

## Tax hike crucial for economic recovery

Says Khosru

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,  
Ctg

Finance and Planning Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury



yesterday said raising taxes is crucial to pull the country out of the current economic downturn.

"The priority is to increase taxes. Through higher taxes, we must attract more domestic and foreign investment. Creating new employment is our [BNP's] one of the main objectives. If investment grows, it will, in turn, create more jobs," he told reporters while visiting the site of a proposed government hospital in his electoral area at Patenga's Jele Para.

He also said that employment, education, and health would remain top priorities in the upcoming national budget.



Two children burst into laughter while flipping through books at a stall at the Amar Ekushey Book Fair at the Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday. Marking 'Shishu Prohor', the fairgrounds were filled with young visitors and their guardians, creating a lively and festive atmosphere as children browsed colourful books, drawing notebooks, rhymes and story collections.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## PM shares warm moments with children



UNB, Dhaka

The solemnity of Juma prayers gave way to smiles and laughter as Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday paused to spend warm, unhurried moments with children and adolescents outside a mosque at Dhaka's Banani.

Surrounded by curious children, he exchanged greetings, shared light-hearted remarks and posed for photographs, turning an ordinary afternoon into a memorable encounter for many.

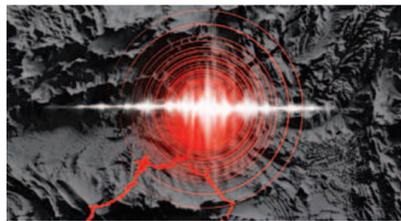
The PM Tarique offered Juma prayers at the central mosque of the Navy Headquarters in Banani, while his wife, Dr Zubaida Rahman, also offered her prayers in a separate area of the mosque for women, the PM's additional press secretary Atikur Rahman Rumon.

After the prayers, as the PM was leaving, he went to greet the children and adolescents outside the mosque, exchanged pleasantries with them and inquired about

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## 'Strongest tremor in our memory'

Residents recount moments of terror as 5.4 quake jolts Satkhira



OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Satkhira was jolted by a sudden earthquake yesterday at 1:52pm.

The tremor was measured at 5.4 on the Richter scale, with the epicentre near Assasuni upazila, about 18 kilometres south east of Satkhira town, said Zulfikar Ali, acting officer at Bangladesh Meteorological Department, Satkhira.

Local residents, including worshippers offering Juma prayers at mosques, felt the tremor for several seconds. Many families, scared and panicked, rushed down staircases.

Residents, visibly shaken by the quake, said it was the strongest in memory.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Saiduzzaman Imu said the earthquake caused strong tremor and widespread panic, but no damage has been reported so far.

Alauddin Hossain, who was at a mosque in Assasuni, said, "I felt the jolt right in my chest."

Rabul Alam and Tuhin Gazi recounted that they were offering prayers in Kulla Baitul Aman Jame Mosque when the ground started shaking violently.

"People in our building started running for their lives. Thankfully, there were no casualties," said Abdul Ali, owner of a two-storey building.

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## Forced to travel 250km for treatment

Critical Ctg burn patients referred to Dhaka for lack of facilities; China-aided hospital delayed for a year

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Critical burn patients in the port city are being forced to travel over 250km to Dhaka for life-saving treatment due to a severe lack of facilities in Chattogram.

The tragic death of five members of a family following a gas explosion in Halishahar this week has once again highlighted the absence of a specialised burn ICU in Chattogram, leaving millions of residents vulnerable to healthcare gaps.

The victims were initially rushed to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH). However, with most suffering from severe inhalation burns and over 40 percent body surface burns, they required immediate ICU and HDU support. Currently, CMCH lacks a specialised burn ICU, forcing relatives into a frantic, and often fatal, search for ICU-equipped ambulances to transport them to Dhaka.

"It took hours just to manage an ICU ambulance," said Mohammad Jamsheer, a relative of the family affected by the Halishahar explosion on Monday. "One died on the way to Dhaka, and another died just after reaching the capital. If we had these facilities here, they might have survived."

For years, the four crore people residing in the greater Chattogram region have relied on a 26-bed burn unit (Ward 36) at CMCH, which lacks modern specialised equipment.

The deaths have reignited the demand for the completion of the

"China-Aid Project of Burn Unit of CMCH." The Tk 285 crore project, largely funded by the Chinese government, is currently under construction in the city's Goachi Bagan area.

According to sources, the project is set to end in June 2026. The Chinese government will fund Tk 179.83 crore as a grant.

work resumed with land preparation starting at the beginning of last year. Physical construction work officially commenced, marking the transition from planning to actual building in June 2025.

Contacted, Dr Rafiq Uddin Ahmed, head of CMCH Burn and Plastic Surgery Unit, said, "So far the progress of the project work is



The work for "China-Aid Project of Burn Unit of CMCH" continues in the city's Goachi Bagan area.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

A formal agreement was signed on March 13, 2023 to establish a 150-bed burn unit at the Goachi Bagan site.

Following the fall of the Awami League government on August 5, 2024, the pace of the project temporarily slowed down due to the shifting political landscape, said CMCH sources.

Despite the earlier slowdown,

26 percent, and we have applied for an extension of the project deadline till June 2027."

He said they currently treat nearly 15,000 patients a year with almost zero vacant beds. "We try our best with limited resources, but without an ICU, we have no choice but to refer critical cases to Dhaka."

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## Little ones bring joy to book fair

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There had been growing concerns surrounding the fair due to last-minute complications.

The issues were resolved only four days before the opening, leaving little time for preparation. The lack of readiness was still evident across the fairgrounds.

Yet, on the second day, the venue came alive with the cheerful buzz of children.

Yesterday was the first Shishu Prohor (Children's Hour) of the fair.

The gates opened shortly after 11:00am, but from early morning, children and their guardians were waiting in line.

Inside, children wandered from stall to stall, browsing books, taking photos, and playing. Many were seen buying books.

The main attraction was a puppet show. Zahriya, a third grade student, walked hand in hand with her mother, stopping at different stalls to flip through cartoon-illustrated books.

She later stood in front of the puppet stage, eagerly waiting for the show.

At one point, a voice called out from behind the stage: "Friends, how are you all? We are ready -- come join us."

Instantly, Zahriya and the other children rushed forward and sat down. Rows of eager faces filled the mat covered floor, while parents stood behind them.

Children's Hour created a different atmosphere at the fair. Beyond the main stage, smaller stalls displayed colourful books, drawing notebooks, rhymes, and story collections, adding to the festivities.

Asaduzzaman Ashiq, founder of Kaktaruya Puppet Theatre, said children easily absorb stories.

"Through puppet shows, we entertain them

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## 32 out of 36 brick kilns in Netrakona illegal: DoE

JAYDUL ISLAM, Netrakona

Of the 36 brick kilns operating across nine upazilas in Netrakona, 32 have been identified as illegal, according to the Department of Environment (DoE).

The kilns have been established on agricultural land and near residential areas, educational institutions, roads, and railway lines, using fertile topsoil from croplands to manufacture bricks, and burning firewood instead of coal, thereby violating existing regulations.

Despite court directives to shut down the illegal kilns, locals allege that the orders have not been effectively implemented, raising concerns about the lack of enforcement by local administration and the DoE.

As per Section 5 of the Brick Manufacturing and Brick Kiln Establishment (Control) Act, 2013, the use of topsoil from agricultural land, hills, and mounds is prohibited for brick production.

Under Section 6, anyone using wood as fuel for burning bricks faces up to three years' imprisonment, a fine of Tk 3,00,000, or both. Section 8 further prohibits the establishment of brick kilns in residential, reserved, or commercial areas; within city corporations, municipalities, or upazila headquarters; on government or privately owned forests; sanctuaries; gardens; wetlands; and agricultural land.

The kilns must also maintain a minimum distance of one kilometre from forests, special installations, railway lines, educational institutions, hospitals, and research centres.

Considering these provisions, many previously issued clearances have been revoked.

Sources at the DoE's Netrakona office said that in 2022, then-inspector Sushil Kumar Das filed multiple cases with the



Netrakona Special Magistrate's Court. Judge Suhel Mroing imposed fines of varying amounts on the illegal kilns and ordered them to relocate to legal and environmentally compliant sites by December that year.

The court also instructed the assistant director of the DoE to demolish the illegal kilns.

However, kiln owners appealed against

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Buddhist monks distribute iftar items to fasting Muslims at the Dharmarajik Buddhist Monastery in Basabosh, Dhaka, yesterday. Organised daily by the monastery authorities during Ramadan, the programme serves 200-250 people and stands as a gesture of communal harmony and mutual respect.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN