

Jeremy Corbyn is like Stalin

Says UK PM as he starts polls campaign

REUTERS, London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's election campaign launch was marred by the resignation of one of his ministers, a gaffe about the victims of a deadly tower blaze and a doctored video of an opponent released by his party.

Johnson called a snap Dec. 12 election in a bid to break the Brexit deadlock that he says has paralysed Britain for more than three years and had started to undermine confidence in the world's fifth largest economy.

But just an hour after meeting Queen Elizabeth to formally begin the election campaign, Johnson's minister for Wales, Alun Cairns, resigned after being accused of lying about his knowledge about an aide who allegedly sabotaged a rape trial.

At the start of the campaign, Johnson's Conservatives enjoy a lead over the opposition Labour Party of between 7 and 17 percentage points, though pollsters warn that their models are failing beside the Brexit furnace.

"Let's get Brexit done," Johnson, 55, said outside his Downing Street official residence, adding that Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn would bring yet more turmoil with fresh referendums on EU membership and Scottish independence.

"Come with us, get Brexit done and take this country forward, or, and this is the alternative next year, spend the whole of 2020 in a horror show of yet more dither and delay," he said.

Johnson said Corbyn hated wealth and was thus like Soviet leader Josef Stalin - who sent millions to their deaths in labour camps. Corbyn said such remarks were "nonsense" that the super-rich came up with to avoid paying more tax.

Earlier, Conservative Party Chairman James Cleverly spent the morning defending distributing a doctored video clip of a rival Labour Party politician instead of touting Johnson's election campaign launch.

Another prominent Conservative, Jacob Rees-Mogg, apologised on Tuesday after he suggested that victims of the blaze at London's Grenfell Tower should have used common sense to ignore firefighters' instructions to stay in the burning building.

Editors

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editors have received this honour all four times since the journalist category was introduced.

Both the editors are also publishers of the newspapers.

Apart from the individual taxpayer, out of the four top taxpaying companies in the print and electronic media category, three are linked with Transcom Group: Prothom Alo owner Mediastar, The Daily Star's owning company Mediaworld Ltd and the printer of the dailies Transcraft Ltd.

East West Media Group Ltd is another of the highest taxpayer in the category.

The dailies Bangladesh Pratidin, Kaler Kantho and The Daily Sun are published from East West Media group Ltd. The media organisation also has a private television channel, a radio and an online news portal.

This year NBR is honouring 76 top taxpayers in different professional categories and 67 organisations. The NBR made the list evaluating last year's tax return submission.

Climate deal

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"We advocate for openness, inclusion and for mutually beneficial cooperation, and are opposed to protectionism and a zero-sum game."

China's efforts against climate change are key as it is the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases.

Xi also called on the international community to "jointly protect our homeland planet Earth", saying "we are against the attempt to place national interests above the common interests of humanity".

In a document titled the "Beijing Call for Biodiversity Conservation and Climate Change", the two leaders voiced their determination to improve international cooperation to "ensure a complete and efficient implementation of the Paris accord".

The document includes a commitment to restoring almost a third of degraded land as well as eliminating fossil fuel subsidies in the medium term.

On Iran, Macron said the two countries agreed to deepen joint efforts to convince Tehran to "fully respect its obligations" under the 2015 nuclear deal with major powers.

Washington's abandonment of the agreement in May last year followed by its reimposition of crippling sanctions prompted Tehran to begin a phased suspension of its own commitments.

President Hassan Rouhani said Tuesday that Iran would resume uranium enrichment at an underground plant south of Tehran -- a move Macron decried as "grave".



French President Emmanuel Macron (L) shakes hands with Chinese President Xi Jinping following a signing ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

KL to reopen labour market

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agent in Dhaka said migrant workers go through medical tests twice -- once in Bangladesh and another in Malaysia. If any worker is found medically unfit in Malaysia, he is deported.

A good number of the Bangladeshis who go to Malaysia face deportation due to double medical tests. The decision of medical tests once at home from that perspective is praiseworthy, he added.

Labour migration experts say it appears to be a good progress on labour recruitment in Malaysia, especially as the two countries spoke on social and financial protection of migrants.

However, they warn that there should not be any rush as the experience of labour recruitment in Malaysia from Bangladesh has been bitter time and again.

Only 10 Bangladeshis recruiting agents were authorised by the Malaysian government under G2G Plus deal in 2016 to recruit workers. The initial recruitment cost was fixed

at Tk 40,000, but it went up to Tk 4 lakh.

The agencies were selected by the then Malaysian government without providing any basis, though Bangladesh had proposed the names of 745 recruiting agencies.

Dato Amin or Datuk Seri Mohd Amin Bin Abdul Nor, who was granted Malaysian permanent resident status, was the Bangladeshi man considered to be a major player in this industry.

Before that, a G2G deal was signed in 2012. Under it, only 10,000 workers could secure jobs in Malaysia allegedly because powerful lobbies in both the countries opposed the deal. Also, Malaysia then allowed recruitment of workers only in the plantation sector -- something that was not preferred by the Bangladeshis.

Earlier in 2006-08, migration cost was set at Tk 84,000, but it went up to Tk 2 lakh. More than four lakh Bangladeshis migrated to Malaysia that time, but joblessness, underpayment and non-payment of wages had led to recruitment freeze

in early 2009.

"Migrants should not be the centre of experiment in Malaysia," said independent migration expert Asif Munier, adding that the two countries must work out a very strong agreement that serves the migrants' interests.

Bangladesh and its people have been the victims of previous anomalies, and Dhaka has to be very cautious about any new deal, he said.

According to the ILO convention on migrant labour, workers should not bear any cost for a job abroad. That's what is being promoted across the globe, and Bangladesh also should go for that, Asif added.

Andy Hall, a UK expert on Nepal-Malaysia and Bangladesh-Malaysia migration corridor, said Nepal inked a labour recruitment deal with Malaysia last year, stipulating that the employers would pay all the cost required for labour recruitment.

"Bangladesh also should follow the same," said Hall, who lives in Nepal, over phone.

Mad rush for updating docs

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August last year.

Mohammad Morshedul Alam, assistant director of BRTA, said it was a positive sign that people were visiting their office to keep the documents up to date.

"As the penalties were nominal under the previous law, many did not care much about it. But people are now crowding our office as they fear that they might face tough penalties," he told The Daily Star.

Visiting the BRTA office yesterday, this correspondent saw hundreds of people waiting in long queues at different counters for submitting documents and fees.

Besides, there were long queues of cars, motorcycles, trucks and covered vans. Drivers of the vehicles were waiting either to get digital number plates or to renew their fitness certificates.

Struggling to offer services to so many people, the BRTA has introduced a token system for the drivers.

BRTA officials said a shortage of manpower at the fitness test section led to the long queues. They said they had to compromise on the quality of their inspection due to the lack of manpower.

Car driver Faruk Hossain said a long queue when he reached the BRTA office at 6:00am from the city's Bangla Bazar area.

He could not even enter the office compound until 11:45am for having his car's fitness tested.

"The car owner sent me here well ahead of November 25 when the car's fitness certificate will expire," he said.

Kamal Chowdhury, a driver of a private company in the city's Uttara, went to the office to get a new driving

licence as he lost the old one three months ago.

He said police fined him twice in the last three months for driving car without a licence, but he did not care much as the fine was nominal.

"The maximum fine is now Tk25,000. I am not capable of paying such a big amount. So I took a one-day leave from the office to collect my licence," he told The Daily Star.

He had to spend almost three hours to get his job done.

Under the new Road Transport Act, the maximum penalty for driving without a licence is six months' jail or a fine of Tk25,000 or both. The punishment will apply in a case for running an unfit vehicle. Under the previous law, the maximum fine for the offence was only Tk500.

Jahangir Alam, who has been a driver for about 15 years, said the provisions of fines in the new law were "illogical". "I earn Tk15,000 a month. How will I maintain my family if the police fine me Tk10,000?"

"At times, the manual signals of the traffic policemen at the city's roundabouts cannot be noticed. Police will fine us even if we move the vehicles a few yards ahead at the intersections unintentionally.... What will we do if they fine us under the new law?" said a worried Jahangir.

Another driver Milon went to the BRTA office to get the fitness certificate and digital number plate of a car. Expressing worries over the provisions of hefty fines in the new law, he said, "May be we will have no other option but to stop driving cars and start pulling rickshaws."

He had to spend more than five hours at the office to get his job done.

The biggest crowd of service seekers was seen before the digital number plate section of the BRTA office.

BRTA official Rubel Hossain said a lot of people went to the office to collect digital number plates ahead of the scheduled date of delivery, fearing they might be fined.

On average, around 300 people used to apply for a learner's driving licence daily. The number has almost doubled since Sunday, officials said.

Private university student Mahmudul Hasan was one of them.

"All the papers of my motorcycle are okay. I have received the learner's licence today [yesterday], but I have to wait at least four months to sit for the test to get the licence," he said.

Mahmudul earlier was fined Tk 400 for driving a motorbike without a licence. He has now decided that he will not drive the motorbike until receiving the licence as the fine for the committing the offence has gone up sharply.

The maximum punishment for driving a vehicle without a registration certificate is six months' jail sentence or Tk50,000 in fine or both. The highest punishment for honking banned horns is three months' jail term or Tk10,000 fine or both.

The new law says the maximum punishment for illegally modifying a vehicle's body is three years' jail sentence or Tk3,00,000 fine or both.

The authorities had earlier said they would not fine traffic rule violators under the new law for the first seven days. They said they would carry out campaigns to make people aware of the new rules.

Voyager 2 charts interstellar space

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"As it moves through the interstellar medium" -- the vast expanses of space between stellar fiefdoms -- "there's a wave in front, just as with the bow of a ship," Stone told journalists by phone.

Scientists hoped to answer a number of questions by comparing data sent back by the two probes, which pierced the Sun's protective bubble at different angles and locations.

"We didn't have any good quantitative data of how big this bubble is that the Sun creates around itself with supersonic solar wind and ionised plasma speeding away in all directions," Stone said.

Voyager 2 confirmed, for example, the existence of a "magnetic barrier" at the outer edge of the heliosphere that had been predicted by theory and observed by Voyager 1.

"But contrary to all expectations and predictions, the magnetic field direction did not change when Voyager 2 crossed the heliopause," Leonard Burlaga, a scientist at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and lead researcher for one of the studies, told AFP.

The so-called heliopause is the relatively thin contact boundary where solar wind of charged particles and interstellar wind collide.

Scientists were also surprised that it took 80 days for Voyager 2 to cross this magnetic barrier, while its sister probe did so in less than a day.

And then there's the leakage enigma. As Voyager 1 crossed the heliosphere threshold, it detected particles from outer space -- notably cosmic rays -- racing the other way.

"On Voyager 2, it was just the opposite," said Stone. "Once we left the heliosphere, we continued to see particles leaking from the inside out."

In at least one case, it was a similarity between the two missions that was perplexing.

- Johnny B. Goode -

"This is very strange," said Tom Krimigis, a scientist in the Applied Physics Laboratory at Johns Hopkins University and senior author of a study reporting on measurements of charged particles.

"One crossing (of the heliopause) occurred at the solar minimum, when solar activity is the least, and the

other at the solar maximum," he told journalists.

"If we take our models at face value, we expect that there would be a bigger difference."

The Sun's activity waxes and wanes in 11-year cycles.

Built to last five years, Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 set out to explore the solar system's outer planets.

After 42 years in action, they are still going strong, although both will run out of power and fall silent within five years.

But that does not mean they will disappear, said Bill Kurth, a researcher at the University of Iowa and co-author of the study focusing on plasma waves.

"They will outlast Earth," he said. "They are in their own orbits around the galaxy for five billion years or longer, and the probability of them running into anything is almost zero."

If intelligent life in a far corner of the Milky Way finds either probe one day, a "golden record" including drawing of a naked man and woman, bird and whale songs, and "Johnny B. Goode" by Chuck Berry will be on board.

ACC sues

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of income.

The ACC also found that Rajib, councillor of ward-33 of Dhaka North City Corporation, has a duplex house, a five-storey, a three-storey and three four-storey buildings in the city's Mohammadia Housing Society area.

He spent about Tk8.3 crore on these buildings, reads the First Information Report of the case. According to the FIR, Rajib owns a plot worth about Tk 60 lakh in Katsur of Mohammadpur. He also has moveable properties worth Tk 12.14 crore and eight cars worth around Tk 1.19 crore.

The enquiry officer found that the councillor, a former joint general secretary of Jubo League's Dhaka north unit, accumulated the wealth in only nine years.

The Rab had arrested him on October 19, eight days after picking up Councillor Habibur Rahman Mizan of ward-32.

Jubo League expelled Rajib following his arrest.

Yesterday, ACC Deputy Director Gulshan Anowar Prodhan also filed another case against Mizan for amassing wealth worth Tk 30.16 crore beyond his known source of income.

Mizan spent Tk 18 crore for constructing three six-storey buildings in the city's Lalmatia. Besides, he owns an under-construction building near Swapnapuri Housing Complex.

"It was learnt that he spent Tk 19 crore to acquire the properties," reads the FIR of the case.

Besides, Mizan bought four flats in Mohammadpur for Tk 1.89 crore.

The accused is a former general secretary of Mohammadpur Thana Awami League.

The FIR says the councillor has moveable properties worth Tk 9.26 crore which were also amassed beyond his known source of income.

Misuse of power and amassing wealth illegally by some ward councillors came to light after the law enforcers launched a drive against illegal casino business recently.

A 'carbon bomb'

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standards, while chromium was 8,025-18,675 times higher, according to the new report.

The coal ash pond also overflows onto cropland, contaminating food production areas, it says.

On the other hand, if the proposed 29 projects, most of which are located in three "power hubs" on the south coast at Payra, Matarbari and Maheshkhali, are built, the country's coal power capacity would increase by 63 times, the report mentions.

Once operational, the projects, which are either under construction or at a pre-construction stage at present with the capacity to generate 33,200 megawatts electricity together, will emit 115 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO2) annually by 2031, it said.

Such a level of CO2 emission would be higher than the upper emissions of 110 MtCO2 per year estimate for the "controversial" Keystone XL oil pipeline between Canada and the US, it added.

The 525 MW Barapukuria is much smaller than the 1,320 MW Payra, 1,200 MW Matarbari and 1,320 MW Rampal coal plants, which are currently under construction.

The Rampal plant continues to face mass protests, demanding a halt to its development as it threatens the World Heritage listed Sundarbans mangrove forest.

Also, 4,600 MtCO2 would be emitted through the operating lifetime of Bangladesh's proposed coal plants. This is 20 percent greater than the lifetime emissions from all of the currently operating coal plants in Japan, it added.

Furthermore, all of Bangladesh's coal-based projects are "inconsistent" with the Paris Agreement's climate goals of "limiting global warming to well below 2 degree Celsius and to pursue efforts to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius," the report says.

On the other hand, the September 2019 Prices estimated the cost of importing 61 metric tonnes per

annum of thermal coal as Bangladesh plans to do by 2041. The estimated cost would be \$2 billion annually, it adds.

During the fiscal 2018-19, the country experienced trade deficits of \$18 billion and \$16 billion respectively, it says, referring to media reports.

The pipeline plants would lock Bangladesh into a huge volume of coal imports for decades. Unless exports increase significantly, coal worth billions purchased from abroad would add to the trade deficits.

Bangladesh has jumped to sixth place from 12th in the last three years in the global ranking of coal power capacity in "active development", which includes coal plants in pre-construction and construction stages, it further says.

The report recommended that a clean, sustainable energy future is possible for Bangladesh, adding that of the 29 proposed projects, only 10 percent have progressed to construction.

Renewable energy can replace planned coal power projects as a lower cost alternative for electricity generation, it said, adding countries like China, Japan, India and the UK are investing heavily in Bangladesh's coal power expansion.

Addressing the press conference, TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said development projects that put people's lives in danger and cause harm to the environment cannot be accepted.

He said Bangladesh's requirement to generate more electricity is imperative and also lauded the government's progress made in power generation over the past decade.

However, this cannot be achieved in a "suicidal" way, he said, adding, "[The government] has developed a kind of addiction to coal-based power projects."

Bangladesh is unique and so are its largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, and world's longest sea beach in Cox's Bazar. Those should be protected, Iftekharuzzaman said.

A company of fraudsters

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and was told that her parcel containing some precious gifts has been blocked by Indian customs and that she would need to pay Tk 70, 000 for the clearance.

Fabian then asked Suma to deposit the amount to an account of the courier company and gave an DBBL account number.

Soon after she deposited the amount, Suma received a confirmation call from the courier company and was told that she would require an anti-money laundering certificate to withdraw the amount and that the certificate would cost Tk25 lakh.

The caller also threatened Suma that they would file a case under the Money Laundering Prevention Act if she acted otherwise.

At this point, Suma realised that she was being conned.

The story above was mentioned in the statement of the case filed by Suma with the capital's Bhatara Police Station a few days ago.

Another case was filed with the capital's Uttara Police Station by one Shyamol Kumar Sarkar who was swindled out of Tk 45,000 in a similar method apparently by the same gang.

While investigating the two cases, Detective Branch of police (DB) has busted a syndicate that has been making Tk 70 to 80 lakh per month by deceiving people using the same trick since its inception in 2014.

The syndicate members call it a company. It has seven to eight foreigners in its top tier, whereas all the mid and lower rank officers are either drug addicts or jail returnee.

All staffers of the so-called company always dress in formal outfits and they often impersonate as custom or Bangladesh Bank (BB) officials. The company has at least 15 staffers,

including a general manager and three area managers. Three of them are female.

The DB team arrested six members of the so-called company from different areas in the capital yesterday.

The arrestees are Md Kawsar, 32, Md Merazul Islam, 22, Md Sakibul Hasan, 26, Kawsar Hossain, 20, Hamim Mollah, 20, and Korshed Alam, 32.

According to DB officials, Kawsar and Korshed were arrested earlier and served prison sentences in narcotics cases.

The detectives also recovered Tk2.40 lakh in cash, a motorbike and huge numbers of credit cards of different banks from their possession, Mashiur Rahman, deputy commissioner of DB (north), told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the gang member first send friend request to the victims on social media and then establish a close relation.

After that they send some fake photos of valuable goods and express their willingness to send those items to the victim as gifts.

Finally, they approach as either customs or Bangladesh Bank officials and demand custom duties for their gifts, said the deputy commissioner.

They opened numerous agent banking accounts where the victims were asked to deposit the money.

After withdrawing money from these accounts, at least eight foreigners, including some Nigerian nationals, used to launder the money abroad, said DB Additional Deputy Commissioner Badruzzaman Zillu, who is coordinating the investigation in this matter.

One Biplob Lashkar from Gopalganj is the boss of the con gang, he said.

Official said Biplob stays in India most of the time and that the gang members maintain their internal communication through a WhatsApp group.