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**A 'TAIL' OF WONDER**

A green-billed malkoha perched contently among the stems and twigs of a tree in Habiganj's Satchari National Park. With a striking appearance, especially their green, curved beak and long, polka dotted tail -- and unique mannerisms, these birds have been captivating birders and photographers across their range -- Southeast Asia and the Indian Subcontinent. Like most birds, they prefer living in forested areas and are arboreal. However, as they are not strong fliers, they depend on their agility and jumping expertise to move around their treetop homes and feed on mostly non-flying insects. Though listed in IUCN's "Least Concern" category, these birds are constant victims of hunting, trapping and habitat degradation.

PHOTO: RIDWANUR RAHMAN

**PADMA RAIL LINK**  
**Chinese firm resumes work after 25 days**  
Contractor suspended work over payments

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The Chinese contractor for the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project halted some major work for 25 days since February 10 over pending payments.

Railway authorities say the contractor resumed working on Wednesday following fruitful talks. But several officials requesting anonymity said that physical work for the "fast track" project, the biggest of Bangladesh Railway, was still progressing at a slower-than-usual rate yesterday.

Meanwhile, the project authority has sought a two-year extension -- including a year of defect liability period -- of the deadline to complete the project.

The current deadline expires this June. The project approved in March 2016 will connect the capital with Jashore with a 169km rail line through the Padma Bridge under a government to government initiative between Bangladesh and China.

The original cost of the project was Tk 34,989 crore and the deadline was June 2022. But the cost rose to Tk 39,246 crore and the deadline was extended after the first

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**Sweden finally joins Nato**

AFP, Washington

Sweden yesterday became the 32nd member of Nato in the shadow of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, turning the page on two centuries of non-alignment and capping two years of torturous diplomacy.



Days after Hungary followed key holdout Turkey and became the last Nato member to sign off, Sweden ceremonially handed over accession documents to the United States, the leading force of the transatlantic alliance that promises joint security for all.

"It is a major step but, at the same time, a very natural step," Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said at the State Department.

The accession "is a victory for freedom today. Sweden has made a free, democratic, sovereign and united choice to join Nato," he said.

President Joe Biden, whose rival Donald Trump has disparaged Nato as unfairly burdening the United States, said in a statement that the alliance was stronger and "more united, determined and dynamic than ever" with Sweden.

The Swedish prime minister was set later yesterday to attend the annual State

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**Gaza offensive to continue**

Vows Netanyahu defying int'l pressure; ceasefire talks stalled; UN expert says Israel destroying Gaza's food system in 'starvation' tactic

REUTERS

Israel will push on with its offensive against Hamas, including into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, despite growing international pressure to stop, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday.

"There is international pressure and it's growing, but particularly when the international pressure rises, we must close ranks, we need to stand together against the attempts to stop the war," he said.

Addressing a graduation ceremony at a training school for Israeli army officers, Netanyahu also said Israel must push back against a "calculated attempt" to blame it for Hamas' crimes.

He added that Israel would operate throughout Gaza, "including Rafah, the last Hamas stronghold".

"Whoever tells us not to act in Rafah is telling us to lose the war and that will not happen," Netanyahu said.

Meanwhile, Hamas said its delegation had left Cairo yesterday amid ongoing negotiations on a ceasefire accord in Gaza that mediators

hope to achieve before the start of Ramadan early next week.

After four days of talks mediated by Qatar and Egypt to secure a 40-day ceasefire ahead of the Muslim fasting month there is still no sign of progress on key sticking points, with both sides blaming the other.

"Hamas's delegation left Cairo this morning for consultation with the leadership of the movement, with negotiations and efforts continuing to stop the aggression, return the displaced and bring in relief aid to our people," a Hamas statement said.

Senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri said Israel had been "thwarting" efforts to conclude a ceasefire deal.

Abu Zuhri told Reuters that Israel was rejecting Hamas's demands to end its offensive in the enclave, withdraw its forces, and ensure freedom of entry for aid and the return of displaced people.

US President Joe Biden said earlier this week that a deal for a ceasefire was in the hands of Hamas.

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- 30,800 Palestinians killed since Oct 7
- Israel will attack Rafah, Netanyahu says
- South Africa again demands World Court's intervention
- Israel thwarting peace talks, Hamas says

**Grameen Kalyan must pay Tk 119cr as income tax**  
HC rejects the firm's applications

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court found valid the government claim that Grameen Kalyan, a non-profit established by Prof Muhammad Yunus, owes the government Tk 119 core in income tax.

The amount is due from seven years following the 2011-2012 tax year, said the HC verdict delivered yesterday.

The HC bench of Justice Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar and Justice Sardar Md Rashed Jahangir delivered the verdict after rejecting seven income tax reference applications filed by Grameen Kalyan which challenged the legality of the claims made by the government.

More details of the verdict will be known after the full text is released.

Assistant Attorney General Tahmina Poly told The Daily Star that the National Board of Revenue (NBR) earlier claimed Tk 555.94 crore in income tax from Grameen Kalyan for the tax years from 2011-

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**Earliest-known 'dead' galaxy spotted by Webb**

REUTERS, Washington

The James Webb Space Telescope since becoming operational in 2022 has uncovered numerous surprises about what things were like in the universe's early stages. We now can add one more -- observations of a galaxy that was already "dead" when the universe was only five percent of its current age.



Scientists said on Wednesday that Webb has spotted a galaxy where star formation had already ceased by roughly 13.1 billion years ago, 700 million years after the Big Bang event that gave rise to the universe. Many dead galaxies have been detected over the years, but this is the earliest by about 500 million years.

In some ways, this galaxy is like the late Hollywood actor James Dean, famous for his "live fast, die young" life story.

"The galaxy seemed to have lived fast and intensely, and then stopped forming stars very rapidly," said astrophysicist Tobias Looser of the Kavli Institute for Cosmology at the University of Cambridge, lead author of the study published in the journal Nature.

"In the first few hundred million years of its history, the universe was violent and active, with plenty of gas around to fuel star formation in galaxies. That makes this discovery particularly puzzling and interesting," Looser added.

**Mobile court jails journo for 'misbehaviour' with UNO**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A journalist was sent to jail for six months for allegedly misbehaving with a government official and an office staffer while trying to collect information from the UNO office in Sherpur's Nakla on Tuesday.

Journalist Shafiuzzaman Rana, 45, is the Nakla correspondent for Bangla daily Desh Rupantor.



Shafiuzzaman Rana

Speaking to The Daily Star, Nakla's Upazila Nirbahi Officer Sadia Ummul Banin said, "Rana had submitted an application under the Right to Information Act, seeking some documents. He was told to wait for at least 20 days, during which time the authorities concerned would comply with his request.

"However, on Tuesday, he forced his way into Confidential Assistant [CA]

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A woman and her school-going child, along with others trailing behind, are having to tread with extreme caution on Moghbazar's Greenway Road, which the DSCC has dug up for development work. The road remains almost entirely blocked for around 15 days now, causing disruptions to people's movement. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

**DELHI-MALE ROW**  
**India opens new naval base near Maldives**

REUTERS, New Delhi

India on Wednesday opened a new naval base on its Indian Ocean island close to the Maldives, as ties with Male remain tense and New Delhi jostles anew with China for influence in the region.

INS Jatayu, the new base on Minicoy Island, on India's Lakshadweep archipelago, had been under construction for years, and is India's most distant base on its western coast. The navy has had a small presence on the island for decades.

The opening comes just as the Maldives pushes India to start withdrawing its nearly 80 troops who have been stationed there to provide technical and medical assistance on three aircraft given to its southern neighbour nation by New Delhi earlier.

The Maldives, which have traditionally had close ties to India, is pivoting towards Beijing since new

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