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RAPE INCIDENTS

CPB raises black flag in protest

Army, cops guard party office after calls online to take it over

STAR REPORT

The Communist Party of Bangladesh raised a black flag at its central office in the capital yesterday, protesting a surge in rape incidents and demanding punishment to the perpetrators.

The event took place amid tensions over calls online to take over the CPB headquarters. However, nothing untoward happened as police and army personnel guarded the facility.

In the presence of police and army men, CPB leaders raised a black flag at 10:40am.

Earlier in the day, CPB leaders and activists gathered at the office to protect the building. Some had stayed overnight to ensure its safety.

Meanwhile, several left-leaning student bodies cancelled their anti-rape march, fearing chaos on Dhaka University campus.

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Policemen stand guard outside the Communist Party of Bangladesh office on Topkhana Road in the capital yesterday as security measures were heightened in response to calls online to take over the party office.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

WOMEN ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT

HELP app to fight harassment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a bid to enhance women's safety on public transport, the Broadcast Journalist Centre and Switch Bangladesh Foundation have jointly launched an app-based service, HELP (Harassment Elimination Literacy Programme).

Funded by the European Union and supported by Free Press Unlimited and Article 19, the app was launched at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday.

Women facing harassment on public transport can seek immediate assistance through the app, said Abdullah Al Saleh, director of Solution Spin, a software company involved with the project.

Initially, it will be piloted on the Basila-Sayedabad route in Dhaka, though some services will be accessible nationwide, he said.

According to the director, the app enables victims to report incidents, which will be sent to volunteers and local police stations.

It also includes an 'Alert' feature that shares the user's real-time location for prompt assistance. Reports will be stored for future legal action, and users can file complaints anonymously.

In future, the app will be integrated with the national emergency service 999.

Speaking as the chief guest at the event, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sheikh Md Sajjat Ali urged the media to refrain from using the word "rape" in their reports, suggesting alternatives like "violence against women" or "repression of women".

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Hours after detention, suspect dies at hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A murder suspect died while under treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday, hours after detectives detained and took him to the hospital, family members have said.

They said DB officials picked up Ezaz Bin Alam around 3:00am yesterday from a hospital in the capital's Saat Masjid Road, where he was already taking treatment.

He died at the dialysis centre of DMCH around 6:08pm, police said.

According to the DMCH register, Sub-Inspector Mahfuz of the DB police admitted Ezaz to the hospital.

DB chief Rezaul Karim Mallick denied that the man died in their custody.

"A team detained him at a city hospital and found him sick. We then immediately took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where he died while undergoing treatment. We did not take him into our custody," said Rezaul, an additional commissioner (Detective Branch) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

Hafizur Rahman, inspector (investigation) of Mohammadpur Police Station, said Ezaz was wanted in a murder case.

Victim's father Shah Alam said his son was picked up by a joint forces team from Mohammadpur's Baroikhali area on March 10.

"He was then taken to a nearby camp. At the camp, he was tortured severely and then handed over to Mohammadpur police early on the morning of March 11."

He added that Mohammadpur police then produced Ezaz before a Dhaka court, which granted him bail.

"Once he got bail, we admitted him to the hospital as he was sick. But again, he was picked up by the DB police," Alam told The Daily Star.

Iftekhar Hasan, officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station, said, "An army team arrested Ezaz and then

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MAGURA RAPE

Accused gives confessional statement

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

The prime accused in the sensational rape and murder case of an eight year old child in Magura yesterday gave a confessional statement before a court.

Magura Senior Judicial Magistrate Sabyasachi Roy recorded the deposition this evening, confirmed Shahed Hasan Tagor, a panel lawyer for the plaintiff.

He said the accused confessed to the rape.

The accused said he raped the child when he found her alone in an empty room, he added.

A d d i t i o n a l Superintendent of Police of Magura Mirajul Islam said the prime accused was produced in the court in the afternoon.

The accused's wife and two sons are currently on remand.

The eight-year-old child was choked and raped late at night while visiting her sister's house in Magura on March 5.

She was initially admitted to Magura Sadar Hospital in a serious

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Putin will have to 'come to table'

UK PM says hosting coalition call

AFP, London

UK premier Keir Starmer yesterday said the "ball was in Russia's court" and that President Vladimir Putin would "sooner or later" have to "come to the table," after a virtual summit to drum up support for a coalition willing to protect any eventual ceasefire in Ukraine.

The British prime minister told some 26 fellow leaders as they joined the group call hosted by Downing Street that they should focus on how to strengthen Ukraine, protect any ceasefire and keep up the pressure on Moscow.

While Ukraine had shown it was the "party of peace" by agreeing to a 30 day unconditional ceasefire, "Putin is the one trying to delay," he said.

"If Putin is serious about peace, I think it's very simple, he has to stop his barbaric attacks on Ukraine and agree to a ceasefire, and the world is watching," he added.

Military chiefs will now meet again on Thursday in the UK as the coalition moves into "the operational phase," Starmer said after the talks.

"The group that met this morning is a bigger group than we had two weeks ago, there is a stronger collective resolve and new commitments were put on the table this morning," he added.

EU chief European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in a message on X that Russia has to show "it is willing to support a ceasefire leading to a just and lasting peace".

And Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof also said on X it was "now important to continue to exert pressure on Russia to come to the negotiating table."

Overnight fighting continued in the relentless three-year war, with Russia saying it had taken two more villages in its Kursk border region where it has launched an offensive to wrest back seized territory.

Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron have been leading efforts to assemble a so-called "coalition of the willing" ever since Trump opened direct negotiations with Moscow last month.

They say the group is necessary -- along with US support -- to provide Ukraine with security guarantees by deterring Putin from violating any ceasefire.

Starmer and Macron have said they are willing to put British and French troops on the ground in Ukraine but it is not clear if other countries are keen on doing the same.

Macron also called on Russia late Friday to

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US mulling travel ban affecting 43 countries

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump's administration is mulling a new travel ban that would affect citizens from dozens of countries to varying degrees, the New York Times reported Friday.

Citing anonymous officials, it said the draft list featured 43 countries, divided into three categories of travel restrictions.

The red category of countries whose citizens would be completely barred from entering the United States includes Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen.

Another 10 countries in the orange category -- Belarus, Eritrea, Haiti, Laos, Myanmar, Pakistan, Russia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Turkmenistan -- would see their visas sharply restricted.

"In those cases, affluent business travellers might be allowed to enter, but not people travelling on immigrant or tourist visas," the New York Times said.

Citizens from countries on the orange list would also have to undergo in-person interviews to receive a visa.

Another 22 countries on a yellow list would have 60 days to address US concerns or risk being moved up to one of the more stringent categories.

"The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive internal deliberations, cautioned that the list had been developed by the State Department several weeks ago, and that changes were likely by the time it reached the White House," the New York Times said.

As one of his first acts in office, Trump froze the United States' refugee admission program and almost all foreign aid.

Starship to depart for Mars at end of 2026, says Musk

AFP, Washington

SpaceX founder Elon Musk yesterday said its massive Starship rocket would leave for Mars at the end of 2026 with Tesla humanoid robot Optimus onboard, adding that human landings could follow "as soon as 2029."

"Starship departs for Mars at the end of next year, carrying Optimus. If those landings go well, then human landings may start as soon as 2029, although 2031 is more likely," Musk said on his X social network.

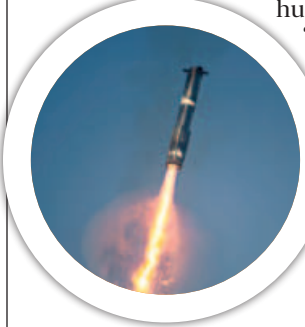
Musk, who is also the Tesla CEO, brought out the company's Optimus robots at an event last year.

He said the dancing robots would one day be able to do menial tasks, as well as offer friendship, and expected them to retail for \$20,000 to \$30,000.

Starship -- the world's largest and most powerful rocket -- is key to Musk's long-term vision of colonizing Mars.

Standing 403 feet (123 meters) tall -- about 100 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty -- Starship is designed to eventually be fully reusable.

NASA is also awaiting a modified version of Starship as a lunar lander for its Artemis program, which aims to return astronauts to the Moon this decade.



Since January last year, the Dhaka Elevated Expressway project has been plagued by slow progress and work stoppages. The setbacks stem from various issues, such as ownership disputes among the private partners and protests by environmentalists against the construction of a ramp at Panthakunja Park. The photo was taken yesterday near the capital's Hatirjheel area.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Falling SME sales shake economic backbone

B1



PRAYER TIMING					
MARCH 16					
Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha	
AZAN 4:51	12:45	4:30	6:08	7:45	
JAMAAT 5:01	1:15	4:45	6:23	8:15	
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION					
SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING					
RAMADAN	MARCH	SEHRI	IFTAR		
15	16		6:08		
16	17	4:49	6:09		
17	18	4:48	6:09		