



The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION



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PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES UGC for uniform admission system

Universities to decide after discussion

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The University Grants Commission now wants a uniform admission system for all private universities as the majority of public universities are set to introduce the new system next year.

Once introduced, the uniform system at private universities will reduce the financial burden and hassles of admission seekers and their guardians, says the regulatory body for both public and private universities.

In its "Annual Report 2019", the UGC has made a set of recommendations, including the introduction of uniform admission system for private universities.

It submitted the report to President Abdul Hamid on Sunday.

Top UGC officials said the new system will help address the issues regarding some private universities that enrol students without any admission tests, flouting the UGC rules on student admission.

"We have made the recommendations, keeping in mind many issues," UGC Member Prof Muhammed Alamgir told The Daily Star yesterday.

The majority of public universities have already announced that they would hold a uniform admission test titled "Central Admission Test" to reduce the hassles of admission seekers, he mentioned.

"Now we can tell the private universities to go for uniform admission test. Public medical colleges first introduced the system and then private medical colleges followed suit.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



As the cold wave sweeps over the country, street children find a sweet spot to take a nap at Khilgaon in the capital. They sleep close to an exhaust vent of a restaurant kitchen that is pumping out warm air from the stoves.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

1,776 more Rohingyas sail for Bhashan Char

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Some 1,776 more Rohingyas are set to be relocated to Bhashan Char in Hatiya upazila of Noakhali today.

The second batch of Rohingyas from 428 families of refugee camps have already reached Chattogram from Cox's Bazar yesterday, witnesses said.

Witnesses in Ukhia and Teknaf said the Rohingyas, who would like to go to Bhashan Char voluntarily, were taken to Chattogram on buses amid presence of law enforcers.

They said officials briefed the refugees on how they would be taken to the island and gave them breakfast in the transit camp at Ukhia Degree College ground and then they were taken to Chattogram.

The refugees will be taken to Bhashan Char from Chattogram Boat Club on navy ship this morning, officials said.

Rohingya leaders said they became interested in moving to Bhashan Char after knowing the detailed facilities in the island.

They said many are showing interest to

PHOTO ON PAGE 12 SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Saudi flights suspended for another week

More than 5,000
workers stuck

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Saudi Arabia yesterday extended suspension of all international flights to the kingdom for another week, adding to the worries of more than 5,000 migrant workers in Bangladesh about their return to that country.

The Saudi government, however, said foreign citizens would be able to leave the kingdom by air.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

Health watchdog remains invisible

Not a single meeting held in last
nine months of pandemic

RASHIDUL HASAN

The parliamentary standing committee on health ministry has shown nothing short of indifference to the health emergency caused by the pandemic.

It had not held a single meeting, let alone make a visible move since March when the first cases of the coronavirus were detected in the country, putting the healthcare services under strain and exposing corruption and mismanagement in the health sector.

Since it was formed in January 2019, the JS body met only six times, officials said. As a result, the committee could not ensure accountability and transparency in the health ministry.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

COVID VACCINE ROLLOUT India starts 2-day dry run in 4 states

NDTV ONLINE

A two-day dry run for coronavirus vaccine program started in Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Gujarat and Assam yesterday morning.

Focus on management of possible adverse events after immunisation, and dry runs that include checks on cold storage and transportation arrangements will be part of program that will be carried out in the chosen districts in each state.

All the Indian states will report the observations - recorded during the program - to the Centre. The government plans to cover 30 crore people in the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Govt retreated from stance, zealots didn't

Menon tells Star on row over sculpture

GOLAM MORTOZA

Rashed Khan Menon is an important figure in Bangladesh's political history. He was at the frontlines during the mass upsurge in 1969 and the Liberation War in 1971. Currently, he is the president of the Workers Party of Bangladesh. He is also a lawmaker from Dhaka-8 and has previously served as a minister in the Awami League-led government. Menon recently talked with The Daily Star about the current political situation in the country.

The following are excerpts from the interview.
The Daily Star: The AL-led grand alliance government is in its third consecutive term. As a politician and alliance partner, what is your observation on the current political and social situation?



SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

THIS EVENING

HONOURING OUR ICT LEADERS WITH THE PRESTIGIOUS

5th The Daily Star

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KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Sergi Herrero
Group Co-Chief Executive Officer
VEON

Sergi Herrero joined VEON, a multinational telecommunication services company headquartered in Netherlands, as joint Chief Operating Officer in September 2019, following a period as Facebook's Global Director of Payments and Commerce Partnerships, where he oversaw the launch and growth of payment and commerce capabilities for Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram. He has also led the deployment of Charitable Giving, the scaling and optimisation of the Facebook Ads payments business and drove the expansion of the platform's global marketplace. Before joining Facebook in 2014, he held several senior roles in technology, banking and consulting.

CATEGORIES OF AWARDS

ICT SOLUTION PROVIDER OF THE YEAR (LOCAL MARKET FOCUS)

ICT BUSINESS PERSON OF THE YEAR

ICT START UP OF THE YEAR

DIGITAL COMMERCE OF THE YEAR

ICT SOLUTION PROVIDER OF THE YEAR (INTERNATIONAL MARKET FOCUS)

ICT PIONEER

Time: 6:30 pm

The programme will be virtual and will be broadcasted LIVE from our Facebook page
www.facebook.com/dailystarnews

SAFA Award for Best Presented Annual Report 2019

Bank Asia is the 1st Prize Winner among all Private Banks in South Asia

10 YEARS INTO ENCROACHMENT OF CENTURIES OLD TEMPLE
Ex-MP's sons still have grasp on Teknaf's first Buddhist temple

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

The law of the land is quite strict against hurting the sentiment of any religious community or any action that threatens communal harmony. But in Hnila union of Teknaf, the authorities never took any action against the individuals who demolished and encroached on a 200-year-old Buddhist temple that had an iconic tin-roofed wooden structure.



2011. In the report ANM Nazim Uddin, the then Teknaf Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), recommended that the grabbers be evicted from the land that belongs to the Buddhist temple. Asked about the report, ANM Nazim Uddin, currently the deputy secretary of fisheries and livestock ministry, said "I might have given [opinion in] the investigation report after visiting the temple site in Teknaf, where I served as a UNO between 2009 and 2012."

When the incident took place in 2010, Mohammad Ali, the father of both the accused, was the then president of Awami League's Teknaf upazila unit.

The iconic tin-roofed wooden structure of Dakhin Hnila Boro Bouddha Vihar, in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar, which was razed to the ground in 2010. Right, the 150-year-old Buddha statue, made of octo-alloy, is still kept in the Ordination Hall of the temple compound.

PHOTO: SANJOY KUMAR BARUA, COLLECTED

Hnila Boro Bouddha Vihar, the first Buddhist temple in Teknaf upazila. The temple's main building was razed to the ground by the offenders.

Hall -- a separate tin-roofed structure in the compound -- where a massive 150-year-old Buddha statue, made of octo-alloy or Ashtadhatu, is still situated.

Burglars had detached and stolen small parts from the statue despite it being under close watch of the monks. But now, when it has been lying unprotected, they might succeed in stealing the entire statue, he feared.

"The grabbers completely destroyed the historical temple where our forefathers prayed; we prayed. We want our temple back," said septuagenarian Aung Kyaw Rakhine, a resident of the area.

Before desecrating and plundering around 18 priceless and ancient Buddha statues kept inside the temple, the goons physically assaulted and drove away the monks from there too, said Kyaw Zaw Aung, secretary of the temple.

Buddhist devotees later recovered a smaller and damaged stone statue as well as a footprint of the Buddha and stored both in the Ordination Hall along with the octo-alloy statue.

In an effort to get the possession of the temple's land back from the clutch of the encroachers, the Buddhist devotees from the area in 2011 submitted at least six petitions to different offices at the local administration as well as a memorandum to the prime minister's office via the deputy commissioner (DC) of Cox's Bazar. "But no one helped us protect this historical temple," lamented Kyaw Zaw.

During a recent visit to the area, this correspondent came across a man who was cutting earth from near the temple site. "It was a historical temple in Teknaf upazila where thousands of devotees from across the country gathered every year... but now it belongs to Rashed chairman and his brother Mahubub," the man said identifying himself as Monir Ahmed. This paper has obtained a copy of an investigation report dated May 3,

He also said although he mentioned it in his report submitted to the religious affairs ministry, "no steps were taken to protect the historical temple."

Asked, Md Nurul Islam, secretary to the religious affairs ministry, said they would take the matter seriously and launch an investigation to find out whether their officials overlooked the allegation of the encroachment and vandalism.

Contacted, Hnila UP Chairman Rashed Mahmud Ali said, "My father took the temple's land from a former monk of the temple via a notary public [deed] in 2001. We later planted trees there... We will return the land if we made any mistake."

After the attention of Cox's Bazar DC (Revenue) Md Amin Al Parvege was drawn on the issue of encroachment and vandalising of the temple in Hnila, he said he would take necessary action after reviewing relevant documents.

Health watchdog remains invisible

FROM PAGE 1
But the picture is different for other committees. Different parliamentary bodies held at least 132 meetings since late March.

Asked whether he will call for a meeting soon, he said he would talk to the committee members in this regard. Over 7,300 people have died with Covid-19 and more than five lakh got infected in the country.

About the meetings of other committees, she said maybe they have the courage to hold the meeting, but the committee members of the health ministry may still feel unsafe to come out and hold meetings.

Bangladesh Chhatra League in Hnila in 2010. He is now the chairman of Hnila Union Parishad (UP) and also the president of AL in the same union. In August 27 that year, henchmen of Rashed and his brother Mahubub Morshed forcibly took possession of 11 acres of land belonging to Dakhin

According to JS procedure rules, a standing committee must meet at least once a month.

Hundreds of new cases are still being detected every day in Bangladesh. On top of the government's initial mishandling of the situation, mismanagement and irregularities made the battle against the outbreak more difficult.

"A few members and chairmen have expressed such concerns. Given the situation, we cannot insist anyone to come and hold a meeting despite the health concerns."

RE-REQUEST FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI)
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Aviation & Aerospace University
Temporary Office: Old Airport, Tejgaon, Dhaka-1215, Bangladesh.

Table with project details including Agency (Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Aviation & Aerospace University), Ministry (Ministry of Education), and various technical specifications.

Table with application requirements including Experience, Resources and Delivery Capacity Required, and Other Details (if applicable).

There are 39 parliamentary standing committees that are supposed to examine bills, review different activities of the ministry concerned, enquire into irregularities, and make recommendations. MP Muhibur Rahman Manik, a member of the standing committee on health ministry, said they have contacted the committee chief about media reports on the committee's lack of initiatives.

Reports of misappropriation of money during procurement of medical equipment became common. Fraudulent activities by Regent Hospital and JKG Health Care over tests and resignation of former director general of Directorate General of Health Services added fuel to the fire.

The speaker said some standing committee chairmen have sought permission to hold meetings virtually. "But the rules of procedure of our parliament does not mention anything about it. It's a new and unanticipated thing. That's why we haven't made a decision yet," she said.

INFORMATION FOR APPLICANT
Brief Description of Assignment: (a). Different types of survey such as digital, topographical, land use, physical feature, hydrological, archaeological, accommodation, geological, traffic and transportation, drainage, existing flora and fauna and other relevant surveys of 638.5428 (six hundred thirty eight and point five four two eight) acres land for the preparation of master plan.

"We cannot call for meetings. The committee chief can," he added. Committee Chairman Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim said he couldn't hold meetings because the committee members live in different places.

But none of these could draw the attention of the health watchdog.

"I am trying to look into how the privacy of the meetings would be ensured and what parliaments in other countries are doing."

(b). Conducting detailed impact assessment (i.e. need analysis, financial, environmental, Social, Vehicle movement, implementation plan etc.).

"After holding a meeting on March 24, we had fixed a date for the next meeting. But that could not happen due to the countrywide lockdown from late March," he told The Daily Star.

As the government is procuring vaccines and taking preparations to tackle a possible surge of infections in winter, the role of the JS body becomes all too crucial.

The standing committees are usually inactive and ineffective, he told The Daily Star.

(c). Preparation of a Master plan including 2-D and 3-D view with animation for at least next fifty years or above of BSMRAAU. Consultant has to submit a preliminary conceptual layout with soft & hard copy including 3D view with animation.

"Later, we couldn't hold meetings as many officials and security personnel of parliament tested positive for Covid-19. We are waiting to see whether the Covid-19 situation becomes normal," said Selim, also a presidium member of

Contacted, Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury said she would talk to the chief of the parliamentary body concerned.

But the committee on the health ministry should not be so indifferent at a time of a national crisis, he said.

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Hajj, umrah

FROM PAGE 12
trial in the country even if they commit any offence in Saudi Arabia.

Mentioning that Saudi Arabia has changed the hajj management system in 2011, the cabinet secretary said India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia framed laws.

He said no one without registration under the law could deal with any hajj (hajj pilgrim) and the authorities concerned could take action against anomalies.

According to the proposed law, the registration of any hajj or umrah agency can be cancelled for anomalies. Besides, a hajj agency could be fined maximum Tk 50 lakh, while an umrah agency could be slapped maximum Tk 15 lakh for irregularities, said Anwarul.

If any agency gets warning in two consecutive years, its registration would automatically be suspended for two years, he added. Besides, lawsuits can be filed for criminal offences committed in hajj and umrah management, said the cabinet secretary.

According to the law, if any hajj-related anomaly is committed even in Saudi Arabia by Bangladesh, it could be treated as if it happened in Bangladesh and legal steps could be taken in the country, he said.

He mentioned that the religious affairs ministry placed the bill in the Cabinet in line with a directive of the Cabinet issued in 2012 to enact a law instead of the existing policy.

S Africa hits 1m cases

Detects new Covid variant; Trump signs virus relief and spending package

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa logged its millionth case of Covid-19 and South Korea yesterday became the latest country to detect the new coronavirus variant, as the pandemic showed no signs of letting up.

Global infections have raced past 80 million with nearly 1.8 million deaths, even as vaccination drives gather pace in North America and Europe, with a top US expert warning that the pandemic might get even worse in the coming weeks.

The explosion of cases worldwide in recent weeks has prompted the return of many unpopular restrictions, including some lockdowns, and concerns have grown after the detection of a new virus variant experts believe could be more transmissible.

South Africa became the first African nation to log one million cases, official data showed Sunday, as authorities considered reimposing restrictions to battle a second wave of infections driven by the new variant.

South Korea became the latest nation yesterday to detect the variant, in three individuals of a London-based family who arrived in the country last week.

The new variant was first detected in

Britain, and made its way to a number of other nations including Japan and Canada, prompting dozens of governments -- including European nations -- to impose travel restrictions on the UK.

Most European countries began their vaccination campaigns over the weekend, boosting hopes of an end to the pandemic, especially in some of the hardest-hit parts of the continent.

US cases have been surging at an alarming rate in recent months. The world's largest economy has added at least one million new cases per week since early November, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

But there was some relief for Americans Sunday when President Donald Trump finally signed a \$900 billion stimulus bill, a long-awaited boost for millions of people whose livelihoods have been battered by the pandemic.

While the United States has also begun vaccinations, experts have said that because of the expected surge in cases over the Christmas holidays, the situation could get much worse.

Top US government scientist Anthony Fauci warned Sunday that the worst of the pandemic may be yet to come, driving the United States to a "critical point" as holiday travel spreads the coronavirus.



Farmers burn posters of the Reliance Jio telecommunications company as they protest against corporate businesses during a demonstration against the central government's recent agricultural reforms, on the outskirts of Amritsar, India yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

KILLING OF LABOURERS IN KASHMIR

Indian cops charge army officer, civilian

REUTERS, Srinagar

Indian police in Kashmir filed charges against an army officer and a civilian for allegedly killing three labourers and planting weapons to pass them off as militants, in a rare indictment of the military fighting an insurgency in the region.

The three labourers were killed in July after what the Indian army had initially said was a gun battle that started after militants fired at security forces in Amshipora village in southern Kashmir.

But Kashmir police, who come under the direct control of the central government in New Delhi, said in a press release on Sunday that their investigation showed the labourers "were murdered" by an army captain and two civilians - one of whom turned state's evidence.

"They planted illegally acquired weapons and material on their dead bodies after stripping them of their identities," police said, adding that the accused had "deliberately and purposefully" chosen not to follow standard operating procedures.

The Indian army declined to comment on the police statement on Sunday.

In an update last week, an army spokesman said that it was progressing with its own investigation, adding that the army was "committed to ethical conduct of operations."

Rights groups have long accused the Indian army of violating human rights in Kashmir, a Muslim majority region that is claimed in full by both India and Pakistan, but ruled in part by both.

Weather disasters cost \$150b in 2020

Says report, reveals long-term impact of global warming

AFP, Paris

The ten costliest weather disasters worldwide this year saw insured damages worth \$150 billion, topping the figure for 2019 and reflecting a long-term impact of global warming, according to a report yesterday.

The same disasters claimed at least 3,500 lives and displaced more than 13.5 million people.

From Australia's out-of-control wildfires in January to a record number of Atlantic hurricanes through November, the true cost of the year's climate-enhanced calamities was in fact far higher because most losses were uninsured.

Not surprisingly, the burden fell disproportionately on poor nations, according to the annual tally from global NGO Christian Aid, entitled "Count the cost of 2020: a year of climate breakdown."

Only four percent of economic losses from climate-impacted extreme

events in low-income countries were insured, compared with 60 percent in high-income economies, the report said, citing a study last month in The Lancet.



"Whether floods in Asia, locusts in Africa, or storms in Europe and the Americas, climate change has continued to rage in 2020," said Christian Aid's climate policy lead, Kat Kramer.

Extreme weather disasters, of course, have plagued humanity long

before manmade global warming began to mess with the planet's climate system.

But more than a century of temperature and precipitation data, along with decades of satellite data on hurricanes and sea level rise, have left no doubt that Earth's warming surface temperature is amplifying their impact.

Massive tropical storms -- variously known as hurricanes, typhoons and cyclones -- are now more likely, for example, to be stronger, last longer, carry more water and wander beyond their historical range.

2020's record-breaking 30 named Atlantic hurricanes -- with at least 400 fatalities and \$41 billion in damages -- suggest the world could see more such storms as well.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) had to use Greek symbols after running out of letters in the Latin alphabet.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Saudi activist jailed for 5 years, 8 months

A Saudi court yesterday sentenced prominent activist Loujain al-Hathloul to five years and eight months in prison for terrorism-related crimes, according to local media allowed to attend her trial. The women's rights activist was convicted of "various activities prohibited by the anti-terrorism law", the pro-government online outlet Sabq and other media cited the court as saying. It added that the court suspended two years and 10 months of the sentence. United Nations human rights experts have called the charges against her spurious, and along with leading rights groups and lawmakers in the United States and Europe have called for her release. Rights groups and her family say Hathloul, who had championed women's right to drive and for ending the kingdom's male guardian system, was subjected to abuse, including electric shocks, waterboarding, flogging and sexual assault.



Pfizer delays vaccine deliveries to 8 EU nations

Pfizer has postponed the delivery of new batches of its coronavirus vaccine to eight European nations including Spain, the Spanish health ministry said yesterday, a day after the EU began its immunisation campaign. The Spanish branch of Pfizer informed Madrid on Sunday night of the delay in shipments to the eight nations due to a "problem in the loading and shipment process" at its plant in Belgium, the health ministry said in a statement. It did not specify which European nations aside from Spain were affected. Pfizer has informed the ministry that the problem "was already resolved" but the next delivery of vaccines "will be a few hours late" and arrive in Spain on Tuesday, a day later than expected, the statement said.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Protesters take part in a torch rally after the parliament was dissolved and general elections were announced to be held in April and May, more than a year ahead of schedule, in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

EU member states endorse post-Brexit trade deal

AFP, Brussels

The 27 EU member states yesterday gave the green light for the post-Brexit trade deal to go into effect on January 1, a spokesman said.

Ambassadors from EU capitals met in Brussels to nod through the accord, using a procedure which will take effect at 3:00 pm (1400 GMT) today.

This will provisionally allow tariff-free trade with Britain to continue after it leaves the EU single market at the New Year.

Sebastian Fischer, spokesman for the German presidency of the EU, said: "EU Ambassadors have unanimously approved the provisional application of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement."

The member states' adoption of the plan allows it to come into effect in time to head off disruption

of cross-Channel trade.

But the deal must still be ratified retrospectively by the European Parliament, probably in late February.

Meanwhile, Britain's cabinet office minister Michael Gove said yesterday most British businesses have made preparations for the end of the Brexit transition period, adding it was important they were ready for changes to trading and regulatory rules.

Asked if businesses were ready for the end of the transition period on December 31, when Britain finally leaves the European Union's customs union and single market, Gove said: "Yes. The overwhelming majority of businesses have been getting ready, absolutely."

China trial of 'Hong Kong 12' begins

US urges release of the dissidents

AFP, Shenzhen

The trial in China of a group of Hong Kong pro-democracy activists who tried to escape the city by speedboat for sanctuary in Taiwan opened yesterday, as the United States urged the immediate release of dissidents it says "fled tyranny".

Ten of the so-called "Hong Kong 12" were in court in the southern city of Shenzhen facing charges linked to an illegal border crossing.

Chinese authorities took them into custody after their boat was intercepted on August 23.

The hearing began as scheduled yesterday afternoon, AFP understands, and was likely to run into the evening.

But court officials would confirm nothing about the case and the trial -- like many in China's opaque legal system -- was not open to foreign reporters or diplomats.

CLASHES BETWEEN TURKISH-LED TSNA, SDF

9,500 flee homes in northeast Syria

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

At least 9,500 people have fled their homes in Ain Issa, northeast Syria, following an escalation in clashes between the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (TSNA) and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in mid-December.

The SDF -- the military forces of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), also known as Rojava -- who control Ain Issa, report daily shelling on the city from Turkish-backed forces for the past week. The sound of fighting could be heard from sunset until Sunday noon.

Ain Issa sits approximately 45km (28 miles) by road from Tel Abyad, a city flanking the Turkish border and captured in October 2019 during Ankara's Operation Peace Spring.

Operation Peace Spring was launched following the abrupt withdrawal of United States troops from Syria to secure a so-called safe-zone on Turkey's border by clearing the region of People's Protection Units (YPG) fighters.

The SDF is comprised of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which Turkey considers to be linked to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Labelled a "terrorist" organisation by Turkey, the US and the European Union, the PKK has waged an armed uprising against the Turkish state since the 1980s.

The Turkish government stated the safe-zone would span 32km (20 miles) deep from the Turkish border into Syria and 444km (276 miles) wide from the Euphrates River to Iraq in order to settle up to two million Syrian refugees currently hosted by Turkey.

The operation resulted in Turkey capturing the cities of Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ain near its border and controlling an area 20km deep into Syria.

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| 369 th Branch Gunagori Branch, Chattogram Siddik City Center, Gunagori Banshkhali, Chattogram | 370 th Branch Bera Branch, Pabna Fakir Plaza, Bera Bazar Road, Bera, Pabna |
| 371 st Branch Patenga Branch, Chattogram Alexia N N Tower, M A Aziz Sarok Patenga, Chattogram | 372 nd Branch Chowdhury Hat Branch, Chattogram R D S Tower, Chowdhury Hat Hathazari, Chattogram |
| 373 rd Branch Kalir Bazar Branch, Gaibandha Gagbachi House, Kalir Bazar, Fulchhory, Gaibandha | |

Keep your eyes on our verified Facebook page to watch the inaugural ceremony at 11a.m. on 29 December 2020

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RIGHTS ADVOCACY

Vaccination is health right not a privilege

M S SIDDIQUI

Bangladesh's Globe Biotech is the only company, globally, to be listed with three vaccine candidates – DNA plasmid vaccine, Adenovirus Type 5 Vector and D614G variant LNP-encapsulated mRNA and other companies have one or two varieties. The candidature of the Globe Biotech vaccine has been shown on the WHO list as a DNA plasmid type vaccine at the preclinical stage.

A Nepalese company Anmol Healthcare Ltd has placed order to buy two million shots of vaccine developed by Bangladeshi company Globe Biotech Ltd after it passes trials. However, Bangladesh government is yet to announce any plan to buy local vaccine. Government has set to import some three crore doses whenever available.

There is a debate all over the world on who should have been at the top of the list to get priority for Corona vaccine. Traditionally, first in line for a scarce vaccine should be the health workers and the people most vulnerable to the infection.

Some experts have already developed draft guidelines for the deployment of early vaccines and proposed a framework for the equitable distribution of any vaccine. These guidelines mostly focus on using the vaccine to protect individuals as targets of the virus, as opposed to using vaccination to slow viral transmission.

An advisory group of the WHO has proposed focusing on the protection of older and more vulnerable people, essential health-care workers and groups in dense urban environments. Another group of experts opined that the less prevalent the virus is, the less that vulnerable people need protecting. Some epidemiological research

even unprotected — far less likely to be exposed to the virus. It also came up in the study as to how many doses of the vaccine were available. If few doses were available, it would be best to vaccinate the most vulnerable. If there were enough doses to vaccinate a decent fraction of the population, then targeting the spreaders would be a better idea, as the achieved immunity level could eliminate viral spreading, although the required fraction depended on how easily the virus could transmit. This study was for influenza, not the novel coronavirus, so its conclusions can only be suggestive.

Management Taskforce has prepared a draft list of ten groups and professions and placed for approval of higher authority. If it is approved, a selected number of people of some profession and group will get the first shots from the 3 crore vaccine doses being procured by Bangladesh.

The largest group to get the Covid-19 vaccine is the people aged sixty and above, which includes residents of old homes and religious leaders. In the initial phase, 4.5 lakh government sector health workers and seven lakh private sector health workers will get the vaccine. Another 1.5 lakh health management and support workers,



The comparisons between data emanated from both the 1918 and 1957 influenza epidemics, the latter of which was more coronavirus-like, with fatalities among older people. The researchers found that the best strategy is to target the most vulnerable and vaccinating the younger people and children to reduce viral transmission.

There is no published study so far on current coronavirus. It should be noted that protection is only one part of vaccination.

Canada has identified key populations that also include health care workers, caregivers in long-term care facilities and all essential front-line responders essential in managing the COVID-19 response. People who are unable to work remotely and are at risk of exposure, such as police, firefighters and grocery store staff, are also among the key groups in consideration.

The National Academy of Medicine of USA report proposes regarding distribution of vaccine in four phases as it becomes available. The first recipients are obvious picks: health-care workers, emergency responders, people with underlying conditions, and older adults living in group settings.

WHO recommends that priority be given to people who score high on the Social Vulnerability Index, which identifies factors such as poverty, lack of access to transportation, or crowded housing that are linked to poor health system. The goal is to rectify the pandemic's disproportionate burden on minorities and poor people and to work toward a new commitment to promote health equity.

In Bangladesh, the Covid-19 Vaccine

including employees of various government and private hospitals. Besides, 5.5 lakh Bangladesh Police personnel will get the shots, with a priority on traffic police officials.

Among others, three lakh front liners of the Bangladesh Army, 50,000 journalists and 5,000 civil surgeons, deputy commissioners, and ministry officials will be vaccinated. The vaccine will be distributed to 2.10 lakh Freedom Fighters as well. Moreover, there will be in line, 70,000 public representatives including members of Parliament, chairpersons and members of Upazila and Union Parishads. Depending on the availability of the vaccine shots, it will gradually be distributed to immunocompromised people, sufferers from chronic diseases, teaching professionals, and public transportation workers.

The policy and plan have not mentioned whether the government has given priority to the prevention of corona or reduction of spread of virus. The primary vaccine program is set for 1.5 crore people or 9% of the population and ten categories of professions and groups. All other countries have common policy of priority to elderly persons and frontline medical professionals.

The treatment or preventive vaccine is not privilege but a human right. It should only be there on equitable basis and not on the basis of some priorities, it should be there for the needy regardless of race, colour, religion, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

THE WRITER IS LEGAL ECONOMIST.

LAW WATCH

Revisiting the discourse of gendering crime

FARZANA AKTHER

Laws are meant to regulate the behavior of human beings with the conformity of equality, equity, fairness and justice. Though legal regimes in South Asian countries greatly attributed to religious, social, cultural repercussions towards a set of norms, sometimes the execution of these rules revolve only around the weaker gender of society. That masculine conundrum of abiding rules sometimes caused dismay among fellow citizens. If we gaze at the platitudes of ethical discourse, the conclusion often reaches to one point of convergence that is 'morality cannot be subjective, it must have some objective connotation'. In our country's perspective, if we think morality as a product of some ethical, religious and idyllic thoughts, it has also some neutral standing stone to placate the sense of justice. The submissive and subjugating approach by assumed dominant gender towards the weaker gender of society in regards to crime cause anarchy. This subliminal non-legal aspect of crime should be initiated in the discourse of socio-psychological causation of crime.

Recently, a video went viral in social media showing a female was smoking in the public place of Rajshahi City. On that place, many other males were also smoking. But this particular woman was humiliated for not being a violator of law but being a 'woman' smoking in public. So let's stare for a moment at the relevant law applicable in this situation. Bangladesh became a Party to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control on February 27, 2005. Mandated by constitutional provision of improving public health as a primary duty, the government enacted "Smoking and Using of Tobacco Products (control) Act 2005". According to section 4 of the Act, it is prohibited to smoke in public places and public vehicles. Section 4 also made it a penal offence by imposing fine. The language of this section is clear enough to trace and does not implicate any gender prerogatives. Interestingly, in that viral video, the scolding males were dispersing ponderous ethics toward the female when they think the same deviant act as quite right for them because they are the 'Alpha Male'!

A close perusal of religious scriptures in this regard also suggested gender-neutral directives to follow. Neither Law nor religion opens up the venture to interpret rules with the prism of patriarchy. It is the subconscious dominant features of distorted masculinity that determine the unjust thinking line of right and wrong. According to marginalisation theory of female criminality, inducing women to a constant marginalised position as a victim or as a perpetrator is self-derogatory. When socialisation process makes women a second sex and tries to hold them as downcast, women become more prone to violating the norms.

Moreover, the strain model of crime causation propounded by famous socio-criminologist Robert K Marton suggested that when there is no junction between the cultural goals and institutionalised means, retreatism and revolution arises to support the new norms. Fluctuation in the moral dimension of 'Gender' in our country creates unnecessary strain on some of the classes of citizens. If a particular social structure is inherently unequal or there is unequal execution of social norms or legal rules, this may change the individual perceptions as to means and opportunities. Role of male or female in preventing crime should be complementary to each other. Uneven gender notion should not be utilised to hold one as a victim or a perpetrator. It is the high time to replace our notion of 'gender' by equitable cultural ethics.

THE WRITER IS LECTURER, DEPARTMENT OF LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS, UNIVERSITY OF ASIA PACIFIC.

The treatment or preventive vaccine is not privilege but a human right. It should only be there on equitable basis and not on the basis of some priorities, it should be there for the needy regardless of race, colour, religion, sex, language, political or other opinion.

suggests that vaccinating the most vulnerable may not be the right thing to do.

A modeling study (2009) on vaccination strategies for influenza concluded that the optimal policy should be on the basis of various measures including deaths and economic costs and a number of other things. If the vaccine apparently immunises only around 50 percent of those vaccinated, then focusing on the most vulnerable was the best strategy. With low vaccine efficacy, even vaccinating most of the population would not be able to prevent continued viral spreading, and so the vulnerable would need direct protection.

High vaccine effectiveness makes it possible to greatly curtail viral spread, thereby making the most vulnerable —

GLOBAL LAW UPDATES

Headscarf ban held unconstitutional in Austria

Austria's constitutional court has struck down a law prohibiting primary school children from wearing specific head coverings having religious significance. This judgment is significant since it makes it clear that bans cannot ensure self-determination for women and girls, as much as impositions cannot. Both impositions and bans militate against free choice of women, and their freedom of expression. The court said that since the law was aimed at the Islamic headscarf, it breached rights having bearing on religious freedom.

The court said the law could lead to the marginalisation of Muslim girls. It also rejected the government's argument that the prohibition could protect girls from social pressures from classmates, saying that it penalised the wrong people. It further said, if necessary, the State needed to draw up legislation to better prevent bullying on the grounds of gender or religion.

The legislation, which came into force last year, did not specify that headscarves were banned but instead proscribed the wearing of "religious clothing that is associated with a covering of the head" for children up to the age of 10. The government had itself said that head coverings worn by Sikh boys or the Jewish skullcap would not be affected.

The court decided that the ban was in fact aimed at Muslim headscarves. "The selective ban... applies exclusively to Muslim schoolgirls and thereby separates them in a discriminatory manner from other pupils," court President Christoph Grabenwarter observed.

—LAW DESK (SOURCE: BBC.COM).



LAW OPINION

The dynamics of Rohingya relocation under 'internal relocation alternative'

SAKHAWAT SAJJAT SEJAN

Internal relocation alternative is one of the doctrines recently developed to determine refugee or asylum seeker status in a host country. It basically examines whether the asylum seeker has exhausted all his opportunities of relocation in his country of origin during status seeking. This principle is also considered as an alternative of phrases i.e. 'well-founded fear of persecution' or 'unable to avail protection in his country of origin' under article 1A(2) of the Refugee Convention 1951 during the determination of refugee status. We can expand the doctrine from country of origin to the territory of host country. If the asylum seekers are already in the host country with minimum chances of repatriation 'internal relocation alternative' might function as a benefactor of principle of non-refoulement. UNHCR has recognised 'internal relocation alternative' in its handbooks and it may examine the expansion of this principle in the host countries as well.

For example, Bangladesh has given refuge to 1 million Rohingyas since 2017. After a lot of bilateral and multilateral steps, repatriation could not take place due primarily to the Rohingya's unwillingness to return and Myanmar's inadvertent approach to them take back. As a consequence, the ecological imbalance and the increase in population has complicated the administrative and environmental mechanisms in Cox's bazar. Hence,

Bangladesh was planning for relocation of Rohingyas since the exodus occurred. According to the relocation plan, they will be transported to Noakhali's Bhashan Char. Bhashan Char being a low-lying land, is designed with protective and productive resources to procure Rohingyas there. In the early week of December, 1600 Rohingyas are relocated to Bhashan Char. International concerns have been on the rise since the beginning regarding the protection of the Rohingyas from natural disasters or the fulfillment of the demands of basic necessities in the Char. Government of Bangladesh has assured international communities that enough protective measures have been adopted. Apart from defending the relocation from this point of view, we better focus on the aspects of 'internal relocation alternative' and whether Bangladesh is a worthy candidate to seek refuge under this principle.

Fundamentally there are two sets of determining factors about the functioning of 'internal relocation alternative'. One is the 'relevance analysis' and the other is 'reasonableness analysis'. Relevance analysis seeks whether the area of relocation is practically, legally, and safely accessible, and if the relocation seekers face serious harm upon the relocation. Reasonableness analysis transpires whether the claimant would be living a comparatively normal life in the relocated place. Imperative answers of these questions will make the 'internal relocation alternative' effective following the directions and practice of UNHCR's

handbook. As the Government of Bangladesh has met the credentials of creating a safe and preserved dwelling place along with livelihood, education, medical facilities, and sufficient freedom of movement for the Rohingyas in the Bhashan Char, it somehow justifies the relocation process at any cost. In fact, if we transpire into the provisions of Refugee Convention, Bangladesh is indirectly treating them with the rights of a refugee despite not having a status as such.



Amidst growing concerns of the United Nations and other international NGOs, this active step of Bangladesh is justified under the auspices of 'internal relocation alternative'. Though generally internal relocation alternative is a threat to non-refoulement principle in the country of origin, but the same principle can be considered as an ace of principle of non-refoulement to some extent if it happens within the territory of host country. In the case of Bangladesh, firstly the country has not pushed the Rohingyas back to Myanmar and secondly after giving them refuge, it proceeded for a planned relocation. Not being a signatory to

the Refugee Convention, Bangladesh is comprehensively opting for protecting the Rohingyas and the relocation alternative is not out of the ambit of its humanitarian responses.

As the case of *Gambia v Myanmar* is still pending with the International Court of Justice, the hopes of repatriation stay dim. In fact, repatriation requires voluntariness, which actually failed twice or thrice due to the trauma carried by Rohingyas and their unwillingness to return. At least the execution of relocation process, as has been seen, has been quite consensual that actually aligns with 'relevance test' and 'reasonableness test' of internal relocation alternative. Since Rohingyas chose to dwell in the char with better refugee facilities, in no way it is justifiable to condemn Bangladesh for such relocation. From the legal point of view Bangladesh did not violate even a single provision or principle of international law rather it opened a scope of newer dimension of 'internal relocation alternative' in the host country. Undoubtedly, the doctrine needs examination, re-examination, discussions, and criticisms, but it will reenergise the refugee protection mechanism by manifesting international refugee law. Lastly, the stance of Bangladesh will create a nexus between the principle of non-refoulement and internal relocation principle by extending the dynamics of relocation from the country of origin to the host country.

THE WRITER IS LECTURER, DEPARTMENT OF LAW, FENI UNIVERSITY

How the demolition of a train station changed America

Lessons for Kamalapur and TSC

THE GRUDGING URBANIST



ADNAN ZILLUR MORSHED

At the heart of the ongoing debate on the potential demolition of TSC and Kamalapur Railway Station in Dhaka is an old philosophical dilemma—how to progress while retaining some loyalty to history, a key concern of many 20th century philosophers, such as Paul Ricoeur. The relationship between progress and history could easily be reduced to one of hostility. If progress or modernisation is seen as a one-directional march towards an improved state of life, things that presumably represent history may be considered impediments to it and, therefore, their removal is justified in the name of progress. What is denied in this falsely simplified equation is the possibility of a symbiotic relationship between progress and history.

This debate has a long record in 20th century urban development. The debate merits a revisit in the context of the current plans to take down such iconic structures as TSC and Kamalapur Railway Station. The experience of the West in the last century could be instructive for urban administrators in developing countries.

Let us consider the contentious case of another railway station: New York's Pennsylvania Station. Designed by the acclaimed architectural firm McKim, Mead and White in 1910, this neoclassical building served, both literally and symbolically, as a gateway to New York City (similar to the role Kamalapur played 50 years later). The largest station in the world at the time of its inauguration, with a concourse longer than the nave of St Peter's in Rome and a light-filled waiting room 148-feet high, Penn Station was meant to be a soaring civic monument to America's technological prowess and rising global stature in the early 20th century.

By the mid-1950s, however, its future became uncertain as train travel declined due to the rise of car and air travel. Yearly financial loss became a headache. While the edifice continued to serve as an urban attraction for architects, photographers, filmmakers and tourists, many observers found its train level, entrances and exits confusing.

Despite protests from leading

architects, artists, critics and the public, the demolition of Penn Station began in 1963. No legal tools to prevent the destruction of historic buildings existed at the time in the US. Furthermore, a demolition frenzy marked the post-World War II period in America as rebuilding became a key driver of modernisation. It was an era of what was known as Urban Renewal—an urban "cleansing" policy of demolishing wide swaths of city blocks, dense neighbourhoods, congested housing complexes, "obsolete" historic structures and business districts to compensate for a rapid population and business decline in the city centre, on the one hand, and accommodate new developments and automobile-centric planning, on the other. That was the euphoric era of progress.

Penn Station would have been just another building that was razed and tossed into history's dustbin. But this time, it was different. The loss of the iconic transportation hub, used by millions of commuters and tourists, was a watershed in raising public consciousness on historic preservation in the US. In 1965, President Lyndon B Johnson appointed a special committee to examine the state of heritage protection. A year later (the demolition of Penn Station was complete by then), the US Congress passed the first national policy governing preservation: The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Earlier preservation measures—the Antiquities Act of 1906 and the Historic Sites Act of 1935—had failed to do what the NHPA could begin to accomplish from the 1960s onward.

The law not only helped formalise and professionalise historic preservation as a process but also spawned other useful preservation measures, including the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register created a legal basis for protecting individual buildings, districts and archeological sites across the US that were considered witness to national and regional narratives.

In developing countries today, there is an important lesson to be learned from the American experience of the NHPA. The law empowered American cities and communities to tell their unique stories through the preservation of buildings and sites that they cherish as part of their history. It is a truism that there is no excitement to visit a city filled with familiar buildings,

familiar restaurant chains and a familiar business district. There is a reason that people love to go to Rome, Venice, Paris, London, Prague and Kolkata, among many other cities with a strong historic-preservation culture. In the era of globalisation, when global corporations perpetuate urban sameness in the name of smart cities, historic preservation as a unique way of storytelling could be both a cultural draw and an economic boost. Research

Scully sarcastically wrote: "One entered the city like a god; one scuttles in now like a rat." Developments can both modernise and traumatise at the same time. Historical memory is a powerful driver of feeling citizenship.

Preservation does not have to freeze a heritage building into a glorified museum and snuff out the vitality of its everyday life. Today, "adaptive reuse" of historic buildings has become a dynamic and economically vibrant

campaign saved the iconic industrial building from the wrecking ball. In the mid-1990s, Swedish architects Herzog and de Meuron transformed the abandoned building into one of the most visited modern art museums in the world and one of the UK's top three tourist attractions. The mammoth turbine hall of the power station became a magnificent, repurposed art gallery. More than 40 million people have visited the power-station-turned-museum since its inauguration in 2000, while generating on average GBP 100 million in economic benefits to London annually.

London-based architectural firm Heatherwick Studio converted a nearly 100-year-old grain silo in Cape Town's Victoria and Alfred Waterfront into what has become one of Africa's best-known museums: the Zietz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa. It is the world's largest repository of contemporary art from Africa. Abandoned since the 1990s and the tallest building in Sub-Saharan Africa, the grain silo's 116 giant concrete tubes were sliced inside to create a huge central atrium and 80 interconnected galleries across nine floors, with a rooftop sculptor garden, restaurant and The Silo Hotel. All of this was made possible without sacrificing the original industrial experience of a grain silo. A derelict building does not always have to be demolished. It can be given a new life. All one needs is a bit of cultural aspiration and a creative desire to take on a challenge.

Development is essential. A city cannot be static. It needs to accommodate population growth and meet economic goals. Infrastructure must be built to modernise a city. But all of this is possible without sacrificing the buildings and sites that serve as symbols of a people's historical memory. I have written before on why TSC and Kamalapur should be preserved in sync with new development plans. These beloved buildings could be adapted to the demands of our time. They do not have to be demolished. They are Dhaka's quintessential stories. We need those stories, maybe with a few new characters and a bit of plot twists.

Adnan Zillur Morshed is a professor of architecture at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. He also serves as Executive Director of the Centre for Inclusive Architecture and Urbanism at BRAC University. He is the author of *DAC, Dhaka in 25 Buildings* (Altrim Publishers, 2017). Email: morshed@cua.edu



The iconic Kamalapur Railway Station's existing plaza is facing demolition due to a new plan regarding the capital's first metro rail.

PHOTO: ADNAN ZILLUR MORSHED

shows that a city with a unique urban personality is in fact good economics. Heritage tourism bolsters local economies, helps build social capital and creates jobs. Both local and foreign investors are attracted to a unique city because there are spaces for new opportunities and people hungry for experimentation. From Hanoi to Marrakesh, Seoul to Shanghai, I have seen in recent times how cities are making efforts to preserve their historic buildings and neighbourhoods.

Development, insensitive to what it replaces, could be a permanent wound. Old Penn Station's modern replacement, including Madison Square Garden (the venue of the 1971 Concert for Bangladesh) and the adjoining commercial building, has drawn much derision for its lack of imagination. Recalling the civic value of the original station, architectural historian Vincent

alternative to the demolition-and-replacement model of development. Adaptive-reuse projects generally preserve the exterior of a building, retrofit it with modern amenities, and repurpose its interior for a new compatible use. An abandoned factory could become a museum or a housing complex. This way the historic building is protected, while it is infused with a new economic and social life. Adaptive-reuse projects are gaining traction around the world since they offer a win-win situation.

Two of my favourite examples of adaptive-reuse projects are London's Tate Modern (2000) and Cape Town's Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (2017).

Bankside Power Station, a mid-20th century oil-fired power station on the banks of the Thames that ceased operations in 1981, was set

The 2020 Development Pathshala: Through the lens of BEACON



MIR AFTABUDDIN AHMED

THE UNSustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) remains the *prima facie* directional narrative for our collective progression

towards a more equitable economy—both at home and abroad. A common theme across the 17 UNSDGs remains in enhancing capacity building measures and mobilising skills transfers to communities. During the ongoing pandemic, we have witnessed, with immense optimism, the activation of coordinated youth efforts and the development of crisis response groups in Bangladesh—beyond humanitarian aid measures, there is an intense focus on youth-based policy innovation and community empowerment.

The term "Development Pathshala (School)" was first introduced to me by one such group. BEACON (Bangladesh Emergency Action Against Covid-19) is akin to several youth-based initiatives which have activated youth potential during the past nine months. Reaching over 100 geographic locations through leveraging its 4P (passion, purpose, performance and pace) philosophy, it has mobilised and implemented projects in food rationing, medical safety gear and provision of oxygen cylinders. It has also supported distant learning initiatives for children via publication of innovative supplementary workbooks and connecting online learning initiatives to resources, and provided cash handouts to non-MPO teachers and members of lower-income groups. Additionally, BEACON's initiatives have supported mental health ventures, mobilised treatment funding for those in need, made provisions for daily meals to street children, and provided medical camp support, winter blankets and warm clothes. It also responded to natural disasters during this pandemic

through specially designed projects aimed at those affected by Cyclone Amphan and the extreme floods this year.

All in all, BEACON has executed over 70 multifaceted projects over the course of the pandemic—from financing and facilitating the launch of Powered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPR) to subsidising over 50,000 people through a project called Food Ration for Covid Impacted Populations. The initiative has designed innovative crisis management

Kabir, a private sector professional by trade with experience in the development sector, highlighted the importance of training volunteers in writing project proposals, planning a budget, preparing survey lists, building a team, organising logistics and knowing how to get the best resources from vendors in their areas. BEACON's primary mission has been to mobilise youth-led community action groups, especially in remote areas, and transform them into an elite force that is prepared to go to

Rajshahi, Banishanta in Khulna or Dingaputha Haur in Netrokona—in places where very little or no help had reached.

Spurred on by a successful crowdfunding campaign that reached beyond the borders of Bangladesh, BEACON judiciously managed its resources by streamlining projects based on targeted communities. Social schemes such as BEACON, BacharLorai and similar youth-based efforts, all have one parallel trend—they use grassroots and to a large extent, non-corporate fundraising strategies, to design projects and target segments of a particular population. For example, in BEACON's work, more than 40 targeted communities, which include dairy farmers, municipality cleaners, sex workers, transgenders, transportation and jute mill workers, cobblers etc., were identified, after several rounds of assessments, as being groups which needed immediate help but were unlikely to receive such. It is here where research and field surveys come into play—all in all, a key focus on skills transfer and the subsequent development of capacity measures to make credible change, is a key takeaway.

Bangladesh has been blessed to have two major organisations that have educated the country and the world when it comes to social development—both the BRAC and Grameen Bank models focus on bottom-up-development. It is my sincere belief that younger Bangladeshis who have stood up to make an impact and assist the country during the pandemic are the true carriers of the vision portrayed by the UNSDGs—fundamentally, there is a general consensus in empowering marginalised communities through the power of education and training. While the impact of BEACON and similar groups for example, is by definition minute when compared to what private corporations are injecting into the economy, it is important to note that there has been an engaged form of youth mobilisation and cross-functional collaboration between

smaller groups. And this is heartening for the future of the country.

This pandemic has been our Development Pathshala and the education we derive through collaboration is crucial in narrating a people-based developmental trajectory for the country—if the UNSDGs are to be realised in its most holistic form, community-mitigation techniques must be prioritised. And I hope that the government takes notice and inspiration from the actions of such actors.

BEACON derives its vision and mission of #TheSpiritof71 by taking inspiration from the first Prime Minister of this country, Tajuddin Ahmed, a selfless and honourable statesman who stood up in our nation's darkest hours. It has supported frontline healthcare workers with medical safety gear in more than 50 hospitals in remote locations like Haluaghat and Hatiya, subsidised seven medical camps with resources that reached more than 5,000 patients and distributed over 1,500 blankets so far to vulnerable populations in cold wave-hit regions in the North. Unlike corporations, such emergency response initiatives work on an adaptable build and operate basis and it is perhaps in this context that their achievements are greater than the numbers themselves.

BEACON, along with similar initiatives, were recognised in a recent book commissioned by the UNDP to acknowledge the crisis management efforts of youth groups and every day citizens in 2020—a recognition which they not only deserve, but one for which the entire country should be proud. The future of Bangladesh remains promising. I hope that in being part of the collective Development Pathshala during the ongoing pandemic, we as a country recognise where the future of Bangladesh lies—in the hands of its youth.

Mir Aftabuddin Ahmed is a Toronto-based Banking Professional and a recent Graduate of the University of Toronto in Economics and International Relations. He can be reached at aftab.ahmed@alum.utoronto.ca



One of the schoolrooms that are supported by the BEACON initiative.

PHOTO: COURTESY

schemes that reflect the needs of its targeted populations. But in addition to providing relief, it has taken its crisis response a step further—via training and education. And it is here where the idea of a Development Pathshala comes into play and this is how BEACON stands out in its approach to youth empowerment during this pandemic.

The lead organiser and co-founder of BEACON, Ashfaque Kabir, suggested that rather than simply getting the youth to partake in food distribution or fundraising campaigns, there is a dire need to guide them in a structured manner at different levels of project management and execution.

any lengths to stand by the country, and most importantly, develop the competence to respond effectively to future emergencies. In essence, it is building capacity for change within segments of its target populations, while empowering youth actors to take ownership of projects—doing so by transferring key project management skills incrementally to those who are participating in their initiatives. The result is that during the peak of the pandemic, when most parts of the country was paralysed under lockdown, these youth-led initiatives reached the most remote locations possible—such as Char Khidirpur in



Bashundhara Kings players celebrate Argentine striker Raul Becerra's (2nd from L) all-important goal against Chattogram Abahani in yesterday's Walton Federation Cup match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Kings ride on Becerra

SPORTS REPORTER



Holder Bashundhara Kings advanced to the quarterfinals of the Walton Federation Cup as Group C champions following a hard-fought 1-0 win over Chattogram Abahani at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Argentine striker Raul Becerra scored the decisive goal four minutes into the second half to ensure Kings' third consecutive last-eight berth in season's curtain-raising tournament with an all-win record. Chattogram Abahani, too, qualified for the last eight, but behind Kings as runners-up from this group with a win and a defeat.

Having already confirmed quarterfinal berths beating last edition's runners-up Rahmatganj in their previous matches, both teams had the target of getting the better of the other. Star-studded Kings pressed from the start against a team they had lost 4-3 in the abandoned Bangladesh Premier League encounter last season.

Despite playing with one less foreigner, the port city outfit kept the defending champions at bay in the first half with an impenetrable four-man backline, which brilliantly thwarted every attack while generating moves to launch attacks on the break.

The first half was fought almost equally with neither side creating clear-cut chances except for one by Kings, who saw Mahbubur Rahman

Sufil provided with an excellent through-ball with only goalkeeper Mohammad Nayeem to beat in the stoppage time of the first half. But the national team forward tried to make space instead of chipping it over the goalkeeper, resulting in a missed opportunity.

Chattogram Abahani were on the backfoot immediately after the restart as their Brazilian forward Nixon Guylerme limped off with an injury. Kings started to press and earned a corner four minutes into the second half which resulted in the decisive goal. Brazilian forward Robson Da Silva curled the corner towards the far post and with Nayeem completely misjudging the flight of the ball, Becerra was at hand to head it in.

Sufil narrowly missed the target from a counter-attack eight minutes

later before Mannaf Rabbi failed to equalise for Chattogram Abahani on the hour-mark. Substitute Rakib Hossain had whipped in a terrific cross for Rabbi, who, despite a lunging dive, could not connect to the ball in front of goal.

Right-back Mohammad Rocky then delivered a well-judged cross for onrushing Charles Didier, but Kings' Iranian defender Khaled Shafei cleared the danger for a corner. Kings coach Oscar Bruzon sent Masuk Mia Jonny and Mohammad Ibrahim in place of Bipli Ahmed and Emon Mahmud to strengthen the forward-line, but there were no more goals in the game as the reigning champions left the pitch satisfied with a single-goal victory following their emphatic 3-0 win over Rahmatganj in their opening match.

SLC proposes shifting Tigers' tour to April

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board and Sri Lanka Cricket are in talks to reschedule the twice-postponed tour of Sri Lanka to April next year.

The tour of Sri Lanka was originally scheduled for July-August, 2020, with Bangladesh scheduled to play a three-Test series under the ICC Test Championship. The tour was postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Later, the two boards were in discussions about arranging the series in October, but the BCB did not agree to the strict quarantine protocols set by the hosts of staying in a mandatory 14-day quarantine after the Tigers reached the island nation.

"We are in talks with the Sri Lankan cricket board and basically the proposal came from their side. When we were in talks about the Sri Lanka tour in the first stage --

which didn't happen at that time -- we were principally in agreement to play the Test series under the ICC Test Championship in Sri Lanka," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told reporters yesterday.

"We are working on finding a window according to the Future Tour Programme and at this stage, we are targeting this tour in April as both countries have an available slot during that time." Meanwhile, the board is also confident about hosting the West Indies in January in a bio-secure bubble by drawing from the experience of hosting two domestic competitions recently.

According to the BCB CEO, the board has been working on a smooth health safety plan to bring international cricket back to Bangladesh as the visitors are scheduled to play a two-match Test and three-match ODI series. Nizamuddin also said the BCB have almost finalised the Tigers' new batting consultant ahead of the West Indies series and will make an announcement soon.



Federer pulls out of Aus Open

REUTERS, MELBOURNE

Six-times champion Roger Federer has withdrawn from the Australian Open as he continues to work his way back to fitness from two knee operations earlier this year, his agent said.

The 39-year-old Swiss last played a competitive match at the season-opening Grand Slam in January before he had to undergo surgery on his knee. He later required a second operation.

The start of the 2021 Australian Open has been delayed for three weeks until February 8 due to the country's strict border rules to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Federer, who had been training at his off-season base in Dubai, had told organisers that the delayed start to the tournament could benefit him.

However, his agent Tony Godsick said Federer was not quite ready to return.

"Roger has decided not to play the 2021 Australian Open," Godsick said in a statement. "He has made strong progress in the last couple of months with his knee and his fitness."

"However, after consultation with his team, he decided that the best decision for him in the long run is to return to competitive tennis after the Australian Open."

Godsick added that he was looking to build a playing calendar for Federer from late February.

Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley said they were disappointed to lose Federer for next year's event.

India close in on victory

AGENCIES



A depleted Indian attack shrugged off an injury to paceman Umesh Yadav to rout Australia's batsmen and give themselves a platform for a series-levelling victory on day three of the second test on Monday.

With Umesh lost to a calf strain after lunch, spin-bowling all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja chipped in two wickets and seamers Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj took one apiece to leave Australia 133 for six at stumps, clinging to a lead of two runs at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Ajinkya Rahane paid tribute to his bowlers but said there was work still to be done. "The bowlers bowled really well and bowled in the right areas. We still got four wickets to go, the game is not over yet," he told broadcasters.

The Australia batting that failed to reach 200 in the two previous completed innings of this series lurched further into crisis today to be 6-133 and, with fine weather forecast for Melbourne over the remaining two days, in need of another

Adelaide-like miracle to prevent India levelling the battle 1-1.

Leading the side just days after a humiliating defeat in the series-opener at Adelaide Oval, Rahane earned praise from the cricket fraternity for the manner in which he handled his bowlers and his field placements at Melbourne.

"Captaincy is all about backing your instinct. You've got to back your gut feeling. Credit to the bowlers, they bowled in the right areas," he added.

India, anchored by stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane's inspirational century on day two, were bowled out for 326 before lunch in reply to Australia's first innings 195.

"It was really special. Getting a century always is. Still feel that my hundred against England at Lord's is my best," Rahane said after the day's play.

The unassuming Indian entered the Lord's Honours Board when he struck an elegant 103 off 154 balls during the Indian team's tour of England in 2014.

India's batsmen are highly unlikely to produce another Adelaide-style horror show where they dismissed for 36.

New Zealand tighten grip on Pakistan

REUTERS, WELLINGTON

New Zealand's bowlers took a couple of rain and hail shower delays in their stride and slowly broke down Pakistan's stubborn resistance to help the hosts take control of the first Test on Monday.

Faheem Ashraf was dismissed for 91, his highest Test score, just before the close of the third day's play at Bay Oval as Pakistan were bowled out for 239, still 192 runs behind New Zealand's 431.

The tourists had been facing the prospect of being asked to bat again after captain Mohammad Rizwan's run out but

Faheem saw them past the follow-on.



A MIGHTY KNOCK ENDS JUST SHY OF FULFILLMENT

Faf du Plessis celebrated his first hundred in two years by raising both arms in the air and unleashing a beaming smile in the direction of his teammates sitting outside the dressing room during third day of first Test against Sri Lanka in Centurion yesterday. He was just one run shy of his maiden double hundred but his career-best 199 in his first Test since giving up the captaincy gave South Africa a stellar first-innings total of 621 and a lead of 225.

PHOTO: AFP

'No plans to become a coach'

REUTERS, BARCELONA

Lionel Messi has no plans to become a coach when he retires from playing, saying he is more interested in being a director of football than working in the unforgiving world of football management.

The 33-year-old Argentine forward has about six months left on his contract with Barcelona and the football world is on tenterhooks over whether he will stay at the club where he has spent the last 20 years or look for a new challenge.

"I don't see myself as a coach, perhaps a sporting director to hire players I want or that the club that I'm at needs," Messi said in an interview with Spanish network La Sexta on Sunday.

Messi will wait until the end of the season before making his mind up but said he would like to return to Barca, regardless of what he does next.

"I would like to tell the Barca fans that I'm not sure whether I'll leave or not," he said.

Kohli, Perry dominate ICC decade honours

REUTERS, Dubai

India captain Virat Kohli topped two men's categories and Australia all-rounder Ellyse Perry swept the women's maiden test series victory in Australia under his captaincy two years ago as special moments. "I have relished all the battles in the last decade," Kohli said.

Kohli was declared the best male player of the decade, as well as the top ODI player. Prolific Australia batsman Steve Smith bagged the Test award to deny Kohli a clean sweep.

Perry, 30, was adjudged the best woman player as well as the premier ODI and Twenty20 player. "It has been tremendous to develop the women's T20 game and take it forward," Perry said. "Amazing to see where it's come from when I was introduced to it."

"It's a great honour for me to receive this award," Kohli, who returned from India's ongoing tour of Australia to attend the birth of his first child, said in

a video.

Kohli listed India's triumphs in the 2011 ODI World Cup and 2013 Champions Trophy as well as the team's maiden test series victory in Australia under his captaincy two years ago as special moments. "I have relished all the battles in the last decade," Kohli said.

"I played against some great bowlers in the past and continued to play some quality bowlers even today." "I take a lot of pride in competing against the best, testing myself out against the best in tough conditions."

Afghanistan spinner Rashid Khan was named the best male Twenty20 cricketer of the decade and former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni bagged the spirit of cricket award.

A nomination panel shortlisted the candidates based on their performances between January, 2011 and October, 2020, and the winners were decided by votes from fans and experts.

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BOGURA MAHASTHANGARH Fort city open to destruction

Artifacts get damaged, new houses built on the site; 393 acres of its land still not acquired despite HC order

MOSTAFA SHABUI, Bogura

The Department of Archaeology continues to struggle to save one of the country's and region's most significant archaeological sites, Mahasthangarh in Bogura, due to the delay in acquiring 393 acres of land in the fort city.

Local villagers have constructed houses and other structures such as wells and drains on the land of Mahasthangarh over decades, despite these being a violation of the Antiquities Act-1968 and a 2012 High Court order.

They are also directly damaging the site and its archaeological antiques by taking bricks from the ancient structures, according to DoA officials.

The officials say they have been trying to obstruct new constructions there but locals managed to build around 1,000 structures including houses at the site over the years, taking advantage of poor monitoring by the department which has a manpower shortage.

Following the High Court order, the DoA beefed up vigilance and were able to halt the construction of new buildings. But its vigilance weakened again amid the pandemic and several unfinished brick houses were completed while construction of new structures began over these months.

Only 42.78 acres of land in Mahasthangarh fort city actually belongs to the DoA. The remaining small parts of land include 22.78 acres which constitute the fort city's

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A convoy of buses carry Rohingya refugees for being relocated to Bhashan Char in the Bay of Bengal from Ukha, Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

SK SINHA'S TRIAL His brother, nephew testify against him

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The elder brother of former Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha and one of his nephews yesterday gave their depositions before a Dhaka court in a money laundering case.

They are SK Sinha's brother Narendra Kumar Sinha and nephew Shankhajit Sinha.

Judge Shaikh Nazmul Alam of the Special Judge's Court-4 of Dhaka recorded their statements. The defence for the accused cross-examined Narendra, but could not complete cross-examining Shankhajit.

Meanwhile, Mahbul Haque Chisty, one of the accused, fell sick on the dock and he was taken to Dhaka National Hospital.

The judge then fixed January 13 for the next hearing of the case.

In their statements, Narendra and Shankhajit told the court that as per direction of SK Sinha, a joint account was opened

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ENCROACHING ON HIGHWAYS Cabinet okays stern punishment

Draft act says one could get 2 years in jail

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Anyone who erects a permanent or makeshift structure or sets up a market on the highways without prior approval may face a maximum of two years in prison or a fine between Tk 50,000 and Tk 5 lakh, or both.

This is according to the draft Highway Act-2020 approved in principle by the cabinet yesterday, with an aim to make the construction, development and maintenance of highways timely and to ensure discipline and safety of vehicular movement.

Under the draft law, even utility service providers -- both public and private -- may face similar punishment if they install utility services without prior approval, because such unapproved works would be considered "invasion".

Anyone operating a slow-moving vehicle on roads without a dedicated lane or driving a vehicle that is unable to meet the minimum speed limit will be fine up to Tk 50,000, says the draft of the new law.

Once passed, the law will replace the near century-old Highway Act-1925, said officials concerned.

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FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

Top priority given to agriculture: Bangabandhu



Indian Law Minister HR Gokhale calls on Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Gono Bhaban on December 29, 1972.

December 29, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

NATION FAST RECOVERING FROM DEVASTATION

Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today says the country is fast recovering from devastation and destruction wrought by the occupation of forces during the Liberation War and is making steady economic progress. While talking to the representatives of Oxfam, the prime minister focuses on the destruction and devastation in different sectors -- industrial, economic, communications, food and agriculture in particular. Talking about the national reconstruction, the prime minister says his

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India lifts ban on onion exports

REUTERS, Mumbai

India yesterday decided to lift a ban on onion exports from January 1, as prices have fallen sharply in the last few weeks on expectations of a big crop.

Exports of all varieties of onion will be allowed, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said in a notification.

India banned exports of onions in September to preserve domestic supplies after flooding in several states worsened seasonal shortages, leading to a spike in local prices.

India is the world's biggest exporter of onions, a staple of South Asian cooking. Countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Malaysia and Sri Lanka rely on Indian shipments.

Wholesale prices of onions have more than halved in the last four weeks, according to data compiled by the National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation, a government agency.

Ancient snack stall uncovered in Pompeii



REUTERS, Rome

Archaeologists in Pompeii, the city buried in a volcanic eruption in 79 AD, have made the extraordinary find of a frescoed hot food and drinks shop that served up the ancient equivalent of street food to Roman passersby.

Known as a termopolium, Latin for hot drinks counter, the shop was discovered in the archaeological park's Regio V site, which is not yet open to the public, and unveiled on Saturday.

Traces of nearly 2,000-year-old food were found in some of the deep terra cotta jars containing hot

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Hajj, umrah law approved in principle

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday approved the draft of "Hajj and Umrah Management Law-2020" in principle to bring more discipline in this sector.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina chaired the regular cabinet meeting, joining it virtually from the Gono Bhaban, while her cabinet colleagues attended the meeting at the secretariat.

Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam briefed reporters after the meeting.

He said the hajj management has been operating through a policy till date and that is why the government faces difficulties while going to take any measure against any agency, as the agencies bring stay order from the High Court challenging any action.

After the new law enactment, he said the government can bring any hajj and umrah agency to

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WUHAN VIRUS REPORTING Citizen journo jailed in China

AFP, Shanghai

A Chinese citizen journalist was jailed for four years yesterday for her reporting from Wuhan as the Covid-19 outbreak unfurled, her lawyer said, almost a year after details of an "unknown viral pneumonia" surfaced in the central China city.

Zhang Zhan, a former lawyer, was sentenced at a brief hearing in a Shanghai court for allegedly "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" during her reporting in the chaotic initial stages of the outbreak.

Her live reports and essays were shared on social media platforms in February, grabbing the

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A group of boys picking winter vegetables from a vacant land near Hatirjheel in the capital. With schools closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, they took the initiative to buy seeds to plant them here, and now are reaping the rewards. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

14-day quarantine must for all UK returnees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All the UK returnees must stay in a 14-day institutional quarantine as the cabinet yesterday made it mandatory in the wake of the spread of a new variant of Covid-19 in the United Kingdom.

The decision came at the cabinet meeting held at the secretariat when another 161 passengers from the UK landed in Bangladesh yesterday amid news of the spread of a new strain of Covid-19 in the US.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina chaired the meeting, joining it virtually from the Gono Bhaban, reports UNB.

"Every returnee, whoever arrives by London flights, will have to stay in quarantine. Even if he or she tested Covid-19 negative yesterday [a day before the journey], the person will have to stay in a 14-day quarantine compulsorily," said Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul while briefing reporters after the meeting.

There were two options -- suspension of flight operation with London or going for strict quarantine for London returnees -- at the meeting. Eventually, the cabinet decided to enforce stricter quarantine rules for them, he said.

The cabinet secretary said the returnees must stay in either the government quarantine or any hotel under supervision of the government.

A notification will be issued for the enforcement of the quarantine rule, said Secretary Anwarul.

After a meeting last night, Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of Directorate General of Health Services, told this correspondent that the mandatory quarantine would be enforced from January.

Yesterday, 144 passengers landed at the Osmani International Airport, Sylhet, by a Biman flight from the UK and 17 others at the Hazrat Shahjalal International

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PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 29

Fajr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:30 12:45 4:00 5:27 7:00
JAMAAT 6:05 1:15 4:15 5:30 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION