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FEATHERS OF ASH

A Pacific reef heron just about to snack on a ghost crab on the Saint Martin's Island. These birds, while found throughout southern Asia and Oceania, are rarely sighted in Bangladesh as they are migratory. When they make a stopover in our country, they can be seen near rocky coastal areas, coral reefs, mangrove-lined shores or sandy beaches where they can find plenty of food – mainly oceanic fish, crustaceans, molluscs and worms. What makes Pacific reef herons, otherwise known as eastern reef egrets, is their unusual, non-sexual dimorphism, with some of them having entirely white plumage and others being charcoal-grey. The reason behind this colour variation, or “morph”, is still unknown, but is considered to be related to camouflage purposes.

PHOTO: TIMU HOSSAIN



BHANGA-KUAKATA RAIL ROUTE

Plan revived to lay 214km track

The dev follows PM's directive, 3yrs after Tk 41,797cr project was shelved

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Bangladesh Railway is reviving its plan to build a 214km rail line from Bhangra to Kuakata via Madaripur, Barishal and Payra port following recent instructions from the prime minister.

The project was apparently backburned after the completion of a feasibility study in 2021 as a huge fund of Tk 41,797.6 crore was required for its implementation. At that time, the exchange rate was Tk 84.80 per US dollar.

“The prime minister has recently directed us to find a financier for the project. So, we are taking steps in this regard,” Railways Secretary Humayun Kabir told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

The premier also instructed the BR to expedite the implementation of a project taken up to build an Inland Container Depot (ICD) at Gazipur's Dhirasram, aiming to relocate the Kamalapur ICD from Dhaka, he said.

The BR took up a project last year involving Tk 3,402.88 crore to acquire land for Dhirasram ICD and to build a connecting rail line. Another project will have to be taken up for building necessary infrastructure for the ICD once the land acquisition is completed, BR sources said.

They said Railways Minister Zillul Hakim, Secretary Humayun Kabir and the BR's immediate past director general Quamrul Ahsan met the PM at her office early this week.

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Saudi crown prince to visit Bangladesh later this year

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Saudi Arabia is hoping to further strengthen its relationship with Bangladesh as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman will visit Dhaka in the latter half of this year.



Mohammed bin Salman

“The Saudi crown prince has accepted the invitation extended by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh to visit the country this year. The date is yet to be fixed, however,” Saudi Ambassador Essa Yousef Essa Alduhailan said yesterday.

“During the visit, main issues [for discussion] will be the common interest issues and strengthening bilateral relations between Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh,” he said while interacting with reporters at the Saudi embassy in Dhaka after launching the distribution of food baskets.

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Aid efforts intensify for famine-stalked Gaza

AFP, Palestinian Territories

Efforts yesterday grew to get more aid into the war devastated Gaza Strip, where the UN warns of famine and desperate residents have stormed relief shipments.

After mediators failed to reach a truce between Israel and Hamas militants for the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan, which started on Monday, fighting continued with at least 69 deaths over the previous 24 hours, the Hamas-run territory's health ministry said.

Hamas authorities reported more than 40 air strikes across Gaza, from Beit Hanun in the north to Rafah in the south, where most of Gaza's population has sought refuge and Israel is threatening a ground invasion.

Among the latest casualties, according to the health ministry, were seven people killed when Israeli troops opened fire on a group at an aid distribution point near Gaza City. The army had no immediate comment.

The charity vessel Open Arms, pulling about 200 tonnes of food aid, was nearing Israel's coast after departing Cyprus on Tuesday, the Marintraffic website showed on Thursday.

Cyprus's foreign minister said a second, bigger vessel was being readied in Larnaca port for the maritime corridor which, senior United States administration officials

have said, will later be complemented by a temporary pier off Gaza to be built by American troops.

Daily aid airdrops by multiple nations have been taking place this month, and Germany said it would join the effort.

But the air and sea missions are “no alternative” to land deliveries, 25 organisations including Amnesty International and Oxfam said in a statement.

- 69 more killed in Gaza including 7 awaiting aid trucks
- Charity says second Gaza aid ship being loaded

“While a convoy of five trucks has the capacity to carry about 100 tonnes of lifesaving assistance, recent airdrops delivered only a few tonnes of aid each,” they said.

Agnes Callamard, Amnesty's secretary general, added that the international community seems to have accepted that the war will drag on.

“Why are you making an investment that is going to take two months?” she asked, referring to the Pentagon's timeline for setting up

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West Bengal CM Mamata suffers injury

Admitted to hospital
OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee yesterday suffered an injury on her forehead when she slipped at her residence in South Kolkata's Kalighat locality, her party Trinamool Congress said.



“Our chairperson @MamataOfficial sustained a major injury. Please keep her in your prayers,” the party posted on X along with pictures of Mamata bleeding from her forehead.

According to TMC sources, Mamata, 69, was admitted to the state-run SSKM Hospital in central Kolkata.

Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim said the chief minister suffered the injury at her Harish Chatterjee house.

According to a hospital official, the chief minister slipped and hit her head on a furniture at her home soon after she returned from an event in South Kolkata's Ballygunge.

RECORDING VIDEO 5 journos confined to AC Land's office, threatened with jail

Another 6 journos attacked in Pabna

STAR REPORT

Five journalists were confined to the office of an assistant commissioner (land) in Lalmonirhat by some government employees for about 40 minutes yesterday following a feud over recording video inside the office.

The journalists alleged that Lalmonirhat Sadar Upazila Assistant Commissioner (land) Abdullah Al Noman Sarkar and his staffers confined them from around noon to 12:40pm, reports our Lalmonirhat correspondent.

According to the journalists, the incident took place when Mahfuz Sazu, Lalmonirhat district correspondent of My TV and The Daily Observer, tried to record a hearing on land mutation at the office.

The staffers got angry over it and informed Abdullah-Al-Noman about the matter over the phone. The official rushed to his office and put Sazu in confinement, they said.

As four other local journalists went to the office to rescue Sazu, the official and his staffers confined them as well and threatened them of jailing, they added.

On information, Lalmonirhat Additional Deputy Commissioner (revenue) TMA Momin and some other newsmen rushed to the scene and freed the five.

Later, journalists staged a protest blocking the Lalmonirhat-Burimari highway in the town's Mor area for around 20 minutes from 1:40pm. They demanded punishment of the AC (land).

The protestors withdrew the blockade after Lamonirhat Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Ullah visited them and assured them of legal actions against the offenders after an investigation and discussion with the higher authorities concerned.

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Shanto's chance to scale new heights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Najmul Hossain Shanto will have the opportunity to seal a first-ever series win as the Bangladesh captain when the Tigers take on Sri Lanka in the second of the three-match ODI series at Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram today.

The match will begin at 2:30pm (Bangladesh Standard Time) and will be telecast live on T Sports.

Thanks to a career-best score from skipper Shanto, Bangladesh cruised to a six-wicket win in the first ODI despite starting both the bowling and batting innings on the wrong foot. Shanto's unbeaten 129-ball 122 -- the left-handed batter's maiden century as captain and third overall -- is now the best-ever score by a Bangladesh skipper in the format.

Shanto had an excellent time with the willow last year in ODIs -- bar the 2023 World Cup in which the 25-year-old failed to impress during a

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INDOMITABLE MARCH

A cold welcome to Yahya

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

March 15, 1971

President Yahya Khan arrived in Dhaka. No local political leader went to the airport to meet him. All the entries to the airport were heavily guarded.

Siddiq Salik, then public relations officer of the Pakistan army in Dhaka, recounts, “It was a strange, eerie atmosphere charged with a deadly stillness. There were no bouquets of flowers, no civil officials, no rows of city elite, no hustling of journalists, and no clicking of cameras. Even the official photographer was not admitted.” [Siddiq Salik, Witness to Surrender, UPI, 1997, pg-59]

Yahya drove quickly to the president's house in a heavily armed convoy. He could not help seeing that virtually every house sported a black flag mandated by the Awami League. The Farmgate check point was removed by Awami League to avoid embarrassment to the president whom Mujib earlier declared publicly as a guest of “Bangladesh”.

Yahya had requested Bhutto to go to Dhaka but he declined on the ground that after Mujib's virtual declaration of independence there was no point in making the journey. He seemed more interested in getting power than in the unity of Pakistan, commented GW Choudhury, a close confidante of

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Smoke rises after an explosion in north Gaza, as seen from Israel, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Felt Chandika wanted to do a little dictatorship: Sujon

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Prime Bank

PRAYER TIMING
MARCH 15

Fazr	Juma	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4:53	12:30	4:30	6:11	7:45
JAMAAT 5:03	1:15	4:45	6:21	8:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN	MARCH	SEHRI	IFTAR
04	15	4:48	6:11
05	16	4:47	6:12
06	17	4:46	6:12