

## Ensure smooth supply of power, gas to factories

### Business leaders urge PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Business leaders yesterday urged the prime minister to ensure uninterrupted power and gas supply to their factories. They also demanded the reinstatement of the previous rates of cash incentives on export receipts until the country graduates from the Least Developed Country group in 2026.

The leaders, who met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban yesterday, wanted different tax benefits in the next budget. They also urged her to ensure that officials of customs and NBR do not harass them.

Led by Mahbubul Alam, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), the meeting discussed the overall business climate and the upcoming national budget with the PM.

They also held a meeting with Salman F Rahman, adviser to the prime minister on private industries and investment, at the office of Bangladesh Investment Development Authority in Dhaka.

Business leaders have been demanding that the import duty on solar panels be lowered as the high tariff is discouraging factories to use them.

A group of businesspeople also held a meeting with Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, the power, energy, and mineral resources' adviser to the prime minister, on Wednesday.

They urged the same regarding solar panels and cited the target to produce over 12,000 megawatts of renewable energy as per the Paris Agreement.

Apart from the FBCCI, leaders from Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association; Bangladesh Textile Mills Association; Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association; cement manufacturers association; and many other chambers and trade bodies attended the meeting.



A student shouts slogans during a march as students occupy the main building of the University of Chile in support of Palestinian people in Gaza, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in Santiago, Chile, on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Israel strikes Rafah defying ICJ's order

Tel Aviv may renew ceasefire talks 'this week'; death toll in Palestinian enclave rises to 35,903

### AGENCIES

Israeli air strikes and artillery pounded Rafah on yesterday, despite the International Court of Justice ordering an immediate halt to its military offensive in the southern Gaza city.

Palestinian witnesses and AFP teams reported Israeli strikes or shelling in Rafah, the central city of Deir al-Balah, Gaza City, Jabalia refugee camp and elsewhere.

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said yesterday that at least 35,903 people have been killed in the territory since October 7. The toll includes 46 deaths over the past 24 hours, a ministry statement said.

In a case brought by South Africa

alleging the Israeli military operation amounts to "genocide", the ICJ ordered Israel to halt its Rafah offensive and demanded the immediate release of hostages still held by Palestinian militants.

The Hague-based ICJ, whose orders are legally binding but lack direct enforcement mechanisms, also instructed Israel to keep open the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza, which Israel closed earlier this month.

In its ruling, the ICJ said Israel must "immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah Governorate, which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical

destruction in whole or in part".

The UN court ordered Israel to allow UN-mandated investigators "unimpeded access" to Gaza to look into the genocide allegations.

Meanwhile, France's president, Qatar's prime minister and the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan held talks Friday on the Gaza war and ways to set up a Palestinian state alongside Israel, the French presidency said.

French President Emmanuel Macron organised the meeting amid growing international concerns over the Israel-Hamas war. It came a few hours after the UN's top court ordered Israel to halt its offensive in the Gaza city of Rafah.

## Rickshaw driver found dead in paddy field

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Police yesterday recovered the body of an autorickshaw driver from a paddy field in Parpara village of Kandua union under Jamalpur Sadar Upazila.

The deceased was identified as Shahadat Hossain, son of Javed Ali of Pathalia village of Sharilpur union of the upazila.

Quoting family members, Mohammad Mohabbat Kabir, officer-in-charge of Jamalpur Sadar Police Station said Shahadat Hossain left the house with his autorickshaw Friday night but didn't return home.

Later in the morning, locals found him dead in a paddy field in Parpara village and informed police, the OC said.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Jamalpur General Hospital for autopsy.

His autorickshaw was also recovered, but the battery was stolen.

"The body bore several injury marks. No case is yet to be filed over the killing," the OC said, adding that the victim might have been killed by robbers.

## Four children drown

UNB, Sylhet/Chudanga

Four children, including two siblings, drowned yesterday in Sylhet and Chudanga.

In Sylhet, two sisters drowned while swimming in a river in Golapganj upazila.

Suheda Begum, 10, and Majeda Begum, 5, were daughters of Joyanal Ahmed of Fatehpur Paschimpara village of the upazila, said Golapganj Model Police Station Officer-in-Charge Masudul Amin.

Suheda and Majeda drowned while swimming in the Kushiara River near their house in the afternoon. Their bodies were recovered around 3:00pm.

In Chudanga, two children drowned in a pond while playing next to it at Shakharia village in Jibannagar upazila.

Tabassum, 6, daughter of Ashrafal Haque and Ritu, 5, daughter of Raju Ahmed, went missing in the morning. Later, their bodies were found in the pond next to the house.

SM Javed Hasan, officer-in-charge of Jibannagar Police Station, said an unnatural death case has been filed with the police station.

The bodies were handed over to their relatives, added the OC.

### WHAT DO THE STORM SIGNALS MEAN?

#### DISTANT CAUTIONARY SIGNAL 1

There is a region of squally weather (wind speed of 61kmph) in the distant sea where a storm may form.

#### DISTANT WARNING SIGNAL 2

A storm (wind speed of 62-88kmph) has formed in the distant deep sea. Ships may face danger if they leave harbour.

#### LOCAL CAUTIONARY SIGNAL 3

The port is threatened by squally weather (wind speed of 40-50 kmph).

#### LOCAL WARNING SIGNAL 4

The port is threatened by a storm (wind speed of 51-61kmph) but it doesn't appear that the danger is as yet sufficiently great to justify extreme precautionary measures.

#### DANGER SIGNAL 5

The port will experience severe weather from a storm of slight or moderate intensity (wind speed of 62-88kmph) that is expected to cross the coast.

#### DANGER SIGNAL 6

The port will experience severe weather from a storm of slight or moderate intensity (wind speed of 62-88kmph) that is expected to cross the coast.

#### DANGER SIGNAL 7

The port will experience severe weather from a storm of light or moderate intensity (wind speed of 62-88kmph) that is expected to cross over or near the port.

#### GREAT DANGER SIGNAL 8

The port will experience severe weather from a storm of great intensity (wind speed of 89kmph or more) that is expected to cross the coast.

#### GREAT DANGER SIGNAL 9

The port will experience severe weather from a storm of great intensity (wind speed of 89kmph or more) that is expected to cross the coast.

#### GREAT DANGER SIGNAL 10

The port will experience severe weather from a storm of great intensity (wind speed of 89kmph or more) that is expected to cross over or near the port.

#### FAILURE OF COMMUNICATION 11

Communications with the Storm Warning Centre have broken down and local officers consider that a devastating cyclone is approaching.

## Fewer but fiercer since the 90s

FROM PAGE 1

"We had a general conception that the number of cyclones has been increasing in the Bay due to climate change. But it is the harshness or intensity of the cyclones that is increasing, not the numbers," said BUET Professor Rezaul Rahman after reviewing the study titled "Projection of Sea Level Rise and Development of Digital Elevation Models in Support of SLR Decision Making".

Analysing the data on cyclones that made landfall on the Bangladesh coast from 1960 to 2020, meteorologists found that 24 cyclones hit the country in the 60s, while only 16 hit the country in the next decade. There were nine cyclones each in the 80s and 90s, 10 in the 2000s, and 13 in the 2010s.

The analysis considered a weather event as a cyclone only if its wind speed was greater than or equal to 63kmph (34 knots).

From 1990 to 2020, there were three super cyclones – one in April 1991, Sidr in 2007 and Amphan in 2020.

Of the around 80 tropical cyclones that form across the world's waters, 5.5 percent form in the Bay of Bengal. Around 17 percent of the 508 cyclones that formed in the Bay over the last century have made landfalls in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to tropical cyclones which usually from late April to early

November.

The formation of cyclones largely depends on sea surface temperatures reaching 26-27 degrees Celsius.

From 1951 to 1987, the temperature had been on a constant rise, increasing the intensity of cyclones, the study said.

The devastating impacts of cyclones are measured not only by the storm's severity but also by the extent of loss and damage to human life and property.

The cyclones of 1970 and 1991 caused high waves leading to the flooding of the country's coastal regions and causing the deaths of over 500,000 and 138,000 people respectively.

Sidr hit Bangladesh in 2007 with heavy rains, strong winds and storm surge, resulting in the death of around 3,000 people and damage to property worth around \$450 million, according to reports.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Professor Emeritus Ainun Nishat of BRAC University and a leading climate expert, said though the number of cyclones has been decreasing, the sea surface temperature is on the rise and so, many cyclone-like weather events are taking place in the Bay.

"While we can't avoid cyclones, we can take precautionary measures like building our embankments properly. Being well prepared will help reduce the catastrophic impacts of cyclones," he added.

## Storm surges feared in 15 dists

FROM PAGE 1

The maximum sustained wind speed within the 54km of Cyclone Remal's eye was 62kmph and it could increase up to 88kmph, said Met officials.

State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Md Mohibur Rahman yesterday said Remal was expected to make landfall in the coastal districts between Satkhira and Cox's Bazar by this evening.

The coastal districts of Satkhira, Khulna, Bagerhat, Pirojpur, Jhalakhati, Barguna, Bhola, Patuakhali, Barishal, Noakhali, Laxmipur, Feni, Cumilla, Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, and their offshore islands and chars are likely to be inundated by storm surges of 3-5 feet above the normal astronomical tide.

Abul Kalam Mallik, a meteorologist at Bangladesh Meteorological Department, said the cyclone will head towards the coast at a speed of 12 to 15kmph.

"If it gathers strength, it may gain speed," he added.

However, Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) said Remal may have wind speeds of up to 120kmph.

Speaking at a press briefing at the Secretariat, State Minister Mohibur yesterday said nearly 4,000 shelter centres have been readied in the coastal districts with adequate amount of dry food.

"We have 80,000 volunteers ready to tackle the situation and all necessary preparations have been made," he added.

The state minister also warned of heavy rain and landslides in the hilly areas.

Yesterday, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) suspended operations of all launches from the Dhaka River Port.

In a notice, the BIWTA said operation of all launches will remain halted from 10:00pm yesterday until further notice to ensure safety.

## 53pc rise in allocation for debt servicing

FROM PAGE 1

in 2012-13.

After nine years, in 2021-22, the amount went past \$2 billion. The following year, Bangladesh paid \$2.67 billion in debt servicing. The amount is going to be over \$3 billion in the current fiscal year.

In the first nine months of FY24, debt service repayment in both principal and interest amounted to \$2.57 billion, a 49 percent increase year on year.

Interest payments alone reached \$1.05 billion in July-March. This was the first time the interest payment crossed the \$1-billion mark. It was \$485 million in the first nine months of FY23.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said spending \$2 billion or \$3 billion in servicing debts would not be a problem if the forex reserves were \$46 billion, which was the case in early 2022.

When the reserves are less than \$20 billion, spending \$5 billion to repay loans becomes difficult because the payment has to be made in foreign currencies, and for foreign currencies, the country needs the earnings, he said.

On May 21, the reserves stood at \$18.61 billion, central bank data showed.

"In the next few years, debt servicing will be a major issue, and we should be careful in managing the debt repayment and try our best to earn more through export and remittance," Prof Mustafizur said.

Besides, the government needs to

## Hitmen were never paid

FROM PAGE 1

However, Aktaruzzaman, a Bangladesh born US citizen is believed to have fled to New York on May 18.

Requesting anonymity, an officer of a law enforcement agency said the assailants were operatives of the Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP).

Even 24-year-old Jihad Hawladar, who dismembered the corpse, was an operative of the PBCP. He used to live illegally in Mumbai where he worked as a butcher.

Amanullah, who was in charge of the killing mission, was a PBCP leader, said the officer.

Aktaruzzaman gave them money to travel to Kolkata and stay there.

After they were done, the killers only had Rs 4.30 lakh they found on Azim, the officer said.

When the lawmaker, who used to run a gold smuggling racket with Aktaruzzaman, reached India and went to his friend Gopal Biswas' house, he had Rs 10,000. Gopal then gave him Rs 4.20 lakh, the officer said, quoting Amanullah, who along with Celesty Rahman and Tanvir Bhuiyan, is on an eight-day remand.

The West Bengal CID yesterday said it may seek Aktaruzzaman's extradition from the US, so that a trial can be held in India.

"India has an extradition treaty with the US. Bangladesh does not. We may seek his extradition to India because the crime occurred here," a senior CID

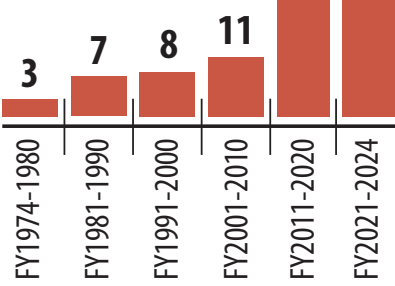
demonstrate zero tolerance on capital flight, which often takes place through hundi, he said.

The economist said the government should be careful in choosing and implementing projects and ensure the desired outcome of the schemes.

With its rising per capita income, Bangladesh's access to cheap loans is decreasing and foreign borrowing is also

### FOREIGN LOAN UTILISATION

In billions of dollars



becoming costlier.

According to an ERD report, the country now has to borrow at the costlier market-based rates to cover the development spending.

The interest rate risk is high when the debt portfolio is dominated by market-based rates because the volume of the payment is based on the vagaries of the global economy.

officer said, requesting anonymity.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said the government was working with India, Nepal, Interpol, and the US to bring Aktaruzzaman to Bangladesh.

Azim went to Kolkata on May 12 and stayed the night at his friend Gopal's house. He left the next day, saying he had a doctor's appointment. Gopal later received a couple of texts from Azim's mobile phone that said there was no need to call him. On Wednesday, India and Bangladesh police said the MP was murdered in a flat in New Town, Kolkata.

An officer at a law enforcement agency in Bangladesh said some of the accused tried to kill Azim in India before.

In mid-January, Aktaruzzaman along with Celesty Rahman and another woman named Arisha went to Kolkata and invited Azim to meet them there. But the latter did not fall into the trap, said another source.

Harun Or Rashid, additional commissioner (DB) of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), said the accused previously failed twice in their attempts to kill the lawmaker.

They planned to kill the MP in the country before the last national election, he told reporters on Mintoo Road.

"Their plan was to take him to that flat in Kolkata and keep him there for two days during which they would blackmail him into giving them money

The cost of foreign loans has been on the rise as the interest rates have shot up globally. The interest rates for market-based loans have also increased significantly, an ERD official said.

In 2023, the government borrowed about \$2.6 billion at the market-based rate, which accounted for 30.7 percent of the total committed loans. In 2022, it was \$3.42 billion, representing 43.9 percent of the total.

The ERD official said the funds released for mega projects like the metro rail, the Matarbari power plant, and the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant have increased in recent times as the physical works are in the final stage.

Besides, Bangladesh received significant budgetary support in the last three years after development partners accelerated lending to help the economy make a turnaround from the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. This has pushed up the loan repayment.

"Moreover, the grace period of some major loans will come to an end over the next few years," Prof Mustafizur said.

During the grace period, a borrower pays only the interest. After it expires, both interest and principal amounts are paid in instalments.

With Bangladesh set to graduate from the group of least-developed countries, the costs have gone up while the share of concessional loans has come down drastically, he added.

"Also, the country has borrowed large amounts over the last few years."

through hundi," he said.

"They used chloroform to make the lawmaker unconscious. As he did not regain consciousness, he was killed. Then they disposed of the body."

"After that, the killers went to different places with the MP's mobile phone to confuse everyone."

"The killers first took him to the flat, and then took one of his phones and went to another place. Besides, the killers came to the Beanpole border with four mobile phones after killing him."

According to investigators, the accused named Sayem and Faisal changed their appearance by shaving their heads.

They even tried to get the lawmaker's political rivals framed for the murder.

Asked how the investigation will make progress as the body is yet to be found, Harun said, "We will analyse everything. The accused are giving information. We are not disclosing everything for the sake of the investigation."

"Besides, the Kolkata police have found evidence, therefore, a murder case has been filed [in Kolkata], Indian police are investigating this murder case very seriously."

"A team of Indian police is investigating here in Bangladesh. They are interrogating the accused [arrested in Dhaka]."

A three-member team of detectives will go to India soon to investigate the murder, said Harun, adding a government order has been issued in this regard.

[Our correspondent in New Delhi contributed to this report.]