

DOCUMENTARY ON MIGRANT WORKERS
 Malaysia grills six Al Jazeera journalists
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BANGLADESH UPDATE	2,949 New cases in 24hrs	1,78,443 Total cases	2,275 Deaths	86,406 Recoveries	GLOBAL UPDATE	559,379 Deaths	12,490,771 Total cases
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PRIVATE CLINICS, DIAGNOSTIC CENTRES

Two-thirds run without licence

Only 5,000 out of 15,000 renewed licences from DGHS; lax monitoring, lack of action by authorities let others run 'illegally'

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Two thirds of the country's over 15,000 private clinics and diagnostic centres have been running without any valid licence since 2018 facing almost no consequences. The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) did nothing but send notices to these facilities and make public announcements in newspapers, officials admitted. The renewal of licences has been slow since 2018, when the DGHS began "digitalising" the process, said Aminul Hasan, director of hospitals and clinics at the DGHS. "Of about 15,000 private clinics and diagnostic centres, some 5,000 have proper licences... They did not come forward for renewal of the licences," he told The Daily Star yesterday. Clinics and diagnostic centres need environmental clearance, employee details, city corporation clearance, tax certificates and other documents to get their licence renewed every year, he explained.

"Most of these facilities could not get their licence updated because they failed to provide those documents." Meanwhile, the DGHS is toothless when it comes to taking corrective measures. The facilities are governed under The Medical Practice and Private Clinics and Laboratories (Regulation) Ordinance, 1982. "According to this ordinance, we cannot do anything, except declare them illegal. Those who do not have renewed licences are illegal," Aminul said. "We regularly send them notices and publish announcements in the newspapers." Manpower shortage is also a major issue, he said. There are three officials to look after the licences of around 5,000 clinics and diagnostic centres in Dhaka. The issue of licences is being discussed widely after it became known last week that the DGHS signed an agreement with Regent Hospital while being fully aware that the hospital's licence had expired in 2014. A mobile court of Rab raided the hospital's Uttara branch on July 7 and recovered

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Denied entry to Italy, Bangladeshi passengers of a Qatar Airways flight walk out of the capital's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 5:30am yesterday. The European country on Thursday imposed a restriction on the entry of all flights and passengers from Bangladesh till October 5 after "a significant number" of Bangladeshis on board of a special Biman flight tested positive for Covid-19 in Rome on July 6. Around 146 returnees were quarantined in Hajj Camp in the city's Ashkona. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

A severe blow to foreign students

Latest US policy worries Bangladeshi, other foreign students as uncertainty looms over their study in the US

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladeshi students pursuing higher education in the United States face uncertainty over their future due to a new policy of the US administration on not allowing foreign students in the aftermath of Covid-19. On Monday, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in a statement said it would not allow foreign students to remain in the country if the courses they take this fall were entirely online. ICE said the decision came as an effort to reduce coronavirus transmission in the country. Talking to The Daily Star, several Bangladeshi students studying at different colleges and universities in the US called the decision "inhumane, demeaning and mindless." "The decision is nothing but inhumane and cruel to international students studying in the US," said Nuhan B Abid, a student at Dickinson College. He said he was still waiting for further instructions from his university about how the ruling specifically affects them. Since his university is conducting in-person classes for the fall semester, he is not directly affected. "However, this would still depend on my course load, as some of my classes might still be remote," he said. The ICE in the statement said, "Nonimmigrant F-1 and M-1 students attending schools operating entirely online may not take a full online course load and remain in the United States." "Active students currently in the United States enrolled in such programs

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Cops yet to track down Shahed

Home boss says he'll be brought to justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Regent Hospital owner Mohammad Shahed was at large till last night, four days after a mobile court sealed off the hospital in the capital's Uttara on charges of issuing several thousand fake Covid-19 test reports. Multiple Rab teams are working to arrest him, Lt Col Ashique Billah, director of the force's legal and media wing, told The Daily Star. "We hope we will be able to catch him soon." Asked whether Shahed was under their watch, the Rab official said they were yet to trace him. Replying to a query, a top Rab official said Shahed could not flee the country. Immigration police have been asked to remain alert, he said. Briefing reporters at his residence yesterday, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said Shahed would not be forgiven



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Half of dist admins ignore govt order

A good initiative for transparency disregarded

MAHBUUB RAHMAN KHAN

The deputy commissioners of nearly half of the country's 64 districts continue disregarding the government's directive to upload information on allocation and disbursement of relief and financial aid on their respective websites. The disaster management and relief ministry has long been asking the DCs to publish the information on the district web portals to ensure transparency and accountability. But going through the web portals of all districts until July 7, The Daily Star found only 30 of them have information related to relief allocation and distribution. Experts say showing such disregard leaves a room for corruption and irregularities to creep into the government's relief distribution activities, already tainted by reports of misappropriation of rice and other aids, meant for distribution among the poor during the Covid-19 pandemic. "This also shows how appropriate government decisions often remain

ineffective and public interest is undermined," said Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman. Questions may be raised if those who have not complied with the directive have vested interest in non-disclosure of the information and hence are among beneficiaries of lack of transparency, he told The Daily Star. Interestingly, some DC portals were found to have uploaded information about donations made by local political leaders and businessmen. Take Shariatpur district for an example. The government allocated about 2,248 tonnes of rice and Tk 1.49 crore in phases till June 4 for those whose life and livelihoods have been affected by the pandemic. While making the allocation, the DC was asked to upload information on the website about the amount of relief the district received from the government and about the amount distributed among upazilas. SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Sahara to be laid to rest today

She passed away at a Thai hospital Thursday night

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sahara Khatun was a key figure among those who led the Awami League during difficult times and who remained by the side of party chief Sheikh Hasina through thick and thin for decades. The former home minister and a presidium member of Awami League, who died at a hospital in Thailand on Thursday night, will be buried at the

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No scope to become complacent

Say experts amid fall in cases; 37 die, 2,949 infected in a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Though the number of new Covid-19 cases dropped last week compared to the week before, experts say there is no room for complacency as the rate of infection remained almost static. They said the number declined thanks to the decreased number of tests. According to sources, 25,917 positive cases were recorded between June 27 and July 3 after testing samples of 1,20,406 people, meaning the average infection rate in that week was 21.52 percent. The test number was reduced to 1,00,925 between July 4 and yesterday, of which 22,052 tested positive, taking the weekly average infection rate to 21.84 percent. Recalling the spike in coronavirus cases during the last eid festival, experts

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Workers of Latif Bawany Jute Mills in the city's Demra loading their household belongings on to a pick-up as they prepare to leave the area yesterday, nine days after the government shut down production of 25 state-run jute mills, including Latif Bawany. Inset, workers staging a protest demanding payment of their dues.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



BD WORKERS IN ITALY 15,000 stranded at home, face uncertain future

RASHIDUL HASAN and JAMIL MAHMUD

After several months of wait in Bangladesh, expatriate worker Enamur Rahim was scheduled to fly back to Italy next week. He has been stranded since March as regular air communications remained suspended from March 16 to June 15 amid the coronavirus pandemic. But the Italy government's fresh decision to put restrictions on entry of all flights or passengers from Bangladesh till October 5 came as a bolt from the blue for Enamur. "If I cannot return to my workplace within the next 15 days, my visa will be expired and my job there at a private company will be at stake," Enamur said, adding, "It seems my whole plan turned upside down." Italy made the decision on Thursday after several Bangladeshi passengers were found Covid-19 positive upon their landing to that country recently. The decision has put the fate of several thousand Bangladeshi expatriates in Italy, who are currently in Bangladesh, in further uncertainty. According to Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB), around 12,000 to 15,000 Bangladeshi expatriate workers in Italy are waiting for their travel to the country at present. An official at Bangladesh embassy in Rome said after several Bangladeshis were found Covid-19 positive, locals in Italy, especially in capital Rome, have started treating Bangladeshis in a "different way".

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MIGRANT WORKERS

Malaysia mulls 'e-wages system'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Malaysia is planning to introduce e-wages system, which will alert the government in case foreign workers are not paid, as part of its new measures to protect the migrants.

"I have begun discussing with the home ministry to introduce this e-wages system. If an employer fails to pay the wages of their workers, we will be alerted through the system," Malaysia's Human Resources Minister Datuk M Saravanan said.

This will provide a form of guarantee to the foreign workers in accordance with international standards, he told reporters after a programme in Putrajaya on Thursday.

Malaysian government will also enforce Section 446 of the Workers' Minimum Standards of Housing and Amenities Act from September 1 to ensure that all employers provide housing, accommodation and that their workers' welfare is taken care of.

"If an employer is found not providing these, they are liable to a maximum of RM 50,000 fine for every offence," Saravanan said, adding that these measures were discussed during a meeting with the Bangladesh High Commission to Malaysia recently.

Malaysia is a popular destination for Bangladeshis. There are some eight lakh Bangladeshis working in the Southeast Asian country.

Malaysia suspended labour recruitment from Bangladesh since September 2018 as it found that a syndicate of agents used to charge up to Tk 4 lakh for recruitment of each worker and that the migrants were facing huge debt.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic,

majority of the foreign workers, including Bangladeshis, were jobless. With the reopening since mid-June, many are rejoining work but many others have no jobs with their factories shutting down or retrenching workers.

"Due to the economic slowdown, we expect to see a lot of foreign workers with permits who will lose jobs. Therefore, we need to do a redeployment exercise," Saravanan said.

"The Bangladesh government is very proactive and concerned about their workers. I have explained these measures to them and I believe they are satisfied with it," he said, adding that he will also engage with government representatives of other countries.

Saravanan said he also discussed Malaysia's freeze on the hiring of foreign workers due to the Covid-19 situation from July 1 to the end of the year.

He said the ministry will also propose that every foreign worker be given protection under the Social Security Organisation (Socso).

"Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen why it is important to ensure our foreign workers are given protection.

"The international standard is that all workers, regardless whether they are local or foreign, are given equal treatment," said Saravanan.

He said Malaysia no longer wants to be a dumping ground for migrant workers.

"Whenever an employer hires a foreign worker, we want to ensure that the employee is paid the wages as promised," said Saravanan.

World entering new military 'drone age': UN expert

AFP, Geneva

The world is entering a military "second drone age" with uncontrolled proliferation and no standards governing their use, a United Nations expert told the UN Human Rights Council on Thursday.

Agnes Callamard, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said the global community needed to take stock of how armed drones have evolved, and examine the challenges they posed to compliance with international law.

"There are no robust standards governing drones' development,

proliferation, export, or capability for use of force. No transparency. No effective oversight. No accountability," she said.

"Drone strikes, it seems, are favoured by decision-makers and military alike for their relative efficiency, effectiveness, adaptability, acceptability, deniability, and political gain."

The independent rights expert does not speak for the United Nations but reports her findings to it.

Callamard presented a report into targeted killings through armed drones, in light of the proliferation in drone use and their expanding capability over the last five years.

Two-thirds run without licence

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stashes of fake Covid-19 test results. The hospital gave test results to patients without testing their samples.

"This [Regent Hospital] is the tip of the iceberg of irregularities at private clinics and diagnostic centres," said Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) at the DGHS.

"People involved in this sector are familiar with the term Bucket Test," he said. It means samples are collected and tossed into a bucket and then test results are given randomly, the former high official explained.

"This is a common practice.... For this, the patients lose money and the treatment gets misguided. The consequences are severe for the victims," he said.

Experts said the DGHS must not shrug off its responsibilities.

Prof Nazrul Islam, former vice-chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said, "A thorough and detailed enquiry is needed to find out why the DGHS and the health

ministry failed to make private hospitals and clinics accountable. The ministry and DGHS officials should keep in mind that purchasing equipment is not their only task."

The DGHS has to be liable for the corruption done by unauthorised clinics and diagnostic centres in the name of treatment, he said.

"The unauthorised facilities are playing with the lives of innocent people."

Be-Nazir said that the licencing process should be decentralised with strict monitoring.

"For example, in upazilas, health and family planning officers will issue and renew licenses. Civil surgeons will do the same for facilities in the districts," he added.

Contacted, Moniruzzaman Bhuiyan, president of Bangladesh Private Clinics and Diagnostic Owners' Association, acknowledged that many of the facilities did not have licences.

"But they are in the process of renewal," he said.

No scope to become complacent

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apprehend that the situation might be worse if the government fails to take proper measures before the Eid-ul-Azha.

"If you see the data, the number of new cases against daily tests remained between 20 percent and 23 percent. It means if you double the test, there is a chance that the number of new cases would be double," said Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director of disease control at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Bangladesh remains the 17th worst affected country in the world in terms of the total number of coronavirus cases.

In the last 24 hours until 2:30pm yesterday, 2,949 people tested positive for Covid-19, taking the total number of infection to 1,78,443, said Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of DGHS.

During this time, 13,488 samples were tested in 77 labs across the country. The rate of infection stood at 21.86 percent yesterday.

Record shows, the rate was 20.19 percent on June 26.

Prof Mozaherul Huq, former regional advisor of WHO South East Asia region and founder of the Public Health Foundation of Bangladesh, suggested that the government tackle the situation skillfully.

"We need to find out actual information about infection and increase the testing facilities," he said.

Pointing out that the country has a weak tracing system, he said the government needs to strengthen its contact tracing system. "Otherwise, the coronavirus will continue to spread among us," he added.

BRIEFING

A total of 37 people died from coronavirus infections in the last 24 hours, taking the death toll to 2,275, Nasima said.

The position is one step ahead of France and one step behind Germany, according to worldometer.info.

Among the deceased, 29 were male and eight were female while 12 were from Dhaka, 17 from Chattogram, two from Rajshahi, two from Sylhet, one from Barishal, one from Mymensingh and two others were from Rangpur division.

Of them, one was between 21-30 years old, one between 31-40, seven between 41-50, nine between 51-60, 15 between 61-70 and four between 71-80 years old, Dr Nasima also said. Meanwhile, 1,862 Covid-19 patients recovered, according to DGHS.

The total number of recoveries has reached 86,406.

A total of 893 people were put under isolation during this time.



An overcrowded launch carries passengers to Kathalbari of Madaripur from Shimulia of Munshiganj, putting them in harm's way. Hardly anybody on board is maintaining social distancing, which is required to curb the spread of Covid-19.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Half of dist admins ignore govt order

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But visiting the portal, this correspondent found no information in this regard.

The site's notice board is flooded with testimonials for local ruling party leaders and businessmen who made contributions during the crisis period.

Earlier, the Local Government Division (LGD) suspended 94 union parishad (UP) chairmen and members for their alleged involvement in misappropriation of rice and other aids meant for distribution among the poor.

Speaking to this correspondent recently, LGD Joint Secretary (UP division) Mustakim Billah Faruqui said they suspended the local government representatives on the basis of reports from local administrations.

According to the Department of Disaster Management (DDM), the government till June 4 allocated to 64 districts about 2.01 lakh tonnes rice and Tk 116.68 crore for providing financial aid and procurement of baby food.

Atiqul Huq, director general of DDM, said they have asked the DCs to publish the relief allocation information on their respective websites to ensure transparency, but many DCs are not complying with the order.

The 30 districts, whose web portals contain information on relief redistribution, were allocated 83,472 tonnes of rice, Tk 38.58 crore for financial aid and Tk 11.16 crore for procurement of baby food.

The districts are Brahmanbaria, Rangamati, Noakhali, Chandpur, Bogura, Joypurhat, Chapainawabganj, Sathkha, Narail, Chuadanga, Jhenidah, Jhalakathi, Pirojpur, Barguna, Moulvibazar, Narayanganj,

Kishoreganj, Munshiganj, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Faridpur, Panchagarh, Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Gaibandha, Rangpur, Kurigram, Sherpur and Jamalpur.

Portals of eight of them -- Brahmanbaria, Rangamati, Moulvibazar, Munshiganj, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Faridpur and Panchagarh -- contain detailed information on redistribution of relief among upazilas.

Contacted, Rangamati DC AKM Mamunur Rashid said he followed the order accordingly to ensure transparency in relief distribution.

"I've not only published the information on the portal, but also uploaded it on social media from time to time to ensure my accountability to the public," he said.

The DC portals of eight districts -- Cox's Bazar, Sirajganj, Rajshahi, Patuakhali, Barishal, Manikganj, Rajbari and Thakurgaon -- have partial information on relief distribution.

The contributions of private donors are displayed well on the website of Manikganj DC whereas the Rajshahi DC's portal has published a list of beneficiaries who have received Tk 2,500 each as cash assistance from the prime minister.

The relief-related information has not been updated on the DC portals of Rajbari and Thakurgaon after April 25 and March 26 respectively.

These eight districts were allocated 25,849 tonnes of rice and Tk 11.89 crore for financial aid. Another Tk 3.36 crore was allocated to the DCs for purchasing baby food.

However, no relief distribution-related information was found on the DC websites of 26 other districts. They were given 92,098 tonnes of rice and

Tk 40.65 crore for providing cash aid. For purchasing baby food, DCs were also given another Tk 11.02 crore.

Asked, Shariatpur DC Kazi Abu Taher on Wednesday said, "The information should be on the website. Have you checked it?"

"If it's not there, it will be uploaded. I'm asking my subordinate colleagues to do it," he added.

The DC's portal was not updated until yesterday afternoon.

Speaking on the issue, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said this is a clear example of non-compliance to a government directive by such a large number of government officials, who should be brought to account.

Given the state of digitalisation of such public offices already achieved all over the country, no potential defence in the name of lack of capacity would be acceptable, he said.

State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Enamur Rahman on Wednesday said, "I've already directed the ministry secretary to direct the DCs to upload relief information on websites."

He said people need to know what the government allocated for them.

Md Mohsin, secretary of the disaster management ministry, said he would give specific directives to the DCs and divisional commissioners in this regard within a day or two.

"I don't know what is there to hide and why they are not uploading the information. You'll find all information regarding relief within a couple of days," he added.

Despite repeated attempts, this newspaper could not reach State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain over phone for comments.

Cops yet to track down Shahed

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for the crime he allegedly committed. He said it did not matter which party or group Shahed belonged to.

"Of course he will be brought to book," the home minister said adding that both police and Rab were looking for him.

He said they would soon be able to give information about Shahed.

Asaduzzaman also said Shahed had called him over phone while Rab was raiding the private hospital on Monday.

"I referred some patients to the hospital. He called me over that matter. He said the hospital was being sealed off."

"I told him 'you must have done something wrong'. They don't seal off anything without a reason. He then asked me what he should do."

"I told him either you face it or go to court if you have something to say. That's all I said."

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday placed Regent Group Public Relations Officer Tariqul Islam alias Tareq Shibli on a five-day remand in connection with a case filed over the matter.

Metropolitan Magistrate Morshed Al Mamun Bhuiyan passed the order after Uttara West Police Station Inspector Md Alamgir Gazi, also the investigation officer of the case, produced him before the court with a seven-day remand prayer.

No lawyer appeared to defend Shahed. Responding to a question, Shibli told the court that the accused works at the PR department, but he was aware about the hospital issuing fake Covid-19 certificates, court sources said.

With Tariqul, Rab so far has arrested nine people in this connection.

Seven of the eight others, all staffers of the hospitals, were arrested during the drive. They also have been placed on a five-day remand each. The other arrestee is underage.

Shahed, who is the chairman of Regent Hospital, managing director and six other accused in the case were on the run.

In another development, Shahed's father Sirajul Karim died of coronavirus infection at the capital's Universal Medical College Hospital on Thursday night.

The hospital authorities said they informed if Shahed's wife over phone, but no relatives showed up to take the body. Later, two persons nominated by the family took it.

Rab on Tuesday night filed the case against Shahed and 16 staffers of Regent Group and Regent Hospital after the mobile court found proof that the hospital authorities issued fake Covid-19 certificates and charged patients for tests and treatment, violating an agreement with the government.

The mobile court sealed off Regent

Group head office and two branches of Regent Hospital in Uttara and Mirpur.

The hospital's licence expired in 2014 and was never renewed.

According to Rab, the hospital authorities so far issued more than 10,000 Covid-19 test reports. Around 4,200 of the samples were tested at different government labs. They threw away rest, prepared fake reports and gave those to patients without testing, Rab said.

The hospital authorities took Tk 3,500 for each test, meaning they embezzled more than Tk 3.5 crore, despite having agreement with the government to conduct tests and provide Covid-19 treatment for free, said Executive Magistrate Sarwoer Alam, who led the drive.

After the Rab's raid, many other information started surfacing.

About Shahed, a home ministry letter sent to the inspector general of police back in 2016 mentioned: "He is a man of dangerous fraudulent nature."

At a briefing on Wednesday, Rab's Intelligence Chief Lt Col Sarwar-Bin-Quasem also said Shahed was a fraud and master of bluffs.

He is facing around 32 cases, including for murder, money laundering and embezzlement of public money. He has already served in jail for embezzling money. Most of the cases were filed under Section 420 of the Penal Code.

Sahara

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capital's Banani graveyard today.

Her body will be flown back to Dhaka in the early hours.

The 77-year-old lawmaker from Dhaka-18 passed away at Bumrungrad International Hospital in Bangkok at 11:25pm (local time).

She was taken to Bangkok on Monday by an air ambulance.

On June 2, the three-time MP was admitted to the United Hospital with fever and complications associated with old age. She was later taken to the ICU of the hospital as her condition deteriorated.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in separate messages expressed profound shock at her death.

Abdul Hamid said Sahara's death was an irreparable loss as she was a tested AL leader at its tough time.

Sheikh Hasina in her condolence message said Sahara dedicated her life for reestablishing democracy and realising people's rights as a combatant of Bangabandhu's principle.

"Sahara Khatun always remained beside the party's leaders and workers and provided all support, including legal aid services during the crisis," said the PM.

"The country and nation have lost a competent and honest woman leader. And I have lost a tested and trusted co-fighter."

Sahara Khatun was born in Dhaka's Kurmitola on March 1, 1943. Her parents were Abdul Aziz and Turjan Nesa.

She completed Bachelor of Arts and LLB degrees and became a lawyer.

Sahara engaged in politics in her student life. She was the former law secretary of the AL.

She entered national politics in 1991, when she contested in the fifth parliamentary election as an Awami League candidate. She was defeated by BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

In the 2008 parliamentary election, she came to the limelight following the arrest of then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina.

Sahara was one of the forefront fighters as a lawyer involved in the legal battle and also on the streets to free Sheikh Hasina.

She became the victim of the military-backed 1/11 government.

In the 2008 national election, Sahara became an MP for the first time from Dhaka-18 constituency.

Giving surprise to many, Sheikh Hasina included Sahara in her cabinet as minister for home affairs.

In a cabinet reshuffle of 2012, she was relieved of her duties as the home minister and made the minister of posts and telecommunications.

Sahara's tenure as minister of home affairs has been marred by different incidents including the BDR mutiny.

She was criticised for the extrajudicial killings done by Police and Rab.

In January, 2011, Sahara Khatun had questioned whether human rights organisations were "siding with the criminals" killed in "encounters" with law enforcers.

She was also widely criticised for her pledges about the 48-hour timeframe, announced to catch the killers of journalist couple, Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi.

Apart from being the presidium member of AL, she was founding president of Bangladesh Awami Ainjibi Parishad and General Secretary of Bangladesh Mahila Samity, chairman of Aziz Master Academy, member of International Women Lawyers Federation, the International Women's Alliance and former member of Bangladesh Bar Council, according to biography, published by the parliament secretariat.

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, AL General secretary Obaidul Quader, ministers including Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque and Home Minister Ashaduzzaman Khan, Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, Law Minister Anisul Huq and Attorney General Mahbubey Alam, top leaders of different political, social and cultural organizations, among others, expressed deep shock at her death.

15,000 stranded at home, face uncertain future

FROM PAGE 1

Bangladesh will be allowed to enter Italy. No airlines can bring passengers from Covid-19-hit country due to the risk of further Covid-19 spread. Passengers who came from Bangladesh cannot be brought on transit flights either.

Different foreign airlines, including Qatar Airways, already sent letters to travel agencies after getting the directives.

On July 7, the Italian government imposed a travel restriction for one week after a significant number of passengers of a special flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines tested Covid-19 positive once they landed at the airport in Rome.

The passengers had certificates that they tested negative for Covid-19 and

were safe to travel. Following this, Italy denied entry of around 146 Bangladeshi passengers -- on board two transit flight of Qatar Airways -- into the country on Wednesday.

Qatar Airways, which along with a few other foreign airlines got ahead last month to operate transit flights on different destinations from Dhaka, carried back the Bangladeshis to Dhaka early yesterday.

In a statement on Thursday, Qatar Airways said, "Upon request of the Italian health ministry, all flights/passengers from Bangladesh with final destination to Italy are forbidden."

"Effective from July 8 and valid till October 5, passengers are not

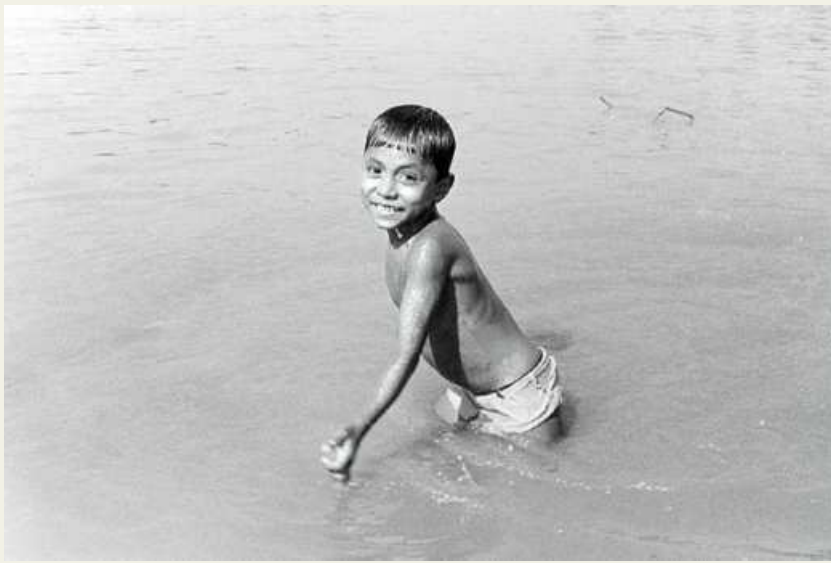
allowed to travel to Italy from Bangladesh irrespective of any nationality and irrespective of any routing involved where flight originates from Bangladesh," read the statement.

Arfanul Haque, labour welfare counsellor at Bangladesh embassy in Rome, yesterday said they got a notice regarding a one-week travel ban for Bangladeshis and that they learnt about the travel ban till October 5 via other sources.

Earlier in June, Japan, South Korea, and China put restrictions on operating flights in their countries from Dhaka after several passengers who had travelled from Bangladesh tested Covid-19 positive after they landed in those countries.

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



The Joy of Water.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Adventures at the Pond

The pond was irresistible, beckoning me every day.

Across the street from our home in Sylhet, was a police station. Next to this station ran an unpaved path which went some way past the station before curving right. Walking down this path, one unexpectedly came upon a large pond (dighi), hidden away from the street. The pond was square with sides of perhaps 500 feet. At the centre of each side was a small ghat – rudimentary stairs for people of the neighbourhood to enter the pond for bathing or swimming.

I learned to swim in this pond – at Abbu's insistence – when I was eight. For him, swimming was a non-negotiable survival skill. This was before the age of swimming instructors and lessons. Abbu recruited Torijullah Bhai, a tough choulidar, for the job, with the promise of a reward if I swam in a month. Every day I eagerly waited for Torijullah Bhai to show up so we could head to the pond. He stood waist-deep in water and held out his arms. Supporting my chest and belly on his palms, I floated. He shouted "Kick! Kick! Kick!" and I kicked the water till I was exhausted. Gradually he started to draw away his hand and I was able to stay afloat without his help. Next thing I knew, I was swimming across the pond. I had the world's worst freestyle technique, breathing face forward rather than turning my head, but when Abbu watched me swim across the pond, he was delighted.

Torijullah Bhai collected his reward and our lessons ended. In the meantime a young man was hired to work in our house. Bodi hailed from a village of Water Gypsies in Mymensingh. I was, by now, addicted to swimming so he accompanied

me every day to the pond where I frolicked in the water and he squatted patiently on the bank chewing on stalks of grass.

One day Bodi jumped into the water. He swam effortlessly and then disappeared underwater, emerging a few seconds later with a dark roundish shell. A few more dives, and he had collected several shells, placing them on the grass. As we walked home with the shells, I asked him their purpose. "You will see," he replied.

At home, Bodi set down the shells on the grass and got himself a large knife. "Watch this," he said. He carefully opened a shell with the knife and with a deft twist of his fingers flipped over the cream coloured flesh inside. He looked inside carefully, discarded the shell, and picked another. He had gone through several when he shouted, "Look!" It was a miraculous sight: a pearl encased safely within the folds of the flesh inside the shell.

Collecting those shells became my new obsession. Every day Bodi and I went to the pond and dived, filling a bucket with shells. Perhaps one in ten yielded a pearl. Most were small, but one day we scored a large one, about ¼" in diameter.

I watched Bodi to learn his technique. But there was a trick to turning over the flesh that I could not master. No matter how hard I tried I simply could not reveal the gem. So the secret of finding pearls stayed with him.

Bodi eventually left our house. That was the end of my pearl hunting days. It was much later that I learned that the Water Gypsies of Bangladesh are expert pearl hunters.

facebook.com/ikabirphotographs or follow "ihtishamkabir" on Instagram.

DAMAGE TO DHAKA-MAWA EXPRESSWAY

RHD, Padma Bridge rail link contractor at loggerheads

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Roads and Highways Department (RHD) and contractor of Padma Bridge Rail Link Project are apparently at loggerheads over the use of Dhaka-Mawa Expressway for transporting construction materials.

RHD officials say the contractor and sub-contractors are damaging the newly-built expressway and service roads by operating heavy-loaded trucks to transport materials for the project.

The department has already sought Tk 50 crore to the project authority as compensation for the damage, and vowed not to allow any truck to use the expressway and its service road to avoid further damage, RHD officials said.

On the other hand, the contractor -- China Railway Group Limited (CRGL) -- said the road authority began closing passage between the main road and the service road since June 11.

As the main road allowing heavy vehicles to pass through is completely closed, vehicles transporting materials cannot reach the construction site and the service road that can reach the construction site is not allowing heavy-loaded vehicles to pass through it, the contractor said though its PR organisation on Thursday.

"As a result, all vehicles transporting materials for PBRLP will not be able to enter the construction site, and the construction of the section of CH25-CH81, nearly 56km long, will be forced to face a complete shutdown," it said, adding that 36 local suppliers and sub-contractors, and their employees are suffering enormously amid the pandemic.

In March, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the country's first-ever expressway from Dhaka to Faridpur's Bhanga upazila. The 55km four-lane highway, with service lanes on both sides, is the most expensive road kilometre-for-kilometre in the country.

On the other hand, the Ecne in May 2016 approved the "Padma Bridge Rail Link Project" to connect the capital with Jashore with a 169km rail line over the under-construction Padma Bridge. The deadline of the Tk 39,246-crore project is June 2024.

WHAT RHD SAYS Sabuj Uddin Khan, additional chief engineer (Dhaka zone) of RHD, said they have already damaged the expressway and its service roads to some extent, by operating heavy-loaded truck, without paying heed to RHD's opposition.

"We've already visited the site and closed the expressway and its service roads on the Bhanga side two days ago, and are closing the Mawa side gradually too. We can't allow our property to be damaged by carrying materials for another project," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He however said they did not close the road from June 11 as alleged by CRGL. Sabuj said the project authority was supposed to build a service road to carry construction materials but did not do that.

Replying to another question, he said "We have already sought Tk 50 crore to the rail link project authority as compensation for the damage. We will seek more after doing further assessment."

Sabuj said they have held several meetings over the issue but the contractor and their sub-contractors are not keeping their promises.

WHAT PROJECT AUTHORITY SAYS Contracted, Project Director of PBRLP Golam Fakhruddin Ahmed Chowdhury also admitted that some sub-contractors operated loaded trucks at night, ignoring authority's directives. "RHD is very unhappy with the issue," he told The Daily Star on Thursday.

He, however, said work is going on although RHD has given some

restriction to use the expressway and service roads.

"We have held two or three meetings with them, the last of them on July 6, and a committee has been formed to resolve the issue," Fakruddin said.

He said the committee, after visiting the site, will give a decision within seven days and hoped to resolve the issue. "Because, the expressway is our asset and we have to go ahead with the project too," he added.

However, CRGL said although a coordination meeting was convened among relevant parties to resolve this issue, where the contractor of PBRLP agreed that they will assign a sufficient number of traffic management staff, provide road protection facilities, and carry out reparation if their trucks damage the road.

"Unfortunately, the N8 road [expressway] still remains closed to trucks carrying construction materials for PBRLP," it said, adding it is understood that the relevant parties have initiated dialogues on this issue several times, but no consensus has been reached as of yet.

"Hence, the PBRLP project is currently facing suspension and heavy financial loss," it added.

RAILWAY ACCIDENTS

113 killed in last six months: report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although train services remained suspended for more than two months, at least 113 people were killed and 15 others injured in 105-rail related accidents across the country in the last six months, said a joint report of two rights bodies.

Some 20 women and 11 children were among victims of accidents that took place between January and June, said Green Club of Bangladesh and National Committee to Protect Shipping, Roads and Railways (NCPSRR).

They prepared the report based on news published in 24 national and 10 regional dailies and nine online news portals and news agencies, said a press release yesterday.

Lack of awareness and poor maintenance of level crossings and railway bridges, among other issues, contribute to the continuation of rail-related accidents.

The report said 29 people lost their lives in January, 44 in February, 19 in March, 40 in May and 17 in June.

The organisations identified five major reasons behind the rise in railway accidents, including use of phones by pedestrians while crossing rail tracks, negligence of railway employees and poor maintenance of level crossings.

Ashis Kumar Dey, general secretary of NCPSRR, said since passenger trains did not ply from late March to May, the casualties took place in four months.

Hilsa glut in Barishal

Season sees promising start; officials expect 10-20pc increase in catches



PHOTO: TITU DAS

Fishermen busy unloading wicker baskets full of hilsa at the river ghat in Barishal. The wholesale market in the city's Port Road has been buzzing over the last week.

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

With the doom and gloom surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic slowly subsiding, the west bank of Barishal's Kirtankhola river has started to see increased activity.

At least 20-30 boats are seen either setting sail on a daily basis or anchoring with their prized catches -- hilsa.

The season is just getting started. At Barishal Port Road's hilsa market -- one of the biggest wholesale hilsa markets in the city -- supplies are higher than that of other seasons.

"Everything kind of clicked this season. The weather has been favourable, rainfall has been great, people did not net jatka as much due to government restriction and strict monitoring. Also, the pandemic forced many to stay ashore. Due to these reasons, the rivers and sea have seen less pollution too," said Bimol Chandra Das, district fisheries officer, Department of Fisheries, Barishal.

"Given all this, we're expecting a 10-20 percent increase in volume of catches this season," the official added.

Ujjal Kumar Das, a wholesaler, said, "This is the first time we're seeing hilsa of this size at the beginning of the season. Most of the catches are turning out to be

around 1kg. I have at least 2,500-3,000 maunds available for the day."

A kilogramme of the fish is going for Tk 800, which is some Tk 200 less due to increased supplies. However, the situation is set to change once the ban on fishing in the sea is lifted on July 23, fisheries officials said.

Over the weekend, huge quantities of hilsa, weighing around 900 grammes to one kg, were seen at the market. From here, most of the fish will be sent to Dhaka and other destinations at other cities on trucks.

Ajit Kumar Das Manu, president of the Hilsa Wholesalers' Association, said most of the hilsa have been netted from Meghna and Elisha rivers of Bhola district.

Wholesaler Abu Bakr Siddik told The Daily Star that they are also selling hilsa below 750 grammes to 950 grammes for Tk 500-650 each. If the fish comes from near the sea, the price decreases by at least Tk 100 per kg.

"The government imposed 65-day ban on netting at sea ends on July 23. After this, supply will also increase in the market," said Azizul Haque, deputy director of Barishal divisional fisheries department.



Three friends share one bicycle on a weekend ride yesterday, making most of a rare opportunity to cruise through a major thoroughfare in the capital. While it is only natural for children to be adventurous, a relatively empty road -- particularly one like Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue -- can be a dangerous place due to fast-moving vehicles.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

RELIEF, HEALTH SECTORS

ACC to ramp up drives against the corrupt: Iqbal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-Corruption Commission will bolster its drive against those involved in corruption in relief and health sectors, said ACC Chairman Iqbal Mahmood.

"Due to the novel coronavirus, we could not carry out regular drives, but for the sake of public interest ACC will strengthen legal drives against notorious corrupt people," he said while addressing ACC's virtual meeting on a report on the implementation of "Strategic Work Plan 2019" on Thursday, said a press release yesterday.

To retrieve money and stop money laundering in the country, the ACC chairman called for filing cases against the corrupt at the quickest possible time.

Mahmood said ACC got verdicts in their favour in 11 money laundering cases filed in 2019. "The ACC was able to ensure punishment of culprits in all money laundering cases filed in 2018 too," he said. Addressing ACC officials, Iqbal said

more than 18 officers have been infected with Covid-19 and two employees died.

Even after that, the ACC is continuing to file cases, arrest accused, issue summon and carry out interrogation, he said.

ACC Commissioner Dr Md Mozammel Haque Khan said focal point officials can play vital role in implementing the National Integrity Strategy.

"It's unfortunate that these officials do not inform ACC about corruption of their ministries and departments. They too need to be made accountable," he said, underscoring the need for appointing honest and bold persons as focal point officers.

Commissioner AFM Aminul Islam suggested increasing detective surveillance of ACC at health institutions. "We've often got allegations that some organisations are failing to provide expected service," he said.

"If necessary, the commission will resume its drives following health guidelines," he added.

1,667 died with symptoms of Covid-19: report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 1,667 people have died after showing Covid-19-like symptoms from March 22 to July 4 in the country, said a report of Dhaka University's Centre for Genocide Studies.

It however, said all the deaths might not have been related to Covid-19 as many deceased tested negative for the virus.

The report said 515 of the deceased were in Chattogram division, 358 in Dhaka, 208 in Khulna, 193 in Barishal, 171 in Rajshahi, 91 in Sylhet, 74 in Rangpur and 57 in Mymensingh.

CGS shared the report, the 13th edition of a series by Bangladesh Peace Observatory, with media on Thursday.

DNCC launching online platform to buy sacrificial animals for Eid

HELEMLU ALAM

This Eid-ul-Azha, those planning to buy sacrificial animals will be able to do so with just a few clicks on their computer or smartphone, as Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) is all set to introduce an online platform for cattle sale in light of the pandemic.

Using it, a potential buyer will be able to view animals on a website, place order and pay, all digitally, said DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam.

"We are going to negotiate with Nagad and some other digital transaction companies to facilitate online payment" he said.

This is not the only service that will be on offer. Customers will also have the option of getting their meat processed from DNCC in exchange of a service charge, he added.

DNCC has already negotiated with Bangladesh Dairy Farmers' Association and E-Commerce Association of

Bangladesh (e-Cab) in this regard, the mayor said.

Authorities have selected five locations for sacrificing animals and processing meat inside DNCC, which will be delivered to customers' homes, he said.

Atiqul said they have also talked to the fisheries and livestock ministry to ensure good health of the animals. Officials of the ministry will ensure animals' health by visiting dairy farms that will sell animals through the online platform.

"We are doing this as a pilot project considering the situation. We will provide the service at a larger scale if we are successful," the mayor said.

He said they will hold a press conference today in this regard.

Md Shah Emran, general secretary of Bangladesh Farmers' Association, told The Daily Star around 3,000 cows will be displayed on the website, and members of the association will

provide 2,500 cows.

"We will not only sell animals but also ensure home delivery after sacrifice," Emran said.

"If we can sell 10 percent of the animals this year, we will consider it a success, as it is totally a new concept," he said.

Customers, however, will have to pay service charge for home deliveries, he added.

Director General of Department of Livestock Dr Abdul Zabbar Sikder said after inspecting cattle farms, their officials will provide health certificates.

Earlier, public health experts expressed alarm over traditional cattle markets, saying the country may face an acceleration of Covid-19 cases if the government fails to ensure health guidelines.

Sacrificing animals in open spaces may also increase the risk of infection, they said.

ATM Salehuddin Chowdhury passes away

City Desk

ATM Salehuddin Chowdhury, former director of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, passed away at Combined Military Hospital at 6:30pm on Thursday.



He was 71 and had tested positive for Covid-19, said a press release.

The deceased was buried at his home village on Friday morning.

He is survived by his wife, two children and numerous admirers.

Throughout his career, he has been director general of Bangladesh Sugar Crust Research Institute, president of Krishibid Institute of Bangladesh (KIB) and board member of KIB Complex.

Six months

FROM PAGE 12

The government has also exempted land revenue for holdings upto 25 bighas. As a part of decentralisation of the administrative authority the subdivisions have been upgraded to districts.

DIPLOMATIC VICTORY IN MIDDLE EAST

Bangladesh has scored a major diplomatic victory by making a breakthrough in the Middle East hitherto considered a safe zone for Pakistan.

What hastened Iraq, the first country from the Middle East, to accord recognition to Bangladesh is not known yet but it is now clear that the Middle East countries are getting to realise that they no longer can ignore Bangladesh – the second largest Muslim country in the world.

Foreign policy experts observe that the Iraqi recognition will set in motion phased out recognition by other Middle East countries.

SOURCES: July 12, 1972 issues of *Bangladesh Observer*, *Dainik Bangla* and *Dainik Ittefaq*.

California

FROM PAGE 12

planning to offer mostly online-only education to their more than 10,000 foreign students, as well as US students, this fall.

"Shame on the Trump Administration for risking not only the education opportunities for students who earned the chance to go to college, but now their health and well-being as well," said Attorney General Becerra.

Forcing Californian universities and colleges to open in-person classes would threaten their finances and could turn them into "super-spreaders" of the disease, Becerra said.

The federal prosecutor for heavily Democratic California -- who has filed dozens of lawsuits over the Republican president's policies -- added: "We'll see the Trump Administration in court."

Harvard University, which also plans online-only classes next year, filed a separate lawsuit against the policy on Wednesday, along with MIT.

Deforestation

FROM PAGE 12

Mourao said international investors want Brazil to show "results" in fighting Amazon deforestation before they will consider participating in environmental protection projects in the country.

President Jair Bolsonaro, a climate change skeptic, has facilitated farming and mining projects on protected land and indigenous reserves.

"It's not true that we're destroying the jungle to produce food," he said, also denying that Brazil was dismantling the state's environmental protection structure.



This handout photo taken and released yesterday by Singapore's Ministry of Communications and Information shows the city-state's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (C) waving as he cast his vote at Alexandra Primary School during the general election in Singapore. Wearing masks and gloves and being careful to observe social distancing, Singaporeans yesterday voted in a general election as the city-state struggles to recover from the coronavirus outbreak.

PHOTO: AFP

2 arrested for raping minor girl

FROM PAGE 12

Station OC Mohammad Mainuddin said the eighth grader had been stalking the 12-year-old girl on her way to her madrasa for a long time.

On April 15, the girl was alone at her home, and the boy entered the house and raped her, the police officer said.

The boy told his friend Atiqul about the incident and Atiqul started blackmailing the girl that he would disclose the incident if she did not agree to have physical relations with him.

On May 28, Atiqul forcibly took

the girl to his house and the two raped her and caught the incident on mobile phone, the statement said.

The accused then asked her to continue physical relations. They threatened her to release the video clip, if she did not agree.

As the girl turned down their proposal, they shared the clip with some of their friends in the locality on Thursday. Following this, the victim's father lodged the case.

In Noakhali's Begumganj, police held three people, including a union

parishad member, for holding a village arbitration over a rape incident, while a female quack was held for giving medicine to abort the girl's pregnancy.

But the rape accused, Kawsar Ahmed Hamid, 28, of Durgapur village in Begumganj upazila, was yet to be arrested.

Police said Kawsar had an affair with the 15-year-old girl and they had physical relations.

At one stage, the girl became pregnant.

On July 6, Kawsar forced the girl to have the abortion.

Later, both the families sat in an arbitration and decided that Kawsar would marry the girl. But he started dillydallying to marry the girl.

On Thursday night, the victim's mother lodged a case against 11 people.

Following the case, police arrested the four, said Harunur Rashid Chowdhury, OC of Begumganj Police Station.

The arrestees were produced before a Noakhali court which sent them to jail.

[Our Mymensingh and Noakhali correspondents contributed to this report]

Scientists find 'stream' of stars in our galaxy

FROM PAGE 12

through our galaxy. "If there are any clumps of stars that are moving together in a particular fashion, that usually tells us that there is a reason that they're moving together," said Lina Necib, a postdoctoral scholar in theoretical physics at Caltech, who led the study, in a statement.

To find the stars now known as Nyx, researchers combined two major

projects that look to catalogue the workings of our galaxy. They were the "FIRE" project which is creating detailed simulations of the galaxy based on our full understanding of how they form and change over time, which worked alongside the Gaia space observatory's project to produce a full 3D map of our Milky Way and those stars beyond it, which hopes to catalogue about a billion stars.

Researchers hope to use both experiments to try and understand how the vast Milky Way that includes our own Sun came about.

But the new breakthrough came from using the two together – they first tracked the movements of stars as they moved through the virtual galaxy, and watched for ways to understand whether they had formed within the galaxy or if they had arrived there

from elsewhere, and then comparing that with real data from Gaia to understand where real stars are likely to have come from.

When the two pieces were combined, the researchers found that there appeared to be a huge, unexpected structure in the data. There seemed to be a cluster of 250 stars that was rotating alongside the Milky Way, but heading towards its centre.

A severe blow to foreign students

FROM PAGE 1

must depart the country or take other measures, such as transferring to a school with in-person instruction to remain in lawful status," it said.

"If not, they may face immigration consequences including, but not limited to, the initiation of removal proceedings," it said.

The new policy came at a time when the number of Bangladeshi students is growing fast in the US.

According to the 2019 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange, the number of students from Bangladesh studying in the United States stood at 8,249 during the most recent academic year (2018/2019).

This is an all-time high for Bangladesh, reflecting a 10 percent increase over the 2018 report and more than tripling since 2009.

Bangladesh now ranks 20th in the world in terms of sending students to the US for higher education.

The increase in the number of Bangladeshi students is highest in the South Asian region. Out of total 8,249 Bangladeshi students studying in the US, 5,278 study at the graduate level, a

13.5 percent increase over 2017/2018 academic year.

"A MINDLESS NEW POLICY" Nuhan said based on the recent instructions imposed by the ICE, international students risk being deported if universities conduct all courses online this fall.

"This means we will either have to leave the USA or transfer to a school that is conducting in-person classes," he said.

Now, since many students chose to go home due to the pandemic, they will be asked to risk their health and fly back. And if the student is in a country with travel restrictions, he/she may even have trouble coming back for in-person classes, risking visa status, he feared.

My international peers are scrambling to find expensive flights on short notice, knowing they'll have to actively risk an in-person semester or risk losing the education they worked so hard for.

"None of this is fair to us and with how the F-1 visa works, we can't do much to advocate for our rights and have to rely on our domestic peers and administration to step up for us to force a change", he added.

Nuren Iftekhar, a graduate student of chemistry at Virginia Tech said that being thousands of miles away from the country to pursue higher studies can be stressful for many reasons.

"But I honestly didn't think I'd have to wake up one day and be threatened with the prospect of being evacuated for a mindless new policy," he said.

"The fact that a decision like this would be taken against a large number of students is inhumane. We are once again being a victim of an asinine bureaucratic move that berates our hard work", he added.

The likely scenario is that the university authority would be unwillingly reopening their class putting the lives of students at risk. "Meanwhile on a personal level I'm now living under the constant worry of having to abandon my research that I've been working on for the past year and be forced out of the country, not knowing if I'd even be able to come back again," Nuren added.

He said the university and the professors are just as troubled by the situation. Their research is driven by a large participation from the international students.

"To say that the directive has been infuriating and even demeaning is an understatement", Prionti Dipita Nasir a student of Rochester Institute of Technology said.

Many of her friends at colleges that have chosen to be fully online are preparing to take leaves of absence, while still trying to push their respective college authorities to find suitable workarounds.

Too many of them are financially drained already, and so flying back home will be a difficult undertaking. "We are signing petitions to the government with the hope that it might miraculously end up reaching and swaying them", she said.

"Until the directive was declared, I was frowning at my college's decision to adopt a hybrid model -- one that will mix a high percentage of in-person classes with online offerings. This has proved to be a blessing in disguise because I, like other international students in my college, can remain in the country and continue my studies".

"But this is entirely conditional. If fully online instruction becomes necessary at any point, the directive will have serious implications for us," she said.

France uncovers 'massive fraud' of virus wage payouts

AFP, Paris

The Paris prosecutor's office said yesterday that it was investigating "massive fraud" across France by people falsely claiming temporary wage assistance for employees laid off during the coronavirus lockdown.

As the crisis hit, the government quickly introduced a system to pay around 84 percent of net salary for people no longer able to work.

Thousands of firms applied for the payments, allowing millions of people to avoid a sudden drop in revenue -- in the first month alone the programme paid out some 24 billion euros (\$27 billion).

But officials soon began noticing suspicious similarities in some applications, in many cases by people who surreptitiously used the tax registration numbers of firms that had not applied for the funds.

WHO releases new guidelines

FROM PAGE 12

avoid crowds and ensure good ventilation in buildings, in addition to social distancing, and encourage masks when physical distancing is not possible.

"This is a move in the right direction, albeit a small one. It is becoming clear that the pandemic is driven by super-spreading events, and that the best explanation for many of those events is aerosol transmission," said Jose Jimenez, a chemist at the University of Colorado who signed the letter, which was published on Monday in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*.

In a press briefing on Thursday, Dr Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said there is not a lot of solid evidence yet on airborne transmission of SARS-CoV-2, but added: "I think it's a reasonable assumption that it does occur."

Although incomplete, Fauci said the evidence so far is "the fundamental basis for why we are now so intent on getting people -- particularly people without symptoms -- to wear masks. To be able to see if we can mitigate against that," he said.

Only a very small number of diseases are believed to be spread via aerosols, or tiny floating particles. These include measles

and tuberculosis -- two highly contagious pathogens that can linger in the air for hours and require extreme precautions to prevent exposure, reports Reuters.

Prior WHO guidance only acknowledged airborne transmission of the novel coronavirus during specific medical procedures. Linsey Marr, an aerosol expert at Virginia Tech who contributed to the WHO letter, said in an email that she is encouraged the agency is now acknowledging that airborne transmission may occur.

But she said the WHO is using an "outdated definition of droplets and aerosols" and is too focused on the size of the droplets and the distance they travel.

WHO defines aerosols as being under 5 microns because only particles that small could float in the air long enough to be inhaled. However, Jimenez and Marr said a much larger range of particle size has been shown to contribute to infection.

Rather than size, they said the differences between droplets and aerosols should be based on how the infection occurs: If a person inhales the virus and becomes infected, it's an aerosol. If the infection occurs by contact, they are droplets.

Although WHO has been focused on airborne transmission at long distances,

Marr said breathing in aerosols "is of greater concern at close contact and when people are in the same room."

WHO TEAM HEADS TO CHINA

An epidemiologist and an animal health specialist from the WHO were flying to China yesterday to try and identify the animal source of the pandemic.

The WHO said the advance team would be in Beijing for the weekend as they lay the ground for a wider mission aimed at identifying how the virus entered the human species.

"They're in the air right now," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris told reporters in Geneva.

Harris said there was no set timeframe for their mission, reports AFP.

The novel coronavirus has killed at least 550,000 people and infected more than 12.1 million since it emerged in China last December.

Scientists believe the killer virus jumped from animals to humans, possibly from a market in the city of Wuhan selling exotic animals for meat.

Chinese officials said early in the outbreak that the virus may have spread from a market in the city, which sold live and wild animals, but no further confirmation of that has been revealed.

'Member'

FROM PAGE 12

Humayun was wanted in a case filed with Gulshan Police Station under Digital Security Act, the statement added.

Asked about Humayun's involvement, the ATU official refused to give an official comment.

They said that they have arrested Humayun after analysing his digital activities and they would be able to say clearly about him after interrogating during remand.

No respite

FROM PAGE 12

Together the two spells would stretch the flood situation for three weeks this year, they said.

"The water level is going to rise for the next one week and it will take another few days for the water to recede. So the flood will sustain this time for another 10 to 12 days," said Md Arifuzzaman, executive engineer of FFWC, yesterday.

Analysing the floods since 1984, Professor AKM Saiful Islam of the Institute of Water and Flood Management (IWFM) found floods occurring in June only in 2000, 2010, 2012 and this year.

"In 1998 the flood lasted for 33 days. This year also the flood will last for at least 3 weeks," he said.

In the last five years, there were three big floods in 2016, 2017 and 2019, the professor said.

In 2016, the water level of the Padma-Jamuna confluence at Bahadurabad point in Sirajganj reached 20.71 metres breaking the record of 1988, which was 20.62 metres. In 2017, the water level rose to 20.84 metres breaking the record of 2016 and in 2019 the water level reached 21.16 metres breaking the record of 2017.

People's sufferings continue

Our Moulvibazar correspondent reports quoting Mahfuz Shakil, a resident from Nabiganj area, that water has entered his house as downpour continued since yesterday.

Saber Mia's house in Sylhet's Teghria is also inundated forcing him to plan moving to a flood shelter.

Executive engineer Sahibur Rahman from the Water Development Board (WDB) in Sunamganj informed The Daily Star that the Jadukata and the Surma rivers were flowing 30 cm above the danger level.

Meanwhile, our Nilphamari and Lalmonirhat correspondents said the Teesta started swelling and was flowing 15 centimetres above the danger mark at 3.00 pm yesterday.

The danger level of the river at Dalia point near Teesta barrage is 52.60 metre.

Executive Engineer Rabiul Islam of WDB at Dalia division said to ease the flood situation all the 45 gates of the barrage had been opened.

Teesta already flooded at least 15 shoals of Dimla and Jaldhaka upazila, marooning about 20,000 people.

Aklas Uddin from Teesta River's char Dowan in Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila just returned home after 10 days from a makeshift shelter on a highway. He had taken refuge there with his family from the first spell of flood.

"Now, we are going to face another flood," Aklas panicked.

Murder, rape

FROM PAGE 12

him dead after he was rushed there, he added.

Later police confirmed his identity as Guraputu, OC Shahjahan said.

A locally made firearm, two rounds of ammunition and 200 pieces of yaba pills were also recovered from the spot, he said.

The body was handed over to family members following legal procedures.

Three cases for murder, arms and drug were filed in this regard, the OC said.

UN cross-border aid to Syria hangs on Russian decision

AFP, United Nations

The UN will announce the results of a vote on a resolution to prolong cross-border humanitarian aid to war-torn Syria, the authorization for which expires that evening.

It is unclear whether Russia, which vetoed a previous draft just three days prior, will once more block the vital assistance.

Stopping cross-border aid would be "a devastating blow to the millions of Syrian families who rely on this aid for clean water, food, health care and shelter," warned the NGO Oxfam.

Russia and China on Tuesday vetoed a draft resolution by Germany and Belgium providing for a one-year extension of the cross-border authorization and the maintenance of two crossing points on the Turkish border -- at Bab al-Salam, which leads to the Aleppo region, and Bab al-Hawa, which serves the Idlib region.

The UN authorization allows the body to distribute aid to displaced Syrians without needing permission from Damascus.

Russia and China argue that the UN authorization violates Syria's sovereignty, and that aid can increasingly be channeled through Syrian authorities.

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Seoul mayor takes own life after '#MeToo' complaint



The mayor of Seoul, a contender to be South Korea's next president and a former human rights lawyer, took his own life a day after he was accused of sexual harassment, authorities said yesterday. Park Won-soon, whose body was recovered on a mountain in the capital, is by far the most high-profile politician to be implicated in a harassment case in South Korea. Park offered a general apology in a suicide note found at his official residence and released by city authorities. "I'm sorry to everyone. I thank everyone who has been with me in my life," he wrote, asking to be cremated and his ashes scattered at his parents' graves. "I'm sorry to my family, to whom I only caused pain." "Bye everyone," he signed off, without referring to the allegations against him. His death came a day after his former secretary filed a police complaint — said to involve sexual harassment — against him.

Furore after Indian police shoot gangster dead

Indian police shot dead one of the country's most wanted gangsters yesterday just a day after his dramatic arrest, sparking accusations of a staged extra-judicial killing. Officials said Vikas Dubey, detained for the killing of eight police officers, was shot as he tried to escape a police vehicle while being driven to his home city in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. Within hours of TV stations carrying images of his bloodstained body lying in a hospital, rights lawyers and activists alleged that police had killed Dubey to prevent him revealing his connections with powerful people. Senior opposition Congress party leader Priyanka Gandhi said the people "protecting" Dubey were still free. Dubey, aged about 50, was accused in more than 60 murders, attempted murders and other cases. He was said to have shot dead an Uttar Pradesh state minister inside a police station in 2001.

Kim's sister says 'no need' for another US-N Korea summit

The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un yesterday said there was "no need" for another summit with the United States unless Washington offered a "decisive change" in approach. Kim and US President Donald Trump first met in Singapore two years ago but talks over Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal have been stalled since their Hanoi summit collapsed in early 2019 over what the North would be willing to give up in exchange for sanctions relief. Trump said this week he would "certainly" meet with Kim again "if I thought it was going to be helpful", after speculation that he might pursue another summit if it could help his re-election chances in November.

SOURCE: ANN, REUTERS, AFP

Pandemic keeps breaking records

Bolivia leader catches virus as US, India see record cases; HK to shut all schools

AGENCIES

Bolivia's interim president became the latest world leader to test positive for the coronavirus, as India and the United States notched yet another record-breaking surge of cases while global infections and fatalities continued their relentless rise.

Covid-19 has now claimed more than 550,000 lives across the planet, and infected more than 12 million people since it first emerged in China in late 2019 -- among them Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and now Bolivia's Jeanine Anez.

In a video on Twitter Anez said she was "fine" and would continue working from isolation.

India recorded 26,506 new cases of the disease, the highest jump so far, in the last 24 hours pushing its infection tally to 793,802, according to the Union health ministry yesterday.

The country has recorded more than two lakh cases since July 1 and has witnessed over 20,000 infections every day since July 3. The ministry reported 25,000 new infections on Thursday and 25,724 new cases on Wednesday.

The death toll in the last 24 hours till yesterday morning mounted to 21,604 with 475 new fatalities. The Indian government continued to maintain that there is no community transmission of the virus yet in the country.

Rajesh Bhushan, Officer on Special Duty in the health ministry, had said on Thursday that "Even today, the health minister (Harsh Vardhan) clearly said



Chilean nurse Damaris Silva plays the violin for patients infected with COVID-19, at the Intensive Care Unit of the El Pino hospital, in Santiago, Chile, on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

that India has not reached the stage of community transmission. In some geographical areas, there have been localised outbreaks."

The number of recoveries from Covid-19 yesterday stood at 4,95,51, while there are 2,76,685 active cases of the infection across the country, the updated data said. "Thus, around 62.42 percent of patients have recovered so far," an official said.

West Bengal reported the highest one-day jump of 1,088 cases taking the state's tally to 25,911 while the death toll stood at 854 with a record 27 deaths in the last 24 hours.

In view of the rise in the cases, West Bengal authorities clamped a

week-long strict lockdown in all the containment zones, which are areas with high caseloads, across the state since Thursday in a bid to contain the spread of Covid-19.

With 2,187 fresh coronavirus cases, Delhi's infection tally stood at 1,07,051 and the death toll mounted to 3,258.

The United States recorded 65,551 new cases in last 24 hours-- a new high, according to Johns Hopkins University.

The country, the hardest-hit in the world by the pandemic, has a total caseload of more than 3.1 million, with 133,195 deaths.

"We're in a very difficult, challenging period right now," top US infectious

diseases expert Anthony Fauci said. US President Donald Trump, who has publicly disagreed with Fauci, has downplayed the spike.

Hong Kong will close all schools after a spike in locally transmitted coronavirus infections, the city's education minister said yesterday.

Schools will close from Monday, bringing forward the start of the summer holidays, Kevin Yeung said, after the city recorded an "exponential growth" of locally transmitted cases in the past few days.

Australia will slash the number of returning citizens allowed into the country by half as it struggles to contain a worsening outbreak in its second-largest city Melbourne. From Monday, only 4,000 Australian citizens or permanent residents will be allowed back each day.

Meanwhile thousands of angry Serbians protested for a third day against the government's handling of the crisis -- though the demonstrations remained largely peaceful after two nights of violence.

And, in a potentially worrying discovery, scientists in Italy said there was "strong evidence" that Covid-19 positive mothers can pass the virus on to their unborn children.

The pandemic could push 45 million people from the middle classes into poverty in already economically troubled Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations warned.

BORDER DISPUTE
Nepal cable operators ban Indian news

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's cable television operators have suspended Indian news channels for "objectionable" reporting on the country's prime minister as tensions between the neighbours rise over a border dispute.

The countries have been wrangling since India opened a new road to the disputed Lipu Lekh pass on their border in May.

The Indian channels went blank late on Thursday, days after the Zee Hindustan news channel aired a report that said a relationship between China's ambassador and Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli had caused the dispute with India.

Indian army chief General MM Naravane sparked anger last month after suggesting Nepal's conflict with India over their shared frontier might have been "at the behest of someone else", hinting at China's involvement in the dispute.

New Delhi and Beijing have been locked in their own frontier stand-off. A deadly high-altitude Himalayan border clash between the world's two most populous nations last month claimed the lives of 20 Indian soldiers.

Hagia Sophia becomes mosque

REUTERS, Istanbul

President Tayyip Erdogan declared Istanbul's Hagia Sophia open to Muslim worship yesterday after a top court ruled that the building's conversion to a museum by modern Turkey's founding statesman was illegal.

Erdogan made his announcement, just an hour after the court ruling was revealed, despite international warnings not to change the status of the nearly 1,500-year-old monument, revered by Christians and Muslims alike.

"The decision was taken to hand over the management of the Ayasofya Mosque...to the Religious Affairs Directorate and open it for worship," the decision signed by Erdogan said.

Erdogan had earlier proposed restoring the mosque status of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, a focal point of both the Christian Byzantine and Muslim Ottoman empires and now one of the most visited monuments in Turkey.



The United States, Greece and church leaders were among those to express concern about changing the status of the huge 6th Century building, converted into a museum in the early days of the modern secular Turkish state under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

The association which brought the court case, the latest in a 16-year legal battle, said Hagia Sophia was the property of the Ottoman leader who captured the city in 1453 and turned the already 900-year-old Byzantine church into a mosque.

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Israeli forces fire a sound grenade at Palestinian demonstrators during a protest against Jewish settlements and Israel's planned annexation of parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, in the Palestinian town of Asira ash-Shamaliya, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWSIN brief

Japan to get 105 US F-35 fighters

AFP, Washington

The United States announced Thursday that it has approved the sale of 105 F-35 stealth aircraft to Japan for an estimated \$23.11 billion. Japan had asked to buy 63 F-35A, the traditional version of the electronics-laden fighter aircraft, and 42 F-35B, the short-takeoff and vertical-landing version for aircraft carriers, the State Department said in a statement.

Colombia lost 159,000 hectares of forest

AFP, Bogota

Colombia lost 159,000 hectares of forest -- an area the size of Brazilian megacity Sao Paulo -- to deforestation in 2019, according to an official report presented on Thursday. Although considerable, it represents a 19 percent reduction in deforestation compared to the 197,000 hectares destroyed in 2018. In 2017, that figure was 219,000. Some 62 percent of the deforestation was in the Amazon, the world's largest rainforest that spans across Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.

Israeli troops kill Palestinian man

AFP, Ramallah

Israeli troops killed a Palestinian civilian in the West Bank on Thursday, the Palestinian health ministry said. The ministry did not give any details as to the circumstances of the killing, stating only that "a civilian was killed by Israeli forces" after being shot in the neck at Kifl Hares, a village south of Nablus. The West Bank is a Palestinian territory which has been under Israeli occupation since 1967.

AL JAZEERA'S MIGRANT DOCUMENTARY

Malaysia grills journos

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian yesterday police questioned five Australian journalists from Al Jazeera over a documentary about the plight of migrants which has angered the government, as the broadcaster expressed shock at the probe.

The investigation into the Qatar-based network's programme has added to concerns about a widening media crackdown in Malaysia after a scandal-plagued party came to power earlier this year.

The documentary, "Locked Up in Malaysia's Lockdown", looked at the detention of undocumented foreigners during a coronavirus lockdown, as well as the plight of other members of the migrant community.

But the government decried it as misleading and inaccurate, and police are now investigating the broadcaster for breaking laws against sedition, defamation and transmitting offensive content.

On Friday six Al Jazeera staff members were questioned for five hours by police in Kuala Lumpur over the documentary made for "101 East", a weekly show featuring in-depth investigations.

Five of the six are Australian, according to Australian union the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance.

Malaysia's national police chief Abdul Hamid Bador said prosecutors believed there were "elements of sedition" in the

documentary but insisted that "police will act fairly". The staff interviewed Friday were being treated as witnesses in the case, not suspects, he said. He also said police were looking for a Bangladeshi man who appeared in the programme.

Ahead of the questioning, Al Jazeera said it was "shocked" by Malaysia's response to the documentary, broadcast on July 3, and it stood by the "professionalism, quality and impartiality of its journalism".

"Charging journalists for doing their jobs is not the action of a democracy that values free speech," it said. "Journalism is not a crime."

The International Federation of Journalists, which represents media unions worldwide, said it "deeply regrets" Malaysian authorities using tough laws against transmitting offensive content "to silence and intimidate journalists".

The show sparked a huge backlash online in Malaysia, and the defence minister demanded an apology from the broadcaster. Authorities said the arrests in May of undocumented migrants were necessary to protect the public, although rights groups raised concern that placing them in detention centres could increase the risk of coronavirus infection.

Malaysia is home to large numbers of migrants from poorer countries like Indonesia, Bangladesh and Myanmar



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
College Education Development Project (CEDP)
Ananda Mohan College
Mymensingh
E-mail: anadamohan1908cedp@gmail.com, Phone No. 091-66769

Invitation for Tenders

Issue No. AMC/CEDP-IDGW-1 Date: 11-07-2020

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Education.		
2	Agency	University Grants Commission/National University.		
3	Procuring entity name	Principal, Ananda Mohan College, Mymensingh.		
4	Procuring entity code	N/A.		
5	Procuring entity district	Mymensingh.		
6	Invitation for	Renovation & Refurbishment of IDG Office, Dept. Office, Classroom, Seminar, Lab, Drinking Water Facilities and Wash Room (Re-Tender).		
7	Invitation Ref. No.	CEDP/PM/IDG/IIDP-11/2017-299 OF PROJECT DIRECTOR.		
8	Date	11/07/2020		
KEY INFORMATION				
9	Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (National).		
FUNDING INFORMATION				
10	Budget and source of funds	Development Budget (Government & IDA Credit).		
11	Development partners	International Development Association (IDA), World Bank.		
PARTICULAR INFORMATION				
12	Project code	224017200		
13	Project name	College Education Development Project (CEDP).		
14	Tender Package No.	002 AMC/CEDP-IDG		
15	Tender package name	Renovation & Refurbishment of IDG Office, Dept. Office, Classroom, Seminar, Lab, Drinking Water Facilities and Wash Room (Re-Tender).		
16	Tender publication date	11/07/2020		
17	Tender last selling date	25/07/2020		
18	Tender closing date and time	26/07/2020 Time 2:00pm.		
19	Tender opening date and time	26/07/2020 Time 3:00pm.		
20	Name & address of the office	Ananda Mohan College, Mymensingh.		
	Selling tender document	Ananda Mohan College, Mymensingh, Muminunnesa Govt. Mohila College, Mymensingh, Date: 12-07-2020, Time 09:00am.		
	Receiving tender document	Ananda Mohan College, Mymensingh, Muminunnesa Govt. Mohila College, Mymensingh, Office of Police Superintendent, Mymensingh.		
	Opening tender document	Ananda Mohan College, Mymensingh.		
21	Place/date time of pre-tender meeting (optional)	Will not be held.		
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER				
22	Eligibility of tenderer	The tenderer shall have a minimum number 05 years general experience in refurbishment activities (renovation/repair/extension) and physical services. The tenderer shall have satisfactory completion of refurbishment activities of minimum BDT 3,500,000 (thirty-five lac) only under maximum 01 contract in the last 03 years. The required average annual construction turnover shall be greater than BDT 20,000,000 (two crore) only over the last 03 years.		
23	Brief description of goods or works	Brick work, Plaster, Floor & Wall tiles, Plastic paint, Door window repair, Grill repair, Enamel paint, Sanitary work & Electrification works etc.		
24	Brief description of related services	Related service shall be in accordance with Section 4: Particular Conditions of Contract Section 6: Schedule of Requirements and Section 7: Technical Specification of the tender document.		
25	Tender document price	BDT 1,500.00 (one thousand five hundred).		
26	Tender name	Location	Tender security amount (Tk)	Completion time in months
	Renovation & Refurbishment of IDG Office, Dept. Office, Classroom, Seminar, Lab, Drinking Water Facilities and Wash Room (Re-Tender)	Ananda Mohan College, Mymensingh	1.00 lac	3 (three) months
27	Name of official inviting tender	Professor Narayan Chandra Bhowmik, Principal, Ananda Mohan College, Mymensingh.		
28	Designation of official inviting tender	Principal, Ananda Mohan College, Mymensingh.		
29	Address of official inviting tender	Principal, Ananda Mohan College, Mymensingh.		
30	Contact details of official inviting tender	Tel: 091-66769	Tel: 091-65366	Tel: 091-66859
31	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.			

Professor Narayan Chandra Bhowmik
Principal, Ananda Mohan College
Mymensingh

GD-1115



REMEMBERING Andrew Kishore

Andrew Kishore, who was battling cancer for months, passed away on July 6, 2020. The Daily Star reached out to some of the most prominent artistes in the country, who shared their feelings about the legend.



RUNA LAILA (Singer)

Eminent singer Runa Laila was among the many who paid tributes to Andrew Kishore over social media, after the news of his demise. "With a heavy heart, I bid goodbye to a stalwart in our music industry," she wrote in a Facebook post. "Andrew Kishore, whose melodious songs and soul stirring voice have made him immortal, will continue to inspire the coming generations."

PHOTOS: STAR

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

GAZI MAZHARUL ANWAR

(Director, producer, lyricist and music director)

Andrew Kishore had the perfect playback singing voice. He understood the language of cinema exceedingly well.



I worked with him for the first time on the song, *Chole Amar Cycle Hawar Break Uira Uira* from the film, *Nantu Ghatak*. It was a huge success. Since then, we collaborated on more than a hundred compositions. He was a hardworking and dedicated artiste. I have many great memories with him. Every year on Christmas, he sent a cake to our house. He was like a younger brother to me. I miss him immensely.

ALAM KHAN (Music Director)

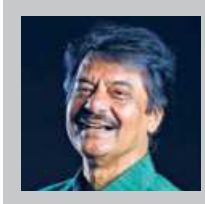
I composed Andrew's first film song, and I collaborated with him on some of his last songs as well. I met him back in 1987, after my friend and radio producer Dulal, told me about him. Andrew was a great singer. He started off as a playback singer with the song *Rajkumari Shundori*, from the film,



Mail Train. Sadly, that film was never released. Soon after, he sang *Ek Chor Chole Jay*, in the film *Oshanti*. It was an instant hit. I composed *Hayre Manush Rongin Fanush*, *Kake Bole Bhalobasha*, *Jiboner Golpo Ache Baki Olpo* and *Tora Dekh Dekhre Chahiya*, among many of his other popular songs. *Fuler Gondher Moto Theke Jabo Tomar Rumale*, penned by Syed Shamsul Haque, was the last song that Andrew and I collaborated on.

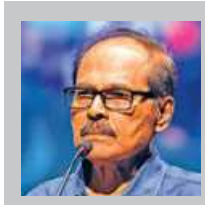
RAFIQUL ALAM (Singer)

I lived about eight minutes away from Andrew's house in Rajshahi. We both studied at Rajshahi Government College and Rajshahi University, but he was four years younger than me. After he was diagnosed with cancer, Andrew knew he wanted to be buried in Rajshahi. He loved his hometown. His mother was a doctor at a Christian Missionary hospital in Rajshahi. All the children in our family were born under her supervision. Much like me, Andrew came from a culturally rich family, and we bonded over many shared interests. After Bangladesh's independence, he came to Dhaka to perform in a folk festival. I was working at Bangla Academy at the time, and he came to meet me frequently. His playback singing voice set him apart from others. He was an exceptional artiste.



SYED ABDUL HADI (Singer)

I was at a loss for words when I got the news. Andrew's demise has left a void in the industry. We will be hard pressed to find another artiste like him.



I worked with him on several occasions. He was like a younger brother to me. Sabina Yasmin and I met him in Singapore in March. He was ecstatic to see us. I was hopeful about his recovery, but sadly, he left us too soon.

SABINA YASMIN (Singer)

My first collaboration with Andrew was on an Alam Khan composition. Since then, we did numerous songs and stage performances together. Andrew was my brother and my friend. Initially, he didn't pay much heed to his deteriorating health. I remember he fell ill after a show in Australia. I called him up, and requested him to go to Singapore for his treatment. At the time, he didn't listen to me. I wish he had. When he eventually went to Singapore, I talked to him regularly,



and he always asked me to pray for him. I was hopeful that his health will improve with time. I met him at the hospital in Singapore in March. After that, we did a show together, where he sang *Jiboner Golpo* and we performed *Shob Shokhire Paar Korite* together, in Singapore. He arrived at the event in a wheel-chair. After he returned to Bangladesh, I checked up on him regularly. Syed Abdul Hadi and I requested him multiple times to come to Dhaka for his treatment, but he was adamant about staying in Rajshahi. One day, over the phone, he asked me to forgive him and to look after his wife and children when he is gone. I kept telling him that everything will be alright. That was our last conversation. I still haven't fully come to terms with the fact that he is no more.

SAMINA CHOWDHURY (Singer)

I truly believed that Andrew Kishore could conquer cancer – he had the blessings of millions and he was supposed to live a longer, beautiful life. He was a true musical legend, and a kind-hearted man, who always encouraged young artistes. This is a tragic loss for our industry. I convey my condolences to his family. May Allah grant him *Jannah*.



Revisiting playback legend Andrew Kishore's iconic songs

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

We recently lost one of Bangladesh's most recognisable voices with the demise of Andrew Kishore. Having started his playback singing career with the 1977 film *Mail Train*, Kishore went on to lend his voice to thousands of songs, in the span of over four decades. Although his importance to our music industry can be talked about for days on end, his greater legacy is that of a person who took music as not just a profession, but as a sacred devotion. That being said, here are only a few of Andrew Kishore's iconic songs.

BHALO ACHI BHALO THEKO: While Salman Shah and Shabnur's acting in *Tomake Chai* brought tears to the audiences' eyes in the theatres, they left humming *Bhalo Achi Bhalo Theko*, sung by Andrew Kishore and Kanak Chapa at the peak of their careers. Composed by Ahmed Imtiaz Bulbul, the evergreen song is a love-letter to the musical generations to come.

PORENA CHOKHER POLOK: The 1997 hit song, *Praner Cheye Priyo*, brought together the duo of Andrew Kishore and Kanak Chapa. This Ahmed Imtiaz Bulbul masterpiece was enriched by the singers' incredible voices, as well as Riaz's unending charm on screen.



Andrew Kishore sang thousands of songs in the course of his storied career.

BEDER MEYE JOSNA: The year was 1989. Commercial Bangla cinema, even though past its 'golden age', was still flourishing – and one song was consistently playing on radios across the country – *Beder Meye Josna*. Andrew Kishore, paired with Runa Laila, gave a stellar performance on par with actors Ilias Kanchan and Anju Ghosh in the track. This song is adored among the masses to this day.

DAK DIYACHEN DOYAL AMARE: It is, perhaps, iconic that the lyrics of *Dak Diyachen Doyal Amare* resonates the most with the artiste's final days. Even though Andrew Kishore knew that he did not have long to live due to his cancer, he wanted to spend his last days in his hometown of Rajshahi, with his family. Composed by Alam Khan, the song was featured in the film *Pran Sojoni*.

HAYRE MANUSH RONGIN FANUSH: Another classic composition by Alam Khan, *Hayre Manush Rongin Fanush* highlights the futility of human beings and the actions that we do to inflate our ego. Originally featured in the film *Boro Bhalo Lok Chilo*, the song went on to galvanise the two Bengals, instantly becoming one of the most covered Bengali tracks in the generation.

AMAR SARA DEHO: The 1984 film *Noyoner Alo* featured fine performances from Zafar Iqbal, Kajori, Suborna Mustafa and Raisul Islam Asad. *Amar Sara Deho* from the film is arguably one of the most soulful performances from the then peaking Andrew Kishore, mirrored on screen by Zafar Iqbal. Directed by Ahmed Imtiaz Bulbul, the song remains one of Kishore's finest works.

AMAR BUKER MODDHEKHANE: Another song from *Noyoner Alo*, *Amar Buker Moddhekhane* tugs at your heartstrings. The timeless classic established that the Ahmed Imtiaz Bulbul and Andrew Kishore could do no wrong when paired together. Zafar Iqbal and Suborna Mustafa's soulful acting further injected life in the melodious song.

AMAR BABAR MUKHE: "Shedin theke, gaan e amar pran" (Trans: From that day, music was my life and soul). *Noyoner Alo* gifted the audiences another classic, *Amar Babar Mukhe*. The song, relatable to any artiste who loves his craft, is hard to listen to without tearing up a little.

BHENGECHHE PINJOR: The strikingly upbeat song rocked the audience who went to watch the 1987 film *Bhai Bondhu*, featuring Zafar Iqbal and Ilias Kanchan. Composed by Alauddin Ali, the song was a staple in parties, hangouts and concerts leading up to the nineties. An instant mood-lifter, the appeal for the song is everlasting, much like the majority of Kishore's repertoire.

TUMI MOR JIBONER BHABONA
Salman Shah and Shabnur brilliantly portrayed a love-struck couple in the film *Anondo Asru* in 1997. The film featured the memorable romantic ballad, *Tumi Mor Jiboner Bhabona*, sung by Andrew Kishore and Salma. Composed by Ahmed Imtiaz Bulbul, it is yet another testament to Kishore's versatile and melodious voice.

Friendships to remember

Falguni Nandi and Alif Alauddin, daughters of legendary singers Subir Nandi and Alauddin Ali, reflect on the close bond their fathers had with Andrew Kishore.



Falguni Nandi



Alif Alauddin



Andrew Kishore visited Alauddin Ali regularly, when Alauddin Ali had fallen ill.



Subir Nandi and Andrew Kishore were together in many intimate musical evenings.

FALGUNI NANDI

Andrew *Kaku's* wedding reception was in Dhaka and I attended the ceremony with my parents. I was very young, but I remember that day vividly. Often, several singers, including Andrew *Kaku* and my father gathered for musical evenings at Linu Billah's house, and I have great memories of those days. We are very close to *Kaku's* family. He would send us a cake every Christmas. He never had any rivalry with anyone in the industry, and he always encouraged other artistes. I have heard many stories about *Kaku* and my father, but I will share one memorable anecdote. When *Kaku* was just starting out as a musician, he and my father went to record a Debu Bhattacharya composition together, on a rickshaw. As they were going to the studio, people on the streets started recognising my father. Seeing that, *Kaku* hoped that crowds will recognise him in the same way someday, and will be cheering

for him. He and my father were more like brothers than colleagues. I hope that both of them are at peace now, wherever they are.

ALIF ALAUDDIN

Andrew uncle was a great artiste. His demise is a tragic loss for the industry, and for our family. I have known him since I was a child. He paid frequent visits to our house, and he spent hours with *Abbu* at his studio. They were very close. *Abbu* is now recovering at home. But when *Abbu* was in the hospital, Andrew uncle came to visit him regularly, despite the fact that he wasn't keeping well himself at the time. He was there for *Abbu* through thick and thin. They worked together on different projects and causes, including copyright issues and getting musical artistes their royalties. It feels as though we have lost someone from our own family.

Statements taken by Shah Alam Shazu

"He was a truly humble man" - Hanif Sanket on Andrew Kishore

AS NARRATED TO ZAHANGIR ALOM:

Hanif Sanket remembers eminent singer Andrew Kishore as a humble person, who never acted like the superstar that he was.

Andrew Kishore was one of my closest friends. Kishore, Humayun Faridee, Anwar Hossain Bulu and I would regularly meet up, and I have great memories of those days. His death is a huge, personal loss for me.

Kishore and I toured several countries together for professional reasons. He never acted like the superstar that he was - He was

a truly humble and simple man, with a kind heart.

Introducing him on the small screen through BTV's *Ityadi* was an immense artistic responsibility for me. *Poddo Patar Pani Noy* was the first song he recorded for *Ityadi*, and his career's last song, *Bangladesher Akashay Jei Uthlo Phute Chander Hashi* was featured on the penultimate iteration of *Eid Ityadi*.

He called me from Singapore in June. He said, "Dosto, I am ready to fly. Pray that I don't have to suffer much."

I truly believed that he will be with us a while longer. As I reflect on what Andrew's friendship means to me, I realise that the loss of some people is so painful that it cannot be explained in words or in writing. Rest in peace, my friend!

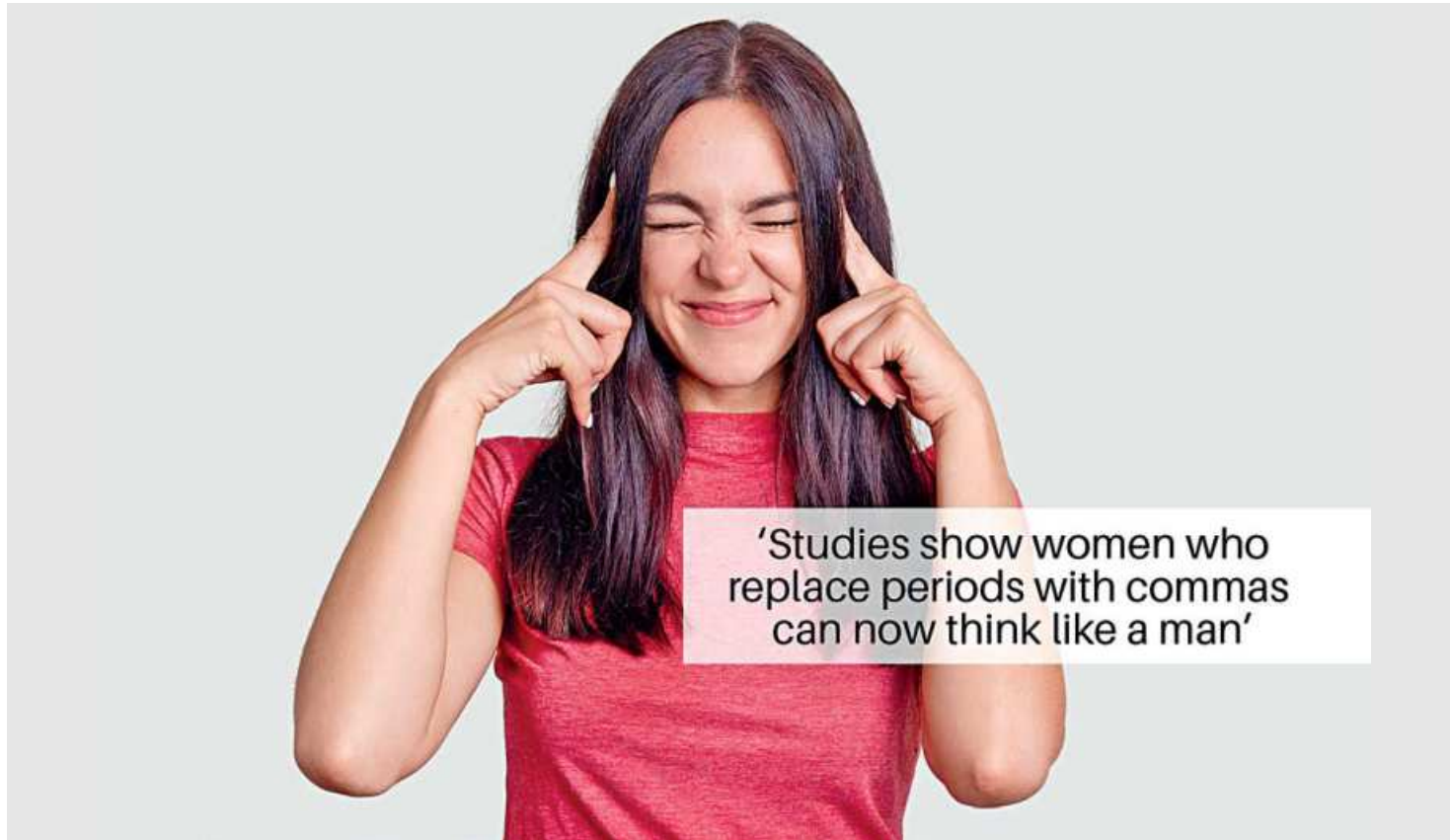


Hanif Sanket and Andrew Kishore on the set of 'Ityadi'.



Andrew Kishore shooting a song on 'Ityadi'.

PHOTOS: COURTESY



'Studies show women who replace periods with commas can now think like a man'

Periods to be replaced with commas in women's bodies

AANILA KISHWAR TARANNUM

When my editor asked me to write a period piece for this week's Satireday, I was quite perplexed. After all, it is common knowledge that periods have been cancelled, and emojis now mark the end of sentences (-;-)

My editor's a boomer, and he likes historical content. He wants me to talk about this other period that women used to experience, one where they would bleed out of their genitals, experience debilitating pain paired with mood swings that almost made it seem like the world was ending. Some would have to drop out of school, spend their days in isolation even at home because periods were too much of a taboo to even be discussed among family members. They would fall behind at work because no organisation took their pain seriously.

"It'll pass," my friend's boss told her, "We're working on legislation to cancel periods. It'll be fine," he said when she asked for a leave, on a day when her cramps were so bad, she could barely walk.

"If you want to normalise periods so bad

then why not normalise shitting, huh?" one Md Shaheen commented on a MyTube video. His opinion matched the general consensus, of course. "Pro-period??? What's next, pro-farting? Pro-choice? Or worse, pro-consent? It is baffling that people can post such offensive content on the internet," said Abul Baten, who is totally not a snowflake.

Ultimately, MyTube gave in. "To be honest, we like being liked. We want Md Shaheen and Abul Baten and the millions of others who hate reproductive rights to like us. I feel like we've gotten some brownie points, we tried being woke, but it's not working out," said a MyTube spokesperson, "So we're deleting all periods, starting now"

"It's a win for feminism, if you ask me," said Basindhara University student Yakub Ali. "It was called menstruation, not womenstruation, haha," added Yakub, a comedy king.

"Women were sinning," said a popular motivational speaker who delivers speeches every weekend to large masses in hats, "Now they will sin in private. Secretly, just

as we do."

You may wonder if this move has helped women. "I thought we were making strides in normalising menstruation but I guess nothing will change. Just have to pretend to be fine even when the pain makes me want to separate my legs and torso," said Farida Khan (not her real name), who was clearly not fine. "My boss better not find out I've been speaking to fake journalists about fake bodily functions," she added.

Until the anti-period legislation is formally passed, let this period piece remind you of this cycle women have been riding since the dawn of time. Some have a perfectly functioning one while some have irregular rhythm. It causes pain in your mind and even in your butt, but not anymore; cause in the patriarchy, periods didn't make the cut >:(

This article sponsored by Hare & Lively, which conscientiously promotes women jumping the ladder at the workplace. If they can. But they really promote hares, who can really jump.

I'm just trying to put food on the table: Industrialist The Wood Ibrahim

STUFF REPORTER

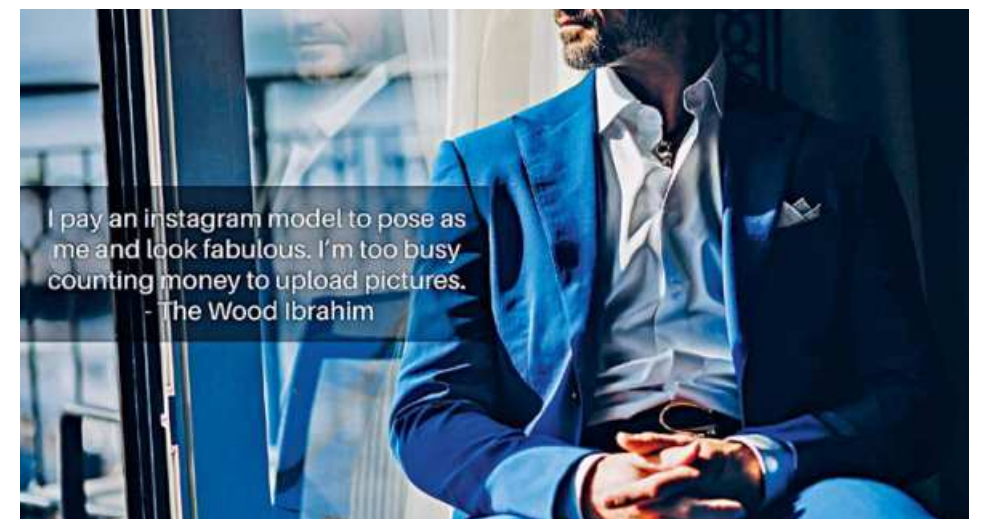
When I was young, my mother gave me two pieces of advice for life: 1) always focus on putting food on the table, 2) make sure to buy a huge table. From that point on, my life has been founded on these two maxims. It has made me into the billionaire I am today.

To this day, when people ask me why I do all that I do, I tell them I'm just putting food on the table. The other day some birds from National Birds against Revenue (NBR) came and audited me. You know how they are, always so underhanded, always trying to pin things on us that have nothing to do with us. I have more than 500 million bucks that are

a t, which is why I started running a t-shirt business in the first place.

By her word, I bought a huge table made out of mahogany straight from the Amazons. If you see it, you instantly recognise the royalty. And such a grand table requires great meals, no?

There's a house rule that during a meal, no more than four inches of the table can be left between two dishes, which means you'd have to feel it up with around 20-25 items at least. It's such a sight, it's what keeps me going. When the birds from NBR told me it doesn't take much to put food on the table and asked me to pay the wages,



I pay an Instagram model to pose as me and look fabulous. I'm too busy counting money to upload pictures. - The Wood Ibrahim

accounted for, but do they care about that? No. They kept hounding me for the other 500m that's unaccounted for. It's really just a glass half-empty, half-full kinda thing.

On top of the pessimism, they don't really seem to understand the point of entrepreneurship at all, the foundation on which this proud country stands. Rather than focusing on all the good stuff that I do, did, will do, whoop de doo, they asked me about unpaid wages of my staff. You know why that's annoying as hell? Because it's just one month of unpaid wage. You know how many people I owe and am owed from, how much and for how long? Sheesh, imagine going berserk over paltry 6,330 taka for around a thousand people. I mean yeah, together it's a small-mid sum, but individually it's just 6000 bucks.

Which is like way less than a single meal at our place. You see, I've always been a mama's boy, I followed everything she said to

I was like bro, what I mean by food is a buffet for each meal and what I mean by a table is basically a stage for an underground metal show.

And then it took another while to make them understand why I need to get some of my money offshore. Well, a man can own multiple tables, can't he? I own property across at least 15 countries, and all of them come with tables. I mean what's any house without one, amirite?

Then there's all the property I own locally, the tables at my office, at my kids' private schools, it all adds up. I showed all the documents, receipts of all the tables I own and asked them, "Is this accounting enough for you?", referring to the "unaccounted" for wealth they just couldn't let go of. They just kept talking about it over and over. It was getting on my nerves.

So I killed each pair of birds down with one stone.

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Man says obvious things and unites online mob

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21 2 SHARE SAVE

MOBans against discussion of urination

POGO WRIGHTS

A group of MOBans (Moral Objection Board Against Newmedia) emerged from the bushes of Boldapur last week to protect their society from Sayman Shukhon's discussion on urination. "We will not let him [Sayman Shukhon] live because his discussion on urination hurt our delicate ears and shook our moral principals," they chanted while marching towards the capital wearing yellow shirts and white caps. They started the march #BANhisLIFE (cause, you know, MOBans) right after a video went viral on social media where Sayman Shukhon was seen talking about some issues he was facing while urinating. In the video, he said, "I

feel a burn and I think many more may feel the same. We should speak about our issue and fix it by consulting a doctor. This is not a taboo."

Countering his statement, the morons said, "None should speak about urination. It's a dirty thing. We all do it but we don't discuss it." "And, we will not let anyone do things that we never did or could never do." Meanwhile, hearing the news of MOBans marching towards the capital, Sayman Shukhon, a successful education trader, formally apologised on social media for educating people. "I should not have tried to enlighten people. I am sorry. I understand my mistake and

will never do it again. Please let me live," he said.

Talking to this newspaper, the cybercrime unit at Boldapur Police Station, said, "As always, we are not aware of it yet." "We promise to take action once the MOBans cause any harm to Sayman Shukhon," they added. Asked how police could make such a statement, they said, "It requires an intelligent brain to harm someone who has a lot of money. We don't believe the MOBans have that." Thus, we are not too worried about it, they added. This correspondent was trying to find a leader among the MOBans until this report was filed at 12:56am today.

Over 100 crore embezzled!

It's time to blacklist DGHS staffers who are enabling corruption

THE Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) published a list on July 9 of 14 blacklisted contractors who had misappropriated over Tk 100 crore from various government medical colleges and hospitals. As per the list, one contractor alone—a Topkhana-based medical equipment supplier called Bengal Scientific and Surgical Company—has embezzled Tk 44.9 million from Rangpur Medical College Hospital, Tk 16.6 crore from Satkhira Medical College Hospital in one instance, and a further Tk 60.6 million from Satkhira Medical in conjunction with Messrs Mercantile Trade International and Universal Trade Company. A report published in this daily highlights that a case was filed against this contractor by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in November and three more cases were filed against it in Rangpur and Satkhira between July and October last year.

It begs the question: why did it take the DGHS over six months to take action against these corrupt contractors when the ACC had submitted detailed investigation reports about their irregularities, and when there were already cases filed against them? One contractor had a case filed against it in 2015. Unfortunately, delayed and inadequate responses to the ACC's recommendations by the health ministry and associated institutions has become the norm—a report published last month highlighted how the ACC's warning about corruption in the purchase of medicines, surgical equipment and other machines had been ignored for 16 months by the relevant authorities.

The ACC has, on multiple occasions, warned about an alleged nexus of contractors and officials from the DGHS and other organisations under the ministry who enable such corruption and misappropriation of money, and provide impunity to embezzlers. We have also demanded on numerous instances that those involved with syndicates be brought to book. It's time the DGHS answers the public about what steps, if any, it has taken to identify the errant staffers within its own organisation.

Blacklisting of corrupt contractors is hardly a permanent solution to what seems to be a systemic problem. Unless those tasked with the responsibility of choosing and monitoring procurement processes are held to account, these 14 blacklisted contractors will simply be replaced with 14 others, and the public will have to continue to pay the price for it.

Promoting communal harmony amidst the pandemic

Volunteers in Mymensingh set up quarantine facility and free oxygen service

AS the pandemic continues to challenge every nook and corner of our healthcare sector, which is struggling to put up with the influx of patients (Covid-19 related and otherwise), we are informed through a recent report in this paper about volunteering organisations and individuals who are stepping up to assist patients in Mymensingh. A Phulpur-based volunteering organisation took the initiative to run a 20-bed isolation centre, as well as set up three more in surrounding areas, and is now ready to start a free oxygen service, with aid from donors, for critical Covid-19 patients in the district. Upon the doctors' recommendation, the volunteers take the cylinders to the referred hospital to provide oxygen support to the patients.

Apart from setting up the isolation centres, the organisation—with support from 100 volunteers who work by rotation—further provides necessary food and medicine for patients who cannot afford the treatment, with contributions from its own administration. The foundation has extended its services to other centres across Mymensingh too and aims to set-up a total of 500 isolation beds in the near future. Doctors from Phulpur Upazila Health Complex are assigned to maintain contact with the isolation centres round the clock to ensure uninterrupted medical support.

We praise the humanitarian spirit and the timely initiative taken by the volunteers in Mymensingh. At a time when the number of people being infected is on the rise and deprived patients are finding it harder to bear the cost of battling Covid-19 and avail the necessary treatment, the above case sets a perfect example that our fight against the pandemic is a collaborative one. We also urge the donor organisations and the health ministry to extend their support to such initiatives. If it can be successfully replicated across other districts, it will go a long way to help ease the burden on our healthcare sector and enable treatment for those who need it the most.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Caring for ASD children

In Bangladesh, a large number of people are suffering from autism spectrum disorders (ASD), especially children, who need regular supervision. But due to lockdown, the institutions that look after such children are closed and their services have been postponed. During the ongoing pandemic, those with ASD are at high risk as they can't express themselves the way they are used to. The lack of specialised care further hampers their well-being. Although some organisations have started online services, many don't have access to proper internet connection and computers. Therefore, parents are the only hope for children with ASD. Creating awareness and demonstrating proper caring techniques via mass media can go a long way to cope with this situation. Specialised programmes for autistic children can also be conducted via television.

Fawzia Khanum Ahona, Rajbari



MUSHTAQUE CHOWDHURY

IN 1989, the United Nations decided to observe July 11 as World Population Day every year in the wake of the world population reaching five billion. The purpose was to bring attention to the "health, development and environmental impacts of rapid population growth". The world population has now risen to 7.8 billion, and in my own lifetime, it has more than trebled.

In the newly independent Bangladesh, "population explosion" was a huge worry. We have come a long way since then and it is no longer considered the nation's top problem. Thanks to the sustained attention and efforts of different stakeholders, Bangladesh is now a success story. In 1971, Bangladesh's total fertility rate (TFR), defined as the number of live births given by a woman at the end of her reproductive period, was over 6. It has now been reduced to 2.3, which is very close to what the demographers call the "replacement level". Similarly, in terms of other related parameters of population health, Bangladesh's progress over the past few decades has been exemplary. Maternal mortality ratio (MMR), defined as the number of women dying due to pregnancy and delivery-related complications per 100,000 live births, has been reduced from over 700 to less than 200 during the same period.

In 1975, I along with a group of fresh university graduates joined the Bangladesh Fertility Survey (BFS), one of the first population surveys done in the country. This took us to many nooks and corners of the country. BFS was a part of the worldwide fertility surveys carried out under the World Fertility Survey. When the results were published a year later, Bangladesh had one of the lowest rates of contraceptive prevalence (CPR)—only about eight percent of eligible couples were using some form of contraceptives. Family planning was a taboo and nobody wanted to talk about it openly. Our female colleagues in BFS had a really tough time to communicate this subject with village women.

Now, family planning is hardly a taboo—women freely talk about it even in front of menfolk. This is a revolution, particularly in the context of a conservative Muslim society. Soon after the BFS was over, I joined BRAC and was fortunate to spend extended periods of time in remote rural areas. It was pleasantly surprising to see how the organisation was promoting the concept of a small family being the norm. A

study done in Sulla, a remote upazila of Sunamganj district, in collaboration with Cholera Research Laboratory (now Icdrr) and Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), found the CPR to be 20 percent, the highest for that time in the country. The Bangladesh contraceptive revolution is owed to many—the government, NGOs, private sector, and development partners.

Unfortunately, the progress has now stalled. The TFR has remained the same for the past decade or more, and so has the CPR. The MMR and other health-related indicators have also stalled since 2010. This means we are perhaps not on track for the different targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Covid-19 threatens not only the continued progress but the sustenance of the gains we have made over the past several decades. Experts are

concerned about the collateral effects of the pandemic on non-Covid health services. Vaccination coverage, maternity services including institutional delivery, contraceptive uptake and other services have marked a downward trend. This is because of both demand and supply factors. Potential users are apprehensive of contracting coronavirus when they visit a health centre. In the supply front, there is a drop in service provision due to diverted attention and resource flows to Covid-19 response and the presence of perennials governance issues including absenteeism.

The theme for this year's World Population Day is "the sexual and reproductive health needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls during the pandemic". A recent UNFPA study estimates that if the lockdown continued for six months and there is major disruption to health services, both of which seem to be true in Bangladesh, then 47 million women



PHOTO: COLLECTED

concern over rising child marriage in their localities. Helplessness of parents in the midst of the pandemic, social pressures, economic reasons and school closures are responsible for this sad state of affair.

As a nation with so much of optimism and hope, we have to face these eventualities. Bangladesh is not unique in this situation. Such effects are being reported for many countries. In the United States, for example, a new "baby-boom" is being speculated by the end of 2020. To combat such a situation, agencies are initiating innovative solutions. PSI, an NGO, has initiated a new movement, "Flatten the boom", to inform potential boomers of the availability of alternative family planning services in their localities.

There are two immediate issues for us—containing Covid-19 and putting ourselves back on track for the SDGs. The government has adopted several measures in combating the pandemic. There is evidence that it has achieved

some early positive results. Containing it fully, however, will require more decisive measures. A lot of these latter measures has been discussed in the columns of this newspaper and other fora. What is most needed is a transparent, coordinated and science-based strategy that engages the whole of society and makes use of the assets we already have, such as community health workers. We need to go back to Bangabandhu's March 7 clarion call and empower and prepare every household for this protracted war.

It is clear that we are not on track to achieve the related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. We have already faltered on the maternal mortality and fertility targets. The latest 2017 survey documented an MMR of 196 but, according to SDG targets, we are supposed to reach a ratio of 70 by 2030. Given the recent track record and the current Covid-19 onslaught, it is unlikely that we will achieve the SDG target unless some drastic and bold steps are taken. The progress we made until about 2010 was possible by making good use of some of the "low hanging fruits" such as easy availability of contraceptives, building new health centres, increasing vaccination coverage and acting on the social determinants of health including primary education, poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, and creating space for NGO and private sectors. Moving from here for a quantum leap forward will require utmost political commitment and imaginative solutions.

This will require greater focus on the "higher hanging fruits". It is imperative that the government move from a "business as usual" to a drastic reform of the health system that will involve but not be limited to setting up of a high-powered permanent national commission on health reforms; increasing investments for health; improving accountability, governance, transparency and management; streamlining data systems; strengthening primary health care; and engaging the whole of society. These, if done well, should lead to much-promised universal health coverage where every citizen will have access to quality healthcare without suffering financial hardships.

Covid-19 has shown how various countries have faced the crisis differently with varying results. One conclusion that has gone viral on social media is that the countries that have women at the helm have done exceedingly better than others. The countries in this list are Denmark, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Iceland, Norway and Taiwan. We can definitely hope to be in this league! Can't we?

Dr Mushtaque Chowdhury is the former Vice Chair of BRAC, Professor of Population & Family Health at Columbia University, and Convener of Bangladesh Health Watch.

Should education be quarantined too?

IPSHTA BONHI UPOMA

THE earth stands still. Time has paused. The bustling streets of yesterday are empty today. Schools and universities which were once filled with joyful youth are now silent. The race that stomped around the ends of the earth, have today been sent home by an enemy smaller than a microbe. Covid-19.

Yet, humans are not to be defeated so easily. Even hidden behind walls, humanity keeps moving forward. Homes have turned into schools, colleges and offices. Meetings, classes, summer schools, online courses and seminars continue at full speed from home.

Universities across the globe have shifted online to ensure undeterred continuation of education. Two Bangladeshi students I know who are studying at the University of Cambridge are continuing their studies from here in Bangladesh. The authorities at the University of Cambridge are evaluating their progress online. Another MIT student attested to similar policies being taken there.

However, keeping the mental wellbeing of the students in mind, the academic authorities have changed the grading system to a Pass/No Record policy. Due to the No Record Policy, students with poor results will have their records removed. Their CGPA will therefore not fall due to a poor grade and they will be allowed to repeat a course if necessary.

The European Girls Mathematical Olympiad 2020 was supposed to be held in the Netherlands this year. It also had to be conducted virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many large scale olympiads like the Bangladesh Mathematical Olympiad are being arranged online. A group of young students, including some past contestants of the Bangladesh team in the International Mathematical Olympiads, have initiated a Special Online Math Camp for other math enthusiasts across Bangladesh. It is fascinating to see young college students teaming up to initiate, manage and conduct online classes on higher level mathematics for around 50 school and college going students. That too is being done with little or almost no

institutional supervision.

In April, some physics students from different public and private universities, including the University of Dhaka and Brac University, initiated and arranged a month-long workshop called Online Physics Camp. The camp was successful, not only in terms of focusing on cutting-edge research topics and inspiring physicists in Bangladesh, but also in building a bridge between these students and leading institutes like Max Planck Institute and the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton University.

Several platforms are being used to conduct the online classes. Zoom and Google Meet are the two most

applications, one needs a medium quality graphics tablet that supports a pen. Google Classroom, Piazza and Moodle are different tools being used for online learning. Elementary quizzes can be taken on Google Classroom, discussions on homework can take place on Piazza and Moodle is being used for document storage. Students need only an internet connected computer or smartphone to participate in the classes.

Many students around the world have been using the edX and Coursera platforms to take courses online. Now, almost a hundred universities are connected to edX and around 20 million learners are participating in

While looking for solutions to deal with this crisis, we are slowly realising the grave mistake of neglecting research, education and knowledge. The irony is that this late but significant realisation hit us only after educational institutes closed. In this situation, there is no better or easier alternative than an online system to continue education. However, many students do not have good internet access.

online streaming solutions used to conduct live classes. Google Meet has made its premium features available for free until September 2020 to support educational and business organisations continue their activities smoothly.

Zoom allows us to conduct meetings or classes consisting of 40 participants for 40 minutes for free. Both Zoom and Google Meet allow screen sharing. Teachers can conduct classes not only by using slide presentations, they can also use the whiteboard features of these applications. A simple computer connected to the internet is enough to conduct a class presentation. However, to use the whiteboard facility of these

online courses using this platform. By subscribing to these online tools and platforms, educational institutes will not only be able to continue their activities online but will also be able to elevate their existing systems to a global standard.

While looking for solutions to deal with this crisis, we are slowly realising the grave mistake of neglecting research, education and knowledge. The irony is that this late but significant realisation hit us only after educational institutes closed. In this situation, there is no better or easier alternative than an online system to continue education. However, many students do not have good internet

Ipshta Bonhi Upoma is a lecturer at Brac University, and academic coordinator at the Bangladesh Mathematical Olympiad. The article reflects the views of the author and not Brac University.

My father was an undocumented migrant worker. People like him don't deserve your scorn



OF MAGIC & MADNESS
BADRUZZAMAN BAY

NOT long ago, I was watching a webinar on the plight of returning migrant workers streamed live on Facebook by *The Daily Star*. One of the speakers, a top official at the ministry of expatriates' welfare and overseas employment, after outlining the government's initiatives in this regard in exhaustive detail, asked her audience: "Why are there so many illegal Bangladeshi migrant workers? When workers from other countries have passports and valid papers, why do Bangladeshis have to hear that they are illegal and undocumented?" We should think about it, she said, hinting at the practice of migrants going abroad through irregular channels.

I'm no expert on labour migration but there is usually a classist subtext to such questions, an unspoken rebuke directed at the poor migrants for their own misfortunes. Woven into this train of thought is the idea that their "ways" are essentially flawed and their lack of legal status is as much a problem for them as it is for the image of the country. Of particular note is the use of the word "illegal". Just as in the remarks of the said official, you see this word being carelessly banded about in public discourses and media outlets, even though the world has long decided that illegal migrants do not exist—because no human being is illegal. Our insistence on using this dehumanising term denies their innate dignity and disregards the multiple factors that may be responsible for their condition. It also places them on a pedestal below other migrant workers. So the question that should be really asked is: how much of this is of their own making?

I don't presume to speak for all undocumented workers but I can share what I know from personal experience, with the hope that it will add to the existing discourse on labour migration.

I come from a lower-middle-class family of migrant workers. Until recently, overseas migration was in our DNA. The desire to change their fortune led many male members of our extended family to seek work opportunities abroad. I grew up hearing tales of their career progression: a certain *jupa* was doing well at his maintenance job in a

Kuwaiti airport, a certain *khalu* rose through the ranks at an engineering consulting firm in Abu Dhabi, a certain uncle worked as a supervisor at a construction company in Singapore. There were also the tales of failed bids and ruined careers: a certain cousin was languishing in a Saudi neighbourhood without a job, the husband of another cousin was forced to come back from Kuwait. My own father belonged to the second category, and it was he who gave me the first real insight into the life of an undocumented migrant worker.

It still feels unreal when I think how he lived without us—and we without him—all these years. While he was away, his children, including his then-unborn daughter, grew into adults; his older daughter married and had children of her own; his mother, of whom he was so fond, died, as did many friends and relatives; his wife turned into an old woman; his village home, where he always wanted to go back and settle down, fell into disrepair; and his country changed forever. Trapped in a foreign land, he saw the most defining moments of his life pass him

he quit the job to open a fruits and vegetables shop. Within a month, however, his plan suffered a blow as the government issued a decree banning the fruits and vegetables business for foreigners. So he turned it into a stationery shop. After about a year, the government issued another decree banning foreigners from running shops smaller than 40 square metres. My father's was 36 square metres.

This time he had no choice but to sell the shop along with all the merchandise. He found a prospective buyer and went to his kafeel (sponsor) to get his approval for the transfer of ownership. The latter assured him of cooperation but secretly sold the shop himself (he was its owner on paper), swindling my father out of his money. Meanwhile, he suffered another blow when two visas that he had purchased on behalf of an uncle and a cousin were found to be duplicate. Every decision he made seemed to be coming back to haunt him. Then with the help of a son of the kafeel, after about three years since his flight to Riyadh, he got his passport back and travelled to Mecca with a demand letter acquired from another kafeel, who promised to give him a valid work permit.

In Mecca, there was no change in his luck either, as this second kafeel mispent the fees he paid for his work permit and transfer papers. So he had to pay again for these papers. He was also heavily in debt by then. For the remainder of his time in Mecca, he would have to make do with a supervisor job at a motel for *Hajis*.

About a year later, he found a way to get transferred to Medina under another kafeel and started selling burqas to shops. It was a hassle-free business. For the next four years, he worked with legal permits. In his fifth year in Medina, trouble emerged again after it was discovered that his kafeel had been dodging taxes due for having foreign hires. He surrendered their passports to the government, claiming his recruits had all fled away. As a result, not only did my father and others like him fail to renew their work permits or get transferred under another kafeel, they also became fugitives under the law. For no fault of his own, he became undocumented again, and would have to stay under the radar to avoid detention.

Fast forward to 2013-2014, the Saudi government offered a deal for the undocumented workers to get legal again, provided they paid for work permits for all

the years they had worked illegally. It was a big opportunity for my father even though the cost was high. He found a willing kafeel and paid him SR 20,000 to get the necessary papers and permits. But as luck would have it, he was duped again as the kafeel vanished with the money. There were several others he knew who also got duped. They all filed cases against the kafeel at the labour court, but nothing would come of it, and my father would go on to remain undocumented. Finally, in 2017, the government announced an amnesty for irregular migrants who could go back home without being imprisoned. Sick and decayed with old age, he gratefully accepted the offer.

My father is the longest-suffering migrant worker I know. But the way he suffered and got harassed by local kafeels is well-documented. These stories of hardship and exploitation that we often come across are proof that migrants may become undocumented for no fault of their own. Central to their vulnerability is the exploitative *kafala* or "sponsorship" system in some Gulf countries. It's intrinsically connected with the "free visas" which, as should be clear from the account of my father, are not free in any monetary sense, but free of an employer or job. According to a white paper of the International Labour Organization (ILO) published in 2016, "the sponsor named on the visa does not actually employ the worker. Sometimes, fake companies are registered simply to obtain and sell free visas." Despite their being employers only on paper, these kafeels have a stranglehold on the workers as they hold their passports, putting them in a precarious legal position, and face hardly any consequence for their crimes and transgressions.

In hindsight, my father may have been guilty of not having an actual job when he left for Riyadh, but it's a guilt he shares with most migrants who are equally desperate to provide for their family but are exploited by local agents and recruitment agencies in their country as well as the shady companies and kafeels that control their fate in the destination countries. We need to dismantle this *kafala* system. We need to be more proactive in terms of putting the right policies and practices in place. And we need to stop blaming our irregular migrant workers for their misfortunes. The buck stops with the government—not the other way round.

Badruzzaman Bay is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*. Email: badruzzaman.bd@gmail.com



The author's father, Md Yasin, in his stationery shop in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

My father left us to work in Riyadh in 1998. Before then, he had a small company that manufactured tin buckets, trunks and so on. It was a time when many traditional jobs and businesses in Dhaka and elsewhere were in the process of being extinct. Unable to evolve in a changing market, he managed a "free visa" and flew to Saudi Arabia, leaving behind three children and his wife who was then pregnant with their fourth child.

None of us knew then that he wouldn't be able to return to his country until after 19 years, in 2017.

by like they were not his own, like he was watching them in some surreal TV show on the meaninglessness of life.

For the most part of his stay in Saudi Arabia, my father had been undocumented and he couldn't come back without risking incarceration or plunging his family into further financial hardship. It wasn't so bad initially, though. In Riyadh, where his odyssey began, he had his *iqama* (residence permit) with him and made a decent start with the assistance of my *mama*, who got him a job in an aluminium workshop. After seven months,

Necessary sacrifices, unnecessary thoughts



BLOWN' IN THE WIND
SHAMSAD MORTUZA

THE coronavirus crisis posed serious threats to the global stock markets. The much anticipated economic downturn was stopped by "a narrow bull" in the global financial market that was mainly powered

by the big-tech surge of FANG (Facebook, Amazon, Netflix and Google) along with Microsoft and Apple and the Chinese BAT (Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent). On May 1, *Financial Times* reported, "the five biggest constituents of the S&P 500—Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, Google's parent Alphabet and Facebook—now account for a fifth of the entire index's market capitalisation. That is a modern-day record in terms of concentration."

Experts are divided in their opinion on the shelf life of this tech-reliant market stability and buoyancy. For now at least, it is evident that the overwhelming trends of massive applications of online tools and services for crisis management have earned the trust of investors in the tech stocks. Meanwhile, most of the other financial sectors are deeply affected by the pandemic, and are estimated to require 3-10 years for their recovery to pre-Covid-19 GDP. Many small businesses are not going to recover at all. In a Darwinian "survival of the fittest" model, where mutability decides the natural selection, these firms are likely to be extinct. And the humans involved with those firms are likely to be sacrificed too. Are they the necessary sacrifices required for the creation of Human 2.0?

Even as a student of culture and humanities, who has little or no understanding of finance, this concentration of the capital worries me. I am worried by the dehumanisation of the system in which traditional manufacturers and labour are fast becoming redundant. Jute is out, Zoom is in. The buzzwords of "contactless service" or "contactless currency" symbolise a new form of alienation. They rob us off our essential human identities and responsibilities in social, biological and economic spheres. In the name of health and safety, social distancing has become the new self-regulatory mantra. We don't shake hands, show our faces, or sit together. We stigmatise the sick and the dead. Our human norms are changing; either we are going back to a prehistoric time where animal rules prevailed or we are leaping to a non-human future. The thermal images and readings of machines determine who can access human facilities, and who cannot. Apps are tracing our mobility. The machine is deciding for us. Our union with

the machine is consensual. We have become willing slaves to the machine. Our herd mentality is controlled by some artificial intelligence where we are nothing but dots in a curve. We seem to be characters in a dystopian novel where the microorganisms are acting as hunter-beaters to lead us like elephants into a *khedda* (the stockade trap).

The overt use of animal imagery in the *Financial Times* report (i.e. bull, BAT, FANG) led me to pursue these unnecessary thoughts. It made me think how these constructed animal figures are putting humanity in crisis. They combine pre-human animal instincts and post-human rationality to make sure that many of us become redundant, and a new version of us is made available. The disease is already culling those who are physically weak and binning those who are living on extra-time. Humanity as we know it is being sacrificed.

some big data as our phones spy on us 24/7. They are the *kiraman katibins*, the honourable angels who sit on our shoulders and record all our deeds. Instead of such records being used for the after-life, our scribe in hand targets consumer or products in this world.

In my day job, I teach my students theories and ideas to enable them to sift appearances from reality. Our seamless flight into the literary and cultural world has suddenly hit an air pocket. The pilot in me warns about the bumpy ride as we pass through the clouds of financial bubble, the simulacra of a convenient life and the apparently eco-friendly immobile lifestyle. I reflect on the many tools and ideas that I adopted and adapted in the last few months. Prior to the current crisis, this cyber vocabulary sounded like Greek to me.

Why am I not surprised that the term "crisis" comes from the Greek noun *krisis*

this link between crisis and disease is understandable. A crisis is seen as "a moment of decisive intervention... of thorough-going transformation." In Western popular culture, this is often expressed through the Chinese term for crisis, *Weiji*, that combines both "danger" and "opportunity". In Chinese, however, while the first character *wei* means dangerous, the second character *ji* does not necessarily mean "opportunity"; *ji* rather implies a "change point".

Our present crisis has brought us to a similar changing point. We are facing a threat of an epic proportion: our lives and livelihoods are in danger. We are also being forced to change. Indeed, such a change is inevitable, but calling it an opportunity will be a misnomer. We have reached the crossroads of history, and like Oedipus who had to decide during a plague to inflict punishments on himself, we too will have to decide.

Call me a pessimist. Five months into the pandemic, I see even hope flying away from the Pandora's Box. Guided by the wills of FANG-BAT (oh, I am so tempted to bring in a vampire analogy here), we are making many investments to create a resilient and sustainable online system without considering the sacrifices that these initiatives would entail. Gone will be the life that we once lived. And the new narrative will present it as a necessary sacrifice.

Each epoch changing crisis demanded such necessary sacrifices, collateral damages. This is an archetypal motif that is coded into the blueprints of humanity. Our grand narratives highlight those sacrifices.

In order for man to have his proper glory, Iblis was sacrificed. In order for Achilles to have his promised fame, Patroclus had to be sacrificed. When Achilles decided to withdraw himself from the Trojan War after Agamemnon had claimed his trophy woman, Patroclus stepped in. He got killed in the battle to make Achilles vow for revenge and win the war for the Greek. In *Gilgamesh*, the legendary king of the ancient Sumerian city of Uruk, sacrificed his wild-man friend Enkidu to complete his quest. In *Mahabharata*, Karna had to be sacrificed to protect Arjuna's fame. In different junctures of history, there have been different moments of crisis. And in every such moment of crisis, we had to decide what necessary sacrifices we will have to make to change our lives. Economy over lives, or lives over economy. Lives or livelihoods! Time a' changing! What collateral damage are we going to have? What necessary sacrifices are we going to make?

The answer my friend, is blowing in the wind.

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Even as a student of culture and humanities, who has little or no understanding of finance, this concentration of the capital worries me. I am worried by the dehumanisation of the system in which traditional manufacturers and labour are fast becoming redundant. Jute is out, Zoom is in. The buzzwords of "contactless service" or "contactless currency" symbolise a new form of alienation.

The illusory bubble of tech-driven comfort during this pandemic is punctured by the emerging monopoly of fin-tech. Cooped at home watching Netflix, maintaining a semblance of social life on Facebook, ordering essentials online, and working from home, I thought I had finally found a red-pill-blue-pill moment to enter *The Matrix* and experience a second life in the virtual world. But unlike Neo, who fought the systemic agents, most of us do not even realise that these gadgets have made us stop being human. We have become a cog in the machine where we are nothing but its content makers; all our activities are feeding the FANG and BAT with data and the little bit of earnings that we have. The machine is creating its own myth of sustainability.

For instance, not too many people talk about the carbon footprints of online cloud storage. We are never told of the grams of carbon we have to burn for a simple Google search or sending of an email. Cloud storage causes massive carbon emissions of which we are both consumers and producers. By the same token, each of us is converted into

(choice, decision, judgment), originating from the Greek verb *krinein* (to decide). In Greek mythology, the King of Mycenaean Greece against Troy (present day Turkey) following the abduction of Helen by the Trojan prince Paris. After an initial success in which Agamemnon's army raided Apollo's temple, he captured the daughter of the priest Chryses as war booty. The father tried to free his daughter Chryseis (Astynome) by paying appropriate ransom, which was denied by Agamemnon. Chryses prayed to Apollo, and the god sent a plague sweeping through the Greek armies to defend the honour of his priest. Agamemnon was thereby forced to give Chryseis back in order to end the epidemic. Agamemnon had a choice to gain financially, but his poor judgement ensued the health crisis. Please note that any resemblance between this Greek myth and today's crisis is purely coincidental.

Historically, the idea of crisis involved a primary medical connotation as it was seen as a possible turning point of diseases in which the infirm would either recover or die. For civilisations that have withstood many pandemics,

QUOTABLE Quote

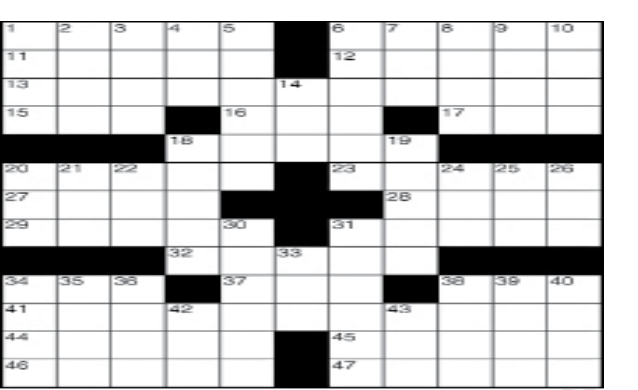


FRIEDRICH SCHILLER
 (1759-1805)
 German dramatist, poet, and literary theorist.
He who has done his best for his own time has lived for all times.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Wastes time
 - 6 Photo session
 - 11 Gave out hands
 - 12 Door part
 - 13 They're up before dawn
 - 15 Noah's boat
 - 16 Tell whoppers
 - 17 Ready to go
 - 18 Answer
 - 20 Stares in shock
 - 23 Student housing
 - 27 Former spouses
 - 28 Casual assent
 - 29 Lukewarm
 - 31 Opium source
 - 32 Draws close to
 - 34 Crunch targets
 - 37 Try out
 - 38 Cool - cucumber
- DOWN**
- 1 Notion
 - 2 Precious
 - 3 Brown songbird
 - 4 Building wing
 - 5 Fashions
 - 6 Gladiator's protection
 - 7 That guy's
 - 8 Wallet bills
 - 9 Storybook monster
 - 10 Final, for one
 - 14 Tear
 - 18 Myrrh, for one
 - 19 Toys with strings attached
 - 20 Obtain
 - 21 Log chopper
 - 22 Energy
 - 24 GOP member
 - 25 Navigating aid
 - 26 Bashful
 - 30 Low cards
 - 31 Speak from the pulpit
 - 33 Fire remnant
 - 34 Swiss peaks
 - 35 Cotton bundle
 - 36 Jazz's Getz
 - 38 Gets older
 - 39 Splitter group
 - 40 Inquires
 - 42 Finale
 - 43 Letter after pi

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



POETRY

Aha Nandalals

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Like my long dead father's face
I'm forgetting the mole on your lower lip
I'm forgetting the taste of cheap ice-creams

I'm forgetting that
I learned to hate Nandalal
since I was a boy.
In these crippled cities,
I must be a Nandalal to live on.

I'm forgetting the voice
that used to bid me goodnight.
It's hard to pull rickshaw
keeping the mask on.
Please! I can't breathe!

Md. Mehedi Hasan occasionally contributes to The Daily Star's literature page; he is a lecturer of English at North Western University, Khulna.



FORGET-ME-NOTS

JOHN DREW

Splashes of blue in the springtime green,
A braver array had never been seen.
Little blue flowers, of flowers we dreamed,
The flowers would go on forever it seemed,
Never so many forget-me-nots.

When dawn emerged the moon sank down,
And birds were heard all over the town.
The daffodils wilted, the tulips went
But still the forget-me-nots weren't spent,
Never so many forget-me-nots.

This was the year the virus came,
Raking the lungs with tongues of flame.
Doctors worked without proper gear,
None had been ordered for many a year,
Ever so many forget-me-nots.

The Earth is round, the Earth is flat,
Some say this and some say that.
Carry on, folks, go down to the pub,

But give your hands a jolly good scrub.
Ever so many forget-me-nots.

The rich went home and shut the door
And left the streets to the hungry poor.

The buses crawled in their twos and threes,
The drivers doomed by a cough or sneeze.
Ever so many forget-me-nots.

The sun still shone but stopped the clock:
Locked down, we stayed in a state of shock.
We clapped the carers and mourned the dead,
We laughed and waved to cover our dread.
Never so many forget-me-nots.

Not daffodils yellow nor tulips red:
Forget-me-nots blue remember the dead.

John Drew has lived on both sides of the Himalayas.

The Darkness Looming

FOUZIA MAHIN CHOUDHURY

They said, when it will be the darkest
You must know the dawn is near.
But it's not that dark yet
That I can still see my fingers
bleeding ink
My hands tied tight
And my face shadowed by
a solar eclipse
While my lips moaning
to the magnetism of the moon.
A wuthering typhoon
I breathe.
Smelling death
My chest_ awfully heavy...
So maybe it would be soon
But not yet
The darkest!
But the darkness looming
With an eye sneaking
direct over my head
No eyelets
Lifeless

His cold metallic gaze
Making certain
My voice doesn't
cross beyond this cell
I have imprisoned me
Sleep-deprived
Listening
howling at the mid-day light
Tumult
of the creatures of the night.
Then it must be Now
in the sky
Sculpting a diamond ring!
Or is it not?
Is it still not that dark yet
But the darkness looming?

Fouzia Mahin Choudhury is a freelance creative writer, lyricist, and an emerging poet. She is also a media communications professional; currently working with a research based audio-visual production hub Empty Yard.



REVIEWS

An Intimate yet Epic vision:
SURALAKSHMI VILLA

Aruna Chakravarti. ISBN-10: 9389109396. Picador India, 2020

REVIEWED BY NEEMAN SOBHAN

In the state of seige that we are living in across the world, or, like myself, in an Italy emerging from the pandemic battlefield, a riveting book is our best means of being transported beyond our confined horizons.

Just such a book is Aruna Chakravarti's richly imagined novel *Suralakshmi Villa*, which I read during the quarantine in Rome. Cocooned in the exquisite prose and the fascinating lives within its covers, I escaped to the world of Bengal of the past, its natural beauty, its lores and myths, and the stories of present day Bengalis.

After *Jorasanko* and *Daughters of Jorasanko*, her acclaimed historical fiction on the Tagore family, the Sahitya Akademi award winning Indian writer returns to pure fiction in this recent work. But history is never far away.

Suralakshmi Villa is both the multi-generational saga of a family home on the eve of its demolition, and the chronicle of the shared edifice of syncretic culture that housed both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis of undivided and post-partition India, till these seismic times of religious intolerance that threaten to destroy the historical structure of peaceful coexistence.

In the divisive world of riots, in which this book was launched this February, in Delhi, the novel exploring the interconnected local history and shared humanity of both Hindu and Muslim rural Bengal, lifts itself above the confines of fiction, on the wings of hope for mutual understanding and harmony in reality as well.

The writer deals with profound sensitivity, compassion and authenticity, an eclectic range of characters from both Hindu and Muslim communities of diverse socio-economic classes, and their intertwined lives and destinies.

The story starts in Delhi in relatively present times with an old villa being put up for sale, to be transformed into an apartment complex. The striking thing about the novel is that the owner and the house bearing her name are both protagonists and points of departure for a narrative journey that encompasses the stories of a myriad cast of characters whose lives intersect with both the villa and its mistress. Yet, much of the narrative takes place elsewhere.

Suralakshmi Villa is the portal through which we enter only to be led, as if through a backdoor, into the meandering geography of other lives. These concern both male and female characters, each vividly delineated with astute psychological insight. However, it's the gallery of women that brings this novel alive: full scale portraits, concise cameos, detailed miniatures, impressionistic sepia photographs, telling ink sketches, and incisive engravings of all sorts of women. We find both highly educated and illiterate women; independent, unconventional, and valiant women; and downtrodden, suffering but battling women.

In fact, the most memorable stories are those of the broken but brave women. Aruna Chakravarti's *tour de force* as a writer is the range of her deeply felt and impoverished Muslim characters, in rural Malda, struggling to keep their humanity in their sordid surroundings.

For me, the most powerful and lyrical part of the novel was here, in rural Bengal, where the author's most compassionate and compelling storytelling is deployed. The dialogue is full of the natural cadences and vocabulary reflecting the voice of each persona. Places are evoked with such visual and sensuous immediacy that even the ugly, the harrowing or the tragic have the impact and luminosity of poetry.

Those who have read Aruna Chakravarti's collection of short stories, *Secret Spaces*, might have read the story on which this novel is based. Whereas, in the short story we get a sketchy view of the muslim girl, Eidun's life, in the novel the strongest part is the exploration of Eidun's childhood: her brutish father, the goat-herd, her suffering mother, and three sisters (ironically named after queens) living in a slum like hall of an abandoned palace in what was once the kingdom of Goud, present day Malda.

What was the start of the short story, in Delhi, is subsumed into the prologue, and the actual novel opens with the chapter called "The Witch" and a stunning first line, which, being a spoiler, I will not reveal. Brilliant in evocative detail, the story of Eidun's maternal grandmother, despite its tragic elements is told with tenderness and humour. Particularly

touching are the anthropomorphic images of the Tamarind tree and Zaitoon Bibi living in the hovel beneath it.

By the time the prologue ends, we surmise what the story is about: resolving the mystery of Suralakshmi abruptly abandoning her home and child, taking with her Eidun. However, the central story, like the pebble setting a ripple in a pond, becomes less important than the world of the characters spinning from it, across time and space, plumbing the motivations for and the emotional repercussions of the action of the



prime mover.

Except for Suralakshmi, the dedicated gynecologist and unconventional protagonist, deliberately left as an elusive presence, most characters reveal dimensions that give them complexity and humanity. Among the strong female characters are: dominating matriarchs like Lakshmi debi, the mother of Suralakshmi and wife of Rai Bahadur Indranath Choudhury; Suralakshmi's cousin Pratul's paternal grandmother, "Korta Ma"; the crafty

mothers-in-law of Eidun's sisters Jeeni and Ojju, both of whom enlist their daughters-in-law as co-helpers and unpaid maids; the modern day journalist Joymita, the free spirited daughter of Tara and Pratul; and Tara, along with Deepa, the two grounded characters, who are instrumental in providing the reader with a deeper understanding of both Suralakshmi and her son Kingshuk.

In the cast of characters listed at the start, there are some brief appearances, but no minor characters. Each leaves an impact. Some, though, are not mentioned. For example, the co-wife of the protagonist Suralakshmi, is given no name except by the Villa (an invisible character in itself, telling its own tale) as that of "the Lady with the suffering eyes," and by Kingshuk as "Boro Ma," yet, despite her passive presence, she becomes a catalyst to the strong willed Suralakshmi's climactic decision at the end.

Then, there is Nadira, the female Museum guide of the Hazarduari palace in Murshidabad, who introduces a legendary character from local history: Bibi Begum, the Hindu lady, Shyamangini, who married a muslim nawab, who built her a temple to practice her religion, even as her children were brought up as muslims. Another unmentioned but fascinating cameo appearance is "Bishu Pagli," a Hindu girl who unearthed the tomb of a local Muslim saint, becoming a devotee and guardian, and gaining a following of disciples from both Muslim and Hindu faiths. The boatman Ayub, while navigating the cruise boat, in which the party of city dwellers, Suralakshmi, her friend Tara and cousin Pratul voyage down the Ganges, tells them stories of the legends of the villages they pass, including the one about Bishu Pagli, whom the city ladies meet in the forest at the Akhra of the Pir.

These incidental encounters and characters are nuggets of gold in the narrative, giving it an edge over Aruna Chakravarti's other novel, her accomplished first, *The Inheritors*, which was shortlisted for the Commonwealth award in 2004. Reminiscent of it for its multi-generational perspective and breadth of historical topics, yet the recent novel is more encompassing, layered, and moving.

"How beautifully you tell stories!...You make the past come alive as though you were actually there!" This is said of Nadira in the novel, but true of the writer herself. She deploys a mesmerizing array of storytelling techniques: a time frame that keeps the pendulum of the story swinging between the recent and remote past; diverse voices and perspectives, from first person reminiscences revealed through letters, dreams and flashbacks, to omniscient voices, both human and inanimate, such as the villa spilling the ultimate secret in the epilogue; and a palimpsest of local history, folklore, rituals, music and culinary traditions, in short, all the mythic and mystic elements of shared culture, forming what Suralakshmi calls "genetic memory."

The novel has some important male characters, too, who counterpoint the women: Kingshuk, abandoned by his mother and hungry for affection, hiding his tormented heart behind a mild personality shows up the brittleness of Joymita and the insightful depth of his wife Deepa, who sees through his inner conflicts but supports him, often without his knowledge. Pratul, is impatient with his impulsive cousin Suralakshmi but, like his wife Tara, protects her and accepts the instant empathy between Suralakshmi and Eidun. Some of the moving passages are Pratul's childhood memories of his bedridden mother and the quiet, wounded dignity of his maternal grandmother.

The characters I found equally captivating were the non-human ones: the Villa itself, and the natural world of rural Bengal, so lyrically evoked here. I would re-read the book just to make the boat trip down the Ganges, relishing the flora and fauna, the food, and the local history.

In these dark times, this work of literary fiction, with its intimate yet epic breadth of vision, is a magic carpet to carry you away.

Neeman Sobhan is an Italy based writer, teaching English and Bengali at the University of Rome. Published works: Piazza Bangladesh (collection of short stories); Calligraphy of Wet Leaves (Poetry), An Abiding City: Ruminations from Rome (collection of columns).



Kraigg Brathwaite fends off a rising delivery. The West Indies negotiated England's pace attack with aplomb after a record six-for from skipper Jason Holder (Inset) had bundled the hosts out for 204 in the first innings of the first Test.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Barca, Bayern on collision course

AFP, Paris



Barcelona and Bayern Munich will meet in the quarterfinals of the UEFA Champions League should both sides make it through, Friday's draw for the final eight confirmed.

Both teams still need to complete their last-16 ties, with Bayern almost there having won 3-0 away to Chelsea in the first leg, while Barcelona are due to host Napoli after a 1-1 draw in Italy.

Meanwhile, if Manchester City can finish the job against Real Madrid, Pep Guardiola's team will go on to a quarter-final against either Juventus or Lyon. City won 2-1 in Madrid in the first leg in March, while Juventus must overturn a 1-0 deficit from the first leg of their last-16 tie against Lyon.

Postponed in March as the pandemic took over, all remaining last 16 second legs are due to be played on August 7 and 8.

The winners will advance to the Final Eight, which will be held as a unique straight knockout tournament in Lisbon due to the difficulties caused by the coronavirus.

The draw threw up the possibility of a Clásico semi-final, with Barcelona and

Madrid on collision course to meet in the last four should both make it that far.

The other side of the draw is clearer. First-time quarter-finalists RB Leipzig will meet Atletico Madrid. Atletico knocked out holders Liverpool in the last 16.

The winners of the Leipzig v Atletico quarter-final will face either Paris Saint-Germain or Atalanta in the last four.

The quarter-finals will be played between August 12 and 15 in the Portuguese capital, with matches shared between Benfica's Estadio da Luz and Sporting's Estadio Jose Alvalade.

The semi-finals are scheduled for August 18 and 19, with the final on August 23 at the Estadio da Luz.

All games are set to be played without spectators after UEFA confirmed on Thursday that "matches should take place behind closed doors until further notice" because of the uncertain health situation around Europe.

The situation in Lisbon itself is particularly concerning, with lockdown restrictions reimposed last week on 19 neighbourhoods across the northern periphery of the city as virus cases increase at a worrying rate.



Paul Pogba (L), Bruno Fernandes (R) and Mason Greenwood got their names on the scoresheet as Manchester United thrashed Aston Villa 3-0 on Thursday, becoming the first team in Premier League history to win four consecutive games by at least a three-goal margin and extending their unbeaten streak to 16.

PHOTO: REUTERS

With five-for in the bag, Holder eyes a hundred

AFP, Southampton



West Indies captain Jason Holder said "my Test is far from over" after he rocked England with a career-best six-wicket haul on the second day of the series opener at Southampton on Thursday.

Holder, the world's top-ranked all-rounder, took 6-42 as England were dismissed for 204 to surpass his previous Test-best of 6-59 against Bangladesh at Kingston two years ago.

It was the sixth time in his last 10 Tests that the towering paceman had taken five or more wickets in

an innings, with Thursday's return including the prize scalp of rival all-rounder and stand-in England captain Ben Stokes.

West Indies have not won a Test series in England since 1988 but they hold the Wisden Trophy after a 2-1 success in the Caribbean last year -- when Holder made an unbeaten double century in an opening win at his Barbados home ground.

"I have done a good job so far but my Test is far from over," Holder told reporters after bad light forced an early close with West Indies 57-1, a deficit of 147 runs.

"I have a massive contribution to make with the bat," the 28-year-old added.

Holder had been struggling with

an ankle injury in the lead-up to the series -- the first Test campaign since lockdown -- but still troubled England with his accuracy and late movement.

He also led from the front. West Indies had twice dropped Stokes, second in the Test all-rounder rankings, before Holder had him caught behind for 43, the top score of the innings, to end a stand of 67 with Jos Buttler (35).

"It was a big wicket to get," said Holder. "We put down two chances and he was looking to make us pay."

"His partnership with Jos was starting to blossom into something that could really hurt us."

"But I was getting just enough movement to keep him at bay, keep

him playing and eventually got the edge."

Holder added he had a particular reason for wanting to do well in England this time.

"I really wanted to get on the honours board at Lord's," Holder said.

"We were scheduled to play there but then due to COVID they shuffled it around," he added of a series where the bio-secure grounds of the Ageas Bowl and Old Trafford, the venue for the last two Tests, are being used instead.

"One of the things I have always strived to do is to score a hundred in England and get a five-wicket haul. I've ticked one box, now it's time to knuckle down and get a hundred."

Henry kneels for 8 mins 46 seconds

REUTERS

Montreal Impact manager Thierry Henry took a knee for eight minutes and 46 seconds at the start of their Major League Soccer game against New England on Thursday to show his support for the campaign against social injustice. He also wore a T-shirt with the slogan "Black Lives Matter".

"Well I sat for eight minutes and 46 seconds, I guess you guys know why. So that was just to pay tribute and show support to the cause, that was basically it and pretty simple," Henry said.

Impact lost 1-0 in Thursday's game, their opener in the "MLS is Back" tournament.



Montreal Impact manager Thierry Henry took a knee for eight minutes and 46 seconds at the start of their Major League Soccer game against New England on Thursday.

PHOTO: MLS

Only BAF, BSSF ready to hold training

SPORTS REPORTER

While the Bangladesh Cricket Board and Bangladesh Football Federation are making their own plans for the resumption of national training, most indoor sports disciplines are not yet in position to resume amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel on Thursday sat with higher-ups of seven federations and one association to judge the possibility of resuming activities, which have been halted since mid-March. Russel agreed to resume training in contactless sports, subject to health ministry clearance, after exchanging opinions with officials of archery, shooting, swimming, handball, volleyball, karate, taekwondo and the women's sports association.

So far, only the archery and shooting federations have shown eagerness to resume training as their athletes are due to take part in the Tokyo Olympics next year.

Bangladesh Archery Federation general secretary Kazi Razibuddin Ahmed Chapal said: "We are completely ready to resume the national camp within a week if the sports ministry gives us the go-ahead because we

have already prepared our training plan in light of recommendations from the WHO, World Archery and local health guidelines."

"Despite the pandemic, India started their training camp. South Korea and Thailand completed their national championships while China has also started training," said Chapal, adding that they wanted to start the camp with 12 to 16 archers at the Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master Stadium in Tongi.

Although Bangladesh Shooting Federation general secretary Intekhabul Hamid could not be reached, Chapal informed Hamid was positive at the meeting about the resumption of shooters' training.

Officials of the swimming, handball, volleyball and karate federations told this reporter that they were not ready to resume activities due to challenges in maintaining sanitary measures.

"There is no environment to resume because it is tough to maintain health measures. However, swimmers Arif Islam and Junayna Ahmed are training abroad," said Bangladesh Swimming Federation general secretary BM Saif, who was eager to resume national training on a small scale.

Bangladesh Handball Federation general secretary Asaduzzaman Kohinooor said: "208 countries play handball across the world and no country has resumed yet. Besides, parents will not allow children to take part in such a situation. So we want to wait but we have arranged different courses for coaches and judges maintaining social distance."

"Volleyball is a contact sport. At the moment, we are not in a position to start the game. Besides, we don't have any hurry with having no international meets. Construction work is still going on at our venue, so we will restart once the situation is normal," Bangladesh Volleyball Federation general secretary Ashikur Rahman Miku said.

"If we start training or tournaments at the moment, we can't control the spread of coronavirus because karatekas will come from across the country. But if the government provide us with facilities, then we think of resuming with a residential camp for the national team on a small scale," said Bangladesh Karate Federation vice-president Moazzem Hossain Sentu, adding that Taekwondo wanted to stage demonstrations, which had no contact.

Marega apologises for moment of madness

REUTERS

Porto striker Moussa Marega apologised for kicking the ball away and remonstrating with teammates after not being allowed to take a late penalty in the 3-1 win at Tondela on Thursday that took his side closer to claiming the Portuguese title.

"Sorry for my behaviour. Now we need one win to become champions," he said on social media after scoring in the victory which put his club within touching distance of the title.

Marega scored the second goal, setting the move up himself after winning possession in his own half and then sprinting onto the end of a searching midfield pass for an expert finish.

But he was angry near the end of the game after

being fouled to earn a penalty. When he got up to take the kick, instructions came from the Porto bench for Fabio Viera to take it instead.

Mali international Marega then picked up the ball and hoofed it away in a petulant display of anger. Porto coach Sergio Conceicao insisted afterwards that the issue had been quickly resolved.

"Marega is a great professional. He works a lot. One moment does not make him less of a good player," he said.

"Everything is resolved, there is no issue, there was a misunderstanding before the penalty was taken. I have already settled it with the squad in the dressing room," he added.

The victory, followed by a draw for second-placed Benfica at Famalicao later on Thursday, means Porto need one more point to guarantee winning the league given their head-to-head record.



Professional cricket may still be sometime away from a return in Bangladesh, but cricket as a means of leisurely recreation has already made it to the parks -- like this one at the Suhrawardy Udyan -- and alleys and terraces despite the scourge of Covid-19.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Fans to return in Germany in autumn?

REUTERS, Berlin

German football fans may be able to return to stadiums to cheer on their heroes in national team and Bundesliga matches soon, the German Football Association (DFB) and the German football league (DFL) said on Friday.

DFB Secretary General Friedrich Curtius said in a statement that he expects that the association will develop a concept that will allow the German national team to play in front of spectators at home games this autumn.



4-LANE DHAKA-BHANGA EXPRESS HIGHWAY BUILT WITH BSRM XTREME

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World's Largest VRM

SHAH CEMENT

No respite for flood-hit people

Country braces for second spell of flood as water level of all major rivers rising

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Water level in all major rivers started to rise again yesterday, only two days after the initial flood water began to recede.

As a result, nearly two million people from 15 flood-affected districts mostly in the northern and northeastern parts of the country will suffer for another 10 to 12 days, having just recovered from a 10-day flood, experts say.

The Surma, Kushiya and Jadukata rivers in Sylhet and Teesta and Dharla rivers in north Bengal are flowing above the danger level, according to the Flood Forecast and Warning Centre (FFWC).

Water level in the Brahmaputra and Jamuna would also increase in the next 24 hours, the centre informed, making a similar forecast about the Ganges.

Citing the mathematical model of Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) and Indian Meteorological Department, FFWC said Assam, Meghalaya, Bihar and Himachal Pradesh and adjoining areas of West Bengal may experience heavy rainfall in the next 72 hours.

This year an early spell of flood started on June 26 and lasted for 10 days.

The regular flooding started yesterday and would last at least for another 12 days, experts warned.

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A car struggles to get off a damaged portion of an inundated road in Sunamganj town's Nabinagar area yesterday. A part of the road caved in due to strong currents of water from the Surma river, which has started flowing above the danger level since Thursday afternoon. Some low-lying areas of the town are going under water, causing floods.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

'GUNFIGHT BETWEEN GANGS' Murder, rape accused killed in Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A notorious criminal, accused in at least seven cases including of murder and rape, was killed in a "gunfight" between two groups of drug peddlers in Cox's Bazar early yesterday, said police.

The dead is Syed Ahmed alias Guraputu, 28, of Isulughona area in the town, said Syed Shahjahan Kabir, officer-in-charge of Cox's Bazar Sadar Police Station.

On information of a "gunfight" between two groups of drug peddlers, police went to the Jhauban area near Motel Shaibal in the early morning, said the OC.

Sensing police presence, the criminal left the area and the law enforcers found a person in severe condition sustaining bullet injuries, the police official said.

Doctors at Cox's Bazar general Hospital declared

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FOREIGN STUDENTS California to sue Trump admin over visa policy

AFP, Los Angeles

California is suing US President Donald Trump's administration over its policy threatening the visas of foreign students whose courses move online due to coronavirus, officials said Thursday.

The lawsuit to be filed by the state's attorney general comes as Trump pushes for the country's education facilities to reopen even as virus infections continue to spike, particularly in the south and west.

"The Trump Administration's unlawful policy... threatens to exacerbate the spread of COVID-19 and exile hundreds of thousands of college students studying in the United States," said a statement announcing the suit.

On Monday, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) said foreign students enrolled in fully online programs for the fall semester would not be allowed to enter the country.

The measure was seen as a move by the White House to put pressure on educational institutions that are adopting a cautious approach to reopening amid the global COVID-19 pandemic.

But California State University -- a plaintiff in the suit -- is among those

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FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

Six months of remarkable success

July 11, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

BANGABANDHU'S FIRST SIX MONTHS IN OFFICE

During the six months in office, a very brief period considering the grisly antecedents, the present government under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has attained remarkable success in all fields. On the international plane, the government has secured recognition of over 77 countries including four permanent members of the UN Security Council, namely, Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the United States.

During the six months, Bangladesh has secured membership of a number of international bodies such as IMF, World Bank, UNCTAD, WHO and ILO.

At home, the government has introduced massive programme of nationalisation that includes banks and insurance companies, jute, sugar and textile industries, abandoned property, concerns having capital of more than Tk 15 lakh and major part of foreign trade.

The most spectacular achievement is that the government has been able to maintain a stable law and order situation following an unprecedented crisis caused by a devastating war.

The government has also successfully brought back around 1 crore refugees from India and rehabilitated them within the shortest possible time. Other government measures

which deserve special mention are fixation of the minimum wages at Tk150 per month and the maximum ceiling at Tk 2000 per month.

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2 arrested for raping minor girl

STAR REPORT

Two people were arrested on charges of raping a minor girl in Mymensingh yesterday.

In another incident, three people were held for holding a village arbitration over a rape incident, while a female quack was held for giving medicine to abort the girl's pregnancy in Noakhali on the same day.

In Mymensingh, police held two people, including an eighth grader, in connection with raping a class-V madrasa student and recording the incident on mobile phone in Bhaluka.

One of the arrestees is Atiqul Islam, 21, of Paragaon Gouripur village in Bhaluka.

On Thursday night, the victim's father lodged a case against the two with Bhaluka Police Station.

Quoting the case statement, Bhaluka Police

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Scientists find 'stream' of stars in our galaxy



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have found a whole stream of stars in the Milky Way - which appear to have come from somewhere else.

The discovery of the cluster of stars, known as "Nyx", could be an indication that a dwarf galaxy merged with the Milky Way, leaving behind evidence in the form of the newly discovered stars.

Researchers found the cluster as they were looking at the movements of stars and dark matter through our galaxy, in the hope of understanding where they came from and where they are going.

As they did so, researchers were looking for clusters that were moving together as they sailed

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

AMAZON FOREST Deforestation increases by 25pc in Brazil

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon increased by a record 25 percent year-on-year in the first half of 2020, according to official data released yesterday.

Some 3,069 square kilometers (1,184 square miles) were affected by deforestation, the highest figure since data has been collected beginning in 2015, the country's National Institute for Space Research (INPE) said.

June, which marks the start of the dry season and fires, also hit a record with 1,034 square kilometers of deforestation, an increase of nearly 11 percent.

Brazil has been criticized by a number of countries and environmental groups over large-scale deforestation and fires that ravage the world's largest rainforest during the dry season.

Vice President Hamilton

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

'Member' of militant outfit held in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) claimed to have arrested an active member of banned militant outfit Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Dumuria area of Khulna early yesterday.

The arrestee is Humayun Kabir, 23, according to a statement of ATU.

Based on information, an ATU team conducted drive in Vandarpara area of Dumuria around 3:00am and arrested Humayun, reads the statement.

ATU team also recovered five Jihadi books, NID card, a cell phone and two SIM cards from his possession.

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PRAYER TIMING JULY 11

Fajr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4-10 12-45 5-00 6-55 8-17
JAMAAT 5-45 1-15 5-15 7-00 8-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



Salesmen sit idle at a shop at Benarasi Palli in the capital's Mirpur as there is no buyer turning up. Shop owners said sales of sarees have almost dried up since they opened their outlets ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr in May after the Covid-19 lockdown. They blamed poor sales mainly on cancellation of wedding ceremonies and people's fear of going out amid the pandemic. The photo was taken on Tuesday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

COVID-19 TRANSMISSION WHO releases new guidelines

Stops short of confirming the virus spreads through air, calls for more evidence

AGENCIES

The World Health Organization has released new guidelines on the transmission of the novel coronavirus that acknowledge some reports of airborne transmission of the virus that causes Covid-19, but stopped short of confirming that the virus spreads through the air.

In its latest transmission guidance, the WHO on Thursday acknowledged that some outbreak reports related to indoor crowded spaces have suggested the possibility of aerosol transmission, such as during choir practice, in restaurants or in fitness classes.

But the WHO said more research is "urgently needed to investigate such instances and assess their significance for transmission of Covid-19."

The report follows an open letter from scientists who specialise in the spread of disease in the air - so-called aerobiologists - that urged the global body to update its guidance on how the respiratory disease spreads to include aerosol transmission.

Based on its review of the evidence, the WHO said the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 spreads through contact with contaminated surfaces or close contact with infected people who spread the virus through saliva, respiratory secretions or droplets released when an infected person coughs, sneezes, speaks or sings.

The new guidelines do, however, suggest people should

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