



Syrian civil defence (White Helmets) and Turkish-backed Syrian forces members search for victims in the aftermath of a car bomb explosion near a security checkpoint in the town of Azaz, in the north of Aleppo province yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## China says Trump trying to 'shift blame' for pandemic

AFP, Beijing

Beijing yesterday accused US President Donald Trump of trying to "shift the blame" for the global coronavirus pandemic in an escalating row between the two powers.

Trump charged Thursday that the world is "paying a big price" for China's lack of transparency on the outbreak when it emerged in the central city of Wuhan late last year.

China has been criticised for suppressing information and punishing whistleblowers during the early stages of the contagion, which an AFP tally shows has now killed nearly 10,000 people with more than 232,000 cases worldwide.

"Some people on the US side are trying to stigmatise China's fight against the epidemic, and shift the blame onto China," foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said.

"This approach ignores the great sacrifice made by the Chinese people to safeguard the health and safety of humankind, and slanders China's major contribution to global public health."

Geng said China has shared data with the US throughout the health crisis.

## Restrictions

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prevent infection," Deputy Commissioner Wahidul Islam of Madaripur told The Daily Star.

The areas are Pachar, Bahertola, and ward-2 and 3 of Shibchar municipality.

As per international practice, under a lockdown people are barred from leaving home except to buy food or essentials, visit the doctor or get to a job certified not doable from home. They must carry a special document, certifying why they are outside, to show security forces.

Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer Shashanka Chandra Gosh said 72 people who recently returned to the areas from different countries were asked to be in home quarantine.

Six others have been kept in isolation at Upazila Health Complex and Madaripur General Hospital, he added.

DC Wahidul said, "No one will be outside without a valid reason."

Shops, except the ones selling daily essentials and drug stores, have been shuttered in the areas, he added.

If necessary, only one member of a family in those areas will be allowed to leave home to buy essentials.

Health department officials have collected blood samples from several suspected coronavirus patients who were admitted to hospitals, Civil Surgeon Shofikul Islam said.

The samples were sent to Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research in the capital for tests, he said.

At a press conference at Shibchar Police Station yesterday afternoon, Deputy Inspector General (Dhaka Range) Nur-e Alam Mina said police will make sure that people who returned from abroad are not wandering about.

Shibchar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Asaduzzaman said people have been abiding by the restrictions.

## Steps to halt smuggling

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trade and payment agreement will be of a more comprehensive nature, he adds.

### UNROD CHIEF CALLS ON BANGABANDHU

Toni Hagen, chief of the United Nations Relief Operation, Dhaka (UNROD) today calls on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Ganabhaban. After the meeting, Hagen tells newsmen that he had discussions with the PM about the food situation of Bangladesh.

### JOINT RIVERS COMMISSION ON FARAKKA

Experts of India and Bangladesh constituting the Joint River Commission of the two countries will make detailed proposals so that the water resources of the region comprising Bangladesh and adjoining

areas of India can be utilised on an equitable basis for the mutual benefit of the people of both countries. The commission will also implement projects based on its findings and recommendations, informs India's Deputy Minister for Irrigation and Power Bajunath Kureel in the Lok Sabha.

### SUFFERINGS OF BANGALEES IN PAKISTAN

The plight of the Bangalees trapped in Pakistan knows no bounds, reports Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha. Most of the Bangalees who were in government service have been demoted or forced to go on leave. In February, they were allowed to draw Rs.1000 or one-third of their basic salary, whichever was less. Telephones at their residences have been disconnected. They have been

deprived of other facilities they were entitled to because of their official position. They are not allowed to draw any money from their provident funds.

### SOVIET SALVAGE TEAM ARRIVES

A nine-member Soviet salvage team for clearing the ports of Bangladesh of war-time wreckage arrives today. The Soviet salvage operation Flotilla will arrive soon at Chittagong Port. The team leader tells reporters that the team has come to Bangladesh on the friendship agreement made between the Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin and Bangladesh Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

SOURCES: March 22, 1972 issues of Dainik Bangla, The Daily Ittefaq, Azad, Morning News, The Bangladesh Observer and Purbodosh.

## 'Wonderchicken' fossil reveals dawn

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million years ago during the Cretaceous Period. It represents the oldest-known anatomically modern bird, sharing skull traits with today's landfowl like chickens, turkeys, quail and pheasants as well as waterfowl like ducks, geese and swans.

Birds evolved from small feathered dinosaurs roughly 150 million years ago. Many birds retained primitive features like teeth until the asteroid struck some 66 million years ago, triggering a mass extinction that erased three-quarters of Earth's plant and animal species.

A current estimate for the appearance of the common ancestor of all 11,000 living species of birds is somewhere between 100 million and 70 million years ago, based on DNA mutation rates. Until now the oldest

fossil of an anatomically modern bird was one called Vegavis that lived 66.5 million years ago in Antarctica, though there is a debate about its placement on the bird family tree.

At first glance, the fossil looked unimpressively like a few broken limb bones poking out of a small rock.

"When we CT scanned the rocks to get a better look at the limb bones we were shocked to discover an incredible, nearly complete skull peering out at us from the computer screen," said University of Cambridge palaeontologist Daniel Field, lead author of the research published in the journal Nature.

"This skull is one of the best preserved fossil bird skulls of any age, so the fact that it is from such an important point in Earth history is

amazing," Field added.

Field coined the "Wonderchicken" nickname, owing to its chicken-like beak and its scientific importance. Its scientific name Asteriornis honors Asteria, an ancient Greek goddess of falling stars, a nod to the imminent asteroid.

Asteriornis provides clues as to which factors may have helped some birds survive the asteroid impact while others perished, said palaeontologist and study co-author Daniel Ksepka of the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut.

Its relatively small size - a foot-long (30-cm-long) body - may have helped it survive as the global environmental calamity caused by the asteroid strike made it hard for larger animals to find enough to eat, Ksepka said.

## India hangs four Delhi rapists

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celebrated outside the prison.

"Today all Indian women received justice," Delhi resident Meena Sharma told AFP, clutching an Indian flag.

"I came here around 3:00 am in the morning. I waited here as today is a great day for us."

Celebrations were also held in Singh's ancestral village in northern Uttar Pradesh state, where her extended family members exchanged sweets.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi responded to the execution on Twitter, saying "justice has prevailed".

"It is of utmost importance to ensure dignity and safety of women," he tweeted.

Many of his cabinet colleagues also expressed their satisfaction.

But the European Union, while condemning the "heinous" crime, reiterated its opposition to executions, calling it a "cruel and inhumane punishment, which fails to act as a deterrent".

Rights Group Amnesty India called the executions another "dark stain" on India's record.

They were India's first executions since 2015.

Singh, 23, was returning home from the cinema with a male friend at night on December 16, 2012 when they boarded a Delhi bus, thinking it would take them home.

Five men and a 17-year-old aboard the vehicle knocked the friend unconscious and dragged Singh to the back of the bus before raping and torturing her with a metal rod.

The physiotherapy student and the friend were then dumped on the road. Singh died 13 days later in a Singapore

hospital from massive internal injuries.

"A decent girl won't roam about at 9 pm," one of the perpetrators later told a BBC documentary that was banned in India.

The saga was also turned into an award-winning Netflix mini-series reconstructing the police investigation.

Nearly 34,000 rapes were reported in India in 2018, according to official data. This is considered the tip of the iceberg, with many more victims too scared to come forward.

But Singh's ordeal, and the fact that she was part of a generation of young women trying to break out of a still very traditional society, struck a chord.

"It was like the bursting of a dam," said Kavita Krishnan, an activist who took part in the huge protests.

"It was not restricted to seeking revenge. Women said they do not want to trade their freedom for safety... There was a social awakening of society," she told AFP before the hangings.

The uproar over the case led to tougher punishments for rapists including the death penalty for repeat offenders.

Singh, nicknamed "Nirbhaya" ("fearless"), survived long enough to identify her attackers and all six were arrested. Four were convicted in 2013.

A fifth, the suspected ringleader, was found dead in jail in a suspected suicide, while the 17-year-old spent three years in a juvenile detention centre.

India "has given a strong message to rapists that if you commit this crime you will be hanged," tweeted Swati Maliwal, of the Delhi Commission for

Women.

But for Krishnan, the executions masked the continued failure to provide justice and improve safety for women in the world's biggest democracy.

Almost 150,000 rape cases are awaiting trial in India's dysfunctional criminal justice system.

The government is "trying to fix the public gaze on the gallows to divert attention away from what it has failed to do", Krishnan said.

## S Korea planning to evacuate citizens from Italy

AFP, Seoul

South Korea is planning to send two chartered flights to Italy to evacuate some 570 citizens from the country with the most deaths from the coronavirus pandemic, reports said.

At one point South Korea was the country hardest-hit by the virus outside China, but Seoul appears to have brought the outbreak under control and has been comprehensively overtaken by Italy, where the death toll has reached 3,405 and authorities declared a national lockdown.

Seoul decided to step in as its citizens in Italy had initially sought to find flight tickets out themselves, but faced difficulties due to high costs, Yonhap news agency reported.

"We currently think that two flights are needed, and we are still in consultations over specifics," it quoted a foreign ministry official as saying.

## Bangladeshis

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Austria and Luxembourg.

People in Afghanistan are the unhappiest with their lives, according to the survey, followed by South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Central African Republic, Tanzania and Botswana.

The happiness index in this year's report included 153 countries, through which the happiness levels were captured by surveying citizens and residents to assess their general life satisfaction levels.

This year's report also included a study that explored the relationship between the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and wellbeing.

The study grew out of a 2011 resolution passed by the UN General Assembly that called on governments to "give more importance to happiness and well-being in determining how to achieve and measure social and economic development."

Over the years, the study has examined how social media, migration, differences in wellbeing inequality and other factors affect levels of happiness. This year, the study ranked cities around the world by their reported sense of wellbeing.

In a comparative analysis among nations listed in the World Happiness Index and the SDG index, the analysis showed a direct relationship between efforts to achieve the SDGs and reported happiness levels, where nations scoring leading positions in the World Happiness Index were also better performers in the SDG Index.

The SDG Index is a global indicator that monitors countries' efforts and

readiness to achieve the 17 sustainable development goals, also known as the Global Agenda 2030.

The study also indicated to the importance of research to better understand the relationship between wellbeing in societies, and its implications on the Global Agenda, especially ones related to sustainable consumption and climate change.

In another special chapter in this year's edition of the World Happiness Report, a study shows how natural environment can be a factor in raising happiness and wellbeing for individuals. An analysis of individual responses in the happiness polls indicated that preserving and maintaining healthy and natural surroundings, does support and elevate levels of happiness and wellbeing in societies.

The study indicated a number of key natural factors affecting happiness, such as weather, green spaces and water surfaces such as beaches and canals. The study documented an increase of happiness levels by individuals who live near green spaces or surrounded by natural trees, more than those who live far from any natural greenery. The same was also true for those who live overlooking water surfaces.

The study concluded that a healthy natural environment plays a role in raising the levels of happiness and wellbeing by presenting opportunities and experiences that instill happiness, such as recreational activities with family and friends in natural open-air surroundings.

## Covid-19 hits Qatar

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new cases included two Qataris who had been in Europe, with the rest migrant workers.

Qatari authorities on Tuesday announced the closure of several square kilometres of the industrial area in Doha, the capital, which also contains labour camps and other housing units.

The country relies on about 2 million migrant workers for the bulk of its labour force, mainly from Asian countries.

"The majority of (coronavirus) cases in Qatar to date have been located in the Industrial Area," the Government Communication Office (GCO) said earlier in a statement in response to a Reuters' query.

"Every effort is being made to prevent the spread of the disease in Qatar and protect every member of the population. As a result, some areas of Qatar have been cordoned off to contain the virus," it said.

The GCO did not comment on the total number of people under lockdown in the industrial zone, the total number of migrant workers who have tested positive or the number under quarantine.

Authorities on March 11 said 238 people under quarantine in a residential compound tested positive for the disease. Subsequent announcements have linked most reported cases to migrant workers without mentioning nationalities.

## 5 kids die in Rangamati

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Chinta Rani Tripura, of the same village, who got infected by this communicable disease during her pregnancy and lost her premature baby after delivery, said, "My baby boy died without any treatment. Nobody came to help us."

"We are very helpless in hill," he added.

Contacted, Bipash Khisa, civil surgeon of Rangamati, said it was really tough to work in remote areas.

It takes around 10 hours to reach the affected areas on foot from Sajek tourist spot as there is on other way to go there, the civil surgeon said.

He added that a medical team with BGB was working in the affected villages. Another medical team would be sent there, he said.

The civil surgeon also claimed that despite awareness campaigns, parents were not interested in vaccinating their children for their superstition.

"After the disease broke out, our health workers went to the affected paras [villages] on March 6 and vaccinated 285 children, aged under 15," said Istekhar Ahmed,

Baghaichhari upazila health and family planning officer.

"The affected children were also suffering from malnutrition, which causes the disease to take a serious turn," he said, adding that the affected children were not out of danger.

The 130 children, who are undergoing treatment, are aged between 1 and 15.

Recently, a child died and around 40 others, including 33 children, were seriously ill in Bandarban's Lama upazila.

Locals said the disease was measles, while health officials said they sent samples to Dhaka for tests and that they could confirm after getting the tests results.

In 2017, nine children of Tripura community died of measles in Chattogram's Sitakunda upazila.

This year, the campaign to vaccinate 34 million children from 9 months to 10 years for measles and rubella in Bangladesh had been scheduled to start on Wednesday. But it was postponed in the ongoing coronavirus fallout.

## Onion price

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ago, now becomes Tk 55. Besides, the prices of onion [local] stood up from Tk 40 to 80 within a few days."

Wasiqur, employee of a private company, said they were already panicked over the coronavirus and would suffer more if the price of essential commodities became unaffordable.

Apart from rice and onion, locally grown lentils were sold between Tk 120 to Tk 130 per kg which was between Tk 100 and Tk 110 a week ago.

Potato were sold between Tk 24 and Tk 26 which was between Tk 18 and Tk 20. Imported garlic were sold between Tk 150 and Tk 160 which was between Tk 120 and Tk 130.

This correspondent visited several grocery stores and kitchen markets in the city's Shukrabad, Farmgate and Karwan Bazar areas and collected the prices.

Asked, most of the sellers blamed high demand and low supply of the goods for the sudden price hike. They also claimed that they had to buy those goods with a higher price, which forced them to charge extra.

Mahmudul Islam, another shopper in Karwan Bazar area, said the prices had not have gone up if some people prevented themselves from panic buying.

"I think, we should stop such unnecessary shopping for our own sake," he said.