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MUNICIPALITY POLLS 3RD PHASE Marred again by violence, irregularities

BNP, independent candidates pull out; 10 hurt in Tangail

STAR REPORT

Elections to 62 municipalities in 36 districts ended yesterday amid reports of clashes, stuffing of ballot boxes and driving polling agents out of voting centres.

Many BNP and independent mayoral candidates boycotted elections brining allegations of rigging against ruling Awami League men.

Besides, five polling officers were withdrawn over negligence of their duties in two districts.

A total of 229 candidates ran for mayor, 2,360 for ward councillor and 755 for reserved seats of women ward councillors in the third phase of the municipality polls, according to the Election Commission.

In Tangail's Bhuiyanpur municipality, at least 10 people were injured in a clash between supporters of two councillor candidates at Kutubpur Government Primary School polling centre around 11:30am.

Voting was suspended at the centre for about 35 minutes due to the clash, said officials.

Meanwhile, an upazila-level AL leader was held in Bhuiyanpur on charges of capturing a polling station and creating chaos in the election, police said.

The arrestee is Tahirul Islam Tota, acting general

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People carrying a man who was seriously injured during a clash between the supporters of two councillor candidates of ward-1 at Bhuiyanpur municipality in Tangail. The clash took place at Kutubpur Government Primary School polling centre. A total of 10 supporters of both groups were injured.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Lowest daily Covid cases in 9 months

17 more die, 363 get infected

UNB, Dhaka

The health authorities confirmed 17 more new coronavirus-related deaths and 363 new cases in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

With the latest fatalities, the total number of deaths from the virus in Bangladesh reached 8,111 while the mortality rate stands at 1.52 percent, the Directorate General of Health Services said in a handout.

The DGHS had reported 312 new cases on April 19, 2020.

Yesterday, it said the Covid-19 infection rate in the country is now 3 percent.

Meanwhile, the new cases pushed up the national tally to 534,770 while the current overall detection rate is 14.69 percent. A total of 479,297 patients (89.63 percent of the total reported cases) have recovered until yesterday morning.

So far, 3,639,497 samples

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'Bomb police station, frame lawyer'

MP Shaheen heard asking OC in leaked phone conversation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jeshore-6 MP Shaheen Chaklader is facing criticisms after a leaked phone conversation revealed that he asked a police officer to bomb a police station and frame a lawyer for it.

The conversation between Shaheen and Jashim Uddin, officer-in-charge of Keshabpur Police Station reportedly happened a couple of weeks ago.

The lawmaker, also general secretary of Jashore Awami League, was heard asking Jashim to bomb the police station and file a case accusing environmental activist Saifullah.

Saifullah who worked closely with Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), recently filed a writ petition with the High Court against an illegal brick kiln called "M/S Super Bricks" in Keshabpur, which apparently irked the lawmaker.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the leaked phone conversation but could not identify the source of the audio clip.

In the clip, the MP called and asked the

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AGRI REFORM PROTEST

Indian farmers begin hunger strike

Mobile internet services blocked in several areas surrounding Delhi to 'maintain public safety'

REUTERS, Singhu

India blocked mobile internet services in several areas around New Delhi yesterday as protesting farmers began a one-day hunger strike after a week of clashes with authorities that left one dead and hundreds injured.

Angry at new agricultural laws that they say benefit large private food buyers at the expense of producers, tens of thousands of farmers have been camped at protest sites on the outskirts of the capital for more than two months.

At the main protest site near the village of Singhu on the northern outskirts of the city, there was a heightened police presence yesterday as hundreds of tractors arrived from Haryana, one of two states at the centre of the protests.

"Many farmers' groups have joined the protest site since last night," said Mahesh Singh, a 65-year-old farmer from Haryana. "They have come to show their support and more farmers are expected to come in the next two days."

India's interior ministry said yesterday internet services at three locations on the outskirts of New Delhi where protests are occurring had been suspended until 11:00 pm (1730 GMT) today to "maintain public safety".

Indian authorities often block local internet services when they believe there will be unrest, although the move is unusual in the capital.

Farm leaders said the hunger strike by hundreds of protesters, primarily at Singhu and two other protest sites and designed to coincide with the anniversary of the death of Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi, would show Indians that the demonstrations were non-violent.

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Modi may visit Tungipara in March

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi may visit Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's memorial in Tungipara during his visit to Bangladesh in March if a proposal under discussion fructifies, diplomatic sources in New Delhi said yesterday.

If the proposal materialises, Modi will be the first Indian PM to pay homage at Bangabandhu's memorial at Tungipara.

The idea of the PM's possible visit is under discussion and no decision has been taken, the sources said.

Modi, who has described Bangabandhu as one of the greatest personalities of the last century, will be visiting Dhaka on March 26 on the occasion of Bangladesh's Independence Day.

The in-person summit between Modi and Bangladesh Prime Minister

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Virus relief tax takes effect in Argentina



AFP, Buenos Aires

A one-off tax on Argentina's richest people to help pay for medical supplies and relief for small businesses battered by the global coronavirus pandemic entered into force on Friday.

A law passed by the Senate in December by a vote of 42-26 approved the levy on people whose assets exceed 200 million pesos (about \$2.3 million).

The center-left government of President Alberto Fernandez hopes to raise about \$3 billion from taxing the richest 12,000 of Argentina's 44 million inhabitants.

More than 40 percent of the country's population lives under the poverty line.

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Rail staff held for raping teen on train

STAR REPORT

A physically challenged teenager was raped in a moving train allegedly by a staff of Bangladesh Railways in Moulvibazar's Srimangal upazila Friday night.

The victim herself filed a case with Srimangal Railway Police Station yesterday.

On information, police arrested the accused Zahid Ahmed Javed, 25, of Kishoreganj's Karimganj upazila. The accused is an assistant generator operator of Bangladesh Railways.

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PRAYER TIMING JANUARY 31

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

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Car bomb kills 5 in pro-Turkey north Syria

AFP, Beirut

A car bomb in the Turkish-controlled region of Afrin in northern Syria yesterday killed five people including a child, a British-based war monitor said.

The car, which contained explosives, blew up in a neighbourhood where workshops are located, killing the child, three other civilians and an unidentified person, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said the death toll could rise as 15 other people were wounded, some of them in critical condition.

Turkish forces and their Syrian proxies grabbed the region of Afrin from Kurdish fighters in 2018.

Afrin and other areas in northern Syria under Turkish control are regularly rocked by such bombings.

There is usually no claim for them, although

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A street vendor trying to protect himself from shivering cold with warm clothes near a kitchen market in the capital's Bashabo area. People of low income group are suffering immensely due to the cold wave. The photo was taken around 7:00am yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Don't repeat 'bad history'

WHO warns vaccine hoarding would only drag out pandemic; EU backs off jab threat in Britain row

AGENCIES

Rich countries squabbling over Covid-19 vaccine supplies must consider the situation in poorer parts of the world, WHO said, as the EU backtracked on a threat to restrict exports of shots to Northern Ireland in its growing row with Britain.

Outbreaks are raging around the globe with Covid-19 deaths nearing 2.3 million, while there are fears the less privileged will not get access to vaccine for a long time.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus decried the skirmish in wealthy countries to secure large amounts of various vaccines against the coronavirus while few doses have yet to reach poorer nations.

"The pandemic has exposed and exploited the inequalities of our world," he told journalists on Friday, warning that there now was "the real danger that the very tools that could help to end the pandemic -- vaccines -- may exacerbate those same inequalities."

"Vaccine nationalism might serve short-term political goals. But it's ultimately short-sighted and self-defeating," he said.

The WHO co-leads the COVAX facility, which is working to procure vaccines and ensure doses are delivered equitably around the world.

The facility expects to begin delivering doses within a few weeks, and Tedros said the aim was for vaccination of health workers and older people to be underway in all countries within the first 100 days of 2021.

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