



# The Daily Star

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**"There is nothing personal between him and me. These things happen."**  
PSG COACH THOMAS TUCHEL ON TOUCHLINE SPAT WITH SUPERSTAR MBAPPE (PAGE 15)

**"It's an ominous sign both for the country and the nation."**  
JATIYA OIKYAFRONT CONVENER DR KAMAL HOSSAIN ON THE LOW VOTER TURNOUT IN THE RECENT CITY POLLS

**"We will not allow Syria the opportunity to gain ground there."**  
TURKEY PRESIDENT RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN VOWS TO PREVENT SYRIA FROM GAINING GROUND IN IDLIB

## DEFAULTED LOANS

# Tk 50,186cr rescheduled last year

*A fourth of this record amount becomes defaulted again; banks did it to clean up balance sheets, say experts*

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Banks rescheduled a record amount of defaulted loans last year as part of their efforts to contain bad debt and show hefty profit.

Last year, defaulted loans amounting to Tk 50,186 crore were regularised, the highest on record for a single year, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

Of the sum, Tk 18,584 crore was regularised under the central bank's relaxed policy announced on May 16 last year, allowing defaulters to reschedule their classified loans with a down payment of only 2 percent of the outstanding amount instead of the existing 10-50 percent.

Banks recovered only Tk 479 crore as down payment from the loans rescheduled under the relaxed policy.

"The rescheduled loans will become defaulted again as banks regularised those on a wholesale basis without verifying the defaulters' ability to repay," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

In fact, Tk 13,284 crore of the soured loans, regularised last year, has already become defaulted, show BB data. This means nearly one-fourth of

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Dozens of beds at an exhibition centre that has been converted into a hospital in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## City polls questionable

*EC Mahub says, citing absence of opposition at the polling stations*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The absence of opposition parties at polling centres has made Dhaka city elections questionable, Election Commissioner Mahub Talukder said yesterday.

"So, it has become essential to reform the electoral process and bring change to the voting system," he said in a written statement issued expressing his opinion on the just-concluded Dhaka north and south city corporation elections that saw very low turn-out.

"Apathy towards elections is synonymous to the absence of democracy," he said in the statement.

On February 1, the DSCC and DNCC elections were held with the use of electronic voting machines

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## Virus outbreak not pandemic yet: WHO

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organization said yesterday that the outbreak of the deadly novel coronavirus, which has spread from China to two dozen countries, does not yet constitute a "pandemic".

"Currently we are not in a pandemic," Sylvie Briand, head of WHO's Global Infectious Hazard Preparedness division, told reporters in Geneva.

Instead, she said, "we are at the phase where it is an epidemic with multiple foci."

The disease has killed more than 425 people and infected a further 20,000 in China, nearly all of them in central Hubei province -- the epicentre of the outbreak -- and spread to two-dozen countries since it emerged in December.

Briand said that while there is rapid spread of transmission in Hubei, outside the province there are mainly "spillover cases" with sporadic clusters of transmission.

"In these other places in China, the strategy currently is to stop transmission," she said, adding that the same was true for affected countries outside of China. The virus has remained "quite a stable virus", she said.

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## CORONAVIRUS SCREENING

# Measures at airport still found wanting

MOUJIDU AHMED SUJAN and WASIM BIN HABIB

A plane carrying passengers from the Chinese city of Kunming landed at the capital's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 2:15pm yesterday. An aircraft of Turkish Airlines arrived from Istanbul around the same time.

Passengers from both the planes got off and walked through the boarding bridges and then the thermal scanner placed at a passageway. At one point, health officials stepped in and the passengers from China were separated from the others for further screening.

"Under the existing set-up, it's almost impossible to prevent passengers landing in different flights from coming in each other's contact," said a health official at the airport, wishing not to be named.

Inbound passengers from different countries, including China, also have to stand in the same queues for immigration, he said, pointing out that if any passenger carries coronavirus, the others might be at risk.

Talking on the issue, experts said although the government has taken measures to prevent the virus from entering the country, a slight oversight

could turn costly.

They stressed the need for keeping passengers from China isolated from the others during the entire screening process as many patients do not show any symptoms during the incubation period.

The novel coronavirus -- the seventh strain of the virus -- was first detected in China's Wuhan city in December. At least 427 people have died with more than 20,500 confirmed cases around the world.

Most of the cases have been reported in China.

On an average, 12,000 passengers land at the airport in Dhaka daily. All of them have to go through the thermal screening and those coming from China are later screened by doctors separately.

In the last 15 days till yesterday, 6,789 passengers from China have been screened at the airport, said the doctors.

"The way the passengers are being screened at the airport, nobody can guarantee that the virus would not be transmitted. It's a serious health concern and we should be careful about every minor details," Prof Saif Ullah Munshi, a virologist, told The Daily Star yesterday.

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CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

425

DEATHS (ALL IN CHINA)

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20,637

CONFIRMED CASES

## DHAKA CITY POLLS

# Despite rout, BNP sees a silver lining

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The BNP says it has found two future leaders in Tabitha Awal and Ishraque Hossain despite their heavy defeats in Saturday's Dhaka city polls.

The opposition party claimed that by joining the polls it was able to reveal the government's intention of ensuring victory for the Awami League mayor candidates.

BNP leaders said the February 1 polls once again proved that a free and fair election was not possible under the incumbent government.

They said the Electronic Voting Machine, used by the Election Commission in the polls, was proved to be a "faulty tool".

According to political analysts, this election, however, has exposed the poor performance and organisational strength of the BNP's Dhaka city unit. An overhaul of the city unit is a must for boosting the morale of the party men.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, BNP standing committee member Moudud Ahmed said, "This election has proved that people have no confidence in the electoral system and elections as the voter turnout was poor. It's so alarming that even many Awami League supporters didn't go to polling centres."

He said the city polls have once again proved that there was no alternative to a non-partisan and neutral EC for holding a free, fair, and credible election.

Party sources said foreign diplomats in Dhaka also had an idea about the roles of the government and the EC in the city polls. The BNP was collecting documents on

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## Voters' apathy not good for democracy

Says Quader

UNB, Dhaka

The apathy of voters during the recently held Dhaka city elections is not good for democracy, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said yesterday.

"We'll assess and analyse the election after Awami League President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina returns from abroad," Quader, also AL general secretary, told reporters at the secretariat.

Describing the full use of electronic voting machines in the polls as "a new experience", he said some mistakes were there but many found it easier and simpler.

"It's a matter of concern for us ... we expected more votes in our favour. Considering the voters of Awami League, the vote percentage was low," he explained.

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A bulldozer knocks down illegal structures on the Turag in the capital's Dhour area yesterday during an eviction drive by Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

New Zealand Dairy

# THE TASTE OF CLASS

YOKOZONA

The Classy Bites