

MY DHAKA

Simple solutions TO EID ALARMS!

RBR

A series of unfortunate incidents began just the day before Eid holidays started.

First, my refrigerator went kaput; imagine Eid-ul-Azha without a freezer or a fridge. This is the king of all disasters, and I literally begged the customer service of the refrigerator brand to come and fix my dead freezer.

Now, the difference between a random mechanic and a brand engineer is in the bureaucracy. A regular mechanic comes as quickly as possible, while the official customer service providers dilly dally over a long list of formalities.

On an average day alone, this was quite the task – taking a minimum of seven days. However, thankfully the brand's emergency service system was active during this Eid break, and it took them just two days to get my refrigerator up and running again.

In many ways, I am lucky that it started running smoothly on the morning of Eid.

Meanwhile, my mother, guard, house help, and nearby grocer had given me racks of empty space in their fridge temporarily. They had warned me, however, that come Eid day, they would no longer be able to ensure this support.

Amidst the



stress of Eid drawing closer, my anxiety forced me to spend my Eid bonus on getting a local brand freezer, with raving reviews and top-class prompt customer service.

While all this was happening, my mother fell ill. Doctors attending house calls are not common in Dhaka. So, normally one ends up calling all of their relatives who are in the profession for a quick fix. An impossible task in my case, as most of them were either on holiday abroad or busy in cattle markets.

So, I had to run to the hospital ER. Their ECG machines were not able to initially process the electrocardiogram of my mother due to technical glitches and finally gave a normal report on the fifth attempt. The emergency doctor prescribed relaxants and saline, for my 76-year-old mother, who was also fasting that day.

Thankfully, it was a blessing to

see that the nurses and doctor attending her were in high spirits, which made the experience comforting for me.

Drama continued as I returned from the hospital. My son was frantic as his geriatric dog was limping and howling from arthritic aches. I must have been the luckiest person on earth, as I got through to an emergency vet call centre and got his prescriptions.

However, stores that stocked veterinary medicine were all closed, while the recommended option for using human medicine was also out of production. All pharmacies in Uttara said the same thing, so I tried the emergency online medicine service, and voila! I had them in my hands.

Phew! I think this is enough for one reading, and I am not going to go elaborate any further about the other mishappenings, but I just want to reiterate that



this holiday I survived because of the city's emergency service providers.

I was humbled by the efforts of all emergency service providers, who were on duty this holiday, to allow me – a hapless Dhakaite – to enjoy her Eid morning tea without pressing every panic button available.

Thank God for the emergency services in the city during long holidays.

PM to brief media on India visit today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will hold a press conference at her Gono Bhaban residence today at 11:00am.

The premier will brief the media on the outcome of her recent visit to India, according to the press wing of the Prime Minister's Office.

Hasina visited New Delhi on June 21-22.

During PM's visit, Bangladesh and India signed 10 memorandums of understanding (MoUs). Seven new MoUs were signed and three existing MoUs were renewed.

Three children drown in Padma

OUR CORRESPONDENT, PABNA

Three children, including two siblings, drowned in the Padma in the Bhaduridangi area of Chartarapur union in Pabna Sadar upazila yesterday.

The victims are Sabbir Hossain, 14, Siam Hossain, 10, sons of Alal Pramanik, of Natun Gohalbari village, and Nur Hossain, 10, son of Islam Sardar, of Atghoripara village of Chartarapur union.

Siddikur Rahman, chairman of Chartarapur union parishad, said five children from the village went to the Padma at Vaduridangi point of the river to bathe.

While bathing three children were drowned and two others managed to save their lives, the chairman said.

13 Bangladeshis return after 2 years in Indian jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Thirteen Bangladeshi nationals, including four children, returned home yesterday morning through the Benapole check post after two years of imprisonment in India.

Petrapole Immigration Police of India handed them over to Benapole Immigration Police for the travel permit process at 8:00am.

Azharul Islam, OC of Benapole Immigration Police, said human traffickers took them to Kolkata, India, two and a half years ago, promising good jobs. The traffickers abandoned them at Sialdaha Railway Station in Kolkata. Police arrested them there within three days. Later, the court sentenced them to two years in jail.

Court slaps

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Matiur and his family hit headlines after a video of his son Mushfiqur Rahman Ifat buying a goat for Tk 12 lakh went viral on social media ahead of Eid. It was also reported that he bought cattle that cost Tk 70 lakh.

Since then, the expensive watches, cars, and properties owned by the family have been reported by the media.

Lucky's tax files submitted to the Election Commission before this year's Narsingdi upazila polls say she is worth Tk 10.31 crore, but a closer look indicates she may have understated her wealth by dozens of times.

Benazir's wife

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Benazir, who is reportedly abroad with his family, did not appear before the ACC on Sunday. He too sent a written statement to the commission on Thursday.

The former inspector general of police and his family members skipped questioning by the ACC on June 6 and June 9, leading the commission to reschedule their appearance dates for June 23 and 24.

Not feasible

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"However, water is very precious and is the lifeline of the people. We cannot compromise on such a sensitive issue which has severe and adverse implication on the people. People of West Bengal will be the worst sufferers due to the impact of such agreements."

In the letter signed yesterday, the West Bengal chief minister also said, "I came to understand that Government of India is in the process of renewing the Indo Bangladesh Farakka Treaty (1996) which is to expire in 2026."

"I would like to bring to your notice that river morphology has changed in the eastern part of India and Bangladesh over many years which has deprived West Bengal and negatively impacted the water availability in the state," she said.

The letter ended with her strong reservation saying that no discussion on sharing of Teesta water and the Farakka Treaty should be taken up with Bangladesh without the involvement of [West Bengal] state government."

She hoped that the Indian prime minister would take action accordingly.

Teesta water is crucial for irrigation in the northern part of Bangladesh, especially between December and April.

The river resembles a narrow canal in Bangladesh in lean season.

India in 1983 built the Gajoldoba barrage on the Teesta 70km upstream of Bangladesh's Lalmonirhat and started diverting Teesta water.

In 2011, Bangladesh and India finalised the Teesta water-sharing agreement but it was not signed as Mamata opposed it.

During the Indian PM's Dhaka visit in 2021, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi directed their respective water resources ministries to work towards an early conclusion of the Framework of Interim Agreement on sharing waters of six common rivers.

IMF approves 3rd tranche of \$1.15b loans

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Bangladesh met all the conditions except for maintaining the foreign currency reserves at the IMF-set level.

As per the loan conditions, the target for net international reserves (NIR) in December last year was \$17.78 billion. However, a recent IMF review mission found the NIR was \$16.73 billion at that time.

"... The Executive Board granted a waiver of non-observance of a performance criterion for the floor on net international reserves on the basis of corrective actions," read an IMF statement issued early today.

The NIR is defined as reserves assets minus reserve liabilities. Reserve liabilities are all foreign exchange liabilities to residents and non-residents, including commitments to sell foreign exchange arising from derivatives and all credit outstanding from the IMF.

After the IMF Executive Board's

discussion yesterday, its Deputy Managing Director Antoinette M Sayeh said, "Bangladesh's economy is navigating multiple macroeconomic challenges. Even in the difficult environment, programme performance has been broadly on track and the authorities remain committed to undertaking the necessary policy actions and reforms. The IMF-supported programme is helping to safeguard macroeconomic stability and protect the vulnerable, while helping to accelerate economic reforms to deliver strong, inclusive, and green growth."

"Near-term policies should focus on rebuilding external resilience and bringing down inflation. The authorities' recent actions to realign the exchange rate and implement the new exchange rate arrangement are welcome. Periodic reviews of the crawling peg would be important to ensure its effectiveness. Continued

monetary and fiscal policy tightening would help to rein in inflation. Should external and inflationary pressures intensify, a further tightening in policies is warranted."

She said a flexible exchange rate regime and bolstering foreign exchange reserve buffers were necessary conditions for external resilience.

Sayeh also spoke about addressing vulnerabilities in the financial sector, and strengthening banking regulation, supervision and governance.

"Sustained structural reforms are required to achieve Bangladesh's goal of reaching upper middle-income country status by 2031. Diversifying exports, attracting more foreign direct investment, and strengthening governance are key."

In January last year, the IMF approved the \$4.7 billion loan. Bangladesh has already received more than \$1 billion in two instalments.

Our concerns were largely

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management project, but now with India coming into the scene, it appears that the project would get stuck indefinitely.

Border killings have been an issue of concern for Bangladesh for long but regrettably, it has not seen any improvement. I also do not think that is going to improve anytime soon.

The two countries spoke of joint production of small satellites. I do not think Bangladesh has the funds to go for satellite production. Also, the purpose of the satellites is not clear. We should go for investments based on real needs. Do we really need a satellite?

Delhi extensively spoke of defence

cooperation. I am not sure how far it can go. We are not sure what India will manufacture. The country buys most of its sophisticated defence equipment from abroad and jointly produces missiles with Israel. I do not think India will go for joint missile production with Bangladesh. What can best happen is that the two countries can jointly produce ammunition.

The railway transit that was spoken about suggests that India wants to restore the rail communication as it was before 1947. However, we need to see how much funds are required for that. This transit, though close to the borders of Nepal and Bhutan, will mostly benefit India. I do not know

how it will benefit Bangladesh. As we already have high loan burdens, I do not think we should take further loans for projects that don't serve the best interests of the Bangladeshis.

I think this visit is a reflection of close relations between the two governments, both of which have entered a new term. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will go on a China visit soon and things will become clearer after that.

Prime Minister Hasina and Indian Prime Minister Modi had one-to-one meeting. We don't know exactly the content of the meeting. However, we assume that India has shared with our prime minister its concerns about China.

Visit long on visions, short on details

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energy cooperation. It was run more on a bilateral basis. So, I think it has moved to a sub-regional direction, which is a welcome move. We must see to it that such a process offers equitable benefits to all parties.

Likewise, the decision for the early commencement of negotiations on CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement) is a welcome move by the two leaders. It is our hope that once agreed upon, the CEPA will create a dynamic for improving the bilateral trade and investment, and address the current challenges we face. Meanwhile, it is our earnest hope that India will take urgent steps to remove the non-tariff and para-tariff barriers to facilitate export of products from Bangladesh.

The formation of a technical committee to initiate discussions on the renewal of the Ganges Water Agreement is also a positive development. However, the decision to send a technical delegation on the management and conservation of Teesta inside Bangladesh is a little unclear. Except a line in the Indian statement – "We will continue to engage in prioritising the exchange of data and formulating the framework

for interim water sharing based on the recommendations of the Joint Rivers Commission" – there is no mention on the signaling of the Teesta agreement, which has remained pending for the last 13 years despite commitments from India's highest political level.

It is important that the water-sharing agreement captures the fundamental right of Bangladesh to the waters of all common rivers flowing between the two countries, and as such, it cannot be ignored under any circumstances. The formulation also does not touch upon the earlier agreement to deal with the water management issue on a basin-wide approach.

Connectivity by bus, rail, cargo through Bangladesh has a strategic dimension to it. India is creating an alternative connectivity to its northeastern region through Bangladesh. This is fine, but what benefit Bangladesh would get from this access is unknown. There is a strong perception in Bangladesh that over the last few years, whatever the connectivity projects have been implemented are mostly for the benefits of India. I think it would be better to make an assessment on the cost and benefit of these projects. In the statement, India says that

Bangladesh is at the converging point of its Neighbourhood First policy, Act East Policy, SAGAR Doctrine, and Indo-Pacific vision, and the intention as reflected therein to integrate Bangladesh in the development of India's northeastern region and beyond is obvious.

Bangladesh has also announced its vision in the form of Indo-Pacific Outlook, which prioritises inclusiveness and economic collaboration. It remains to be seen how the Indian vision and Bangladesh outlook can work side by side in the context of growing competition in the region. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has highlighted India's interest for defence cooperation and modernisation of defence equipment in Bangladesh. One only hopes that such cooperation will remain consistent with the foreign policy objectives of Bangladesh.

The decision to issue e-visas for medical purposes, and bus services from Rajshahi and Chattogram to Kolkata are also welcome initiatives, which will benefit the common people of both Bangladesh and India.

Overall, the visit was long on vision and short on details and roadmap for resolving the bilateral issues between the two countries.

Khaleda now stable

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He said Khaleda Zia's physical condition has remained stable since the pacemaker procedure.

Several specialist doctors from Australia, the UK, and the US, including Khaleda's daughter-in-law and cardiologist Zubaida Rahman from London, participated virtually in the medical board meeting.

Yesterday, a group of specialist doctors at Evercare Hospital successfully implanted the pacemaker in Khaleda's chest.

Zahid, who also serves as a BNP vice chairman, mentioned that the former prime minister had previously experienced heart issues involving three blockages.

"After a thorough assessment, the medical board opted to implant

the pacemaker in her heart," the physician explained.

On June 11, 2022, Khaleda Zia was diagnosed with multiple blockages in her heart at Evercare Hospital. One of these blockages was 95 percent and was treated with stent placement.

Khaleda Zia was rushed to the hospital in an ambulance around 3:30am on Saturday after suddenly falling ill at her residence, "Firoza" in Gulshan. She was promptly admitted to the CCU, where her medical treatment began under the supervision of the medical board.

Khaleda, 79, has long been battling various ailments, including liver cirrhosis, arthritis, diabetes, and issues related to the kidney, lung, heart, and eyes.

Mid-day meal in primary schools

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The project will be placed at the next meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council or the one after that for approval, he said.

"The Planning Commission hinted that the project is likely to get approval quickly since mid-day meals for students are on the priority list of the government," said another top official of the primary and mass education ministry on the condition of anonymity.

The official pointed out that even Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali spoke of the school feeding programme in his budget speech.

The World Food Programme ran a project to feed schoolchildren from 2001 to 2009. The last government school feeding programme was introduced in 2010.

Nearly 30 lakh children in over 15,300 primary schools of 104 poverty-prone upazilas were provided with fortified biscuits, while students in three upazilas received hot meals. The project ran until June 2022.

Before it ended, the ministry concerned in August 2020 prepared a project worth Tk 17,290 crore to feed all students of the 65,566 government primary schools for five years. It, however, drew criticism from many quarters as it required officials to go on foreign trips to learn how to make khichuri, a local dish that would be served as the mid-day meal.

Subsequently, the project was turned down by Ecnc in June 2021. "The project was not approved as the prime minister was concerned about its structure [modus operandi]. She said cooking khichuri in schools might hamper academic activities," said then planning minister MA Mannan.

Primary education ministry officials argued that it would be tough for them to provide hot meals as it requires manpower and places for cooking.

However, in the revamped programme that is expected to kick off later this

year, the government will not only provide fortified biscuits but also seasonal fruits, bananas, eggs and bread, according to Ahmed, the primary and mass education ministry secretary.

Besides, another school feeding programme for about 2.2 lakh primary school students of Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts will be introduced in July, said Farid Ahmed, secretary of the primary and mass education ministry.

The World Bank will provide assistance for the project, he said.

"Reintroduction of mid-day meals is a positive step," said KM Enamul Hoque, capacity support and advocacy adviser at the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education.

In Bangladesh, many students attend classes with an empty stomach, which makes it difficult for them to concentrate in the classroom, he said, adding that the mid-day meals will help increase the attendance and nutrition level of students.

"But I think the government should also consider giving hot meals," he added.

In August 2019, the government prepared the National School Meal Policy for government primary schools to ensure children get at least 30 percent of their required daily calorie intake by 2030.

A 2018 study by the World Food Programme showed that mid-day meal programmes resulted in a 4.2 percent increase in school enrolment and a 7.5 percent reduction in dropouts.

The dropout rate at the primary level stood at 13.95 percent in 2022, down from 39.8 percent in 2010, according to the Directorate of Primary Education.