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# An elaborate con indeed

*PBI arrests five fraudsters who sold businessman 'valuable coins'*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Their target was businessmen and industrialists. They sold old coins, takkar (a type of chameleon) and border pillars as valuable items.

They claimed that such old coins are used for research at US space agency Nasa which buys coins from different countries at inflated prices and sells them for millions of dollars.

In their trick, they themselves become the sellers, the buyers and the middlemen. And many would fall into this trap. When they strike a deal with a rich man, the victim, by greed, gives them a big chunk of money to make a big profit.

Such a fraudulent gang sold a coin for Tk 1.5 crore to Dr Abdullah Bari, 70, chairman of Ananda Group, saying he could sell it to Nasa for Tk 1,200 crore.

The Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) arrested five members of the gang from Jessore, Jhenidah and Dhaka on Tuesday.

PBI chief Banaj Kumar Majumder came up with the information at a press briefing at its headquarters in Dhanmondi yesterday.

The arrestees are: Salam, 50, Akhteruzzaman, 61, Moniruzzaman Kamrul alias Jaman, 38, Abu Taher Joba, 35, and Shafiqul Islam Swapan, 49.

Banaj Kumar said the chairman of Ananda Group met Joba, a member of the fraudulent gang, a year ago.

Joba introduced Akhteruzzaman to Bari saying Akhteruzzaman travelled the world and that he runs his

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Volunteers of Bidyanondo Foundation in Chattogram collecting posters of CCC election campaigns. The election ended Wednesday. The charity organisation will recycle those for making papers for the underprivileged children. The photo was taken from the port city's Sagarika area yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

# Three DU teachers demoted for plagiarism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three Dhaka University teachers have been demoted on charge of plagiarism in their research papers.

The university authorities took the decision yesterday at a monthly syndicate meeting.

Seeking anonymity, a syndicate member confirmed the development to The Daily Star last evening.

The demoted teachers are Samia Rahman of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism; Syed Mahfuzul Haque Marjan of the Department of Criminology; and Muhammad Omor Faruq of the Department of Islamic History and Culture.

Samia Rahman, who was an associate professor, has been demoted to assistant professor. Omor Faruq, who was an assistant

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# A 'model for irregularities'

*Says EC Mahub Talukder about CCC polls*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Frustrated during the disorder during the Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) election, Election Commissioner Mahub Talukder dubbed the polls as a "model for irregularities".

While speaking to reporters at his EC office yesterday, he also said that the low turnout of voters in the election was an early sign of "the people's lack of trust in the election, which is an ominous sign for democracy".

On Wednesday, Awami League mayoral candidate Rezaul Karim Chowdhury has won by a landslide in the CCC election marred by violence, low-voter turnout and the capturing of scores of polling centres by ruling party men.

"Chattogram City Corporation election is a model for irregularities [during polls]. If the model is followed in all future elections, we would be not able to uphold our self-esteem as a democratic nation before the world," Mahub said, adding that four people were killed before and during the election.

"Violence, seizing polling stations, vandalising police vehicles and EVMs have stigmatised the election."

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## ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

# Friendly talks with Myanmar still on

Says PM

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh continues its discussions with Myanmar with a friendly attitude, without engaging in any conflict, for the repatriation of Rohingyas and regional security and development, said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday.

"Responding to the call of endangered humanity, we've given shelter to around 10 lakh Rohingyas despite [our] limitations, including internal resource constraints. And we didn't engage in conflict with anyone for the sake of regional security and development, apart from creating scopes, so that the forcibly displaced Myanmar citizens can return to their homeland," she said.

The prime minister made the statement while addressing the graduation ceremony of the Defence Services Command and Staff College (DSCSC) 2020-21 Course at Sheikh Hasina Complex in Dhaka's Mirpur Cantonment.

She joined the programme virtually from her official residence the Gono Bhaban.

Talking about coronavirus, she said this virus brought the entire world to a standstill, dealing a blow to every sector, including socioeconomic development.

"In this condition, we're continuing our efforts for maintaining all the development activities, including the economy, besides ensuring health

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# Cold spell to last this entire week

STAR REPORT

The ongoing cold spell that has paralysed normal life across the country, especially in the northern region, may continue for the next one week.

"Mild cold wave is sweeping over some regions and it may continue till February 3 to 4," said Ruhul Quddus, a meteorologist of Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

"However, temperatures may slightly rise tomorrow [Friday]. But it may fall again from the next day," he told The Daily Star last evening.

Meanwhile, a weather bulletin yesterday said, "Mild cold wave is sweeping over Rangpur division and the regions of Sitakunda, Sreemangal, Rajshahi, Pabna, Naogaon and Chuadanga and it may continue."

"Moderate to thick fog may occur over the

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# S'pore launches self-driving bus trial



AFP, Singapore

Singapore has moved a step closer to a driverless public transport network with the launch of a new trial of self-driving buses.

Orderly and high-tech, the Asian city-state has become a testbed for self-driving vehicles and has developed home-grown technology while inviting foreign companies to trial their own.

In a three-month trial launched this week, passengers can book a bus ride through an app that takes them around Singapore's Science Park, a high-tech business hub, during off-peak hours.

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## ROHINGYA RELOCATION

# Around 3k Rohingyas reach Ctg

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

The third batch of Rohingyas -- around 3,000 -- is set to reach Bhasan Char today from the refugee camp in Cox's Bazar's Ukha.

The Rohingyas left the camp around noon in 20 buses amid tight security and reached Chattogram later in the day, said Armed Police Battalion (APBn) Additional General

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## PRAYER TIMING JANUARY 29

Fazr Juma Asr Maghrib Esha  
AZAN 5:35 12:35 4:15 5:46 7:15  
JAMAAT 6:10 1:15 4:30 5:50 7:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

# 15 more die, 509 get Covid

UNB, Dhaka

The health authorities in Bangladesh yesterday confirmed 15 new coronavirus-related deaths and 509 new cases, raising the death toll to 8,087.

The Covid-19 infection rate in the country now stands at 3.43 percent, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said in a handout.

"The mortality rate is now 1.51 percent," the DGHS said.

Meanwhile, the new cases pushed up the national tally to 533,953 while the current overall detection rate is 14.77 percent.

Until this morning, 478,546 patients -- 89.62 percent of the total reported cases -- have recovered.

So far, 3,615,338 samples have been tested, including 14,633 in the last 24 hours till yesterday morning.

Bangladesh reported its first coronavirus cases on March 8 and the first death on March 18 last year.



A flock of mixed shorebirds are seen flying over Damar Char area in Noakhali's Hatiya upazila. In winter, this char becomes a haven for many migratory birds. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ZABER ANSARY

# 'Too early to ease' curbs in Europe

*Warns WHO, says Covid vaccine makers working to plug supply gap*

AGENCIES

The World Health Organization's European branch yesterday said it is too early to ease virus restrictions in Europe despite a drop in new cases in most countries.

Hans Kluge, the WHO's regional director for Europe, said 30 of the WHO European region's 53 countries had "seen a significant decrease in 14-day cumulative incidence."

"Yet, transmission rates across Europe are still very high, impacting health systems and straining services, making it too early to ease up," Kluge told an online press conference. The regional director also noted that since only three percent of people in the region had already had a confirmed infection, areas that had been "hit badly once can be hit again."

Kluge described the current situation as a "pandemic paradox", noting that while the rollout of vaccines offered "remarkable hope... newly emerging variants of concern are presenting greater uncertainty and risk."

In the WHO's European Region, which includes Russia and several Central Asian countries, 35 states have started vaccinations, according to the WHO.

As for the new variant first discovered in the UK, it has been confirmed in 33 countries and the variant first identified in South Africa has been reported in 16.

Kluge also said vaccine manufacturers were working non-stop to plug shortfalls in supplies to countries struggling to contain the pandemic and urged them not to jostle for deliveries.

"Solidarity does not necessarily mean that each country in the world starts (vaccinating) at exactly the same moment ... The good understanding is that no one is safe

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