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## Just a slap on the wrist?

Govt official gets a mere demotion for involvement in Tk 7.35cr embezzlement

BAHARAM KHAN AND SAJJAD HOSSAIN

What is the punishment for involvement in the embezzlement of Tk 7.35 crore from the government coffers?

Apparently, it is just a demotion if you are a government official.

The public administration ministry on April 4 demoted Promatha Ranjan Ghatak, former land acquisition officer in Madaripur, from senior assistant secretary to assistant secretary. The Daily Star has a copy of the gazette notification issued in this regard.



Ranjan Ghatak

Promatha provided Tk 7.35 crore of public money as compensation to five individuals in June 2021, for supposedly acquiring their land for the Padma Bridge project in Madaripur's Magurkhanda area.

However, subsequent investigations by the public administration ministry found that the land never belonged to the five. Rather, it was government land for which a single penny should not have been paid, as the matter of compensation is out of question.

Promatha had been the land acquisition officer in Madaripur from June 2020 to June 2021.

As per the gazette notification, Promatha issued

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**A MOTHER'S WOE ...** It has been eleven years but Safia Bewa, around 70 years old, still searches for the body of her deceased son every year on the anniversary of the Rana Plaza collapse, when all the victim families gather at the site of the disaster. Her son, Lal Mia, worked as an operator of a garments factory on the third floor of the building. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Biden signs bill to provide new aid for Ukraine

AFP, Washington

US President Joe Biden yesterday signed legislation authorising desperately needed military aid for Ukraine, saying Washington would begin sending new assistance to Kyiv within hours.

The passage of the \$95 billion package -- which also includes aid for Israel and Taiwan -- comes after months of delay that saw Ukrainian forces run short of ammunition and suffer battlefield setbacks.

"I just signed into law the national security package that was passed by the House of Representatives this weekend, and by the Senate yesterday," Biden told reports, saying he is "making sure the shipments start right away, in the next few hours."

"It's going to make America safer, it's going

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## ROAD CONDITION SURVEY Fearful of flak, RHD won't publish entire reports

All previous ones already taken down

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Roads and Highways Department will not make public its annual survey report on road conditions in its entirety to avoid, what its officials say, public criticism.

The RHD has already taken down all its previous reports, formally named as "Maintenance and Rehabilitation Needs Report", from its website.

**The Highway Development and Maintenance Circle of the RHD carries out the survey every year to make a projection of the total maintenance costs for its roads.**

Sources said the high-ups of the road transport and bridges ministry became furious after different media outlets ran reports on road conditions following the publication of its survey report in June 2023.

Last year was the first time both the length and percentage of roads in "poor, bad or very bad" conditions increased in a year-to-year comparison since 2018,

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## Israel intensifies strikes on northern Gaza

Residents say bombing as intense as at the start of the offensive; 79 more Palestinians killed

REUTERS

Some Palestinian civilians were fleeing their homes in northern Gaza yesterday just weeks after returning because of an Israeli bombardment which they said was as intense as at the start of the offensive.

Much of the shelling was focused for a second day on Beit Lahiya on the northern edge of Gaza, where the Israeli military gave evacuation orders to four neighbourhoods on Tuesday, warning they were in a "dangerous combat zone".

Israel is "moving ahead" with an assault on Hamas in Rafah and will work to spare Palestinian civilians there, a government spokesperson said yesterday. The move comes as the US Congress on Tuesday night approved \$13 billion in military aid for Israel.

The offensive, now in its seventh month, has killed at least 34,262 Palestinians in the territory, with many more feared buried in the rubble. The tally includes at least 79 deaths in the past 24 hours, the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza

said yesterday.

The offensive has laid to waste much of the densely populated enclave, displacing most of its 2.3 million people and creating a humanitarian crisis.

- Israel 'moving ahead' with Rafah operation
- Deadly shelling reported in central Gaza
- Death toll in enclave rises to 34,262

Overnight, two people were killed in a strike on a house in the southern city of Rafah, four were killed when a missile hit a group standing outside a supermarket in the Al-Nuseirat refugee camp and one was killed in a strike on a house in Deir Al-Balah, central Gaza, Palestinian health officials said.

Residents in northern Gaza and

suburbs of Gaza City also reported heavy shelling.

"We don't know why this is all happening. Is it because we returned home and we finally got some aid through after months of starvation and the Israelis didn't like that?" said Mohammad Jamal, 29, a resident of Gaza City, near Zeitoun, one of Gaza's oldest suburbs.

Asked about yesterday's developments, the Israeli military had no immediate comment.

Israel said its operations in Beit Lahiya targeted areas from where the armed wing of Hamas-aligned Islamic Jihad had launched rockets at two Israeli border settlements on Tuesday.

Additional targets, including operational tunnel shafts, military structures and a launcher containing rockets ready to be fired at Israel were also struck, the Israel Defense Forces said in a statement.

Yesterday, residents also reported shelling in central Gaza around Al-Nuseirat and Khan Younis, a city in the south from where troops withdrew earlier this month.

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## Foreign airlines' \$323m stuck in Bangladesh

Says IATA; experts blame it on high ticket prices

RASHIDUL HASAN

The amount of foreign airlines' money stuck in Bangladesh has increased to \$323 million from \$214 million in less than a year, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

The IATA, which represents 320 airlines responsible for 83 percent of the global air traffic, yesterday also said Pakistan was withholding \$399 million from foreign carriers.

It called on the two countries to immediately release the funds that have been blocked in contravention of international agreements.

"The situation has become severe with airlines unable to repatriate over \$720 million [\$399 million in Pakistan and \$323 million in Bangladesh] of revenues earned in these markets," the IATA said.

It also said that the timely repatriation of revenues to their countries is critical for payment of dollar-denominated expenses such as lease agreements, spare parts, overflight fees, and fuel.

About Bangladesh, the IATA said the country has more standardised processes, but aviation needs a higher priority from the central bank to facilitate access to foreign exchange.

It also said delays in funds repatriation in Bangladesh

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## TRADE DEAL WITH IRAN US warns Pakistan of 'potential risk of sanctions'

NDTV ONLINE

The US has warned Pakistan of "potential risk of sanctions," adding that they will continue to disrupt and take actions against proliferation networks considering business deals with Iran.

Emphasising the US imposing sanctions on suppliers to Pakistan's Ballistic Missile Program, US State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said: "We're going to continue to disrupt and take actions against proliferation networks and concerning weapons of mass destruction procurement activities wherever they may occur... Just let me say, broadly, we advise anyone considering business deals with Iran to be aware of the potential risk of sanctions. But ultimately, the government of Pakistan can speak to their own foreign policy pursuits."

Responding to a question on the reason behind these sanctions, Patel while addressing the press on Tuesday, said, "The sanctions were made because these were entities

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**Two families with children crossing the street with a footbridge right above their heads on the capital's Dhaka-Chattogram highway yesterday. One child had fallen behind and was seen running alone in front of incoming buses. 3 days ago, 2 women and 2 children were killed after a bus ran them over while they were crossing a road in Cumilla's Daudkandi.**

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Two lifeforms merge for first time in a billion years

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

For the first time in at least a billion years, two lifeforms have merged into a single organism.

The process, called primary endosymbiosis, has only happened twice in the history of the Earth, with the first time giving rise to all complex life as we know it through mitochondria. The second time that it happened saw the emergence of plants.

Now, an international team of scientists have observed the evolutionary event happening between a species of algae commonly found in the ocean and a bacterium.

"The first time we think it happened, it gave rise to all complex life," said Tyler Coale, a postdoctoral researcher at University of California, Santa Cruz, who led the research on one of two recent studies that uncovered the phenomenon.

"Everything more complicated than a bacterial cell owes its existence to that event. A billion years ago or so, it happened again with the chloroplast, and that gave us plants."

The process involves the algae engulfing the bacterium and providing it with nutrients, energy and protection in return for functions that it could not previously perform -- in this instance, the ability to "fix" nitrogen from the air.

