



'UNACCEPTABLE MISTAKES'
Myanmar army chief, government clash ahead of November 8 election
SEE PAGE 6

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ELECTORAL VOTE (270 TO WIN)		POPULAR VOTE	USA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2020	SENATE CONTROL (50)	HOUSE CONTROL (228)
213	237	66,672,225	48	171	
		68,894,617	46	181	



Too close to call

Premature victory declaration by Trump, looming legal battles push America to edge; Biden leads in key states; mail-in ballot count delays results

Democratic hopes to flip US Senate dim

AFP, Washington

Despite retaining the House of Representatives, the path for Democrats to flip control of the US Senate narrowed sharply yesterday after three key Republicans facing tough reelection battles claimed victory.

Democrats flipped two US Senate seats in western Colorado and Arizona states on Tuesday, networks projected.

But the blue wave that many Democrats predicted may have crested there,

BATTLEGROUND STATES

- PENNSYLVANIA** (20 electoral votes)
TRUMP 53.2% BIDEN 45.5%
Difference 448,129 with 81% votes in
- MICHIGAN** (16 electoral votes)
BIDEN 49.5% TRUMP 48.8%
Difference 37,350 with 94% votes in
- ARIZONA** (11 electoral votes)
BIDEN 51.0% TRUMP 47.6%
Difference 93,518 with 86% votes in
- GEORGIA** (16 electoral votes)
TRUMP 50.2% BIDEN 48.5%
Difference 89,509 with 93% votes in
- NEVADA** (6 electoral votes)
BIDEN 49.3% TRUMP 48.7%
Difference 7,647 with 86% votes in
- NORTH CAROLINA** (15 electoral votes)
TRUMP 50.1% BIDEN 48.6%
Difference 76,737 with 95% votes in

SOURCE: CNN

AGENCIES

The excruciatingly close US presidential election hung in the balance yesterday, with Democrat Joe Biden leading in two critical Midwestern states that could tip the contest in his favor even as President Donald Trump falsely claimed victory and made unsubstantiated allegations of electoral fraud.

In boost to Biden's presidential bid, CNN yesterday projected the former vice president to win Wisconsin. Biden also extended his narrow lead in Michigan, according to Edison Research. Trump won both the battleground states in 2016.

Together with Nevada, another state where Biden held a small advantage with votes still left to be tallied, those states would deliver Biden the 270 votes needed in the state-by-state electoral college to win the White House. But Trump still had a path to victory with those states officially undecided.

In dueling conference calls with reporters, officials from each campaign insisted their candidate would prevail.

"If we count all legal ballots, we win," Trump campaign manager Bill Stepien said, potentially setting the stage for post-election litigation over the counting of mail-in ballots.

Biden campaign manager Jennifer O'Malley Dillon told reporters the former vice president was on track to win the election, while senior legal adviser Bob Bauer said there were no grounds for Trump to invalidate lawfully cast ballots.

"We're going to defend this vote, the vote by which Joe Biden has been elected to the presidency," said Bauer, adding that the campaign's legal team was prepared for any challenge.

Biden is expected to deliver an address today.

Trump continued to make baseless attacks on the vote-counting process on Twitter yesterday, hours after he appeared at the White House and declared victory in

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Ballots are counted at the TCF Center in Detroit, Michigan yesterday. Mail-in ballots were causing a long wait for results in key battlegrounds states.

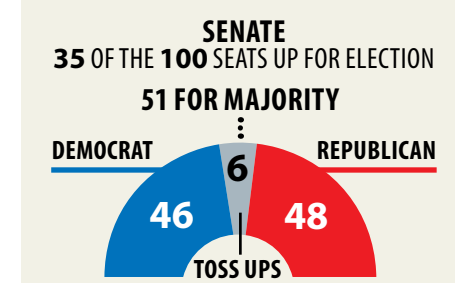
PHOTO: AFP

"Frankly, we did win this election. This is a major fraud on our nation... We'll be going to the US Supreme Court. We want all voting to stop."

DONALD TRUMP

"We believe we're on track to win this election. Keep the faith, guys, we're going to win this."

JOE BIDEN



potentially falling short of the three to four seat gains they needed to take control of Congress's upper chamber.

Republicans ousted a vulnerable Democrat in Alabama, and the GOP stood their ground in other key races, often defying polls that warned how President Donald Trump could be a drag on GOP incumbents defending vulnerable Senate seats.

Senator Lindsey Graham -- under intense pressure after overseeing the controversial confirmation process of a Supreme Court justice weeks before the presidential vote -- fought back a fierce challenge from

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Ensure hassle-free justice for people

PM to judges, lawyers

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged judges and lawyers to ensure people's right to quick and hassle-free justice.



"Getting justice quickly, less expensively and hassle-free is the right of the people. This can boost people's confidence and trust. Although we have our confidence and trust in the judiciary, I would request all to pay special attention to the matter," she said.

The PM was addressing a programme marking the inauguration of the newly-built Chief Judicial Magistrate Court Building in Dhaka. She joined the event virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

Hasina said some 3,794,908 cases were pending trial in courts till June this year. She requested the judges and lawyers to find a way to ensure delivery of verdicts in cases quickly.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 6

Migrants' crisis mishandled

Govt initiatives lacked proper planning and coordination after workers returning from abroad got stuck home during pandemic

JAMIL MAHMUD and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The migrant workers' crisis, which emerged after the outbreak of novel coronavirus, further deepened with the government response marred by inappropriate decisions coupled with delayed and inadequate actions.

Thousands of migrant workers, mostly from Gulf countries, came home on holidays early this year and subsequently got stuck amid the pandemic.

The authorities concerned did not chalk out adequate plans to ensure that the workers return to the workplaces smoothly once normalcy returns.

As a result, a huge number of the workers with expired re-entry visas and residence permits endured untold sufferings when Saudi Arabia, the biggest labour market for Bangladesh, stopped automatic visa extension but resumed air communications.

They had to take to streets for plane tickets and extension of the tenure of visa and iqama (residency permit), forcing the authorities concerned to hold meetings to resolve the problems.

On the other hand, the government initiative, taken in April to provide special loan facilities to returning migrants who lost jobs abroad amid the pandemic, got delayed due to bureaucratic tangles at the expatriate welfare ministry.

Labour migration experts say the government lacked farsightedness in the absence of coordinated efforts between ministries and agencies.

The expatriates' welfare ministry could have played a pivotal role, they said and warned that migrant workers' crisis may deepen further if comprehensive steps are not taken, as more workers are expected to return to the country in coming months.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

COVID VACCINES Govt set to import '3cr' doses from Indian firm

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will import "three crore" doses of novel coronavirus vaccines from India's Serum Institute, a top health ministry official told The Daily Star last night.

Each dose of the vaccine will cost \$5, the official added.

Earlier in the evening, the ministry's Public Relations Officer Maudul Islam said a ceremony on the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in this regard would be held at the ministry at noon today.

He, however, didn't disclose details of the MoU. Health Services Division Secretary Md Abdul Mannan said details of the deal would be shared with the media after the signing ceremony.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Dropped calls irk phone users

Carriers say drop rate within BTRC threshold

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Frequent call drops and disruptions have been a bane for a large chunk of the country's more than 16 crore mobile subscribers in the first eight months of the year.

There were 112.95 crore call drops between January and August, according to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

That translates to an average of about 47 lakh call drops per day. Other than call drops, weak reception causes disruptions in conversations, causing many subscribers to end the call and start a new one.

This has been especially problematic during the Covid-19 pandemic, when smooth mobile connections are imperative as many continue to work from home.

Dhaka city resident Adnan Faisal -- an Airtel subscriber -- has been facing excessive call drops.

"There were two call drops today while I was in my office in Agargaon. It's become unbearable," Adnan told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

He also said two out of 10 calls drop when he uses his phone in his Mohammadpur residence.

"Sometimes, when I am on a call with my bosses, it gets disconnected. It's really embarrassing," he added.

The 5 crore subscribers of Robi Axiata, which operates under Robi and Airtel brands and has over 5 crore customers, are the worst sufferers as

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Seventy-year-old Nannu Mia carries a sack of grass that he has cut from the Bangabandhu National Stadium in the capital, where months of inactivity due to the pandemic resulted in the overgrown weed in the field. Nannu had to work doggedly for several hours in the scorching heat yesterday to get the grass that he sells for about Tk 100. He has no family member to help him out at his vulnerable age.

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I have inherited many of this city's problems: Taposh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh yesterday said he inherited many of the city's problems after taking charge as mayor.

The mayor made the comment while visiting the construction site of a modern slaughter house at Kaptan Bazar.

He said DSCC is gradually taking steps against those issues.

Taposh said although car-parking area at every market is mandatory, many markets constructed shops at the areas instead.

He further said that they have already taken steps to evict shops at a market, and they plan to take similar measures at all markets under DSCC.

He said they will recover the old Buriganga channel as per instruction of the PM, and have already appointed Military Institute of Science and Technology as consultant. "MIST has submitted a primary report, and DSCC is working on it," he said.

"We'll reclaim old Buriganga channel and create an aesthetic atmosphere, with the channel being garbage-free. City dwellers will be able to enjoy an open, beautiful place there," Taposh said.

During the visit, the mayor showed his resentment towards slow construction work of the slaughterhouse.



BEAUTIFICATION? A number of iron structures were built on the footpaths to spruce up the capital's Gulistan area. However, unidentified miscreants have broken off and stolen a number of them, while a few lie on the streets in a dangerous manner, with rods sticking out in a way that can hurt pedestrians and damage vehicles anytime. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Sleepwalking into crime

Youth claims at court after being caught red-handed trying to break into ATM

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

He was caught red-handed while trying to dismantle an ATM (Automatic Teller Machine) from a booth of a private bank, and handed to police.

But when police produced Alif Sakin Habib (20) in front of a judge, he claimed that he does not remember the incident at all.

Habib said that in the midnight of October 31, he took several sedatives, as he had sleep issues, and later got out on a ride with his motorcycle from his Matuail residence.

"I can't remember anything else," police quoted him as saying in court.

However, it was not hard for law enforcers to prove his misdeed, by showing CCTV footage at the court and other evidence like a recovered shovel, two knives, two screwdrivers, and a backpack.

Jahidul Islam Shohag, assistant commissioner of Motijheel zone of Dhaka Metropolitan Police shared the incident with this correspondent yesterday. The Daily Star has also obtained a copy of court documents recording the accused's statement.

Around 5:30am on October 31, Habib entered a Brac Bank ATM booth in the capital's Motijheel, wearing helmet and mask, said police sources.

Habib asked security guard Jashim Uddin for help by saying he is trying to withdraw money using a "foreign card" but was not getting it. When the guard came to help him, he held the guard at knifepoint and tied him up.

Habib stabbed Jashim's neck, snatched his cell phone, and locked him in the server room of the ATM booth by taking away the key.

"He then unscrewed the ATM with screwdriver and shovels, and ripped all connected wires, and pulled out both CCTV cameras," said police.

The security guard shouted for help and people of the area nabbed Habib red-handed.

Shah Abdul Aziz, sub-inspector of Motijheel Police station, said that youth is unemployed. "We are looking into his background, as a youth was also seen on CCTV trying to rob an ATM booth of another bank in the dead of night on October 28," he said.

BLOGGER OYASIQUR MURDER Charges reframed against 5 militants

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday reframed charges against five members of banned militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) in a case filed over the murder of blogger Oyasiqur Rahman Babu in 2015.

Judge Md Rabiul Alam of Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka read out a new charge -- conspiracy to kill blogger Oyasiqur before murder -- against the ABT men in the case.

Earlier, a Dhaka court framed two charges against the five on July 20, 2016.

Three accused -- Zikrullah alias Hasan, Ariful Islam alias Mushfiq and Md Saiful Islam -- are now in jail. Two others -- Akram Hossain Hasib alias Abdullah and Junayed alias Taher -- are on the run.

The court set November 12 for next hearing of the case.

On October 27, the same court withdrew its decision to pronounce judgment of the case against the five accused.

The judge passed the order after assistant Public Prosecutor Md Salahuddin Howlader submitted two petitions -- one for withdrawal of the judgment and the other for reframing charges against the accused in the case.

'Help them survive winter, Covid'

Civil society organisations urge Bosnian govt to send aid to stranded Bangladeshi migrants in peril

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants yesterday expressed grave concern about the wretched conditions of several hundred Bangladeshis currently stranded in different locations near the Croatia-Bosnia border.

In a statement, BCSM, a platform of leading civil society organisations in Bangladesh working on migration, urged the Bosnian government to provide food, shelter, and emergency medical services to protect these people from the coronavirus pandemic and cold winter.

It also urged Bangladesh government and international organisations including Red Cross, International Labour Organisation, and International Organisation for Migration to immediately intervene to protect them, reads the statement.

German broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW) recently reported on the plight of the Bangladeshis, estimated over 500, living in forests and rundown buildings for several months.

These stranded Bangladeshis were lured by "human traffickers" from Bangladesh with networks in the Middle East and Europe, BCSM said citing the DW report. Each of them reportedly paid \$10,000 to \$14,000 to reach a rich European country.

They made several attempts to enter Croatia but were detained by security forces and pushed back to Bosnia.

Croatian border guards reportedly beat the Bangladeshis and snatched away their belongings including money, phones and winter clothes.

"To the best of our knowledge, the Bangladesh government has not yet made any major initiative to redress

their sufferings," said the statement.

BCSM feared with the onset of winter, if no immediate action is taken to rescue them from the forests where they are living under open sky and in tents, some may not survive.

BCSM urged the Bosnian government to provide humanitarian support to this group of people.

It also appealed to Bangladesh government to rescue them and ensure that effective measures are taken to curb all forms of irregular migration including human trafficking and human smuggling from the country.

BCSM also urged European countries to make provisions for regular migration.

The statement signatories include RMMRU, BASUG-Diaspora and Development, WARBE Development Foundation, Brac, Ain o Salish Kendra, and Manusher Jonno Foundation.

350 Kalyanpur fire victims left roofless

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 350 people who used to live in Kalyanpur's Notun Bazar slum, which was burned down in a devastating fire on October 30, are now spending their days under the open sky.

While visiting the place, this correspondent found some people sleeping where their homes used to stand, some sitting under trees with their families, and some others roaming around their former homes.

Hadis Bepari (75), a resident of the slum for the last 27 years, said he and his family have been living on the streets for the last four days.

"We did get relief materials and Tk 2,000 cash from the local MP, but we cannot rebuild our house with this," a grief-stricken Hadis said. He urged the government to arrange a small loan facility for the affected. According to him, at least Tk 30,000 is needed to build a house.

"Back in the days, we used to get loans from NGOs and local multi-purpose co-operatives in case any accident took place in the slum. But this time, due to the Covid-19 situation, we aren't getting any of that," he said.

Most of the slum-dwellers echoed these sentiments and urged influential people to come forward and stand by them.

Justice served after 10 years

Man sentenced to life term for rape and forced abortion of teen

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A woman yesterday finally got justice, 10 long years after her rape and enforced abortion.

A Rangpur court sentenced the lone accused man to life-term imprisonment for rape and jailed him 10 more years and fined Tk 1 lakh for forced abortion, court sources said.

Judge Rokonuzzaman of Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-2 delivered the judgement in a crowded courtroom in absence of convict Mosfekur Rahman (34), said Jahangir Alam, public prosecutor of the court. The victim was a tenth grader during the incident.

According to prosecution, Mosfekur Rahman, a neighbour of the victim, raped girl several times "with promise to marry". She was last raped on February 5, 2010.

When she became pregnant, she asked him to marry her, but he refused. Moreover, he forced her to abort the baby, said police.

Afterwards, elder brother of the girl filed the case with Badarganj Police Station accusing Mosfekur Rahman on May 22, 2010.

JOURNALIST GOLAM SARWAR ABDUCTION

Case filed against six unidentified persons

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cig

Journalist Golam Sarwar, who was abducted on October 29 and discovered four days later, yesterday filed a case with the port city's Kotwali Police Station accusing six unidentified people.

Sarwar was accompanied by some senior leaders of Chattogram Union of Journalists (CUJ) when he went to the station to file the case.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mohamed Mohsin of Kotwali Police Station confirmed the filing, saying that police are still investigating the incident and trying to arrest the criminals.

Before filing the case, Sarwar talked to media at the office of CUJ and described his experience of the abduction and torture.

He said he still feels frightened every time he remembers the traumatic incident.

He thanked his colleagues and journalist union leaders for coming to his support.

"I demand the immediate arrest of the criminals so that no one dares to repeat such an incident with other journalists," Sarwar told journalists there.

Mohammed Ali, President of CUJ, said "We (CUJ) have formed a lawyer's panel to fight the legal battle against the abductors."

"We will provide all kinds of support to Golam Sarwar so that he can move the case without any difficulties," said Mohammed Ali.

After going missing from the port city on October 29, the journalist working with a local online news portal was found unconscious beside a canal at Sitakunda's Kumira area on the evening of November 1.

He was found lying at the spot stripped off his clothes.



Yesterday was the last day of the 22-day hilsa netting ban in the Bay of Bengal that started on October 14. In preparation for setting out on sea again, fishers at Barishal's Rosulpur area were spotted getting their nets ready.

PHOTO: TITU DAS



The towering pillars of Moghbazar-Tejgaon flyover are covered with posters to advertise all sorts of stuff, from films and rentals to educational institutes and medical clinics. And as days go by, these pieces of paper degrade or get torn off, but what stays is the unappealing sight for residents and passers-by to witness.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

COUNTERFEIT NOTES CASE

Rab presses charges against Shahed, Regent MD

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) has pressed charges against Regent Group Chairperson Mohammad Shahed and Managing Director Masud Parvez, in a case filed over possessing fake notes worth Tk 1.14 lakh.

Mohammad Zakir Hossain, a sub-inspector of Rab-1 and investigation officer of the case, on Tuesday submitted the charge sheet to Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka, showing 13 people as prosecution witnesses.

The charge sheet will be placed before the court on November 22 for its next course of action.

According to prosecution, on July 15, a Rab-1 team raided a house at the capital's Uttara around 8:40pm and seized fake notes worth Tk 1,14,500 from the accused's possession. Later, Rab filed a case against them with Uttara Paschim Police Station under Special Powers Act.

On September 28, Shahed was sentenced to life imprisonment in an arms case.

Shahed was arrested on July 15 from Satkhira, when he was trying to leave the country on a boat, while Masud was arrested from Gazipur on July 14.

Tk 80 LAKH GRAFT CASE

Court frames charges against ex-DIG prisons Partha Gopal Banik

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against Partha Gopal Banik, a suspended deputy inspector general (prisons) of Sylhet division, in a case filed over the recovery of Tk 80 lakh from his residence in Dhaka.

Partha, now in jail, pleaded not guilty and demanded justice after Md Nazrul Islam of Special Judge's Court-10 of Dhaka read out charges to him.

The court also set November 18 for starting trial of the case.

On August 24 this year, Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Deputy Director Md Salauddin, also investigation officer, submitted the charge sheet to the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court.

Fourteen people were made prosecution witnesses in the charge sheet.

In the charge sheet, the IO said the charges of "illegally acquiring wealth through money laundering" brought against Partha were primarily proven, so he should be brought under trial.

On July 29 last year, ACC Director Mohammad Yousuf quizzed Partha over allegations that he committed irregularities and corruption as DIG (prisons) of Chattogram division. The interrogation continued at the ACC headquarters for about four hours.

After interrogation, the ACC team, accompanied by Partha, went to his Green Road residence in the capital and recovered the money.

They later detained him and showed him arrested after the case was filed against him on the same day.

The following day, Partha was sent to jail after he was produced before a Dhaka court.



(From left) A supporter of the Democratic party react as they attend a watch party in Miami, Florida; and Republican supporters celebrate as they watch Ohio being called for Donald Trump at a Republican watch party in Michigan. Both photos were taken on US election day.



PHOTO: AFP

US formally exits Paris climate pact

REUTERS, Washington

The United States formally exited the Paris Agreement yesterday, fulfilling an old promise by President Donald Trump to withdraw the world's second-largest greenhouse gas emitter from the global pact to fight climate change.

But the outcome of the tight US election contest will determine for how long. Trump's Democratic rival, Joe Biden, has promised to rejoin the agreement if elected.

"The US withdrawal will leave a gap in our regime and the global efforts to achieve the goals and ambitions of the Paris Agreement," said Patricia Espinosa, executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The United States still remains a party to the UNFCCC. Espinosa said the body will be "ready to assist the US in any effort in order to rejoin the Paris Agreement."

Trump first announced his intention to withdraw the United States from the pact in June 2017, arguing it would undermine the US economy. The administration formally served notice of the withdrawal to the United Nations on Nov 4, 2019, which took one year to take effect.

The departure makes the United States the only country of 197 signatories to have withdrawn from the agreement, hashed out in 2015.

Current and former climate diplomats said the task of curbing global warming to safe levels would be tougher without the financial and diplomatic might of the United States.

European and US investors with a collective \$30 trillion in assets on Wednesday urged the country to quickly rejoin the Paris Agreement, and warned that the country risked falling behind in the global race to build a low-carbon economy.

World holds its breath

As US polls result delayed, world leaders decide not to draw line too soon

REUTERS, London/Lagos/Sarajevo

A day after Americans voted in a bitterly contested election, the rest of the world was none the wiser yesterday, with millions of votes still to count, the race too close to call and a mounting risk of days or even weeks of legal uncertainty.

Donald Trump's pre-emptive declaration of victory at the White House was condemned by some US political commentators and civil rights groups, who warned about the trampling of long-standing democratic norms.

Most world leaders and foreign ministers sat on their hands, trying not to add any fuel to the electoral fire.

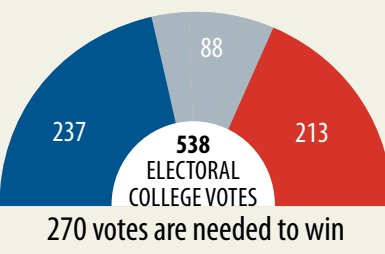
"Let's wait and see what the outcome is," said British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab. "There's obviously a significant amount of uncertainty. It's much closer than I think many had expected."

But while Raab and others urged caution, the Slovenian prime minister broke ranks, congratulating Trump and the Republican party via Twitter.

"It's pretty clear that American people have elected @realDonaldTrump and @Mike_Pence for #4moreyears," wrote Janez Jansa, one of several east European leaders, including Hungary's Viktor Orban, who are fervent Trump allies.

The latest vote tally showed Democrat

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION



challenger Joe Biden with a lead in the Electoral College - 224 votes to 213, with 270 needed for victory - but with counting still be completed in at least five major 'battleground' states: Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, North Carolina and Georgia.

On Twitter, the hashtags #Trump, #Biden and #USElections2020 were trending from Russia to Pakistan, Malaysia to Kenya and across Europe and Latin America, underscoring how much every region of the world sees the outcome as pivotal.

In Russia, which US intelligence agencies have accused of trying to interfere in the election, there was no official reaction.

In Australia, crowds watched the results roll in while drinking beer in an American bar in Sydney. Some supported Trump,

while others were quick to underline the ramifications of the US vote worldwide.

"I think it affects us all, what happens over there really matters for the next four years over here," said Sydney resident Luke Heinrich.

China said the election was a domestic affair and it had "no position on it".

Chinese social media users, however, were quick to mock the failure of the US electoral system to deliver a quick and clear result. "Whether he wins or loses, his final mission is to destroy the appearance of American democracy," one user on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform wrote on Wednesday. "Let Trump be re-elected and take the US downhill," another wrote.

In Nigeria, one leading politician, Senator Shehu Sani, said the uncertainty in the United States was reminiscent of Africa.

"Africa used to learn American democracy, America is now learning African democracy," he tweeted to his 1.6 million followers.

In Iran, President Hassan Rouhani said the result of the US election was not important for the country's clerical rulers, but that the next president in Washington should respect international treaties and laws.

"For Tehran, the next US administration's policies are important and not who wins the US election," Rouhani said.

US ELECTION 2020

WHAT WE KNOW

The scenario many had feared has come true: November 3 has come and gone and we don't know whether Trump or Joe Biden has won the White House. Here's the current state of play and a preview of what to expect.

WHAT RESULTS REMAIN?

As it stands, Biden has won 227 electoral votes and Trump a maximum of 213, based on the states they've so far won. The Democrat was boosted by the addition of Arizona in the early hours of yesterday morning -- as the two men try to eke their way to the magic number of 270 out of a total of 538. We are still not counting Arizona in as vote counting is going on there. That leaves the battlegrounds Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania up in the air -- as well as the easier to predict states of Alaska (Republican) and Nevada (Democratic).

WHEN WILL WE FIND OUT?

Officials in many of the states have indicated how long it will take to count the ballots, with the situation complicated this year by the Covid-19 pandemic that has led to record mail-in voting. Georgia, Michigan and Wisconsin, have all indicated a final picture could emerge later yesterday. Pennsylvania has said it could take up to November 6, while in North Carolina mail ballots postmarked election day are accepted until November 12.

WHAT CAN HAPPEN NEXT?

While Biden has voiced confidence in his chances, President Trump has gone a step further, already claiming victory and saying he'll go to the Supreme Court to get his way. The Republican said in a White House speech that "we want all voting to stop," apparently meaning that he wants to stop the counting of mail-in ballots which can be legally accepted by state election boards after Tuesday's election.

Democrats are widely thought to have cast more mail-in ballots than Trump's supporters and Republicans have already signaled they'll pursue an aggressive strategy in Pennsylvania to have the votes that arrived after the election thrown out. The state's Democratic governor shot back, tweeting that there were a million votes left to count. The state's top court ordered a three-day extension which the US Supreme Court refused to block, but said it could revisit the issue after the election -- and the ascension of new conservative judge Amy Coney Barrett could prove decisive in that decision.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Facebook and Twitter flagged some of Trump's posts on the US election as votes were still being counted, in a real-time test of their rules on handling misinformation and premature claims of victory.

Fox News faced criticism from Trump's campaign and its allies on Tuesday for projecting that Arizona's 11 electoral votes would go to Biden, as other news networks sought more evidence before making a call.

SOURCE: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF



Top Indian news anchor Arnab Goswami arrested

One of India's top TV news anchors, Arnab Goswami, was arrested by police in Mumbai yesterday for alleged abetment of suicide in a case registered in 2018, his channel said in a statement. According to local media, the case related to the suicide of an interior designer who said he was owed money by Goswami's Republic TV. Republic showed footage of more than a dozen police officers entering Goswami's house and taking him away in a van. Republic, in the statement, said Goswami and his son were physically assaulted by the police and access to his legal team was denied. Goswami, known for chairing chaotic prime-time debates and widely seen as supportive of the BJP, has been in a tussle with the police in opposition-ruled Maharashtra this year.

US approves sale of armed MQ-9 Reaper drones to Taiwan

The United States has agreed to sell four armed MQ-9 Reaper drones to Taiwan, the State Department announced Tuesday, helping to boost the island's defenses as China steps up its threats. The \$600 million sale aids Taiwan's "continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and to maintain a credible defensive capability," the State Department said. It will also assist in maintaining political stability and the military balance in the region, the department said in a statement. The sale covers four drones, ground stations, and associated surveillance and communications equipment, but not the bombs or missiles usually associated with it. The drones deal comes on the heel of several other major arms packages to Taiwan announced in recent weeks worth \$4.2 billion, including potent Harpoon anti-ship missiles, air-launched SLAM-ER cruise missiles, air reconnaissance technology and mobile light rocket launchers.

US postal service fails to complete sweep for ballots

The US Postal Service told a judge it could not complete his order to sweep mail processing facilities on Tuesday afternoon for delayed election ballots and immediately dispatch any for delivery in about a dozen states, including closely fought battlegrounds Pennsylvania and Florida. USPS data showed as of Sunday about 300,000 ballots that were received for mail processing did not have scans confirming their delivery to election authorities. While ballots may be delivered without scans, voting rights groups fear mail delays could cause at least some of those votes to be disqualified. US District Judge Emmet Sullivan on Tuesday had ordered the sweep in response to lawsuits by groups and Latino community advocates.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Bettors stampede back in favour of Joe Biden

REUTERS, London

Democratic candidate Joe Biden was back as clear favorite to win the US presidential election in online betting markets yesterday, a reversal of fortune for President Donald Trump who had been favored overnight.

The shift, according to data from three odds aggregators, came after Biden overtook Trump in the battleground state of Wisconsin, with an estimated 89% of the vote tallied there.

British-based Smarkets exchange was giving Biden a 78% chance, while New Zealand-based predictions market PredictIt had Biden at nearly 80%. Trump's chances on Smarkets were sitting at 21% - a massive drop from nearly 80% overnight.

"Taking the lead in Wisconsin could be the turning point with the Democrat now also projected to win Nevada and Arizona, which would likely give him the 270 electoral college votes he needs for victory," Betfair spokesperson Sam Rosbottom said. Bettors on Betfair were giving Biden a 66% chance to win by breakfast time on the East Coast.

Trump earlier falsely claimed victory over Biden with millions of votes still uncounted. Biden, meanwhile, was pinning his hopes on the so-called "blue wall" states of Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania that sent Trump to the White House in 2016, although they could take hours or days to finish counting.

The 2020 election is shaping up to be the biggest betting event of all time, betting companies say, with one player on Monday placing a record-breaking bet of one million British pounds (\$1.3 million) on a victory for Biden. Betfair Exchange said a record 425 million pounds has been bet on the outcome of the winner so far -- more than double that of 2016. It accepts bets right up until the result is announced.

Biden had been favored before election day, but his chances according to oddsmakers plunged to less than one-in-three overnight, after Trump pushed ahead in the swing state of Florida.

Trump gains with Latinos, loses some white voters: exit polls

REUTERS

As the US presidential race remained undecided, President Donald Trump showed some surprising gains with Latino and other nonwhite voters, but they may have been offset by losses among those who supported him four years ago, according to exit polls conducted by Edison Research.

Trump won both Florida and Texas over Democratic opponent Joe Biden in part because of newfound support from Latino voters.

In Florida, according to exit polls, Trump and Biden split the Latino vote. In 2016, Trump only won four out of 10 Latino voters in his race against Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. Overall, he was winning three of 10 nonwhite voters versus winning just two of 10 four years ago. Trump maintained his advantage among white voters in Florida. According to Edison Research exit polls, six in 10 white voters said they cast ballots for Trump, unchanged from 2016.

The Trump campaign made winning over Cuban-American voters in populous South Florida a top priority by emphasizing the administration's

hardline policy toward Cuba and Venezuela, and branding Biden and Democrats "socialists" in the manner of those countries' regimes.

In Texas, four in 10 Hispanics voted for Trump, up from three in 10 in 2016, according to exit polls in that state. Edison's national exit poll showed



that while Biden led Trump among nonwhite voters, Trump had received a slightly higher proportion of the nonwhite vote than he did in 2016.

The poll showed that about 11% of African Americans, 31% of Hispanics and 30% of Asian Americans voted for Trump, up 3 percentage points from 2016 among all three groups.

The Republican president appears to have lost some support among white men and some older voters in



A Trump supporter (L) clashes with a demonstrator at Black Lives Matter plaza across from the White House on election day in Washington, DC. Despite fears of violence, a handful of incidents stood out on an otherwise mostly tranquil election day as Republican President Donald Trump battled for a second term against Democratic challenger Joe Biden.

PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar govt, army chief clash ahead of Nov 8 polls

REUTERS, Yangon

The Myanmar President Office yesterday hit back at the army chief for criticising the government's handling of an upcoming general election, warning that his remarks risked creating fear and unrest, just days away from the vote.

Military commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing in a rare interview on Tuesday said the government was making "unacceptable mistakes" in the run-up to Sunday's pivotal ballot, which would be Myanmar's second democratic vote since the end of nearly five decades of army rule.

It was his second warning in as many days about potential bias in the election, remarks that President Office spokesman Zaw Htay said were based on "uncertain words" of others.

"It is not helpful to having a free and fair election but will encourage unrest and concerns," Zaw Htay told a news conference.

Min Aung Hlaing had told the Popular News Journal that the military, as the "guardian" of the country, was watching election preparations closely. He said opposition parties had complained about irregularities, including voter lists that were incomplete and riddled with errors.

He made similar comments on Monday in a military statement that accused the election commission of "widespread violation of the laws and procedures of the pre-voting process".

The election commission could not be reached for comment.

The commission is controlled by the government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, which has been at odds with the military on numerous issues in recent months, including reform of the constitution that was drafted by the military before it ceded power. That constitution enshrines significant powers for the military and its control of several key ministries, including Home Affairs.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy is widely expected to win Sunday's vote. In a Facebook post late on Tuesday, she called for calm and urged voters not to be intimidated.

BOOK REVIEW: GEOPOLITICS

When Empires Collide: China vs America

ZIHAD AZAD

"It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made the war inevitable," Thucydides wrote in *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. Building on this historic context, American political scientist Graham Allison hypothesised the "Thucydides' Trap"—whenever the world's premier rising superpower bumps against the world's pre-existing superpower, ruinous war is almost certain. Much like the Romans could not avoid it against the Persians, nor the British against the Germans, it seems the geopolitical contest between US and China has also become unavoidable.

In *Has China Won? : The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy* (PublicAffairs, 2020), Kishore Mahbubani prognosticates about the near future as much as he emphasises the recent past in USA and China's geopolitical battle.

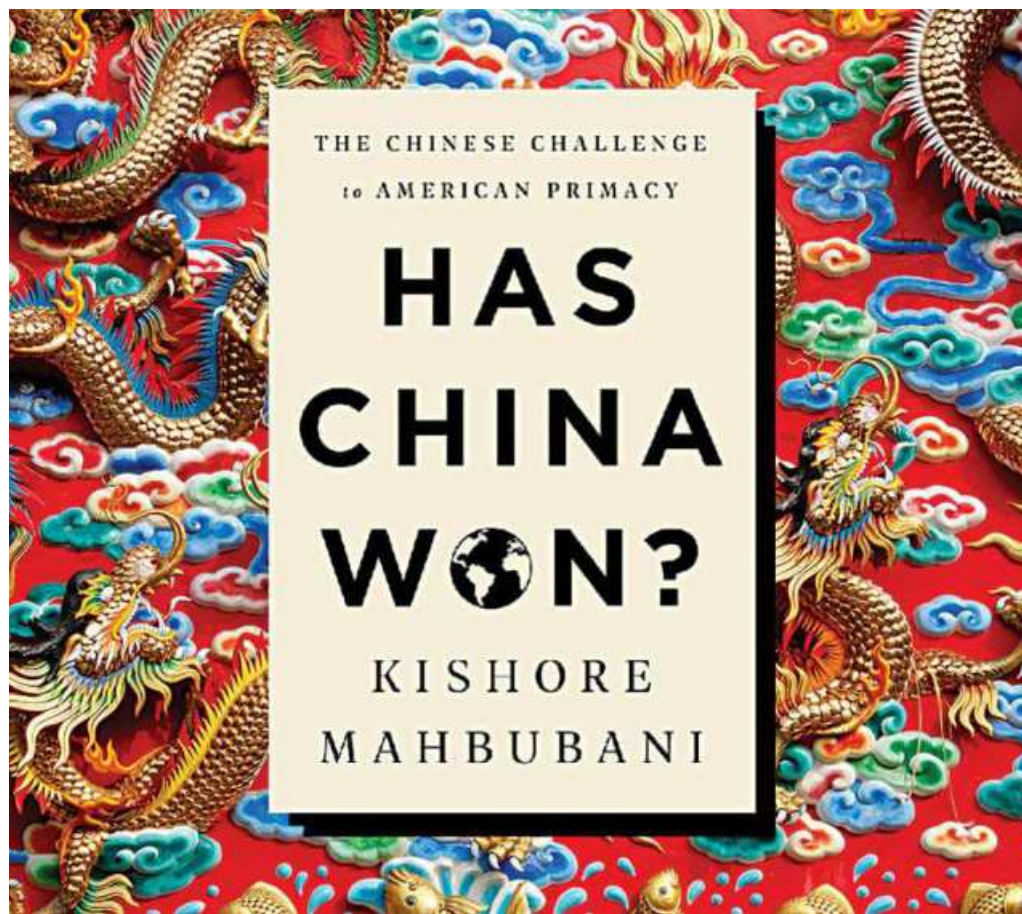
A career diplomat-turned-academic who represented Singapore in the UN, Mahbubani takes recourse to the Modernization Theory, which prophesies that as a developing nation's middle-class surges, they will demand more political rights until democratic reforms become inevitable. Hence, as China lifted more than 800 million people above the extreme poverty line over the past 40 years—creating the world's largest middle income population in the process—American policymakers complacently waited for the revolution to overthrow the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Well, nothing of the sort transpired. Now Western sinologists are scratching their heads over why reality isn't conforming to the textbook.

Mahbubani resolves the dilemma with his deep insight into the Chinese psyche, "Chinese culture values social harmony over individual empowerment. American culture is the opposite."

Indeed, over the 2,500 year history of the united China, it has mostly been ruled by a centralised authoritarian bureaucracy punctuated by a few brief inter-dynastic exceptions. Mahbubani therefore warns the West to exercise caution in their wish for a "Democratic China". Sure, it can embroil China in political and civil unrest; but it can also usher in a populist Trumpian figure who might start asking for reparations from Britain for the ignominious opium wars, attack Japan as a retribution for the Nanjing massacre, or start messing with exchange rates that would spell disaster for the average American or European consumer.

While America was busy getting mired in disastrous wars in the Middle East, China, unbeknownst to the world, overtook the US economy in a key figure of merit: purchasing power parity. And now it looks set to overtake USA in nominal GDP terms by 2025. How to deal with this new 'middle kingdom'?

This is where the book becomes engaging. US Army General H R McMaster expresses the American attitude succinctly, "At the end of the day, the struggle between America and China



DESIGN: SARAH ANJUM BARI

represents the struggle between 'free and open societies and closed authoritarian systems.'" Except this time, as Mahbubani convincingly contends, the choice is not that straightforward. Burgeoning student debt, housing crisis, an ongoing opioid epidemic, a poor healthcare system, crumbling infrastructure—these are all telltale signs of an empire in decline. And while self-correction is baked into democratic institutions, they do not have the leeway to make major U-turns in a short timeframe.

But China does. This unchecked executive power has drawbacks—the disastrous "one child" policy comes to mind—but it also means going from zero kilometers of 6-lane expressways to 150,000 kilometers in under 10 years. Furthermore, unlike the old and corrupt Soviet communist party, the CCP has devised an ingenious filtering mechanism which results in the best and the brightest minds running the country. So this time, China has assumed the role of America—flexible, supple, and forward-thinking, while America acts increasingly like the Soviets—arrogant, myopic, and unbending. The role reversal is uniquely ironic.

Unfortunately, at the end of the day, Mahbubani is a diplomat, unwilling to ruffle too many feathers. Instead of carefully examining American war economics and how it holds US foreign policy hostage, he politely accepts the

narrative that US invades the Islamic world in order to liberate and modernise the oppressed.

In a similar fashion, he sidesteps any meaningful deliberation on the Uighur humanitarian crisis by claiming that any Chinese leader who shows weakness towards the Xinjiang separatist movement would lose his legitimacy to rule. Mahbubani does this with an ease befitting a man who has been in rooms full of war criminals way too many times (incidentally, he often recounts with nostalgia his meetings with Henry Kissinger).

Has China Won ends on a positive note, I suspect because it has to. From combating climate change to realising UN developmental goals, the two largest economies of the world have no other recourse but to cooperate, the author reminds us. But he overlooks one key aspect of the American psyche: its deep-seated belief in "American Exceptionalism". Americans truly view the world through a binary prism in which they are the "good" guys and those who go against them are invariably "bad".

What happens if they decide to channel this supreme righteousness against China?

Zihad Azad works as a research assistant at the BUET nanophotonic research group, with primary focus on plasmonic nanolasers.

FROM PAGES TO PIXELS

In Search of A Suitable Adaptation

SUSHMITA S PREETHA

I've long come to accept that there's no such thing as a suitable adaption of a favourite book. Yet, when it was announced that Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993), a novel I have loved through the decades, was going to be adapted by the BBC for a miniseries—and directed by Mira Nair, no less—I couldn't help but feel hopeful about the possibilities. Could this really be... the one?

A Suitable Boy is centred on the search of an eligible groom for the spirited student of English Literature, Lata Mehra, coming of age in North India in 1951. But it's also the story of a newly independent nation coming to terms with its own identity—a story about communalism, feudalism, land reform, the first Indian general elections and women's position in Indian society—told through the lives and perspectives of four entwined families: the Mehras, Kapoors, Chatterjees, and Khans. Despite being one of the longest books ever to be published in a single volume in English, it is a surprisingly easy read, lucid and engaging in equal measure. What makes the novel a success is the brilliance and playfulness with which Seth weaves layers of stories, depicting the ordinary even in the midst of dramatic familial and political upheaval.

The adaption, alas, reduces it to an almost exoticised story about India, with its monkeys, courtesans, arranged marriages and Hindu-Muslim conflict. The satiric elements evident in the novel are all but lost in the forced attempt(s) to make a larger political point. Perhaps such a fate is inevitable when a 1,488 page novel is stripped to its highlights—the novel is to the adaption what a test match is to a T20—but it's nevertheless disappointing given the extraordinary success of some recent book-to-series adaptions in retaining, even intensifying, the complexity of the text. Why could this not be a longer series, stretched over multiple seasons, so that the characters and story lines could be properly fleshed out?

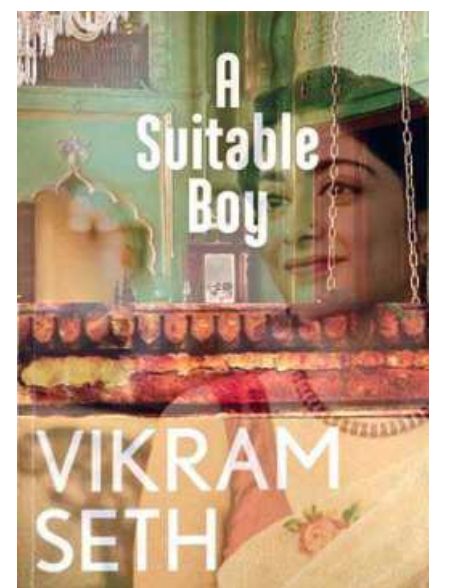
While some characters, such as Maan Kapoor and Saeeda Bai, shine in their roles—which has perhaps more to do with the actors rather than the screenplay—many others who make the book memorable fall flat.

Lata herself is borderline annoying, with her wide-eyed smile that overpowers every scene and robs the character of its depth. The witty and whimsical Chatterjees—"an intelligent family where everyone thought of everyone else as an idiot"—are reduced

to just idiots, and Amit Chatterjee (I was team Amit all the way) to a barely believable contender for Lata's hand in marriage. Many important characters are reduced to mere sidekicks (Praan and Savita, for instance), while others, such as Meenakshi and her lover, are given unnecessary screen time to add some sizzle and spice.

In the novel the dialogues are a revelation—poetic, satiric, always sharp and convincing, but in the series they seem to acquire a saccharine, exaggerated quality. While it makes sense for some of the characters in newly independent India, such as the Chatterjees, to chatter away in British accents, it is beyond any comprehension why Maan does not speak to his Urdu teacher in Urdu or why two villagers are conversing in English. The occasional sprinkling of Urdu/Hindi dialogues (Tabu is magnificent in any language but in Urdu she is to die for) made me wish that the makers had not taken the safe route of setting the show in English simply because it had been adapted from an English novel and/or is catering to an international audience.

Some parts of the series are enjoyable, no doubt. While the cinematography is beautiful and Nair's ability to bring

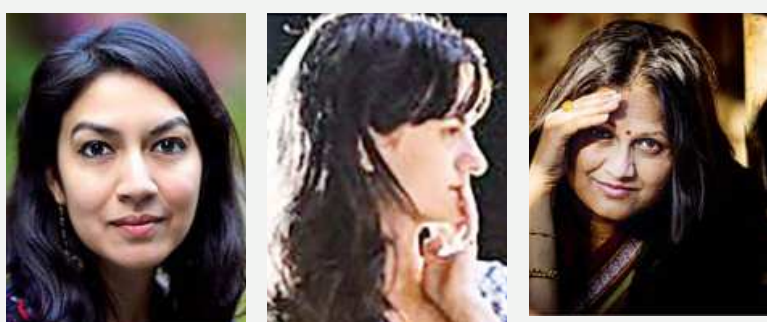


DESIGN: SARAH ANJUM BARI

to life the colours, the calmness and the chaos of post-independent India, noteworthy, I, for one, could have lived without the SparkNotes version of this literary masterpiece. I better go brush the dust off my copy of the novel.

Sushmita S Preetha is deputy editor, Op-Ed & Editorial, The Daily Star.

INTERVIEW



Tahmima Anam, author

Filiz Ozcan, co-artistic director, Komola Collective

Leesa Gazi, actor and co-founder, Komola Collective

ON STORIES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Tahmima Anam's play *Shahrazad*, written for UK-based arts organisation Komola Collective and live streamed on October 29, 2020, adopts the epic of *1001 Nights* to explore the lives of survivors of domestic violence. We spoke to author Tahmima Anam, director Filiz Ozcan, and actor/co-founder Leesa Gazi about putting a play together virtually, and the ethics of dramatising domestic violence in fiction.

Read the interview online on The Daily Star website, on fb.com/DailyStarBooks and @thedailystarbooks on Instagram.

THE BOOK REPORT

Wreetu's Comic Book on Menstrual Health

MRIITIKA ANAN RAHMAN

In 2016, while already involved in conducting school-wide workshops on the topic, Sharmin Kabir began to think of ways in which adolescents could be taught about menstrual health in a friendly manner. "What would the children be left with once the workshop was over and Sharmin and her team had left?" she wondered.

So she began building her own resource. The end result? A resourceful and enjoyable guide that children can consult for everything from mood swings to getting their periods.

"I was inspired by *Meena* and the way it used cartoons to teach children crucial information. So I decided to develop our resources in a comic book format," says Kabir, founder of Wreetu, a platform that works to improve the experience of menstruating women.

The comic book centres on a group of cousins who go to their grandmother's house in their village during the summer holidays. The girls are excited to see their relatives, but it soon becomes apparent that one of them is entering puberty but isn't aware of it. Their aunt, who is a medical student, teaches them about their bodies, menstruation, and about growing up.

"We chose the rural setting because I think all of us can relate, even if a little bit, to the nature and surroundings of a village. I also based the kids in the story on my own nieces. The character of the aunt was based on my own sister," Kabir shares.

The fictional narrative works to warmly invite readers into the familiar setting of a family home, where older cousins pass on their wisdom and cousins growing up together



PHOTO: WREETU.COM

bond over their shared experiences. It creates a comfortable environment for children to tackle otherwise uncomfortable topics.

"I always believe in including everyone in the conversation," Kabir shares. "Even when we conducted workshops in schools, we made sure to include the boys and if possible the parents too. So for the book, I asked the children in all the workshops what they wanted to see and what they needed to learn. And we simply developed that. So in a way, these kids created the books, I was just the medium."

The book starts by talking about physical and emotional changes during puberty, why

and how menstruation happens, and how the female reproductive organ functions. It offers instructions on how to use sanitary napkins, exercises that one can do to relieve period pain, proper dietary choices for periods, and how one can keep track of their cycle, all in a way that speaks to fifth to eighth graders—the main target demographic for the book.

"I consulted with a gynaecologist to get all the medical facts right and showed it to more doctors to fact check," Kabir clarifies. Another concern was designing the content so as not to offend conservative families. "So we were extra cautious in the way we approached the topics and diagrams."

"Raising funds to print and distribute the books for free was a bigger challenge but EMK Center gave us a grant. The first and so far only edition was published in March 2019. We distributed it to 20 schools. Later, more schools contacted us and sourced the book for their students."

Most recently in October, 45 copies were distributed among adolescent girls in Nimok Pura village of Kishoreganj.

The glossy and colourful pages of the comic book look entertaining and inviting—it reads like any other children's book. Yet it passes on valuable information to an age demographic that desperately needs it. Copies of *Wreetu Comic Book* can be ordered through Wreetu's Facebook page, for BDT 250.

Mriitika Anan Rahman is sub-editor, Shout, and a contributor to DS Books.

Govt must prepare for a second wave of Covid-19

Enforce health guidelines, ensure more testing and life-saving facilities

WITH fears of a second wave of Covid-19 coming in winter—as is happening in Europe and other countries—the government's preparation for it seems to be limited to rhetoric only. Large numbers of people in the country have all but stopped wearing face masks in public, and the government has not been able to strictly enforce other health safety rules either. Even more disappointingly, the health directorate has not been successful in ensuring adequate tests, central oxygen supply and other life-support equipment at public hospitals across the country. This has left experts worried that, should the number of cases start to spike, our healthcare system will once again be ill-prepared to handle the rise in infections.

Experts believe strict implementation of the health safety rules is the key to containment of virus transmission, and have urged the government to take effective preventive measures based on projections and experience gained over the last eight months. However, it seems that the government has not been learning from past mistakes and has failed to address many of them. Whether it be the issue of testing or quarantining passengers travelling into the country, or launching public awareness campaigns, or introducing antigen-based rapid testing, the government seems to be slow to react, if not reluctant. Meanwhile, the health ministry's initiative to set up central oxygen supply systems in 79 district hospitals seems to have fallen flat—after nearly five months, only 24 Covid dedicated hospitals in the country have central oxygen supply systems.

We are absolutely baffled by this. What makes the authorities so confident that they have not taken even the most basic precautionary measures? Is it apathy that is driving this kind of behaviour? When lives could potentially be at stake, why isn't the government more urgently trying to prepare for a possible second wave? When about a thousand new cases are still being reported daily—despite the decline in testing—why are the authorities acting as if the outbreak is all but over?

This is totally irresponsible and may lead to further devastating consequences. The authorities need to strictly enforce the health safety rules such as mask wearing and continue spreading awareness among people to follow them. Travellers coming into the country must be quarantined to prevent further spread, and Covid dedicated hospitals in the country must have central oxygen supply systems installed. There can be no excuses this time that the government did not have prior warnings and time to prepare. The last months have provided the government with ample time and experience. This time, there will be no one left to blame but the government itself, should the situation again start to spiral out of control.

Textile mills evaded taxes worth nearly 39 crore

Such corrupt practices cannot be allowed to continue

IN a report published by *The Daily Star* on Wednesday, it was revealed that 36 textile mills located in Narsingdi had evaded tax duties and VAT of nearly Tk 39 crore in the last five years. According to sources at the National Board of Revenue (NBR), these textile mills imported 30,350 power looms to make clothes under a one-percent concessionary duty benefit for capital machinery import. However, the owners of the mills neither set up the factories nor used the looms for production—around 84 percent of the machinery is suspected to have been sold in the local market, depriving the state from getting its due revenues.

At a time when Bangladesh is struggling with the after-effects of an unprecedented economic downturn as a result of the global coronavirus crisis, with the government spending billions of taka in the form of stimulus packages in efforts to keep our economy afloat, it is extremely disheartening to see this level of corruption at our local textile mills. This is not just revenue that is going into private pockets instead of government coffers. These duty benefits are in place to support local production and give Bangladeshi workers much-needed employment. Yet while the pandemic pushes the poor and extreme poor further into property, certain unscrupulous business owners continue to find ways to abuse the system and make a quick profit, even at the expense of others.

The pandemic has shown how crucial it is for the government to provide social safety nets to the most marginalised workers and communities in the country. However, this is only possible if the government has enough revenue to invest in social protections. Data suggests that Bangladesh's tax/GDP ratio is still extremely low and has actually fallen, from 11 percent in 2010 to 8.9 percent in 2019. If this lamentable ratio is to be improved, the authorities must bring legal proceedings against tax-evading businesses and hold them to account. There must also be a long-term commitment to dismantling the ties between corrupt businessmen and corrupt government officials, and to holding all tax evaders and their enablers to account, if we are to ever have a proper tax regime and fiscal revenue stream in Bangladesh.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

PM's timely decision

As Covid-19 has started to spread again with new force around the world and many countries in Europe have announced fresh lockdowns, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently said that the time has come to reintroduce coronavirus tests for every inbound passenger at all ports in the country. She mentioned that those coming from abroad must be checked to ensure the safety of the people.

I think we must pay heed to her instructions and prepare accordingly. We have already had quite a disastrous experience, so we must learn from those mistakes and take every precautionary measure necessary. Hopefully, this time we will do better.

Jewel Ahmed, Chattogram

Sarwar's abduction: A chilling message for journalists

OF MAGIC & MADNESS



BADIUZZAMAN BAY

LATE in the evening on November 1, 2020, journalist Golam Sarwar, who went missing on October 29, was found unconscious near a canal at Sitakunda, Chattogram. He was heavily bruised, stripped off his clothes, but "thankfully alive", a reference fast becoming meaningful in cases of disappearance and such extrajudicial harassment in Bangladesh. Sarwar, who works for a local news portal, went missing four days after publishing an article about the alleged involvement of a minister's family in land grabbing.

According to a report by *The Daily Star*, during the three days of his disappearance, the abductors called his family members at least five times, instructing them to be ready to pay a ransom. This was perhaps a ruse to conceal their true motive. A video clip capturing the early moments of his rescue shows a barely conscious but deeply traumatised Sarwar—believing he was still being held by his abductors—begging for relief from their torture. Using words that are bound to have a long shelf life in the memory of journalists and ordinary people alike, he is heard saying: "Bhai, please don't beat me. I won't write news anymore!" He stretches his hands in a pleading gesture as he repeats these words again and again.

The next morning, while talking to journalists, Sarwar confirmed that he was indeed kidnapped and tortured for reasons not related to money but to his work. As we wait for police investigation to shed light on the identity of those behind the incident, it must be acknowledged that there is something eerily familiar and profoundly unsettling about the circumstances of Sarwar's abduction, especially the wording of his plea for mercy to his invisible torturers.

Soon after the incident, a reporter of *Prothom Alo*, one of the journalists beaten by the *helmet bahini* during the road safety movement in August 2018, recalled in a Facebook post what words he had used to dissuade his own attackers: "Bhai, don't beat me. I didn't do anything. I'm

a good boy, bhai. Don't beat me, bhai." But he wasn't spared, neither was the Noakhali victim of gang rape whose helpless appeal to her attackers—calling them *baba* (father) and *bhai* (brother) as she begged for mercy—went on to trigger a nationwide movement in October. The visceral fear conveyed through these words and unlikely terms of endearment latches onto your heart like a virus latches onto its host cells.

It's hard to be not affected by Sarwar's plea for mercy or the manner in which

I, too, share Sarwar's fear of harm or retribution even as I wax eloquent about his wording. Many a time my friends and family warned me that I'm playing with fire by writing pieces critical of the powers that be. In truth, all I'm doing is my work. Just like Golam Sarwar, Shafiqul Islam Kajol, Ilyas Hossain, Mohiuddin Sarker, and many other staff and district correspondents of local, national and online newspapers who endured countless incidents of assault, intimidation, harassment,

message, to anyone who dares to speak or unearth the truth, to those who believe in the lofty ideals about journalism. I can go on to rattle off a long list of cases of assault and harassment endured by journalists every year, or the number of times the Digital Security Act and other repressive policies of the state have been used to persecute journalists, activists, teachers, students, etc. The lists are being updated even as we speak. But it's futile to talk of lists and statistics when the authorities are not even ready to acknowledge them.

Perhaps what's more important now is to unmask the enemies of the press, like the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) once did, releasing annual lists of state actors from various countries who posed great threats to the journalists. The enemies in Bangladesh are many, and they don't exactly come blowing trumpets to announce themselves or their intention. Often they rely on stealth to serve their purpose, and sometimes they can be very persuasive. Combatting the arguments, strategies and instruments they use to stifle press freedom and putting up a successful defence against them will require resilience, innovation, financial and organisational strength, and no small degree of courage. More importantly, the journalist community must be united to stand any chance against these press tyrants and offenders. But can our financially and legally weakened, politically compromised, and ideologically divided press institutions unite for their own survival and protect all journalists from harm's way?

Something tells me it's not going to happen soon. With so much division and violence and insanity going around, why should we still write and keep fighting? What hope is there for journalists like Sarwar who enjoy little to no support or legal safety? What can we possibly achieve in the end? The only truth I'm interested in right now is the truth that I keep telling myself: that we must keep our protests on record, so that those trying to bury the truth know their misdeeds haven't gone unprotested. But to start going forward together and build an enabling environment for the serious press, all journalists should have their own answers to these questions.

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Golam Sarwar, who works for a local news portal in Chattogram, was abducted after he published an article about the alleged involvement of a minister's family in land grabbing.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

he kept uttering those words, hysterically, unmindful of his surroundings or the fact that he was no longer under the clutches of his abductors. He was so overwhelmed by this traumatic experience that it consumed his entire being. If this wasn't a clear enough message, Sarwar's subsequent and significantly saner statement to the press puts any remaining doubt to rest. While talking to *The Daily Star*, he said he had heard his abductors say: "He [Sarwar] has to be beaten in a way that will teach other journalists a lesson." He was thus both their target and a conduit to send a message to the wider journalist community. Well, duly noted.

There's no shame in admitting that

arrest, lawsuit, and yes, disappearance. Many of my more frontline colleagues who tirelessly work to deliver facts to the public are also afraid of the likely consequences of their work. Recognising how fear is manufactured and spread as well as our own vulnerability is vital to understanding the level of threat we're facing today.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has rightly described the Sarwar incident as a threat aimed at gagging freedom of speech and freedom of the press. What distinguishes violence faced by journalists from other cases of violence is that no assault on them is a one-off event. It's always meant to be a

How vulnerable are the small businesses?

ASAD ISLAM and ATIYA RAHMAN

IN Bangladesh, the Covid-19 pandemic hit economic players all at once. The small business sector, the country's engine of growth and employment, is one of the worst-hit sectors because of its high dependency on low-skilled labour, low compliance with occupational health and safety standards, and limited access to the financial market. In late April 2020, LightCastle Partners & Sheba.xyz and Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) conducted a survey on the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) and their workers and found that the pandemic-induced lockdown and social distancing caused a sharp contraction in production, supply chain disruption and workers' layoff, and that the SMEs needed financial support (e.g. loan) to get back on their feet. Now that the economy has opened up, are the SMEs recovering from that shock?

To understand the effects of lockdown and subsequent reopening of the economy on small enterprises and their workers, the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) in collaboration with Monash University, Australia, surveyed around 2,000 firms from 18 districts in Bangladesh in July. Of them, 95 percent are light engineering firms and the rest are other small businesses like beauty parlour, hotel, grocery store, and clothing/tailoring. The study mostly focused on the light engineering sector (a small and informal sector) which accounts for more than two million workers and 2 percent of the GDP.

During the lockdown, the majority of the small enterprises were shut down. After the lockdown was lifted, very few were still closed; about two-thirds were operating at full capacity while one-third were operating at a limited capacity.

After reopening, these enterprises were facing two-fold challenges: reduced demand and the burden of paying for fixed costs such as rent and utilities. Even after more than a month of reopening, almost all the enterprises were still running at the break-even point (very low average profit of Tk 4,000), largely due to the low volume of sales. The enterprises such as beauty parlour, hotel, and tailoring were facing the most severe drop in sales, reflecting the additional challenge of the service sector where social distancing is often not feasible.

Intriguingly, compared to the lockdown period, more owners were unable to pay the rent for their workshop premises after reopening. This is perhaps because the owners were in critical shortages of funds as the pandemic prolonged, and they used up their savings or, even worse, capital by then. Now, with low sales after reopening, they are struggling to meet the pressure of fixed costs. Predictably, those who were

facing a larger drop in sales were more likely to face difficulty paying rent in July.

What made the situation worse, almost two-thirds of these enterprises also reported experiencing a shortage of raw materials. Most of them reported that they were either reducing their production or increasing product prices to cope with this shortage, further deepening the crisis.

Consequently, many workers of the small businesses were forced to leave jobs and migrated back to villages from towns and cities. Though most workers returned to work by July, income-recovery has been low for them. Male workers were earning about 30 percent less than the pre-pandemic period; female workers were

through low-interest loans (about half of the market rates) to be delivered through the banking system. Though two-thirds of the surveyed enterprises reported that they knew about this initiative, only three percent applied for the support. Only one out of 1,960 firms received credit from the banking channel under the stimulus package of the government.

Our study found that the enterprises that had a higher profit margin before the pandemic were open during the lockdown, or had higher sales after the lockdown, or in other words, financially stronger enterprises were more likely to apply for government support. High costs in lending to the small enterprises

make any plan for their business recovery. If the small businesses do not get support, many may never recover.

Apart from financial support, what factors can help small businesses be more resilient, particularly during a public health crisis like this? Before the pandemic hit the country, in 2017/18, BRAC provided intensive training on occupational health and safety (OHS) along with business training and financial linkages to a group of managers/owners of small firms. Our study found that in July, these SMEs made almost double the profit compared to the enterprises which did not receive the training; however, the absolute amounts of profit of both the training recipient and



The small business sector is the country's engine of growth and employment.

PHOTO: MOKSUMAL HAQUE/CGAP

earning 52 percent less. Female workers in these enterprises were also less likely to return to the labour market.

What's most concerning is that "poorer" enterprises, which had lower financial capital during the pre-pandemic period, are less likely to operate their business at full capacity after the end of the lockdown. They also had lower sales after the lockdown was lifted—the poorest enterprises were experiencing about 50 percent reduction in sales, almost double the loss incurred by the richest. These findings demonstrate the vulnerability of the poorer enterprises and the need for providing support for them to start their activities.

It is clear that the small businesses are in dire need of support to get back on their feet. On April 13, the government announced a stimulus package for SMEs

and fear of non-repayment have already been established as major hindrances for small enterprises to access the incentive loans, and there is a growing concern that the stimulus package will not reach the vulnerable firms.

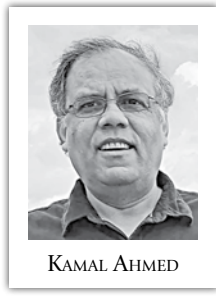
The targeting criteria for reaching the more vulnerable enterprises with the support package are of utmost importance. At the beginning of the pandemic, many experts had suggested that smaller enterprises should get priority for getting support. The small enterprises face several challenges in accessing credit through the formal banking system, and many of them are not even aware that they can obtain this support to recover from the shock created by the pandemic. When asked about their future business plan, almost half of these enterprises reported that they face uncertainties and could not

non-recipient enterprises were significantly low compared to their pre-pandemic profit. The findings indicate that OHS and business training can help firms survive in difficult times, and firms receiving such training are better able to withstand shocks like the ongoing pandemic.

It is evident that poorer enterprises and vulnerable workers (e.g. female workers) in the informal sector are experiencing severe challenges in coping with this "new normal". To ensure an equitable post-pandemic economic recovery, it is essential to increase the scope of the incentive and, more importantly, better target those who need it the most.

Asad Islam is Director, Centre for Development Economics and Sustainability (CDES), and a professor of economics at Monash University, Australia. Atiya Rahman is Senior Research Associate, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University.

Ban GCM for claiming ownership of our coal



KAMAL AHMED

A controversial energy company, forced to wind down most of its operations and exposure in Bangladesh following a

popular opposition from the local population, is now claiming Phulbari's coal deposits as their resources. On October 15, the company, GCM Resources PLC, announced that it signed a framework agreement with China Nonferrous Metal Industry's Foreign Engineering and Construction Co., Ltd (otherwise known as NFC) and Power Construction Corporation of China, Ltd (PowerChina) in relation to its world-class 572 million tonnes (JORC 2004 compliant) of high-grade coal resources at the Phulbari Coal and Power Project in northwest Bangladesh. GCM in the past used to say it had "identified a high-quality coal resource of 572 million tonnes at the Phulbari Coal and Power Project in Bangladesh".

The JORC Code provides minimum standards for public reporting to ensure that investors have all the information they would reasonably require for forming a reliable opinion on the results and estimates being reported. As GCM Resources PLC is an AIM-quoted mining and energy company, these announcements are regulatory requirements. AIM is the Alternative Investment Market of London Stock

Exchange (LSE) where listings of companies give them opportunities to raise funds. In the two weeks since the announcement, there has been increased trading activities involving GCM shares and at least thrice they had to announce Price Monitoring Extension to extend the auction call period. Auction call extensions give electronic order book users a further opportunity to review the prices and sizes of orders before the execution occurs.

Surprisingly, the latest GCM announcement and claim of Bangladeshi coal as their resource comes despite recent deputations to the LSE and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) by Bangladeshi activists in the UK calling for investigations into alleged fraud by the company. Representatives of the UK branch of the National Committee to Protect Natural Resources of Bangladesh (NCPBD) have pointed out that the Bangladesh government had refused to renew the company's licence in 2010 and therefore it is wholly inappropriate and "illegal" to trade in shares relating to that project.

The LSE, in its response, said that it takes allegations relating to companies listed on their markets—which could impact "the integrity and reputation" of those markets—"very seriously". It can, therefore, be reasonably assumed that some sort of investigation is underway or may be nearing conclusion. Although, under the strict privacy law, confidentiality of any such investigation is quite natural, thereby prolonging our wait to know about the



File photo of Bangladeshi activists in the UK protesting against GCM Resources PLC's operations in Phulbari, Bangladesh. SOURCE: PHULBARI SOLIDARITY GROUP

fate of those complaints.

Companies inflating their worth and potentials are nothing new, and there are innumerable examples of such exaggerations crossing the thresholds of deception. And regulators are there to curb such deceptions. But claiming ownership of a nation's asset by a foreign company is a rarest-of-rare kind of fraud. GCM has committed exactly that. My query to the Bangladesh High Commission in London about this fraudulent claim, however, remains unanswered for over a week.

Since the refusal of the government to renew its licence for its exploration work, GCM has been maintaining low-level exposure within Bangladesh, thereby avoiding media scrutiny.

Instead, the current management of the company is seeking intervention of the Chinese government. To obtain official Chinese backing, it has entered into several partnership agreements with state-owned entities of China. Among those, the most crucial is a joint venture with PowerChina, owned by the central government of the People's Republic of China. PowerChina is one of the most influential foreign companies in Bangladesh as it completed 10 infrastructure projects including five power plants totalling USD 750 million, and has 12 current projects amounting to USD 4.6 billion including two coal-fired power plants of 1,670MW. Their joint venture is proposing a 2,000MW coal-fired power plant at Phulbari with

an approximate investment of USD 4 billion.

The latest deal with the China Nonferrous Metal Industry's Foreign Engineering and Construction Co., Ltd—which triggered the unusual trading activities on AIM—says they will focus on works "including, but not limited to, the definitive feasibility study and financing". However, chattering on the stock traders' online networks suggests the company is in a dire financial situation, and the majority shareholder, Polo Resources, is thought to be considering selling it off to the Chinese partners. Speculations are rife that if the Chinese partners buy them out, then they might get as high as ten to twelve times the current share price. Otherwise, those stocks are worthless.

When GCM first roped in Chinese interests in the project in January 2019 in Dhaka, it happily announced that their bid to seek necessary approvals from the government would be "greatly assisted by having appropriate consultants and lobbyists in both China and Bangladesh". Whether these rumours have any substance or not, one thing is clear: GCM has resorted to a daring fraud involving Bangladesh's mineral resources which demands serious attention from our government and civil society. The government should immediately blacklist GCM, stop all its operations in the country, and take legal actions at the appropriate forum for its attempted sale of our coal resources.

Kamal Ahmed is a freelance journalist based in London.

The other side of the coin: Unanswered questions of men's sexuality



FARZANA MISHA

THE Covid-19 pandemic in Bangladesh, particularly during the period of the lockdown, has seen a significant increase in the reported cases of sexual assault,

harassment and abuse of women and girls. These appalling acts have been more brazen over time and consistently made headlines in various dailies. Just between January and August this year, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) recorded 892 cases of rape—tantamount to nearly four cases a day. The reader at this juncture must keep in mind that this is but a fraction of what actually may be happening, as the majority of cases stay unreported. At the same time, we have had a marked growth in all areas of women's empowerment. For instance, we have had two female premiers in power continuously over the past three decades, while our largest foreign currency earner (RMGs) has been a driver of female labour market engagement. We have an active young population, who have taken to the streets repeatedly to protest against the harrowing violence against women. In response, the government has introduced the capital punishment for rape, though not without criticism.

Now the question is, although our general response seems to be fine on paper, why is it not working? What is the missing part of the puzzle? We should ask ourselves: Are men, particularly the youth, missing from our equation of the solution? The answer, unfortunately, is a resounding yes!

To answer our first question, we should ask: how much do we really know about the sexual aspects of male youth in Bangladesh—particularly, in

the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)? Not much. At this juncture, our understanding of male sexuality, thoughts and perceptions, source of information, or healthcare seeking behaviour is limited at best. But why does this matter? It does because they represent the missing part of our "solutions" equation. Where these men and youth get their information, how these warp their perceptions, and how they deal with their frustrations directly affect how they treat women.



Although our general response to sexual crimes seems to be fine on paper, why is it not working? PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

This absence of knowledge on these topics is mostly driven by an absence of international attention to the subject. For example, despite the issue of all-inclusive SRHR being reflected across some of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the focus on the male aspects of SRHR is largely absent. The global literature on men's SRH behaviours and practices is limited. A study by Darroch et al (2016) finds that globally, only a quarter of the countries systematically collect information

on men's sexual and reproductive behaviours, contraceptive needs and use as well as fertility preferences.

Taking all these factors into consideration, the Brac James P Grant School of Public Health recently conducted a national survey on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of male youth in Bangladesh. The survey, funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is the first of its kind in Bangladesh and is expected to generate nationally

ethnographic approach, where the researchers literally spent months in the selected localities to collect information from the selected respondents, to generate a deeper and comprehensive understanding of the current condition of SRHR of male youth from both supply- and demand-side perspectives.

This study generated data on an array of indicators. This includes demographic, socio-economic conditions, knowledge, perception and practice regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights, health seeking behaviour regarding SRH, exposure of technology, pornography, daily activities, religious beliefs, gender-based violence, stress and conflict related to gender roles, masculinity, risk taking behaviour and aspiration of male youth.

In this article, we won't go into the details of the findings as the analysis is still ongoing, but some initial findings suggest that peer networks are one of the first sources of information for men regarding sexual and reproductive health. This increases the likelihood of warped perceptions, practices and being misinformed as the peer groups are themselves in the dark. As a result, most of the information are derived from questionable sources including pornography, word of mouth and informal sources of providers (i.e. street sellers of medicines, *kabirajis*, untrained homeopaths). Shyness and taboo around the topics were identified as among the leading barriers to seeking healthcare, despite many suffering from severe health problems such as erectile dysfunction, urethral discharge and testicular swelling. The survey further explores the role of education and age when it comes to adhering to gender equitable perceptions and respect for women. In addition, it investigates how risk-taking behaviours (drug abuse, having multiple sexual partners, etc.) are correlated with performing idealised and perceived masculinity behaviours.

The nationwide research attempts to understand the gaps and challenges of male-inclusive sexual and reproductive health interventions and services. Challenges such as community resistance, lack of sensitivity among parents, teachers and health care providers at the field level have emerged from the initial findings. The study further reviewed how much this issue has been addressed in the existing policies, laws and acts in Bangladesh and tried to identify gaps in these areas that require immediate attention. The findings along with recommendations will be disseminated at the national level later this year.

The significance of scientifically derived evidence in addressing core social issues is immense and, in this case, the generated data will give us a clear picture of the ground realities. This will further facilitate adopting new and revising existing policies to address their shortcomings. As a society, our broader objective should be to create an environment where men can become advocates for sexual and reproductive rights, not only for themselves but also for their gender counterparts as well. Unless they are not aware of their own health and rights, they will not be able to comprehend and respect the sexual and reproductive health and rights of the opposite sex. There continues to be an urgent need to hold males accountable. To accomplish this, there needs to be widespread inclusion of men in discussions on gender equity and respect in the media and mass campaigns, providing good role models who can denounce and shame toxic masculinity traits and promote them in taking on more gender equitable roles.

Farzana Misha is research coordinator for the project "Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for Male Youth in Bangladesh", James P Grant School of Public Health, Brac University. The writer is grateful for the support of Professor Sabina Rashid, principle investigator of the project, and the research team for the production of this article.

QUOTABLE Quote

THOMAS CARLYLE
(1795-1881)
British historian.

The block of granite which was an obstacle in the pathway of the weak becomes a stepping-stone in the pathway of the strong.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Algiers section
- 7 October birthstone
- 11 Twin of Artemis
- 12 Ship of 1492
- 13 Conical abodes
- 14 River of Hades
- 15 Like vistas
- 17 Atlas pages
- 20 One of the Kennedys
- 23 Boxing great
- 24 Cajole
- 26 Got together
- 27 Concealed
- 28 Trickery
- 29 Bailing needs
- 31 Hold up
- 32 Different
- 33 Scottish isle
- 34 Ineffectual

DOWN

- 1 Manx, for one
- 2 Gorilla, for one
- 3 Soak up
- 4 Sanctify
- 5 Baldwin of "Beetle-juice"
- 6 Garden aid
- 7 Like some training
- 8 Lacking any light
- 9 One or more
- 10 Unmindful
- 16 Must have
- 17 Cuban dance
- 18 Alaska native
- 19 Devil's prop
- 21 Judy Jetson's brother
- 22 Not bother
- 24 Question of place
- 25 Wallop
- 30 With vigor
- 33 Arrange
- 35 Londoner, e.g.
- 36 Company symbol
- 37 Floral garland
- 38 Holm of "The Hobbit"
- 40 - about (wander)
- 41 First numero
- 42 Luggage ID

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

DOGMA SCARE
FRET PALED
FRIGHTENING
TEN OIL TOY
SMELL
SHAKE SETUP
PERU SVINE
APTLY DEMON
LABEL
ATM CAP MIA
BRIGHTENING
COMET NONCE
STEMS DREAD

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

GRAPE VINE



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Into The World of Cinema

Popular child actor Prarthana Fardin Dighi first came into the limelight with a *Grameenphone* TVC. Later, as a child actor, Dighi acted in several films including *Chachchu*, *Kabuliwala*, *Dadima* and *Ek Takar Bou*, among others. She even received *National Film Awards* in the category *Best Child Artist* for three of her films. Recently, the actor finished shooting for her upcoming film, *Tungipara'r Miya Bhai*, directed by Shamim Ahmed. She will also commence shooting this month for another film, *Tumi Acho Tumi Nei*, by Delwar Jahan Jhontu.

Haimanti's Time

Recently, musician Haimanti Rakshit Das released a song for this year's Puja, called *Pujo Elo*, which features Kolkata musician Akash Sen. Upon release, it garnered a lot of appreciation from her fans. She also released another song, *Durgatashini*, which too was appreciated by fans. With Runa Laila's birthday coming on the 17th of November, *Dhruba Music* will be releasing four songs which were given tune by Runa Laila herself. Haimanti Rakshit Das will be giving her voice to one of those songs. She said, "I am very honored to have been able to sing a song which a legendary singer like Runa Laila gave tune to. I am very happy to have been a part of that project. I am also very happy with the songs that I released for this year's Puja. I am working on a few new songs which I will release soon."



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Ridwan Intisaar Mahub



The shooting for Apurba's new web-movie, *Jodi Kintu Tobuo*, has begun. The direction, script and screenplay writing are being done by Shihab Shaheen, and it is being made under the banner of *ZEE5*. The shooting was initially supposed to start in March, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible. However, the shooting did start on the 28th of October, and will continue until November 28. In the web film opposite Apurba, we will be seeing prominent actor Nusraat Faria. We will also see actors like Tariq Anam Khan, Safayet Mansur Rana, Saberi Alam and Sarika Saba, among others. Apurba said, "We were meant to start working a long time ago, but the pandemic stopped that. Now that we have started working on this again, I am sure we are making something that people will enjoy."

Ridwan Intisaar Mahub

COVER STORY

A Melodious Weapon

Farzana Wahid Shayan, a well-known lyricist, composer and mental health advocate, has a unique philosophy of life, which she conveys through her music. With her melodious voice and beautiful lyrics, she has been able to create a spot for her in the hearts of music lovers. In this interview with Rafi Hossain, she talks about her music and how she uses it as a weapon against the injustices prevailing in society.

Rafi Hossain: Welcome to *Uncensored* with Rafi Hossain. Today, we are here with Farzana Wahid Shayan, a well-known figure in the music industry. Shayan, I want to know how you classify or define your songs.

Farzana Wahid Shayan: Songs that are written in the sphere outside of nature, love and prayer are generally, categorised under *Jibonmukhi* songs. I consider *Jibonmukhi* songs as songs that keep me at one with my life because I am someone who celebrates life.

Rafi: Do you think these songs play a special role in motivating and resonating within listeners more than songs of other genres?

Shayan: I don't necessarily agree with that. Songs about movement or revolution will resonate with people who want to see such. However, there is also a world outside that – a world of emotions. Songs that deal with emotions are just as important, I

happy. No matter how many times I hear such things, I can never stop myself feeling a sense of pride. I consider this to be a huge achievement and validation. It encourages me to go forward. If I wasn't able to tug at the heartstrings of my listeners, I wouldn't have been as content in my career as I am now.

Rafi: Your family birthed three incredible musicians: Ferdous Wahid, Habib Wahid and you. Do you perform songs when you are together?

Shayan: I grew up listening to and revering Ferdous Wahid. Having a well-known person like him as a member of the family was something of pride. As for Habib, I think he has made a unique musical sound, and I'm incredibly proud of him for that. When we are together, we talk more about music than actually performing. During gatherings or special events, three of us perform together along with other family members who practise music.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

believe. So, it ultimately depends on individual preference that decides which kinds of songs will resonate more with the listeners.

Rafi: Who were your inspirations?

Shayan: Shahnaz Rahmatullah is one of my biggest inspirations in music. I hold her in a special place in my heart. When I was learning the ropes of music, I practised her songs. I feel that they display so much more than vocal expertise. She pours her emotions into every single song. I hold her music above all music in the world. During my longer shows, I make sure to perform her songs. I also love to sing them in front of my close friends and family.

Rafi: How did you develop an interest in the kind of songs you sing?

Shayan: When I started writing my own music, I began learning the nuances of life, the facets of society, and I found myself diving into a world of music where I had the freedom to talk about whatever I wanted. I was inspired by the works of Rabindranath Tagore, among others.

Rafi: How does it feel when your listeners appreciate your music?

Shayan: When someone comes to me and tells me that a certain lyric of my song struck a chord in them or spoke to them, it makes me incredibly

Rafi: So many horrible things are happening in society right now. How do you use music as an instrument to talk about these?

Shayan: We all have different ways to react to situations, and for me, it is music. We see so much injustice everywhere, and although me creating a song referring to them won't change or exterminate them from society, it will help me feel a little better. If I can share this sentiment with similar minded people, we can create a voice.

Rafi: Why do you think such injustices are taking place? What can we do to stop them?

Shayan: In our culture, women are extremely tolerant. It is seen as a virtue. However, under this guise, they are mistreated in ways, not just physical. Still, they are told to keep tolerating those in silence. As a woman, I have seen the realities of the injustices faced in this society. Although women have been able to take themselves to a place where they hadn't been a few hundred years ago, there are still some oppressive practices that have prevailed through time. There isn't one solution to this. We have to punish some people, educate women on their rights, teach children about these things, stop the regressive practices that we still have and remove the taboo on certain topics and discuss them at length. Through media, we can express ourselves



more freely. As I can't participate in the protests in Dhaka, I have protested in my own way in Toronto for seven days by posting works of mine relating to such topics. When a pressure is created by society like this, then only will the laws change in favour of us. If we don't raise our voices and protest, these injustices will continue to exist. In this way, I hope that we'll be able to create a society where women are safe and respected.

Rafi: You do not live your life following the stereotypes of how women should live or present themselves according to society. Can you talk a little about that?

Shayan: There is this idea of how a woman should look and carry herself, and I do not align with it. Do I have to wear a saree to be a woman? I do love sarees, just not for myself. I have been told many times in my life that I can't be called a complete woman because of my attire or presentation. However, I'm free to wear whatever I choose; it doesn't make me less of a woman. If a man decides to wear a saree, it doesn't make him any less of a man. We have the right to exercise our freedom. Society tends to shun people who steer away from these gender norms, but this is who I am, and I want to be accepted for that. We have made this society, so we have to make sure that it doesn't become an obstacle for us to completely express ourselves.

Rafi: If we're talking about Bangla culture, where do you think we are headed?

Shayan: There is no certainty in where we are headed, but from what I see, we are headed towards wherever we take ourselves. I hope that we can head in a direction where individuals and their ideas are respected. When making any artistic piece, I hope that we can sway from creating things which have the sole purpose of being commercial because we are better than that. We should aspire to create things with meaning. We are capable of leaving a mark, so we should make something worthwhile to be remembered with. If we all try, we can surely achieve this.

Rafi: Even though there are many talented individuals, we don't see many works like you have suggested. How can we overcome this?

Shayan: I can't speak for everybody as everyone has their own needs. Sometimes, breaking the commercial route means risking their finances. So, artists fall in this predicament of deciding what to prioritise. I think that the risk should be taken because it is the duty of artists to create something worthwhile. Many literary figures we know of have gone through a lot of hardships, but their works are still very much known and revered. Not everyone wants to follow the same path as them, but I think it is the only way. I can't say much about how we can overcome this, but if we want to do so, we must walk the difficult path. I won't tell everyone to steer completely away from anything commercial since we all have to sustain ourselves, but we do have to take risks.

Rafi: Do you have any final message?

Shayan: Thank you so much for having me here today. Thank you to everyone for supporting me. I make songs with a purpose, whether it be for my personal fulfilment or a part of the bigger picture. I make music for a better society. If my songs resonate with one person, that is still an achievement as they are a part of the society. Even if it's a small achievement, I value it a lot. I would encourage everyone to live freely and be vocal about things, so that we can live with dignity and grace.

Rafi: Thank you for being here with us today.

Amina Hossain

POPCORN HIGHLIGHTS

THE GOOD LORD BIRD

The Good Lord Bird is a drama series, based on the eponymous novel by James McBride. It follows the life of an enslaved boy who is a part of a group of abolitionist soldiers participating in the raid of 1859 which eventually instigated the American Civil War. The show was created by Ethan Hawke

and Mark Richard, distributed by *Showtime Networks*, produced under the banners of *Under The Influence*, *Mark 924 Entertainment* and *Blumhouse Television*, and stars Hawke himself, Daveed Diggs and Wyatt Russell, among others. It was aired on October 4, 2020 on *Showtime*.



Qurban Hua

Qurban Hua is a Hindi drama series, released on 25 February 2020 on *Zee TV*. It was created and produced by Sonali Jaffer and Amir Jaffer under the banner of *Full House Media*, written by Sameer Garud, Shilpa Jathar, Gaurav Sharma and Zaher Shaikh, directed by Tabrez Khan, and stars Karan Jotwani, Pratibha Ranta and Sonali Nikam, among others. The story follows the lives of Neel and Chahat who are set on destroying each other's families, but fate has a surprise in store.

Amina Hossain

Here are some binge worthy movie and series you can spend your time watching while you stay at home social distancing, keeping yourself, as well as others, safe.



The Queen's Gambit

The Queen's Gambit is a drama series, created by Scott Frank and Allan Scott, directed by Frank himself, produced by Marcus Loges and Mick Aniceto under the banners of *Flitcraft Ltd* and *Wonderful Films*, and stars Anya Taylor-Joy, Bill Camp and Moses Ingram, among others. The plot, which is based on the eponymous novel by Walter Tevis, follows the life of an orphaned chess prodigy as she strives to become the greatest chess player anyone has ever seen. The show was released on October 23, 2020 on *Netflix*.

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

Indian Premier League
Mumbai v Delhi
Live from 8:00pm

TEN 2

UEFA Europa League
Ludogorets v Tottenham

Live from 11:55pm
Arsenal v Molde
Live from 2:00am (Friday)

TEN 1

UEFA Europa League
Benfica v Rangers
Live from 11:55pm

AC Milan v Lille
Live from 2:00am (Friday)

SONY SIX

STAR SPORTS 2
Jio Women's T20 Challenge
Velocity v Trailblazers
Live from 4:00pm



POLICE FLY HIGH IN HANDBALL

Bangladesh Police clinched the title of the Bangabandhu Federation Cup Handball Competition following a 31-26 goal victory over Bangladesh Ansar & VDP at the Shaheed M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium in Paltan yesterday. The first half of this thrilling encounter was tied 14-14. This is the first Federation Cup title for Police, who had been second best on three previous occasions. The fifth edition of the competition, with Bandarban DSA and Team Handball Dhaka being the other two teams, was held after a gap of 15 years.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Jamal on the verge of signing for Kolkata Mohammedan

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national team captain Jamal Bhuiyan is all but confirmed to sign for Indian outfit Kolkata Mohammedan for the upcoming I-League, subject to a confirmation to return to his current outfit Saif SC for the second phase of the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

It was learned that a tri-party agreement involving Jamal, Kolkata Mohammedan and Saif SC is going to be signed within a couple of days.

"The transfer window of the Indian League has already been closed [on October 24] but as per an exceptional clause of FIFA, the clubs can still sign players, who, however, must be a free player during the period of the transfer window. And Kolkata Mohammedan are taking this opportunity to sign Jamal," Saif SC general secretary Mahbubur Rahman Sumon told The Daily Star yesterday.

"As we want Jamal to play for Saif SC from the second phase of the upcoming BPL, we have asked Jamal to discuss with Kolkata Mohammedan on whether he can sign an agreement till April 20," said Suman



adding that they want to re-sign Jamal during the mid-season transfer window of BPL from April 15 to 30 as the I-League is scheduled to end on April 30.

"Jamal has already informed Mohammedan about the matter and if they agree on it, then we don't have any objection in giving Jamal a clearance to play for them," said Suman.

Jamal, who has been playing for Saif SC for the last three seasons, wasn't responding though he had said earlier that if he was offered a good contract, then he would consider it. But if the contract was similar to that of Saif SC, he would rather choose to play in Bangladesh.

Nepal to land today

SPORTS REPORTER



Nepal national football team faced another blow yesterday with two more players testing Covid-19 positive before leaving the country today for Dhaka where they are scheduled to play two friendlies this month.

Nepal are scheduled to land in the capital this morning. After arriving here, all 35 members of the visiting team will undergo further Covid-19 tests today under the supervision of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF).

"All members of Nepal team are supposed to board after Covid-19 negative results and they will again be tested here. The visitors will stay at the hotel until the results of the covid-19 tests come out and then avail training facilities," said BFF executive Mahmudul Hasan.

It has been learned that Nepal are going to keep two footballers, who were the roommates of two footballers who tested positive yesterday, out of the squad in fear of further infection among the rest members.

Nepal had initially called up 30 players for the friendlies but five tested Covid-19 positive before the start of their preparation on Oct 31. Bangladesh are scheduled to play the friendlies on November 13 and 17 at Bangabandhu National Stadium. The matches will kick off at 5:00pm in front of a limited number of spectators.

Meanwhile, defender Tutul Hossain Badsha withdrew himself citing his sickness. Earlier, the defender had however skipped the training camp on account of tending to his sick wife. Midfielder Mamunul Islam is in doubt to be included in the final squad following a small fracture on his left hand.

Back on top, can Shakib return strong again?

MAZHAR UDDIN



Back in 2014, after a six-month suspension by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) for his 'misbehaviour' with the then Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha and for his altercation with a spectator during an ODI against India in Mirpur, all eyes were on Shakib Al Hasan when he returned.

The champion all-rounder made a grand comeback by picking up a six-wicket haul against Zimbabwe in the first Test in October 2014 and followed it up with a magnificent hundred in the second Test.

With his one-year ICC ban for not reporting corrupt approaches from a bookie ending on October 29, Shakib's

challenges he will face and works accordingly, which was reflected in both his fitness and skills during the World Cup.

Shakib had expected to return after the one-year ban with the tour of Sri Lanka which was supposed to start last month. The champion cricketer returned from the US in September and worked both on his fitness and skills under his two mentors Salahuddin and Nazmul Abedin at BKSP for nearly a month.

The tour was postponed due to the host country's strict quarantine protocols, and Shakib will return to competitive cricket in the upcoming Bangabandhu T20 tournament. After returning tonight, Shakib is expected to appear for the BCB's fitness test on November 9.

With the cricket world mostly being



return to the cricketing sphere was marked by him reclaiming the number-one ODI all-rounder spot without a ball being bowled.

He will return to the country tonight from the US and will take the field in the Bangabandhu T20 tournament late this month, and when he does there is every chance that he will shine.

Before the 2019 World Cup, when the 33-year-old was not being picked regularly by Indian Premier League side Sunrisers Hyderabad, he had his mentor Mohammad Salahuddin floundering in and worked silently ahead of the mega event.

The rest was history as Shakib went in an all-time great all-round performance in the World Cup and could well have been the player of the tournament, had Bangladesh not been eliminated before the semis.

His preparation method has always been very specific as Shakib knows

at a standstill for the past seven months due to Covid-19 pandemic, Shakib was fortunate that he did not miss much international cricket.

His climb back to the top of the all-rounders' charts, which he has dominated for a decade, serves as a reminder to the rest of the world that Bangladesh's pre-eminent player is back.

But anyone who knows Shakib closely will definitely say that it will not distract him for a second; his focus instead will only be that his new beginning continues in the tradition of comebacks past.

Considering all the comebacks he made over the years, and the controversies he was at the centre of, the absence in the last year – caused by arguably the darkest chain of events of his career – perhaps helped Shakib grow both as a player and as a person, which may bode well for Bangladesh.



"DIEGO, DIEGO!"

A fan of Diego Maradona, with his idol's name and jersey number emblazoned on his back, stands outside the clinic where the Argentine football legend underwent a surgery for a subdural haematoma, a blood clot on the brain, in Olivos on the outskirts of Buenos Aires on Tuesday. "We managed to successfully remove the clot. Diego coped well with the surgery," Leopoldo Luque, Maradona's neurosurgeon and personal physician, said. "It's under control, there's a little drainage (of blood). He'll remain under observation." Around 50 fans gathered in front of the clinic to celebrate when reports of the successful outcome started to emerge, chanting: "Diego, Diego!". "What we want the most is for Diego to get out of all this. He can be, he is the greatest, the greatest in the world," said Diego Bermudez, a Maradona fan.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Mumbai in the hunt again

REUTERS, Undated

Mumbai Indians are in familiar territory as the Indian Premier League moves into the playoffs but the defending champions know they will have to take their game to another level when they face Delhi Capitals on Thursday.

Mumbai, the tournament's most successful team with four titles, became the first side to reach the playoffs last week and used Tuesday's game against Sunrisers Hyderabad to test the strength of their bench.

It did not work out well, a 10-wicket thrashing coming as a wake-up call ahead of the Delhi tie.

Delhi, led by the tournament's youngest captain in 25-year-old Shreyas Iyer, will be hoping it is third time lucky against Mumbai having lost both their group matches to them last month.

The winners of Thursday's match will move straight into the Nov. 10 final in Dubai but all is not lost for the losers.

They will meet the team that comes through Friday's eliminator between Royal Challengers Bangalore and 2016 champions Hyderabad to decide the second finalist.

Liverpool, Bayern run riot as Real edge Inter

AFP, PARIS



Diogo Jota scored a stunning hat-trick in Liverpool's 5-0 demolition of Atalanta in the Champions League on Tuesday, as holders Bayern Munich scored six and Real Madrid struck late to beat Inter Milan in a thriller.

On a prolific night across Europe which also saw a rampant Borussia Moenchengladbach hit six in Ukraine, the star individual performances came from Jota and Alassane Plea.

Real, the 13-time European champions, ran out 3-2 winners in a dramatic encounter with Inter behind closed doors at the Alfredo di Stefano Stadium, as Vinicius Junior set up his fellow Brazilian substitute Rodrygo to lash in the decisive goal 10 minutes from time.

Portugal forward Jota joined Liverpool from Wolverhampton Wanderers in September and has



wasted little time making an impact with seven goals from just five starts.

In Bergamo, against an Atalanta side who reached the quarter-finals last season, Jota was brought into the starting line-up in place of Roberto Firmino and required just

16 minutes to open the scoring.

Jota then got his hat-trick as the Premier League champions recorded their biggest win in Europe since beating Porto 5-0 away in February 2018.

"I'm playing in the best team of

my career so far. I don't know if it's the best moment of my career but obviously scoring goals is my way of playing football," Jota told BT Sport.

Ajax won 2-1 away to Midtjylland in Denmark, as Brazilian youngster Antony opened the scoring in the first minute and Dusan Tadic netted from an indirect free-kick inside the box soon after. Anders Dreyer got one back for the hosts, who remain pointless.

French forward Plea had earlier scored a hat-trick as Gladbach claimed a stunning 6-0 victory over Shakhtar Donetsk in Kiev, the German side's biggest European triumph since their 1970s heyday.

The unfortunate Valeriy Bondar scored an own goal, with Rami Bensebaini and Lars Stindl also scoring as Gladbach went top of Group B, a point clear of Shakhtar and Real Madrid.

Gladbach coach Marco Rose said: "Six-nil is extraordinary. We did a lot right today -- not to say almost everything."



(Anticlockwise from top) Bayern Munich extended their winning streak to 14 matches with a 6-2 mauling of Salzburg, two of the goals coming from Robert Lewandowski while Diogo Jota netted a hat-trick as Liverpool thrashed last season's quarterfinalists Atalanta 5-0. Meanwhile, Sergio Ramos leaped high in the air and headed home his 100th goal for Real Madrid as Los Blancos resurrected their Champions League campaign with a thrilling 3-2 win over Inter Milan in Madrid on a night of extraordinary football on Tuesday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

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CHECKING VEHICLE FITNESS Govt to hire pvt firm for first time

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

For the first time in the country, the government is going to hire a private company to check motor vehicles' fitness with machines.

The move, aimed at improving road safety, comes when Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) is issuing the vital clearance mostly manually as it has only one digital machine for the job.

Now, Computer Network System (CNS) Limited will set up a 12-lane Vehicle Inspection Centre (VIC) at BRTA's Mirpur office to test more than 400 vehicles every day.

The Cabinet Committee on Public Purchase yesterday approved a proposal, placed by the Road Transport and Highways Division, in this regard.

As per the proposal, CNS, which is now providing several services to the BRTA, will establish, operate and maintain the VIC for five years at a cost of Tk 105.23 crore.

The company will provide training to 200 BRTA staffers on the job and will hand over all equipment to the BRTA after the tenure's end.

"We will sign a contract with the company as soon as we receive documents regarding the approval," a top BRTA official told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said they hoped the company would be able to start its operation (checking vehicles' fitness) within six months.

Asked about the capacity of the VIC, the official said it would check between 384 and 450 vehicles on each working day.

He said the machine would look into seven things of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



A truck stand built illegally in Mohammadpur's Basila in the capital. The stand was built after a canal in Katasur of Basila was unlawfully filled up and occupied by grabbers. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

FOREIGN WORKERS KSA to relax sponsorship rules from next March

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia yesterday said it will ease key restrictions on millions of foreign workers, as part of plans to reform its long-criticised labour policy.

Human rights groups have repeatedly called on the kingdom to abolish its "kafala" sponsorship system, described by critics as a modern form of slavery that binds workers to their Saudi employers.

The ministry of human resources and social development said that from March 14, expatriates will no longer need their employers' permission to change jobs, travel or leave Saudi Arabia -- home to some 10 million foreigners.

"This initiative will improve and increase the efficiency of the work environment," the ministry said in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency.

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GOVT-SPONSORED PROJECTS Forex reserves may be used for those Says finance minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday said the country's forex reserves could be invested in good projects which would be sponsored by the government.

"The foreign minister said the size of foreign currency reserves will continue to grow. That's why we are thinking how to use this fund," he told reporters after a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Public Purchase.

Kamal's comments come at a time when the country's forex reserves hit the record \$41-billion mark.

He said the foreign currency reserves would be used to implement the government-sponsored projects. "In that case, our money will remain in the country instead of going out and we will be able to use the money for the country's development."

The minister said the demand for money has fallen substantially across the world after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. So, depositing the forex reserves in any foreign bank is not profitable now, he added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

Bangladesh-Poland economic cooperation

November 5, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

IDI AMIN'S MESSAGE TO BANGABANDHU

Ugandan special envoy JN Kakamba has handed over a personal message from President General Idi Amin to Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman yesterday evening at the Gono Bhaban. The envoy says the expulsion of 'non-citizens' from Uganda is an internal question of Uganda and the expellees have full understanding of that matter. He adds that full humane considerations have been shown to the expellees by his government.

BANGLADESH, POLAND JOINT COMMUNIQUE

Poland and Bangladesh are to exchange an economic mission. It is announced today in a communique released at the end of the official visit by Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad. The decision is taken to finalise trade cooperation between the two countries, especially in the fishing, marine, construction and power sectors, the communique says. It adds that Poland still gives its support to the earliest possible admission of Bangladesh into the United Nations. JAPAN WILL BUILD BRIDGE OVER JAMUNA

The Japanese government has decided to build a bridge over the Jamuna River in the upper reaches of the Ganges as part of its

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



LALMONIRHAT LYNCHING 'Khadem called in some people after argument with Jewel'

STAR REPORT

Slain Shahidunnabi Jewel's friend in a statement to police said Jewel did not demean the Holy Quran but had a bitter argument with the Burimari mosque khadem after Asr prayers.

Sultan Rubaiyat Sumon, 50, who was with Jewel on October 29, added that khadem Jobed Ali called in some people who started beating them up on the mosque premises, said Abida Sultana, superintendent of Lalmonirhat police, citing the written statement.

Sumon went back to his Rangpur home yesterday after his treatment in a Lalmonirhat hospital.

He went to Lalmonirhat along with Jewel, a former librarian of Rangpur Cantonment School and College, on a motorbike to get medicine for Jewel from

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

A 5-story building in China 'walks' to a new location

CNN ONLINE



Shanghai residents passing through the city's eastern Huangpu district in October might have stumbled upon an unusual sight: a "walking" building.

An 85-year-old primary school has been lifted off the ground -- in its entirety -- and relocated using new technology dubbed the "walking machine."

In the city's latest effort to preserve historic structures, engineers attached nearly 200 mobile supports under the five-story building, according to Lan Wuji, chief technical supervisor of the project.

The supports act like robotic legs. They're split into two groups which alternately rise up and

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

'No religion supports killing'

Momen writes to French FM, says Dhaka respects everyone's religious values

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has reaffirmed its commitment to show respect for everyone's religious and cultural sensitivity, conveying to the France government that no religion supports killings.

"It's our long-standing policy to have respect for each other," said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday, adding that he wrote a letter to his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian.

"Everyone has sensitivity. We're very aware of it," said the minister.

He said they do not interrupt anyone's freedom of opinion and expression as Bangladesh believes in freedom.

Momen, however, said there is an obligation with freedom and Bangladesh does not instigate anything negative.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

ASSAULT ON NAVY OFFICIAL Erfan, his bodyguard denied bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent Mohammad Erfan Salim and his bodyguard Zahidul Mollah to jail after rejecting their bail prayers in a case filed over the assault on navy official Lt Wasif Ahmed Khan.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Ziaur Rahman passed the order after Mobinul Haque, a sub-inspector of Detective Branch (DB) of police and also the case's investigation officer (IO), produced the duo before the court on completion of their five-day remand in two phases.

In yesterday's forwarding

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



PRAYER TIMING NOVEMBER 5

Fajr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4:55 12:45 4:00 5:30 7:15
JAMAT 5:30 1:15 4:15 5:34 7:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



A man selling wool on a footpath in Golap Shah Mazar area of Gulistan. For many years, he has been selling wool to people, who like to make their own winter wear, just before the cold weather sets in. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Europe reels from virus as cases top 11m

Italy agrees curfew joining a host of countries; Russia sees record number of infections

AFP, Rome

Italian officials yesterday agreed to impose a night-time curfew, joining a slew of European nations in ramping up restrictions in the face of a dramatic surge in coronavirus cases.

But the measure, which restricts Italians to their homes between 10:00 pm and 5:00 am, fell short of the kind of rules in force in countries including France, Belgium and Germany.

Governments in Europe are struggling to get a hold of a pandemic that has now infected more than 11 million on the continent.

Yesterday saw Russia announce a daily record for cases and deaths, upping pressure on the government only days after President Vladimir Putin said there were no plans for a lockdown.

The novel coronavirus has killed at least 1,215,957 people since the outbreak emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 11:00 GMT yesterday. More than 47,520,750 cases of coronavirus have been registered.

On Tuesday, 8,649 new deaths and 544,664 new cases were recorded worldwide. Based on latest reports, the countries with the most new deaths were United States with 1,045, followed by France with 854 and India with 514.

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