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SHAH CEMENT

Ensure sugar, onion supply before Ramadan

Dhaka urges Delhi

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka has requested Delhi to ensure supply of at least 1 lakh tonnes of sugar and 50,000 tonnes of onions to Bangladesh before the Ramadan begins next month.

Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud made the request yesterday when he met India's Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal at the Parliament Bhaban in Delhi, says a foreign ministry statement.

During his three-day visit to India from February 7 to 9, Hasan held meetings with Indian President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President and the ex-officio chairman of the Rajya Sabha Jagdeep Dhankhar, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.

He also delivered a lecture at the Vivekananda International Foundation and interacted with foreign journalists in Delhi.

After the meeting with Goyal yesterday, he told journalists, "We have discussed in detail the issues of uninterrupted supply of essential

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Shyam Biswas feeding his pet otters in the Chitra river in Narail. Shyam said five families in the district's Malopara make a living by making pet otters catch fish for them. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

CORRUPTION CHARGES

3,300 cases await court disposal

DIPAN NANDY

The Anti-Corruption Commission is grappling with case backlogs as over 3,300 remain pending in various courts across the country.

The number is rising as fresh cases are being filed with the anti-graft watchdog every month, but the rate of disposal is dismally low with only 341 cases disposed of last year, according to the organisation's January report.

Politicians, businesspeople, current and former government officials and their family members are the majority of the accused in the cases filed on various charges, including bribery, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, irregularities in property acquisition, and tax evasion.

ACC officials said after filing of the cases, the accused turn up at the courts, including the High Court, and file writ petitions.

The HC issues stay orders in many cases, halting the proceedings. As a result, the case backlog continues to pile up, they said.

Since the ACC's inception in 2004, as many as 2,994 cases filed by the commission are pending in various courts till December last year, according to the report, signed by Md Mostafizur Rahman, deputy director prosecution (general) of ACC.

Of the cases, 2,745 are under trial while 249 were stayed by the HC.

Last year, 303 ACC cases and 38 cases of the now-defunct Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) were disposed of.

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World's biggest flying lab comes to Asia on air pollution mission



AFP, Clark

Nasa has kicked off a series of marathon flights in Asia with the world's biggest flying laboratory, in an ambitious mission to improve the models that help to forecast and fight air pollution.

Millions of deaths each year are linked to air pollution, and improving the ability to identify its sources and behaviour can lead to more accurate warning systems for the public.

Starting this week in the Philippines, the US agency's DC-8 is flying for up to eight hours at a time — sometimes just 15 metres (50 feet) from the ground — to swoop up air particles for study.

"We can provide direct measurements of how much pollution is coming from different sources. And that's one of the primary inputs to the air quality forecasting models," Nasa's Barry Lefler told reporters Thursday at Clark International Airport, around 80 km (50 miles) north of Manila.

Air quality forecasting relies on readings from ground stations as well as satellites, but both methods are limited in their ability to see how pollutants are spread in the air, according to experts.

STUDYING ABROAD

Students struggle to open profiles for dollar crisis

MD MEHEDI HASAN

For over a year now, thousands of Bangladeshi students wanting to study abroad have encountered obstacles while trying to open bank profiles essential for paying their fees or other expenses like housing and transportation.

Pointing to a limited reserve of foreign exchange, authorities initially assured that the problem was a temporary one and that it would be resolved soon.

Although there have been signs of improvements in remittance and export earnings in January this year, the wait continues, leaving aspiring scholars and their ambitions in limbo.

This has been the case since July 2022, and so The Daily Star recently spoke to a dozen students who want to go abroad for higher studies to get an understanding of the present scenario.

They said most banks have stopped opening student profiles, while others require influential lobbying, hefty deposits, and high fees and dollar rates. Robiul Islam faced an uphill battle in opening a bank account for his admission to an Australian university. Despite visiting 20 branches, success came only through his father's transaction history with Islami Bank.

Similarly, Rubaet Hossen needed a central bank official's recommendation to open an account at a private bank for his US studies.

One student said several banks asked him to park Tk 15 lakh to Tk 18 lakh as an FDR before opening student files.

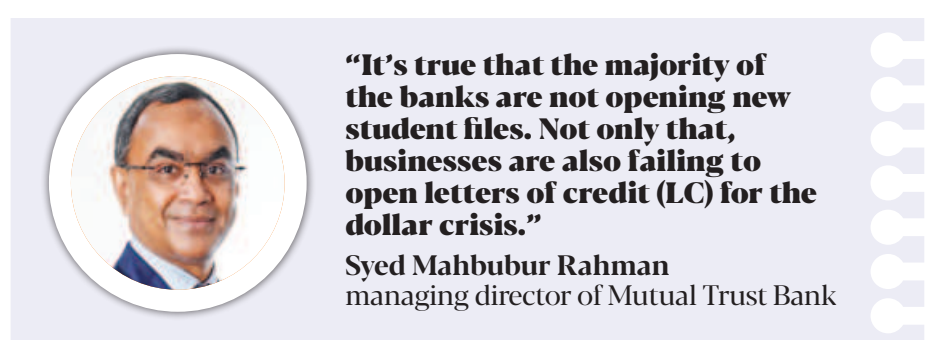
Wishing to remain unnamed, he also said those banks also charged extra fees and the highest rates at Tk 128 to Tk 130 for each US dollar.

Standard Chartered Bank is one of the few banks that is facilitating students with the foreign transactions. Last year, the bank processed 4,870 student files, up

The forex crisis intensified in mid-2022 due to the price rise of essential goods and other commodities in the global market because of the supply chain disruption created after the Russia-Ukraine war.

The central bank pumped over \$28 billion to banks from its reserve to meet the forex shortage, BB data showed.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, told The Daily Star that there is still a dollar



"It's true that the majority of the banks are not opening new student files. Not only that, businesses are also failing to open letters of credit (LC) for the dollar crisis."

Syed Mahbubur Rahman
managing director of Mutual Trust Bank

from 3,787 the previous year.

Naser Ezaz Bijoy, chief executive officer at SCB, said, "We continue to process student files as most private banks aren't doing so."

In the post-pandemic period in 2021, the country's import payments started to rise faster than the remittance earnings and exports, which prompted a shortage of US dollars in banks.

shortage in the market and the central bank is still pumping US dollars to banks from the reserve.

Between July and January of this fiscal year, BB sold around \$8 billion to banks from the reserve.

"It's true that the majority of the banks are not opening new student files. Not only that, businesses are failing to open letters

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Aid groups warn of Rafah 'bloodbath'

Say any Israeli military advance into southern Gaza city could cause mass deaths

AGENCIES

Any Israeli military advance into southern Gaza's Rafah area could cause mass deaths among the more than a million Palestinians trapped there, with humanitarian aid in danger of collapse, aid workers said yesterday.

Israel has threatened to advance from Khan Younis, Gaza's main southern city, to Rafah, where the population has increased five-fold as people have fled bombardment, often under evacuation orders, since Israel began its assault on Gaza's ruling Hamas movement.

Some 1.5 million people are now jammed into filthy, overcrowded shelters or on the street in a patch of land hemmed in by Egyptian and Israeli border fences and the Mediterranean Sea as well as Israeli forces.

Doctors and aid workers are struggling to supply even basic aid and stop the spread of disease.

"No war can be allowed in a gigantic refugee camp," said Jan Egeland, Secretary-General of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), warning of a "bloodbath" if Israeli operations expand there.

"Expanded hostilities in Rafah could collapse the humanitarian response," NRC added in a statement.

Meanwhile, Israeli forces carried out deadly air strikes on Gaza yesterday, hours after US President Joe Biden described the Israeli offensive in the Palestinian enclave

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PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Comilla Victorians batter Tawhid Hridoy celebrates his 53-ball century against Durdanto Dhaka -- the first century of BPL 10 -- at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Hridoy's unbeaten 108 propelled his side to a four-wicket victory.

TRADE WITH INDIA

Sultanganj river port opens Monday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Sultanganj river port is set to open on Monday in Rajshahi's Godagari upazila with an aim to strengthen trade and economic ties between Bangladesh and India, BIWTA officials announced yesterday.

Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, the state minister for shipping, is likely to inaugurate the much-needed river port in the presence of Pranay Verma, the Indian High Commissioner to Dhaka, said Joyanal Abedin, director for marine safety and traffic management at Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority.

"Initially, the river port will connect to the Maya Port of Murshidabad, India, via the Padma River. Starting Monday, several trial runs will be held on the route," he said.

The river port is launching under the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT) as part of the trade agreement between Bangladesh and India, said the BIWTA official.

The protocol was signed in 1972 and renewed on March 31, 2020, to

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