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 MP ASADUZZAMAN NOOR
 CHIEF GUEST AT THE EVENT



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 NASER EZAZ BIJOY
 CEO, STANDARD CHARTERED, BANGLADESH



Clockwise from left, dancers performing at the Standard Chartered-The Daily Star "Celebrating Life Awards 2019" ceremony at the International Convention City Bashundhara yesterday. Singer Fahmida Nabi captivates the audience with her performance. Dignitaries visit a photo exhibition at the venue. A portion of the audience at the programme.



PHOTO: STAR

Bolivia's Morales declared winner in disputed election

AFP, La Paz
 Bolivia's Evo Morales was officially declared the outright winner of presidential elections Thursday after a disputed vote count that triggered violent protests and furious allegations of fraud from the opposition.

term, by calling for a run-off vote to restore trust and confidence in the electoral process.
 With 99.99 percent of the ballots counted, the country's Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) declared Morales had secured 47.1 percent of the vote, against 36.5 percent for his closest rival Carlos Mesa -- just scraping past the 10 point margin of victory required for an outright win.

Voluntary return

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 disarmament. Bangladesh has also pledged firm and determined commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and its peaceful use, she added.
 With the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, NAM principles are once again upheld at the UN, said the PM.
 "We should stand together in conforming to what we agreed in 2015 to reduce inequality within and among countries," she said.
HASINA MEETS ROUZHANI
 Iranian President Rouhani said his country would work to mount international pressure on Myanmar to resolve the Rohingya crisis.
 He gave this assurance during a meeting with Hasina at Baku Congress Centre.

Briefing reporters, Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque said Rouhani thanked Hasina for sheltering Rohingyas.
 Hasina thanked the Iranian president for his country's support to Bangladesh on the Rohingya issue.
 Both the leaders vowed to work unitedly against terrorism.
MEETING WITH MAHATHIR
 Malaysian PM Mahathir assured Dhaka that Kuala Lumpur and other Asean member states would do whatever necessary for resolving the Rohingya crisis.
 Mahathir said this during a meeting with Hasina at the same venue.
 Briefing reporters, Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque said Mahathir strongly feels that genocide was committed against Rohingyas and the perpetrators should be brought to book.
 He strongly condemned the oppression on the Rohingyas in Myanmar and said the Malaysian field hospital in Cox's Bazar would continue its operation.
 He requested Hasina to inform him about Bhashanchar where Bangladesh has prepared a shelter for the Rohingyas temporarily.
 Hasina apprised him of security and other related issues for the Rohingyas in Bhashanchar as well as the present condition of Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar.
 Mahathir also talked about the safety and security of the Bangladeshi expatriates living in Malaysia and said his government would try to take more manpower from Bangladesh.
 He also mentioned that Malaysian investment in Bangladesh would be increased.

3 cultural luminaries honoured

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 of entries in the film-making, photography and lyric writing segments, among which the best were awarded at the gala yesterday.
 Three cultural icons -- legendary singer Syed Abdul Hadi, film personality Sarah Kabori and theatre personality Syed Jamil Ahmed -- were given lifetime achievement awards. They were welcomed on the red-carpet entrance to Nabarat Hall.
 Shaikh Mohiruddin, Sohel Chowdhury and Liman Barua were the winners of the first, second and third prizes for photography. Winners for lyrics were Tapan Bagchi, Rana Masud and Mohsin Ahmed. For film, Suborna Senjutee Tushee won the award.
 The event, hosted by Nobonita Chowdhury, began with a spectacular dance performance by Warda Rihab's group.
 As the programme progressed, Editor

and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam delivered his welcome speech, after which a documentary on the three life-time achievers was played.
 The three awardees were then called on to the stage to accept the honours.
 Receiving the award, Syed Abdul Hadi thanked everyone and said he felt honoured.
 "Understanding the celebration of life has brought human beings from the stone age to modern age. We never know how far it might take us in the future," he said.
 Sarah Kabori praised the documentary makers for their "spectacular work on the award winners".
 Speaking as the chief guest, MP Asaduzzaman Noor lauded The Daily Star for promoting and rewarding young talents from across the country.
 "We give importance on text-based education, rather than the creative and cultural education. It's not the right

way," he said.
 "Our children have creativity in them, it's our duty to guide them to grow up as better human beings with cultural and secular mind."
 Naser Ezaz Bijoy, CEO of the Standard Chartered, Bangladesh, said, "Taking Celebrating Life to the national level was our main aim... We have always tried to find a way for the young talents to explore their own potentials."
 Earlier in his welcome address, The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam mentioned that the institution itself felt privileged to be able to honour the awardees.
 He said, "If we do not know how to celebrate life, then there is no point of living life. Life will have challenges, obstacles, however, life means harmony, beauty, creativity and peace, at the same time."
 "No nation is truly complete

without the practice of liberal arts and creativity."
 Prolific musicians Syed Abdul Hadi, Dilruba Khan, Indra Mohan Rajbongshi, Chandana Mazumdar, Fahmida Nabi, Shukonna Mazumder Ghosh, Ismat Ara Eva and Mohammed Shueb performed the award-winning songs of the contest.
 Italian Ambassador of Bangladesh Mario Palma and Nepal Ambassador Banshidhar Mishra were present at the event.
 Celebrating Life began its journey as a national-level contest in 2008. Many established filmmakers, musicians and photographers of today had their first recognition in this unique competition that encourages aspiring talents who have the potential. The competition introduces a new theme every year, on which the contestants must base their work accordingly. Last year's theme was "Architecture of Bangladesh".

He saw death so close

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 day they came and beat all of us with steel pipes. He made us call our home and ask for the money. He [Rubel] also warned that we would be killed if police are informed."
 It took three days to arrange the money. Billal's nephew Mofiz Hossain gave it to Enam by cheque and in cash in Sylhet. In the meantime, the four were beaten up three to four times.
 Once Enam received the money, Rubel put four of them in the boot of the car and took them to somewhere in Tripoli.
 "It was too hot inside the boot. The road was bad and it was very painful to travel in that. They did not give us anything to eat or drink," said Billal.
 They took us to the basement of a five-storey building. It had two small rooms where 16 Bangladeshis had already been held captive.
 After three days, Rubel and some Libyans came and took away their cell phones, other valuables and the US dollars they had.
 They were locked in those two tiny rooms all the time.
 The number of captives rose to 41 within a few days. Most of those people were from Sylhet region; some were from Habiganj and some from Bianibazar.
 One day, came Mehedi, who received them in Colombo. Billal said this time the gang asked for Tk 2 lakh more from each of them and gave them a phone to call home.
 They already lost track of date. But when they called home with Mehedi's phone, they learnt that nearly a month had gone by.
 "Whenever our family members inquired about us, Enam said we were doing fine and soon we would reach Italy," Billal added.
DAYS IN ZUWARAH
 After getting the money, the gang took them to a place in Zuwarah, a port city in northwestern Libya.
 It took them three days to reach the place. They were put in the boot of the car and they had to travel all the way lying inside it.
 After the whole day's drive through desert, they would stop in the evening by sheds made for shepherds. Only Khbeiza and some water were their meal.
 After three days, they reached a two-storey building. Some other Bangladeshis were already there.
 The gang brought many others from Tripoli to Zuwarah, four to five at a time. Within days, the number of people reached 82, all of them Bangladeshis.
 "They kept all of us in three rooms -- 12 feet by 12 feet each. There were only one stove and one washroom for us," said Billal.
 "They used to give us 25kg rice, two to three kg lentil and onion for two days. We used to cook khichuri with those. We had only six bowls and two pots.
 "We did not get enough water to drink. We rationed water by measuring it with a tea cup," he said.
 "It was not possible for all of us to

sleep at the same time. Some of us used to sleep in two rooms while the others stayed awake in another room.
 "We were starving and becoming weak. We wanted more food. But they never gave it; rather they beat us with steel pipes."
 They were locked in and some Libyans used to guard the house.
 Rubel used to come every two or three days. One day he told them if they wanted extra food, they would have to buy it from him.
 But they had no money. They again called home and asked for more money.
 Billal said his family members in Sylhet gave Enam Tk 2.5 lakh through bKash for providing him with food.
 One day Rubel wanted to sell a few packs of milk to them. But none of them had any money. But he did not believe that and became furious.
 "They poured petrol in our water tank. We were forced to drink from it as there was no other source of water," he said.
 Almost half of them became sick after drinking that water. But they were not given any medicine.
 "Even I saw one person licking sweats, as there was no drinking water," Billal said.
 "It was horrible ... It was almost impossible to survive there. We had to spend three days like this."
 He said they begged the gang members to send them back home.
 "But they would not listen to us. Our family members also requested Enam to make arrangements for our return. When they put pressure on Enam, he informed Rubel about it. And we would be beaten up again."
 Some of them were keeping the count of days with scratches on the wall. It was three and a half months in that house.
 Finally, on the night of the first Ramadan, the gang members told them that they would be sent to Italy. The gang then started moving them to another house near the coast.
86 ON ONE BOAT
 The gang brought some other people from different places. The number of captives rose to 156. Most of them were Bangladeshis. At least 16 were from Morocco and Egypt.
 There were three small fibreglass boats on the seashore.
 "Seeing such small boats, many of us did not want to get on those. They again beat us up... They then put all of us in three small boats. After sailing for a couple of hours, we saw a fishing trawler anchored in the sea," said Billal.
 "All of us boarded the trawler."
 Two of those fibreglass boats were tied to the fishing trawler. And Rubel and some of the Libyan guards took the other boat and went back to the shore.
 The fishing trawler started around 7:00am the next day. Around 9:00pm, the armed Libyans forced them to get on the two fibreglass boats and left by the trawler.
 Now they were on their own.
 "The boat ahead of us carried around

70 people and moved to the coast. We were in the second boat and there were 86 people in it. The boat started sinking as soon as the trawler left," said Billal.
 The men in the fishing trawler did not stop or try to rescue them. "We were begging, crying and screaming. But they just left us there."
 The boat turned upside down and was floating in the sea. They were trying to float themselves holding the rope and the edges of the boat. The water was very cold.
 "We were trying to survive, holding each other's hand. When big waves came, it was hard for us to hold onto the boat."
 Billal said his three nephews were with him.
 "My nephews were asking me whether they were going to die. I kept telling them to cling to the boat anyhow and not to lose hope."
 Billal first saw his nephew Ahmed drown. Then Aziz, his another nephew, went down. "I tried to help them. But they fainted and drowned. I could not do anything."
 His third nephew, Liton, managed to stay afloat.
 "Liton was asking again and again whether they would survive or not as he saw two of his cousins drown. I was giving him hope but could not save him," said Billal with tears rolling down his cheeks.
 Liton drowned just an hour before a Tunisian boat came to rescue them in the morning. Only 16 people out of 86 survived.
 It was May 10, 2019.
 The next day Billal called home from Tunisia and informed his family about the incident.
 Now Billal and the parents of his three nephews want exemplary punishment to Enam, who was arrested in two cases filed under the Human Trafficking Act and the Money Laundering Prevention Act.
 Police are yet to submit charge sheets in the cases.
ILLEGAL MIGRANTS
 According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Bangladesh is one of the biggest sources of illegal migrants to Europe.
 Between January and August 2017, more than 8,700 Bangladeshis arrived in Italy by sea -- roughly 9 percent of all maritime arrivals in the European country, show IOM data.
 There is no specific data on how many Bangladeshis drowned in the Mediterranean on their perilous journeys to Europe.
 The IOM said around 500 migrants, including Bangladeshis, either died or went missing in the Mediterranean as of October this year while trying to reach Europe by boats. The figure was 2,299 in 2018 and 3,139 in 2017.
 Data of Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, show that 93,435 Bangladeshis were staying illegally in European countries till 2015.
 [Dwoha Chowdhury contributed to this report.]

Biman returns

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 A senior official of the ministry said the government is identifying the officials who were responsible for the lease and those who delayed the process to return the planes.
 The board of Biman Bangladesh Airlines on September 3 decided not to renew its contract with Sazzadur Rahim, director of engineering and material management, and suspended Ghazi Mahmud Iqbal, chief engineer of engineering services.
 Since its inception in 1972, Biman has incurred losses due to corruption and mismanagement,

aviation experts said.
 The military-backed caretaker government in 2007 turned Biman into a public limited company with an aim to make it profitable. But that is still a far cry.
 Except for three fiscals: 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17, Biman has been losing money since 2009-10, sources said.
 Mohibul blamed the contentious lease agreement for the Boeing 777-200 ERs as a major cause for the loss.
 With its fleet of 16 planes, Biman currently flies to 16 international and seven domestic destinations. Six of the aircraft are on lease.

They left Misrata airport on a van that took them to a well-protected house with high walls in a desert after a three-hour drive.
 Besides Rubel, three Libyan men carrying heavy arms were in that house. They put all of them in a small room.
 Rubel gave them each a piece of Khbeiza (a local bread), and water. After a while, he provided them with Wifi password and said they had to spend a huge amount of money to buy their plane tickets.
 He asked for Tk 20 lakh for four of them and said the money had to be sent through Enam.
 "But I said it was a body contract. We were supposed to pay the money only after reaching Italy," Billal told this correspondent.
 "For talking back, they beat me up with a steel pipe. Actually, they held us hostage... We contacted our family members and asked them to pay Enam Tk 20 lakh."
 The next day, Rubel came and inquired about the money.
 "We already agreed to pay them. But they were not ready to wait. The next