

Brexit or no Brexit?

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mandate and a majority that lets him sever Britain's ties with its closest partners after nearly a year of delays.

"Just imagine how wonderful it will be to settle down to a turkey dinner this Christmas with Brexit decided," he said in a final message to voters.

Yet the complex divorce between the single market of 27 remaining EU nations and Britain would run on even of the first stage of Brexit end next month.

Brussels has indicated that Johnson's plans to secure a comprehensive trade deal needed to secure smooth future relations before a December 2020 deadline is unrealistic.

That would again raise the prospect of Britain facing a no-deal scenario that plunges business and the British economy into fresh uncertainty.

The British pound slipped in afternoon trading in expectation of exit polls at 2200 GMT. The first official results are expected an hour later.

A victory for Labour would make 70-year-old Corbyn the party's first prime minister since Gordon Brown

in 2010 -- and the oldest first-time premier since Viscount Palmerston in 1855.

Corbyn's proposal for Brexit is for Labour to strike a more EU-friendly agreement with Brussels. Voters would then choose between that deal and the option of staying in the bloc.

But he has refused to publicly back or oppose Brexit and instead cast himself as an "honest arbiter" who would carry out voters' wishes -- no matter the outcome -- in a bid to unify the country.

"Vote for hope. Vote for real change," he said on the eve of the vote.

Johnson has hammered home his message to "Get Brexit Done" against a backdrop of voter fatigue and the tortuous Brexit process.

"I wasn't happy. Brexit should not be dominating," voter Gaurang Naik said.

Pollsters YouGov last month predicted that Johnson's Conservatives would have a comfortable 68-seat majority but on Tuesday indicated that projection been cut to 28.

Brexit has turned traditional political allegiances on their head and shock results could be on the cards.



PHOTO: REUTERS

A picture taken yesterday in Marseille, southeastern France shows overturned cars during a blockade of the port autonome to protest against government's plans to overhaul the pension system. French officials yesterday said they were open to negotiating a plan that could push back many people's retirement to 64, after unions vowed to maintain a transport strike through the year-end holidays unless the government backs down on its pension overhaul.

Govt to buy

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German firm Veridos GmbH to promote Bangladesh into the e-passport era.

Around 120 countries have already introduced e-passports so far.

Bangladesh introduced the MRP and machine-readable visa system in April 2010, following the International Civil Aviation Organisation guidelines.

The committee yesterday also approved three other proposals, including the construction of a four-lane road from Ashuganj River Port to Brahmanbaria's Sarail at a cost of Tk 2446.27 crore.

Indian farm Afcons Infrastructure Limited has been awarded for the job.

India will finance the major costs of the project.

The road is very important for India to transship their goods to Tripura and other neighbouring states by using the Ashuganj River Port and Chattagram Sea Port.

"Connectivity with India will improve following the construction of the road," said the finance minister.

Asked about the reasons behind fixing a low service charge for transporting Indian goods using Bangladeshi ports, Kamal said, "We didn't consider whether we would gain or lose something from the service charge. We saw the issue as a whole."

The minister said the Bangladeshi exporters would also be allowed to use the road.

The committee yesterday approved another project of developing land for a special economic zone in Narayanganj's Araihaazar upazila.

Japan-based Toa Corporation was awarded the job at a cost of Tk 1081.45 crore.

World's

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and the earliest figurative artwork in the world," researchers said.

The discovery comes after a painting of an animal in a cave on the Indonesian island of Borneo was earlier determined to have been at least 40,000 years old, while in 2014, researchers dated figurative art on Sulawesi to 35,000 years ago.

"I've never seen anything like this before," Griffith University archaeologist Adam Brumm told Nature.

"I mean, we've seen hundreds of rock art sites in this region, but we've never seen anything like a hunting scene," he added.

For many years, cave art was thought to have emerged from Europe, but Indonesian paintings have challenged that thinking.

There are at least 242 caves or shelters with ancient imagery on Sulawesi alone, and new sites are being discovered annually, the team said.

In the latest dated scene, the animals appear to be wild pigs and small buffalo, while the hunters are depicted in reddish-brown colours with human bodies and the heads of animals including birds and reptiles.

The human-animal figures, known in mythology as therianthropes, suggested that early humans in the region were able to imagine things that did not exist in the world, the researchers said.

"We don't know what it means, but it seems to be about hunting and it seems to maybe have mythological or supernatural connotations," Brumm was quoted as saying.

A half-lion, half-human ivory figure found in Germany that was estimated to be some 40,000 years old was thought to be the oldest example of therianthropy, the article said.

The Sulawesi painting, which is in poor condition, suggests that a highly advanced artistic culture existed some 44,000 years ago, punctuated by folklore, religious myths and spiritual belief, the team said.

11 PWD officials held over 31.24cr embezzlement

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Masudul is the prime accused in all the cases lodged yesterday. All of PWD engineers were working in Pabna at that time.

For accommodation of engineers and other officials of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, the government is constructing 966 flats.

According to a case statement, the PWD on March 19, 2018, made about Tk 28.37 crore estimation to procure 70 items, including curtains, aluminium doors, window frames, electric irons, smart TVs, refrigerators, and washing machines, for the 20-storey building.

PWD Deputy Assistant Engineer Shafiqul assessed the price of electrical appliances.

Sub-divisional Engineer Sazzad approved it and said, "I have personally verified the market rate. The rate had been proposed accordingly."

Deputy Assistant Engineer Jahidul estimated the price of items like curtains, aluminium doors, and window frames, and it was verified

by Sub-divisional Engineer Mostafa Kamal.

On the same day, executive engineer Masudul approved the price assessment.

On March 21, 2018, the estimation was submitted before PWD Superintendent Engineer of Rajshahi zone AKM Zillur Rahman who approved and forwarded it to Additional Chief Engineer Shafiqur Rahman for final approval. He also gave the nod on that day.

The tender was published in e-GP on April 3 that year and two dailies the following day.

Mazid Sons Construction submitted a tender on May 1 that year, and Sajin Construction the following day. Mazid was awarded the work on May 24.

The ACC in its inquiry, however, found that furnished flats of the building had already been handed over to the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission, which is implementing the nuclear power plant project, between October 28 and November

1, 2017.

On behalf of PWD, Jahidul and Shafiqul handed over the flats.

"That is how the PWD received goods from the contractor before floating the tender," read the FIR.

The housing and public works ministry in its investigation found that prices of the items should be Tk 19.30 crore.

After deducting vat and income tax, it was found about Tk 7.79 crore was additionally paid, said the FIR.

"Masudul, Jahidul, Mostafa, Shafiqul, Sazzad, Sumon, Aminul, and Tareq were directly involved in the tender process."

They misappropriated Tk 7.79 crore, mentioned the FIR.

In a similar way, the PWD officials floated tender for similar items for another 20-storey building.

About one month before awarding the work order to Mazid Sons Construction, the furnished flats, with furniture and home appliances, were handed over to the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission on April

25, 2018.

The anti-graft body found about Tk 7.48 crore was misappropriated from this work.

The PWD awarded two contracts to Sajin Construction for similar goods for two other 20-storey buildings where about Tk 15.96 crore was embezzled.

Corruption in the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant came to the fore following media reports over purchase of furniture and other household items at exorbitant prices.

The reports claimed that each pillow was bought for Tk 5,957, and the cost of carrying it to a flat was Tk 760. An electric stove cost was Tk 7,747, and the carrying cost from the ground floor to the top was Tk 6,650.

The reports also said the price of an electric iron was Tk 4,154, and the carrying cost was Tk 2,945.

The total cost for the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant stands at around Tk 1,13,025 crore.

Stay alert to bribery, corruption

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The PM was addressing the concluding ceremony of the 113th, 114th and 115th law and administration courses at Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy in the city.

Hasina asked the new officials of the administration to spend public money properly for a planned development of the country.

Regarding the field-level administration officials, she said if an officer wishes, he can change the outlook of a district, an upazila or a union by making development visible there. "You will have to have such innovative ideas, plans and thoughts [to do so]."

The premier directed the government officers to pay special

attention to the ongoing drives against drugs, terrorism and corruption.

She asked them to take steps in a planned way keeping the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in mind so that the development is made sustainable.

Hasina also asked the officials to develop themselves further to work for the country by continuing their training and studies using the advantage of the digital platforms.

She suggested that they should read two books -- Osomapto Attojiboni (Unfinished Memoirs) and Karagarer Rojnamcha (Prison Diary) -- of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to know about his dedication and the history of the

country.

The PM said a 14-volume book on "Secret Documents of Intelligence Branch on Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman" was being published.

"If our officers read the books, their self-confidence would grow as they will be able to know how they can ensure the development of a country and how the Father of the Nation had made the country independent through struggles," she said, adding that the four volumes of the book have already been published.

Focusing on the country's development, Hasina said Bangladesh made a turnaround and reached a dignified position in the world in the

last one decade as her government had been working for its progress.

The PM distributed certificates among the participants of the five-month training courses. A total of 120 admin cadre officers attended the three courses.

State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain, Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Administration Ministry HN Ashequr Rahman and Public Administration Secretary Faiz Ahmed spoke at the function, chaired by Kazi Rowshan Akhter, rector of Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy.

Two ministers cancel trips to India

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Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan was scheduled to fly to Meghalaya today at the invitation of its Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma.

Sharif Mahmud, public relations officer at the home ministry, confirmed the cancellation of the trip.

Another home ministry official said the minister would not visit India now as the northeastern Indian states were seeing protests over the citizenship bill.

In New Delhi, the spokesman for the Indian external affairs ministry, Raveesh Kumar, yesterday said cancellation of Momen's India visit would not have any effect on bilateral relations.

"We know the visit has been cancelled... I understand the foreign minister has given an explanation. Our relations are strong, like our two leaders have said repeatedly, and I don't think this cancellation will have any effect," he told reporters.

He said the cancellation of the visit and the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Bill should not be linked.

"We will have to go by the reason stated. As for his [Momen's] comments

on Citizenship Amendment Bill, there is some confusion. Religious persecution was in reference to military regime and past governments," Kumar said.

The Indian parliament on Monday passed the controversial Citizenship Amendment Bill that would grant Indian citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians who faced "persecution" in Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

ATTACK ON ENVOY'S CONVOY

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has protested an attack on the convoy of its assistant high commissioner in Guwahati and vandalism of signposts near the mission.

Acting foreign secretary of Bangladesh, Kamrul Ahsan, lodged the protest with Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Riva Ganguly Das when the latter met him at the foreign ministry in Dhaka yesterday evening, the ministry said in a release.

Kamrul requested the Indian government to protect the personnel and property of the mission.

Riva Ganguly said the Indian

government was immediately alerted to enhance security of the chancery and residence premises of the Bangladesh assistant high commission.

Yesterday, the security vehicle escorting Bangladesh assistant high commissioner, Shah Mohammad Tanvir Monsur, from the airport to Guwahati city was attacked by mobs protesting adoption of the Citizenship Amendment Bill.

The foreign ministry release said some people from the processions and agitations knocked down two signposts of the mission approximately 30 yards away from the chancery premises.

The Indian authorities have already stepped up security to protect the Assistant High Commission, its personnel and members of their families, added the release.

The passage of the bill triggered protests in Assam. Several hundred troops, alongside paramilitary forces, were deployed in Tripura and Guwahati.

During a recent debate on the bill at the Lok Sabha, Indian Home Minister Amit Shah said torture on Hindu communities in Bangladesh,

Afghanistan and Pakistan was taking place.

The debate continued for about nine hours before the lower house of the Indian parliament eventually passed the bill amid protests from opposition parties.

Denying the allegation of torture, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Momen told reporters in Dhaka on Wednesday that the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019 could weaken India's "historic position" as a tolerant and secular country.

There were also concerns over the Indian National Register of Citizens (NRC) which excluded nearly two million people in Assam, raising fears they could be rendered stateless.

Indian Home Minister Amit Shah on several occasions said the NRC would be implemented across India and all illegal migrants would be expelled.

Bangladesh maintains that the NRC is an internal issue of India and it will not affect Bangladesh.

Our diplomatic correspondent and New Delhi correspondent contributed to this report.

Take steps

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forest ministries, director general of department of environment; deputy commissioner and police super of Feni; upazila nirbahi officer, assistant commissioner (land) and chairman of Feni sadar upazila; director and deputy director of DoE Chattogram region; through the notice.

Citing The Daily Star report, the notice urged the officials to take necessary steps to protect the century-old Mohammad Ali Dighi in Sundarpur area of the sadar upazila from being filled up.

The waterbody must be protected for the greater interest of the environment and locals relying on it for their daily chores, says the notice.

"It is a clear violation of the existing laws aimed at protecting waterbodies. If you can't take steps to stop ... legal steps will be taken as per the law," it mentions.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of BELA, said laws, formulated to protect the waterbodies, were being frustrated by such activities.

"Those who make law can't act like those who break it. Otherwise, violation of laws will become a common practice. So, we want such activities to be stopped immediately."

Dhaka starts

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orders on time.

A large number of holidaymakers seek direct bus services to the two popular tourist destinations. Besides, many Bangladeshi parents send their children to boarding schools in Darjeeling, said officials.

The service will ease their journey to the places, they added.

Suvenker Ghosh Rakesh, managing director of Shyamoli NR Travels that provided the officials with the buses, said they were ready to operate commercially on the routes if the authorities approve after the trial run.

Darjeeling via Siliguri is around 450km and Gangtok about 500km away from Dhaka.

Mahbub Hossain Sumon, managing director of Touch Creation Ltd, a travel agency, said, "This definitely is a great initiative."

In November, India lifted a ban that restricted foreigners from entering Gangtok. The bus service will definitely be a great help to the visitors now, he said.

He however, said heavy buses would not be able to operate on the narrow and zigzag roads between Siliguri and Darjeeling.

Currently, buses operate on five cross-border routes between Bangladesh and India -- Dhaka-Kolkata-Dhaka, Dhaka-Agartala-Dhaka, Dhaka-Sylhet-Shillong-Guwahati-Dhaka, Agartala-Dhaka-Kolkata-Agartala and Dhaka-Khulna-Kolkata-Dhaka.

On this day

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Two brigades of 57th division advance from the east. Another brigade led by General Gandharv Nagra and the paratroopers in Tangail moves forward from the northern side. And the 4th division crosses Madhumati River and reach the bank of Padma River.

General Nagra reaches Tangail around 9:00pm. He meets two Brigadiers -- Kler and San Singh -- at Wapda rest house to discuss next course of action. He praises the Muktibahini, "If they did not help us coming all the way till here without facing any battles, then we would be tired on the road due to the fighting and skirmishes." The allied force in the northern region start advance towards Bogura from Govindaganj.

A Pakistan regiment with cannons and tanks waiting in Bogura creates a heavy defensive resistance. In the night, the allied force cordons Bogura town. In midnight, three battalions attack from northern, southern and north-eastern part of the town.

Murderer becomes 22nd person executed in US this year

AFP, Washington

A Texas man who killed a prison officer was executed late Wednesday, bringing to 22 the number of people put to death in the US this year.

Travis Runnels, 46, was pronounced dead at 7:26 pm (0126 GMT), the Texas Department of Criminal Justice said, after a lethal injection at Huntsville prison north of Houston.

Runnels made no final statement, the department said.

Just minutes earlier, the US Supreme Court had rejected a stay of execution request.

Runnels had received a 70-year jail sentence in 1997 for armed robbery.

In 2003, he slashed the throat of a prison supervisor, Stanley Wiley. Two years later he pleaded guilty to the killing and was sentenced to death.

His lawyers later sought to have the penalty reversed. They said mitigating factors about his childhood were not introduced in the trial, and that an expert witness, A.P. Merillat, gave false testimony.