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COLLECTIONS FROM TRANSPORT It's not extortion, it's agreed upon

Says Roads Minister
Rabiul, draws flak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Minister for Road Transport and Bridges Shaikh Rabiul Alam yesterday said the money collected from transport operators through mutual agreement should not be considered extortion.

He made the remark while responding to questions from journalists at a press briefing at his Secretariat office.

"What is described as extortion on the roads, I don't see it that way. There are owners' associations and workers' associations, and they spend it for their welfare. It is like an unwritten rule. I would call it extortion when someone doesn't want to pay or is forced to pay."

The minister explained that owners' associations often collect money at fixed rates to support the welfare of vehicle owners. "There may be debate over how much of it is actually used. But they do it based on mutual understanding."

He added that several organisations, including the Workers' Welfare Federation, also collect funds based on



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BASHANTA'S BRILLIANCE . . . Perched amid blazing palash flowers, also known as the flame of the forest, a rose-ringed parakeet surveys spring in full bloom in the Chattogram Naval Area. At this time of year, the birds turn especially vocal and restless; pairs form, males show off their rose collar, bow repeatedly, and offer bits of food to win over a partner. Tree hollows become precious real estate as they prepare to nest, often reusing the same cavity season after season. While sipping nectar and nibbling tender buds, the parakeet dusts itself with pollen, helping flowering trees reproduce throughout the season. However, despite their abundance, old trees and trapping pressure still matter for their future.

PHOTO: KOMOL DAS

Raped, tortured and jailed

Bangladeshi migrant
returns from Saudi
Arabia pregnant

MD ABBAS

When Rima, not her real name, left for Saudi Arabia ahead of Eid-ul-Azha last year, she believed she had secured a company job with a monthly salary of 1,000 riyals, with food and accommodation included.

Instead, she says she was sold, starved, raped, and jailed.

Now six months pregnant, the 32-year-old returned to Bangladesh on February 9 and is staying at the Brac Migration Programme's learning centre at Ashkona Hajj Camp in Uttara after seeking help from airport authorities.

"I did not go abroad for money. I had no debt. I just wanted a decent job," Rima told The Daily Star.

"If they could not give me work, they could have sent me back. Why did they destroy my life?"

Rima said a local broker in Dhaka arranged her visa, promising a company job.

She does not know how much was paid for her recruitment, as all the costs were borne by the Bangladeshi

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'JS without reform council holds no value' Says Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

NCP Convener and opposition chief whip Nahid Islam yesterday termed the Constitution Reform Council essential, saying, "without it, this parliament holds no value".

"The reform council is integral to the legitimacy and function of this parliament," he said at a press conference at the party's Banglamotor office.

Nahid, the member of parliament (MP) from Dhaka II, said that despite raising allegations of election rigging, his party had accepted the results in the interest of democracy and national stability.

"We have taken an oath to fulfil our duties in parliament and in the Constitution Reform Council."

Referring to ruling party MPs not taking the oath as members of the Constitution Reform Council, Nahid said, "This was a betrayal of the people who voted in favour of reforms in the referendum."

He warned that such actions disregarded the public's aspirations for a "new Bangladesh"

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Prices of Ramadan essentials jump on first day

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and
MUNTAKIM SAAD

The prices of key Ramadan items edged up yesterday, the first day of the fasting month, with those of lemon and cucumber spiralling to a level that many consumers termed irrational.

round, the peak season only begins with the monsoon – the months of January and February typically see a supply squeeze," he said, adding that the wholesale prices have jumped by Tk 20 to Tk 30 per four pieces in just two weeks.

The price of cucumber, an

hike of Tk 20 to Tk 50 per kg in just one day.

The most significant increase was observed in the case of the Zahidi variety, which is popular among low- and middle-income groups.

Zahidi dates that sold for Tk



- Lemon, cucumber, date prices soar
- Fruits also dearer
- Beef, mutton, chicken prices hold steady
- Rice prices remain unchanged

In Dhaka's kitchen markets, one had to shell out Tk 150 to Tk 200 to get four pieces of normal-sized lemons or limes; even the smallest-sized ones were priced at no less than Tk 40.

Fazlul Huq, who has been trading limes and lemons at Kawran Bazar for 42 years, however, pinned the price rise on the citrus fruits being out of season.

"While the fruit is grown year-

round, the peak season only begins with the monsoon – the months of January and February typically see a supply squeeze," he said, adding that the wholesale prices have jumped by Tk 20 to Tk 30 per four pieces in just two weeks.

At Kawran Bazar and Mohammadpur Geneva Camp market, hybrid cucumbers were retailing between Tk 100 and Tk 120 per kg, but the preference for the local variety pushed its price to nearly double that of the hybrid ones.

Date, the most essential item for breaking the fast, saw a price

280-300 per kg on Wednesday morning were retailing for Tk 350 by Thursday.

The better-quality Zahidi dates were selling for as high as Tk 500, almost double the price during Ramadan last year.

The premium varieties have also become dearer, said Abul Hossain, a date trader in Kawran Bazar.

The varieties that sold for Tk 440 last year are now Tk 500,

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EPSTEIN SCANDAL Former UK prince Andrew arrested King says 'law must take its course'

REUTERS, London

King Charles' younger brother Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor



was arrested yesterday on suspicion of misconduct in public office over allegations he sent confidential government documents to Jeffrey Epstein.

Mountbatten-Windsor, celebrating his 66th birthday yesterday, was arrested and questioned by detectives from Thames Valley Police, which this month said it was looking into allegations that he had passed documents to the late convicted sex offender while working as a trade envoy.

"Following a thorough assessment, we have now opened an investigation into this allegation of misconduct in public office," Thames Valley's Assistant Chief Constable Oliver Wright said in a statement.

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AMAR EKUSHEY

Pearu Sardar and Dhaka's first Shaheed Minar

AHMAD ISTIAK

ÖAkÖæ†gkvAvgv†itmBcª.gkwn'wgbvîhw'lAvR`vuwo†q†bB Avi, eZ†gv†biwgbv†iB†Zv†i†q†Q`S, wZZvi, Avi`S, wZ†ZAvRIAv†Qbwcviaem`vilÖ

These immortal lines from "Pearu Sardar Shorone" were penned by noted litterateur Syed Shamsul Haque as a tribute to Pearu Sardar – the influential leader from Old Dhaka, who played a key role behind the construction of the first Shaheed Minar in Dhaka during the Language Movement in 1952.

According to the book "Prothom Shaheed Minar O Pearu Sardar" and the essay "Shaheed Minar O Pearu Sardar" by Anisuzzaman, after police killed several language activists on February 21, 1952, students of Dhaka Medical College decided on February 23 to construct a memorial in their honour.

However, there was a curfew in force, and the army was patrolling the streets at all times. As a result, students were unable to procure

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How much
reliance on AI
is too much?

P10

HASANAH ISLAMIC BANKING
البنكية الاسلامي
Prime Bank

PRAYER TIMING
FEBRUARY 20

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5:14	12:30	4:30	5:58	7:30
JAMAAT 5:24	1:15	4:45	6:08	8:00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN	FEB	SEHRI	IFTAR
2	20		5:58
3	21	5:11	5:59
4	22	5:10	5:59



Since independence, Rajshahi city never had a central Shaheed Minar. Recently, the authorities built one in the Sonadighi area. At the first hour tomorrow, February 21, residents of Rajshahi will gather at the memorial to lay flowers and honour the martyrs who made the ultimate sacrifice during the Language Movement of 1952. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Laser-written glass can store data for millennia Microsoft says

AFP, Paris

Thousands of years from now, what will remain of our digital era? The ever-growing vastness of human knowledge is no longer stored in libraries, but on hard drives that struggle to last decades, let alone millennia.

However, information written into glass by lasers could allow data to be preserved for more than 10,000 years, Microsoft announced in a study on Wednesday.

Since 2019, Microsoft's Silica project has been trying to encode data on glass plates, in a throwback to the early days of photography, when negatives were also stored on glass.

The system uses silica glass, a common material that is resistant to changes in temperature, moisture and electromagnetic interference.

In the journal Nature, Microsoft's research arm said Silica was the first glass storage technology that had been demonstrated to be reliable for writing, reading and decoding data.

