



A trip down memory lane

WR1



250-bed on paper, 100-bed in reality

P5



Russia attacks Ukraine with 72 drones

P6



A 10-step proposal for election road map 2025

P8

MRT-1 unlikely to be ready before 2030

Inaugurated in 2023, country's first underground rail project sees little progress

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Five years have passed since the country's first underground metro rail project was approved, but construction of the key structure has not yet begun.

The Tk 52,561-crore project, Mass Rapid Transit Line-1 (MRT Line-1), was formally inaugurated in February 2023. The Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited (DMTCL), which is implementing it, has so far been able to hire contractors for one of the 12 packages.

Realising that the December 2026 deadline is too ambitious, officials say they may need an extension of three or four years. A significant rise in the cost is inevitable.

Officials at a meeting last month, chaired by DMTCL Managing Director Mohammad Abdur Rouf, said the delays were mainly caused by the Covid-19 restrictions and the lengthy approval procedure of the project's primary financier Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica).

The meeting decided to accelerate the tendering process.

The MRT Line-1 will connect Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport with Kamalapur Railway Station. It will also bring Purbachal township

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



A man on a bicycle pedals through the dense morning fog in Barunagaon village in Thakurgaon yesterday. The icy winds from the Himalayas, coupled with clear skies, have intensified the cold in the northern districts.

PHOTO: QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

Cold snap to continue in North for 2 more days

Says Met office

STAR REPORT

A mild cold wave currently affecting northern and western regions will persist for the next two to three days.

However, day and night temperatures are expected to improve during this period, according to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

"People will continue to experience the chilly conditions for the next few days. The northern and western regions will face a mild coldwave during this time," meteorologist Md Abul Kalam Mallik told The Daily Star.

Panchagarh, the country's northernmost district, recorded the season's lowest temperature of 7.3°C yesterday as a mild to moderate coldwave swept

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



No local polls before general election

Demand BNP, like-minded parties

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP and its like-minded parties have firmly opposed plans to hold local government elections before the national polls.

The parties want to hold programmes to mobilise public support for an early national election if the government attempts to delay it by raising issues like local government elections.

At liaison committee meetings between the BNP and 10 other parties on Wednesday and Thursday, the leaders called the idea of holding local government elections before national polls "an attempt to detract from the major issues".

In recent years, the BNP and these parties simultaneously demonstrated against the Awami League government. As part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen ties, the BNP



BNP, like-minded parties criticise govt for 'shifting focus from national election'



They plan programmes to mobilise public support for early general election if govt attempts to delay it

is scheduled to hold discussions with leaders of the 12 party alliance today.

Leaders of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Jatiyatabadi Samamona Jote -- an alliance of BNP's like-minded parties -- among others, attended the liaison committee meetings at BNP chairperson's Gulshan office.

"We want the national elections to be held after essential electoral reforms as soon as possible," said Fariduzzaman Farhad, chairman of the National

People's Party and coordinator of Jatiyatabadi Samamona Jote who attended a meeting.

"If the government fails to do this, we will intensify efforts to build public opinion on the issue," he told this newspaper.

"The people want their voting rights restored and an elected government in place,"

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Cancer patients cut off from vital lifeline

All 6 radiotherapy machines at NICRH out of service for 19 days

AHMED DEEPTO

All six radiotherapy machines of the NICRH have been out of order for 19 days, depriving over 200 cancer patients of their scheduled therapy every day.

The National Institute of Cancer Research & Hospital (NICRH) in the capital is the country's only full-fledged cancer treatment facility.

Of the hospital's six radiotherapy machines, two Linear Accelerators (LINACs) became nonfunctional two years ago and two Cobalts a year ago.

Since then, the two remaining LINACs were used beyond their capacities for approximately 200-230 patients every day, until they recently became nonfunctional.

One of the machines malfunctioned during a therapy session on December 21. The other stopped working the following day, halting all radiotherapy services at the state-run facility.

Of the hospital's six radiotherapy machines, two Linear Accelerators (LINACs) became nonfunctional two years ago and two Cobalts a year back. The two remaining LINACs went out of order recently.

While visiting the NICRH yesterday, a notice was seen in the radiotherapy department, announcing that the machines were out of order. There was no mention of when they might be operational and patients were told they would be contacted later when the machines start working again.

The hospital authorities are yet to specify when the machines will be repaired and made operational. However, they have announced plans to set up two new radiotherapy machines in February and March.

Confirming that all six machines are currently non-functional, NICRH Director Dr Jahangir Kabir said the hospital has been unable to provide radiotherapy services, forcing around 200 cancer patients to return home without the therapy every day.

He added that efforts are underway to resolve the issue as quickly as possible.

"By the first week of February, we hope that one new machine will start its operation, and within the first week of March, we will start operating another new machine."

"If four more machines can be made operational, we will be able to provide therapy to an additional 600 cancer patients daily."

The collapse of radiotherapy services at the NICRH is a stark reminder of the systemic challenges in Bangladesh's healthcare system.

Patients who had waited months to get radiotherapy appointments at the NICRH have expressed frustration over the disruption in services. Many travelled long distances to Dhaka, only to find the machines out of order.

Rabeya Begum, 53, a breast cancer patient from Moulvibazar, said she underwent four radiotherapy sessions at the NICRH.

She arrived at the hospital yesterday morning for her

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

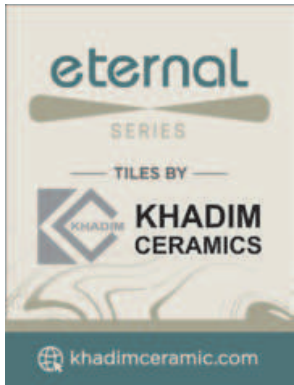
Police launch hunt for ex-OC who escaped custody

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have issued a nationwide red alert to arrest Shah Alam, the former officer-in-charge of Uttara East Police Station, who escaped from custody.

It was issued yesterday across all police stations and border points in the country. The immigration authorities were notified to prevent Shah Alam, 42,

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



The water of this ditch near the Botanical Garden in Mirpur's Goran Chat Bari area has turned blue due to toxic chemical waste from different factories. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN