

PRAN UP launches campaign to help cold-hit people

STAR REPORT

PRAN UP has launched a campaign to help clod-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 Bhalobasha 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 Polash, 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 Herge'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.

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.

It's a tall order. Yet Biden takes office with one advantage he was not expecting even a few weeks ago: full, if razor thin, control of Congress.

Shock victories by Democrats in Georgia's two Senate run-off races this

month mean Democrats will have slim majorities in both chambers when he takes over.

This will also help Biden in getting confirmations of his cabinet picks.

Among those beginning the process is Treasury secretary pick Janet Yellen, who goes before the Senate Finance Committee on January 19.

Avril Haines, Biden's pick for director of national intelligence, had been scheduled to have a nomination hearing yesterday, but the Senate Intelligence Committee said late Thursday they were postponing until next week.

The elephant in the room, however, is impeachment.

Trump was impeached by the House of Representatives Wednesday for "incitement of insurrection" by egging on a huge crowd of his supporters to march against Congress on January 6.

The mob rampaged through the Capitol building, fighting with police and leaving lawmakers fearing for their lives. Five people died.

In the Democrats' dream scenario, the Senate would have convened in emergency session to conduct a lightning-quick trial before January 20, forcing Trump out.

But the Republican leader of the Senate, Mitch McConnell, scratched that idea.

As of January 20, McConnell will lose his leadership, ceding to Schumer, who is vowing to press ahead.

A McConnell statement that he is open-minded on Trump's guilt raises the possibility that Trump gets convicted by a two-thirds Senate majority.

If convicted, a second, simple-majority vote would be enough to bar the real estate tycoon from trying to come back as president in 2024.



Rescuers search for survivors at a collapsed building in Mamuju city yesterday, after a 6.2-magnitude earthquake rocked Indonesia's Sulawesi island. PHOTO: REUTERS

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.

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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.

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.

Russia

FROM PAGE 12 The agreement was signed soon after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1992 and came into force in 2002.

It allowed its nearly three dozen signatories to carry out short-notice flights over one another's territory to monitor potential military operations.

Members include countries across Europe, the former Soviet Union and Canada.

Last year Washington announced it would be leaving the treaty after accusing Russia of violations, including blocking flights over certain sites and forbidding surveys of military exercises.

The Russian foreign ministry said Friday that the United States had used a "fictitious pretext" for its withdrawal and had disturbed "the balance of interests of the participating states".

The ministry said Russia had put forward proposals to retain the "viability" of the agreement but did not receive support from Washington.

The pact allows its members to request copies of images taken during surveillance flights carried out by other members.

The country under surveillance is given 72-hours' warning ahead of a flight and 24-hours' notice of the flight path, to which it can suggest modifications.

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 Kamuzzaman 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 power as he faces calls to step down and hold a general election.

Muhyiddin came to power in March last year with a thin majority, but he was facing threats from coalition allies that they would withdraw support for his government, triggering 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 a very few customers," said Ismail Sagor, a Bangladeshi migrant working in Cyberjaya area in Selangor state.

He said in normal days, the sales of the restaurant used to be 1500 Malaysian Ringgit, but the figure has now come down to less than RM 300.

"This is a time when I am just trying to survive," Sagor said.

He added that those who are undocumented 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 employing undocumented workers.

Due to the pandemic, many undocumented workers also could not have their status regularised, but they fear arrest if they go outside. Malaysia hosts about 800,000 Bangladeshi workers. Of them, an estimated two lakh are believed to be undocumented.

There is an ongoing regularisation programme called "recalibration" for the undocumented workers. Those 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, 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.

Again, even if one has work permit, he has to work in the particular company that originally hired him. Otherwise, the employer is fined, Kabir added.

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

With the state of emergency in force, there is a real uncertainty over how the situation would be in the coming months, he added.

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, commerce and distribution and plantation and commodities sectors are open, but the 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 has left many Bangladeshis jobless, 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.

Jahirul 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.

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