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Four killed as ambulance, 2 buses catch fire after collision

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

Four people were burnt to death, and seven others injured when an ambulance and two buses caught fire following a collision on the Dhaka-Aricha highway in Savar yesterday.

The deceased were the passengers of the ambulance while the injured were the passengers of one of the buses, said Md Rakibul Islam, duty officer at the Fire Service Control Room.

The official said the ambulance first collided with a road median in the Fulbaria Police Town area around 2:00am.

A bus then crashed into the ambulance from behind, causing the vehicle's gas cylinder to explode, which triggered the fire.

A second bus, which collided with the burning vehicle, also caught fire, he said.

Five firefighting units brought the fire under control in an hour, the official said.

The ambulance and the two buses, however, were completely destroyed.

The injured have been sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment.

The identities of the deceased could not be confirmed.

A firefighting helicopter is seen on the backdrop of plumes of smoke as a wildfire burns in Pacific Palisades, California. A fast-moving wildfire in a Los Angeles suburb burned buildings and sparked panicked evacuations as "life-threatening" winds whipped the region. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: AFP

No room for favouritism in next polls: CEC

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin yesterday said they were working wholeheartedly to hold free and fair polls.

"We are committed to holding fair, transparent, and acceptable elections," he said.

The CEC made the comments while speaking at the inaugural session of a workshop titled "Challenges in the Voter Registration Process and Ways to Overcome It" held at the Moulvibazar Bengal Convention Hall. The Election Commission Secretariat's Capacity Building Project and Moulvibazar District Election Office jointly organised the programme.

"We have assumed the posts not to favour any particular party, organisation or individual to win elections. We are here to hold fair elections," the CEC said.

"Our aim is to hold an election where people's votes will be the only deciding factor in winning an election."

The CEC also asked the field-level officers to work fearlessly, saying, "There

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BCS EXCLUSION

Intel reports on 227 to be reviewed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A decision has been made to review the intelligence reports on 227 candidates who were excluded from the final gazette of the 43rd BCS.

This was decided at a meeting between Public Administration Senior Secretary Mokhles Ur Rahman and representatives from two intelligence agencies at the Secretariat yesterday.

However, individuals facing legal cases are unlikely to achieve favourable outcomes.

Talking to journalists, the senior secretary said, "Those who have no record of criminal offences can hope to join their positions."

Altogether, 267 candidates were excluded from the 43rd BCS in two gazette notifications on October 15 and December 30 last year.

Among them, 40 candidates did not attend their medical check-ups and will not be considered for the review. As a result, the review will focus on the remaining 227 candidates.

Sources indicate that the senior secretary has directed officials to approach the review process positively.

No specific reasons were disclosed for disqualification of 227 candidates,

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Govt expands OMS programme across country

Sale of rice to begin Jan 12 in 422 upazilas amid rising prices of the staple

BAHARAM KHAN and SUKANTA HALDER

The interim government has expanded the Open Market Sales (OMS) programme across the country to help families cope with inflation, as retail prices of kitchen essentials continue to soar in the local market.

Sales will continue till February after the first phase of the programme begins on January 12, a food ministry official said.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Food Adviser Ali Imam Majumder said the price of rice has increased exponentially in the local market, which is why the government has taken the initiative to provide relief to the common people.

A ministry official told this newspaper that under the OMS initiative, around 1,752 centres across 422 upazilas in the country will sell rice. "Two tonnes of rice will be sold every day in each upazila."

Each person can purchase five kilograms of rice at Tk 30 per kg, the official said.

Over the past two years, real income reductions due to ongoing inflationary pressure have pushed at least 78 lakh people into poverty, shows the study by the Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID).

This includes 38 lakh people who have become extremely poor.

Besides, around 1 crore more are at risk of slipping below the poverty line due to continued inflationary pressures, said Md Deen Islam, research director of the RAPID.

In the past week, the price of coarse rice has increased by 6.67 percent and medium-grain rice by 1.63 percent, according to the state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

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'Unhealthy competition' on to cling to power

Says Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said an "unhealthy competition" is going on to cling to power, and urged all political parties to prioritise unity and stability in these critical times.

"Since Sheikh Hasina fled on August 5 last year, we haven't been able to regain the trust among ourselves. We are failing to stay united what has started is unfortunate; I think it's not a healthy development. An unhealthy competition has begun to remain in power.

"You can only stay in power when you can ensure stability," he said at an event at the party chairperson's Gulshan office.

He, however, did not specifically name who his remarks were directed at.

A book, titled "Rajbandir Jabanbandi", which chronicles the court depositions given by BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia

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Mediators make some progress in Gaza truce talks

Say sources; 3 children among 17 killed in Israeli strikes

AGENCIES

US and Arab mediators have made some progress in their efforts to reach a ceasefire accord between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, but not enough to seal a deal, Palestinian sources close to the talks said yesterday.

As talks continued in Qatar, the Israeli military carried out strikes across the enclave, killing at least 17 people, Palestinian medics said.

The death toll included eight Palestinians killed in a house in Jabalia, the largest of Gaza's eight historic refugee camps, where Israeli forces have operated for more than three months. Nine others, including a father and his three children, died in two separate airstrikes on two houses in central Gaza Strip.

Israel's military offensive in the Gaza Strip has killed at least 46,006 Palestinians and wounded 109,378 since October 7, 2023, the Gaza health officials said yesterday.

Palestinian authorities, meanwhile, warned that the al-Aqsa, Nasser, and European hospitals face imminent closure over dire fuel shortages, reports Al Jazeera online.

Pope Francis yesterday stepped up his recent criticisms of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, calling the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian enclave "very serious and shameful".

- Three Gaza hospitals face imminent closure over fuel shortages
- Death toll in enclave rises to 46,006

ACC sues Nixon, wife over Tk 3,162cr shady transactions

Nixon Chowdhury

Tarin Hossain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti Corruption Commission has filed two cases against Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury, alias Nixon Chowdhury, a former Awami League lawmaker from Faridpur, and his wife Tarin Hossain for their alleged involvement in shady bank transactions of more than Tk 3,162 crore.

The two also face charges of amassing illegal wealth of about Tk 19.5 crore.

During his tenure as a lawmaker, Nixon, also nephew of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, abused his power and accumulated unexplained wealth of Tk 11.23 crore, according to the case statement filed with the ACC's Integrated District Office in Dhaka by its Assistant Director Ferdous Rahman yesterday.

Besides, Nixon, the younger brother of former chief whip Noor-E-Alam Chowdhury, also conducted unusual

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PRETTY LI'L PECKERS

A male scarlet-backed flowerpecker gently perched on a twig in the Hazarikhil Sanctuary in Fatikchhari. This passerine bird is found in subtropical or tropical moist lowland forests, and occasionally gardens, in a number of countries throughout South and East Asia, including Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and more. However, it is known to be rare in Nepal and Bhutan. It feeds primarily on seeds, fruits and flower nectar, hence the name "flowerpecker". The bird is sexually dimorphic, meaning the males and females are easily distinguishable – the male has navy blue upperparts with a bright red streak down its back from its crown to its tail coverts, while the female and juvenile are predominantly olive green.

PHOTO: MD SUMON

FA'S CHINA VISIT Rohingya crisis, trade gap to top agenda

BSS, Dhaka

Addressing trade imbalances, attracting Chinese investments in Bangladesh and Rohingya issue will be on the agenda during Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain's upcoming bilateral visit to China from January 20 to 24, according to a foreign ministry's spokesperson.

"This year marks the golden jubilee of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and China.

The adviser's visit to China is therefore of significant importance," said spokesperson Mohammad Rafiqul Alam during a weekly media briefing at the foreign ministry yesterday.

The foreign adviser is expected to hold a bilateral meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi

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