

Retirement allowance for senior journos in the works

UNB

The government is working to introduce a retirement allowance to ensure financial security for senior journalists, said Zahir Uddin Swapon, the information and broadcasting minister.

Although the media is regarded as the fourth pillar of a modern democratic state, journalists often work without institutional protection, leaving them in uncertain conditions.

"Journalism is a very important and respected profession. However, unfortunately, many senior journalists spend their final years in financial hardship. The government is working to address this situation so that they can live with dignity."

Swapon's comments came while visiting the ailing journalist Ismail Hossain Negaban at Bangladesh Medical University yesterday. He handed over a cheque of Tk 100,000 as financial assistance to Negaban on behalf of the Journalists Welfare Trust.

The government is formulating policies to ensure media freedom and responsibility while strengthening the activities of the Journalists Welfare Trust.



Displaced people drive back to their homes across the Litani river through a makeshift bridge as Israel destroyed most of the bridges in the area. The photo was taken from the southern Lebanese village of Bedias yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

JCD FACTIONAL CLASH MMC suspends classes, exams for a week

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

All classes and exams at Mymensingh Medical College have been suspended for a week after a clash between two factions of Chhatra Dal left two students injured.

Students were instructed to vacate the halls by 8:00am yesterday, said Principal Prof Dr Md Nazmul Alam Khan.

The decision was made at an emergency meeting of the academic council held early yesterday, he said.

Additional Superintendent of Police (Admin) Md Abdullah Al Mamun said the clash broke out around 9:00pm Friday at the college dormitory. The injured – Md Muaz and Mir Hamidur, both third year students – belong to rival groups of the college unit of Jatitotabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD).

Quoting campus sources, the police official said Muaz went to Hamidur's room where a heated exchange over refuelling a motorcycle escalated into a scuffle. Hamidur and his associates allegedly beat Muaz and forced him out. Later, as Hamidur went out for tea, he was reportedly attacked and struck on the head with a blunt object. A chase and counter chase followed between the two groups, triggering the clash.

Police rushed to the scene and brought the situation under control. The injured were admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital. Muaz was later referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, while Hamidur remains under treatment at MMCH.

Kotwali Model Police Station OC Shebirul Islam said one person, Naful Islam, 25, has been detained, though no case had been filed yet.

The college authorities have formed a three-member probe committee tasked with submitting a report within seven working days.

JCD unit convener Tanvir Abdullah denied it was a factional clash, claiming it may have resulted from personal enmity, and said the JCD central committee is also investigating.

Govt, IMF at odds

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net programmes, warning that without proper coordination, increased spending may not yield the intended results. "The IMF has raised questions over how the government's electoral promises and safety net programmes will be implemented," one of the officials said.

Bangladesh is currently under a \$4.7 billion IMF loan programme agreed in 2023, which was later expanded to \$5.5 billion. Persistent gaps in the country's performance against IMF benchmarks could complicate the upcoming review and delay the release of the next tranche. By June last year, however, Bangladesh had received \$3.65 billion in five instalments.

Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury held two meetings on the sidelines of the IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington on Thursday – one with Nigel Clarke, the IMF's deputy managing director, and another with Krishna Srinivasan, director of its Asia-Pacific department.

Speaking to reporters after the meetings, Chowdhury acknowledged that differences remain. "There are some unresolved issues with the IMF. We will try to resolve them through discussions over the next 15 to 20 days," he said. "Discussions will continue. We will try to find solutions," he added, without

specifying the unresolved issues.

The finance minister sought to cast the broader relationship in positive terms, saying development partners, including the IMF, were broadly aligned with the BNP's manifesto. "What is being discussed is the approach – how we implement it," he said. Beyond social spending, disagreements have also emerged over revenue mobilisation and the pace of financial and banking sector reforms. The IMF is pushing for a more market-determined exchange rate – a longstanding demand that Dhaka has only partially addressed.

It has also called for concrete measures to raise tax revenue by 0.5 percentage points of GDP and voiced concern about the speed and sequencing of financial sector reforms.

Chowdhury pushed back on the timeline, citing the exceptional circumstances facing the new administration. Returning to power after 17 years, the government inherited a severe energy crisis, compounded by the Iran war, he said at the meetings. Implementing sweeping reforms within two months of taking office, he argued, was unrealistic, according to the officials.

"Revenue cannot be raised abruptly," one official quoted the minister as saying. He maintained that the pace and sequencing of reforms must reflect

domestic political and economic realities, rather than an externally imposed timeline.

When asked about the IMF's concerns over [how the government plans to implement its electoral commitments], Golam Mortoza, press minister at the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, said: "Public interest, linked to the most important electoral promises, is at the heart of the government's governing philosophy."

"The government is unyielding on these matters. The finance minister has firmly presented that position before both the IMF and the World Bank – the government will not rush," Mortoza told The Daily Star.

In a statement, the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington said the IMF had reaffirmed its role as a development partner and expressed its willingness to continue working with the elected government. Both sides agreed that further dialogue could help bridge the remaining gaps.

Separately, following meetings with World Bank President Ajay Banga and other senior officials, the finance minister described those discussions as "very positive." He said the World Bank had expressed no disagreement with the government's electoral commitments and was ready to align with its development agenda.

aimed at ending the Iran war, with Field Marshal Asim Munir leaving Tehran and premier Shehbaz Sharif headed home from Turkey.

Munir met Iran's top leadership and peace negotiators during a three-day visit to the Iranian capital, a Pakistani military statement said.

Egypt, which has also been involved in diplomatic efforts, also appeared upbeat yesterday, with Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty saying Cairo and Islamabad hoped to secure a final agreement "in the coming days".

He was speaking at the same event in Antalya as Khatibzadeh, who insisted no date had been set for the next round of direct talks.

The Speaker also criticised Trump for "tweeting a lot."

"The American side tweets a lot, talks a lot. Sometimes confusing, sometimes, you know, contradictory," he told journalists.

Islamabad has emerged as the lead mediator during the conflict, hosting a marathon first round of talks last weekend.

Iran shuts Hormuz again

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– and they can't blackmail us," Trump said at a White House event.

Trump said there would be "some information" about Iran later in the day, adding: "We're taking a tough stand."

Iran's top national security body yesterday also vowed no "compromise, retreat" in US talks.

The toing and froing over the strait casts doubt on Trump's optimism the day before, that a peace deal to end the US-Israeli war with Iran was "very close".

On Friday, Tehran had declared the strait, which usually carries a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas, open after a ceasefire was agreed in Lebanon to halt Israel's war with Hezbollah.

This prompted elation in global markets and sent oil prices plunging, with Trump insisting that a US naval blockade of Iranian ports would continue until a deal was concluded. Tehran said the US has no right to block the waterway and threatened to shut the strait once more.

A ceasefire between Tehran and

remain disrupted.

Maritime security and shipping sources said some merchant vessels received radio messages from Iran's navy saying no ships were allowed through the waterway, reversing signs earlier yesterday that traffic might resume.

By 10:30 GMT, no fewer than eight oil and gas tankers had crossed the strait, but at least as many ships appeared to have turned back.

Meanwhile, CNN reported that Iran will prioritise vessels that pay to cross the Strait of Hormuz.

"Given the limitation on the number of vessels that will be allowed to pass, Iran has decided to give priority to those vessels that respond more quickly to the new Strait of Hormuz protocols and pay the costs of security and safety services," the official said.

According to the official, vessels that do not pay the fees will have their passage "postponed."

Speaking at a diplomatic forum in Turkey, Iranian deputy foreign minister Saeed Khatibzadeh said the "Americans cannot impose their will over Iran"

through a siege.

Meanwhile, in a written message, Iran's supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, who had not been seen since taking power, said Iran's navy "stands ready" to defeat the United States.

Iran's Supreme National Security Council yesterday said that the country was reviewing "new proposals" received from the US.

"In recent days, with the presence of the commander of the Pakistani army in Tehran as an intermediary and mediator in the negotiations, new proposals have been put forward by the Americans, which the Islamic Republic of Iran is currently reviewing and has not yet responded to," it said in a statement.

It went on to say that Iran's negotiating delegation "will not make even the slightest compromise, retreat or leniency, and will defend with all its strength the interests of the Iranian nation".

Nevertheless, Trump appeared convinced that a deal could be finished shortly.

He declared Friday "GREAT AND BRILLIANT," and made a series of social media posts praising the progress in the talks.

Pakistan's powerful military chief and prime minister concluded separate visits

A second round is expected in the Pakistani capital this coming week, but it was not clear what impact Iran's latest move would have on that possibility.

In a sign that the two-week ceasefire remained stable, Iran's civil aviation agency declared its airspace was open again, with international flights able to transit Iran via the east of the country.

Nevertheless, differences remained on two major sticking points in the peace talks – Iran's stockpile of near-weapon-grade enriched uranium and the future of the Strait of Hormuz.

Speaking by phone with AFP on Friday, Trump said "we're very close to having a deal," adding that there were "no sticking points at all" left with Tehran.

Later the same day, at an event in Arizona, the president declared that Iran had agreed to hand over its 440 or so kilogrammes of uranium enriched to 60 percent – close to that needed for a bomb.

"We're going to get it by going in with Iran, with lots of excavators," he said.

But hours before, Iran's foreign ministry had said its stockpile, thought to be buried deep under rubble by US bombing in last June's 12-day war, was not going anywhere.

Diesel now Tk 115, octane Tk 140

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Private condensate fractionation plants, which also produce octane and petrol, fear a storage crisis as the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) has decided to procure less locally produced fuel amid rising imported stocks.

Super Petrochemical PLC, the country's largest private refinery, recently informed the BPC that three of its barge tankers have remained idle for several days as the BPC's distribution companies have reduced fuel collection from them following the arrival of the first consignment of imported octane.

The government had earlier this month decided to keep domestic fuel prices unchanged for April

by absorbing rising import costs through heavy subsidies to shield consumers from global energy shocks following the US-Israel war on Iran.

With the latest decision, fuel prices have reached their highest level on record. When the Ukraine-Russia war began in 2022, the then government set diesel at a peak of Tk 114, octane at Tk 135, and petrol at Tk 130.

However, fuel prices were cut by Tk 5 within a couple of days amid widespread criticism from different stakeholders.

When fuel prices increase locally, it impacts the transportation, irrigation, and industrial production costs, inevitably driving up commodity prices.

Opposition leader and Jamaat-e-

Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman last night criticised the government's latest decision to raise fuel prices, calling it "very unfortunate" at a time when people are already grappling with high living costs.

In a post on his verified Facebook page following the announcement, Shafiqur said, "At a time when global fuel prices are declining, the government has announced an increase in fuel prices in the name of adjustment. This is very unfortunate."

He added that people are already struggling to cope with rising expenses, and the latest hike would worsen their hardship. "This will be a blow to people who are already suffocating under the pressure of living costs," he said.

Man sent to jail over post

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finding his involvement during investigation. not communicate with the honourable member of parliament before filing this case.

"I acted on my own because I felt bad. The whole Patharghata area is being portrayed falsely on Facebook over a minor incident every day. It has created unrest in the locality."

Asked about the legality of the case, Md Dawud Hossain, officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station, said, "It seemed cognisable to me, so I took the case ... The court will give directions if any law was violated in filing the case."

A team of the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police picked up Hasan Nasim from his house in the city's Agargaon area around 8:00pm on Friday.

Yesterday, he was produced before the court with a seven-day remand prayer after being shown arrested in the case.

Later, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Hasib Ullah Pias rejected the remand prayer and sent Hasan to jail, according to a sub-inspector working at the court.

The court also fixed today (April 19) for the hearing of the bail petition, the SI added.

According to the police forwarding report, detectives arrested him after

finding his involvement during investigation.

In the case statement, the complainant said that on April 11, he saw a Facebook post on "Patharghata.com", which said, "Three whales were brought from the sea, two sharks are on the way, Inshallah – everyone's invited: Chief Whip".

Chief Whip Moni had, in fact, said these lines in parliament on April 10.

Meanwhile, the case statement further said that multiple screenshots of different posts were sent, with "an intent to blackmail", to the chief whip's WhatsApp number from an unknown number.

Complainant Nazrul also claimed that the same account had repeatedly published and circulated misleading information at different times. He said he later informed Moni about the matter.

Contacted, Moni said that five to seven Facebook pages had been consistently spreading propaganda since December last year. At that time, they filed general diaries with three police stations and also lodged a complaint with the returning officer. Based on that complaint, the cyber police informed him that they had tracked down the individual on Friday night.

Govt achieved 60 milestones in 60 days

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Mahdi went on to accuse the opposition of obstructing reform and development efforts instead of cooperating.

The BNP government had expected cooperation from the Jamaat-NCP alliance over what he described as positive measures taken in a short span of time.

"But we saw that instead of doing that, they chose another path, including creating chaos in the parliament, threatening movements on the streets and spreading rumours and propaganda – these are obstacles to the country's progress."

People had lost trust in the government and the state system.

"Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has now brought back that trust and confidence among the people of the country. He has brought back a transparent and accountable system – he is implementing the promises made in the election manifesto, which is a unique achievement."

Among the measures highlighted at the briefing were direct cash support under the Family Card scheme, the launch of the Farmers' Card programme, agricultural loan waiver of up to Tk 10,000, and fuel and commodity price controls.

The pilot phase of the Family Card programme has been completed, with 37,567 families receiving the cards so far. Each cardholder's family is receiving Tk 2,500 a month.

The Farmers' Card programme, which offers 10 benefits and cash support, had also been launched, initially covering more than 22,000 marginal, small and medium farmers in 10 districts.

Loans of up to Tk 10,000, including

interest, for about 12 lakh small and marginal farmers had been waived.

The government also settled 133 ordinances in the first session, said Mahdi, also one of the 10 advisers of the PM.

Of those, 16 ordinances, including the Human Rights Commission Ordinance and Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance, would be reviewed and later placed before the parliament as bills.

The government had taken up a programme to excavate and re-excavate 20,000 kilometres of rivers, canals and water bodies, with work already under way in 54 districts.

Despite the global energy crisis, fuel oil prices had been kept under control, he said, adding that reining in the prices of essentials remained one of the government's priorities.

The government has set a target of producing 10,000MW of renewable energy by 2030, of which 35 megawatts were added to the national grid through rooftop solar and net metering in the first 60 days.

He also referred to the monthly allowances for religious leaders.

In the health and education sectors, the government had announced plans to recruit 100,000 health workers, with 80 per cent of them being women.

He also mentioned the planned introduction of an e-health card.

The government had decided to scrap re-admission fees, double scholarship amounts, recruit teachers at different levels, including religious teachers and make sports compulsory for students.

There is a plan to fill 468,220 vacant posts in government offices over six

months, one year and five years.

The government is working to reopen closed factories, reopen the Malaysian labour market and sign labour-related agreements with seven European countries.

Some 15 million saplings have already been produced as part of a five-year target to plant 25 crore trees.

An initiative has been taken to launch "Expatriate Card".

The Hajj cost has been reduced by Tk 12,000 per ticket and the Nusuk Hajj Card has been introduced for the first time in the country.

Intelligence and law enforcement agencies are taking swift action against extortion, with maintaining law and order given top priority, alongside initiatives to build a people-friendly police force.

The other initiatives mentioned included the Padma Barrage project, mandatory online applications for mutation and land development tax services and a draft legal amendment to treat river grabbing and river pollution as criminal offences.

Efforts towards the recovery of laundered money are ongoing and long-term plans have been formed to prevent river erosion in coastal areas.

Safeguarding human rights is one of the pledges in BNP's manifesto and the government's record over the past two months had met public expectations, Mahdi said.

The prime minister is staying at his Gulshan home instead of the state residence Jamuna, using his own car and paying for fuel, working on Saturdays and enforcing 9:00am attendance. He has also cut airport formalities during state visits.

Washington is due to expire on Wednesday.

"Maybe I won't extend it, but the blockade is going to remain," Trump told reporters on Friday aboard Air Force One when asked if the ceasefire would be extended.

Asked about a potential deal, Trump said, "I think it's going to happen."

There was no immediate sign of direct US-Iran talks taking place over the weekend to end the war that the US and Israel launched on February 28.

Then, late yesterday morning, Iran's central military command said that, in response to the US blockade, "control of the Strait of Hormuz has returned to its previous status" and "is under strict management and control of the armed forces".

Shipping sources said at least two vessels reported coming under fire while trying to transit the waterway. In Mumbai, an Indian government source said India summoned Iran's ambassador after an Indian-flagged vessel carrying crude oil was attacked while trying to cross the Strait.

Tehran's renewed tough messaging injected fresh uncertainty around the Iran conflict, raising the risk that oil and gas shipments through the strait could

Iran says reviewing 'new US proposals'

8 ships pass strait during brief reprieve; 2 attacked

Tehran says no date set for next round of talks

Iran partially opens its airspace