

## Must recognise girls as driving force for change

Says PM



UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said there is no alternative to integrated social movements against child marriage, dowry, and violence against women.

"We must recognise our girls not just as victims, but as the driving force behind change," she said while inaugurating a two-day event titled "ICPD30 Global Dialogue on Demographic Diversity and Sustainable Development" that would create a platform to discuss the challenges and explore the opportunities of the world's shifting demographics.

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Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority is building a jetty well inside the demarcation pillar of the Turag in the capital's Chhoto Diabari area. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## FERTILISER THEFT

# Ex-MP, 4 others land in jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday cancelled the bail of former lawmaker Kamrul Ashraf Khan, owner of Poton Traders, and four others and sent them to jail in a corruption case.

The case was filed on November 26 last year in connection with misappropriating 72,000 tonnes of government-imported urea fertiliser valued at Tk 582 crore.

The other accused are Poton Traders General Manager Shahadat Hossain and General Manager (management) Nazmul Hossain Badal, its North Bengal representative Md Sohrab Hossain and its Khulna and Noapara unit's representative Md Ataur Rahman.

Judge Mohammad Ash Shams Joglul Hossain of Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court passed the order after Ashraf and four others surrendered before it and sought extension of their ad-interim bail, ACC Prosecutor Mosharrar Hossain Kajol.

Ten days after the filing of the case, Ashraf and four others on December 6 last year got ad-interim bail from another Dhaka court.

On November 26, ACC Deputy Director Md Rafikuzzaman filed the case against them with the commission's Dhaka-1 office.

According to the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) investigation report, the corporation had an agreement with Poton Traders to deliver 3.93 lakh tonnes of urea imported from the Middle East to

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## Swiss nursery lets robot do the talking

AFP, Lausanne

Sat in a circle on the nursery floor, a group of Swiss three-year-olds ask a robot called Nao questions about giraffes and broccoli.

By the time these children become adults, interacting with robots may well be as commonplace as using a smartphone, experts believe. So one Lausanne creche has decided to give them a head start.

Nao has been a regular visitor at the Nanosphere nursery on the campus of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology university since the New Year. He is what is called an "interactive learning companion" rather than a substitute teacher.

As the children were dropped off, Nao — who is only 58 centimetres tall — stood on a bench to greet them at eye level.

"Hello, my name is Nao. I'm happy to be at the Nanosphere today," he said, in a child-like high-pitched voice. "I left my planet some time ago to come and meet you. I look forward to getting to know you and being able to talk with you in the weeks ahead."

Some children walked straight past, some waved, pointed, touched his hand or simply gazed at him transfixed.

"What will the children's future be like? Will they have to work with robots? Very probably yes," Olivier Delamadeleine, director-general of the Educalis group of nurseries and primary schools in Lausanne, told AFP.



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## Battery-run rickshaws must be stopped

Says Quader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday asked the authorities concerned to take steps to stop the plying of battery-run rickshaws on the streets of the capital.

"Imposing a ban on such vehicles is not enough... Steps have to be taken to stop their operations," the minister said after the first meeting of the advisory council of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) at its headquarters in Dhaka yesterday.

Quader also said that "no helmet, no fuel" policy for motorcycles should be implemented across the country to reduce casualties in bike accidents.

He said the government's initiative on wearing helmets became successful in Dhaka city.

"Everybody now wears helmets. It is now rare in Dhaka that motorcyclists ride without helmets."

The minister, also the head of the council, said unfit and outdated vehicles will be scrapped and use of hooters in vehicles, except for ambulances, must be stopped.

## Israel-Hamas gun battle intensifies

60 more Palestinians killed; ceasefire talks mediated by Qatar, Egypt at a stalemate

AGENCIES

Israeli troops fought Hamas members across Gaza yesterday, including in the southern city of Rafah that had been a refuge for civilians, in an upsurge of

Netanyahu's army has in recent days pressed into the east of Rafah in pursuit of what it says are four Hamas battalions, despite warnings from its ally the US and others to hold off to avoid mass civilian casualties.

said it killed some foot soldiers in Jabalia, while Israel's military said it had eliminated many Hamas members in an area it had claimed to have cleared months ago.

Israeli tanks have been

- UN investigates death of int'l staff member
- 105 media workers among dead in Gaza: CPJ
- Police clear pro-Palestinian camp from Swiss university
- Death toll in enclave rises to 35,233



the more than seven-month offensive that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians.

Antagonism between Israel and the United Nations worsened as the Israeli army sought an explanation for footage showing armed men next to UN Palestinian relief agency vehicles. Separately, the UN said it was investigating an unidentified strike that killed an international staff member in Gaza earlier this week.

Prime Minister Benjamin

Since the October 7 offensive, Israel has killed at least 35,233 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials yesterday, with 60 dead in the last 24 hours. In the northern Jabalia refugee camp, residents said Israeli tanks had destroyed clusters of homes but were facing heavy resistance. "They are bombing houses on top of their inhabitants. We know of many families being trapped inside their homes," said Abu Jihad.

massed around the eastern edges of Rafah and in recent days have been probing into built up areas of the city, where hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the fighting have been sheltering from fighting elsewhere.

In the north, Israeli military said it had concluded an operation in the Zeitoun area, killing "dozens of terrorists". Residents said tanks had pulled back from the area, with

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## Rab arrests 'Arsa acting chief', seizes weapons

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Rapid Action Battalion yesterday claimed to have arrested the acting chief of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army in Bangladesh and one of his cohorts from Cox's Bazar's Ukhiya and seized weapons and explosives.

The arrests were made during an early morning raid on an "Arsa den" at Lal Pahar (hill) near the Rohingya camp no 20, said Commander Arafat Islam, director of the Legal and Media Wing of the force.

Five grenades, three rifle grenades, 10 handmade grenades, 13 molotov cocktails, a foreign-made revolver, nine rounds of 9mm pistol ammunition, a light gun and three cartridges were also seized, he added.

Arsa sourced the arms, and explosives from the crisis-hit neighbouring country, he said referring to Myanmar.

The arrestees are Mohammad Shahnur alias Master Solim, one of the chief coordinators and commander of Arsa in Bangladesh, and his associate Mohammad Riaz, 27 of Balukhali camp, the Rab official said.

According to Rab, the force has been conducting regular drives against the Myanmar-based militant group after a spate of killings and criminal activities in the Rohingya camps. In 2023, 64 people were killed by terrorist groups for various reasons.

Rab said, since then, regular drives against Arsa have resulted in significant gains against the group

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## Mango harvest season starts in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The mango season is upon the country as some farmers in Rajshahi have started harvesting the early varieties.

The growers who have the mangoes — locally known as Guti varieties — in their barns are asking for unusually high prices, partly because it's early in the season and mostly because there are fewer mangos on the trees.

The farmers blame rains when the trees blossomed, prolonged winter, record-setting heat, inadequate rain in summer for what they say is a significant drop in yield.

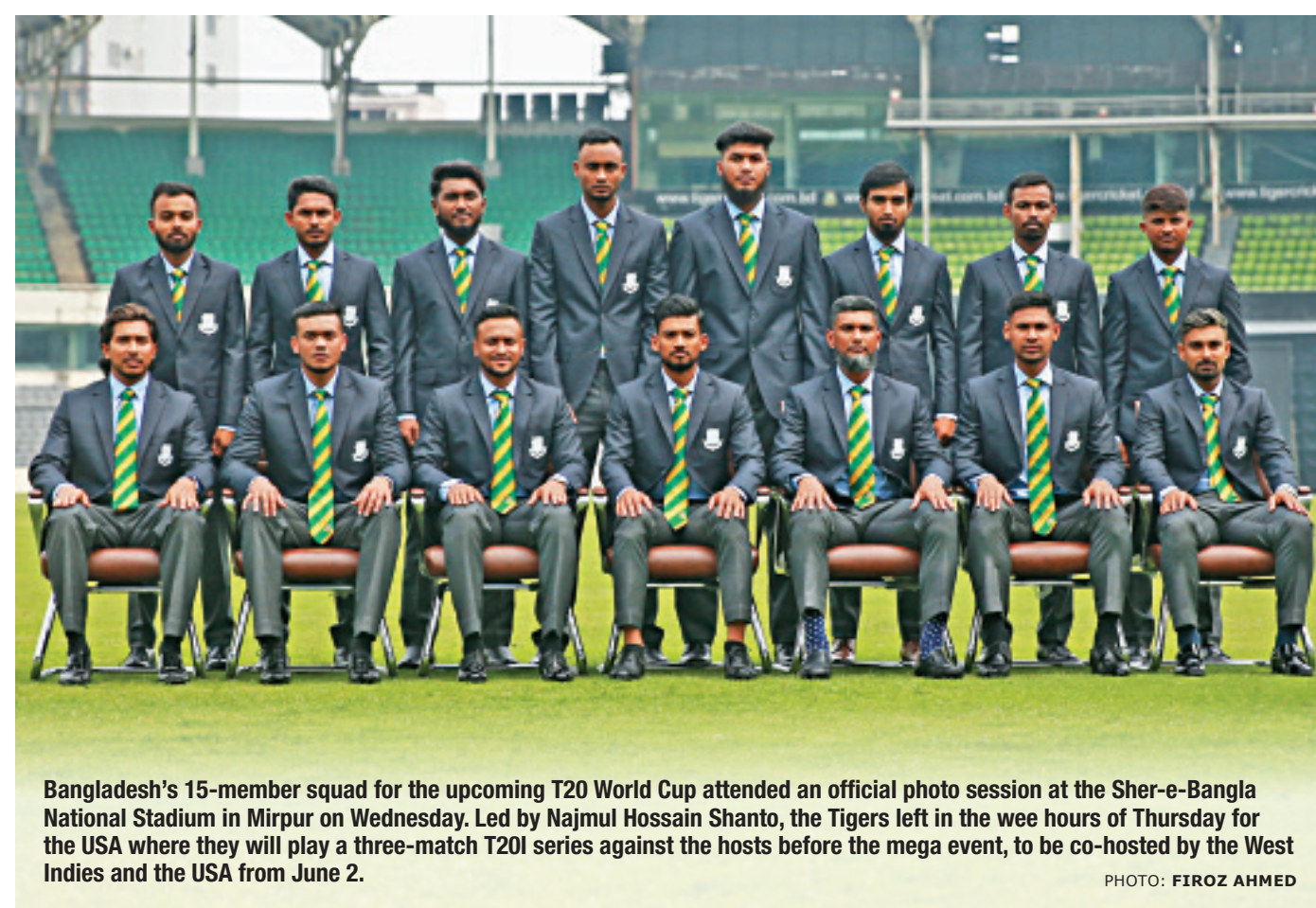
However, Umme Salma, acting deputy director of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), says the mangoes will be bigger this year as the trees are bearing fewer fruits.

This year's yield will not be less than last year's 13.28 tonnes per hectare, which is satisfactory, she adds.

Farmers hope the sour varieties of Guti will be sold at almost Tk 1,500 per maund, up from last year's Tk 500.

The sweeter ones, sold at Tk 700 per maund last year, are likely to be sold at Tk 2,000 a maund

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Bangladesh's 15-member squad for the upcoming T20 World Cup attended an official photo session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Wednesday. Led by Najmul Hossain Shanto, the Tigers left in the wee hours of Thursday for the USA where they will play a three-match T20I series against the hosts before the mega event, to be co-hosted by the West Indies and the USA from June 2.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## ASSASSINATION BID

# Slovak PM suffers life-threatening injuries

REUTERS, Handlova

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico suffered life-threatening injuries when he was shot and wounded in an attempted assassination yesterday, the government office said.

Fico, 59, was rushed to hospital in the central city of Handlova after holding a government meeting there, and was being transported by helicopter to the city of Banska Bystrica for urgent treatment, it said.



Robert Fico

A Reuters witness heard several shots fired after the meeting in Handlova northeast of the capital Bratislava. Police detained a man and security officials pushed someone into a car and drove off, the witness said.

Fico became prime minister for the fourth time last year after shifting political gears to appeal to a changing electorate.

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