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সড়ক সেতু

বিশ্ব বলেছিলো- পদ্মা সেতু 'সম্ভব না'

একজন প্রধানমন্ত্রী আর ১৬ কোটি বাঙালি বলেছিলো- 'কেন না!'

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Speed over safety

Pabna-Dhaka passengers favour risky river journey to avoid highway jams

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU with ANDREW EAGLE

To visit his family in Dhaka each week, retired public servant Mirza Azad from Kacharipara in Pabna town has a choice: he can take a bus and face the nightmarish tailbacks on the highway through Tangail or he can travel by boat. The river journey is considerably faster; but with safety most often overlooked, it's also a journey of risk.

"The road trip takes up to ten hours these days," Mirza says. "By boat I can be in Dhaka within half that time. So I usually go by boat despite safety concerns."

Since early this year, two transport companies have been offering passengers the faster river route. Launches of questionable seaworthiness and unauthorised speed boats leave from the Kazirhat Ferry Ghat, taking passengers to Aricha where buses take them on to Dhaka.

"Our river route is popular because passengers can reach Dhaka within five hours," says Sazzad Hossain, the counter manager of Pabna Express, one company that first trialled the new service on January 1, this year and now runs ten such services each day.

In response, competitor Shamoli Paribahan is using speedboats in place of launches, to save even more time. "A launch will take around 1.5 hours to reach Aricha," says



To reduce travel time and avoid hassles on the highway, people are turning to speedboats these days to reach Dhaka from Pabna. Such services have no authorisation and the journey is also quite risky. This photo shot recently shows people board a speedboat in Pabna's Kazirhat Ghat to go to Aricha.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU



Zainul Abedin Mahbub Uddin

Pro-BNP panel sweeps SC Bar election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pro-BNP lawyers have won 10 out of 14 posts, including president and secretary, in the Supreme Court Bar Association election.

BNP leaders Zainul Abedin and AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon have been reelected SCBA president and secretary.

Pro-Awami League lawyers have secured the rest of the four posts, including an assistant secretary.

The election results were announced yesterday morning after the two-day voting ended on Thursday. A total of 4,865 lawyers out of 6,152 cast their votes in the capital's SCBA auditorium.

Two elected vice-presidents are pro-BNP lawyers Golam Mostafa and Golam Rahman Bhuiyan.

Pro-BNP lawyer Nasreen Aktar has been

Migrant workers at risk of exploitation

5.5 lakh undocumented Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia unable to seek justice when victimised, say KL-based migrant rights bodies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 5.5 lakh undocumented Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia remain vulnerable to exploitation and are unable to seek justice when victimised -- a situation akin to human trafficking, rights bodies Tenaganita and CARAM Asia have said.

According to the Kuala Lumpur-based organisations, the migrants undergo various forms of violations, including physical and mental abuses, long hours of work without any overtime pay and wage deductions, which leave them in debt bondage as they spend exorbitant fees for overseas jobs.

"The undocumented workers have no access to healthcare and treatment, and are unable to seek justice or obtain compensation," Tenaganita Executive Director Glorene Dass said in a statement on Thursday.

Tenaganita and CARAM Asia launched a fact sheet on Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia to create awareness on migrants' conditions and to demand protection of rights of the migrants, who signifi-

cantly contribute to the country's economy.

"Workers come to us with complaints of poor wages and working conditions often in violation of the National Minimum Wage Act and Employment Act," said Glorene.

Such practices cause extreme hardship and unhappiness and thus affect their productivity in Malaysia which hosts some eight lakh Bangladeshis, she added.

"The current conditions they are in can be categorised as human trafficking."

Even, workers with proper documents are also subjected to various forms of violations by the employers, who withhold their passports. This sometimes leads to arrest, detention and deportation of the migrants, Glorene said.

She said labour recruiters in Bangladesh and Malaysia take undue advantage of the migrants, who desperately seek jobs, by charging exorbitant recruitment fees, often far exceeding the amount set by the government.

According to her, Malaysia has Anti-Trafficking in

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Scientists develop helmet scanner



REUTERS, London

British scientists have developed a lightweight and highly sensitive brain imaging device that can be worn as a helmet, allowing the patient to move about naturally.

Results from tests of the scanner showed that patients were able to stretch, nod and even drink tea or play table tennis while their brain activity was being recorded, millisecond by millisecond, by the magnetoencephalography (MEG) system.

Researchers who developed the device and published their results in the journal Nature said they hoped the new scanner would improve research and treatment for patients who can't use traditional fixed MEG scanners, such as children with epilepsy, babies, or patients with disorders like Parkinson's disease.

"This has the potential to revolutionise the

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BGMEA Building Another year sought for demolition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has recently filed a petition with the Supreme Court seeking one more year before demolition of its 15-storey building constructed illegally on the capital's Begunbari Canal and Hatirjheel Lake.

A four-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Syed

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ISIBL Foundation Hospital & Diagnostic Center

PRAYER TIMING MARCH 24

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha

AZAN 4-55 12-45 4-45 6-16 7-45

JAMAAT 5-30 1-15 5-00 6-20 8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Democracy in decline in Bangladesh, across globe

Says German think-tank's study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is among five countries that no longer meet minimum standards for democracy and are now under autocratic rule, German-based think-tank Bertelsmann Stiftung said in a report published yesterday.

The four other countries are Lebanon, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Uganda.

Democracy has been undermined in these five countries for years, and it is often the shortcomings in the quality of elections that tipped the balance, the study said.

"These five new autocracies have crossed a threshold that the defective democracies of Honduras, Hungary, Moldova, Niger, the Philippines and Turkey are nearing, though to varying degrees," the report said.

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PHOTO: STAR



Gillnets set out on the shore of the Bay for fishing shrimp fry in Ashar Char area of Barguna. Fishermen sell the catch to wholesalers who supply it to shrimp enclosures in Khunla. Because of the ongoing ban (from November to June) on netting jatka (hilsa fry), many fishermen have shifted to shrimp. But the use of gillnet threatens the breeding of all fish species as it can trap very young ones.

Not afraid of trade war

Beijing threatens Washington with tariffs on \$3b worth of US goods

AFP, Beijing

China warned the United States yesterday that it was "not afraid of a trade war" as it threatened tariffs on \$3 billion worth of US goods in retaliation over President Donald Trump's moves against Chinese imports.

Beijing unveiled a hit list of products that could face duties of up to 25 percent, from fresh fruit to pork and wine, though it stopped short of pulling the trigger as it indicated its readiness to negotiate an agreement.

The latest trade action sent stocks diving as fears rise that the US, which accuses China of mass theft of intellectual property and other unfair practices, could provoke a damaging trade war.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average plunged more than 700 points, while Tokyo closed 4.5 percent lower, Hong Kong fell 2.45 percent and Shanghai sank more than three percent.

"China does not want to fight a trade war, but it is absolutely not afraid of a trade war," the commerce ministry said.

Hours earlier, Trump signed an order that also could result in restrictions on Chinese investment in the US, saying it would be the "first of many" trade actions.

"We have a tremendous intellectual

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