

New cabinet

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President Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury administers the oath of office to the prime minister and his cabinet colleagues.
BRANDT GREETES BANGABANDHU
West German Chancellor Willy Brandt has congratulated Bangabandhu and the people of Bangladesh on their having passed a constitution reflecting the wishes and aspirations of the Bangalee people.

“May the constitution of your country continue in all fields successfully under your leadership and may the people of Bangladesh enjoy a prosperous development and a happy future,” wishes the Chancellor.
SOVIET HELP TO BANGLADESH REASSURED
The President of the Soviet Union N Podgorny has expressed the confidence that the friendship and fruitful cooperation between Bangladesh and the Soviet Union would develop and strengthen to the benefit of both. In a message to President Abu Sayeed Chowdhury on the occasion of national Victory Day, the Soviet President has assured his country’s friendly support to Bangladesh in its struggle for independent development and social progress.

Source: December 18, 1972 issues of Dainik Bangla and Ittefaq
Sources: December 18, 1972 issues of Dainik Bangla, Ittefaq and The Daily Observer.

Opens after 55

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out of operation.
In the last several years, the Bangladesh and India governments restored rail connectivity on several routes that got snapped after partition of the Indian subcontinent.

Chilahati-Haldibari route is to be fifth one as the two countries already revived four such rail routes like Benapole-Petrapole, Darshana-Gede, Rohanpur-Singhabad and Birol-Radhiapur.

To make the Chilahati-Haldibari route operational, the Bangladesh government spent Tk 81 crore to construct 7km new rail tracks, 2.64km loop lines, seven minor bridges, two level crossings, and set up colour light signals and telecommunication system, said Abdur Rahim, project director of construction of broad-gauge rail line from Chilahati to Chilahati border for connectivity with India.

On the occasion, bordering town Chilahati takes a festive look as the venue is prepared near Chilahati rail station where over 1,000 distinguished guests are expected to witness the grand opening of the route.

Besides, an arrangement is made to allow thousands of people from Nilphamari and adjacent Panchagarh to witness the video conferencing through projectors as a number of big screens are set up at different points.

To make the programme a success, a preparatory meeting was held at conference room of deputy commissioner of Nilphamari on 10 December.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan, who attended the meeting as the chief guest, told the participants that after inauguration of the route by the two PMs, a well decorated empty goods train as a token journey would run from Chilahati rail station to Haldibari rail station.

The route is likely to become operational first with goods trains, and passenger trains may run from March 26, the minister added.

Once the rail communications between Chilahati and Haldibari route resume, it will connect Mongla port with northeastern India, Nepal and Bhutan. It will help boost the country’s economy and develop railway communications in the country, says a Bangladesh Railway press release.

Operation of a freight train may start soon on the route, and the import and export activities through the route will begin, the release said.

Bangladeshi tourists, who want to travel to Darjeeling and other parts of the northeastern India, would be able to go there easily using this route, the release added.

People of Nilphamari, Panchagarh and Thakurgaon feel enthusiastic as rail communications between Bangladesh and India are going to resume through the Chilahati-Haldibari route.

Rafiqul Islam, 80, of Chilahati station area said, “In my childhood, I saw long trains running on the route and stopping here.”

There were big warehouses near the station to store the imported coal and raw jute for exporting to India. “The ruins of the warehouses still can be seen.”

Akhtar Hossain, president of Small Garment Factory Owners’ Association in Saidpur, said they used to export cheap garment products to India for small income people through Burimari and Banglabandha land ports by road and now it would be easier for them to send these through Chilahati-Haldibari rail route at comparatively low costs.

Farhanul Haque, vice-president of Nilphamari Chamber of Commerce and Industries, said, “A scope has been created for Bangladeshi exporters to find new markets in India’s seven sister states and also in Nepal and Bhutan. There would be demand for our agricultural and garment goods.”



This handout photograph taken yesterday and released by the Indian Press Information Bureau (PIB), shows Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) lighting the ‘Swarnim Vijay Mashaal’ on the occasion of “Vijay Diwas”, which commemorates the victory over Pakistan during the 1971 war that led to the independence of Bangladesh, at the National War Memorial in New Delhi.

PHOTO: AFP

Biden joins Senate battle

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a rally for two Democratic candidates in runoff races that will determine the Senate’s balance of power.

“Honk for your next United States senators Jon Ossoff and Rev. Raphael Warnock,” Biden told the crowd at the drive-in event in Atlanta as he urged voters to turn out in force on January 5.

“Send me these two men, and we will control the Senate!”

One day after the Electoral College affirmed Biden’s victory, attention shifted to the looming Senate battle -- and to the shape of the incoming administration, as Biden also announced he had nominated Pete Buttigieg, a former mayor and presidential rival, as secretary of transportation.

Buttigieg would be the first openly gay person confirmed by the Senate to a presidential cabinet post -- in line with Biden’s pledge to usher in the most diverse cabinet ever when he takes office on January 20.

And while Trump still refuses to concede -- continuing to tweet baseless allegations of mass fraud that have been rejected in dozens of lawsuits -- top Senate Republican Mitch McConnell finally broke his silence with a message to the president: it’s

over.

“The Electoral College has spoken. So today I want to congratulate President-elect Joe Biden,” McConnell said on the Senate floor, adding Americans can also “take pride” that they will have their first female vice president in Kamala Harris.

Biden told reporters before flying to Georgia that he had a “good” phone conversation with McConnell, a longtime Senate colleague.

“I told him that while we disagree on a lot of things, there are things we can work together on,” Biden said.

The Electoral College confirmation triggered an acknowledgement of Biden’s win from Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and Mexico’s Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador -- who had both waited until now to recognize the president-elect -- also sent their congratulations.
‘TURN THE PAGE’
Trump, in unprecedented fashion, has yet to acknowledge his defeat in the chaotic election that will see him exit the White House after a single four-year term.

In the wake of McConnell’s message to the president-elect Tuesday, Trump suggested he would continue to fight the results and aired unproven claims

that November’s poll was “rigged”.

“Too soon to give up,” he said in a second tweet. “Republican Party must finally learn to fight. People are angry!”

But Biden urged the divided country to “turn the page” as he welcomed the Electoral College vote on Monday, saying US democracy proved “resilient” against Trump’s “abuse of power.”

He praised voters for casting ballots in record numbers despite fears of Covid-19 and “enormous political pressure, verbal abuse and even threats of physical violence.”

The White House transition is occurring with the coronavirus pandemic surging, pushing US Covid-19 deaths above 300,000.

While critical winter months lie ahead, a bright spot has emerged with health care workers receiving the first doses of the coronavirus vaccine distributed in the nation.

And with top infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci recommending Biden and Harris quickly take the vaccine, the president-elect said they would receive the shot in public view.

MINDS ON GEORGIA

Although the door has all but shut on his efforts to overturn the vote results,

Trump has remained defiant.

In a threatening move against Republican leaders in Georgia, where he has made baseless claims of massive voter fraud, he retweeted a pro-Trump lawyer who posted a picture of Georgia’s governor and secretary of state, saying “they will soon be going to jail.”

Democrats, who control the House of Representatives, must flip both Georgia Senate seats in order to seize control of the upper chamber, while Republicans must hold just one to maintain their majority.

Republicans have framed Georgia as must-win races, with the state forming the last line of defense against what they describe as radical “socialism.”

If Republicans do win, McConnell will remain majority leader, and his relationship with Biden will quickly become the most closely watched in Washington.

The pair were known for striking deals during crunch periods when Biden was Barack Obama’s vice president.

But McConnell gave Obama no quarter, repeatedly stymying him on judicial nominations and forcing the president to curtail his legislative agenda.

Europe tightens

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health regulator to approve the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine “before Christmas”.
China is also looking to stock up on the Pfizer vaccine with one company agreeing to buy 100 million doses subject to local approval -- the country is mixing its vaccination strategy between locally developed drugs and imported ones.

Britain’s government said yesterday it had delivered the first jabs to 137,000 people, but high infection numbers still forced London to join large parts of England under tough restrictions.

Pubs, bars, restaurants and other hospitality sites will close, as will theatres and other entertainment venues.

“The hospitality business needs this week, and it’s devastating. It is devastatingly awful,” said Lesley Lewis, owner of The French House, a London pub.

“But if this is what it takes to save lives, that’s what we have to do.”

Denmark, France, Turkey and the Netherlands have all tightened their coronavirus restrictions and Spain’s prime minister expressed alarm at rising infection numbers there.

Release cartoonist

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and its use to silence critical voices.

In court hearings held virtually, Kishore’s bail applications have been denied five times, and no trial date has been set. An insulin-dependent diabetic, Kishore is at heightened risk of Covid-19 complications.

“Around the world, Covid-19 outbreaks in prisons increase the risk of harm or death of individuals with underlying health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and chronic respiratory conditions,” the statement said.

“Bangladeshi authorities have released thousands of individuals due to the threat that Covid-19 poses in prisons, and there seems to be no legitimate reason to refuse Kishore’s request for bail,” the experts said in the statement.

“We urge Bangladesh to release Kishore on humanitarian grounds to avoid further deterioration of his health.”

In addition to requesting Kishore’s immediate release, the experts called on the authorities to drop the criminal charges against him in light of Bangladesh’s obligations under international human rights law.

Earlier this year, the Cartoonists Rights Network International gave Kishore the Robert Russell Courage in Cartooning Award in recognition of his social engagement and defence of human rights.

“During the pandemic, it is more vital than ever to respect the rights of artists such as Ahmed Kabir Kishore to express dissenting views,” said the experts.

“Not only are these rights internationally guaranteed, they play a vital role in promoting critical policy discussions.

“Silencing their voices harms their human rights and also puts everyone at greater risk.”

5,000-yr-old

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hook thought to be used for construction -- had been donated to the University of Aberdeen.

But the trail ran cold and the ancient artefact disappeared almost without a trace until the end of last year when an assistant curator at the university, Abeer Eladany, originally from Egypt, made a chance discovery in its Asia collection.

Knowing that a small cigar tin she found there bearing an old Egyptian flag did not belong with the other pieces, she cross-referenced it with other records.

“It has been like finding a needle in a haystack,” Eladany said after discovering the fragment of wood among hundreds of thousands of items.

“I’m an archaeologist and have worked on digs in Egypt but I never imagined it would be here in northeast Scotland that I’d find something so important to the heritage of my own country.”

The fragment -- initially measuring five inches or around 13 centimetres but now in several pieces -- was first discovered in the Great Pyramid’s Queen’s Chamber in 1872 by engineer Wayman Dixon.

It made its way to the Scottish city because of a link between Dixon and a medical doctor named James Grant who studied in Aberdeen and went to Egypt to treat cholera in the mid-1860s.

More evidence that the lost piece of wood, as well as the other items known as the “Dixon relics”, could have been used in the construction of the Great Pyramid has come to light following modern tests on the artefact.

Carbon dating results, delayed by coronavirus restrictions, placed the wood at somewhere between 3341 and 3094 BC, long before the construction of the pyramid.

This supports the theory the items were left behind by builders rather than by later explorers.

Neil Curtis, head of museums and special collections at the University of Aberdeen, called results from the carbon dating a “revelation”.

“This discovery will certainly reignite interest in the Dixon relics and how they can shed light on the Great Pyramid,” he added.

AFP, Suva

Fijians living in the path of an approaching super cyclone were told to hunker down at home or head to emergency shelters immediately yesterday, as authorities warned of the storm’s potential to uproot buildings and cause mass destruction.

The Fiji Meteorological Service said Cyclone Yasa had intensified into a top-of-the-scale category five storm, with gusts of up to 280 kilometres per hour (174 miles per hour).

It is on track to hit Fiji late today and the National Disaster Management Office said around two-thirds of the island nation’s population of 900,000 were in its path.

National Disaster Management Office director Vasiti Soko said

anyone who doubted their home’s structural integrity should prioritise survival over protecting their property and flee right away.

“If you need to move to an evacuation centre, we are pleading that you move before it gets dark.”

“If you know that your house cannot survive strong winds, let alone the cat five cyclone that is on the way, please take yourselves, your children and your valuables to the evacuation centre.”

Soko said Yasa was likely to have a larger impact than Cyclone Harold in April this year, another category five storm that gouged a trail of destruction across the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga.

Category five cyclones were once rare but have become more common in recent years, with Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama among

those blaming the phenomenon on climate change.

“We can see the eye (of Cyclone Yasa) and the area that’s of concern -- it’s not just part of Fiji like Harold, it’s the whole of Fiji,” Soko said.

“It’s strong enough to uproot trees. It’s strong enough to uproot buildings that are not well secured. It can also create a lot of flying debris.”

She added that authorities were considering a curfew and movement restrictions, with Fiji’s military on standby if needed.

Schools have already been closed so they can be converted to evacuation centres.

Aid agencies such as the Red Cross are gearing up for a major disaster relief effort, with the focus on maintaining basic services and minimising longer-term social impacts.

“Disasters can strike at any time

Fijians told to seek shelter as super cyclone bears down