



# The busy days of AC MECHANICS

RBR

As Dhaka continues to tackle the woes of summer heat, the business of selling air conditioners, stand fans, table fans, and coolers has seen an obvious rise.

Alongside this, the demand for AC mechanics has also increased.

Maruf Hossain, a young lad of 21 years, has been a junior mechanic in an AC repair shop in Uttara for the last four years. He claims that recently his shop manager has been maintaining a roster to keep track of their appointments.

"Every day we work from 10:00am until 11:00pm, with a minimum of 12 visits. Clients are servicing their old ACs, pumping in gas and fixing gas leaks caused by overuse that puts pressure on the compressor. Most importantly, we are installing a minimum of three or a maximum of five new ACs per day," he says, adding that his shop has six mechanics and a few apprentices working round the clock.

"Our manager is also on the roster and doing rounds with us. Our business is seeing better times now, but we are all working overtime," says a chirpy Maruf with a bright smile about his long hours, which are giving him extra pay and earning him hefty tips.

People are now very conscious about their electricity bills that have skyrocketed. "They are opting for an inverter air conditioner, which uses microprocessors to control the speed of the compressor motor. The trick is to match the output required until



PHOTO: STAR

the room is cool enough. An inverter AC is sought after because it lowers the speed of the motor to save energy and at the same time can maintain the desired temperature," Maruf explains.

Shahana Huda, a homemaker in

Uttara Residential Area said, "We use prepaid electricity and within ten days, I had to fill my card twice, paying Tk 14,000 altogether. We had guests over, so I had to run a few ACs, which are window models and extremely power

consuming."

"This is unusual times. It seems I have to apply for a bank loan to buy my electricity," she says jokingly. "Even my vehicle's air-conditioning was not working due to a failing compressor and I had to wait days for a car AC mechanic," Huda adds.

Rashid Sharif, also an Uttara resident, explains how his prepaid electricity metre is facing capacity issues now.

"I cannot run two ACs at a time as the power trips every few hours. My metre has a capacity of seven kilowatts, but I have been told by my electrician and AC mechanic that I need to increase the capacity by a few extra watts. Now, handling this issue with DESCO is a tedious process. By the time I can run my AC without a glitch I might be a well done steak," Sharif says sarcastically.

Shahed Latif, an event manager, explains how he bought five extra fans for his home.

"Our garage is a heat trap, even though we have the provision of fans for our guards and drivers, I added two extra table fans for them. My garage houses two dogs and the other day I saw them panting and sitting under the tap, so I installed another ceiling fan for them.

"I bought one for my mother, my son and myself, all my service people have access to extra fans other than their ceiling fans in their room," he explains the reason for adding so many extra fans to his already burgeoning electricity bill.

## Rohingya man hacked to death at Ukhiya camp

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A Rohingya man was hacked to death by armed criminals at a refugee camp in Ukhiya upazila of Cox's Bazar last morning.

The incident took place near the office of the Red Crescent Society at Camp 18 around 5:30am.

The deceased was identified as Noor Kalam, 29, son of Noor Salam from D-14 block of Ukhiya's Tajnimar Ghona refugee camp (Camp-19).

Ukhiya Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Shamim Hossain said, "A group of criminals abducted Noor Kalam from his house early in the morning and took him to a place near the Red Crescent office at Camp 18 and hacked him indiscriminately with sharp weapons, leaving him dead on the spot."

Later, the criminals went into hiding in the nearby hills, he added.

Informed, Ukhiya police reached the spot, recovered the body and sent it to the Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

The murder is primarily believed to have taken place over disputes centring drug trafficking and establishing supremacy in the camp, said the OC.

"The police are conducting raids to arrest the criminals."

According to sources inside the refugee camp, Noor Kalam was associated with Myanmar's armed group Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) for some time. A few months ago, he left ARSA and joined another armed group, the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO). Since then, ARSA members have been threatening to kill him.

## Mother, son die as lightning strike sets house on fire

UNB, Khagrachhari

A woman and her son died in a house fire that resulted in from a lightning strike in Madhyabetchhari village under the Dighinala upazila of Khagrachhari district early yesterday.

The victims Hasina Begum, 30, and her son Hanif Mia, 8, died in the fire, which burned down their house to the ground.

Local Union Parishad Chairman Mahmuda Begum Lucky said, "The lightning strike incident occurred around 5:00am, sparking a fire that completely destroyed their residence."

At the time of the tragedy, Hasina Begum's husband, Sadek Ali, was not home, she added.

Fire service personnel were dispatched to the scene, where they managed to extinguish the blaze and recover the remains of the victims.

## Top Afghan diplomat in India quits after gold smuggling reports

AFP, New Delhi

Afghanistan's top diplomat in India resigned days after she was reportedly caught by airport authorities smuggling nearly \$2 million worth of gold into the country.

Zakia Wardak, the Afghan Consul-General in India's financial capital Mumbai, posted a statement on social media platform X announcing her resignation.

Afghanistan's embassy in New Delhi shut down in November, more than two years after the Taliban returned to power in Kabul following the collapse of the Western-backed government, leaving Wardak as the country's most senior representative in India.

"It is with great regret that I announce my decision to step away from my role at the Consulate and Embassy in India, effective May 5, 2024," Wardak said Saturday.

Indian media reports said Wardak was last month stopped by financial intelligence authorities at Mumbai airport on arrival from Dubai -- along with her son -- carrying 25 kilograms of gold.

She was not arrested because of her diplomatic immunity, the reports said, but the gold -- worth around \$1.9 million -- was confiscated.

## BB dissolves NBL board again

FROM PAGE 1

seeking anonymity, told The Daily Star that all independent directors of the previous board had resigned on Thursday following a decision not to merge with other banks.

Bangladesh Bank officials during a meeting with the chairman of United Commercial Bank (UCB) on April 9 decided to merge UCB with National Bank.

The central bank officials said National Bank directors split over the merger issue.

The NBL incurred losses of Tk 1,497 crore in 2023, down by around 54 percent from Tk 3,285 crore of the previous year, according to its financial statement.

The bank's bad loans stood at Tk 12,368 crore which was 28.92 percent of its total disbursed loans, shows BB data.

Bangladesh Bank on December 21 dissolved the board of NBL after receiving a recommendation from the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission.

## Under control, not entirely doused yet

FROM PAGE 1

"Smoke is still billowing. Breathing is difficult due to the thickness of the forest, and sufficient water sources are not available to douse the fire."

The nearby water sources -- Bhola and Shela rivers -- are around 2.5 kilometres away from the spot, and the route for transporting water is remote.

The district administration suspended the firefighting operation at night for security reasons, the press release said, adding, "The operation will resume at 5:30am tomorrow [Monday]."

Around 55 members of the Department of Fire Service and Civil Defence and 250 volunteers were deployed to put out the fire.

Besides, the navy, air force, coast guard, forest department, police and local administration have joined the operation.

Mamun earlier said, "The efforts to douse the blaze suffered due to the absence of nearby water sources and the thick layer of leaves in the Sundarbans."

A team of Bangladesh Air Force used a helicopter to spray water over the affected area, he said.

"We are yet to determine the volume of damage done by the fire," said Mihir Kumar Doe, forest conservator in

Khulna Circle. "We also haven't gotten any news of animal deaths yet."

The forest department formed a three-member committee to probe the incident. It has been asked to submit a report within seven days, he told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the environment ministry issued a statement saying the fire was under control. "The fire did not spread to the top of the trees or branches; it only spread sporadically above the ground," said a UNB report.

Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Secretary Dr Farhina Ahmed have been supervising and coordinating the firefighting operations round the clock.

The prime minister is aware of the matter and is keeping a regular check.

Amir Hossain Chowdhury, the chief conservator of forests, rushed to the Sundarbans to supervise the activities on the ground, the report added.

The fire originated in Latif's Chila area near Amurbunia forest in Chadpai range of eastern Sundarbans in Bagerhat around 3:30pm on Saturday, said Quazi Mohammad Nurul Karim, divisional forest officer of Sundarbans eastern division.

The forest department, with the

help of locals, immediately took steps to stop the spread but as there was low tide at that time, there was no water in the canal to help extinguish the fire. They managed equipment and water dispensers on Saturday night.

However, since the fire is spreading underground through the roots of the trees, it has to be extinguished with caution, it added.

"Although the fire is under control, fire extinguishing operation will continue for the next few days."

Meanwhile, Dhoritri Rokkhai Amra, an environmental organisation, in a statement yesterday expressed concerns over the fire incident.

It demanded investigation by representatives from forest departments, law enforcement agencies, environmentalists, local representatives, journalists and researchers to find the cause of the fire.

It also demanded exemplary punishment to those responsible.

Around 75 acres of land were damaged in 26 fire incidents in the Sundarbans in last 24 years, the statement said, citing government statistics.

(Our Bagerhat correspondent contributed to the report.)

## Taka to trade more freely

FROM PAGE 1

component of the Balance of Payment (BoP), was in surplus by \$4.7 billion.

In contrast, the financial account, another key part of the BoP that includes foreign direct investments and short-, medium-, and long-term loans, suffered an \$8.3 billion deficit.

This is nearly four times the deficit from the same period a year ago, as shown by the central bank.

On the other hand, the net trade credit deficit stood at \$10.75 billion in the same period, which was \$3.55 billion in the same period of the last fiscal year.

According to the IMF assessment, the exchange rate not being market-based is the reason behind the deficit in the financial account. As a result, export proceeds were not coming to the country while remittances were coming through unofficial channels.

Since the launch of the IMF's loan programme, Bangladesh has been

unable to meet the conditions set for net international reserves.

As Bangladesh could not meet the target set for June last year, the country had to get a waiver to secure the second tranche.

For the third tranche, the net international reserves target was revised down to \$17.78 billion for December, but the country fell short by \$58 million.

For the fourth tranche, the IMF set the net international reserves target for June this year at \$20.1 billion.

Bangladesh is unlikely to meet the target.

In this context, the country has sought IMF's consideration to lower the latest net international reserves target as well. A central bank official said the visiting IMF mission, which leaves on May 8, has agreed to revise down the target. However, the figure has not been fixed yet.

## Economy facing

FROM PAGE 1

payment, but "around \$5 billion in debt is unpaid in the energy and other sectors".

Besides, the government's fiscal space for spending is declining due to the slow growth in GDP.

"If the government wants to achieve the annual target of 7.5 percent [GDP growth] by June 2024, they have to achieve over 10 percent growth throughout the rest of the current fiscal year."

In the October-December quarter of 2023, Bangladesh's GDP growth stood at 3.78 percent, as per BBS data.

According to Debapriya, the government is going to place the upcoming 2024-25 budget amid a critical socio-economic and political environment.

"The budget will give us a sign of what the government is thinking about how to rebound from the slowed growth. The upcoming budget is crucial for the government."

He then urged the parliamentary standing committees to meet at least once every month to ensure good governance and accountability.

Anisul Islam Mahmud, lawmaker of the Jatiya Party, said MPs and parliamentary standing committees make very little contribution to the preparation of the budget.

The weakness in the financial sector resulted mainly from a lack of good governance, he said.

"So, good governance is a must. Whatever has been done in the past is now past. From now on, good governance should be the top priority in all the sectors," he added.

Echoing the same, former planning minister MA Mannan said, "Good governance should be on the

menu. Every country has its own characteristics of governance. The country should put emphasis on it."

The lack of good governance is a common reason behind all the problems, he said.

Lawmaker AK Azad, also managing director of the Ha-Meem Group of Companies, said "As long as the ministries are free from corruption, the budget benefits will not reach the people, no matter how much allocation is increased."

## 2 JP lawmakers slam the govt

FROM PAGE 12

"So, where does all that electricity go?" he asked.

Chunnu said people in his constituency invited the state minister for power and energy to visit for a day to see for himself the load-shedding situation.

He extended the request to State Minister Nasrul Hamid and invited him to visit his constituency in the next few days.

He said that by staying in Dhaka, one cannot comprehend the gravity of the situation in villages due to load shedding.

Referring to frequent road crashes in the country, Chunnu, also the opposition chief whip, said many cars are operating on the road without fitness certificates and valid driving licences.

He advised the minister concerned to take a strong stance in this regard.

"If old vehicles, unfit cars, auto-rickshaws, and easy bikes were not plying on the roads, people would not get killed like this."