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## No let-up in upward trend of rice prices

Various govt steps to bring down prices yet to yield any results

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MD ABBAS

There is no sign of rice prices going down despite the government's efforts to stabilise the staple market, including expansion of Open Market Sale (OMS) programme and the move to accelerate imports.

Some of the rice varieties have seen Tk 0.5 to Tk 1 hike per kg this week at retail level, compared to last week.

Prices of almost all varieties have been increasing over the past three weeks.

The interim government has announced an expansion of the OMS programme across the country to help families cope with inflation, as retail prices of kitchen essentials continue to soar in the local market.

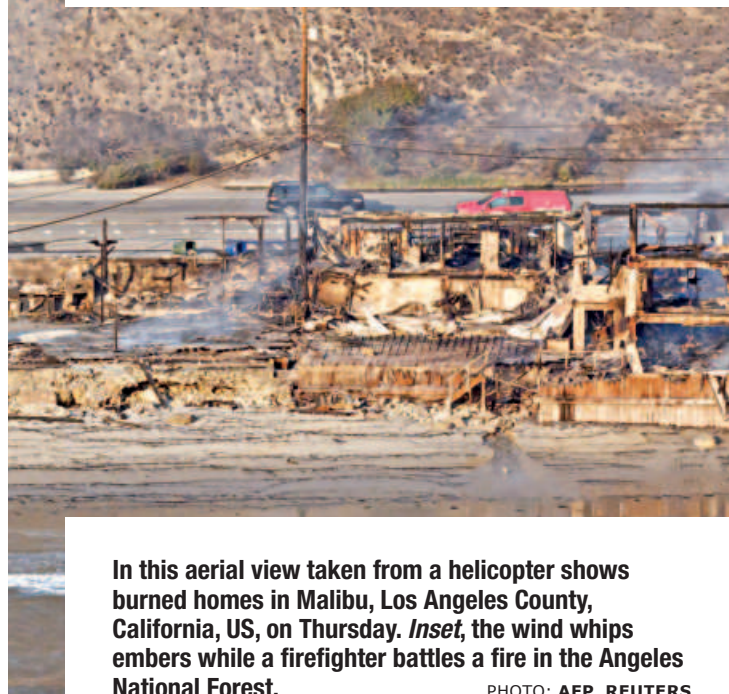
The programme's first phase will begin on January 12, and sales will continue until February, according to food ministry officials.

Speaking to The Daily Star on Thursday, 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.

In November, the National Board of Revenue withdrew duties and regulatory taxes on rice imports. It also lowered the advance income tax from five percent to two percent.

The government then allowed 277 private entities

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



In this aerial view taken from a helicopter shows burned homes in Malibu, Los Angeles County, California, US, on Thursday. Inset, the wind whips embers while a firefighter battles a fire in the Angeles National Forest.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

## HUSH MONEY CASE Trump spared jail or fine Judge grants him unconditional discharge

REUTERS, New York

US President-elect Donald Trump will not go to jail or pay a fine over his criminal conviction stemming from hush money paid to a porn star, a judge ruled yesterday, but the sentencing will place a judgment of guilt on his record.

Justice Juan Merchan's sentencing of Trump, 78, to unconditional discharge closes a case that had loomed over his bid to retake the White House just days before his Jan. 20 inauguration.

By granting an unconditional discharge, Merchan would place a judgment of guilt on Trump's permanent record - without any other legal penalty such as custody, a fine or probation.

Trump pleaded not guilty and has vowed to appeal the guilty verdict. He appeared with his lawyer on TV screens beamed to the courtroom with two American flags in the background.

"It's been a political witch hunt," Trump said before sentencing, wearing a red tie with white stripes. "It was done to damage my reputation so I would lose the election and obviously that didn't work."

"I'm totally innocent, I did nothing wrong," said Trump, who did not testify during the six-week trial last year.

Now that he has been sentenced, he is free to pursue the appeal, a process which could take years and play out



SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## JULY UPRISING Conspiracy, greed causing rift in unity Says Jamaat secretary general

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Mia Golam Parwar yesterday said a conspiracy and greed are causing a rift in the unity among students and the public that existed during the July uprising.

He made this remark while speaking at a workers' conference held at Bhabanipur Muktijoddha College ground in Gazipur Sadar Upazila.

"We want to build this new Bangladesh through a free, fair, participatory, and credible election. But there are obstacles as well. I wonder what conspiracies or greed is causing the split...," Parwar said.

"We should move forward with the election after necessary reforms," he added.

Parwar said those who want an election without reforms cite

SEE PAGE 6 COL 2

## Gaza death toll 40% higher than recorded

Says Lancet study; Israeli forces bomb a group of Palestinians in eastern Gaza City

AGENCIES

Research published in The Lancet medical journal yesterday estimates that the death toll in Gaza during the first nine months of Israeli offensive was around 40 percent higher than recorded by the Palestinian territory's health ministry.

The number of dead in Gaza has become a matter of bitter debate since Israel launched its military campaign against Hamas.

Up to June 30 last year, the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza reported a death toll of 37,877 in the offensive.

However, the new peer-reviewed study used data from the ministry, an online survey and social media obituaries to estimate that there were between 55,298 and 78,525 deaths from traumatic injuries in Gaza by that time.

Meanwhile, Gaza's rescue service yesterday said in a brief statement on Telegram that the Israeli forces bombed a group of Palestinians near the Shujayea roundabout in the east of Gaza City, reports Al Jazeera online.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7

## Five Reovirus cases found for 1st time in Bangladesh IEDCR says there's nothing to worry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) has found the presence of reovirus for the first time in Bangladesh.

The virus was found in the samples of five individuals, and none of them experienced significant health complications. All five have recovered and returned home after treatment, according to the IEDCR.

IEDCR Director Professor Tahmina Shirin told The Daily Star that the institute recently tested samples from 48 individuals showing symptoms similar to the Nipah virus. Among them, the reovirus was found in the five persons.

They took the sampling as part of IEDCR's routine research on new pathogens in collaboration with

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

## 2024 hottest year on record

Say US scientists; EU data shows average global temperature was 1.6C above preindustrial levels

AGENCIES

2024 was the hottest year on record, breaking the previous record set in 2023 and pushing the world over a critical climate threshold, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

All of the 10 hottest years since 1850 have occurred in the past decade.

The data supports separate figures released by European Union scientists this week that also found

2024 as the hottest in recorded history. It also showed that the year was 1.6C (2.8F) hotter than pre-industrial times, the first time the temperature went beyond the internationally agreed threshold of keeping long-term temperatures below a 1.5C (2.7F) rise.

However, NOAA data shows the year was 1.46C (2.6F) warmer than the era prior to humans burning huge volumes of planet-heating fossil fuels.

Nasa, which also released its temperature data yesterday, concurs that 2024 was a record year, being 1.47C (2.6F) hotter than the pre-industrial era.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

Blazing temperatures in 2024 require trail-blazing climate action in 2025.

ANTONIO GUTERRES  
UN Secretary-General

## Tamim retires, ends Champions Trophy talks

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh's longest-serving opener Tamim Iqbal announced his retirement from international cricket through a social media post yesterday, putting an end to all speculation regarding a potential return to the national team for the upcoming Champions Trophy.

The selectors had approached Tamim during the ongoing Sylhet phase of the Bangladesh Premier League, presenting the 35-year-old with an opportunity to rejoin the squad. While the southpaw listened to their proposition and mulled over his prospects, he ultimately decided against making a comeback.

Tamim believed the discussions surrounding his potential return - both on social media and in the press - were interfering with the focus of the national team ahead of a major tournament, beginning on February 19.

"I have been away from international cricket for quite some time. That distance will not be reduced. My stint in international cricket has ended.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 2



Durbar Rajshahi's Ryan Burl (R) and Akbar Ali were all during their 28-run victory against Khulna Tigers in Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Sinner favourite as Djokovic eyes elusive record

REUTERS, Melbourne

Jannik Sinner will launch his Australian Open title defence under a stubborn doping cloud but the whiff of scandal may do little to halt the Italian juggernaut.

Sinner remains the man to beat at Melbourne Park even as doping officials seek a two-year ban for the world number one for failing two drugs tests last March.

The saga failed to derail Sinner during a stellar season as he put the distractions aside to win eight titles, including a second Grand Slam crown at the U.S. Open and a maiden ATP Finals trophy.

Sinner may face a cooler reception than usual for a defending champion at Melbourne Park but it will likely take more than heckling to knock him off his game.

"It's a different feeling but we are all happy to start the season again here in Australia, in Melbourne," Sinner, who faces Nicolas Jarry in the first round, said at the tournament's draw at Melbourne Park on Thursday.

"It's called the 'Happy Slam' so we are all very happy to be back here."

Though Sinner was docked ranking points and prize-money, the

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

