

Go to polls

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Addressing Bangladesh Chhatra League students at Ramna Green today, Bangabandhu says there is no logical reason for the resignation of his government before the polls. He advises his political opponents to go to the polls and take the mandate from the people to administer the country. He says he would be too glad to be relieved of his onerous responsibilities if the people return the opposition to power.

The prime minister makes it clear that the opposition should have no misgivings about the fairness of the coming elections. He says a High Court judge has been entrusted with the responsibilities of holding the elections in a free and fair manner. He reiterates that the elections will be free, fair and impartial.

INDIA, BANGLADESH WILL EXCHANGE SURPLUS POWER
An India-Bangladesh agreement is signed in Dhaka today providing for setting up of a Joint Power Coordination Board, an expert body which will study the feasibility of exchange of surplus power of the two countries. The board will also examine the feasibility of linking the power grids of the two countries to share power. The plan is to meet the shortage of power of one area of the country from the surplus of the adjacent area in the other country.
SOURCES: January 5, 1973 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Dainik Ittefaq.

Probe body

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reserve forest on December 27, he added.

The report titled "Sangu Reserve Forest: Left exposed to human greed" mentioned that loggers have been plundering a huge number of century-old trees in the reserve forest over the last few years.

Asked, Col Gazi Nahiduzzaman, sector commander of Border Guard Bangladesh Bandarban Region, said, "When they [forest officials] sought our cooperation, we told them to take permission from the BGB headquarters."

Talking to this correspondent, Jumlian Amlai, president of Bandarban chapter of Parbatya Chattogram Forest and Land Rights Protection Movement, alleged that loggers had transported the plundered trees from Sangu reserve forest to different remote areas in Thanchi upazila after learning that the probe committee would visit the forest.

"Some unscrupulous officials at the forest department tipped off the timber smugglers about the committee members' visit. The smugglers shipped the plundered trees to various remote areas, including Wak Chakkai Mro Para and Baklai Road area in Thanchi," he claimed.

Jumlian further said many of the plundered trees were hidden at various points of the Sangu River.

Contacted, Md Anwar Hossain, assistant conservator of forest of Bandarban Pulpwood Plantation Division, said "Today [yesterday], we seized over 3,000 cubic feet timber from Wak Chakkoi Mro Para, Baklai road and also a place near the Thanchi UNO's residence."

"These might be from the Sangu reserve forest..." he added.

27 more die

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and 19 were above 60 years, added the release.

On March 8, authorities reported first three Covid-19 cases in the country while the first death was reported on March 18.

Covid-19 transmission and casualties rose to the highest during June and July which started to decrease in the following months.

Again it started rising since the second week of November. During last one week, the infection rate was decreasing again.

The government has arranged some 98 million doses of vaccines -- 30 million Oxford-AstraZeneca's vaccines from Serum Institute of India and 68 million from the Gavi.

Officials said they were expecting the first shipment of Oxford vaccine will reach the country by mid-February.

New curbs

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Health officials are concerned that the surging numbers could overwhelm hospitals during their busiest time of the year.

In Bangkok, the city's nightlife shut down following a ban on bars, nightclubs and restaurant alcohol sales, among a raft of restrictions aimed at curbing the kingdom's rising virus toll.

Public schools in the Thai capital are to close for two weeks.

An outbreak last month at a seafood market has led to a resurgence of the virus in Thailand, with infections detected in 53 of the kingdom's 77 provinces.

In Tokyo, the city's governor asked Japan's government to declare a new state of emergency as the country battles a third wave, with record numbers of new cases.

And a South Korean health official said yesterday that a third wave of the coronavirus is being contained, as it reported the lowest number of new infections in nearly four weeks with the help of tougher restrictions during the New Year holiday season.



People lining up to be tested for coronavirus at a testing centre in Shenyang, in China's northeast Liaoning province yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Litterateur Rabeya Khatun passes away

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In her career spanning almost six decades, Rabeya had shown her capacities in short stories, essays, religious history, and travelogues. And she became an inspiration for many budding writers, including females.

Rabeya wrote over 50 novels and more than 400 short stories.

She received Ekushey Padak in 1993 and Independence Day Award in 2017, the two most prestigious and highest civilian awards of the Bangladesh government, for her contributions to literature.

She also wrote numerous screenplays for television and radio and at least three of her books were adapted for cinema.

Her body will be taken to the Bangla Academy premises around noon today where people can pay their last respects. After that, her body will be taken to Channel I and she will be buried at Banani graveyard in the afternoon.

President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and others expressed grief over the demise of Rabeya.

In a condolence message, the president said, "Rabeya Khatun's death is an irreparable loss to the country's literary arena."

Recalling her contributions to promoting Bengali literature, Hamid said she will always be remembered for her outstanding literary works.

The PM expressed deep shock and sorrow at the death of the eminent litterateur. She said Rabeya will be remembered for her outstanding contributions to the field of literature.

Both prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family.

Born on December 27, 1935, in Bikrampur, Rabeya was also a journalist and teacher. She worked with the Ittefaq and cine magazine Cinema and she became the editor of the monthly Angana in the 1950s.

In July 1952, she married film director Fazlul Haque. Her children include Faridur Reza Sagar, managing director of Impress Telefilm Ltd and Channel I, and Keka Ferdousi, a famous host of television cooking show and a

chef.

Her first story -- "Prashno" -- was published in the weekly Juger Dabi. Her novel Rajarbagh was published in Begum. She wrote her first novel Madhumati in 1963.

Her books on the Liberation War -- Ekattorer Noy Maash and Megher Pore Megh -- earned praise of readers as well as critics.

Movies were made on Madhumati, Megher Pore Megh and Kokhono Megh Kokhono Bristu.

Her notable novels include Shaheb Bazar, Ananta Anwasha, Shalimarbagh, Rajarbagh, Ferari Surjo, Onk Joner Ekjan, Jiboner Ar Ek Naam, Dibos Rojoni, Bayanoo Golir Ek Goli, Baganer Naam Malnichara, Ei Birohokal, Basanta Villa, Malinir Dupur, Akahse Akhono Anek Tara, and others.

For her contributions to the literary field, she also got Bangla Academy Award, Lekhika Sangha Award, Nasiruddin Gold Medal, Humayun Kadir Memorial Award, Uro Shishu Shahitya Award, Komor Mushtari Shahityo Award, Shere-e Bangla Gold

Medal, Wrishijo Literary Award, Layla Samad Award and various other awards.

For her tele-dramas, Rabeya won Tenashinas Award, Bacas (Bangladesh Cholochitra Sangbadik Samiti) Award, Bangladesh Cultural Reporters Association Millennium Award, Television Reporters Award and many other awards and recognitions.

Ministers and a group of people from different walks of life expressed deep shock at the demise of the novelist.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister and Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader, Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq, Information Minister Mohammad Hasan Mahmud, LGRD Minister Tazul Islam, Fisheries and Livestock Minister SM Rezaul Karim, Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Shahab Uddin, State Minister for Water Resources Zaheed Farooque, State Minister for Cultural Affairs KM Khalid, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mahubb Ali, Water Resources Deputy Minister AKM Enamul Haque Shamim and others expressed shock.

4 describe to court grief caused by PK Halder

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During the hearing on a suo moto rule, they connected with the virtual proceedings of the bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Ahmed Sohail and placed their statements before the court.

The depositors prayed to the HC to pass necessary directives so that they get their deposited money back from the authorities concerned.

The bench asked them to submit their statements to the court through affidavits along with relevant documents and fixed tomorrow for passing an order on this issue.

Nashid told the HC that she has deposited Tk 50 lakh and her family members, including eminent singer Ferdousi Rahman, have deposited around Tk 3 crore with PLFS as the organisation is endorsed by Bangladesh Bank.

She said they approached the Bangladesh Bank for the money, but the bank authorities have not taken any step to refund their money.

Samia told the HC bench that she deposited Tk 1 crore, her and her

husband's whole lives savings, with PLFS. Now, they are jobless due to ongoing pandemic and suffering from financial hardship.

Samia said, "She could not give their children fish and meat in their meals for more than one year due to the financial hardship."

She said though PK Halder, former managing director of NRB Global Bank, has been absconding abroad, his accomplices, including Amitabh Adhikary, Uzzal Kumar Nandi, Abantika Boral, Swapan Kumar Mistri and Manik Lal Sarkar, are in Bangladesh. They have regular communications, but they are not being detained, she said.

Samia said the depositors have deposited a total of Tk 750 crore with PLFS, but they are not getting back their money even though the Bangladesh Bank, finance ministry and even the Prime Minister's Office have been informed of the incident.

Tariqul Islam said the Khaled Mansur Trust deposited Tk 10 crore with PLFS and Shawkat-Ur Rahman said he deposited Tk 13 lakh.

Anti-Corruption Commission lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan and Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik told the HC that the ACC and the home ministry provided relevant documents and papers to the Interpol to arrest PK Halder and bring him back home.

Issuing the suo moto rule, the HC bench on November 18 last year wanted to know from the authorities concerned what steps have been taken to arrest Halder, who fled the country after allegedly siphoning off around Tk 10,200 crore from some non-banking financial institutions.

According to Canadian media reports, Halder is now in Toronto. He is director of P&L Hal Holding Inc, a Canadian corporation.

The three other NBFIs from which PK Halder allegedly embezzled crores of taka are: International Leasing and Financial Services Limited (ILFSL), FAS Finance and Investment, and Bangladesh Industrial Finance Company.

Halder came to the limelight during

the anti-casino drives in 2019. The ACC opened investigation into the involvement of 43 people, including Halder, in the illegal casino business.

The ACC on January 8 last year filed a case against Halder on charges of illegally amassing wealth worth Tk 275 crore.

Following a petition filed by two depositors, the HC on January 21 last year directed the Bangladesh Bank and all private banks to freeze the accounts of PK Halder, his five relatives, Bank Asia's former MD Erfanuddin Ahmed and Halder's aides Uzzal Kumar Nandi for allegedly misappropriating funds.

The HC ordered the government to seize the passports of 20 people, including Halder, his wife Susmita Saha and his brother Pritish Kumar Halder.

The court also directed the authorities concerned not to allow transfer ownership of any of their movable and immovable properties, including stock, cash and cars, to any person or entities until the disposal of the case.

9 killed in road crashes

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workers of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant lost their lives and three others were injured.

According to a Road Safety Foundation report released yesterday, at least 464 people were killed and 513 injured in 402 road accidents throughout the country in December last year.

The accident that killed the six family members and the driver took place in Mymensingh's Tarakanda upazila on the Mymensingh-Netrakona road in the afternoon.

The family were returning home from hospital after the birth of the child.

The victims were identified as Maulana Faruq Ahmed, 35, his wife Masuma Khatun, 25, their five-day old male child; Faruq's elder brother Nizam Uddin, 45, younger sister Julekha Khatun, 22, sister-in-law Joshna Begum, 40, and driver Rakibul Hasan, 29.

Maulana Faruq hailed from Fenchualendi village in Netrakona's

Purbadhala upazila and used to work at a madrasa in Dhaka. Rakibul was from Char Laxmipur village in Mymensingh sadar upazila, police said.

Quoting locals, Officer-in-Charge of Tarakanda Police Station Md Abdul Khayer said the accident took place when a Mymensingh-bound bus from Netrakona collided head-on with the CNG-run auto-rickshaw, killing the seven on the spot around 1:00pm.

The bus collided with the auto-rickshaw when the bus driver was overtaking another vehicle at high speed, said the OC quoting locals.

The CNG-run auto-rickshaw from Mymensingh was heading for Purbadhala upazila in Netrakona, said the OC.

On information, police went to the spot, recovered the bodies and handed them over to family members, said the OC. Police seized the bus but its driver managed to flee the scene.

Locals said the area was gripped by gloom following the incident, the

tragic nature of which they said they had not experienced before.

Sarwar Jahani Khan Masud, local union parishad member, said it was a great loss for the family and the locality as well as Maulana Faruq was a well-known and well-liked person in the locality.

Maulana Faruq's nephew Masum Ahmed said the baby, the couple's first child, was born at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital five days ago and they were returning home on the auto-rickshaw from the hospital.

In Pabna, the accident happened when a locally made three-wheeler known as Nasiman veered off into a roadside ditch.

The deceased are Md Abdul Khaleque, 32, of Damukdia village and Anisur Rahman, 31, of Ajgar Ali village in Kushtia's Veramara upazila.

Officer-in-Charge of Ishwardi Police Station Sheikh Md Nasir Uddin said a few Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant workers were coming to the project in

the morning on the three-wheeler, when the driver lost control near the Lalon Shah Bridge intersection in Ishwardi and the vehicle veered into a ditch.

The victims died on the spot while three others were injured, and were later admitted to Ishwardi upazila health complex, the OC said.

The driver fled the scene after the incident, the OC added.

Md Abdul Khaleque is a worker of MAX, a sub-contracting firm in Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant and Anisur Rahman worked for Ruinworld, another firm working in Rooppur Power Plant, sources said.

Md Ruhul Kuddus, in-charge of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant site office, said they came to know of the matter but the accident had happened outside the project. No case was filed over the incident till filing of this report.

(Our correspondents from Mymensingh and Pabna contributed to the report)

Nasa launching

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providing protection to earth.

Nasa said that it has approved two related missions: the Extreme Ultraviolet High-Throughput Spectroscopic Telescope Epsilon Mission, or EUVST, which will be led by the Japanese space agency JAXA; and the Electrojet Zeeman Imaging Explorer, or EZIE.

The first will launch in 2026, and takes the form of a solar telescope, to which Nasa will provide a host of components. It will look to understand how the sun's atmosphere releases solar winds and pushes out eruptions of solar material.

Those phenomena come out of the sun but spread throughout the solar system, affecting all of the objects in it, including our Earth.

Relief

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Brahmanbaria, to add the names of his well-off family members in the list of beneficiaries.

Amid widespread allegations of corruption, the OMS authorities headed by Deputy Commissioner Hayat investigated the matter and cancelled Alam's dealership on May 14.

In a separate incident less than a month later, a mobile court found at a grocery store in Kawtoli area 31 sacks of daily essentials the government intended to sell among the poor people through the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB).

The grocer told officials at the time that he bought the goods from Alam, who also has a TCB dealership.

The district's social services department officials could not be reached over phone yesterday.

Contacted, Alam told The Daily Star some people were out to tarnish his image as a politician.

"I did not go to the social services office asking for an award... They picked me," said Alam, who is also the director of the district unit of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries.

Backlog

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the resumption of all international flights amid strict precautions against the new Covid-19 strain.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines will resume flights on three routes -- Jeddah, Riyadh and Dammam -- from January 6, while Saudi Arabian Airlines will resume flights from January 5, said officials of the two airlines.

M Mokabbir Hossain, managing director and CEO of Biman, told The Daily Star that more than 5,200 passengers could not go to Saudi Arabia by Biman flights due to the suspension of flight operations between the countries on December 21.

An official of the Dhaka office of Saudi Arabian Airlines said at least 5,300 of its passengers were stuck in Bangladesh due to the suspension.

"We hope the backlog of passengers will be cleared within a month and we are working on reducing the passengers' hardships," the officials said, preferring to remain unnamed.

"We are also contacting our head office in Saudi Arabia about whether we can fly additional or special flights from Dhaka," he also said.

Biman CEO Mokabbir Hossain said the national airline operates 11 weekly flights to the kingdom -- four each to Riyadh and Jeddah and three to Dammam.

Saudia, the national flag carrier of Saudi Arabia, operates 14 weekly flights between the countries.

Biman yesterday requested the passengers of its cancelled flights to contact a nearby Biman sales office as per the schedule provided on the Biman website.

Seats will be allocated on a priority basis subject to vacancies on the flights, Biman said.

On December 20, Saudi Arabia had suspended all international flights to and from the country, with some exceptions, due to the spread of a new variant of Covid-19 discovered in the UK.

GACA in its circular yesterday said any foreign passenger wishing to enter Saudi Arabia from the United Kingdom, South Africa, and any other country determined by its Ministry of Health (in which the new mutated type of Covid-19 has spread) must spend at least 14 days outside the country impacted with the mutated virus before entering the kingdom.

These passengers must also undergo a PCR test after the expiration of this period to prove they are not infected.

Citizens and passengers allowed to enter the country on humanitarian grounds, coming from countries with widespread outbreak of the new mutated strain, will be quarantined in their homes under surveillance for 14 days.

They also have to take two PCR tests -- the first after arrival within a maximum of 48 hours, and the second before the end of the quarantine period, on the 13th day.

Passengers from countries that have recorded cases of the strain, but not a widespread outbreak, are to be quarantined in their homes under observation for seven days, and undergo a PCR test on the sixth day of arrival.

For passengers from the rest of the countries, precautions currently in place will be followed, including home quarantine for seven days or home quarantine for three days, and a PCR test, said the GACA circular.

Student dies in police custody

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Reja was sent to Barisal Central Jail the next day, he said.

Jail Superintendent Prashant Kumar Banik said, "After he [Reja] was brought to the jail on December 30, our doctor sent him to the prison hospital. The forwarding documents mentioned injuries to both ankles.

"On January 1, he started

bleeding from his feet. He was then sent to the medical college hospital and his family was informed about this."

Reja's father Yunus Munshi said his son was in good health at the time of his arrest.

He added that jail authorities called him around 9:00pm on Friday and said that Reja was bleeding after he fell in the

bathroom and that he was admitted to the hospital.

"We went to the hospital and found injuries on his legs, chest and neck. He must have been beaten up with sticks. He was losing blood with stool and urine," he said.

"Police tortured and killed my son, I want a fair investigation and justice," he added.

His neighbour Suján also told The

Daily Star that there were injury marks all over Reja's body.

DB Deputy Commissioner Manjur Hossain said Reja fell ill because of his addiction and police had not tortured him.

Meanwhile, over a hundred locals of Sagordi area where SI Mohiuddin lives barricaded a street and threw brick chips at the officer's house yesterday evening.