

US ELECTION 2020

23 DAYS TO GO

More than 6.6m Americans have already voted

Americans are rushing to cast ballots ahead of the Nov 3 election at an unprecedented pace, early voting numbers show, indicating a possible record turnout for the showdown between President Donald Trump and Democratic challenger Joe Biden. With less than four weeks to go before Election Day, more than 6.6 million Americans already have voted, more than ten times the number who had at this time in 2016, according to the United States Elections Project, which compiles early voting data. The shift has been driven by an expansion of early and mail-in voting in many states as a safe way to cast a ballot during the coronavirus pandemic. The early surge has led McDonald to predict a record turnout of about 150 million, representing 65% of eligible voters, the highest rate since 1908. Trump has rallied against mail-in voting, making unfounded accusations that it leads to fraud. Experts have said such fraud is rare.

Nearly 58 million watch VP debate

US Vice President Mike Pence's debate with Democrat Kamala Harris attracted 57.9 million TV viewers, the second-highest audience ever for a matchup between vice presidential candidates, according to Nielsen data released on Thursday. The viewership figure for the Wednesday evening faceoff in Salt Lake City included people watching across 18 networks. The tally came in 56% higher than four years ago, when 37 million people tuned in to see Pence debate Democrat Tim Kaine. Vice presidential debates typically draw smaller audiences than presidential clashes. President Donald Trump's Sept. 29 debate with Democratic challenger Joe Biden pulled in 73 million viewers, making it the second-biggest event on US television this year, after the Super Bowl. T

China joins Covax

Vaccine group says 'impossible' becoming 'reality'

REUTERS, Beijing

China yesterday said it has joined a global Covid-19 vaccine initiative co-led by the World Health Organisation (WHO), becoming the 170th country and biggest economy to date to support equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines to rich and poor countries alike.

"This is fantastic news, which gives even more momentum to our efforts to ensure global, equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines," said Dr Seth Berkley, CEO of the GAVI vaccine alliance.

Covax is co-led by the GAVI vaccine alliance, the WHO and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI).

The move means China "will be procuring vaccines through the facility for a proportion of their own population, just as with other countries that have joined", a GAVI spokesman said.

"Vaccine deals are underway and we are fast approaching our initial fundraising target to jumpstart support for lower-income countries," Dr Berkley told Reuters in a statement.

"What seemed like an impossible challenge just a few months ago - ensuring every country, rich or poor, gets equitable, rapid access to Covid-19 vaccines - is now becoming a reality."

The move by China, where the new coronavirus was first reported, comes as it holds separate talks with the WHO to have its locally produced Covid-19 vaccines assessed for international use.

China will purchase Covid-19 vaccines for 1 per cent of its population, or 15 million people, via a global scheme backed by the World Health Organisation, the Foreign Ministry said yesterday.

The first batch of vaccine available under the plan will be in short supply, so there would be less for other countries if China had secured doses for a large number of its 1.4 billion people, ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a news briefing.

China has at least four experimental vaccines in the final stage of clinical trials - two are developed by state-backed China National Biotec Group (CNBG), and the remaining two are from Sinovac Biotech and CanSino Biologics, respectively. It is in talks with the WHO to have its domestically made vaccines assessed for international use.

China joins some 168 countries that have already announced their participation in Covax including 76 wealthy, self-financing ones. But neither the United States nor Russia have joined the programme.

The Covax facility aims to deliver at least 2 billion doses of vaccines by the end of 2021.



Palestinians attend Friday prayers as they react to tear gas fired by Israeli forces during a protest against Jewish settlements, in Beit Dajan near Nablus in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

PLOT TO KIDNAP US GOVERNOR, 'INSTIGATE A CIVIL WAR'

Right-wing militias among 13 held

AFP, Washington

Thirteen men, including members of two right-wing militias, have been arrested for plotting to kidnap the Democratic governor of the US state of Michigan and "instigate a civil war", officials said Thursday.

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer thanked law enforcement for thwarting the kidnap plot and rebuked President Donald Trump for failing to condemn hate groups.

Announcing the arrests, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel described the conspiracy to kidnap the 49-year-old Whitmer as a "serious and credible threat."

Andrew Birge, US attorney for the western district of Michigan, said six men were facing federal charges for conspiring to kidnap Whitmer from her vacation home. Birge said they had conducted surveillance of her residence and even tested a home-made bomb they intended to use to divert law enforcement away from her home.

Trump has repeatedly attacked Whitmer over

her tough coronavirus lockdown, and armed right-wing groups have staged protests against her in the state capital Lansing.

Whitmer pointed to Trump's refusal at the recent debate with Democrat Joe Biden to condemn white supremacists and "hate groups" like the two Michigan militias that allegedly targeted her.

"Stand back and stand by, he told them," she said. "Hate groups heard the president's words not as a rebuke but as a rallying cry, as a call to action," she added.

Biden also sought to pin some blame on the Republican president. He said that Trump "is giving oxygen to the bigotry and hate we see on the march in our country. We have to stop it."

Attorney general Nessel said that seven members of a militia group called the Wolverine Watchmen were also facing state charges. They are suspected of attempting to identify the home addresses of law enforcement officers in order to target them and "instigate a civil war," Nessel said.



Moscow talks lift Karabakh truce hopes

REUTERS, Baku/Yerevan

Azeri and ethnic Armenian forces fought new clashes in and around Nagorno-Karabakh yesterday, while plans to hold talks in Moscow raised hopes of ending the deadliest battles in the South Caucasus for more than 25 years.

The Armenian and Azeri foreign ministers were expected to attend the Moscow talks later on Friday, a day after France, Russia and the United States launched a concerted drive for peace at a meeting in Geneva.

"We are moving towards a truce soon even if the situation is still fragile," French President Emmanuel Macron's office said after he spoke to the Armenian and Azeri leaders.

The Armenian government said yesterday's talks would focus on a cessation of hostilities and exchanges of bodies and prisoners of war.

Turkey, a close ally of Azerbaijan, said Ankara also wanted a diplomatic solution but that peace moves would succeed only if they ensured a withdrawal of Armenian forces from Nagorno-Karabakh, where fighting broke out on Sept 27. More than 400 people have been killed since then.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Trump slaps sweeping sanctions on Iran banks

President Donald Trump's administration imposed sweeping sanctions Thursday on Iran's banking sector, taking a major new step to cripple the arch-rival's already struggling economy weeks ahead of US elections. The Treasury Department said it was designating 18 major Iranian banks, a move that could largely cut off the nation of 80 million people from the world's financial system just as it tries to cope with the Middle East's worst Covid-19 outbreak. The United States defied concerns from European allies that the sanctions could cause needless suffering and insisted it was making exemptions for humanitarian trade. US said the Iranian leadership was to blame for devoting funds to the military when it has health needs.

Assam govt to shut down all govet-run madrasas, 'tols'

After dissolving the State Madrasa Education Board in 2018, Indian state Assam's education minister Himanta Biswa Sarma yesterday announced that the state government is going to close down all government-run madrasas in the state. Stating that they can't allow religious education with public money, the minister said that a notification to this effect would be issued next month. In February this year, Sarma had announced that the government has decided to close down not just government-run madrasas but also government-run Sanskrit 'tols'.

Aussie ex-PM registers as foreign agent over UK role

Australia's right-wing former prime minister Tony Abbott registered as an agent of foreign influence yesterday, after controversially taking up a role as a trade advisor to the UK government. Abbott -- who lost his seat in parliament at the last election -- is registered under the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme, which is designed to monitor outside influence over Australian public life. The scheme is similar to the United States' Foreign Agents Registration Act, and was introduced in late 2018 amid concerns about growing Chinese lobbying efforts Down Under.

India test fires new generation anti-radiation missile

India yesterday successfully test-fired the "Rudram" Anti-Radiation Missile, developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), from a Sukhoi-30 fighter aircraft off the east coast today. The missile hit with pin-point accuracy a radiation target located on Wheeler Island off the coast of Bay of Bengal in the eastern state of Odisha, the Indian Defence Ministry said in a statement. This is the first indigenous anti-radiation missile of the country for Indian Air Force (IAF) being developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), it said. With this, India has established indigenous capability to develop long range air launched anti-radiation missiles for neutralizing enemy radars, communication sites and other radio frequency-emitting targets, said the statement.

SOURCE: REUTERS

Padma Oil Company Limited
(An Enterprise of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation)
Strand Road, Sadarghat, Chattogram

Request for Expressions of Interest (EOI)

Consultancy Services for Modernization/Improvement and Retrofitting of Design/Drawing Inc. Supervision of under construction Head Office Building (23-storied with two Basement & one Semi Basement) of Padma Oil Company Limited at Agrabad, Chattogram.

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources/Energy and Mineral Resources Division
2	Agency	Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC)
3	Name of procuring entity	Padma Oil Company Limited (POCL)
4	Title of service	Consultancy Services for Modernization/Improvement with Retrofitting of Design/Drawing Inc. Supervision of under construction Head Office Building (23-storied with Basement & one Semi Basement) for Padma Oil Company Limited at Agrabad, Chattogram.
5	Procuring entity district	Chattogram
6	Expression of interest for selection of	Consulting Firm Lump-sum
7	EOI Ref. No.	PO/CAPEX/28P/95/20-21
8	Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	07/10/2020

KEY INFORMATION
9 Procurement sub-method: Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS).

FUNDING INFORMATION
10 Budget and source of funds: Own fund of Padma Oil Company Limited.

PARTICULAR INFORMATION
12 Project/programme code (if applicable): 4205
13 Project/programme name: Consultancy Services for Modernization/Improvement with Retrofitting of Design/Drawing Inc. Supervision of under construction Head Office Building (23-storied with two Basement & one Semi Basement) for Padma Oil Company Limited at Agrabad, Chattogram.
14 EOI closing date & time: 22/10/2020 at 12:30pm.

INFORMATION FOR APPLICANT
15 Brief description of the assignment:
Padma Oil Company Limited (POCL), a subsidiary of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) under the Ministry of Energy & Mineral Resources. It is the largest oil marketing company of Bangladesh. The Head Office of the Padma Oil Company Ltd is situated on Strand Road, Sadarghat, Chattogram. The location of the under construction multi-storied Head Office Building of Padma Oil Company Ltd is at Agrabad, Chattogram which is basically commercial and office area. Almost all government/semi-government/office buildings, bank/financial institutions are situated in this area. As such the location of the proposed multi-storied Head Office Building is very suitable in all respect. The objectives of the project are:
a) To construct a multi-storied office building to accommodate Head Office of POCL including all its divisions to facilitate and organize the office management efficiently.
b) To save extra revenue by setting out premises to the interested parties.
c) To attain right of ownership on the plot of land at Agrabad Commercial Area, Chattogram.
In 2012, a consultant has prepared the architectural, structural, electrical, electro-mechanical, sanitary and plumbing fire fighting system etc. design/drawing of this under construction building for the project. The construction works of foundation, Basement floors and Ground floor are almost completed. Over the years, many improvements/alterations have been made to the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC). So, it is important to modernize the design/drawing by incorporates with a view and coordinating with the new BNBC code before conducting the superstructure of the building for construction of a modern building situated at the heart of Agrabad CIA, Chattogram. Since the concept of building construction has already been approved to a very modern level, so the design/drawing modification is very important to keep the project in line with the modern concept.
In this context, design/drawing of architectural, structural, electrical, electro-mechanical, sanitary and plumbing, fire fighting system etc. of the building needs to be reviewed/upgrade with modern facilities. In view of above, POCL authority invites EOI through national duties in accordance with Rule 105 of PPR-2009 for appointment of consultant for providing consulting services for Modernization/Improvement and Retrofitting of Design/Drawing for Construction of Head Office Building of Padma Oil Company Limited.
The consultant's scope of services shall include, but not limited to, the following:
(a) Assessment of existing structural system and Preparing Design proposals for appropriate adjustment of existing design in order to create efficient space management.
(b) Contextually Survey and Analysis Report.
(c) Remedial Architectural aesthetics in compliance with GoB and international standard.
(d) Assessment of existing structural system and Retrofitting of Structural Design due to remodeling.
(e) Relevant and sustainable design modification of Electrical, Mechanical, Electro-mechanical, Sanitary Plumbing, Fire Fighting system or any in compliance with GoB and international standard.
(f) Preparing BOQ with materials Specification and Tender documents.
(g) Ensuring all technical inputs and cost estimates related to the construction components.
(h) Responsible to ensure that effective implementation, monitoring and supervision tools are developed and implemented.
(i) Responsible to ensure that effective quality assurance systems.
(j) Construction Supervision, Architectural, Electrical, Mechanical, Electro-mechanical, Sanitary and Plumbing, Fire Fighting System works supervision to control quality of development works.
(k) Top supervision at any necessary part of works to ensure quality of development works of the project.
(l) Preparing project interim and completion reports whenever necessary and maintain all the relevant project records.
(m) Visiting/Retrospection Design from BUET.
(n) Project Management Support.
The consulting firm will function as the engineering body and requires to report to POCL. The Consultant will administrate all types of engineering works of the project and ensure that the project works are constructed in accordance with the provision of the contracts. The Consultant will be required to nominate an experienced civil engineer who will be full-time resident in the project area.

16. Experience, resources & delivery capacity required:
The Consultant shall be short-listed on the basis of the following criteria:
Nature of Business: Construction consultancy firms
Year of experience: The Interested Consulting Firm should have at least 15 (fifteen) years of general experience in the relevant field with specialized experience in the field of High Rise Commercial Building Design & Construction Supervision works.
Specific/similar experience: The Interested Consultant should have satisfactorily completed similar assignment during the last 10 (ten) years ending last day of the month in which the EOI has been invited as under:
(a) Three similar assignment each pertaining to Design & Supervision of minimum 12-storied Building with minimum 1 Basement.
(b) Experiences in Modern Office Building design & supervision.
(c) Experiences in Sustainable Building (LEED Certified) design & supervision.
(d) Experience in designing at least 10000sqm area in a single building structure.
(e) Availability of appropriate skills staff (list of relevant professional staff, their qualification & experience to be furnished).
(f) Applicant (lead firm in case of the consortium) shall have minimum annual average turnover of BDT 3 (three) crore as per committed financial result of at least 03 (three) of the last 05 (five) financial years from the date of the submission of EOI offer.
(g) Company incorporation certificate, up-to-date trade licence, Vat registration, Income tax certificate, bank solvency certificate, last 5 (five) years annual turnover supported with audit report of the company.
(h) The Consultant who have records of litigation and delaying the works are strongly discouraged to apply for the Expressions of Interest.
Special instruction: Duration of assignment: Duration of the contract + project liability period (according to govt. rules)
Submission of EOI should be done in bearing the name and address of the applicant, EOI No. & date and be addressed to the POCL, Construction of Head Office Building in 02 (two) copies/01 (one) marked as ORIGINAL, & other as COPY in sufficient envelope in the form of book binding both the ORIGINAL & COPY shall have to be covered within a single envelope & submitted the same at Head Office, Strand Road, Sadarghat, Chattogram by 12:30pm on/before 22/10/2020.
16. Association with foreign firms is: Encouraged.

PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS
19 Name of official inviting EOI: Numon Ahmed Taffader
20 Designation of official inviting EOI: Project Director, Construction of Head Office Building of Padma Oil Company Limited.
21 Address of official inviting EOI: Strand Road, Sadarghat, Chattogram, Bangladesh.
22 Contact details of official inviting EOI: Phone: 031-610630, Fax: 031-612666, 031-618312, Email: numonpo@bpc.com Cell: 0177703317, 02-55012266.
23 The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all EOIs without showing any reason whatsoever.

Numon Ahmed Taffader
Project Director, Const. of
Head Office Building
Telephone: +88 031 610630

Whose body?

Indian court says sex work is a woman's choice

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION

A police sting that busted a prostitution ring and triggered a back-and-forth in the courts has revealed a conflict in Indian law over a woman's right to sell sex and a state's right to stop her.

It all comes down to female choice, according to a landmark legal ruling last month that hands a rare victory to prostitutes in a land which affords women scant sexual freedom.

"You cannot rehabilitate anyone against their will. There has to be consent," the women's lawyer Siddharth Jaiswal told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The case began last year when a Mumbai court prevented three sex workers from leaving the protective home they were forcibly moved to after police rescued them from prostitution. Despite their opposition, the court said they should be counselled against sex work, learn new skills and find fresh jobs. It said the trio needed state "care and protection".

That order was overturned last month by the Bombay High Court, which upheld the women's right "to choose their own vocation", a judgment campaigners say should help other adult sex workers break free from enforced protection.

"The consent of the victim is never taken before they are taken into shelters. The victim themselves are not aware of their rights," said Jaiswal.

The case is key as India's Immoral Traffic Prevention Act - applied in brothel raids and sex worker rescues - fails to distinguish between victims of trafficking and women doing sex work out of choice, lawyers and campaigners said. Adult sex workers rounded up by police are housed in shelters for 21 days for verification and medical tests, among other formalities, according to the law. After the 21 days, courts can impose a further detention of up to three years, based on a woman's family background and the circumstances that led them into prostitution.

"The belief is that no woman can take sex work by choice, that they are all trafficked... they infantile adult women," said Smarajit Jana, founder of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, a collective of 65,000 sex workers in Kolkata.

"But (the high court) did not confuse morality with livelihood... it distinguished between trafficking and sex work," said Jana.

"It is very rare."



Kyrgyzstan in state of emergency

REUTERS, Bishkek

Kyrgyz President Sooronbai Jeenbekov declared a state of emergency in the capital Bishkek yesterday and ordered troops to deploy, as supporters of rival political groups took to the streets after days of unrest following an overturned election.

Jeenbekov's office said in a statement the state of emergency, which includes a curfew and tight security restrictions, would continue until 8:00 am on Oct. 21. Earlier the president had said he was ready to resign once a new cabinet was appointed.

The country has seen a power vacuum, with opposition groups quarrelling among themselves since seizing government buildings and forcing the cancellation of results from Sunday's parliamentary election.

Russia has described the situation in Kyrgyzstan, which borders China and hosts a Russian military base, as "a mess and chaos".

The crisis tests the Kremlin's power to shape politics in its former Soviet sphere of influence, at a time when fighting has erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Belarus is also engulfed in protests.

'IMMORAL' CONTENT Pakistan to block TikTok

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan has decided to block social media App TikTok for failing to filter out "immoral" content, three top government officials said yesterday.

A formal announcement to this effect will be made in a few hours, they said.

"We have been asking them repeatedly to put in place an effective mechanism for blocking immoral and indecent content," one of the top officials directly involved in the decision told Reuters.

"The platform, however, hasn't been able to fully satisfy Pakistani authorities," he said.

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