

100pc ballots

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An official, requesting anonymity, said an old voters' list might have been used at the centre, creating the opportunity for fraudulence.

The district administration and election officials said they were investigating the allegations.

AL nominee Enamul Haque said these were isolated cases, and those making the allegations had bad intentions.

UGC

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UGC Acting Secretary Ferdous Zaman sent the letter to the PSC today, said press release of the grants commission.

In the letter, the UGC said that all education institutions have been closed since March 18, 2020, following a government announcement of nationwide closure due to Covid-19. As such, Honour's and Master's degrees exams were not conducted as per schedule.

On December 13 last year, a meeting was held between the UGC chairman and vice chancellors of public universities and a decision was taken to hold all exams of Honour's and Master's degrees.

In that meeting, the university VCs urged the UGC to take steps for extending the deadline of the 43rd BCS applications, the press release said.

Through the general 43rd BCS, 1,814 officials will be recruited, including 300 in public administration, 100 in police, 25 in foreign services, and 843 teachers.

Currently, the application process for the 43rd BCS, which began from 10:00am on December 31, is scheduled to go on till 6:00am on January 30.

Provide security

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requested them to let him speak to the presiding officer, the reports said.

SP Arafath then called the magistrate impolite and asked him to leave the premises, according to the reports.

Mohsin later filed a complaint with the Election Commission, Registrar General's Office of the Supreme Court, law and home ministries, and the office of Inspector General of Police, accusing the SP of serious misconduct, reports our correspondent in Kushtia.

The SP's conduct during the polls was a blatant violation of the Local Government Election Rules, 2010, the complaint said.

The HC bench of Justice Mamnoon Rahman and Justice Khizir Hayat on Wednesday issued a contempt of court rule against SP Arafath.

The bench also directed him to appear at the court in person on January 25 and place his explanation of the event.

The bench observed that the SP had not only committed serious contempt of court but also tarnished the image of the judiciary as a whole.

"The action of the superintendent of police... cannot be taken lightly," the HC said in a suo moto order. "The behaviour and the attitude... of the police to an officer of the judiciary who is performing the judicial functions as per the provisions of law under the guidance of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh amount to serious contempt of court."

"Such behaviour of the said superintendent of police, Kushtia, is a severe attack to the administration of justice and ultimately the entire judiciary."

BCL leader

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A couple, who also rented the house and lives there, caught Himel red-handed when he was keeping a camera in their room early Wednesday for taking footage of the couple's private moments.

Later, the house owner and other tenants checked his mobile phone and found several videos of the house owner's daughter bathing.

Police arrested Himel from the house on Wednesday night.

Sheikh Rizual Haque Dipu, officer-in-charge of Mirzapur Police Station, told The Daily Star that Himel admitted the offence during interrogation. Later, he was sent to jail through a court after the victim lodged a case against him under the Digital Security Act, he added.

Meanwhile, Mirzapur upazila unit BCL President Saddam Hossain and General Secretary Saiful Islam in a press release yesterday said Himel was suspended.

A recommendation was made to the central BCL to expel him from the organisation, the release said.

Death toll in Madrid building blast rises to four

AFP, Madrid

The toll from a powerful explosion caused by a gas leak that gutted a building in a residential part of Madrid rose to four yesterday after a priest died from his injuries.

The 36-year-old, who was ordained a priest last June, was one of the 11 people who were injured during Wednesday's blast in the La Latina district.



Smoke rises from fire at Serum Institute of India in Pune, India yesterday. At least five people were killed in the fire, said Pune district collector Rajesh Deshmukh. The company insisted that the production of vaccines to counter the coronavirus pandemic was not affected. PHOTO: REUTERS

Don't panic, you'll get it

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year, with funding covered for the 92 lower- and lower-middle income economies involved.

"We are expecting to have the first doses reaching countries end of February," Simao said.

VACCINE APPROVALS

The UN health agency plans to approve several Covid-19 vaccines from Western and Chinese manufacturers in coming weeks and months, a document published on Wednesday shows, as it aims for rapid rollouts in poorer countries.

In the race to deploy shots, regulatory approvals are key to confirming the effectiveness and safety of vaccines, and to boosting output. But some poorer countries rely mostly on WHO authorisations as they have limited regulatory capacity.

The WHO is therefore "expediting" emergency approvals, according to a COVAX internal document seen by Reuters.

The Covid-19 vaccine developed by

AstraZeneca and manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII) could be authorised by the WHO in January or February, the document said.

The same vaccine produced in South Korea by SK Bioscience could be approved by the UN agency in the second half of February, at the earliest, a provisional calendar published by the WHO on Wednesday shows.

VACCINE PLANT FIRE

Five people died as a fire tore through a building in Serum Institute of India (SII) yesterday, but the world's biggest vaccine maker said production of the AstraZeneca coronavirus shot would not be lost.

"Five people have died," Pune city mayor Murlidhar Mohol told reporters.

Rescue workers discovered five bodies in the under-construction building after the blaze was brought under control, media reports said, but the company insisted its production of drugs to counter the coronavirus pandemic was not affected.

"We are deeply saddened and offer

our deepest condolences to the family members of the departed," Adar Poonawalla, the firm's CEO, tweeted. "I would like to reassure all governments & the public that there would be no loss of COVISHIELD production due to multiple production buildings that I had kept in reserve to deal with such contingencies."

NASAL VACCINE? According to the WHO's overview of candidate vaccines, 64 have been tested on humans, 22 of which have reached final-stage mass testing.

A further 173 candidate vaccines are being developed in laboratories with a view to eventual human trials, reports AFP.

WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan welcomed the "really incredible" range, saying it was important to have a variety of vaccines with different properties.

So far, the WHO has only approved emergency use validation for the two-dose Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which requires ultra-cold storage.

"That's a problem in many

countries," said Swaminathan.

She said there were vaccines in development that only require a single injection; a nasally-inhaled vaccine; and versions which will be much more affordable than those already in use.

"There may be many vaccines that have advantages over the first generation," Swaminathan said.

"What we want to see is prevention of disease. Prevention of infection is another question. But that is secondary," she added.

"We will learn about how effective this vaccine is in actually preventing the spread of infection from person to person. Some vaccines produce sterilising immunity; they stop infection, they prevent disease.

"Some vaccines do not stop infection but prevent disease. At this point of time we're still waiting to see the results of the studies to know which of the Covid vaccines are actually going to prevent infection successfully. Hopefully they should."

Biden reverses Trump policies on first day

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memorandums and directives.

"Some of the executive actions I'm going to be signing today are going to help change the course of the Covid crisis, we're going to combat climate change in a way that we haven't done so far and advance racial equity and support other underserved communities" said Biden. "These are all starting points"

Aides said the actions the Democratic president signed included a mask mandate on federal property and for federal employees, an order to establish a new White House office coordinating the response to the coronavirus, and halting the process of withdrawing from the World Health Organization.

Biden signed a document to begin the process of re-entering the Paris climate accord and issued a sweeping order tackling climate change, including revoking the presidential permit granting to the contentious Keystone XL oil pipeline.

Among a raft of orders addressing immigration, Biden revoked Trump's emergency declaration that helped fund the construction of a border wall and ended a travel ban on some majority-Muslim countries.

The Day One plans were just the start of a flurry of executive actions Biden would take soon after entering office, said his press secretary, Jen Psaki.

"In the coming days and weeks,

we will be announcing additional executive actions that confront these challenges and deliver on the president-elect's promises to the American people," Psaki said.

Further actions would include revoking the ban on military service by transgender Americans, and reversing a policy that blocks US funding for programs overseas linked to abortion, reports Reuters.

On the economic front, Biden asked the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to extend a moratorium on evictions until the end of March, and the Department of Education to suspend student loan payments until the end of September.

\$1.9 TRILLION VIRUS PLAN Biden launched a \$1.9 trillion plan to tackle the pandemic at home and despatched his top expert Anthony Fauci to Switzerland.

"Under trying circumstances, this organisation has rallied the scientific and research and development community to accelerate vaccines, therapies and diagnostics," Fauci told a WHO meeting in Geneva, confirming that the US would continue to pay its dues to the organisation.

Biden was a fierce critic of Trump's approach to tackling the virus in the US, which with more than 400,000 dead is the world's worst-hit nation.

The new president is seeking to vaccinate 100 million people in the next 100 days, increase the use of masks and testing, expand the public

health workforce and offer more emergency relief to those struggling with the restrictions.

"For almost a year now, Americans could not look to the federal government for any strategy," said Jeff Zients, coordinator of the new Covid-19 task force. "As president Biden steps into office today, that all changes."

New White House vaccines coordinator Bechara Choucair restated the administration's intention to bring online thousands of federal vaccination centers as well as the mobilization of thousands more workers to help.

'MUSLIM BAN' Biden rescinded the so-called "Muslim ban", an executive order Trump signed in 2017 that banned travellers from seven Muslim-majority nations from entering the US.

The ban was changed several times amid legal challenges and ultimately upheld by the US Supreme Court in 2018, reports Al Jazeera Online.

"The president put an end to the Muslim ban - a policy rooted in religious animus and xenophobia," Biden's White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said during a Wednesday evening briefing.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations welcomed the decision as "an important first step toward undoing the anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant policies of the previous administration".

Farmers in North fear crop loss

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bitter cold, said several people of the profession.

Contacted, Aftab Ahmed, deputy director of Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Thakurgaon, said farmers were already instructed to take extra measures to protect their crops.

In Kurigram and Lalmonirhat, cold is affecting Boro seedbeds, turning the saplings yellowish.

Atiar Rahman, a farmer of Kailashkutir village in Kurigram's Rajarhat upazila, said cold and fog damaged two-week-old Boro seedlings on his 20 decimals of land.

"The young plants have turned yellowish due to lack of sunlight for several days," he said.

Rafiqul Islam, a farmer at Teesta River basin in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, said if the cold and fog continued for several more days, they

would face seedling crisis during this ongoing Boro transplantation season.

District agriculture officials urged farmers to cover their seedbeds by polythene at night to protect the seedlings to minimise losses.

Meanwhile, ferry services on two major routes were suspended for hours while vehicular movement was disrupted due to dense fog.

In Tangail, a 20-kilometre-long tailback was created on the eastern part of Bangabandhu Bridge as vehicular movement on the bridge was suspended for around three hours due to dense fog.

Traffic movement was suspended on the bridge between 6:00am and 9:00am due to poor visibility, said officials at Traffic Control Room (TCR) of the bridge.

The tailback lasted for around seven hours. Traffic movement started easing

around 1:00pm, said Mohammad Kamal Hossain, in-charge of Elenga Highway Police Outpost.

On Paturia-Dauladia route, the ferry service was suspended for around six hours from early yesterday due to dense fog.

Paturia is located in Manikganj, while Dauladia is located at Rajbari. The ferry route is considered as one of the major gateways to southern districts.

Zillur Rahman, deputy general manager of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) at Aricha, said they suspended the ferry service as marking lights on the Padma became invisible.

Over 200 vehicles were stranded at Paturia terminal due to suspension of ferry operations, he informed.

Meanwhile, a weather bulletin of Bangladesh Meteorological

Department (BDM) yesterday said, "Moderate to thick fog may occur at places over the country during midnight to morning."

"Light rain or drizzle is likely to occur at one or two places over Barishal and Chattogram divisions. Weather may remain mainly dry with temporary partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country."

The 24-hour bulletin was released at 9:00am yesterday.

"Night temperature may fall by one to three degree Celsius and day temperature may rise slightly over the country," it said.

Yesterday's lowest temperature was recorded 10.4 degree Celsius at Chuadanga.

Our correspondents from Thakurgaon, Lalmonirhat, Tangail and Manikganj contributed to this report

Pre-historic

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professor in European Prehistory, told AFP the research was based on a new methodology he had developed "that is more attuned to how people would weigh items in the Bronze Age."

He and his co-author Catalin Popa studied more than 5,000 objects from over 100 ancient hoards.

Rather than measuring the items by weighing scales alone, they statistically compared their weight using a psychology principle known as the "Weber fraction."

This quantifies the concept that if objects are similar enough in mass, people weighing them by hand can't tell the difference.

They found that around 70 percent of rings, which averaged around 195 grams, were similar enough in weight to have been indistinguishable by hand.

These pieces aren't the world's oldest money by a long way -- people in Mesopotamia developed coins some 5,000 years ago -- but Kuijpers said the methodology devised could have wider uses for investigating objects of the ancient world.

As to how much each individual object might be worth in today's money and what items they might have been used to buy -- cattle, weapons, etc -- it's impossible to know for certain.

But "it's a material that they really that they valued a lot, that much is clear," said Kuijpers.

ACC arrests

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The anti-graft body found 14 sales deeds as proof of Joyal owning huge amounts of land at Cox's Bazar. The corruption committed by Joyal involves around Tk 100 crore, including movable and immovable assets.

Sarif said, "He [Joyal] started his job at Keruntholi land office in 2016. When massive land acquisition started in Kalamarchora, Joyal managed his high ups and took charge of Kalamarchora union land office in 2018 as additional duty."

Massive development work was going on at the government-acquired 7,000 acres of land from Kalamarchora union and at another 5,333 acres at Keruntholi union, Sarif said, adding that Joyal took it as opportunity to realise 30-50 percent commission from genuine land owners. Anyone refusing to give him commission would have to face trouble in the land acquisition process.

The land official hid information about his assets in his income tax profile, the ACC found.

Sarif added that if one wants to get compensation of his land, which the government acquired, he or she has to pay land revenue first.

"Joyal would not register the revenue, if anyone refused to give him bribes. Without the revenue slip, it is not possible for land owners to get the compensation for their land. So, people were forced to pay him," he said.

The Daily Star last year had run a couple of stories regarding the corruption surrounding land acquisition.

The government acquired around 30,000 acres of land in various upazilas of Cox's Bazar for development works worth Tk 3.5 lakh crore.

PM does

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person. She would not want it [naming the bridge after her], but we have some responsibilities and obligations also," the MP said amid thumping of tables by the lawmakers.

Later, Pankaj also placed a similar proposal.

He said the PM made a bold decision to go ahead with the implementation of the bridge project with the country's own funds after donors cancelled their funding.

"She is a modest person, but we are not ungrateful," Pankaj said.

Earlier, on Tuesday, a Supreme Court lawyer filed a writ petition with the High Court seeking its directive on the government authorities concerned to name Padma bridge as "Sheikh Hasina Bridge" considering her contributions to its construction.

Lawyer Md Kamruzzaman submitted the petition as a public interest litigation to the HC. The petition said most of the people of the country desire that the bridge will be named after the prime minister as she had taken the challenge of building it with the country's own funds.

The HC may hold hearing on the petition next week, the lawyer told The Daily Star.

The last span of the Padma bridge was installed on December 10 last year. The top deck of the two-level steel truss composite bridge will accommodate a four-lane highway for vehicles and the lower deck railway tracks. The bridge is likely to be opened to traffic in the first half of next year.

The bridge, which would connect Dhaka to 21 southern districts, will be a potential catalyst for major economic changes in the lives of over 30 million people living in the region. It will also give a major boost to trade and economic activities.

The Tk 30,193-crore bridge will be one of the major transport corridors linking Bangladesh with India, Nepal and Bhutan. Besides, it will enhance regional trade and collaboration along the Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway Network.