



The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

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Your Right to Know

JAMADIU SANI 2, 1442 HIJRI

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SHARIFUL ISLAM and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

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chances of those getting damaged," said Kamruzzaman Talukdar, officer-in-charge of the police station, adding that he contacted the higher authorities for special arrangements to preserve the evidence.

This is the picture of one police maalkhana -- a highly restricted facility -- where important evidence in cases over the years are being kept like piles of rubbish.

The problem is particularly acute in police stations housed in small old buildings or rented houses, where evidence is kept for as long as 20 years amid shabby and damp conditions.

Failing to accommodate all the things

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A face mask vendor pedals his bicycle on a road in the capital's Shahbagh area yesterday. The sale of face covers, hand sanitisers and other personal protective equipment has gone up in recent months amid the Covid-19 outbreak.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

EDN INSTITUTIONS

Closure extended till Jan 30

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

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As many as 7,862, people lost their lives to the disease till yesterday. The death rate currently stands at 1.49 percent.

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762 Covid cases reported in a day, 13 more die

UNB, Dhaka

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Bangladesh has recorded 526,485 cases so far.

And the country's fatality number rose to 7,862 and death rate to 1.49 percent, with 13 Covid-19 deaths in the last 24 hours, since the first death was reported on March 18.

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Jafor was held in the Italian city of Cosenza, while police arrested Shahadat from the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka upon his arrival from abroad, investigators added.

The two were put in Interpol's "wanted-list" along with four other Bangladeshis accused in the human trafficking case filed with Paltan Police Station in June last year.

A red notice was issued by Interpol asking about

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An indigenous woman weaves a cloth on a handloom in front of her home in Sajek union of Rangamati's Bagaichari upazila. Her family members weave cloth in their spare time to meet their own demand. The use of handlooms, now being replaced by power looms, is a laborious and time-consuming process. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

60 municipalities go to polls amid violence worries

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Elections to 60 municipalities will take place today amid fears of further violence in many places.

Clashes in Jhenidah and Rajshahi have already made people wary of the elections.

The Election Commission (EC) is using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in 29 municipalities and traditional ballot papers in 31.

The EC has been holding the polls in four phases due to the pandemic. Today's will be the second.

The main contest would presumably be between the Awami League and BNP nominees. Other political parties, including the Jatiya Party and Islami Andolan Bangladesh, are also participating in the polls.

EC Senior Secretary Mohammad Alamgir said the EC had taken measures to prevent violence during and after the polls.

"We asked law enforcers to maintain law and order and to take strict actions against miscreants," he told The Daily Star.

He added that social distancing and mask wearing would be strictly maintained.

A total of 216 people are running for mayor at the 60 municipalities in 33 districts.

There are 2,232 councillor candidates and 724 women's reserve seat candidates.

No election for mayor will be held in four municipalities in Sirajganj, Pabna, Pirojpur and Narayanganj.

In Shaikupa municipality of Jhenidah, two ruling Awami League men belonging to rival groups were killed on Wednesday night and early Thursday.

One of them was councillor aspirant Alamgir Khan Babu. The EC then postponed the polls for ward-8 of Shaikupa municipality, reports our correspondent in Jhenidah.

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The EC then postponed the polls for ward-8 of Shaikupa municipality, reports our correspondent in Jhenidah.

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TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Spotted Hyena and Cub, Maasai Mara, Kenya.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Hyena

I saw my only wild hyena at Kenya's Maasai Mara park: a mother lying on the ground and her cub. The cub was plain dark brown. The mother was unmistakable with its spotted brown body and black face. More than anything, I recall being surprised at its large size, bigger than a dog or a jackal.

Hyenas are known as feliform (cat-like) mammals and belong to the family Hyaenidae. With only three species, the family of hyenas is one of the smallest among mammals.

The Spotted Hyena that I saw is the largest of the three hyena species. It can reach six feet and weigh up to 180 pounds. Striped Hyenas are smaller, at about 110 pounds. The smallest and shiest hyenas are Brown Hyenas weighing in at less than 100 pounds. Hyenas inhabit most of the Old World: Africa, Middle-east, India and parts of Europe.

Spotted Hyenas hunt in packs, going after wildebeest, zebras, and antelopes while racing at speeds up to 65 kilometres per hour. Striped Hyenas scavenge but can also take livestock such as sheep. Hyenas have strong jaws and eat virtually every part of their kill, including the bones that they crush. Their stomach contains concentrated hydrochloric acid that digests it all.

Over time, hyenas have come into frequent contact with humans. They have acquired notoriety as vermin for several reasons, including preying on livestock, stealing food and consuming waste. The portrayal of villainous hyenas in the movie *The Lion King* has added to their disrepute.

But after reading about the fascinating social life of Brown Hyenas in Mark and Delia Owens' *The Cry*

of the *Kalahari* my opinion of hyenas changed.

Starting in the mid-1970s the authors spent seven years in the middle of the Kalahari Desert. They went there to observe and study wildlife. Upon arrival with meagre funds, they searched desperately for a research topic to obtain a grant and finance their stay. One night they ran into nocturnal Brown Hyenas which are extremely rare and elusive. They gradually earned the trust of these endangered mammals and secured funding to research them.

But their work encountered a hurdle: they were unable to find Brown Hyena cubs. Eventually they tracked two cubs to an elaborate underground den, but these disappeared shortly. Then one day, almost accidentally, they discovered where all the cubs had gone. A large group of hyenas, including many cubs, was living in a clearing surrounded by a wall of tall grass. It was a communal den.

The authors observed three cubs of a hyena which had been killed by lions. Other female hyenas nursed these cubs. Furthermore, juvenile and adult hyenas of the den shared their food with younger cubs and helped them grow. In the ruthless environment of the desert, where food was scarce and water scarcer, one would have expected a bitter fight for every morsel of food. Instead, the hyenas acted with compassion and generosity.

Who would have guessed that these reviled animals could be so caring and noble?

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BCL activist dies from stab injuries

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chhatra League activist succumbed to his injuries yesterday morning after being stabbed by "rivals" in port city's Bakalia area.

Ashikur Rahman Rohit (22), a first-year student of MES College, was critically injured following stab injuries during an election campaign on January 8, said police sources.

Ashikur and the alleged killers were both supporters of Awami League supported Pashchim Bakalia ward councillor candidate Md Shahidul Alam.

OC Nezam Uddin of Bakalia Police Station said Ashikur was stabbed in Dewanbazar area over previous enmity.

"Ashikur and the killers both are supporters of Shahidul Alam and few days ago a brawl ensued between them over anti-drug posters in the area," said the OC. He said locals -- Mohiuddin, Babu and Sabu -- called Ashikur from Chawkbazar DC road area later stabbed him.

Ashikur was admitted to CMCH, where he died, said the OC. Shahidul could not be contacted for comments.

Police are trying to arrest the killers, the OC added. Ashikur's brother filed a case in this connection. The body was sent for autopsy.

As the news of his death spread, aggrieved BCL activists demonstrated at Chawkbazar Gulzar intersection, demanding punishment for the killers.

Meanwhile, AL organising secretary (Chattogram Division) Ahmad Hossain in a views-exchange meeting with party leaders yesterday warned that the party would take tough action not only against councillor candidates who are participating in the CCC polls defying party decision, but also against their "godfathers".

The event was held at the main election campaign office of AL nominated mayoral candidate Rezaul Karim Chowdhury on KC Dey Road. Former CCC mayor and general secretary of AL's Chattogram city unit AJM Nasir Uddin and Rezaul were also present at the meeting.

CHATTOGRAM CITY CORPORATION POLLS

An environment-friendly campaign

CCC councillor candidate decides to go poster-free

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

When mayoral and councillor candidates of Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) polls are decorating areas with posters and banners as part of their campaigns, Shaibal Das Suman stands as an exception.

Suman, the Awami League-backed candidate in Ward-21 (Jamal Khan area), announced in his verified Facebook page on January 8 that he would not hang posters or banners due to probable environmental hazards. He also declared that he will not campaign through loudspeakers to avoid sound pollution.

After visiting different areas of the ward -- including Cheragi Pahar Intersection, Hem Sen Lane, Askar Dighir Par, DC Hill, JM Sen By-lane and Momin Road -- on Wednesday, this correspondent found his announcement to be true.

The roads, lanes and by-lanes were decorated with posters and banners of mayoral and councillor candidates, but none were found mentioning Suman. Although campaigning through loudspeakers was ongoing, Suman's name was not heard.

Asked how he was campaigning, Suman, also former councillor of Ward-21, said he was doing so by going door-to-door and using digital platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

"In the past, I saw posters and banners were used for campaigning but were not removed properly after polls, posing environmental hazards," Suman told The Daily Star. "It made me concerned."

"I have observed that campaigning through loudspeakers made people suffer, especially babies, patients and students," he said. "It creates sound pollution most of the time."

By forgoing the conventional methods and using alternative means for campaigning, Suman is getting great response from voters, he said.

By not printing posters and banners nor using loudspeakers, Suman has saved money, and with that amount he decided to contribute to the treatment of 20 cancer patients who are going through financial difficulties.

"Some four to five patients have already contacted me after my announcement," he said. "I have sent their treatment documents to health professionals for verification." "I always want to be humanitarian regardless of whether I win or lose in the polls," Suman said.

"I believe people will love my efforts, and many more candidates in future polls elsewhere in the country would follow my steps to protect the environment."



The wall of colourful gamcha is a vibrant sight even on the most drab days in Dhaka. Commuters stop by beside SOS Children's Village on Mirpur Road to haggle for a crisp new gamcha. Price depends on size -- smallest costs Tk 60, while the larger ones can go up to Tk 250.

'Abducted' girl found dead in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police yesterday recovered the body of a seven-year-old girl, who was allegedly abducted three days ago, from Tarakanda upazila of Mymensingh.

The girl was identified as Sanjida Akter, daughter of Shahjahan Akanda of Ram Chandrapur village of the upazila, said Shah Kamal Akanda, officer-in-charge of Detective Branch of police in Mymensingh.

Akanda said the second grader was abducted by unknown persons from in front of her house on Tuesday noon.

The alleged abductors left a note with a mobile number and asked them to contact.

The family tried to reach the abductors repeatedly but found their mobile phone switched off, he said.

The girl's father filed a general diary with Tarakanda Police Station on Wednesday.

Afterwards, abductors contacted the family and demanded Tk 20,000 for Sanjida's release, the family said.

But the family members failed to get in touch with them, the police official added.

Yesterday, locals found her body in a jungle near her house and informed police, OC Akanda said, adding that police recovered the body and sent it to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

None was arrested and no case was lodged in this connection yet.

The karate sisters

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

At a time when the public conscience is gripped by fears over women's security, three sisters from a remote village in Lalmonirhat decided to take up matters in their own hands.

In a bid to secure their safety, they've not only learned martial arts themselves, but are spreading the art of self-defense to others in their area -- a remarkable feat, considering their family's tight financial situation.

"Our family is poor, it's hard for us to even afford education. So we practise at home, every day, to develop our martial arts skills," said Jannati Khatun, the eldest of the three.

Jannati is an honours third-year student at Lalmonirhat Government College. It's located some 14km away from her family's homestead, which she has to cover by cycling. She was the one who first learned the craft and proceeded to teach it to her younger siblings.

It all happened when a Taekwondo teacher from Dhaka's Cambrian College came to Jannati's college to teach them martial arts. Sharker Rani Roy, the sensei, visited the college in 2017 on two three-

month term and trained them within that time. Jannati ended the training period with a Red Belt, which in Taekwondo is just below a first-degree Black Belt.

Khadizatul Kobra Moni, the middle sibling, is currently in her first year of HSC at a college 12km from home. With the help of her sister, she has already ranked up to a yellow belt. The youngest, Fatema Yasmin, is a student of class five starting out with her own training.

Their mother Rasheda Begum is a pre-primary teacher at a school run by Brac, while their father Jafar Uddin works as a day labourer. In their homestead of four-decimal land in Kisamat Chandrapur village of Aditmari upazila, all five of them live under two tin-shed rooms.

Despite their struggles, the sisters at least have peace of mind. Khadizatul said they now feel safe to cover the long routes to their schools and colleges.

Following their example, girls from their village now come to them to learn martial arts. "Everyone should learn martial arts. It could serve as an inspiration for a safer and better life," she added.

"Martial arts is more than just a self-defense tool, it keeps the body

and mind fresh and strong too. It's never an obstacle for any kind of work, but makes them more dynamic," chimed in Jannati.

Jamila Khatun, a student of class ten and daughter of local farmer Zaminur Rahman, said, "I and a few other girls go to Jannati and Khadiza apu to learn self-defense. It's having a positive impact in strengthening our confidence and morale."

All of this is changing the village's attitude on gender roles too. Local farmer Mazidul Islam told this correspondent, "Initially, the idea of girls learning martial arts did not sit well with the villagers. But over time, we've started to get it. The girls who learn martial arts are also helping others become confident," he said.

Their mother Rasheda Begum told The Daily Star that it's a tough task for the family to ensure the sisters get formally educated. With their meagre income, it's hard to meet the needs of the siblings, Rasheda said. That they choose to keep fighting for a better life despite all of this makes her really proud.

"I am proud of our daughters. They are moving forward with a very optimistic and disciplined take on life," she said.



Amidst all their financial woes, sisters Jannati, Khadizatul, and Fatema cannot afford institutional lessons, but they keep up their practise by sparring with each other at their homestead in Lalmonirhat's Kisamat Chandrapur village. This photo was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: STAR

Joint operation to save jatka continues

9 jailed in Barishal region

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A joint operation is being carried out to save jatka (hilsa less than nine inches in length) and other fishes in coastal areas since January 10.

Mobile courts jailed nine fishers for different terms for catching fish with illegal nets in Barishal region from January 10 to 14.

In 129 joint drives, 118 mobile courts fined fishers Tk 18,000 and seized 420 nets, 18.77 lakh metres of current nets, 576 other illegal nets, 1,214 items used for fishing, 2.8 tonnes of jatka and 0.48 tonnes of other fishes from their possessions.

The operation is being conducted by the fisheries department, naval police, coastguards and police, according to the department.

Anisur Rahman Talukder, deputy director of Divisional Fisheries Office, Barishal, said

they are acting in coastal areas to save jatka. Protection of other fishes is also a part of the drive, he added.

The office's Deputy Assistant Director Abdul Mannan said behind, current, mosquito, charghera and khota are different locally-made nets used for catching fish in large numbers. The government has banned all these nets to save the country's fish, he said.

Anisur Rahman said on January 10, six behundi nets, 3,000 metres of current nets and 5,000 metres of charghera nets were seized from different rivers in Rajapur, Jhalakati.

They urged the upazila administration to launch a campaign to discourage fishers from using illegal nets, he said.

"I hope production of hilsa and other fishes will increase in the future." The joint drive will continue till February 1, the official said.

Congratulations



Australian International School Dhaka delightfully announces the great achievement in the WACE (Western Australian Certificate of Education) Examination 2020. Our student, Sagufta Shahrin Khan has scored 92% ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) which is recorded the second highest score in the history of the school. Heartfelt congratulations for her excellent success and good luck for more progress.



AUSTRALIAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
Joarshahara, Purbachol (300 Feet Road), Khilkhet, Dhaka.

PRAN UP launches campaign to help cold-hit people

STAR REPORT

PRAN UP has launched a campaign to help cold-stricken people of the country. The announcement came at an event held at PRAN Center in the capital's Badda on Wednesday, said a press release.

Under the campaign "Chhorai Bhalobashar Ushnota Season-3", which will continue till February 5, the popular beverage brand will distribute blankets among people in Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh.

The distribution will start on January 20. Popular actor Fazlur Rahman Babu, Ziaul Haque Polish, Gully boy Rana Mridha and Tabib Mahmud are engaged with the initiative this year.

Eleash Mridha, managing director at PRAN Group; Anisur Rahman, executive director at PRAN Beverage Ltd; Atikur Rahman, its general manager (marketing); and Tanmoy Das, senior brand manager of PRAN UP, were present at the launching event.

Tintin

FROM PAGE 12

a porcelain jar in front of a menacing depiction of a Chinese dragon.

It was judged to be too expensive to reproduce by the Hergé's publisher, which ultimately used a simplified version of the same scene for "The Blue Lotus" cover.

The selling price -- higher than Artcurial's estimate of 2.2-2.8 million euros -- underscores the tremendous appetite for original memorabilia of Tintin, whose adventures have entertained people of all ages since the 1930s.

CID submits supplementary

FROM PAGE 12

Md Kutubuddin, a superintendent of police at CID and also the IO of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the First Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka on Wednesday, a court official told The Daily Star.

The IO named three accused in the supplementary charge sheet. They are: Lt Col Mostafa Kamaluddin Bhuiyan (ret'd), Lt Col Shamsur Rahman Shams (ret'd) and Maj Kazi Emdadul Haque (ret'd).

The trial court will decide on January 25 whether it will accept or refuse the supplementary charge sheet.

Kutubuddin in the charge sheet said he had contacted Manzur's wife and children, who lived abroad, but they refused to give statements to the investigators and before the trial court.

The CID official said he did not find any flaws in the previous investigation.

On February 27, 2014, the trial court ordered further investigation into the murder case after Special Public Prosecutor Asaduzzaman Khan Rochi submitted a petition in this regard during the closing arguments.

"While scrutinising the charge sheet, I found some flaws and incompleteness in the probe.... Although it is a sensational case, names of some key witnesses have been dropped," the prosecutor had told the court.

This newspaper could not reach Asaduzzaman over phone for comments on the supplementary charge sheet.

Abdul Kahar Akand, former CID

special superintendent of police, had launched the further investigation. But he later went into retirement and Kutubuddin completed the probe.

This paper tried to reach Kutubuddin for comments, but in vain.

Maj Gen Manzur was killed at Chattogram Cantonment on June 1, 1981, just two days into the assassination of the then president Ziaur Rahman.

The army official, who was the Sector-8 commander during the Liberation War, was believed to have carried out an abortive Chittagong coup in which Zia was killed.

A total of 26 judges have heard the murder case since it was filed on August 28, 1995. The judges were either promoted or transferred to other districts.

The case filed during the then BNP-led government never got the pace for disposal. The trial had begun in 1999 when the Awami League-led government was in power.

But it suddenly got pace in July 2013 after Ershad had refused to extend support to the AL mayoral candidate in the Gazipur City Corporation election.

At that stage, both the prosecution and the defence placed their arguments before the court.

Hearing of the case resumed in November 2013. Upon completion of the hearing on January 22 the following year, the court fixed February 10 for delivering the verdict.

The Dhaka district judge on January 29 transferred Judge Begum Hosne Ara Aktar of the Manzur murder case to another court.

Strong quake kills 42 in Indonesia

FROM PAGE 12

The meteorological agency warned residents that the area could be hit by strong aftershocks and to avoid the beachfront in case of a tsunami.

"The aftershocks could be as strong, or stronger, than this morning's quake," said Dwikorita Karnawati, chief of the meteorological agency.

The Indonesian Red Cross said it was rushing medical and relief supplies to the scene, with its teams working to help find trapped residents.

The quake's epicentre was 36 kilometres (22 miles) south of Mamuju and it had a relatively shallow depth of 18 kilometres, the United States Geological Survey said.

Indonesia experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where tectonic plates collide.



In 2018, a 7.5-magnitude quake and a subsequent tsunami in Palu on Sulawesi left more than 4,300 people dead or missing. On December 26, 2004, a 9.1-magnitude

earthquake struck off the coast of Sumatra and triggered a tsunami that killed 220,000 throughout the region, including around 170,000 in Indonesia.

2 arrested over human trafficking

FROM PAGE 1

their whereabouts in November.

Senior Superintendent of Police Jisanul Hoque of the Criminal Investigation Department's organised crime unit yesterday said Italy police nabbed Jafer from Cosenza based on Interpol's red notice.

Meanwhile, the CID arrested Shahadat from Dhaka airport upon his arrival from abroad, he said.

The CID official, however, refused to disclose details regarding the arrest.

Mohiul Islam, assistant inspector general of police at National Central Bureau (NCB) in Dhaka, said Bangladesh does not have any treaty with Italy for extraditing prisoners.

However, it will be possible to bring him back home from Italy through mutual cooperation, he said.

On May 28 last year, alleged human traffickers killed 30 migrant workers, including 26 Bangladeshis in Libya.

The incident caused a huge public outcry at home and abroad.

The killing took place at a smuggling warehouse in the city of Mizzadh near Tripoli. Twelve more Bangladeshis were also injured in the attack, nine of whom were repatriated.

CID official Jisanul said 26 cases were filed all over Bangladesh in connection with the killing incident.

The CID is investigating 25 cases, he said.

Some 299 people have been made accused in the first information reports of the cases, while police have so far arrested 171 of them, he added.

So far, 42 arrestees have given confessional statements before the court, he said.

Interpol issued a red notice against six alleged human traffickers following assistance from the Police Headquarters in Dhaka, said the CID official.

Another suspect in the Interpol's

"wanted-list" might have been hiding in Italy, he added.

Interpol put the six human traffickers of Bangladesh in their "wanted list" on charges of deceiving job seekers and "wrongfully confining and killing" people over ransom demands.

The four others are: Minto Mia, 41, Shapan, 28, Tanzirul, 35, all from Kishoreganj, and Molla Nazrul Islam, 43, from Madaripur.

The CID wrote to the NCB, the Bangladesh counterpart of Interpol, in October last year against the six when the process started.

Red notices by Interpol are issued for fugitives wanted either for prosecution or to serve a sentence.

A red notice is a request to law enforcement worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition, surrender, or similar legal action.

TO LET
GULSHAN 2 RD. 79 NEXT ITALIAN NEAR OTHER EMBASSIES, 2600SFT. 4 BED, 4 BATH, LARGE DRAWING/ DINING UPTODATE AMENITIES. Contact # 01712180378 D-08

Turkish flag

FROM PAGE 12

bring Covid-19 negative certificates are conscious and well-educated people. They are not unaware of what's going on in the US regarding the spread of Covid-19. It's surprising that they didn't bring Covid-19 negative certificates while coming to Bangladesh from that country," said the magistrate.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ
কমান্ডিং অফিসারের কার্যালয়
২ আর্মড পুলিশ ব্যাটালিয়ন
মুজাগাছা, ময়মনসিংহ
উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র আহ্বান বিজ্ঞপ্তি
স্মারক নং-কিউএম-২৭৩/১৮৮ তারিখঃ ১৪/০১/২০২১খ্রিঃ
এতদ্বারা 'দি পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট আইন-২০০৬ ও পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট বিধিমালা-২০০৮, ২০০৯ এবং তদীয় সংশোধনী অনুযায়ী' ২০২০-২০২১ অর্থ বৎসরের ২ আর্মড পুলিশ ব্যাটালিয়ন, মুজাগাছা, ময়মনসিংহের লট ভিত্তিক কাজের ঠিকাদার নিয়োগের লক্ষ্যে প্রকৃত বাংলাদেশী ঠিকাদারগণের নিকট হতে সীলমোহরকৃত 'উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র' আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।

Investigators

FROM PAGE 12

Station against Fardin Iftekhar Dihan, 18, under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act after his 17-year-old daughter, an O-level student, was raped and murdered in the capital's Kalabagan area.

According to the case statement, Dihan tricked the victim into going to his flat when his family members were away from home and raped her. The victim bled profusely and fell unconscious. Dihan then took her to a hospital to deflect blame, the plaintiff alleged.

On January 8, Dihan gave his confessional statement before a Dhaka court. Dihan, who recently passed A-levels, is now behind bars.

A Dhaka court on January 13 allowed police to conduct tests to ascertain whether Dihan, the lone accused in the case, had taken any narcotics or stimulants. Earlier, the same court allowed police to conduct DNA tests on samples collected from Dihan and the victim's bloodstained clothes, following two petitions submitted by the investigation officer.

Police have also collected CCIV footage from all possible sources.

The family of the victim and her schoolmates have been demanding a fair and impartial investigation into the incident.

On Wednesday, the schoolgirl's family placed four demands before the government. The demands are: bringing criminals to justice, transferring the case to a speedy trial tribunal, conducting a transparent DNA test, and making sure that the family is not harassed.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Chhatra Union brought out a torch rally on Dhaka University campus yesterday evening, protesting the rape and murder of the Kalabagan schoolgirl and another death of a Kalabagan housemaid who died allegedly by suicide after being raped by a security guard of the building where she used to work.

Biden promises

FROM PAGE 12

that nearly overwhelmed Washington last week.

Instead he addressed "the twin crises of a pandemic and this sinking economy," a challenge exceeding even that which faced him as vice president to Barack Obama when they assumed office following the 2008 financial crisis.

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to hit new peaks, the vaccination program is stumbling, and there are fears the economic recovery from the cratering of 2020 could backslide.

His proposal, dubbed the American Rescue Plan, will include a host of measures aimed at revitalising the world's largest economy.

Among those are raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, aiding struggling state and local governments, safely reopening schools, rolling out a massive Covid-19 vaccination campaign, extending unemployment benefits and boosting the size of stimulus checks Congress approved last month.

Biden, who will be sworn in January 20, is also promising to get vaccinations off the ground, with an eye-catching slogan of 100 million shots administered in the first 100 days.

The incoming president plans to tackle all of this at the same time, putting one of the darkest periods of American history in the rearview mirror.

Miseries pile up for poor

FROM PAGE 12

pullers, who manage their livelihood hand to mouth.

It is also forcing people to stay indoors, affecting business and other day to day activities.

During a visit in different areas, the low-income group people were seen to warm themselves by lighting fire with straws or other wastes.

Farm and day labourers and rickshaw pullers were struggling hard to continue their jobs.

Farm worker Sirajul Islam, 50, of Sabdalhat village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, said due to the cooler wind it is much harder for them to continue their work in the cropland.

As it is peak time for nourishing potato filed they are to stay work despite adverse weather, he said.

Rafiqul Islam, 48, of Yakubpur village in the upazila, working in a vegetable field, said it is very difficult to stay in the field amid in such bone-chilling cold wind.

Though the weather became tolerable few days ago, in last three-four days the severity of cold is much higher after the fog decreased.

Rickshaw puller Mozaffar Ahmed, 45, of Nishchintapur in Thakurgaon municipality, said it is difficult to pull rickshaw because of the cold but he had to continue it amid the adverse weather as he was the only bread earner of his four-member family.

On the other hand, the number of patients, especially elderly people and

children affected with different cold related diseases, has been increasing at different hospitals and clinics.

About 135 children, affected with different cold related diseases, are currently admitted to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital while another 215 adult patients are staying to other wards of the hospital, said Resident Medical Officer Rakibul Alam Chayan.

Besides, about 800-1000 patients were treated at the hospital outdoor each day. Of which about 50 percent patients came with the complaints of cold related diseases, the RMO said.

Thakurgaon Deputy Commissioner KM Kamruzzaman Selim said the district administration has already distributed 32,319 blankets and 501 quilts in five upazilas of the district.

"We are also requesting the solvent people from the society to help the poor," the DC said.

In Panchagarh, 21,200 blankets had been distributed among the distressed people and Tk 6 lakh were allocated for each upazila for buying blankets through UNOs aiming to distribute among poor cold-hit people, DC Sabina Yasmin said.

Thakurgaon Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Deputy Director Aftab Hossain said although it is hard for farmers to work in the crop fields in such chilling weather, the situation is not alarming for the Robi crops yet.

The growers of potato and boro are successfully overcoming the adverse weather, he added.

Worries grow as KL declares

FROM PAGE 12

Muhyiddin took office in March last year with a thin majority, but he was facing threats from coalition allies that they would withdraw support for his government, which would trigger a snap election.

Analysts say pandemic-related slowdown of the economy and signs of political instability are frustrating all.

"This is a worrying situation for the migrant workers. The schools and universities are closed and the restaurant I work for draws very few customers," said Ismail Sagor, a Bangladeshi migrant working in Cyberjaya area of Selangor state.

He said the daily sales of the restaurant used to be 1500 Malaysian Ringgit (Tk 31,500) during normal time, but the figure has now come down to less than RM 300.

Ismail said. He said undocumented workers are hit the hardest as employers are reluctant to hire them. Also, the Malaysian government is strict in enforcing the law under which employers face penalties for hiring undocumented workers.

Due to the pandemic, many undocumented workers also could not have their status regularised, but they fear arrest if they go out of their home.

Malaysia hosts about 800,000 Bangladeshi workers, including an estimated two lakh undocumented ones.

There is an ongoing regularisation programme called "recalibration" for the undocumented workers. They can get jobs and regularised only if the immigration department is satisfied that their employer really has jobs.

Therefore, the rate of regularisation is low now, said Ahmadul Kabir, a Bangladeshi journalist based in Kuala Lumpur.

Traditionally, he said, many employers hire undocumented workers and pay them less than regular

salaries. But this practice is shrinking now as the government has tightened rules against such recruitments.

Kabir said even if one has a work permit, he has to work for the particular company that originally hired him. Otherwise, the employer is fined.

"Closure of many businesses and tightening of laws have made the situation worse for foreign workers," he added.

With the state of emergency in force, there is a real uncertainty over the situation in the coming months, the journalist said.

Sumitha Shaanthinni Kishna, director of migrant rights charity Our Journey, said the situation is not as bad as it was during the first lockdown in Malaysia.

The manufacturing, construction, service, plantation and commodities sectors are open now, but their businesses are yet to be fully operational. The government has banned foreign workers from working in the wet markets for fear of spread of the virus -- a decision which resulted in joblessness of many Bangladeshis, she said.

Abu Hayat, an independent Bangladeshi researcher based in Kuala Lumpur, said economic slowdown has left several lakh Malaysians jobless. They, however, have been brought under various public social safety schemes, but not the foreign workers.

"This is the area where we need to work because migrants are the group of people most badly affected by the pandemic," he said.

Jahurul Islam, labour counsellor at Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia, however, said he didn't see Bangladeshis being affected by the state of emergency.

"We don't have reports that the state of emergency has created problems for the migrants. This is just for controlling the spread of novel coronavirus," he told this correspondent over the phone.

NEWS IN BRIEF

UN rights body picks Fiji in first ever presidential vote

The UN Human Rights Council elected Fiji's ambassador as its 2021 president in an unprecedented secret ballot after a diplomatic stand-off blocked the usual consensus decision. Fiji's ambassador in Geneva, Nazhat Shameem Khan, who served as the council's vice president in 2020 and is considered a rights champion, won with 29 out of 47 votes. She ran against two other candidates from the UN's Asia-Pacific regional group of countries: Bahrain's ambassador Yusuf Abdulkarim Buheeri and his counterpart from Uzbekistan, Ulugbek Lapasov, who received 14 and four votes respectively. The council's presidency rotates each year between the regions and the candidate is typically agreed upon by consensus within each regional group. This year, though, the Asia-Pacific group due to take the helm failed to agree on a candidate -- or even on holding a vote within their group.

US troop levels cut to 2,500 each in Afghanistan and Iraq



The US military has cut troop levels in Afghanistan and Iraq to 2,500 each, their lowest levels in the nearly two decades since the wars began, the Pentagon announced yesterday. Outgoing President Donald Trump, seeking to fulfill a campaign promise to end the two wars launched after the 9/11 attacks, had ordered force levels slashed in both countries to that level by January 15. Acting Secretary of Defense Chris Miller said progress towards peace in both countries permits the cuts without a decrease in security for Americans and their counterparts.

46 Pygmies killed in militia attack in eastern DR Congo

Forty-six Pygmies have been massacred in eastern DR Congo's Ituri province by the notorious Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) militia, local sources said yesterday. "ADF rebels overran the village of Abembi" on Thursday, said Gili Gotabo, a local NGO leader. "Forty-six people died and two were wounded, all of them from the Pygmy community," he said. The province's interior minister, Adjo Giji, confirmed the toll and also blamed the ADF, which has been accused of hundreds of killings in the past year. The attack took place in a local chiefdom called Walese Vonkutu, on Ituri's border with North Kivu province, the source said. Originating in the 1990s as a Ugandan Muslim rebel group, the ADF is the most notorious of more than 100 militias that plague eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. It has been accused of slaughtering hundreds of civilians in North Kivu and southern Ituri in reprisal for an army offensive launched in late 2019.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

US capital locks down

FBI, citing credible threats, tells police of all 50 states to stay alert ahead of Biden's inauguration

AGENCIES

The center of Washington was in lockdown Thursday as more than 20,000 armed National Guard troops were mobilized following the deadly assault on the Capitol and the threat of more violence at the presidential inauguration of Joe Biden.

Police chief Robert Contee said the US capital was facing "a major security threat" after supporters of outgoing President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol building a week ago in a violent bid to block Biden's confirmation that left five people dead.

On Thursday, a day after Trump was impeached in Congress for allegedly supporting the assault, more barriers were being erected and razor wire laid as part of precautions ahead of the January 20 ceremony. Most of downtown Washington was off-limits to traffic, drawing comparisons to Baghdad's high-security "Green Zone."

The Secret Service, in charge of security, was weighing an unprecedented shutdown of the entire National Mall, the grassy spread where hundreds of thousands traditionally gather to celebrate the inauguration of a new president.

Security officials are warning that armed extremist Trump supporters, possibly carrying explosives, pose a threat to Washington as well as state capitals over the coming week.

"We are seeing an extensive amount of concerning online chatter," FBI Director Chris Wray told Vice President Mike Pence in a televised briefing. "We're concerned about the potential for violence at multiple protest rallies planned here in DC and state capitol



PHOTO: REUTERS

National Guard members being deployed on US Capitol grounds in Washington, on Thursday.

buildings around the country in the days to come, that could bring armed individuals within close proximity to government buildings and officials," he said.

In steps not seen since after the September 11, 2001 national alerts, an internal FBI bulletin warned that an armed group planned to "storm" government offices in all 50 states to protest Biden, ABC News reported.

"The FBI received information about an identified armed group intending to travel to Washington, DC on 16 January," the bulletin added.

The New York Times reported that the FBI has told police departments around the country to stay alert for extremist activity and pass on intelligence.

Meanwhile, the Defense Department Thursday said far-right and white supremacist extremists are actively recruiting in the US military and have gained more support over the past year.

The Pentagon said it will launch an investigation into the extent of extremism in US military ranks. But the Defense Department has not yet released any data on the size of the problem.

The military has been aware of the problem for some time. But it was underscored by the involvement of serving and retired force members, as well as police officers, among the pro-Trump protesters who violently forced their way into the Capitol building.

In another development, US prosecutors now believe supporters of Trump planned to "capture and assassinate elected officials" in their siege of the Capitol building last week, according to a new court filing.

Far-right extremists recruiting in military: Pentagon

Prosecutors say Capitol rioters sought to 'capture and assassinate' lawmakers

The filing, submitted by Justice Department lawyers late Thursday, sought the detention of Jacob Chansley of Arizona, the QAnon conspiracy theorist pictured in the riot dressed as a horned shaman at the desk of Vice President Mike Pence.

"Strong evidence, including Chansley's own words and actions at the Capitol, supports that the intent of the Capitol rioters was to capture and assassinate elected officials in the United States government," prosecutors said of the January 6 siege.

Covid cases in Europe top 30m

AFP, Paris

More than 30 million coronavirus cases have been officially recorded in Europe, according to an AFP tally based on official health statistics at 0800 GMT yesterday.

The 52 nations, which include Russia, constitute the world's worst affected zone in terms of the number of infections, with a total of 30,003,905. Europe is followed by the United States and Canada, which had recorded 23,994,507 cases, Latin America and the Caribbean 16,989,628, Asia 14,485,588, the Middle East 4,323,966, Africa 3,170,837 and Oceania 31,443.

The worst affected countries in Europe were Russia with 3,520,531 cases and 64,495 deaths, Britain with 3,260,258 infections and 86,015 deaths, France (2,851,670 and 69,313) Turkey (2,364,801 and 23,495), Italy (2,336,279 and 80,848) and Spain (2,211,967 and 53,079).

'Catastrophic' warming awaits us

Warns UN chief; forests may flip from CO2 'sink' to 'source' by 2050

AGENCIES

The world is on course for a "catastrophic" temperature rise this century, the United Nations said Thursday as it confirmed that 2020 rivalled 2016 as the hottest year on record.

The relentless pace of climate change is destroying lives, said Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as the UN's World Meteorological Organization said 2011-2020 had been the warmest decade recorded. The UN weather agency said the warmest three years on record were 2016, 2019 and 2020, and the differences between them in average global temperatures were

It said the average global temperature in 2020 was about 14.9 degrees Celsius -- a figure 1.2 C above the pre-industrial (1850-1900) level.

The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change calls for capping global warming at well below 2C above the pre-industrial level, while countries will pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 C.

The WMO believes there is at least a one in five chance of the average global temperature temporarily exceeding the 1.5 C mark by 2024.

"The confirmation by the WMO that 2020 was one of the warmest years on record is yet another stark reminder of the relentless pace of climate change, which is destroying lives and livelihoods across our planet," said UN chief Guterres.

"We are headed for a catastrophic temperature rise of 3-5 C this century. Making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century. It must be the top priority."

Forests and other land ecosystems today absorb 30 percent of humanity's CO2 pollution, but rapid global warming could transform these natural 'sinks' into carbon 'sources' within a few decades, opening another daunting front in the fight against climate change, alarmed researchers have said.

Climate sceptics often describe CO2 as "plant food", suggesting that increased greenhouse gas emissions will be offset by a massive upsurge in plant

growth. But the new study shows that beyond a certain temperature threshold -- which varies according to region and species -- the capacity of plants to absorb CO2 declines.

Under current greenhouse gas emission trends, plants across half the globe's terrestrial ecosystem could start to release carbon into the atmosphere faster than they sequester it by the end of the century, researchers reported this week in Science Advances.

Ecosystems that store the most CO2 -- especially tropical and boreal forests -- could lose more than 45 percent of their capacity as carbon sponges by mid-century, a team led by Kathryn Duffy from Northern Arizona University found.

"Anticipated higher temperatures associated with elevated CO2 could degrade land carbon uptake," said the study. Failure to take this into account leads to a "gross overestimation" of the role Earth's vegetation might play in reducing global warming, the researchers warned.



PHOTO: REUTERS

NORTH KOREA SHOWS OFF NEW SUBMARINE-LAUNCHED MISSILE

This picture taken on Thursday and released from North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) yesterday shows what appears to be submarine-launched ballistic missiles during a military parade celebrating the 8th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) in Pyongyang. Political analysts say the unveiling of the missiles was a calculated show of strength days before Joe Biden's inauguration as US president. A working SLBM on a nuclear-powered submarine would be a strategic game changer, enabling Pyongyang to launch a surprise attack from close to the United States or carry out a strike even if its land-based forces had been destroyed.

'Laws meant to finish farmers'

Rahul Gandhi leads Congress protest

NDTV ONLINE

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra yesterday protested outside Delhi Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal's official residence, in solidarity with those farmers who have been protesting against the central government's recently introduced agricultural laws.

The protest by Congress, which has backed the farmers all this while, is part of its "Speak Up For Kisan Adhikar" campaign. The Congress was observing "Farmer Rights Day" yesterday and all state units had been asked to congregate around all Raj Bhavans in the states.

"BJP government will have to withdraw the farm laws. The Congress will not relent till these laws are repealed. These laws are not to help farmers, but to finish them," Rahul said leading the protest outside Raj Niwas.

"The Narendra Modi government earlier tried to take away the land of farmers, when it brought the land acquisition Act and the Congress party stopped them at that time. Now the BJP and their two-three friends are once again attacking the farmers and have brought these three farm laws," he alleged.

Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan have been camped in and around Delhi in decrepit conditions for the past many weeks. They have been protesting against three recently-passed farm laws perceived to be harmful to them.

The ninth round of discussion between farmers and the government -- held days after the Supreme Court stayed their enactment "until further orders" -- ended yesterday with no progress.



A bull charges participants during an annual bull-taming festival 'Jallikattu' in Palamedu village on the outskirts of Madurai, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

ALLEGED IRAN-QAEDA TIES

Friends with benefits or ideological foes?

AFP, Paris

Iran has for years faced accusations of cooperation with al-Qaeda despite stark ideological differences, but while mutual interests may have sometimes converged any relationship has been marked by distrust, analysts say.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's claim -- made just a week before President Donald Trump leaves office -- that Iran was the "new Afghanistan" for Qaeda militants surprised observers, who said there was no evidence of the country being used as a base.

He also stated publicly for the first time that al-Qaeda's number two, known as Abu Muhammad al-Masri, was assassinated in Tehran in August.

On paper, Iran and al-Qaeda are ideological foes -- the former the Persian regional heavyweight guided by Shia Islam, the latter inspired by a militant vision of Sunni Islam and dominated by Arabs.

Tehran has long dismissed claims of links to al-Qaeda, and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif accused Pompeo of "ending his disastrous

career with more warmongering lies."

Zarif noted that all the militants who carried out al-Qaeda's 9/11 attacks on the United States came from Pompeo's "favourite ME destinations," a pointed reference to Iran's regional rival Saudi Arabia.

Daniel L. Byman, a professor at Georgetown University, described the relationship between Iran and al-Qaeda as "troubled and mutually suspicious."

"In general, there is cooperation, and Iran does provide some sanctuary," he said, adding that "Iran has put limits on al-Qaeda even as it has provided a haven."

After 9/11 many al-Qaeda cadres from Afghanistan did seek refuge in Iran but it was never an easy relationship, he said, leading up to a wave of arrests in 2002 and 2003.

The New York Times reported that Pompeo succeeded in "bewildering counterterrorism officials" with his comments, with some saying his assertions "appeared to represent his own analytic conclusions" rather than those of US intelligence.

Pompeo's comments came amid speculation that the Trump

administration, in its final days, might go as far as ordering a strike against Iran -- even as incoming president Joe Biden mulls rejoining the 2015 deal on its nuclear programme.

The killing of Abdullah in Tehran, reportedly carried out by Israel's Mossad agents at the behest of the United States has also thrown new light on the alleged presence of Qaeda members in Iran.

Assaf Moghadam, associate professor at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya (IDC) in Israel, described the relationship as "tactical cooperation." Especially with the US administration changing, he said, Iran will not want to give up an "al-Qaeda card" that has proved "way too valuable" for Iranian leaders in the past.

Iran has worked with al-Qaeda and sheltered them on many occasions. But beyond these episodes of cooperation, the relationship has remained one of hostility and distrust.

Depending on the political climate, Iran "would be happy to sell out Al-Qaeda, but only for the right price," Byman said.

CHILD BENEFITS SCANDAL

Dutch government quits

AFP, The Hague

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte's government resigned yesterday over a child benefits scandal, threatening political instability as the country battles the coronavirus pandemic.

Thousands of parents were wrongly accused by Dutch authorities of fraudulently claiming child allowance, with many of them forced to pay back large amounts of money and ending up in financial ruin.

The fact that some parents were targeted for investigation by tax officials because they had dual nationality also underscored long-standing criticisms of systemic racism in the Netherlands.

Rutte -- one of Europe's longest-serving leaders, having been in power since 2010 -- said the cabinet would stay on in a caretaker role to oversee the response to Covid-19 until elections in mid-March.

"The buck stops here," Rutte told a press conference after a crisis meeting of his four-party coalition cabinet in The Hague.

"We are of one mind: if the whole system has failed, only joint responsibility can be borne. And that leads to the conclusion that I have just now offered the king the resignation of the entire cabinet."

He added: "The rule of law must protect its citizens from an all-powerful government, and here that's gone terribly wrong."

Rutte defended the decision to resign when the Netherlands is fighting the coronavirus pandemic, with the country facing a surge in cases of a new variant first found in Britain.

Polls say his Freedom and Democracy Party would likely come first in the next elections, putting Rutte in line for a fourth term since 2010.

A hard-hitting parliamentary investigation in December said civil servants cut off benefits to thousands of families wrongly accused of fraud between 2013 and 2019.

Many were required to pay back benefits totalling tens of thousands of euros (dollars). Reports said several couples had split up as a result of the strain.

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Sohel Rana looks back on his illustrious career



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Sohel Rana came into the limelight with the film, "Masud Rana". He has made outstanding contributions to the industry, not only as a noted actor, but also as a director and producer. Sohel Rana will be receiving the lifetime achievement award at the National Film Awards. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, the actor looks back on his memorable career.

How do you feel about receiving the lifetime achievement award at the National Film Awards?

I am ecstatic, I can't find the words to describe my feelings. I will be 74 soon, and I feel that my acting career is nearing its end. The Almighty has been kind to me. I would like to thank the government and the jury board for honouring me with this recognition.

What do you consider to be the biggest achievement of your life?

The audience's love is my biggest achievement. Whenever I meet people from Bangladesh in different parts of the world, they are always respectful to me. I am lucky and grateful to have the love of so many people.

You were a producer of the acclaimed film, "Ora Egaro Jon". Can you share your experience with the film?

"Ora Egaro Jon" is based on true events. I used to write in *The Daily Ittefaq*, and after our independence, I learned about several true events of the war and I wrote about

them.

Freedom fighter Khasru and director Chashi Nazrul Islam were my close friends. When Chashi Nazrul Islam decided to make a film, I went to writer Masum Yahudi, and we worked on the story.

We decided that our first film should be based on the Liberation War. I was a student of Dhaka University, and I lost several of my close friends in the war. Their memories inspired me to make the film.

"Masud Rana", your debut film, was a notable project in your career. How was your experience of making that film?

I gained immense popularity with this film, and it had a positive impact on my life. Masud Rana, as a character, was beloved. We had doubts about how well the audience would respond to him, but thankfully, people loved him. I worked opposite Kabori in this film. It was an amazing experience.

How has the pandemic affected you?

At this point, we are all helpless against Mother Nature. I stay at home on most days. I haven't gone out much. I spend my time listening to music, praying, and sometimes, watching my own films. Songs such as "Banshi Oi Ager Moto Baje Na" are close to my heart. Sometimes, I get emotional when I watch my films. The memories often sadden me.

Translated by Rasheek Tabassum Mondira

Professor Abdus Selim on writing the English screenplay for 'The Grave'

SARAH ANJUM BARI

Having lost his family, the journey of a Muslim man digging a hundred graves to enter shapes the story of *The Grave*, the first Bangladeshi film to be made in English. For playwright, translator, and academic Abdus Selim, translating the original Bangla screenplay—titled *Gor*—by Gazi Rakayet was part of the vision of seeing Bangladeshi films find international recognition.

In a conversation with *The Daily Star*, Professor Selim discusses his experience of writing the English screenplay and all that goes into translating and writing for the stage.

How did you become involved with this project?

Gor was originally a play. It all started almost four years back—I was teaching at North South University at the time. Gazi Rakayet had directed the first play to be performed at North South University. One of my earlier translations had also been directed for the TV by Rakayet, so we knew each other quite well. So when he suggested that we make a film in English, I was initially reluctant but somehow he convinced me.

Last year or maybe the year before, he told me he's ready.

When it is spoken all over the world in many varieties, we, the foreign language speakers of English, develop our own structures, our own vocabulary and our own phrases and idioms influenced by our culture. The Spanish, the Scandinavians, the Africans, they each have their own pronunciations of English. Native English speakers should accept that there are many Englishes in the world today.

If Bangladesh has a specific variety of English, why should it not be projected to the world? This idea convinced me to work on *The Grave*.

Were you involved in any other capacity besides writing the screenplay?

Yes. I asked Gazi Rakayet to finish his work and show me the raw "rush". He had shot the scenes originally in English, but once he called me in, I explained to him that, ultimately, he would have to dub in some scenes. So we worked on the pronunciations, the intonations, giving the actors some training, etc.

Working on this film made me change my mind about some things. It made me think,

why can't we use our local pronunciations and intonations? India and many other non-English speaking countries are producing films and TV series which we watch on streaming platforms. So why not us?

Apart from the fact that this is the first English or bilingual film made in Bangladesh, what makes the story special?

The film reflects our culture and religion. The premise is based on a man who has lost everything, his loving family, his daughter, because of a tsunami, which is linked with life in this country. The loss makes him return to his ancestral land. And he thinks that the only way to get salvation is to dig one hundred graves, so he can go straight to heaven and meet his family. This really

though the sad reality is that they don't work commercially. Hopefully they can bring us critical acclaim.

As a linguist, what were some of the things that influenced your process of translating this script?

The main question was, what kind of English will we use to express our folk and rural culture? Simple expressions like *panta kheyey rouna dilam*, or the socioeconomic implications of the death of a village family's cow—how do you explain them to an international audience?

Secondly, when writing subtitles, I have to condense dialogues to fit the duration of a scene. But with *The Grave*, instead, I had to focus on making the dialogues communicable to the audience and speakable for the actors.

When you're writing a script for the stage or the camera, you're working with text, but the end result is meant to be visual. How do you navigate these differences?

The first play I ever translated was *Galileo*. When I watched the final performance after nine months of rehearsal, I realised that there is a big difference between what we read in the classroom and what we watch on the stage. A play has a double existence—it belongs to the writer and to the interpretation of the director. That convinced me to translate more plays.

There is of course a difference between writing for the camera and the stage, but I prefer the latter because it is more challenging. Even after months of rehearsing, whatever you do on the stage is the first and final product.

What other projects are you working on right now?

Five or six plays have been submitted to directors. Upon reading one of them, titled *Love Letters*, Aly Zakir had told me, "This is the play with which I will return to the stage." Ramendu Majumder and Ferdousi Majumder will act in it now. I translated another play for Neema Rahman, as well as another Broadway version of *The Plague*. They're all in the works, but given the pandemic I'm not sure when they will be staged.

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PHOTO: STAR

intrigued me—it can be wrong, but it touches upon a belief system. The last scene in which he digs his own grave—the hundredth grave—really impressed me.

The other thing is, as a member of the Bangladesh Oscar committee—every year we nominate films made in Bangladesh knowing that it won't amount to anything. Our filmmaking has not yet acquired the quality that can bring us an Oscar. However, upon making this film, we realised we can nominate it for the category of English films made in a non-native country.

I believe this English version of *Gor* can work as an example and an initiator for many filmmakers in Bangladesh, even



Tariq Anam Khan and Sabira Alam.



Sabira Nur in a powerful scene with Tariq Anam Khan.

Ashfaque Nipun's 'Koshtoneer' is a riveting commentary on family

SHARMIN JOYA

Celebrated director Ashfaque Nipun's "Koshtoneer" was released on Hoichoi yesterday (January 15).

The film is a production of Packup Films, featuring Tariq Anam Khan, Runa Khan, Syed Babu, Shamol Mawla, Sabila Nur and Yash Rohan among others. The story of this Hoichoi film revolves around a family, where the father is the head and is responsible for all kinds of decisions in the household.

"The plot is layered with modern political and social contexts in very subtle ways," shares the director. "Though it is about a family, it represents the image of the state at many levels."

Nipun also shared that working with Hoichoi, an international OTT platform, for the first time, was a pleasant experience.

The dubbing and post production work of the film, including colour grading and sound design, was done



Director Ashfaque Nipun explaining scenes to Sabila Nur.

in Kolkata. "We shot everything in six days. However, we got enough time for the post production work," says Nipun.

He also discussed the major differences between television and streaming platform projects. "I am glad to get the opportunity of crafting a plot without any barriers of thought that usually we have to take into account while working for television," he asserts.

He also shared that he could freely choose the actors, and had enough

budget to complete the production.

Tariq Anam Khan plays the head of the household in the film, who is somehow connected with corruption, but wants his family to be ideologically firm.

"I have seen such families in my life," says the actor. "The plot is quite relatable to the households of our country, where people struggle with their philosophical ideas and the clashes between the perspectives of individuals."

He mentioned that it is his first collaboration with Ashfaque Nipun. "I have watched his work before, he is a truly passionate director and a great storyteller," he says.

"As theater artists, we prefer getting the full script from before to understand the character and get involved in the story. Then, we learn our lines and improvise accordingly. Nipun handed us the script after we arrived on the set and we had instant rehearsals for the scenes of each day. I had sessions with him as well. He is very supportive."

He further adds, "Nipun is very clear about what he wants, so, it was not very hard to get the work done smoothly. It was a great experience working with the whole team. We became a family, and after the shoot, we missed each other, as we had such a great time together!"

Hoichoi Bangladesh's Business Lead Sakib R Khan talked about his expectations from "Koshtoneer". "Ashfaque Nipun is a brilliant director, and we have tried to bring out all of his strengths. This film has both political themes and drama," he says.

He further said that Hoichoi is confident about the director's work. "We didn't have the complete script for Koshtoneer, like other projects, as Ashfaque Nipun improvises on the set. We had full faith in him, and he has exceeded all of our expectations. We have plans to work with him on projects with bigger budgets in the future," adds Sakib.

"This will be the experience of a lifetime"

— Arifin Shuvoo on portraying Bangabandhu

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

National Award-winning actor Arifin Shuvoo entered the world of showbiz with television, making his way to the silver screen with hits like "Dhaka Attack" (2017) and "Shapludu" (2018), among many other memorable hits.

The actor is set to portray the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his biopic. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, the actor talks about his preparations for the role, his experience and his expectations.

How are you preparing yourself for portraying the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman?



PHOTO: COLLECTED

I was cast in this role in February 2019 and since then, I have prepared for this every day. I watched a lot of documentaries and films on our great leader, and viewed his archived video clips. Reading different research-based books and conversing with the writers of such pieces has also helped me understand him a lot.

We were supposed to start shooting, but it was halted due to the coronavirus pandemic. Nevertheless, the long break has given me more time to perfectly understand the character of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

How do you feel about this opportunity?

Being a Bangladeshi, it is a matter of great pride and honour from my side. As an artist, it is my responsibility to do justice to his legacy, and I will give it my all. Even though at times, there is a lot of anxiety and pressure, I am trying to keep calm. This will be the experience of a lifetime, and I want to enjoy it to the fullest. Shyam Benegal is a perfectionist, and I wish to deliver in accordance with his expectations. The performance I put up is all that matters now, and that's what I have been focusing on.

Tell us a bit about your recent conversation with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

This has been one of the most memorable incidents of my life. She gave me a lot of insight on her father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's character, things I would have only known from someone very close to his heart. This experience has left a mark in my heart for all eternity. She gave me her blessings to succeed in this challenging portrayal.

When do you plan to begin shooting for this project?

We will be travelling to Mumbai, India on January 19 and plan to start from January 25. This role will remain a milestone in my career.



Citizens visibly shaken by 'VISIBLE' 2021



SHOAIB AHMED SAYAM

On January 1, 2021, Chapasthan transformed into a "utopia". Weeks have passed, but Chapasthanis are still struggling to face reality.

"I-I can't handle this much development," said Kabir Hossain, founder of a local development NGO, which vanished while he was partying on the 31st with the establishment's funds. "I was a changemaker. Now, there is no change to make. My organisation unfounded itself."

The government has issued a gazette notification on the decision to

change the country's name to "Digital Chapasthan". What seems like a sudden development was declared by the glorious government a decade ago, under its "Visible 2021" manifesto.

"Ha-ha, we told you! In your face!" said Roads and Highways Minister Omaigo Buader, while making funny faces in front of reporters. "What are you going to criticise now, losers?"

Meanwhile, BMP held a press conference, where Shamshuddin was visibly distraught. "Um, oh wow. So, like, it's a conspiracy, right?" he asked, whispering "what do we do now?"

under his breath.

United Nations was like "damn" in a recent statement, congratulating Digital Chapasthan for its miraculous transformation. All of UN's organs withdrew from the country in absence of issues to tackle.

Start-ups and the 6,294 organisations that give them awards are also starting to dematerialise. With nothing to innovate, the up-and-comers are now down-and-goners.

Annan Karim, CEO of now defunct ChickenExpress, the service that only delivered fried chicken, was seen pacing

and murmuring motivational quotes.

"There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure. But answer me, how can I learn when the government's amazing social and financial safety-nets prevent me from failing? My life is over," he lamented.

Internet Minister Goshtokha Chochar has somehow transferred his consciousness into the internet, leaving behind his mortal body.

He can now monitor every citizen's online activity in real-time. Whenever someone violates the digital guidelines,

Goshtokha's face appears on the computer screen, with Soldier Boy's "youuuu" blaring out the speakers.

"This is what digitisation looks like," the minister said. "We are now prepared for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the fifth, and the sixth. But development is not over."

"Visible 2041" is still ahead of us, and under that plan, all citizens will be digitised like me. We will become something akin to a primordial soup with a single consciousness, with no opposing thoughts. Glory to Digital Chapasthan," he added.

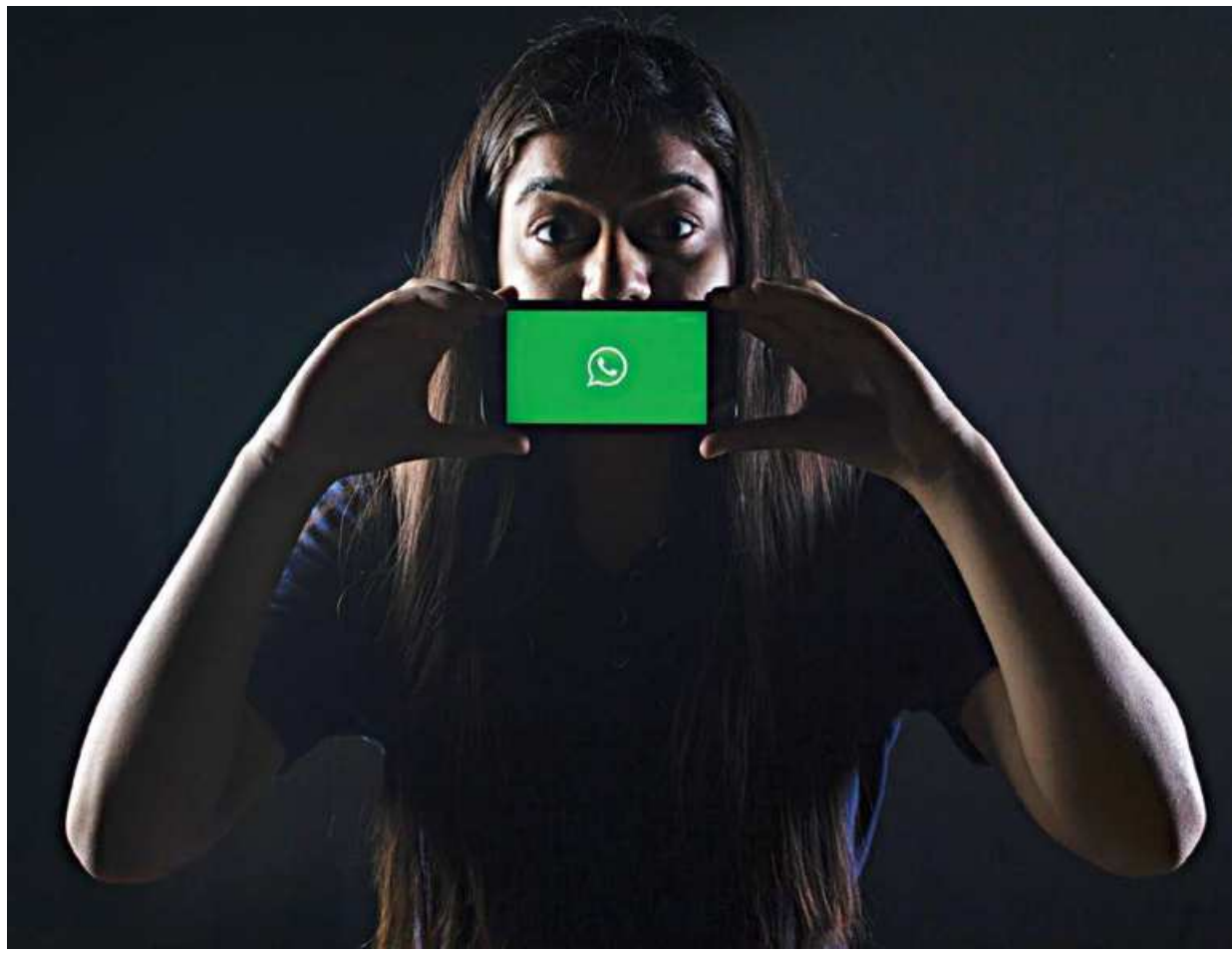


PHOTO: RACHIT TANK

"A MOVIE, A SMILE, A FRIEND AND A GOOD SLEEP"

WhatsApp group discovers cure for crippling anxiety

OSAMA RAHMAN

WhatsApp groups comprising pandemic doctors -- or people who used their free time to research important causes using choice keywords -- recently announced a surefire way of curing anxiety in the country.

"Bangladesh has an anxiety problem. This is an open secret and everyone knows this. But thankfully, we have stumbled upon the cure," Simran aunty, the creator of the Whatsapp group "Family Bondage" said.

"Zarif bhai yesterday sent a video by a Nasa doctor who clearly explained what steps to do to cure anxiety. Anxiety is not actually a disease; it is a mind state," she said, explaining that one of the first things someone with anxiety should do is breathe. "You

need to breathe, count your breaths, inhale through mouth to fill up your belly and then exhale through nose."

Of course that was Step-1 of a rigorous programme that the group had come up with.

"The next thing you need to do is find a good, funny movie to watch. Funny movies, like for example Dostana, will make you feel better and forget about this pretend disease that the new generation seems to claim to have," Simran aunty said, adding the next step involved smiling or laughing a lot. "Read some jokes. They can really help with this thing that you think you have."

Other steps include eating a hearty meal and then getting a good night's sleep. "Just spend some money. Eat expensive food, go on a holiday abroad, get plastic surgery. Basically, if

you want to get rid of this fake thing, get rich and pretty. I doubt any other advice will be as helpful," she said.

Contacted, Zarif bhai said he firmly stood by what the Nasa doctor had said. "He wore a shirt with a Nasa logo emblazoned on the top pocket. He spoke English well, but with an accent like ours. And he had a stethoscope around his neck. I don't know what else you need in terms of reliability," he said. "I have sent the video to my son and daughter, who constantly complain about this made-up anxiety thing. I don't even know what it is, but the Nasa doctor said it is all about the mind. And if you can make your mind feel better, by following the steps we have chalked out, then anxiety can go back to being a thing no one really cares about," he said.

Men's rights NGO releases list of activities men can do in public

STARMAN CORRESPONDENT

In yet another twist in the tale of growing demands by men and men's rights activists to recognise the dwindling rights of men, the group has now released a long, winding list of things men can in fact do in public without any shame or worry.

A press conference in this regard was held at the Erectors House in Bonani area of the capital where the list was revealed on a piece of long paper riddled with cigarette burns, coffee stains and all other things considered manly.

Below is a list of some of the activities men can do in public:

-To counter the growing calls of women wanting to breastfeed in public, men will also now be allowed to bottle feed their babies in public.

- Additionally, they may scratch their pot-bellies in public and urinate in public.

-To counter the growing trend of women smoking in public, men can not only continue to smoke and spit in public, they can also cat-call and wolf-whistle at women who smoke.

However, the cat-calls must be made using the newly-approved lexicon of unwanted flirting.

-Men can also sport dirty finger nails without being made to feel bad about it.

-Men can demonstrate toxic traits from the approved list of toxic traits in public.

-Men can actually close doors whenever they want now. Too many men have spent hours holding doors open to women who have clearly told them they don't want to be their girlfriend, but still always take advantage of open doors.

-Men can make sexist jokes amongst themselves in public, provided they spend the next minute discussing how problematic the jokes are and it was made just to see who was really sexist.

Unfortunately, my paper is out of space to accommodate more from the list of activities men can do without shame to address the growing imbalance and gap in the traditional way of life, leading to modern women ruining the fine balance of life.



Dhaka airport ill-equipped for bird strikes

CAAB must adopt modern, innovative methods to ensure flight safety

WE are alarmed by the lack of preparedness to prevent bird strikes at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) in Dhaka, as revealed by a report by *The Daily Star* on Friday. According to the report, the central airport in the country is ill-prepared for such strikes which may cause flight cancellations, minor to heavy damage to an aircraft's structure leading to costly repairs, and in rare instances, loss of life due to crash landing. HSIA's bird control system is rudimentary at best. It relies on only two guns for the purpose. Four other guns remain out of order. The two automated bird deterrents installed on the runway, one using laser beams and the other using sound signals, have been out of service for more than seven years. Given the threats bird collision poses to aircrafts, this level of preparedness is far from adequate.

Airport authorities globally allocate significant resources to drive birds away from key aviation installations. This is because while a bird strike can occur anytime during a flight, it nearly always happens during take-off and landing. The severity of damage to an aircraft depends on the size and number of birds or the ferocity of collisions. Jet engines are particularly vulnerable to such incidents, leading to a loss of thrust following the ingestion of the bird. But the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) seems to be indifferent to the danger. At HSIA alone, at least 20 aircrafts of Biman suffered bird strikes in 2019; other airliners also suffered similar accidents, although the airport authorities couldn't give an exact number. One can assume that the cumulative costs of aircraft repairs and flight cancellations caused every year will far outweigh the cost of installing a modern system that can automatically detect and deter birds. Why CAAB still hasn't installed one is a mystery to us.

Bird strikes are a fairly common occurrence in airports around the country. In order for any collision prevention policy to be effective, aviation experts suggest a combination of measures using both modern and conventional methods (since when you follow one specific method to drive away birds, it does not work after some days as birds usually adapt to it). Experts think CAAB should also take measures to encourage birds to seek alternative nesting and feeding grounds by removing food sources such as seed-bearing plants and food sources for the insects that birds eat, covering nearby ponds with netting to prevent birds from landing, and clearing bushes and trees that offer attractive nesting sites. The aviation authorities must adequately respond to the danger bird strikes pose and take all necessary measures to ensure flight safety in our airports.

Violence ahead of Chattogram City Corporation polls

Maintain law and order at all costs

WE'RE worried about the escalation of tensions and violence ahead of the Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) polls scheduled for January 27. On Tuesday, in a clash between the supporters of two rival councillor candidates from Awami League in the port city's Mogoltuli Mogpukur Par area, a man identified as Azgar Ali Babul was shot dead while another suffered a gunshot injury. Both of them were supporters of Nazrul Islam Bahadur, who secured his party's backing for his candidacy and was a councillor of ward-28 between 2010 and 2015. The other candidate is Abdul Quader, a Jubo League leader who was elected councillor in the polls held in 2015 but failed to get party ticket this time. Quader decided to vie in the polls anyway, defying party decision.

The conflict ensued following removal of Quader's posters by some of Bahadur's supporters, and the situation further deteriorated when both candidates went to the same area for campaigning the following evening. Worryingly, a total of 12 former ward councillors who did not get support from Awami League are vying in the polls, all defying party decisions. This points to lack of discipline and central control within the party in Chattogram, and is a likely fallout of the decision to allow parties to field candidates at the ward council election level. In yet another display of the escalating tensions, Ashikur Rahman Rohit, an activist of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), succumbed to his injuries yesterday after being stabbed on January 8 over a brawl which ensued between him and his killers. Ashikur and the alleged killers were all supporters of Chattogram's AL-nominated Pashchim Bakalia ward councillor candidate Md Shahidul Alam. The killers are yet to be apprehended.

Such incidents taking place ahead of the polls are a tell-tale sign of things to come. While we appreciate the joint effort by the police and Rapid Action Battalion to detain 26 people including Quader during a prompt drive following the clash on Tuesday night, we would urge them to remain vigilant at all times so that no violence takes place in the remaining days before the election and of course on election day. The polls must be held peacefully, without any fear among the voters or violent clashes among the supporters of rival candidates. Stern action must be taken against anyone violating the law and the electoral code of conduct. And parties failing to control their errant leaders and activists must bear responsibility for their actions.

Consuming facts without flavours

A reflection on research funding



SHAMSAD MORTUZA

A national newspaper ran a story on January 10 featuring the research expenditure of public and private universities of Bangladesh. Based on the information submitted to the University Grants Commission (UGC), the report exposed the dearth of funding in academic research, mentioning, "125 public and private universities in the country altogether spent only Tk 153 crore—an average of Tk 1.22 crore each—on research activities in 2019, which is only 1 percent of their total expenditure." There is a lot more to it than meets the eye.

According to the UGC report, 34 public universities spent Tk 53 crore on research (an average of Tk 1.40 crore) while 87 private universities spent Tk 100 crore (an average of Tk 1.15 crore) in 2019. In other words, public and private universities in Bangladesh on average spent 1.14 percent and 2.96 percent of their total budgets on research, respectively. The report charts the public-private divide by highlighting the operational expenses including staff salaries: the figures for the public universities stand at Tk 4,643 crore against those of Tk 3,631 crore for the private universities.

Without getting into the validity of these figures submitted to the UGC, the report calculated that the top 10 private universities together accounted for more than half of the country's research allocation in higher education. They spent Tk 82 crore to surpass the expenditures of the top 10 public universities, which stand at a meagre Tk 32 crore.

Brac University leads the private universities with an investment of Tk 37.9 crore followed by the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) with an investment of Tk 12.48 crore. The research has been translated into 179 and 158 publications for these top two universities with research alignment. In contrast, the country's oldest university—Dhaka University—has spent Tk 5.2 crore and produced 472 publications. DU trails BSMAU (Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University) and BAU (Bangladesh Agricultural University) to rank third among the public universities in terms of research allocation.

The report, however, does not mention the total number of university teachers, to put things in perspective. As per the UGC report, the country has 15,524 teachers (11,476 male, 4,057 female) engaged in the public universities and 16,070 teachers (11,200 male and 4,870 female) in the private ones. The total number of teachers shown in the report include: DU 2,387, BRAC 722, ULAB 342. If you tally these figures, then the number of research publications per faculty are far from satisfactory. The healthiest publication figure belongs to North South University. It has 885 teachers who produced 1,135 publications against their allocated budget of Tk 6.3 crore. The list also does not credit universities that attract foreign/external funds.

If I may be blunt, from the figures available in the UGC report, not more than five universities have the qualifying number of publications to be considered for world rankings. The figure will further go down if we take indexed publications into consideration. For instance, QS requires 300 Scopus indexed publications simply to be considered for world ranking. So we need to take these facts with a grain of salt, especially when some of these universities are known to have crept into the ranking list.

The twin pistons that move a university forward are teaching and research. Both are important not only for creating a labour force but also for fostering new discoveries that improve our lives and the lives of others around the world. Another important goal of a university is to create an educated citizenry that is empowered to keep on learning even after their graduation and make informed choices as participants in a democratic society.

teacher never felt the urgency to publish more than 20 papers in his/her entire 25-year career. Now, private university teachers are expected to publish at least 2-3 papers a year in addition to their overwhelming teaching load. The universities know that unless they invest in research, it will be difficult for them to stand out from other universities and hang onto a ranking ladder and earn a badge of honour to attract students.

To use research and money in the same breath highlights one simple facet of our contemporary life. Money that was once created to serve humans has become a source of absolute power and authority. One factor for such a paradigm shift involves our over-emphasis on turning everything into assessable and measurable data. We are translating quantity into quality by benchmarking ourselves against various international standards devised by ranking and accreditation agencies. These agencies follow a business model that does

enterprise. Say for instance, we can have a private pharmaceutical company investing in the creation of a vaccine involving the pharmacy departments of several universities. This is a common practice all over the world—and I am sure there are some examples of such partnerships in our country too. If a private company invests in its R&D, its motivation will be profit driven. However, the moment we introduce an academic collaboration, the nature of research investment will change; we will move into the realm of impact and integral investments. One glaring example is when Ganoshasthya and Jahangirnagar wanted to create Covid test kits, there was serious resistance from the health ministry as they were more interested in importing the devices from abroad rather than encouraging local home grown knowledge. The same thing happened when Dr Asif Mahmud was trolled for trying to create Covid vaccines.

All recent scholarships suggest that



Students are the direct beneficiaries of the academic research conducted by their teachers. They receive first-hand knowledge, and often become associates in the research projects of their teachers. The symbiotic relationship between a teacher and a student is indicative of a healthy research culture. While it is important to keep a tab on research funding, it is more important to ensure that such investments are done to promote and create a research culture. The race for facts is symptomatic of the neoliberal milieu in which we are thriving. Neoliberalism tends to measure success in quantifiable entities. The data given above, for instance, can perhaps help us map the academic directions and devise strategic interventions needed for goal oriented improvements. Then again, such investments are stark reminders of the fact that knowledge is fast becoming a commodity. In order to "profit" from knowledge, we are forced to make it "profitable". A traditional public university

not often accept immeasurable human values, ethics, and morals.

Before we get carried away by the research facts and figures, we need to take a step back to decide what we really need for our national enterprise. What role do we really want our universities to play? Do we really want all our universities to become research universities or do we incentivise certain institutions to become our spearheads?

Without a clear idea on research, figures aligned with money will simply encourage the academic brokers to lobby for more funding without any concrete results. And then they will be investing on building buildings, visiting foreign countries to learn about things that can be Googled. Given our limited resources, it is more important to create a research culture in which we learn to collaborate. Instead of pitting one system against the other, we need to create an academic platform where we come together to aid the national

profit-only oriented activities are harmful to society as well as to the entire ecosystem. Impact investing in research ensures that there is a transparent and corruption free environment for research. Integral investing goes a step further to include issues of ethics, morals, and personal values. Integral research is motivated by the desire to address global problems not through competition, but through cooperation. The building block for such desired cooperation is mutual trust, which can be attained only when high ethics, morals, and values are maintained. Profit can still remain a priority, but not at the expense of sustainability.

Let us rethink our investments in education and research that do not simply benchmark one against the other; let us think of investments that envision a crucial role for the academics in establishing a sustainable future.

Shamsad Mortuza is the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of ULAB.

Children need less screen time and more active play

LAILA KHONDKAR

IN August 2020, a Bangladeshi television channel aired a news story on the excessive use of smartphone use by children under the age of 5, and its negative consequences. Many of them are having severe problems with their eyesight, and in some cases, are developing the ability to speak later than normal.

In Bangladesh, many parents use smartphones to make children eat. During that time, the children passively watch the screen. It is also quite common to observe that parents and children are together in a restaurant or any other public place, but there is hardly any interaction—both are busy looking at their screens. These are just a few examples of smartphone addiction. Raising children is the responsibility of parents. We cannot expect smartphones to do it, right?

Many parents complain about the excessive screen time of their children. But who is responsible for developing this habit? If parents let children use smartphones, then they also have to set a limit on using them.

A World Health Organization's panel of experts issued guidelines on the physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep for children under 5 years of age in 2019, which emphasised that children must spend less time sitting and watching screens, or restrained in prams and seats. They should also get better quality sleep and have more time for active play if they are to grow up healthy. Quality sedentary time spent on interactive non-screen-based activities with a caregiver (e.g., reading, storytelling, singing and solving puzzles) is very important for child development.

Failure to meet current physical activity recommendations is responsible for more than 5 million deaths globally each year across all age groups. Currently, over 23 percent of adults and 80 percent of adolescents are not sufficiently physically

active. Establishing healthy habits early in life contributes to developing good habits through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood.

"What we really need to do is bring back play for children. This is about making the shift from sedentary time to playtime, while protecting sleep," said Dr Juana Willumsen, WHO focal point for childhood obesity and physical activity. While the WHO guidelines are for children under 5 years, sedentary lifestyle is detrimental for all children.

It is concerning that most parents in Bangladesh are not even aware of the negative impacts of excessive screen time and sedentary lifestyle on children's

sufficient levels of communication skills. This is due to the limited stimulation they receive from their parents in the home environment—as the parents are busy with their smartphones and do not spend adequate time talking, reading stories, or playing with their children. Parental screen time can reduce face-to-face interaction that is vital for children's emotional and intellectual development.

In an article published in *JAMA Pediatrics* (2018), Dr Jenny Radesky (University of Michigan) and Dr Megan Moreno (University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health in Madison) suggested that children learn smartphone habits from their parents. Parents should

Many parents complain about the excessive screen time of their children. But who is responsible for developing this habit? If parents let children use smartphones, then they also have to set a limit on using them.

development. They need to realise the seriousness of the issue and take initiatives to reduce the harm before it is too late. There should also be awareness of the fact that passive screen time is harmful. If parents or adult caregivers interact with children while they are watching something on the screen, then that provides stimulation and also facilitates learning.

In some western countries, efforts have been made on limiting the screen time of children for quite some time. But now there is a growing realisation that adults also need to make sure they are not glued to their phones and are prioritising one-on-one time without the use of gadgets. Many children are entering school without

prioritise mealtimes, bedtimes and specific downtimes for family members to unplug and perform tasks together. They have to resist the urge to document everything.

While mobile technologies have certainly made some things easier, they create more demands on parents than they had before: more emails, more feeds to check, more games to play, etc. When parents are engaging with their smartphones, they talk less to their children, respond slower and without paying much attention, and overreact in response to these interruptions. In the long run, this may lead to more parenting stress and damage parent-child relationship.

Parents must limit their own screen time,

as children follow what parents do, not what they say. They should spend quality time with their children, where children get uninterrupted attention. Parents have to make their children interested in various outdoor activities. Parents should provide guidance in developing children's capacity so that they learn to use technology for their own benefits. This should happen before they become addicted to it; as unlearning something becomes very difficult once it becomes a habit.

Instead of losing track of time, parents have to notice how much time has passed when checking their email or social media. When parents use smartphones for shared enjoyment with their children, or to get things done faster so they can return to family time, smartphones could be a positive force. If used wisely and optimally, technology could enhance the quality of parental interactions with children.

While parents have to be very thoughtful in developing proper screen time habit for themselves and their children, it is the responsibility of the state to ensure that there are sufficient playgrounds for children, and they have opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities. Healthy development of children should be one of the highest priorities for any country, and there must be sufficient investment for that. Unfortunately, we have lost most of our playgrounds and there has been a decline in sports and cultural activities that were available at the community level. This must be reversed. Cultural organisations should also come forward to engage with children and young people.

Excessive and passive screen time for children should be a concern for all of us. Are we concerned enough and performing our responsibilities to address this, so that children grow-up properly to realise their full potential?

Laila Khondkar is an international development worker.

Main reasons why the government's recovery effort has fallen short



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

BANGLADESH is no stranger to disaster management. Since independence it has dealt with numerous natural disasters as well as political unrest and overhauls. Despite these past experiences, the Covid-19 pandemic was something that it couldn't have prepared for—especially due to its global nature and scope—even though it can be argued that having a well-funded and better managed healthcare sector could have made a big difference.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh is no stranger to corruption either, particularly during times of emergencies. In the first week of April, at the height of the pandemic, we saw a social media storm erupting over allegations of substandard masks being supplied to several state-run hospitals instead of N95 masks. Senior health ministry officials were heavily criticised for terming this a "mistake" without conducting proper investigations. Later on, a probe committee was formed as per the prime minister's order, which found, according to a report submitted by the committee on April 29, that the supplier JMI Hospital Requisite Manufacturing Ltd had delivered research-stage N95 labelled masks instead of the general mask demanded by the Central Medical Stores Depot (CMSD)—and that the masks were made from unauthorised imported material.

This was not a one off case of corruption concerning the healthcare sector that we've seen since the pandemic began. Nor has such corruption been restricted to the healthcare sector.

According to a Transparency International Bangladesh survey, the pandemic has not only exposed the widespread corruption in the healthcare sector, but has created new opportunities for corruption in the country. In the case of just one government relief

programme, each affected family who were supposed to be the beneficiaries of the system had to pay an average bribe of Tk 220 to get cash assistance of Tk 2,500, according to its findings. Moreover, over 12 percent of beneficiaries for government cash assistance had been victims of irregularities and corruption, while 10 percent of Open Market Sales (OMS) card holders faced the same. Also in the list of beneficiaries, the names of around 3,000 government employees and 7,000 pensioners were found and around 300,000 names had been included more than once.

One of the government's first response to the economic hardship, especially for low income households, was to provide subsidised food under the OMS social security programme. On April 13, 2020, UCA news reported that law enforcers had arrested 29 people, mostly leaders of the ruling party and its associate organisations and officials of the Union Council, for allegedly stealing



Hungry poor wait for food in a neighbourhood of Kamalapur, Dhaka. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

4,167 sacks full of rice. Plenty of similar reports—and allegations of government crackdown on the press following their publication—have come out since the pandemic began.

All these misuses have not only hampered the government's effort to provide relief to the poor, but have protracted their misery. According to Selim Raihan, Executive Director of South Asian Network on Economic Modeling, "the crisis has forced poor-households to sacrifice prospects of better health, better education and a better life" in order to survive. The consequences of these trade-offs will be long-term and intergenerational. But more effective government support could have minimised these effects, leading to faster recovery.

On the business side of things, the disbursement of funds to small and medium enterprises has also been mired with inefficiencies. Till October 31, only 31.73 percent of the stimulus packages slated for them had been used, while 70.87 percent had been successfully given to big

industries. Most of the small, cottage and small enterprises (CMSME) in the country have not been able to benefit from the stimulus package because of cumbersome and drawn-out banking procedures that required mortgage and collateral. However, it is particularly the enterprises that couldn't afford the required collateral that most needed urgent government assistance. Moreover, a large number of CMSMEs were unable to provide documents to banks, such as tax identification number certificate and trade licence, which is why the government should have used microfinance institution to disburse the loans to them, according to Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist at the World Bank.

The result of everything that has happened is that businesses are currently experiencing an uneven recovery, where larger firms are bouncing back strongly, while the smaller ones are still struggling. According to a Daily Star report, "large industrial and service sectors have made as much as 80-90 percent recovery compared to the pre-pandemic

level", whereas small and medium enterprises have recovered only 30-40 percent. And this is leading to a K-shaped recovery, rather than the V-shaped recovery that was hoped for.

The way the government stimulus packages have been designed and distributed has also affected employment. According to a joint Centre for Policy Dialogue and Oxfam study titled, "Employment Implications of Stimulus Packages: Challenges for Recovery", the government's stimulus packages to fight the economic fallout of Covid-19 have reached just 8 percent of total employment of the country, whereas it could have reached 12 percent had they been fully implemented.

According to one senior research fellow of CPD, the "stimulus packages in Bangladesh had only limited employment impact", and it was "much lower compared to most other countries in the region". The stimulus package offered for the agriculture sector reached 2.7 lakh people against a probable target of restoring 9.6 lakh jobs. The stimulus package for SMEs reached only 1.3 lakh people employed in the sector, instead of a possible 4.4 lakh. And one of the main reasons for this was that these packages were not designed to give employers the incentive to sustain employment, which was clearly a big strategic mistake on the government's part.

In order to correct some of these mistakes, the focus of the debate on recovery has to shift from the single-minded pursuit of growth only, to how that recovery and growth can be achieved through greater inclusivity. Of all the government packages, the ones meant for the poorer sections of society or smaller businesses, have had the greatest design flaws, which shows the lack of comparative importance given to these sections.

But the resultant recovery that would come from this will be unsustainable and short lived. Hence, the government needs to include experts and other stakeholders in the recovery discussion and in its planning process, so that its own blind spots get identified and are addressed.

Eresh Omar Jamal is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star. His Twitter handle is: @EreshOmarJamal

Of all the government packages, the ones meant for the poorer sections of society or smaller businesses, have had the greatest design flaws, which shows the lack of comparative importance given to these sections. But the resultant recovery that would come from this will be unsustainable and short lived.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Narendra Modi's Potemkin Democracy

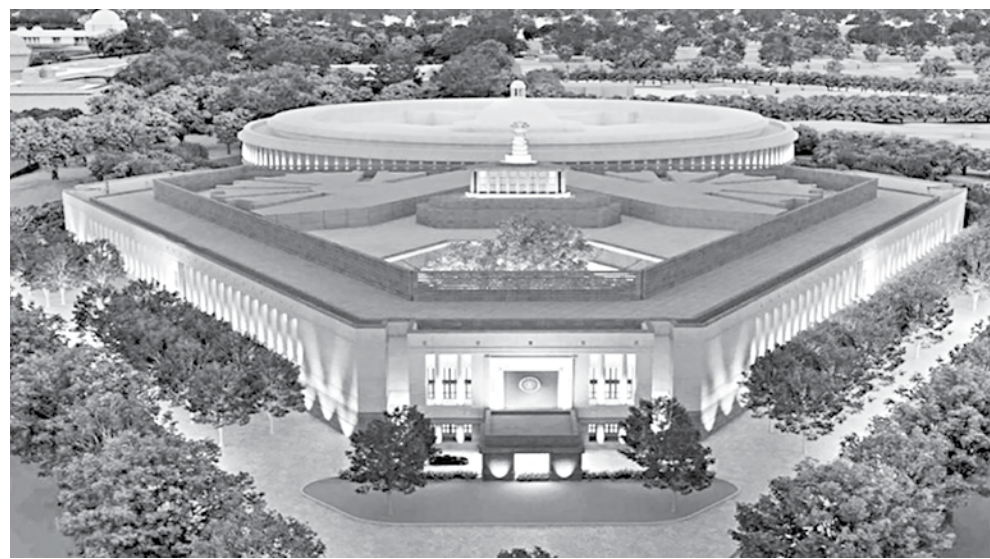


SHASHI THAROOR

INDIAN legislators woke up in the new year to two realisations. First, the annual winter session of parliament, from which they should just have been emerging, had not taken place at all. And, second, New Delhi's magnificent parliament complex, a tourist attraction since it was built in 1927, had been turned into a construction site.

These two facts sum up the reality of Indian democracy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). On one hand, the government has shrugged off the very concept of accountability to the people's representatives, the cornerstone of parliamentary democracy. On the other hand, Modi, an increasingly larger-than-life figure whose flowing beard and other-worldly air make him resemble the "Raj Rishis" or emperor-sages of ancient days, is doing all he can to transform the republic physically as well as politically. A new, grander parliament building is to arise alongside the old one, as part of his determination to leave his visible mark on the national capital.

Modi's "edifice complex" includes plans to construct an array of new government buildings alongside New Delhi's Central Vista, the grand sweep of which leads past parliament to the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the presidential palace. A new residential-cum-office complex for the vice president and the prime minister are also part of the plans. Environmentalists have obtained a stay on construction from the Supreme Court, but did not challenge the ground-breaking ceremony for the new parliament building to



The new building will have an area of 64,500 square metres and is being built at an estimated cost of Rs 971 crore.

PHOTO: PTI

proceed.

Parliament itself barely met in 2020. The official reason, of course, was the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to the shortening of the year's first two sessions and the cancellation of the third.

Parliament sat for only 23 days in the budget session that began the legislative year, before being adjourned in March because of the pandemic. The government then showed no desire to convene the monsoon session, which normally starts in late June or mid-July and continues until August. It might happily have ruled by decree were it not for the constitutional requirement that parliament convene within six months of the end of the previous session.

The monsoon session was belatedly called on September 14 to meet for just 18 days

with no weekend breaks. But it was abruptly adjourned after 10 days, again because of the virus. And the winter session, which should normally have started in mid-November and continued until Christmas (on some occasions, it has even extended through the holiday session) simply never happened.

There is no doubt about the current dangers of 750 MPs and hundreds of officials and journalists crowding into the parliament complex. Three ministers, two dozen MPs, and several parliamentary officials tested positive for the coronavirus during the monsoon session; three MPs and a minister of state died after contracting Covid-19. But it seems absurd that a country claiming to be a world leader in information technology finds itself unable to connect its MPs virtually through videoconferencing, as so many other

national parliaments have done.

A national crisis is precisely the time when parliament should be meeting to discuss its cause, in this case the pandemic and how policymakers are managing it. But that appears to be exactly what the government wants to avoid. As the truncated monsoon session showed, it sees the legislature as a mere rubber stamp for decisions it has already taken. Key legislation—including hugely controversial labour and farm bills—was pushed through both houses without significant debate.

The government imposed its own priorities, ensuring that the presiding officers took up its bills (mainly those ratifying previously issued executive decrees) while deferring debate on the issues that opposition parties wanted to raise. These included the border standoff with China, during which 20 Indian soldiers were killed in June, a controversial draft Environment Impact Assessment, the government's New Education Policy, and financial and tax compensation to state governments.

Under the previous Congress-led government from 2009-14, 71 percent of all bills were first scrutinised in parliamentary standing committees. Under the BJP government, that rate has decreased to 25 percent, and since Modi's re-election 20 months ago, not a single bill has benefited from such scrutiny. This sorry record includes the three farm laws whose passage sparked major protests, with angry farmers besieging the capital for several weeks in late 2020.

The protests again proved the utility of thorough legislative consideration before bills are passed. But the government seems to believe that its electoral mandate is all the approval it needs, with parliamentary examination and debate being a mere formality.

Parliamentary committees have struggled to meet in recent months even after the easing of the initial draconian lockdown, because travel restrictions and quarantine rules in MPs' home states have made it difficult to assemble a quorum. Pleas by committee chairs, including me, to connect some members virtually by secure videoconference have been rejected on confidentiality grounds.

The irony of conducting a ground-breaking ceremony for a new parliament building during the pandemic, while suspending the work that should have been taking place in the old one, was lost on the government. Even the confidentiality excuse does not apply to regular parliamentary sessions, which, unlike committee meetings, are televised. The inescapable conclusion is that the government would rather dispense with the inconvenience of being accountable to the legislature.

Such tendencies were apparent even in the shortened monsoon session, when parliament dispensed with Question Hour, the one time when MPs can demand unscripted answers from ministers. I have previously noted the Modi government's propensity to sidestep debate on important issues and use its majority to reduce parliament to a noticeboard for its decisions. This is an administration that does not like to be questioned.

India will eventually have a new building to showcase its democracy. Sadly, under Modi and the BJP, the spirit of deliberation and debate that animated the country's old parliament will be left there.

Shashi Tharoor, a former UN under-secretary-general and former Indian Minister of State for External Affairs and Minister of State for Human Resource Development, is an MP for the Indian National Congress. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2021. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

QUOTABLE Quote

ALBERT SCHWEITZER
(1875-1965)
Alsatian-German theologian and physician.

Until he extends his circle of compassion to include all living things, man will not himself find peace.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Letter after epsilon
- 5 Highprotein grain
- 11 Spoken
- 12 Zombies
- 13 Storybook monster
- 14 Edmonton team
- 15 Heir, at times
- 16 Maze runners
- 17 Furious
- 19 Horse healer
- 22 Stopwatch button
- 24 Emergency light
- 26 Dull pain
- 27 Diva's piece
- 28 Burglar's crime
- 30 Discards
- 31 Lawn material
- 32 Alpine girl of story
- 34 Chinese secret society
- 35 Relaxing retreat
- 38 "Casablanca" star
- 41 Lash
- 42 Online icon
- 43 Lend a hand
- 44 The Milky Way, e.g.
- 45 Lofty pems

DOWN

- 1 Menageries
- 2 Therefore
- 3 Sullied
- 4 Pub brew
- 5 Ring tossed at a peg
- 6 Children's welfare org.
- 7 Not active
- 8 Originally called
- 9 Galley item
- 10 Spots
- 16 Yoga need
- 18 Sailing hazard
- 19 Like some floors
- 20 Composer Satie
- 21 Pekoe and oolong
- 22 "Doggone!"
- 23 Cave sound
- 25 Praise
- 29 Insect section
- 30 Lively dance
- 33 Contest form
- 34 "Toodleoo!"
- 36 Heap
- 37 Phone downloads
- 38 Do a checkout job
- 39 Future embryos
- 40 Lass
- 41 Question of identity

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BEETLE BAILEY

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

GRAY
AIMAT
SPOKESMODEL
PERSTYARA
SNAPTO
SLEEKENOS
PREEN
BEEP
ONLY
SAMFLYMOE
SMOKEEATERS
EERIE
SLEDS

GROSS
AORTA
SMODEL
ARA
DIED
ENOS
HAIRS
OSMOND
MOE
SAREK
PODS

BY MORT WALKER

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

BABY BLUES

EXERCISE 7: Describe what you think it will be like to be old someday.

Include a personal interview and photograph of a grandparent or other senior citizen you know.

SO, WHAT'S IT LIKE?

I'M NOT EVEN MIDDLE-AGED!!

CLICK!

Art's Pantheon

SAIKAT MAJUMDAR

Mashrur Arefin's 2019 novel, *August Abchhaya*, is full of moments that evoke the blood-stained memory behind the language of conflict. One such moment arrives in the intense exchange between the narrator-protagonist and Sarafraz Nawaz,

else, he despises the narrator's pantheistic belief of the manifestation of God in all reality, in the manner of Hindu and Buddhist tantric practitioners, not least because it draws in its fold the beauty of women and possibly helps to disguise his "immoral" desires.

"Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a
brinded cow
For rose-moles all in stipple
upon trout that swim"

In mid-Victorian England, a Jesuit priest named Gerald Manley Hopkins fought the pangs of his religious conscience for writing poetry of such Keatsian beauty about the sensuous beauty of the universe. How can an ordained priest take such delight in the senses? His answer was Pantheism. Who else but God can create such beauty? Hence, "Pied Beauty", the poem which thus opened ended with these lines:

All things counter, original, spare,
strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who
knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour;
adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past
change;

Praise him."

Pantheism – the perception of divine beauty in all reality – has historically bridged religions to a range of aesthetic and philosophical visions and lifestyle practices. It involves a broadening of horizons that helps to keep a sense-loving Jesuit priest such as Hopkins in the fold. But it also evokes hostility in the upholders of traditional faith, as evident in Sarafraz Sahib's suspicions.

Is the suspicion about the pluralization of divinity? Of worshipping many embodied gods as opposed to The Great Abstract One? When Rabindranath wrote the line:

"Ami roopsagore doob diyechhi orup
roton pabo bole" – "I have dived in
the ocean of forms to find the formless
treasure" – his pantheism became a
credo for polytheism. One worships a
range of images as the formless God is
too hard to imagine.

Artistic narration needs both kinds. In a famous chapter of *Mimesis* entitled "Odysseus' Scar," Eric Auerbach contrasts Homeric and Biblical narration: the former is externalized, sensory, digressive, while the latter is more obscure and abstract, directed unrelentingly toward a single goal. Unlike the Homeric epics, which take delight in sensory effect and lie and fabricate when necessary, the biblical stories lay claim to the singularity of an absolute truth.

Hinduism shares with Hellenism the sensory appeal of polytheism. It is the beauty of Saraswati, the goddess of learning, sitting with her book and her musical veena; the appeal of the blue Krishna, playing his flute and wielding his fatal weapon, the chakra; the terrifying beauty of the demon-slaying goddess Durga; even the violent rhythm of Shiva's dance of destruction that earns him the name "Nataraj," the lord of dancers. But the beauty of Brahminical Hinduism is also limited to its caste-beneficiaries. As the caste-oppressed intellectual Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd says in his memoir, as a boy in his village, he would wake up in the middle of the night to the nightmare of Saraswati as a ghost, ready to kill him as he nurtured dreams of education, unpardonable hubris for a lower-caste child.

The icons of polytheism can haunt as well as nourish, depending who you are.

But to identify religious faith with a conservative, even reactionary position might be a knee-jerk reaction for people on the secular

left. This has repeatedly turned out to be a false instinct. There have been many progressive religious thinkers, even among those canonized as prophets. But writing in 2002, Ruth Vanita made an observation of curious but pointed significance – unlike the continuing presence of the Islamic or the Christian left, which collaborate with the secular left in different parts of the world, there is no Hindu leftwing in India, none left any more – the pun is unavoidable. Marxist thinkers and writers flock to Durga Puja celebrations on the streets and pray to shrines at home, but very few have tried to integrate leftist and religious thinking in the context of Hinduism. Thinkers like Ashish Nandy and Ramchandra Gandhi, who attempt to do so, are a tiny minority.

Why this lacuna? The reasons, Vanita argued, has much to do with the shame heaped on polytheistic Hinduism in the 19th century. This was essentially the work of British colonialism, which successfully labeled idol-worship as savage and backward. The British were confounded by Hinduism, which they found harder to understand than Islam – which was, like Christianity, monotheistic and based on a single text. Hinduism, with its textual and iconographic plurality, was much more like ancient Greek and Roman religions that Christianity had wiped out centuries earlier. Though Hinduism, which proved resilient through many centuries of attack on its temples and idols, was not to be wiped out easily, the modern method of attack was quite insidious: it took the form of shaming English-educated Indians regarding Hindu rituals, especially those relating to idol-worship. "The best evidence of this shaming," writes Vanita, "is the way new Hindu organizations, such as the Arya Samaj, who rightly embraced such causes as women's education

and the eradication of untouchability, felt compelled to also renounce polytheism and idol-worship." Liberal and educated Indians continued to internalize the shame of polytheism; not long after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, whom Vanita calls the last left-wing Hindu, the Hindu left got lost between the stridency of the Hindu right and the shame felt by the secular left regarding Hindu polytheism.

The literary intelligentsia, especially as it has been forged through colonial modernity and the resistance to imperialism, has gradually moved further and further away from religious iconography, donning a secular mantle. The disenchantment with faith that in Europe energized the Enlightenment and forged the secular form of the novel found its way to India too, through anticolonial movements no less than through movements of colonial modernity. From the Bengal Renaissance to the Progressive Writers' Movement in Urdu, Hindi, and other north Indian languages, this disenchantment has gained pace, nowhere more so than in the English language literatures of India, produced almost exclusively by the urban, English-educated bourgeoisie.

But it would be madness to deny the tremendous aesthetic and emotive power of religion. Literature, and all art, have lived ancient lives enabling – and being enabled by – the beauty, emotion, mystery and terror of religion till secular modernity pried them apart. Subsequently, this has become a reality all across the subcontinent, across all religions. We are left wondering: can Arefin's narrator and Sarafraz Sahib even find a common language in which to voice their differences?

Saikat Majumdar's novels include *The Scent of God* (2019) and *The Firebird* (2015).



prominent local citizen and the head of the local Mosque and the Madrassah committees. The liberal, artistic protagonist knows that the conservative Sarafraz sahib disapproves not only of his uninhibited lifestyle, but more importantly, of the ideology that supports it. More than anything

NONFICTION

Say "Hello" to the Skunks

SOHANA MANZOOR

"Have you met Mr. Skunk? In case you have not, he is a short black and white fellow that you might often see at the bottom of the stairs, or near the dumpster." Joe paused for breath.

I gaped at him uncomprehendingly, my mind racing fast. I wondered if Mr. Skunk was one of the housing assistants. Did he smell that bad? So, yes, I had a vague idea of what a skunk was.

Joe ploughed on, "If you see him, please keep away. If he sprays on you, you are as good as dead. Nobody in the civilized community will accept you. And it's difficult to get rid of skunk odour. Keep a large bottle of tomato juice at home, will you? If you do get sprayed, wash yourself with it."

Before I go further, let me demystify you. Joe was a caretaker at the SIUC graduate housing in Carbondale where I had just arrived in 2009. He came by to explain the rules and show the geyser knob and a few other things. As he was about to leave, he suddenly asked me about Mr. Skunk.

I nodded slowly, comprehension dawning on me. "I know about skunks. But I didn't realize you have them around here too."

Joe laughed. "Wherever wilderness and human beings live side by side, you'll find skunks."

"What's that thing about the tomato juice?" I was curious.

"When I was growing up, our dog Willy used to chase skunks, and often he got sprayed. My mom used to douse him in tomato juice-- the only way you can get rid of that smell."

"Oh!" I could find nothing more to say.

That was my introduction to the skunks of Carbondale. Within a few days, I learnt that skunks were something to be avoided at all costs. But in a small university town surrounded by vast expanses of woods and greens it was next to impossible not to come across them. As it happened, I spotted my first skunk on an early morning in September, as I was standing outside my apartment building to catch the bus. A

small dark creature was foraging near the large metal dumpster. Someone had been careless in throwing the garbage and there were vegetable stalks lying around. The animal was furry and blackish. I wondered if it was the fabled racoon who had been seen around the housing by quite a few people. Then I noticed the white streak and my heart skipped. Right then, Emmanuel, a Nigerian graduate student who lived in another building, came out. He had not seen the little furry fellow at all and was singing along with whatever he was listening to on his earphone. He stopped about six yards away from me and his eyes went wide in shock.

"E-ew!" He croaked. "That's a skunk!" Emmanuel refused to come any closer to the bus-stop and shouted, "Run, Suhanna. If he sprays on you, they won't allow you anywhere near your office."

I did not know what to think and started running alongside Emmanuel. Both of us sped away from the place and went to stand at the next stop.

During my graduate studies, apart from discerning the various tools of research, I also learnt to cook. Cooking was one thing I was awful at back home. But I had to master the art during my stay in the US as I realized that apart from a few selective dishes, I could barely eat what I cooked. It was one of those times when I made a disaster with my cooking venture. The burnt smell of chicken was so bad that I opened all the windows and then went to throw out the trash. Instead of the regular scent of wet grass of autumn evening, there was a stench of something wild and sulphuric in the air. It was quite strong and I wondered what it might be. On my way back to the apartment, I saw the animal again disappearing behind the bushes and I realized that this was the infamous smell of skunk-spray.

A few weeks later, I hurried into the English Department Office early in the morning and smelled the same stench. Joyce,



one of secretaries, sat at her desk with a beatific smile.

"Good morning, Sohana." Joyce nodded at me graciously, her special way of greeting the nervous first year graduate students.

"Morning, Joyce," I replied back. After a bit of chit-chat I asked, "What's that smell? It's as if a skunk had walked in here before me."

Joyce rolled her eyes and said, "Oh, that was Bryan. He got sprayed by a drasted polecat on his way and came to inform that he has cancelled his morning class." She paused and chortled, "And his office mates refused to let the fragrant fella in. . . . The number of skunks is surely on the rise. . . ." Joyce trailed off into one of her stories of skunk meeting as another graduate assistant joined in. I could not wait as I, too, had a class to teach.

In summer 2013, I met a whole brood of

skunks. That year, I was living in Evergreen Terrace, the other graduate housing of Southern Illinois University. Toma was a young graduate assistant of Engineering and we were having a lot of fun roaming through Carbondale. We used to take long walks around the park every afternoon. Since it was the month of Ramadan, many of the middle-eastern students used to sit with their family members on the grassy area in the middle of Evergreen Terrace and enjoy their elaborate iftar. During summer, the housing had fewer staff and hence there was nobody to monitor the activities in the park. So, children would scatter quite a bit of their food. And as soon as darkness descended, small furry black and white animals would creep in to enjoy the littered food. Toma and I did not want to be anywhere near them and both of us would be in a hurry to return home.

One late afternoon, however, we were

detained by a neighboring bhabi and as we stepped out of her house, Toma whispered, "Apu, see, the skunks are out. Don't you think their number has increased?"

There was an entire family of six to seven furry creatures creeping through the grass.

"Let's walk around the other way," I whispered back.

As we tiptoed to the opposite direction, we heard a shrill cry. Surely, that was not one of the skunks! Another bhabi was yelling at us from her balcony, "Sohana Apa, Toma, why are you going all the way round the park? Are you afraid of the skunks? They are harmless really and skunk-spray is not as bad as they make it sound!"

"Since when did Himika bhabi become a skunk-keeper?" Toma asked as we pretended not to have heard her and walked our way.

Clomping along the pathway, I looked at the lush green meadow where the skunks were bumping with chocolate wraps, boxes and food items that were scattered about the grass. In the dying light of dusk, the five smaller skunks looked rather cute. Living around human beings also meant easy food for them. Even though we tend to avoid them, they seemed pretty happy with the leftover food. Toma was right -- in four years they certainly had grown in number. Up until this point, I had not seen an entire family of skunks roaming together so close to the human hub. But then, our habits really were at fault. We had been careless and failed in keeping a clean environment and calling out to the creatures of the wild. I recalled that I had seen squirrels tugging at McDonalds boxes with discarded fries and chicken wings at the bins behind the Student Centre. We surely were contributing to change animal food and habits. With a big sigh I hoped that the housing office would be fully staffed soon and they would clear the space and chase the skunks away.

Sohana Manzoor is Associate Professor, Department of English & Humanities, ULAB. She is also the Literary Editor of The Daily Star.

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS
BANGLADESH PREMIER
League
Saif Sporting vs Rahmatganj MFS
Live from 8:00 pm
SONY SIX & TEN 1

AUSTRALIA VS INDIA
Fourth Test (Day 3)
Live from 6:00 am (Sunday)
TEN 2
SRI LANKA VS ENGLAND
First Test (Day 3)
Live from 10:30 am

SERIE A
BOLOGNA VS VERONA
Live from 8:00 pm
Torino vs Spezia
Live from 11:00 pm
TEN 1
SERIE A

SAMPDORIA VS UDINESE
Live from 1:45 am (Sunday)
STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
Wolves vs West Brom
Live from 6:30 pm



(L-R) Mohammad Ismail and Shirin Akter motor along on their way to defending their 100m sprint titles during the Bangabandhu 44th National Athletics Championships at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. (Bottom) Ritu Akter clears 1.70 metres to set a new record in high jump event earlier in the day.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/ COLLECTED

Ritu bowls them over in first try

SPORTS REPORTER

As a pace bowler, Ritu Akter could have used her height, extracted bounce from the pitch and work her way up to the national team, but she had to leave the sport due to a lack of support from her family. The 11th-grade student however did not leave sport altogether and made a big splash in another discipline with a record in the high jump event of the Bangabandhu 44th National Athletics Championships at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Ritu, from Bangladesh Army, cleared 1.7 metres to eclipse the previous record of 1.68 metres set by former footballer Umme Hafsa Rumki in 2019.

"Before the championships, I had cleared the national high jump thrice in training and [coach] Mehedi Hasan sir spurred me on to carry that into the national meet. My target was to win the gold along with a national record. I just repeated it [training] in the championships. With my height, I believe I can clear more than I did today," said the five-foot-nine-inches tall



height Ritu, who had won gold in the high jump in 2018 junior championships and won a bronze medal in the Summer Athletics Championships in 2019.

"I was worried about Umme Hafsa Rumki, but I was confident that I could overcome her after what I did in training," said Ritu.

"I started playing cricket in Gaibandha before being selected for Mirpur Boys Club [in the First Division Women's Cricket League] for two years in 2016 and 2017 and doing well but I was not getting support from my family

because I had to stay away from them. Later, I thought I could do better in athletics because of my height. I also participated in the high jump at school level and won a gold medal. One day, I came to the Bangabandhu Stadium here to watch the junior athletics and then decided to participate in athletics and I won the gold medal in my first meet," said Ritu.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Ismail and Shirin Akter defended their crowns in their respective 100m sprints. Ismail clocked 10.55 seconds to win his third

successive gold in national athletics championships while Shirin reached new heights to win her 11th consecutive gold medal in women's 100m sprint. She took 11.8 seconds to touch the line.

"I had to face a lot of obstacles during the pandemic and I am really happy to retain the title of fastest man. I am now looking forward to bettering my time in the upcoming Bangladesh Games," said Ismail who made a national record in 100m sprint in January 2019 with a timing of 10.2 seconds (hand-timing) before retaining the gold in next the national championships in Chattogram by clocking 10.4 seconds.

"It is possible to win gold from South Asian Games because those who competed in 100m sprint in the last SA Games were not extraordinary, they were ahead of us by only 0.2 seconds. If we are given training abroad, we can make up the gap."

"I am happy with my timing. The athletes of services teams have been in training during the pandemic, so everyone is trying and I am also trying in my way with Bangladesh Navy providing me all types of facilities," said Shirin.

Brothers pay for goalkeeping errors

SPORTS REPORTER

Title contenders Sheikh Russel KC made a winning start to the Bangladesh Premier League with a hard-fought 2-1 win over Brothers Union at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday, thanks to a couple of terrible blunders from Brothers goalkeeper Mohiuddin Ranu.

National discard Mohammad Abdullah and Brazilian Lopes Rodrigues scored the goals for Sheikh Russel before Congolese striker Siyo Zunapio pulled one back from the spot for the men in orange.

Sheikh Russel, the 2012 league champions, got off to a fine start and enjoyed better ball possession but lacked cutting edge. However, Brothers goalkeeper made the job easy for them by conceding the two goals within a space of four minutes.

Ranu conceded the lead in the 12th minute when he came out of the danger zone and handled the ball outside the box, giving away a free-kick, which was swung in by Abdullah.

The goalkeeper came out of his line again four minutes later, this time trying to clear a long ball from Bakhtyar Duishobekov but only managing to get the ball rebounded off his own defender Osagie Monday, with Rodrigues in position to nod it in.

Zunapio converted a spot-kick in the 32nd minute but that only reduced the margin of defeat for the club from Gopeebagh.

Root relieved with SL ton

REUTERS, Undated



Joe Root's 13-month wait for a Test century, the longest of his career, ended on Friday with a masterful unbeaten 168 on day two of the first Test against Sri Lanka as he revealed a change in mindset was behind his success.

Root dominated Sri Lanka's spin attack on a turning wicket in Galle to help his side to 320 for four, a commanding lead of 185 on the first innings that he will look to extend in search of a double-ton.

"In the last two years I have made too much of a big deal about it in my own mind, which has been to my detriment," Root told reporters in responding to a question about his failure to regularly turn half-centuries into three figures.

"So I tried to get it out of my mind and just get into one-on-one contests with each bowler and choose the right shots. "My shot selection was good today, I managed to pick the



right ball the majority of the time. It is about doing that more often."

Root has made a half-century on 67 occasions in Tests, and converted 18 of those into hundreds.

He concedes at being frustrated that he has not managed it more often, but now has a fourth double-ton in his sights.

"I have been desperate to convert the 50s into big scores, but when I do get a 100 I generally make it count," Root said. "It felt like a long time coming but the aim now is to try and make this one count and drive the first innings (total) as high as we can to bat once in this game."

Weather permitting, England look overwhelming favourites to win the first match of the two-Test series, but Root warned things can change quickly in Galle.

"There has already been prodigious turn, so this test is only going one way. We need to be ruthless and drive home the advantage," he said.

Murray, Keys test Covid-positive

AFP, London

Andy Murray's participation in the Australian Open has been thrown into doubt after it was revealed on Thursday he had tested positive for coronavirus.

The British former world number one was due to travel to Australia on one of a series of charter flights laid on by tournament organisers but is still isolating at home in London.

It is understood that Murray, apparently in good health, is hoping to be able to arrive in Australia at a later date.

Australian Open organisers wished the 33-year-old a speedy recovery but it was unclear whether he would still have a chance to take part.

The three-time major winner is hoping to make his first appearance in Melbourne since the emotional events of 2019, when he revealed the extent of his right hip problem and raised the possibility of imminent retirement.

In another blow, American world number 16 and former US Open runner-up Madison Keys said she too had tested positive for Covid-19.

"I am very disappointed not to be able to play in the coming weeks after training



Serena Williams and her daughter Alexis Olympia Ohanian Jr. arrive in Adelaide on Thursday before heading straight to two-week quarantine. PHOTO: AFP

hard in the off-season and knowing Tennis Australia and the tours did so much to make these events happen," said the 25-year-old.

"I am self-isolating at home. I look forward to being back on tour next month."

Keys made the semifinals of the Australian Open in 2015.

On Wednesday, Rafael Nadal's coach Carlos Moya said he will not attend the Australian Open due to coronavirus travel restrictions.

LABUSCHAGNE PUTS AUSTRALIA IN CHARGE

Marnus Labuschagne rode his luck to a home-ground century as Australia exploited India's injury woes and punished their poor fielding to reach 274 for five at the close of a steamy day one of the fourth Test decider in Brisbane on Friday. The 26-year-old had two reprieves on way to scoring 108 off 204 deliveries, his fourth century in 17 Tests. Captain Tim Paine was 38 not out and all-rounder Cameron Green on 28 at stumps, with Australia holding sway after winning the toss.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Natarajan continues fairytale journey

REUTERS, Undated



T Natarajan's fairytale trip to Australia continued on Friday when the left-arm quick, who arrived as a net bowler, became the first Indian player to make his international debut in all three formats during the same tour.

Known for his pinpoint yorkers, which troubled batsmen in the Indian Premier League (IPL), Natarajan made his international Twenty20 and one-day debut last month.

And the 29-year-old became India's 300th Test player on Friday, essentially because the injury-ravaged tourists had run out of options to fill the holes in their depleted pace attack.

India had already lost the services of quicks Mohammed Shami and Umesh Yadav, and spearhead Jasprit Bumrah joined the lengthy injury



list after hurting his abdomen in the drawn third Test in Sydney.

Natarajan would have had his maiden Test wicket earlier in the match had Cheteshwar Pujara not dropped Marnus Labuschagne but after the tea break he delivered a two-wicket burst to end Australia's only century-plus partnership of the first innings.

Natarajan cramped Matthew Wade for room and the batsman still went

for a pull shot only to scoop it behind the bowler.

Three players, including Natarajan, gathered under the ball and nearly collided before Shardul Thakur took the catch.

In his next over, Natarajan induced another mistimed pull shot to see off centurion Labuschagne.

"I think 'Nattu' bowled really well today," said fellow Tamil Nadu player Washington Sundar, who also made his Test debut in the match replacing injured spinner Ravichandran Ashwin.

"It feels really good to make test debut alongside him."

"He is a champion bowler and I hope he does really well in this test and we can win this game," added the spin-bowling all-rounder.

Australia finished opening day of the final test on 274-5 with the engrossing four-match series level at 1-1.

Rooney named Derby manager

AGENCIES

Manchester United legend Wayne Rooney has been appointed Derby manager on a permanent basis, with the 35-year-old agreeing a contract through to the summer of 2023.

The former England captain has been in temporary charge of the Rams since November, when Phillip Cocu was dismissed with the East Midlands outfit struggling towards the wrong end of the Championship table.

Rooney oversaw three wins and four draws across nine games as interim boss, but is now committed to the first managerial post of his career to date and will be looking to steer Derby clear of trouble.

He will be assisted by Liam Rosenior, Shay Given and Justin Walker, while Steve McClaren is to continue in a role as technical director and advisor to the board.

Rooney, who had been filling a player-coach role with the Rams since returning to England from a spell in MLS with D.C. United, said of his appointment, "When I first arrived back in the United Kingdom I was completely blown away by the potential of Derby County Football Club. The stadium, training ground, the quality of the playing staff and the young players coming through and of course the fan base that has remained loyal and supportive."

"Despite other offers I knew instinctively Derby County was the place for me."

"I can promise everyone involved in the club and all our fans, my staff and I will leave no stone unturned in achieving the potential I have witnessed over the last 12 months of this historic football club."



Athletic Bilbao players celebrate their victory over Real Madrid in the semifinal of the Spanish Super Cup at La Rosaleda stadium in Malaga on Thursday. Two goals from Raul Garcia in the first half helped the Basque side to a 2-1 win, setting up Sunday's final against Barcelona. PHOTO: REUTERS



আবাস বাংলাদেশ!





Aktaruzzaman Flyover
Chittagong

Principal Cement Brand



BANGLADESHIS IN MALAYSIA

Worries grow as KL declares emergency

Restrictions to stay till August to curb rise in Covid cases

PORIMOL PALMA

Expatriate workers, including Bangladeshis, in Malaysia are facing concerns over their jobs and income after the country declared a nationwide state of emergency until August 1 to combat the rising Covid-19 cases with the daily case number recently crossing the 3,000-mark.

Migrants and rights activists said many foreign workers either lost their jobs or had their wages slashed amid the pandemic since February last year when a lot of businesses faced closure or downsizing.

With some businesses reopening in June, the economy began recovering. But the country saw another wave of Covid-19 late last year, prompting Malaysian King Al-Sultan Abdullah to declare a state of emergency on Wednesday.

The state of emergency allows the state to take over private hospitals and deploy additional military and police forces. Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin warned that the health system was at "breaking point".

According to Malaysian media reports, much of the businesses face closure because of the state of emergency.

The state of emergency gives the incumbent cabinet extraordinary powers to suspend parliament and introduce laws without approval of the House. Opposition parties say the PM was using the declaration to cling to power as he faces calls to step down and hold a general election.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Vehicles bound for the capital lined up as far as the eye can see on the Dhaka-Archa highway near Aminbazar in Savar, on the outskirts of the capital. Authorities closed one side of the nearby Salehpur bridge because they spotted cracks on the girder, creating severe congestion leading up to the bridge. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

KALABAGAN RAPE

Investigators hope to finish probe soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police said the investigation into the rape and murder of a schoolgirl in Kalabagan has progressed well and they are trying to complete it soon.

"The accused gave a confessional statement; the witness gave a statement too. We have collected some evidence and documents," Abul Hasan, assistant commissioner (New Market zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The dope test of the accused has been done. We are now waiting for the result. Besides, we are trying to get the medical certificate. There has been substantial progress and we will try to complete the probe soon."

The police official, however, did not disclose details for the "sake of the investigation".

The victim's father on January 7 filed the case with Kalabagan Police

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

LALMONIRHAT BORDER

Bangladeshi man shot dead by BSF

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A 29-year-old man was shot dead yesterday morning by the Indian Border Security Force in Sreerampur area of Patgram, Lalmonirhat.

Abul Kalam Azad died while he was being taken to Rangpur Medical College Hospital. He was a resident of Jhalangi area in Patgram.

Officials of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) said Azad and six others were trying to smuggle in cows from India by crossing the international border when he got shot around 5:30am.

Patrolling officers of Border Security Force Battalion 140 of Cooch Behar, West Bengal, opened fire at them. Azad was shot in the neck and head, said Jhalangi BGB Camp Commander Nayek Subedar Jalal Sardar.

He added that a protest letter was sent to the BSF.

Tintin painting sells for record €3.2m at auction



AFP, Paris

An original painting by Tintin creator Hergé sold for a record 3.2 million euros (\$3.9 million) at an online auction on Thursday, auction house Artcurial announced.

The item, intended as a front cover for "The Blue Lotus" volume from 1936, easily beat the previous record for the sale of comic book art of 2.65 million euros, which was reached in 2014 for a double-page drawing by Hergé.

The gouache, ink and watercolour creation measures 34 by 34 centimetres (13 inches) and features Tintin and his dog Snowy emerging from

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Turkish flag carrier fined Tk 3 lakh

The airline brought 3 passengers sans Covid negative certificates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mobile court at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport fined Turkish Airlines Tk 3 lakh for carrying three passengers without Covid-19 negative certificates.

The three returned to Bangladesh from the US via a stopover in Turkey on Wednesday, Ahmed Jamil, a magistrate of the mobile court at HSI, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The passengers, members of the same family, are Bangladeshis. They are well-educated and one of them even works at the health department in the US, Jamil added.

They were sent to institutional quarantine, he said.

"It's unfortunate that those who didn't

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Strong quake kills 42 in Indonesia

Many trapped under toppled buildings on Sulawesi island

AFP, Jakarta

A powerful earthquake rocked Indonesia's Sulawesi island yesterday, killing at least 42 people, levelling a hospital and severely damaging other buildings, authorities said, as they warned there were people still trapped beneath rubble.

Hundreds were also injured when the 6.2-magnitude quake struck in the early hours, triggering panic among the terrified residents of the island, which was hit by a huge quake and tsunami two and a half years ago that killed thousands.

So far, 34 bodies have been hauled from beneath crumpled buildings in Mamuju, a city of about 110,000 in West Sulawesi province, while another eight were killed south of the area after the quake struck.

"We don't know how many more are missing," said Arianto from the rescue agency in Mamuju, who like many Indonesians goes by one name.

"There are still people trapped beneath the rubble." Rescuers were searching for more than a dozen patients and staff trapped under a levelled Mamuju hospital.

"The hospital is flattened -- it collapsed," Arianto said. Earlier, rescuers said they were also trying to reach a family of eight who were under their destroyed home.

At least one hotel had partially collapsed, while the regional governor's office also suffered extensive damage after the quake struck at 2:18 am local time yesterday (1818 GMT Thursday).

A Mamuju resident said damage across the city was severe.

"Roads are cracked and many buildings collapsed," said 28-year-old Hendra, who also goes by one name.

Landslides triggered by heavy rains and the quake blocked the main access road out of Mamuju.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

2ND COLD SPELL

Miseries pile up for poor in the North

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

The northern part of the country is witnessing a sharp fall in temperature as the second spell of cold wave from the Himalayan sweeping through the region.

The bone-chilling cold, accompanied by mild cooler wind, during the last four days disrupted normal life in different areas of Panchagarh and Thakurgaon.

The lowest temperature was recorded between 8.7 degree Celsius and 13.8 degree Celsius in Tentulia whereas the highest temperature was between 16.8 and 21.4 degree Celsius in the last four days, said Assistant Met Officer Rasel Shah of Bangladesh Meteorological Department (Tentulia).

The severity of cold is increasing due to a less fog for several days, he added.

As the gap of temperature between day and night time is being reduced, people feel colder than the last spell of cold wave that swept through in December, he said.

It would continue for four more days, he further added.

The adverse weather hit many, especially the low income group people like farm workers, day labourers and rickshaw-

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

MAJ GEN MANZUR MURDER

CID submits supplementary charge sheet to Dhaka court

Drops HM Ershad's name COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Criminal Investigation Department has submitted a supplementary charge sheet in Maj Gen Abul Manzur murder case, stating that their further investigation found nothing new.

The investigation officer of the case dropped the names of late Jatiya Party chairman HM Ershad and Major Abdul Latif (ret'd) from the charge sheet as they died earlier. The first investigation had found five accused, including the two, involved in the incident.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



Rods sticking out of a manhole on the side of a road at the north-west corner of the Panthapath intersection in the capital. According to locals, the cover of the manhole had broken around a month ago and people had bent its rods outward to ward off vehicles. However, contrary to that purpose, the rods pose a danger to vehicles which pass perilously close. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Biden promises 'new chapter' for Americans

Calls for unity, unveils \$1.9tn virus stimulus package

AFP, Wilmington

President-elect Joe Biden unveiled plans Thursday for fighting Covid and injecting \$1.9 trillion into a battered US economy, but already his ambitious first 100 days agenda is overshadowed by the looming Senate trial of his soon-to-be predecessor Donald Trump.

Biden promised "a new chapter" for the nation on the day after Trump became the first US president to ever be impeached twice, as the incoming Democrat sought to seize the narrative in a primetime address and get Americans looking forward again.

"We will come back," he said in a speech from his hometown of Wilmington.

"We didn't get into all this overnight. We won't get out of it overnight. And we can't do it as a separated and divided nation," he said.

"The only way we can do it is to come together, to come together as fellow Americans."

With his Democrats narrowly controlling both houses of Congress, Biden, 78, has a shot at passing what would be the third massive pandemic aid package.

What he is less keen to talk about, however, is the impending trial of Trump, something that will introduce a potentially nightmarish mix of scheduling complications and political drama into an already tense Senate.

In his 25-minute televised speech Biden made no mention of Trump, impeachment or the deadly violence

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

PRAYER TIMING JANUARY 16

Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
5:30	12:45	4:00	5:36	7:00
JAMAT	6:05	1:15	4:15	5:40
				7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION