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Your Right to Know



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In the name of Digital Security Act, people's freedom of expression is being assaulted. We need to get our society out of this completely.
DR KAMAL HOSSAIN



"How much more can we allow the Myanmar military to get away with?"
UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL ENVOY CHRISTINE SCHRANER
BURGENGER ASKS 15-MEMBER UN SECURITY COUNCIL



"From this place, where faith was born, from the land of our father Abraham, let us affirm that God is merciful and that the greatest blasphemy is to profane his name by hating our brothers and sisters."
POPE FRANCIS DURING HIS VISIT TO UR IN IRAQ

ANSAR AL ISLAM

Regrouping by stealth

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Ansar al Islam is far from over.

Xulhaz Mannan, an LGBT rights activist, and his friend Khandoker Mahub Raby Toney, were the victims of its last targeted killing in Dhaka in 2016.

The militant outfit has not carried out any such operation since then but its other activities continue in full swing, according to police officials.

Apart from making recruitments through online platforms including Facebook, it is targeting the needy, even from non-Muslim and transgender people, who would not ever come under suspicion of joining militancy.

It has undertaken some projects in Dinajpur, Netrokona, Jamalpur, Madhupur and Tangail for marginalised and ultra-poor communities, providing them with cash and other supports, to get close to them.

Ansar al-Islam has also got a new spiritual leader who goes by the name of Sheikh Tamim Al Adnani. A former madrasa teacher, he is now responsible for reorganising the outfit, said an official of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of DMP.

- ➔ Sheikh Tamim Al Adnani new spiritual leader
- ➔ Targeting marginalised communities, including transgenders
- ➔ Adopted new communication strategy
- ➔ Continues to get funds from abroad, some businessmen at home
- ➔ Invests in local business
- ➔ Has at least 56 sleeper cells

Sheikh Tamim's sermons are published in different platforms to draw potential militants, he added.

Officials say the organisational activities of Ansar al-Islam appear strongest in Dhaka and Chattogram. It also has bases in Satkhira and Kusthia.

Said to be the Bangladesh chapter of al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), the outfit continues to get financial support from abroad and some businessmen in the country, according to documents obtained by the CTTC officials.

A high official told this newspaper that

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ROAD TO FREEDOM
THIS DAY IN BANGLADESH
LIBERATION WAR HISTORY

Thus spoke MUJIB

March 7, 1971

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

It was the afternoon of March 7, 1971, the day Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made the historic speech that would resonate throughout the annals of history, changing its course forever.

Bangabandhu unequivocally declared, "The struggle this time is for emancipation. The struggle this time is for independence."

Bangabandhu called for a peaceful, non-cooperation movement to continue the struggle for independence and the emancipation of the Bengalis. He issued several directives for

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Abuse of DSA worries editors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Journalists and free speech advocates are constantly being harassed and tortured by the execution of the Digital Security Act, Sampadak Parishad (Editors' Council) said in a statement yesterday.

The Parishad said the controversial act must be amended immediately.

"We have feared such when the act was being formulated. It is no exaggeration to say that in some cases the implementation of the Digital Security Act is more concerning than what we feared," said the statement.

"Mushtaq Ahmed, a free-spirited writer, had to prove it with his life. We thank the honourable court for granting bail to cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore. But the way journalists and writers are subjected to cruelty after their arrest under the Digital Security Act is unexpected.

"It's needed to be mentioned here that journalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol had been missing and then was in jail for a long time just for sharing an article on social media. Although he was granted bail, cases against him are ongoing. Kajol, who is financially, physically and mentally disadvantaged, has to deal with the case."

According to Article 19, a UK-based

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3 PMs phenomenal in pandemic

Says Commonwealth secretary general



Hasina

Jacinda

Mottley

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been named among the top three inspirational women leaders who have demonstrated extraordinary leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic in the Commonwealth, Bangladesh High Commission in London said in a statement yesterday.

In a special announcement ahead of the International Women's Day 2021, Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland QC bracketed Hasina with New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Arden and Barbados Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley for demonstrating extraordinary leadership during the pandemic.

"For me whilst I am inspired all the time by so many women and girls, I would like to name three phenomenal leaders in our Commonwealth -- Jacinda Arden, the prime minister of New Zealand, Mia Amor Mottley, the prime minister of Barbados and Sheikh Hasina, the prime minister of

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50,000 female migrants returned during pandemic

Says Brac data

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 49,924 female migrant workers returned home from 21 countries amid the coronavirus pandemic, according to the Brac Migration Programme.

Besides, at least 487 bodies of female migrant workers arrived after 2016.

The NGO yesterday shared the data with the media ahead of the International Women's Day on March 8.

Brac said about 9.24 lakh female migrant workers went abroad for employment in different countries including the Middle Eastern ones between 1991 and last year.

However, there is no comprehensive data on the female returnee migrants, it said.

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, said in the last two and a half years, they in support of expatriates' welfare desk provided immediate support to some 2,645 returnee female migrants at the airport.

Besides, Brac supported about 200 returnee female migrants in launching small-scale trades, he said.

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Papul jailed, but victims in lurch

PORIMOL PALMA

Thousands of poor Bangladeshi workers who faced physical, mental and financial exploitation over the years due to Kazi Papul's crimes have so far been denied justice.

Bangladeshi MP Mohammad Shahid Islam alias Kazi Papul had been sentenced to four years in jail and fined Tk 55 crore in a bribery case in Kuwait, some eight months after his arrest. Papul was also charged with allegations of human trafficking.

The conviction led to the cancellation of his membership in the Bangladeshi parliament. His victims, however, have not yet gotten any justice for the sufferings they had to endure because of Papul.

"He [Papul] is facing punishment for the crimes he committed, but I have not committed any crime. I have lost much time, money and peace of mind. Where is my justice?" said Sheikh Farid, a victim of Papul's misdeeds.

A first-year undergraduate student of Government Titumir College in 2015, Farid had received a job offer in Kuwait through a broker with the promise of about Tk 50,000 a month. The young man, from a lower-middle class family of Brahmanbaria, then decided to take the opportunity, hoping it would change the fate of his family.

Farid had sold some of his family assets and borrowed most of the Tk 6.5 lakh required to finance his travel and job at "Ali Tawab" company as assistant to technician. Later that year, he arrived in Kuwait where he and dozens of other workers were given accommodation in the desert. They were also not issued any iqamas [residency permits].

"We were worried over what was going to happen to us. At one point, we were told that we would be placed as security guards at a market. We

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

BUSINESS

People's mobility passes pre-pandemic level in Bangladesh

Google's Mobility Report shows

People's mobility has gone past the pre-pandemic level in Bangladesh, according to a new Google report, although the coronavirus pandemic is still prevailing in the country.

Bangladesh is the only country in the world that has shown positive growth in all of the six indicators used by the Covid-19 Community

Mobility Report to help remediate the impact of the crisis and shows how visits to places, such as corner shops and parks, are changing in each geographic region. The report was published on March 2. The turnaround came compared to the baseline period of January last year. In Bangladesh, mobility trends for places such as restaurants, cafes, shopping centres, theme parks, museums, libraries, and cinemas rose 13 per cent on March 2 compared to the baseline. The trends for places such as supermarkets, food warehouses, farmers markets, specialty food shops and pharmacies were up 41 per cent compared to the baseline.

STORY ON B1



Forest department officials seized this boat of stolen logs in Chiringa area on the Karnaphuli river in Rangunia, Chattogram. They later claimed that a gunfight took place and the boat was taken. Locals and police say that was not the case.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

'Gunfight staged' to release stolen logs

Forest officials claim firefight; police, locals say nothing of that sort happened

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Ctg

Three forest officials in Chattogram's Rangunia staged a fake gunfight allegedly to give back a boat, seized earlier with logs, to its owner in exchange for a bribe.

The Daily Star investigated the incident, which took place in Chiringa beat adjacent to the Karnaphuli river on January 3, and found it to be all cooked up.

The three forest officials at the centre of the plot are Masum Kabir, range officer of Rangunia Range Office, Shafikul Islam and Debobroto Debu, both forest guards at Chiringa beat, all under Chattogram South Forest Division.

Rouful Islam Khan, beat officer of Chiringa, filed two cases -- one with Rangunia Police Station, stating loggers fired at beat officers and took away the engine-run boat from where it was anchored.

Another was filed with the Forest Court, mentioning the boat was seized with illegal logs and planks. It did not mention any incident of attack.

Khaleque Member, who is named as the accused in both the cases, said he owns the boat and claimed, "My men had to pay Tk 40,000 to the range officer to get it released. It was done after mutual understanding."

He denied attacking the forest officials or carrying any illegal goods, claiming that he brings logs from the hill tracts for timber trade.

Usually, forest officials can practise COR (compounding offence report) under section 68 of Forest Act-1927, which allows them to release the seized goods by realising revenues from the loggers. In that case, the revenue goes

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BANGLADESH UPDATE



540
New cases in 24hrs



5,49,724
Total cases



8,451
Deaths



5,01,966
Recoveries



2,595,975
Deaths



116,913,676
Total cases

Pandemic risks undoing gains for women: Merkel

AFP, Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday warned that the pandemic risked rolling back progress made on gender equality, as women take on the lion's share of childcare in lockdown and are more likely to work in at-risk jobs.

"We have to make sure that the pandemic does not lead us to fall back into old gender patterns we thought we had overcome," Merkel said in a video message ahead of International Women's Day on March 8.

Women have been disproportionately affected by the health crisis, she said, while being underrepresented in decision-making positions.

"Once again it's more often women who have to master the balancing act

between homeschooling, childcare and their own jobs," said the veteran leader.

Women also outnumber men in care professions at a time when those jobs are "particularly challenging".

"More than 75 percent of those working in the health sector are women, from doctor's offices and hospitals, to labs and pharmacies," Merkel said -- yet women account for barely 30 percent of management positions in those areas.

"It cannot be that women are to a large extent carrying our society yet at the same time are not equally involved in important political, economic and societal decisions," she added.

Merkel welcomed recent legislation requiring listed German companies to include more women on their executive boards.



Syed Ali's will power more than compensates for his physical challenges. He travels across the capital on his custom-designed trike and sells medicinal herbs to people on the streets. The photo was taken near Moghbazar Wireless intersection recently.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

50,000 female migrants

FROM PAGE 1

"However, coordinated efforts from both the government and non-government organisations are required to ensure rehabilitation of the large number of female migrants who returned home amid the pandemic and also to mitigate the crises facing those who are abroad," he added.

Shariful said there were cases where women were "sold" in the name of employment abroad while there were also incidents in which women became trafficking victims.

According to Brac data, of the women who returned amid the pandemic, 21,230 returned from Saudi Arabia, 11,602 from the United Arab Emirates, 4,826 from Qatar, 3,209 from Oman, 2,910 from Lebanon, and 2,259 from Jordan. Besides, bodies arrived from 11 countries with the highest 198 from Saudi Arabia, 88 from Jordan, 71 from Lebanon, 53 from Oman, 39 from UAE and 38 from different other countries. Of these corpses, 57 arrived in 2016, 102 in 2017, 112 in 2018, and 139 in 2019. Also, 77 bodies of female migrant workers arrived home amid the pandemic when global air communications largely remained suspended, it added.

Of the deceased, 86 female migrants reportedly died by suicide, 167 died of "stroke", 71 died in accidents, 115 died "naturally", two were murdered, and 46 died due to other reasons.

Recently, a criminal court in Saudi Arabia sentenced a Saudi national in connection with the killing of

Bangladeshi female migrant worker Abiron Begum.

Citing government data, Brac said according to cases filed under the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, at least 1,791 women fell victim to human trafficking between 2012 and 2020.

Besides their male counterparts, female migrant workers have also been contributing to the country's economy by sending remittance home, the NGO said.

However, the country lacks data regarding how many female migrant workers have returned home after completing their work contracts or after facing torture and abuse abroad, it said.

Brac recommended implementing "female migration policy" effectively to ensure their rights and uphold dignity. And emphasis has to be put on creating skilled female workers and sending them abroad, it said.

It stressed providing SIM cards to female migrant workers before they reach the host countries in order to ensure communication with family members.

It is essential to bring recruiting agencies under a monitoring mechanism and ensure accountability of the agencies in question, it added.

It further demanded ensuring punishment of employers accused of torturing female migrant workers as per law of their own countries and quick disposal of cases filed under the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012.



Thus spoke Mujib

FROM PAGE 1

a civil disobedience movement -- people should not pay taxes; government servants should take orders only from him; the secretariat, government and semi-government offices and courts in East Pakistan should observe strikes; with necessary exemptions announced from time to time, only local and inter-district telephone lines should function; railways and ports could continue to function, but their workers should not co-operate if they were used to repress the people of East Pakistan.

In his speech, Bangabandhu refuted Yahya's charge [Yahya's 6th March speech] that the Awami League was primarily responsible for the present situation. He said that he had placed a call to Yahya the previous week urging him to visit East Pakistan to see personally how military bullets were killing Bengalee civilians.

Bangabandhu laid down his terms for attending the National Assembly session which Yahya had on the previous day called for March 25: withdrawal of army to barracks; an end to martial law; and the transfer of power to the people. He also demanded an inquiry into the army killings and an end to the reinforcement of the army in East Pakistan.

East Pakistan police intelligence estimated that there were 12 lakh people present in the public meeting. [East Pakistan Police Abstract of Intelligence, March 13, 1971]

The historic 7th March speech is now included in Unesco's Memory of the World Register as a documentary heritage.

MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATORS' REACTION

The general reaction of the martial law authorities to the 7th March speech was that of relief. In a reply to the call of Yahya Khan, a senior officer reported, "This is the best speech under the circumstances." [Siddiq Salik, Witness to Surrender, UPL 1997, pg. 54]

Khadim Hussain Raja, then General Officer Commanding in East Pakistan, terms Sheikh Mujib's speech, in comparison with Yahya

Khan's 6th March speech, "remarkably conciliatory". He further writes, "Credit goes to Sheikh Mujib for averting an immediate crisis and for preventing a lot of Bengali blood being split on the streets of Dhaka." [Khadim Hussain Raja, a stranger in my own country, UPL 2012, pg. 63]

"WHAT DOES MUJIB NOW INTEND?": AMERICAN ASSESSMENT

American observers were in general agreement that a showdown of force had been averted but the crisis remains unchanged. Dhaka's American Consulate was optimistic. Archer K Blood, then American Consul General writes in his memoir: "The situation remains confused as two sides jockey for position and wait for others to force the issue. Mujib has, we believe, defused the immediate crisis. ... Little by little the Sheikh and the Awami League become the de facto authority in East Pakistan. Meanwhile, the concept of Pakistan continues to erode. The Sheikh's tactics, if successful, reduce the chances of open confrontation by exposing only a fuzzy target for the MLA [Martial Law Administration]. At the same time, he keeps the initiative and maintains control of the situation."

American Embassy in Islamabad was more pessimistic in their assessment: "Thus, events of March 6-7 have deferred showdown, but have not altered basic elements. Bengalis appear bent on a degree of autonomy the Pak military (and probably Bhutto) unable to swallow. The question now is whether Yahya or Mujib will blink first -- or whether neither will blink. Showdown cannot be put off much longer."

In their assessment of what does Mujib now intend the US Embassy report wrote: "His goal remains unchanged -- 'Emancipation' of Bangla Desh from West Pakistan domination. This could mean full provincial autonomy' as under six points. It could also mean Mujib has come to believe that the freedom he seeks is attainable only by outright independence."

Shamsudozza Sajen is a journalist and researcher. He can be contacted at sajen1986@gmail.com

Regrouping by stealth

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Police have traced a number of financial transactions involving Ansar al-Islam and found that it received around \$900 to \$1,100 from abroad through PayPal on several occasions.

The official, however, refused to disclose the countries of origin for the sake of investigation.

"We have also got details of some local businessmen who are working for the outfit. We are now analysing the details for further action," added the official.

It is the Ansar al-Islam, previously called Ansarullah Bangla Team, whose members were involved in brutal murders of bloggers, free thinkers and secular activists that shook the nation from 2013 to 2016.

All the victims were hacked to death in a similar manner, with four of them killed within just seven months in 2015. It started with the killing of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider near his house in Mirpur on February 15, 2013.

On February 16 this year, the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal sentenced five members of the organisation to death and another to life in jail for killing writer-blogger Avijit Roy in 2015.

Before this on February 10, the court sentenced eight members of the outfit to death for killing publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan the same year.

Delivering the verdict in the Avijit murder case, the court said the writer was killed to gag freedom of expression so that no one in the country can write or express themselves freely.

On July 28, 2019, police pressed charges against eight Ansar al-Islam members in the case over the killing of Xulhaz Mannan, also a former USAID official, who was hacked to death at his Kalabagan home along with his friend Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy in April 2016.

The case is now under trial at the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal of Dhaka, which recorded statements of 15 prosecution witnesses in the case so far.

NEW COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
Ansar al-Islam operates through several wings like recruitment, media, IT, intelligence, and operation. It also has sleeper cells -- each containing not more than five members.

To dodge the law enforcers, the outfit has started using a portable operating system, which can be carried in a pen drive and operated from any device

without keeping any digital evidence.

It takes maximum 10 minutes to boot and all the files are removed soon after the portable drive is unplugged from the device.

The top leadership uses it to communicate with a sleeper cell chief, according to several top officials who have been monitoring militant activities for more than a decade.

The outfit members also use a secret platform called jabber.net for communication.

These details and documents about the outfit's activities were found after intercepting correspondences over "Tutanota", an email service which Ansarullah members earlier used, said the officials.

Ahmedul Islam, additional deputy commissioner of CTC unit, told The Daily Star, "We have got some information about their latest communication and are now analysing the details to trace their hideouts."

According to available documents, the outfit has stopped carrying out any assassination after the Holy Artisan café attack perpetrated by IS-inspired "Neo JMB" in July 2016 as it believes everything drastically changed and went against them after this.

After the café siege, law enforcers carried out many high-risk anti-militancy operations in which around 79 militants were killed. Besides, more than 250 militants have been arrested since then.

Another reason for not launching attacks is that the government has a proper database of all the tenants in Dhaka and the outfit members cannot stay safe for long in a rented house.

Thirdly, the outfit wants to gain popularity in the Qawmi madrasas and among different communities and it is now focusing more on this, read the documents.

Monirul Islam, chief of CTC unit, told The Daily Star yesterday that the outfit is now more concentrating on dawah (invitation) on online platforms than operations.

"It has been trying to inspire people to carry out lone-wolf attacks since 2019 but they did not see any success," said Monirul, also the additional commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

ORGANISATIONAL HIERARCHY
The organisation has at least 56 sleeper cells.

Papul jailed, but victims in lurch

FROM PAGE 1

They then realised that they were illegally employed under Marafie Kuwaitia Group, where Papul was managing director and CEO, instead of Ali Tawab company.

Farid said he and other Bangladeshi workers at the market had to work 12 hours a day against their will and were paid low salaries, that too on an irregular basis.

"With no iqamas, we were always under fears of detention," he said, adding that if some of them argued for position and wait for others to force the issue. Mujib has, we believe, defused the immediate crisis. ... Little by little the Sheikh and the Awami League become the de facto authority in East Pakistan. Meanwhile, the concept of Pakistan continues to erode. The Sheikh's tactics, if successful, reduce the chances of open confrontation by exposing only a fuzzy target for the MLA [Martial Law Administration]. At the same time, he keeps the initiative and maintains control of the situation."

After ten months, they complained to the Bangladesh Embassy in Kuwait, which then arranged jobs for them in another company. That job also did not manage iqamas for them and paid irregular salaries.

"I could not endure such abuse anymore. Towards the end of 2017, some of my colleagues and I took the advantage of a general amnesty by the Kuwait government and returned home," said Farid, now working at a coffee shop in Brahmanbaria.

He said he is yet to recover from the financial loss incurred, as the loans with interests went up, and the mental stress he had undergone. Sources in Kuwait told this correspondent recently that many of the Bangladeshi workers who went to Kuwait through Papul returned home hapless and many are still in Kuwait undocumented.

According to the CID, which is investigating Papul's human trafficking case in Bangladesh, Papul used his younger brother Kazi Mohammad Badrul Alam's recruiting agency -- Job Bank International in Dhaka -- to recruit workers in Kuwait.

According to sources and media reports, Kazi Papul, who was elected independent lawmaker from Laxmipur-2 in 2018, used to bribe Kuwaiti officials to get the work visas approved and then charge the

jobseekers high amounts.

Witness accounts in the case against Papul in Kuwait said Papul was part of an "organised gang" comprising two Kuwaitis and himself. They used a company to recruit workers from Bangladesh through fraudulence. They took over 20,000 Bangladeshi workers to Kuwait in exchange for more than KD 50 million, reported Kuwaiti news portal The Times.

Although the company was closed due to legal violations, the workers landed in Kuwait to discover their visas were fake. They were forced to work in Marafie Kuwaitia Group.

Eleven Bangladeshis taken to Kuwait by Papul testified to the court that the workers were charged money for renewing residential visas and even forced to work long hours against their will in inhumane working conditions without wages or with low wages.

Papul's men also allegedly attacked those who objected to his views and threatened them with false cases, The Times reported.

Even Bangladeshi newsmen working in Kuwait were not spared.

In 2018 and 2019, the Kuwaiti government deported at least two Bangladeshi reporters Ehsanul Haque Khokon of Jamuna TV and Kamrul Hasan of Banglavisian allegedly after the Bangladeshi embassy's complaints to the Kuwaiti CID against them. They told this correspondent Kazi Papul was behind it.

Besides, five Bangladeshi journalists based in Kuwait -- Kamrul Hasan of Banglavisian, Jalal Uddin of RTV, Mahmudur Rahman Mahmud of Ajker Surjoday, Al Amin Rana of Dainik Yad and Sheikh Nizamur Rahman Tipu of Drishti Nandan Sylhet -- had written to the Bangladesh Embassy back in 2015 complaining that Shahidul and his cohorts had threatened them at various time for reporting his misdeeds.

On February 23, Kamrul told this

correspondent that they complained to the foreign and expatriates' welfare ministries, but got no justice.

"I have recently complained to the National Human Rights Commission seeking justice. I expect the state to ensure justice for me and other victims of Papul's crimes," Kamrul said.

Hasina among 3

FROM PAGE 1

Bangladesh -- for their leadership during Covid-19 in their roles in their respective countries," the Commonwealth secretary-general said.

"All three leaders alongside so many other women have given me hope for a world that delivers a common future for women and men and serves all of our common good," she added.

Earlier, different countries have lauded Bangladesh for successfully tackling the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Of the total 549,724 coronavirus cases in Bangladesh until March 6, the number of recoveries is 501,966. A total of 8,451 people have died -- one of the low ratios of infections and deaths, though health systems have been affected during the peak months.

Bangladesh's agricultural productivity, as well as foreign remittance, has been robust. The government declared stimulus packages for the people adversely affected by the pandemic.

Bangladesh is one of the first countries that have begun early Covid-19 vaccination campaign and economic recovery.

Referring to Bangladesh's past successes in disaster management, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres last week said in view of the country's ranking as a global leader in risk mitigation, he was not surprised to see such an accomplishment.

He expressed admiration for PM Hasina, especially for her strong commitment to the people of Bangladesh.

10 more die, 540 infected with Covid

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh recorded 10 more coronavirus-related deaths and 540 new cases in 24 hours till yesterday morning, showing a slight fall in daily infection rate.

Some 822 people have recovered from the virus infection during the same period, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

With the fresh cases, the number of total cases rose to 549,724 in the country.

The daily infection rate stood at 4.13 percent yesterday, down from 4.63 percent the previous day. The overall infection rate slightly fell to 13.30 percent, which was 13.33 percent on Friday.

However, the mortality rate remained unchanged at 1.54 percent for the past few days, the DGHS said in a handout.

So far, 501,966 patients (91.31 percent) have recovered from Covid-19. The health authorities have so far tested 41,32,113 samples, including 13,082 in the same 24-hour period.

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

'Gunfight staged'

FROM PAGE 1

allows them to release the seized goods by realising revenues from the loggers. In that case, the revenue goes straight to the government exchequer.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED
According to the case filed with Forest Court on January 4, Masum Kabir, the range officer, seized the boat loaded with around 700 cubic feet of illegal logs from the Kamaphuli river at 10:00pm the previous day.

Sources from the Forest Department said after unloading the logs on the evening of January 4, Chiringa beat office staffers moored the boat at Chiringa canal adjacent to the river.

The staffers then left the place. While two guards stayed back, Masum waited at Khetro Bazar, which is a kilometre away from the spot.

Around 8:45pm, Masum Kabir phoned his colleagues to say a group of loggers attacked them at the beat and asked them to come to the spot soon.

When his colleagues reached there, Masum informed them that the loggers snatched away the boat, they added.

There is a tea-stall adjacent to Chiringa beat. An elderly man who was at the stall at that time told The Daily Star that no incident of gunfight took place there.

"I saw a few people come from across the Kamaphuli river. They had a chat with the forest officers and others. They then went away with a boat, which was anchored at Chiringa canal," he said.

Sources at the Forest Department said no staffer was present at the beat office when the so-called gunfight took place. Actually, the trio designed it this way to pocket all of the bribe money themselves, they added.

Mohammad Alam, a local contractor, told The Daily Star that asked by the Forest Department, he first supplied 14 labourers to unload the logs and planks from the boat around midnight on January 3. But they were not experienced in unloading big planks.

The next day, he hired another batch of labourers from Chattogram city and they unloaded the goods till 7:00pm.

"Just 15 or 20 minutes after we left, I got a call from the beat office that loggers attacked. I rushed there but found no sign of such an attack. I informed it to the top boss of the forest division but he shrugged it off," he said.

Mahbub Milky, officer-in-charge of Rangunia Police Station, told The Daily Star that the incident was not like what was stated in the case.

The forest officials had anchored the boat at a canal after seizing it, he said, adding that a few people came later and went away with the boat.

The boat was left in a way so that it can be easily taken away, the OC further said.

Shafikul Islam, divisional forest officer of Chattogram South Forest Division, did not receive repeated phone calls of this correspondent.

Rouful Islam Khan Tuhin, beat officer of Chiringa, said he was not on the spot and can't talk to the media without approval from his top boss.

Range Officer Masum Kabir claimed they fired nine rounds of bullets in retaliation when the loggers attacked them and the gunfight lasted for one hour. He alleged that the police and Khaleque Member were lying.

Shafikul Islam, one of the two forest guards, said they clashed for one hour with the loggers who were around 50 in number. He said the incident took place around 10:00pm.

Debroto Debu, the other forest guard, echoed the same, except that it occurred around 8:00pm.

A villager who often works with the Forest Department and lives adjacent to the beat office told The Daily Star they saw the seizure of the boat on January 3 and they saw the boat being released by the forest guards on January 4. "It all happened peacefully."

"But," he added, "next day in the morning [on January 5], when I went to the tea stall, I heard forest guards talking about a gunfight. Had there been a gunfight for an hour, the whole village would have been terrified. Everyone would have known that."

Book on March 7 speech published in all six official languages of UN

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A book on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic March 7 speech -- published in UN's six official languages Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish -- was unveiled at Unesco headquarters on Friday.



Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to Unesco and Bangladesh embassy in Paris have published the book titled: "The Historic 7th March Speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: A World Documentary Heritage".

Ambassadors and permanent representatives of Australia, England, France, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Spain, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, Kuwait, Russia, China and Bangladesh to Unesco unveiled the book.

Unesco included the speech in the Memory of the World International

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Spring is increasingly showing its vibrant colours as the days go by. This tree, with its branches spreading out in all directions, at the capital's Ramna Park is ready to welcome in visitors with its recently sprouted crimson leaves.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Adolescents' healthcare in poor state at districts

Finds MJF study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite the government's emphasis on providing health services for adolescents, no adolescents from Patuakhali and Barguna received the services in 2019 and 2020, while no boys received the service in Bhola in this period.

Only 571 boys and 3,018 girls received services in the Barishal division in this period, although the statistics of boys receiving services in Barishal division is way higher than other divisions.

The data was presented yesterday by Naripokkho member Samia Afrin, at a webinar titled "The Current State of Adolescents Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights", organised by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) on the occasion of International Women's Day-2021.

Although the government in its adolescent health services operational plan included programmes to raise awareness on child marriage, adolescent motherhood, violence against women, menstrual hygiene management and nutrition, mental health and personal hygiene, people who need to be more aware such as parents, educational institutions, religious leaders, local and political leaders do not pay heed to these issues at all, the study found.

The current quality of healthcare services at community level is even worse, due to the absence of adequate service providers. In addition, adolescents also have no clear idea about the services and are not informed significantly.

A number of adolescents from different districts of the country also shared their problems regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights at the webinar.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Idle time may frustrate Rohingyas, lead to unwanted situations

Finds study on relocation to Bhasan Char

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ample idle time could frustrate Rohingyas in Bhasan Char, which could lead them to create unwanted situations, a Dhaka University (DU) teacher said yesterday, while disseminating findings of a research.

Associate Professor Touhidul Islam of DU's peace and conflict studies department said scope must be created for Rohingyas in the new shelter to involve themselves in income-generating activities.

The department and Central Foundation for International and Strategic Studies (CFISS) conducted the research titled "From Cox's Bazar to Bhasan Char: A Step Forward Towards Sustainable Livelihood Options for the Rohingyas".

The findings were disclosed during a seminar on "Relocation of the Rohingya Displaced People from Cox's Bazar

to Bhasan Char: Opportunities and Challenges" at DU's Nabab Nawab Ali Senate Bhaban.

Touhidul, a research team member, said healing Rohingyas people's psychological trauma is important, as they have been traumatised since facing persecution in their homeland.

Mentioning that relocation of Rohingyas to Bhasan Char is temporary, he said there must be a plan for Rohingyas to go back to their country. He stressed for bilateral processes to continue, and engagement of regional actors and international communities in the repatriation process.

The research was conducted both in Bhasan Char and camps of Cox's Bazar in two phases from November to December last year.

According to the report, shelter in Bhasan

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Historic March 7 today

Bss, Dhaka

Today is the historic March 7.

This year the observance of the day will be more significant as the nation is going to celebrate the golden jubilee of the country's independence on March 26 while "Mujib Year", the yearlong celebration of Bangabandhu's birth centenary is ongoing.

On this day in 1971, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his fiery speech called on the freedom-loving Bangalis to wage a decisive struggle against the Pakistani rulers.

"Ebarer sangram amader muktir sangram, ebarer sangram swadhinatar sangram [The struggle this time is a struggle for emancipation, the struggle this time is a struggle for independence]", Bangabandhu declared in a thunderous voice at a mammoth rally at the Racecourse Maidan (now Suhrawardy Udyan) that day.

"Turn every house into a fortress, resist the enemy with everything you have... Having mastered the lesson of sacrifice, we shall give more blood. God willing [Inshallah], we shall free the people of this land," Bangabandhu also said in his speech.

On the night of March 25, just 18 days after the 7th March speech, the Pakistani military launched genocide on innocent unarmed Bangalis, the most gruesome and shameful act the human history has ever seen.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



The harmoniums, made from imported reeds and Burmese Teak timbre, are attracting demand from across the country. Insiders said products worth around Tk 4 crore are being shipped to Dhaka, Khulna, and Sylhet per year.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Harmonium-making brings them success

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

In something of an unexpected turn in the region's history, local musical instrument production, especially of harmoniums, have found a home in two villages of Barishal's Baraipara upazila.

Banaripara, some 10-12km away from Barishal district, is now home to at least three new harmonium factories set up over the last two years.

Around 1,000 to 1,500 instruments worth around Tk 4 crore are being produced and sent from these factories to several parts of the country, including Dhaka, Khulna and Sylhet every year, this correspondent found after talking to factory owners and artisans.

As a result, employment in the two remote villages of Gava and Narekathi, and a number of surrounding villages, have increased.

Talking to this correspondent recently, Saidur Rahman, president of Barishal Chamber of Commerce and Industries, heralded the manufacturer's efforts, saying that such small-scale manufacturing systems play a vital role in the rural economy.

At Gava, Sujoy Mandal has set up a harmonium factory at a place adjacent to the primary school on the bank of the Narekathi canal. Artisan Sumon Mandal works at the factory. He told this correspondent that they supply at least 500 harmoniums in one calendar year. From Gava, the instruments reach the shores of Dhaka, Sylhet, and Khulna, to shelves of popular stores in Dhaka and Khulna.

Sumon Mistry, who works at Sujoy's factory, said each harmonium produced by them sells from Tk 12,000 to Tk 35,000. The factories make a profit of around 20 percent from a single harmonium.

Jiban Sarker owns the other factory in the village. His factory produces around the same number of harmoniums per year, he told this correspondent.

"Around 1,200 to 1,500 harmoniums, worth almost Tk 4 crore are produced and sold across the country from the two villages," he said.

Hasan Maqsood, cultural officer of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Barishal district unit, attributed the rising demand of musical instruments to the increased opportunity to practise music under various organisations, including educational institutions at the upazila level.

Babu Mistry, owner of a factory at Narekathi village, said at least 300 harmoniums are sold by them every year.

Artisans said the major material they use for the harmoniums is reed, imported from India, while Burmese teak timber is also used. These timbers are bought for Tk 5,500 to 6,000 per cubic foot of timber.

Factory owner Sujoy Mandal is one of the pioneers of making harmoniums in the region. As someone who's seen it grow from the start, he knows what they need to expand the scope of the craft.

He said he used to make harmoniums at a store in Dhaka. "Around two years back, I decided to come back to my village and start on my own. Soon, others joined in and got involved," he added.

"It would be great if we had some capital to work with. If we could receive Small and Medium Entrepreneur (SME) loans, it would work wonders for us," he said.

Jalish Mahamud, deputy general manager of BSCIC, said, "It's possible... If the harmonium makers want to have access to these loans, they can register as SMEs, after which the the loan procedure can be initiated."

Taqi's 8th death anniversary observed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

The eighth death anniversary of Tanwir Muhammad Taqi was observed yesterday amid shock, grief and frustration, as the killers have still not been brought to justice.

The victim's family, and socio-cultural and political activists paid their respects at Taqi's grave in Narayanganj's Bandar upazila, and vowed to continue their movement until the killers are tried.

"We have come here to pay tribute. We vow to continue our movement until justice is ensured," said Bhabani Sangkar Roy, president of Narayanganj Sangkritik Jote.

Narayanganj City Corporation Mayor Selina Hayat Ivy and Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) Narayanganj District Unit President Hafizul Islam, among others, paid tribute.

Taqi (17) went missing after leaving his home on Shaista Khan Road for Sudhijon Pathagar, a local library, around 4pm on March 6, 2013. He was a student of ABC International School.

On the morning of March 8, his body was found floating on Shitalakhya River.

Taqi's father Rafiqur Rabbi filed a murder case with Narayanganj Kotwali Police Station the same day. He also submitted a complaint to the superintendent of police

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

GRAFT ALLEGATIONS AGAINST BEGUM ROKEYA UNIV VC 'Education minister had nothing to do with it'

UGC says probe impartial, without influence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

University Grants Commission in a statement yesterday said they have done an impartial investigation without anyone's influence while probing into alleged corruption of Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur (BRUR) Vice Chancellor Prof Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah.

UGC said Kalimullah made some unexpected comments regarding the probe committee and Education Minister Dipu Moni from a press conference on March 4.

Such a comment was not expected from a VC, it added.

UGC said the education minister has not tried to influence the probe by any means. The minister has never made any recommendation to influence probe against any VC, the statement added.

Kalimullah on March 4 denied all findings of UGC's recent report on his reported irregularities, saying it is biased and fabricated, and the education minister patronised and insisted on it.

Hours after, the education ministry denounced his statement, terming it fabricated, baseless and

motivated.

At a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity, Kalimullah said, "I state without any hesitation that Education Minister Dipu Moni, for her personal animosity towards me, forced UGC to prepare the fabricated and biased report."

Kalimullah also claimed that he was a victim of local politics of Chandpur district.

"UGC member Muhammad Alamgir, who led the investigation team, is from Chandpur and served the minister's agenda by making me a scapegoat of corruption done by the previous VC," he said.

UGC had launched an investigation on 45 allegations against Kalimullah.

Recently, a probe body found irregularities surrounding construction of two 10-storey buildings and a mausoleum at the university. It recommended taking measures against those involved, including the VC.

In the press statement, the education minister said they have received the investigation report, on which a high-level meeting will be held soon at the ministry.

Five killed in road crashes

STAR REPORT

Five people were killed and another was injured in road accidents yesterday, according to reports from our correspondents.

In Dhaka, a man was killed and another injured after a human hauler and an auto-rickshaw collided head-on in Kadamtali.

The deceased -- Mobarak Hossain (28), worker of a steel mill -- was a passenger of the auto-rickshaw, said police.

Kadamtali Police Station Sub-inspector Mahbul Haque said the collision took place around 9am, leaving Mobarak dead on the spot. His co-passenger Rabbi sustained injuries and took treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The body was sent to Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue for autopsy. Hailing from Debidwar in Cumilla, the deceased used to live in Shyampur.

Police seized the vehicles but the drivers fled after the accident.

Our Mymensingh correspondent adds, two persons including a journalist were killed as a CNG-run auto-rickshaw and a truck collided head-on on Mymensingh-Netrakona road at Gacchola in Tarakanda upazila.

The deceased -- Chandon Roy (55), Amader Somoy's Durgapur upazila correspondent; and Abul Kashem -- hailed from Durgapur, Netrakona.

The accident took place around 5:20pm while Chandon was returning home by the auto-rickshaw from a journalists' meeting in Mymensingh city, said Tarakanda Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Abul Khayer.

Kashem died at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, said the OC. Police seized the vehicles but the drivers managed to flee.

In another incident, a pick-up van hit an unknown vehicle from behind in Bhaluka upazila headquarters in Mymensingh around 6am, leaving the pickup driver and his helper dead.

Kawsar Sheikh (25) was the driver and Emran Mia (26) his helper. Both hailed from Netrakona. They died on the spot, said Moshir Rahman, in-charge of Bhoraduba Highway Police Station.



A truck lies overturned in a paddy field by the side of M'sing-Netrakona highway as fire service personnel rush to the spot. A journalist from Durgapur upazila was killed in a road accident at Mymensingh's Tarakanda upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

CMP sets up central washing plant

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Cig

Chattoogram Metropolitan Police (CMP) has set up a washing plant at the city's Dampara Police Lines, facilitating the laundry needs of its members.

With the technical support from Chattoogram-based apparel company "Smart Group", the plant has been installed at a cost of Tk 18 lakh, said police officials.

CMP bore the finance -- the plant's price of Tk 10 lakh and the installation cost of Tk 8 lakh, said CMP Deputy Commissioner (North) Bijoy Basak.

The service for one set of clothes (a shirt and pants) will cost only Tk 1, said the official.

Police said they used to wash their uniforms themselves.

Asked when the service will start, the police official said, "At the end of this month [March] hopefully."

CMP itself will operate the washing plant, said Bijoy Basak.

Mujibur Rahman, director of Smart Group, told The Daily Star, "We will provide free technical assistance to CMP to maintain regular works of the plant."

Police sources said CMP has a total of 7,000 members; of them 1,875 live in seven dormitories at Dampara Police Lines.

Shamsur Rahman Khan passes away

CITY DESK

Shamsur Rahman Khan, a retired civil service officer, breathed his last on March 4 following a brain hemorrhage. He was 93, said a press release.



Born at Jantrael in Nawabganj, Dhaka, SR Khan graduated in Economics from Dhaka University before joined the civil service in 1961. He was responsible for coordinating relief and rehabilitation of the Chattogram Division after the 1970 tide.

Khan was honoured for his cooperation with Armed Forces officers in the Liberation War. While serving in the home ministry, he was instrumental in administering Fire Service and Civil Defence as its DG. He was later appointed governor of Bhola.

His qulkhani will be held at his house -- House-43/A, Road-5, Dhanmondi, Dhaka today after Maghrib prayers.

Moyrunnesa no more

CITY DESK

Mosammat Moyrunnesa, mother of Newspaper Hawkers' Welfare Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd secretary Md Shahabuddin, passed away on Friday night.

She was 95. She had been suffering from old age complications, said a press release.

Moyrunnesa, wife of Shamsul Haque Sardar from Khodkhasta village in Sonaimuri upazila of Noakhali, left behind three sons, grandchildren and a host of relatives and well-wishers to mourn her.

Idle time

FROM PAGE 3

Char for the displaced Rohingyas is safer than in Cox's Bazar camps, as "all modern facilities, income-generating opportunities, and heightened security systems have been ensured" on the island. To make livelihood in Bhasan Char sustainable, the report recommended few steps, including preservation of rainwater and its use in daily life.

It also recommended creating small and cottage industries and ensuring education of Rohingya children in their mother language.

Addressing the seminar, international relations expert Prof Delwar Hossain said understanding the geopolitical context of the Bay of Bengal, where there is a "scramble for influence", is important to understand the Rohingya situation. It is also important to understand the situation in Myanmar in terms of their repatriation.

He said Cox's Bazar has become a congested area, where Rohingyas were living in destitute condition. It is clear that living conditions in Bhasan Char is much better compared to situation not only in Cox's Bazar but in cities of many other countries.

The reported challenge Bangladesh faced regarding relocation is "misinformation", he said.

There is a huge information gap among Bangladeshis and among global citizens when it comes to seeing the reality, he further said, adding that since Rohingyas are not well educated and informed, they could be used by different organised groups in Cox's Bazar.

Addressing as chief guest, DU Pro Vice-Chancellor Prof ASM Maksud Kamal said international communities need to put pressure on Myanmar and its junta for repatriation.

Prof Maksud, also a noted geologist, said from recent studies it was found that deposition phenomena of sedimentation in Bhasan Char was more stable than erosion phenomena. The island is a safer place for Rohingyas.

As per geological conditions, Bhasan Char is a stable area, since the island is still having sedimentation, said Prof Zillur Rahman of DU's disaster science and management department. More engineering measures should be taken to keep the island stable.

CFISS Chairperson Commodore (ret'd) MN Absar said misconceptions and negative propaganda were spread regarding Bhasan Char in terms of its sustainability to accommodate Rohingyas.

Prof Rafiqul Islam, lead researcher and chairperson of DU's peace and conflict studies department, and Prof Sadeka Halim, dean of DU's social science faculty, also spoke at the seminar.

Book on

FROM PAGE 3

Register, a list of world's important documentary heritage, in 2017.

According to Unesco, the speech constitutes "a faithful documentation of how the failure of post-colonial nation-states to develop inclusive, democratic society alienates their population belonging to different ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious groups."

According to a press statement by the Bangladesh Mission in Paris, the book contains statements of Bangladesh President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and Education Minister Dipu Moni.

Paying homage to the memory of Bangabandhu, Bangladesh Ambassador to Paris and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to Unesco Kazi Imtiaz said the March 7 speech worked as a major source of inspiration for the nine-month long war.

He also thanked the ambassadors and permanent representatives who participated in the event, and those who worked for translation and printing of the book.

The envoys present at the event recalled the leadership of Bangabandhu in the 1971 Liberation War and lauded the Bangladesh mission to Unesco for this significant publication.

Taqi's

FROM PAGE 3

on March 18, accusing seven persons by name and 8-10 unnamed.

Eight of the accused remain absconding, while five have been arrested in the case. But, law enforcers are yet to file charge-sheet in the case.

Govt to turn it into

FROM PAGE 12

In September 2019, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in an Ecenc meeting, instructed the authorities concerned to collect tolls from long-haul vehicles on the national highways.

The move got momentum after she inaugurated the 55km expressway in March last year.

Earlier, the authorities had decided to start collecting tolls on the expressway once the Padma Bridge has opened to the public. The authorities have not yet finalised the toll for the bridge.

But the Road Transport and Highways Division, in the last month, decided to start toll collection from vehicles using the country's first expressway -- Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga Expressway -- from July.

The division also agreed to a toll rate proposed by a special committee. As per the proposal, the toll for a medium truck (two axes) would be Tk 9.9 per kilometre.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader has fixed the rate at Tk 10 and the division has sent the proposal to the Finance Ministry last week, sources said.

If the finance ministry approved the rate, a medium truck would have to pay Tk 550 for using the entire 55km expressway on top of the toll for using the Padma Bridge once it is open to the public in June 2022.

After the toll collection starts on the expressway, the authorities will gradually begin collecting tolls on the national highways that are at least dual-carriageways. Bus service operators and road-

safety campaigners say the passengers will ultimately shoulder the burden as the transport companies would charge more from them once the decisions are implemented.

TOLL FOR SASEC CORRIDOR

The Division on January 11 wrote to RHD for implementing PM's instruction regarding toll collection from four-lane roads and recently gave a reminder, sources said.

In this given situation, RHD on Wednesday held a meeting with its Chief Engineer in the chair and attended by officials concerned, they said.

At the meeting, a committee led by Abul Kalam Azad, superintendent engineer (maintenance), was formed, Abdus Sabur said.

The committee will visit the highway and select sites for setting up toll plazas, he said, adding that they would submit a report regarding all necessary aspects within 15 days.

"We will take further steps following their report," he added.

The RHD is currently collecting tolls on the two-lane 50km Hatikumul-Bonpara highway, 13.7km Chattogram Port Access Road, and 74km Dhaka-Sylhet highway between Jagadishpur and Sherpur.

Under 22,362km road network of RHD, 17,50km are eight-lane, 20,60km are six-lane and 584.54km are four-lane highways, according to its 2019-20 annual report.

Besides, 617km roads are now being upgraded into four lanes, Obaidul Quader said last month.

Missile strikes on Syria oil refineries kill 4: monitor

AFP, Beirut

Missile strikes on makeshift oil refineries in northern Syria killed four people and injured more than 20 others, a war monitor said yesterday.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said a series of strikes launched from Russian warships and by allied Syrian government forces hit the makeshift refineries in Aleppo province on Friday night, causing a massive blaze in the area controlled by Turkey and its Syrian rebel proxies.

The Britain-based monitor "documented the deaths of four people, while 24 others sustained various injuries and burns" in the attacks near the town of Jarablus.

At least one Syrian rebel was among the dead, said Observatory head Rami Abdul Rahman.

Rescue workers spent hours trying to extinguish the fire which spread to about 30 oil tankers, according to the war monitor.

Oil installations in Turkey-controlled parts of Aleppo have come under repeated attack in recent months although Moscow and the Syrian regime have not claimed responsibility.

The Observatory reported two such missile attacks last month.

I was made

FROM PAGE 12

Expressing worries about his future, Kishore said despite his ailments, he would have to appear before a court soon to prove himself to be innocent.

A doctor treating the cartoonist said they would examine him today and check his right ear to determine whether they would need to operate on it.

Kishore walked out of jail on bail on Thursday after staying behind bars for 10 months.

Inmate goes

FROM PAGE 12

with a murder case filed with Sadarghat Police Station," said the OC.

The Daily Star made several phone calls to the jail but no official picked up the phone.

However, jail sources said the prison guards were looking for the inmate inside the jail. They believe that he was hiding inside the jail.

Police said a businessman named Abul Kalam Azad was stabbed to death by criminals in SRB Gate area under Sadarghat police station on February 5.

Rubel was arrested in this connection on February 9 after the victim's mother Marzina Begum filed a case.

Astonishing nearby super-Earth

FROM PAGE 12

It is found around a star just 26 light years away, a relatively close neighbour at the scale of the universe. Gliese 486b orbits around and close to a red dwarf star that allowed researchers to find it in the first place.

One of the reasons it is so exciting is because it is a "transiting" planet, allowing scientists to examine it as it crosses in front of its star and makes itself visible to scientists who can examine its atmosphere.

But that is not the only way that scientists are able to study the planet. It is unusual because it can be seen in two ways: as well as spotting as it crosses its stars, it can also be detected through Doppler radial velocity, which looks for planets in the way their gravity wobbles other stars, and sticking the two together could allow for even more detailed understanding of the planet and its atmosphere.

That atmosphere is especially exciting, too – it is so hot that the atmosphere is "puffed up" by the temperature, letting astronomers measure it.

'Our revolution must win'

FROM PAGE 12

township with cafes, restaurants and bars that has emerged as a hotspot for unrest.

Security forces fired tear gas and stun grenades in the morning, scattering protesters, and removed their makeshift barricades with bulldozers.

Activist Maung Saungkha said the movement would persist -- even as security forces continued to step up their enforcement tactics -- as many remember the repression under the previous junta.

"In our past revolutions, we never won... this time we must fight to win," he told AFP. "We must fight together with the younger generation to get victory."

Meanwhile, authorities in Myanmar have asked India to return several police officers who sought refuge to avoid taking orders from a military junta, an official in northeast India said yesterday.

A Reuters report said around 30 Myanmar police and their family members came across the border to India seeking refuge in recent days.

The senior-most official in Champhai, a district in the Indian state of Mizoram, told Reuters that she had received a letter from her counterpart in Myanmar's Falam district requesting the return of eight police "in order to uphold friendly relations."

Deputy Commissioner Maria CF Zuali said that she was "waiting for the direction" from the India's Ministry for Home Affairs

Adolescents'

FROM PAGE 3

Many said they live in such a community or groups, that belong to and practice age-old traditions and don't encourage any discussion on SRHR issues and in many cases, don't allow children discussing such issues.

Education Minister Dipu Moni joined the webinar as chief guest and said the responsibility of parents, teachers and health workers is to raise awareness among adolescents. The adolescents do not open up about their sexual and reproductive health with their parents or teachers, while the parents also do not make them aware of the issues. "This is why we need to work on changing mindsets. Two lakh teachers will soon start working to provide counselling at school level."

According to a 2018 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics survey, the number of adolescents in the country is 2.77 crore.

Bangla Academy fellow Prof Dr Ratan Siddiqui; Dr Sabina Faiz Rashid, dean and professor at BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health and Umama Zillur, founder of Kotha also spoke at the event, moderated by MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam.

Historic

FROM PAGE 3

Shortly before his arrest on the black night, Bangabandhu proclaimed the independence.

On October 30 in 2017, Unesco recognised the historic speech as part of the world's documentary heritage.

To mark the day, different political parties and socio-cultural organisations have chalked out various programmes, including laying wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu and holding discussions and rallies, maintaining health guidelines.

The government has made hoisting national flag at all public and private buildings in the country and its diplomatic missions abroad compulsory on the historic March 7 from this year.

The "Historic March 7 National Day" observance programme will be held at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre at 3pm today.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will join it virtually as chief guest. Marking the day, Islamic Foundation called for arranging special prayers at all mosques, seeking eternal peace of the departed souls of Bangabandhu and 1971 Liberation War martyrs.

Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television as well as private television channels and radio stations will broadcast special programmes while national dailies will bring out special supplements.

US, Australia

FROM PAGE 12

The delegation met government officials and international agencies assisting host communities and Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar. They reiterated their unwavering support for Bangladesh's refugee response, according to a statement issued by the US embassy in Dhaka yesterday.

It also visited a disaster preparedness project, food programmes, a learning centre, a health facility, and spoke with community health volunteers about their role in the Covid-19 response in the refugee camps and host communities.

The latest visit marks a year since the first cases of coronavirus were reported in Bangladesh. It was the first visit since the October 2020 Rohingya donor conference, which raised nearly \$600 million in additional relief funds for Rohingya refugees and host communities.

Since the outbreak of violence in Myanmar in 2017, Australia has provided over \$240 million, Japan has contributed \$140 million, and the US responded with an assistance of \$1.2 billion in humanitarian assistance to Rohingya and host communities in Cox's Bazar.

"We continue to work with international organisations to encourage Myanmar to create the conditions that allow for the voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable return of refugees," said Miller.

"We strongly support all those calling on the Myanmar military to restore power to the democratically elected government, release all those who have been unjustly detained, and cease attacks on journalists, activists, and others.

"The military must exercise maximum restraint and refrain from additional violence."

Australian High Commissioner Bruer said Covid-19 created many new challenges in Cox's Bazar.

"With case numbers steady and with the vaccine in sight, it is as important as ever, for us to work together with the Bangladesh authorities to ensure humanitarian partners can deliver the much-needed assistance to both Rohingya and Host communities," said the high commissioner.

Japanese Ambassador Ito said the aim of the visit was to further promote support for Bangladesh and to strengthen cooperation with international organisations and NGOs.

"We strongly hope that, as the coronavirus situation has been improving, comprehensive service delivery including education will restart soon," the ambassador said.

Nine int'l rights bodies urge

FROM PAGE 12

Kennedy Human Rights.

In a joint statement on Friday, the organisations also urged the government to repeal the Digital Security Act (DSA) - under which both writer Mushtaq Ahmed and cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore were charged.

"All digital and cybersecurity laws must conform to international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," it said.

Mushtaq and Kishore are among hundreds of victims whom the Bangladesh authorities have held in detention under the DSA, it added.

"These vaguely defined provisions of the law are incompatible with international human rights law and are being used to criminalize freedom of expression."

It added that Mushtaq, 53, and Kishore, 45, a prominent cartoonist, were held in pretrial arbitrary detention under the draconian Digital Security Act of 2018, following their arrests in May 2020 for Facebook posts and social media communications that were deemed critical of the government.

There are strong reasons to believe that Kishore has been tortured while in custody of the Rab, which has been accused of serious human rights violations in the past.

In light of these developments, the organisations call on Bangladeshi authorities to conduct prompt, thorough, impartial, and transparent investigations into the death in prison of writer Mushtaq Ahmed and the allegations of torture against cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore. Perpetrators must be identified and brought to justice, the organisations said.

Authorities must also unconditionally and permanently release Kishore, and end

DSA should

FROM PAGE 12

for abolishing or the amendment of the law, the eminent jurist said, "We are for abolishing the Digital Security Act."

About the his party leaders leaving, he said, "Some of our men have left the party. Ask them why they left. We urged all of them to come back, we need unity.

"But they might have different reasons for leaving the party. There might have been power-related interests. If they have a disagreement at the policy level, we can

resolve it. But if not, how could we...?"

Gonoforum's acting secretary AHM Shafiqullah, Mostak Ahmed, and Jan-E-Alam, Suraiya Begum, among others, were present at the press conference.

On the other hand, another portion of Gonoforum organised a human chain in front of the press club, demanding the abolishment of the DSA and justice for Mushtaq Ahmed, who died while in jail under the DSA. Jaglul Haider Afrik and Latiful Bari Hamim, among others, were present at the human chain.



A bookstall owner at his shop in Tangail's Ghatail upazila. Sales have dropped drastically since outbreak of the deadly coronavirus.

PHOTO: STAR

Abuse of DSA worries editors

FROM PAGE 1
media watchdog, 456 people were prosecuted and arrested in 198 cases under the DSA last year. Of them, 65 are journalists of whom 32 are now facing trial.

Against the backdrop, Law Minister Anisul Huq, in a recent interview with BBC Bangla, said the law would be reviewed. He said steps would be taken so that none can be arrested before the end of investigation in a case under the Act.

"Initially, we welcome this statement from our law minister. We demand that steps must be taken immediately to make the statement of the law minister legally effective. We demand necessary ordinance or legal initiative in this regard immediately," the parishad said in the statement.

During and after the formulation process of the law -- from the draft to its cabinet approval, placing before parliament to the president's approval -- different journalists associations, political parties, the Editors' Council, different local and foreign bodies voiced concern over several sections of the law.

"On behalf of the government, several ministers and members of the parliamentary standing committee sat with us and heard our points of concern. But our demands were ignored. Even the speech of the minister concerned while he was placing the bill in parliament and the opinion of the media representatives placed before the standing committee was not taken into consideration," said the statement.

The representative of the media pinpointed the questionable sections of the law and recommended their amendment. Had those recommendations were taken into consideration, today's situation might not have arisen, it said.

The Editors' Council on September 29, 2018, had given a detail explanation as to why it was concerned over the act.

In the explanation, the Editors' Council expressed concern over 9 sections (8, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, 43 and 53) of the act.

In trying to make a law prevent crimes through digital devices and provide security in the digital sphere, the act ends up policing media operations and controlling the media contents. Sections 8, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31 and 32 are contradictory to freedom of the press, guaranteed by the constitution, it said.

These sections will create a scope for controlling people's freedom of speech and expression. For example, section-8 says the law enforcers can request the BTRC to remove information or block it if it deems any information that are published or circulated in digital media undermining unity of the country or part of it, economic activities, security, defence, religious sentiments, or public rules and order, or creates hatred, hostility towards any ethnicity.

Section-21 says that if any person, through digital media, spreads propaganda or assist it against Liberation War, Spirit of the Liberation War, Father of the Nation, National Anthem, and National Flag, such action will be considered a crime.

Section-25 says if any person using a website or any digital device deliberately or knowingly spreads any information or data that is attacking or intimidating in nature; or if a person publishes or distributes any information, despite knowing that it is false,

to irritate, humiliate, defame or embarrass or to discredit a person, or damages the image and reputation of the state or spreads confusion or with the same purpose publishes or distributes fully or partially distorted information or data despite knowing that it is false, and if any one assists in such actions, then all such actions of the individual will be considered a crime.

Section-28 states that if a person or group with the intention of hurting or inciting religious values or sentiments intentionally or knowingly publishes or promotes something on a website or in any other electronic format, which hurts religious feelings or religious values, then this act of that person will be a crime.

Section-31 states that if a person intentionally publishes or broadcasts something on a website or digital format that causes hostility, hatred or animosity between the various classes or communities concerned or destroys communal harmony or causes instability or disorder or deterioration of law and order or if it happens or is about to happen, then it will be a crime.

Section-32 states that if a person commits or assists in committing any crime under the Official Secrets Act through computer, digital device, computer network, digital network or any other digital means, the person will then be sentenced to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 14 years or a fine not exceeding Tk 25 lakh or both.

The statement also said the DSA will create an atmosphere of panic and intimidation where journalism, especially investigative journalism, will become virtually impossible.

This law will create fear among all the users, including media workers, who uses computers and computer networks.

Section-43 of the act gives the police unlimited powers in terms of entering homes to search them, search offices, search people's bodies and seize everything related to computers, computer networks, servers and digital platforms. The police will be able to arrest any person without a warrant under the powers given by the law. In this case, there is no need to get any kind of approval from any police authorities.

The statement adds that there is ambiguity in this law and many words have been used which can be misinterpreted and easily used against the media.

Another concern of the Sampadak Parishad is that out of about 20 sections of the law relating to crime and punishment, 14 are non-bailable, five are bailable and one is negotiable. This has inevitably created an atmosphere of fear, where the normal practice of journalism has become even more risky.

Those who commit criminal acts on digital platforms must be brought to justice. However, the law needs to be amended immediately to ensure that it is not applied against the media and free-spirited writers, the statement added.

"We demand that all the cases filed against journalists under the Digital Security Act [are withdrawn], all journalists and free-spirited writers who have been arrested and imprisoned under the act be released immediately. We expect the government's due diligence in considering this issue."

Education insts' closure hits small traders hard in Tangail

MIRZA SHAKIL

Mohammad Fazlul Haque, a bookstall owner in Tangail's Ghatail upazila, could not pay rents of his shop and house for the last few months due to abnormal drop of sales in his shop since outbreak of the deadly coronavirus.

He has been keeping his shop open after the lockdown was lifted following government directives but the sales have not increased as the educational institutions still remain shut.

"How can I pay rents of my shop and house maintaining the cost of my family as I cannot sell books more than Tk 500 to Tk 1000 in a day," Fazlul said.

"I have heard that the educational institutions will reopen in the end of March but it will be very tough for me to turn around as I am already in debts," he added.

Not only Fazlul but also hundreds of small traders involved in education related business have been passing hard days for the last one year due to slump in their sales

Although normalcy has returned after the lockdown was relaxed but the traders who are involved with education related business could not turn around so far.

due to shutdown of educational institutions due to coronavirus pandemic.

Those who run shops of educational equipment, tailoring shops making uniforms for students, stationary shops, small cyber cafes, hotels, snacks and fast food shops and photocopyers adjacent to the educational institutions have incurred heavy loss due to the countrywide shutdown of educational institutions.

Although normalcy has

returned after the lockdown was relaxed but the traders who are involved with education related business could not turn around so far.

Many of the traders are still struggling to continue their business while a number of them have already shut their business.

Many of the employees who had jobs at the small shops were also laid off by the shop owners. Many of them have returned to their villages.

Mozammel Haque, who runs a shop at GBG College Intersection area, was passing idle time by browsing social medias as he didn't receive any customer since the morning.

"What can I do? I have no work but sitting idle at the shop. My business is related to educational institutions. So, the people engaged with business like mine have almost become unemployed," he said.

"The deadly corona virus outbreak has almost destroyed my business as well as my financial stability. Now I can neither pay the

rent of the shop nor can shut the business," Mozammel added.

Abu Taher, owner of a shop in the same area that produces and sales different types of crests, said sales of crests have dropped abnormally as such programmes and events have remained suspended due to the pandemic.

"It has become difficult for me to buy food for my family," he said.

Shiplu Miah, a fast food shop owner near a private but busy school at Biswas Betka area in Tangail town said he left the business few months ago due to failing to pay the shop rent.

"I will not able to reopen my shop after re-opening of the school as I don't have the capital required for it," he said.

"No one including the government or any other institutions provided me any incentives or loans for sustaining my business in the crisis period.

After my little savings ended, I have been running my family for the last few months by taking loans from relatives and friends," he added.



PHOTO: STAR

People from indigenous Rakhine community form an hour-long human chain in front of Seema Buddhist Temple at Misrepara in Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila yesterday, demanding removal of all the illegal structures and business establishments from the temple premises. The century-old temple was established on 1.86 acres of land in 1911.

EXPLOSION AT FENI BUILDING 3 of a family injured

A CORRESPONDENT, Feni

A woman and her two daughters sustained burn injuries in an explosion inside their rented flat in Feni municipality area early yesterday.

The injured were first taken to 250-bed General Hospital, from where victims Meherun Nesa, 40, and her elder daughter Hafsa Islam, 15, were shifted to the Burn Unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) as their condition deteriorated.

Meanwhile, after giving primary treatment Meherun's younger daughter was released from the hospital, Resident Medical Officer (RMO) of 250-bed General Hospital Iqbal Hossain Bhuiyan said, adding that Meherun and Hafsa, who sustained 60 percent burn injuries, were referred to DMCH.

According to police and fire service officials, the explosion took place on the fifth floor of the six-storey building on Shaheed Shahidullah Kaisar Road in the municipality in the early hours of yesterday.

The explosion damaged the third, fourth and sixth floors of the building, police said, adding that the reason behind the incident could not be known immediately.

CU student takes own life

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

A university student allegedly took his own life in Khagrachhari's Ramgarh upazila early yesterday.

The deceased, Naimul Hassan Mission, 21, was a second year student of Chemistry Department at Chattogram University (CU), Inspector (Investigation) of Ramgarh Police Station Monir Hossain said.

Police said Mission had been suffering from mental depression for the last two years.

Teen held for rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police arrested a teenage boy yesterday in a case for raping a minor girl in Dumuria upazila on Friday.

The law enforcers detained the 14-year-old after father of the five-year-old victim filed a case with Dumuria Police Station, police said.

According to the case statement, on Friday evening, the accused lured the neighbouring girl with chocolate, took her to his house and raped her.

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Website: www.bmcollege.gov.bd
Memo No. cedp/bmc/otm/2021/02/G-04 Date: 06/03/2021

e-Tender Notice 02/2020-2021
e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following package:

Sl. No.	Tender ID No.	Name of works	Last date and time of tender security submission	Tender closing date & time
1.	553753	Procurement of Generator & Air-conditioner	22-Mar-2021 2:00pm	22-Mar-2021 3:00pm

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank's branches up to 21-Mar-2021 4:00pm. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Professor Dr. Mohammad Golam Kibria
Principal
Govt. BM College, Barishal
Phone: 0431-64793
E-mail: principalbmcollege@gmail.com

GD-453

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Project Director
Institutional Development and Capacity Building (Phase-2) Project
River Research Institute, 72, Green Road, Dhaka
Phone: +880-2-58155538, Fax: +0631-63065, Website: www.rii.gov.bd
Memo No. RRI/GD-26/2020/1210 Date: 03/03/2021

e-Tender Notice (Re-Tender)
This is to notify all concerned that the following tenders are invited in the National e-GP Portal:

Sl. No.	Tender ID No.	Last selling date	Opening date
1	533008	14/03/2021	15/03/2021

This is an online tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP helpdesk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Dr. Moniruzzaman Khan Eusufzai
Senior Scientific Officer & Project Director
mkeusufzai@rii.gov.bd

GD-452

ANTI-COUP PROTESTS IN MYANMAR

Grave of slain 'Everything will be OK' protester disturbed

REUTERS

Guarded by police and soldiers, authorities in Myanmar disturbed the grave of a 19-year-old woman who became an icon of the anti-coup protest movement after she was shot dead wearing a T-shirt that read "Everything will be OK", a witness and local media said.

One witness said the body of Kyal Sin, widely known as Angel, was removed on Friday, examined and returned, before the tomb was re-sealed in Myanmar's second city of Mandalay. The independent Mizzima news service reported the same.

A military spokesman did not answer calls seeking comment. Reuters was unable to contact police for comment.

State media on Friday questioned reports that the protester had been killed by security forces when they opened fire to disperse a demonstration on Wednesday and said the cause of death was being investigated by "rule of law bodies".

Pictures provided to Reuters by a resident who visited the grave on Saturday showed cement that was still drying as well as discarded rubber gloves, boots, surgical gowns. One block appeared to be stained with blood.

A witness who lives near the graveyard said he had seen the grave opened using power tools on Friday evening by a team of at least 30 people that arrived with four cars and two police trucks as well as two trucks of soldiers for security.



"They pulled out the coffin and removed the body and placed it on a bench. They even placed a brick under the head," said the witness, who declined to be named for fear of reprisals.

"Those who seemed to be doctors wearing the protective cover did something to the body, I think they were touching the head. They took a small piece from the body and showed it to each other," he said.

Reuters was unable to contact Kyal Sin's family. Photographs of her body on Wednesday showed a bloody head wound.

Kyal Sin was among at least 38 people killed on Wednesday, the bloodiest day so far in attempts by security forces to stop protests against the Feb. 1 coup that has prompted daily demonstrations for over a month.

The army says it has been restrained in the use of force, but that it will not allow protests to threaten stability.

Protesters have rejected army's election fraud claims and its promise of new elections.



Protesters react as they are engulfed by tear gas fired by police during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon, yesterday. Inset, Police beat a protester as they detain him in Yangon.

PHOTO: AFP

HATING IN THE NAME OF GOD IS 'GREATEST BLASPHEMY'

Says Pope Francis as he meets Iraq's top Shia cleric, visits birthplace of Abraham

REUTERS, UR, Iraq

Pope Francis entered a narrow alleyway in Iraq's holy city of Najaf to hold a historic meeting with the country's top Shia cleric and visited the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham yesterday to condemn violence in the name of God as "the greatest blasphemy".

The back-to-back inter-religious events some 200 km (125 miles) apart, one in a dusty, built-up city and the other in a desert plain, reinforced the main theme of his risky trip to Iraq - that the country has suffered far too much.

"From this place, where faith was born, from the land of our father Abraham, let us affirm that God is merciful and that the greatest blasphemy is to profane his name by hating our brothers and sisters," Francis said in Ur, where Abraham was born.

With the desert wind blowing his white cassock, Francis, sitting with Muslim, Christian and Yazidi leaders, spoke within sight of the archaeological dig of the 4,000-year-old city that comprises a pyramid-style Ziggurat, a residential complex, temples and palaces.

Hours earlier in Najaf, Francis met Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a visit that was a powerful signal for coexistence in a country



tom by violence.

The US invasion of 2003 plunged Iraq into years of sectarian conflict. Security has improved since the defeat of Islamic State in 2017, but Iraq continues to be a theatre for global and regional score-settling, especially a bitter US-Iran rivalry that has played out on Iraqi soil.

Sistani, 90, is one of the most influential figures in Shia Islam, both within Iraq and beyond, and their meeting was the first between a pope and such a senior Shia cleric.

After the meeting, Sistani called on world religious leaders to hold great powers to account and for wisdom and sense to prevail over war. He added Christians should live like all Iraqis in peace and coexistence.

Although Abraham is considered the father

of Christians, Muslims and Jews, no Jewish representative was present at the inter-religious event in Ur.

"Hostility, extremism and violence are not born of a religious heart: they are betrayals of religion," the pope said in Ur. "We believers cannot be silent when terrorism abuses religion; indeed, we are called unambiguously to dispel all misunderstandings," he said.

Islamic State militants, who tried to establish a caliphate covering several countries, ravaged northern Iraq from 2014-2017, killing Christians as well as Muslims who opposed the insurgents.

Iraq's Christian community, one of the oldest in the world, has been particularly devastated, falling to about 300,000 from about 1.5 million before the U.S. invasion and the brutal Islamist militant violence that followed.

The pope, who began his four-day visit to Iraq in Baghdad on Friday, was expected to say Mass later yesterday at the capital's Chaldean Cathedral of Saint Joseph.

Today he travels north to Mosul, a former Islamic State stronghold, where churches and other buildings there still bear the scars of conflict.

Pak PM survives confidence vote boycotted by opposition

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan survived a vote of confidence by the country's parliament yesterday, days after his party lost a key Senate seat to an opposition candidate.

Ruling party and opposition activists clashed briefly outside the parliament ahead of the vote, with local TV channels showing a shoe being thrown at former interior minister Ahsan Iqbal.

Khan secured 178 votes in the 340-seat National Assembly through an open ballot, boycotted by the main opposition parties, the Pakistan Muslim League and Pakistan Peoples Party.

The vote followed the contentious results of Wednesday's election to Pakistan's Senate, whose members are chosen by provincial parliaments and lawmakers from the lower house.

In a sign of growing ruptures within his ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party,

Khan's foreign minister lost his seat to an opposition candidate, suggesting some members of the party had switched their loyalty.

Khan -- who came to power in 2018 after a fiery campaign vowing to clean up corruption -- accused the opposition of horse-trading and buying some of his party's parliamentarians in a bid to ward off graft investigations.

Speaking following the confidence vote, the prime minister accused the opposition parties of "plundering national wealth" during their times in office.

Addressing party workers outside the parliament, senior opposition leader and former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi denounced the vote as "illegal and unconstitutional".

Since taking office, Khan has struggled to stabilise an economy hit by soaring inflation, a depreciating rupee and ballooning deficits.



Migrant families and children sit in the back of a police truck for transport after they crossed the Rio Grande River into the United States from Mexico in Penitas, Texas, US, on Friday. U.S. border agents detained nearly 100,000 migrants at the US-Mexico border in February, according to two people familiar with preliminary figures, the highest monthly total since a major border surge in mid-2019.

PHOTO: REUTERS

100TH DAY OF FARMERS' AGITATION

Defiant protesters block highway outside Delhi

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian farmers yesterday blocked a six-lane expressway outside New Delhi to mark the 100th day of protests against deregulation of agriculture markets, to add pressure on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

Farmers young and old headed in cars, trucks and tractors to the highway for a five-hour roadblock to oppose three farm laws enacted in September 2020 they say hurt them by opening up the agriculture sector to private players.

Modi has called the laws much-needed reforms for the country's vast and antiquated agriculture sector, and painted the protests as politically motivated.

"The Modi government has turned this protest movement into an ego issue. They are unable to see the pain of the farmers," said Amarjeet Singh, a 68-year-old farmer. "They have left us no option but to protest."

Tens of thousands of farmers from several north Indian states have been camped out on the outskirts of the capital in bitter cold since December demanding that the laws be repealed.

Several rounds of negotiations between farmer leaders and the government have failed. Modi's government has lashed out at supporters of the protests and stands accused by rights activists of using heavy-handed tactics to curb the protests.

While the protests have been mostly peaceful, a brief spate of violence on Jan 26 led to the death of a protestor, and the police have filed criminal charges against eight journalists over alleged misreporting on the events of the day.

As the capital braces for harsh summers and the harvesting season begins, farmers gathering yesterday said they had no plans to turn back until their demands were met.

"Bitter cold didn't affect our movement, and neither will deathly heat," said Raja Singh, a 58-year-old farmer from Punjab state.

DISSENT IN INNER MONGOLIA

Xi pushes Mandarin to 'solve ethnic problems'

AFP, Beijing

Authorities in Inner Mongolia must "solve ethnic problems" and push the use of the Mandarin language, Chinese President Xi Jinping has said, months after the region was rocked by protests over a new rule that would reduce the use of the local language.

The region in China's far north borders the independent nation of Mongolia, with which it shares ethnic, cultural and linguistic ties.

Tens of thousands took part in demonstrations and school boycotts last year after an edict mandated Mandarin replace Mongolian as the language of instruction, part of a nationwide drive to assimilate China's ethnic minorities into the majority Han culture.

On Friday, Xi doubled down on the integration policies.

Speaking at an annual convention of political leaders in Beijing, he said Inner Mongolia should "unwaveringly promote the use of national common textbooks," to correct "wrong ideas" on culture and nationality, according to a readout of the meeting in state media.

He said Inner Mongolians should "learn by heart that the Han ethnicity cannot be separate from ethnic minorities and that ethnic minorities cannot be separated from the Han ethnicity."

The clampdown echoed Beijing's moves in Xinjiang and Tibet, where similar assimilation policies have been implemented.

Nasa rover goes for a 'spin' on Mars

AFP, WASHINGTON

The Mars rover Perseverance has successfully conducted its first test drive on the Red Planet, the US space agency Nasa said Friday.

The six-wheeled rover travelled about 6.5 meters (21.3 feet) in 33 minutes on Thursday, Nasa said.

It drove four meters forward, turned in place 150 degrees to the left, and then backed up 2.5 meters, leaving tire tracks in the Martian dust.

"This was our first chance to 'kick the tires' and take Perseverance out for a spin," said Anais Zariifan, Perseverance mobility test bed engineer at Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

Zariifan said the test drive went "incredibly well" and represented a "huge milestone for the mission and the mobility team. We're going to do some longer drives," she added.

"This is just the beginning." The rover can cover 200 meters per



Martian day, which is slightly longer than a day on Earth.

And it goes five times faster than Curiosity, its predecessor, which is still functioning eight years after landing on Mars.

Perseverance deputy mission manager Robert Hogg said engineers were also preparing for the first flight of a helicopter drone in the coming months carried by the rover. They are currently working on

the flight sight and other details, he added.

Perseverance was launched on July 30, 2020 and landed on the surface of Mars on February 18 on a mission to search for signs of past life on the Red Planet.

The rover's primary mission will last just over two years but it is likely to remain operational well beyond that.

Over the coming years, Perseverance will attempt to collect 30 rock and soil samples in sealed tubes to be sent back to Earth sometime in the 2030s for analysis.

About the size of an SUV, the craft weighs a ton, is equipped with a seven-foot-long robotic arm, has 19 cameras, two microphones and a suite of cutting-edge instruments.

So far it has sent back more than 7,000 photographs.

The rover is only the fifth to set its wheels down on Mars, all of them American. The feat was first accomplished in 1997.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Clashes kill 90 in Yemen's Marib

Fierce fighting between Yemeni pro-government forces and Iran-backed Huthi rebels has killed at least 90 combatants on both sides in the past 24 hours, government military sources said yesterday. The Shia rebels launched an offensive last month to seize Marib, the last stronghold in northern Yemen of pro-government forces who are backed by a Saudi-led military coalition. The clashes in the oil-rich province left 32 dead among government forces and loyalist tribes, while 58 Huthi rebels were killed in coalition air strikes, the sources told AFP. The fighting also left dozens of people wounded, the sources added. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday urged the Huthis to halt their offensive in Marib, as he announced \$191 million in aid at a donors' conference. The United Nations had sought to raise \$3.85 billion from more than 100 governments and donors, but only \$1.7 billion was offered.

Thai protesters rally defying warnings

Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in the Thai capital yesterday evening to demand that authorities release some protest leaders from jail, defying an order on late Friday banning public gatherings in the city. A youth-led protest movement sprang up last year calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, a former junta leader, and reform of the powerful monarchy. Thai courts have denied recent requests for bail for some of the jailed protest leaders. A few protesters burned photographs of the king at the rally. Separate groups also led two other protests at other locations in Bangkok. Earlier yesterday, police warned protesters that they risked being arrested and that police might use harsher measures if protesters became unruly.

Taliban says met with US envoy in Doha

Washington's special envoy to Afghanistan met with the Taliban in Qatar, the insurgents said yesterday, as efforts intensify to revive a peace process faced with mounting violence and a US troop withdrawal deadline. The envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, held talks earlier this week with Afghan leaders in Kabul. Taliban spokesman Muhammad Naeem tweeted that Khalilzad and the top US general in Afghanistan met with the insurgents' negotiating team in Doha late Friday. Speculation is rife over America's future in Afghanistan, after the White House announced plans to review a withdrawal deal brokered by Khalilzad and the Taliban in Doha last year. Under that agreement, the US is set to withdraw from Afghanistan in May, but a surge in fighting has sparked concerns that a speedy exit may unleash greater chaos as peace talks between the Kabul government and Taliban continue to stall.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

The origins of COVID-19

SHAKEEL MAHMOOD

The World Health Organisation (WHO) team on its visit to the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the outbreak first emerged at a seafood market in late 2019, said the team's work had uncovered new information. The WHO said that there was still insufficient evidence to determine how the virus entered Wuhan, but that it was clear it was circulating elsewhere in Wuhan at the same time. WHO ruled out the lab leak and accepting that COVID-19 could have originated outside of China. The team also considered that the first human transmission took place across the border in Laos or Vietnam.

According to Professor Tom Jefferson at the University of Oxford, pointed that rather than originating in China, COVID-19 may have been lying dormant across the world until emerging under favourable environmental condition. Traces of COVID-19 found in sewage samples from Spain, Italy, and Brazil, which pre-date its discovery in China. Recent reports suggest that this virus might have been responsible for a spike in pneumonia cases in France, and few researchers believe it could have entered Wuhan from Europe.

In 1918, around 30% of the population of Western Samoa died of the Spanish flu, and they had not had any communication with the outside world. "The explanation for this could only be that these agents do not come or go anywhere. They are always

here and something ignites them, maybe human density or environmental conditions, and this is what we should be looking for," he added. Coronavirus traces found in Spanish sewage samples from March 2019.

An internationally renowned medical microbiologist and

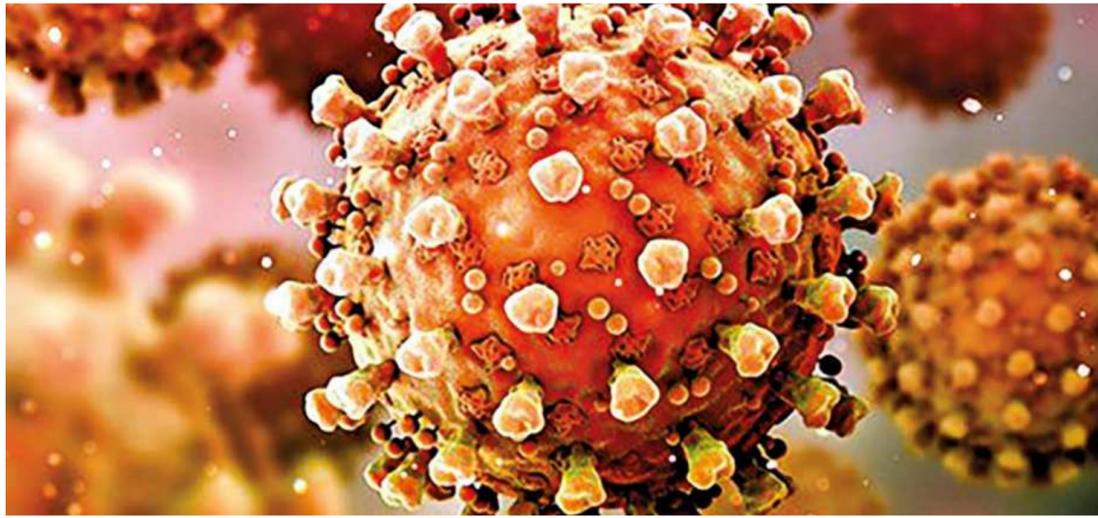
immuno-electron microscopy in Bangladesh in 1978.

Professor Choudhury mentioned in his book 'Modern Medical Microbiology' in the section 'Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases' that "the myth that infectious diseases are being controlled and

is quite obvious that microbes can strike us back whenever the delicate ecological balance is disturbed".

Professor Choudhury's prediction, University of Oxford Professor's observation and recent WHO findings in Wuhan - all theories are similar. 21 years

humans will suffer more in the future from microbes. Human behaviour needs to be changed when it comes to environmental issues. It is an injustice to nature, in other words, not doing a natural justice to nature. The relationship between humans and nature should be harmless.



recipient of the first-ever Independence Day Award of Bangladesh, the late Major General Mahmudur Rahman Choudhury was an eminent medical scientist and physician of Bangladesh. The late Professor Emeritus Dr Mahmudur Rahman Choudhury was a pioneer of

are fading away has evidently been found to be incorrect. There exist definite indications that alterations, which we make in our lifestyles and environment, could have profound impacts on the dynamic biological changes in the microbial world. The results can be disastrous. It

ago, Professor Choudhury was correct, since he speculated that this might happen if we do not keep the ecological balance intact. Hence, it is evident that to eradicate this paradox of pandemic, the ecological balance needs to be restored in the global atmosphere, otherwise,

"Do no harm" - not only to humans but also to nature. It appears that human behavioural change is the key to prevent all domains of infections by viruses and microbes.

The writer is a PhD Candidate at the University of Newcastle, Australia. E-mail: shakeel.mahmood@uon.edu.au

DID YOU KNOW?



5 fruits and vegetables a day may be optimal in terms of survival

STAR HEALTH DESK

Five servings of fruits and vegetables a day — in particular, three vegetables and two fruits — provide the greatest mortality benefit, according to an observational study and meta-analysis in Circulation.

Researchers analysed results from the Nurses' Health Study and Health Professionals Follow-Up Study. Over 100,000 people regularly completed food-frequency questionnaires and were followed for up to 30 years. During that time, nearly a third of participants died.

After multivariable adjustment, the greatest mortality benefit was seen for five servings of produce a day, compared with two servings (hazard ratio, 0.88).

Eating more than five servings a day was not associated with greater risk reductions. Of note, increased intake of starchy vegetables, fruit juices, or potatoes was not associated with lower mortality. Results were similar in a meta-analysis of roughly 25 studies.

We often become dependent on the supplements for vitamins and minerals rather than exploring in the natural sources. Sometimes, we are confused how much should we take on a regular basis. Moreover, various forms of food adulteration (for preservation, adding colour and for other reasons) have made it difficult to depend on the fruits from natural sources.

Editorialists in the journal conclude however: "In the post COVID-19 world, where diets and other health behaviours have been adversely impacted due to lockdowns, more, not less, needs to be done to tackle the epidemic of unhealthy eating."

HEALTH bulletin



Even in polluted areas, regular physical activity is an effective strategy to prevent diabetes

New research published in *Diabetologia* (the journal of the European Association for the Study of Diabetes [EASD]) shows that regular physical activity is a safe diabetes prevention strategy for people residing in relatively polluted regions.

The authors say: "We found that high levels of habitual physical activity combined with low levels of chronic PM2.5 exposure were associated with a lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes (T2D), whereas low levels of habitual physical activity combined with high levels of chronic PM2.5 exposure were associated with a higher risk of developing T2D."

They further emphasise that "the benefits of habitual physical activity on T2D remained stable in participants with different levels of PM2.5 exposure." Additional analysis showed that the effect on diabetes risk seemed to be more pronounced for higher levels of pollution that it was for lower levels of physical activity.

The findings suggest that habitual physical activity is a safe strategy for diabetes prevention for people who reside in relatively polluted areas and should be promoted. The study reinforces the importance of air pollution mitigation for diabetes prevention.

Zinc: The magic mineral

DR TAUHIDA RAHMAN EREEN

Zinc is among the most talked about health and skin benefitting micronutrients in town right now. Naturally occurring powerful mineral zinc is a key ingredient to overall bodily health.

Essential mineral zinc performs healthy cell metabolism, optimises the immune system and acts smartly as a common cold fighter. Zinc also helps the body protein synthesis and wound healing process. The functions of zinc include antioxidant activity.

Trace mineral zinc acts as a co-factor for certain enzymes involved in the effective functioning of the antioxidant defence system. It helps protect against the oxidative stress caused by free radicals. Several studies find a strong correlation between low serum zinc levels and severe COVID-19. COVID-19 patients showed significantly lower zinc levels when compared to healthy controls.

Are you aiming to improve the skin's well-being? Your skin needs the mineral zinc to stay moisturised and healthy. One of the best-known minerals for skin and hair health is zinc. Zinc mineral works as an ultraviolet (UV) protective filter, that protects your skin from UV damage. Zinc oxide is present in nano form in a variety of hair and skincare products. Support your immune system with zinc fortified food and supplements with antiviral properties. Oral zinc sulphate supplementation (10mg/kg/day) is an adjuvant therapy of viral wart.

Zinc pyrithione is an active ingredient in anti-dandruff shampoo. Zinc pyrithione containing shampoo is intended to kill dandruff-causing fungi that live on the scalp. Zinc helps control sebum production, it has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties. You can take it orally and also use topically in your acne-fighting arsenal. Zinc oxide paste is

the ideal diaper rash protectant. It soothes your baby's sensitive skin and gives it a barrier effect.

The micronutrient zinc is naturally found in many food sources such as fish, oyster, mushroom, whole grain cereals, and dairy products. In general, nuts, beans and seeds are good choices because they have zinc. lobster is delicious food that is rich in zinc.

Our body needs only a very small amount zinc each day. Adequate daily intake of zinc is 11 mg for men and 8 mg for women. Poor dietary intake, ageing process, inadequate absorption, increased loss are responsible for zinc deficiency.

Eating foods rich in zinc and incorporating a supplement into your diet may harmonise the issue. People who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or following a plant-based diet require extra zinc. However, as always, check with a doctor before using a supplement.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Seminar held on DPP-4 inhibitors and COVID-19 related outcomes among patients with T2D

STAR HEALTH REPORT

A scientific seminar on "DPP-4 inhibitors and COVID-19 related outcomes among patients with type 2 diabetes (T2D)" was organised by NIPRO JMI Pharma Ltd. at the capital recently, says a press release. Distinguished Professor AK Azad Khan, President of Bangladesh Diabetic Association, was the chief guest at the event.

The session speaker, renowned endocrinologist Dr Md Feroz Amin presented that the use of DPP-4 inhibitors in COVID-19 patients with diabetes might significantly lower the probability of all-cause mortality and severe manifestations of COVID-19.



SHE PLAYS DIFFERENT ROLES In YOUR LIFE

International Women's Day 8 March

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Achieving the mass inoculation target

Success depends on door-to-door registration, bridging the rural-urban gap

WHILE as per the National Vaccine Deployment Plan, 70 lakh people should have been inoculated in the first month of the mass vaccination campaign that began on February 7, the government has achieved only 51.15 percent of the target, with 35.81 lakh people getting their first shot of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine as of March 4. There have been some gaps in the government's vaccine deployment plan, which is why the number of people getting registered for the vaccine is still not satisfactory. However, it is encouraging that Bangladesh's performance in the global context is good—it holds the 18th position among all countries, with 2.17 percent of its population immunised till March 4.

There have been some major limitations in the government's vaccination plan from the very beginning, as its inoculation programme started without conducting any major awareness campaigns. It took people quite some time to gain trust in the effectiveness of the vaccines. Now that the urban educated people from well-off backgrounds are registering for vaccinations online through the Surokha app, the urban poor are lagging far behind in the race. Needless to say, many people are finding the registration process quite difficult. Moreover, fear and superstition surrounding the vaccine are still pervasive among the urban poor and the rural people in general. In addition, the lower participation of women compared to men in the vaccination programme is a big issue that should be addressed by the authorities—of the 35.81 lakh people vaccinated till March 4, only 12,87,100 were women. Furthermore, while some districts of the country vaccinated quite a large number of their population, the performance of many other districts is still not satisfactory, which only reveals the inefficiency of some of the district authorities.

As we identify the reasons behind the slow pace of vaccination in the country, we hope that the government will consider these factors while working towards achieving its vaccination target. Since people living in urban areas responded more than those in rural areas, awareness needs to be raised amongst rural populations about the need to get vaccinated. The digital centres, set up by the Local Government Division in every union, should assist people in rural areas in registering for inoculation. Moreover, more vaccination centres should be set up in remote areas and online registration support should be taken to people's doorsteps, as suggested by health experts. Last but not the least, the authorities must address the huge gender gap that exists in the mass inoculation campaign to make the programme a success.

Another death at a shipbreaking yard

Dismally unsafe working conditions to blame

WE are appalled at the tragic and untimely death of a worker in one of Chattogram's shipbreaking yards. The foreman, Ripon Mia (37), died on the spot after iron sheets fell on him at Tasin Steel Shipbreaking Yard, a yard owned by a Chattogram-4 lawmaker.

Whenever a worker at a shipbreaking yard dies during duty—which happens far too frequently—the employers' first course of action is usually to try to evade responsibility and accountability. But while the owner of the yard in question had no qualms confirming the cause of Ripon's death, his disregard in saying that "sometimes incidents like this happen in spite of [owners'] efforts to save workers from accidents" is quite shocking. That the gruesome death of an employee (while he was on duty at midnight) should invoke such indifference is outrageous.

Besides incidents such as this, workers in the port city's shipbreaking yards are also injured or killed by inhaling toxic fumes, receiving burns, or even from explosions of oil tanks when working without proper (or any) safety gear on. Another example of how these workers' safety is not prioritised is that last year, the yards began reopening in April less than a month after they were shut down due to the coronavirus outbreak. Even then, there was not enough protective gear to protect the workers from the deadly virus.

In its guidelines for safety and health in shipbreaking in Asian countries, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) lists myriad safety precautions, including the wearing of appropriate PPE, which are hardly ever practiced in Chattogram's shipbreaking yards. Being in the informal sector, these yards are also not always subject to controls or inspections for proper health and safety measures. And with many of the workers being under the age of 18, these jobs would also violate the Minimum Age and Worst Forms of Child Labour Conventions of the ILO.

It is clear that Ripon's death is not an isolated event, and that it could well have occurred at any of the over 100 such shipbreaking yards in Chattogram, as none of them have ensured proper safety of their workers. Even more alarming is the non-existence of any action being taken against these yards. Although there were 181 such deaths between 2005 and 2017, and several more in the following years, not a single case has ever been filed against a yard owner in the history of this industry, according to the president of the Shipbreaking Trade Union Forum.

So who is to blame for these injuries and deaths? A letter from the Ministry of Industry (issued on December 30 last year) blames yard owners' apathy when it comes to ensuring a safe workplace for employees. But where can we find the empathy of the Ministry itself in mentioning that "accidents like this give a negative impression about the yards in the international arena" in the letter? Why is the perception of the international arena the only concern when we are discussing the safety of human lives?

While the owners of these yards are morally obligated to protect their employees from dangerous working conditions, we believe it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Industries (and others in charge) to make sure that visible and effective changes are made so that injuries and deaths at shipbreaking yards can be prevented.

The case for rescinding the Digital Security Act



C R ABRAR

THEY were both active, conscientious, thinking citizens. Both were passionate about social issues, and were gifted—one had a penchant for writing, the other for drawing cartoons. Both were tech-savvy and loved sharing

their views on social media, banding together to set up a digital platform proudly titled "I am Bangladeshi". Both were under the belief that as citizens of a democratic country, they were relatively free to express their views and had the protection of the constitution and the law. Unfortunately, as events would reveal, they were both sadly mistaken on that count. When the time came, the facade of protection crumbled. One had to pay the ultimate price, as his soul, yearning for freedom, sneaked out of the prison van; the other now languishes in severe bodily pain, mourning his comrade who promised him company to see the Everest after "they get out and get fit".

Within months of the infamous Kajol episode, the Mushtaq Ahmed and Kishore Kabir tragedies have unleashed citizens' fury against the Digital Security Act (DSA). Every freedom-loving citizen has rallied behind the call for rescinding the DSA. Termed as the "killer Act", "an archaic legislation" and "a medieval law", critics have argued that it cannot exist in a democratic polity as it blocks people's voices. The mixing of the concepts of "criticism of government" and "sedition", and interchangeable use of terms like "anti-government" and "anti-state" in the Act's application, is evidence enough that it was framed not in the interests of the people/state, but of those in command of the state apparatus. Litmus papers have turned red in all three cases (Kajol, Mushtaq and Kishore) with regard to the efficacy of the law.

The DSA substantively curtails freedoms of expression, thought and the media. With its vague provisions, the law was open to abuse from the very beginning. It targeted free thinkers, journalists and dissenting voices. Not surprisingly, it was enacted only months before the 2018 elections.

The law was framed without consultation with major stakeholders. Those involved in the drafting of the law refused to take into account the inputs of those who were likely to be most affected by its application. In response to the widespread condemnation about the draconian contents and broad sweep of the law, the umpteen numbers of ministerial promises to amend it and introduce Rules to clarify the ambiguities have remained undelivered. The non-bailable provisions have made the law inherently unfair. As Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua, counsel for both Mushtaq and Kishore, observed, it deprives the accused of the opportunity to put up a legal fight that s/he generally enjoys and "there is no scope for the accused to get justice".

The Bangladesh police headquarters has reported that in the first five months alone of 2020, 403 cases were filed and 353 arrests were made under the Act. No further

information was made available for the subsequent seven-month period.

A detailed analysis of 197 cases of 2020 by Prothom Alo found that most of the cases were filed for "making adverse remarks" (*kotukti*), "defamation", "sharing distorted images", "spreading rumours" and "conspiracy against the state". In 80 percent of instances, the plaintiff was either leaders or activists of the ruling party or police. Of the 197 cases, 88 were filed by Awami League MPs, union council chairs and activists of youth, student and volunteer wings of the ruling party, and 70 more were filed by the police. Journalists were the principal targets.

The investigation further revealed that the news items for which journalists were charged included theft of relief goods, criticism of Covid-19 treatment arrangements, criticism of actions of local MPs and public representatives, and land/property grabbing by the locally

there was not enough evidence to support the charges. In merely 25 cases, the state was able to prove the charges. Of these, 24 were filed under the ICT Act and only one under the DSA.

Thus, there is little doubt that instead of providing redress to the aggrieved, the DSA has come in as a handy tool to suppress those who may hold contra views or dare to question and expose the wrongdoings of those who hold power. The fact that most of the provisions are made non-bailable means that the accused may have to endure incarceration for prolonged periods, even before s/he is found guilty. It therefore provides some quarters, who do not wish to be accountable and be questioned for their deeds, an opportunity to abuse the law. This provision of the law is contrary to the tenets of the rule of law and human rights. As rights lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua further states "any application (of such an inherently flawed law), itself is a misapplication".



PHOTO: COLLECTED

powerful. Some cases were filed for updating Facebook statuses on current topics, and criticisms of MPs and local government representatives. Of the 197 cases, as many as 48 were filed for allegedly publishing false news against MPs, public representatives and ruling party activists; 40 for objectionable posting against Bangabandhu, the president, prime minister and other important persons of the state, and 30 for passing adverse remarks against religion, hurting religious sentiments and spreading communal hatred.

The tenuous nature of the charges is evident from the following figures. In the last seven years, of the 2,682 cases filed at the Dhaka Cyber Tribunal—the only competent court to try cases under the ICT Act and DSA—990 were disposed of up to September 2020. Of those, more than 400 were disposed of after the final report. In many cases, the accused were exonerated as

A brief examination of Mushtaq and Kishore's cases would reveal the extent of the misapplication of the law and the propensity of law enforcers to circumvent the rule of law.

Firstly, in his interview with *The Daily Star* within hours of his release, Kishore alleged that he was picked up by 17 plainclothesmen, some brandishing weapons, without any warrant or identity documents. This is a violation of the law and High Court order.

Secondly, Kishore was picked up an hour before Ifaara on May 2, 2020 and produced before the magistrate on May 6. The concerned agency claimed that he was picked up at 2:30 am on May 5 and thus within the time-frame allowed under the law. In reality, if one goes by Kishore's statement about the timing of his arrest, one has to surmise that he was involuntarily disappeared during the interim days.

WTO receives a booster shot with new DG



ABDULLAH SHIBLI

THE World Trade Organization (WTO), the body that is entrusted to promote free international trade, has recently received two very well-timed shots in the arm. The WTO was in a moribund state—almost on life support—during the last year and a half, following the outbreak of the US-China trade war and the total decimation of its Appellate Court. International trade among nations suffered a massive blow during the Covid-19 pandemic and there

was concern on whether the WTO would just fold itself up and wait for another international body to take its place. Now, the WTO cheerleaders can keep their fingers crossed and hope that this year will bring about a much-needed morale boost and restore some normalcy in the global arena. This will not only facilitate the resuscitation of the WTO but also enable rule-based trade and commerce to grow, which will in turn create a synergistic effect on economic growth and create a virtuous cycle.

On March 1, the new Director-General (DG) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a Nigerian economist and former government minister, took charge at the WTO headquarters on the banks of Lake Geneva. On the same day, she addressed the ambassadors and other top government envoys that make up the 164-member body's General Council and minced no words. "The world is leaving the WTO behind. Leaders and decision-makers are impatient for change," she said. She warned them that several trade ministers had told her that "if things don't change," they would not attend the WTO's biggest event—a ministerial meeting—"because it is a waste of their time."

Incidentally, she is the first woman and African to head the WTO. With International Women's Day a few days away, her ascendancy bodes well for the role of women in international leadership.

The WTO has been without a permanent leader since the former DG Roberto Azevedo stepped down on August 31, a year ahead of his term. Dr Okonjo-Iweala will be at the helm for a renewable term expiring on August 31, 2025. However, she understands that she does not have much time before the next Ministerial Council meets in June 2021 in Nur-Sultan, the Kazakh capital. The meeting, known as MC12, will be an important

milestone as the world economy emerges from the clutches of the pandemic.

The new DG is aware of the role she will play as she tries to revive the WTO. She made three important points on her first day at work. As was expected, she called for a "technology transfer" when it comes to Covid-19 vaccines. After her appointment last month, she said that promoting and facilitating the enhanced distribution of Covid-19 vaccines and protective equipment will be high on her priorities list.

Second, she urged member nations to reach a deal to reduce overfishing after years of fruitless talks. Third, she immediately set about trying to change the organisation's culture. "It cannot be business as usual. We have to change our approach from debate and rounds of questions to delivering results," she proclaimed to the General Council.

MC12 was originally scheduled to take place on June 8-11, 2020, but was postponed due to the Covid-19 outbreak. The last meeting of this group, MC11, was a total failure and the leaders of member countries need to recognise now that the issues need to be resolved well in advance of the ministerial council meeting, and that talks need to be sped up. Areas of contention include e-commerce, subsidies, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The new DG's arrival couldn't have come at a better time. The future of world trade has been in jeopardy since the US-China trade war broke out in 2018. Even before the pandemic hit in early 2020, the WTO was facing mounting problems. Countries closed their borders, and nationalistic agendas challenged the economic argument for free trade. "Numerous countries began to impose trade restrictions—on imports and exports—under the pretense of national security."

The WTO forecasts that trade could decline this year by as much as 32 percent. World merchandise volumes had been in decline for nearly a year, even before the outbreak hit. In 2019, governments introduced trade restrictions, including tariff increases, stricter customs procedures, and the imposition of import taxes and export duties, on USD 747 billion worth of global imports, the highest since 2012, prompting businesses to postpone investment and hurting growth, job creation and purchasing power around the world.

However, Okonjo-Iweala is realistic in terms of her expectations. In an online press conference after her election in mid-February, she said, her task "will not

be easy because we also have the issue of lack of trust among members which has built up over time, not just among the US and China and the US and the EU... but also between developing and developed country members, and we need to work through that."

Okono-Iweala holds a PhD from MIT and is the board chair of Gavi, a global alliance to ensure low-income countries can access life-saving vaccines. Many are hoping that her political interpersonal skills, rather than trade background, can help inject some confidence back into the system. "She can contribute to strengthening multilateralism by using her influence," said Peter Ungphakorn, a former WTO secretariat staff member. "There is cause for renewed optimism that the WTO can measure up to the tasks ahead," Alan Wolff, a WTO deputy director-general and an American trade lawyer, said at a conference last month.

The global trade body was created in 1995 to help settle trade disputes, write new trade rules and encourage the flow of goods and services worldwide. However, the last ministerial meeting, MC11, held in 2017 in Buenos Aires, was a total failure, with members at loggerheads in two negotiations over fishery subsidies and the digital trade.

Before he resigned in frustration, the former DG Azevedo cautioned, "Ensuring that businesses and households have the confidence to invest and consume will be a very important part of our economic recovery. And it is why the multilateral trading system has an important role to play in all of these efforts."

"All members must intensify efforts to do what they can—at home, and collectively—to foster a strong rebound. In our activities here at the WTO—on monitoring and transparency, implementation of commitments, negotiations and broader reform efforts—we must work to ensure that our organisation emerges out of this crisis more resilient than ever, and even more responsive to members' changing needs."

Bangladesh has a lot at stake in the revival of the WTO and the new DG's success. Our march to middle-income status will hinge on export growth and remittances. The Bangladesh government has outlined a plan to raise USD 150 billion through remittances in the next five years. The success of the DG's agenda will only assist us to achieve the target.

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and has been working in higher education and information technology for 35 years in the USA and Bangladesh. He is also Senior Research Fellow, International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI), a think-tank in Boston, USA.

HISTORIC MARCH 7

Bangabandhu's rapier-like words reflected his unswerving resolution

NAADIR JUNAID

IN the very first general elections of Pakistan held in December 1970, the Awami League won an absolute majority in the National Assembly. But for the Pakistani military junta as well as the Pakistan People's Party head Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the desire to retain control of the central government took precedence over the need to abide by democratic norms. The central government paid no heed to the Six Point demands presented by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1966, the implementation of which would have eradicated the economic and political disparities suffered by the Bengali majority since the inception of Pakistan. The Pakistani ruling minority became anxious about the Six-Point demands after the landslide victory of the Awami League. President Yahya Khan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the senior military generals became involved in machinations to prevent a political party led by Bengali politicians from forming the government in Pakistan.

On March 1, 1971, General Yahya Khan postponed the inaugural session of the National Assembly for an indefinite period. The President's announcement provoked widespread public outrage and the people of then East Pakistan ran out of patience with the unjust attitude towards them by the Pakistani military-bureaucratic authority. A storm of protest erupted across Bangladesh. Declaring that the central government's manoeuvre would not go unchallenged, Bangabandhu initiated a Non-Cooperation Movement against the Pakistani authorities guilty of repudiating the democratic process. Strikes were observed on March 2 and 3, and a public meeting was organised in Dhaka on March 7.

A few lines from the much-cited opening paragraph of Charles

Dickens' famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities* can aptly be drawn on to describe the disorienting situation of Dhaka in the first week of March 1971. Certainly, "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness." Since the postponement of the meeting of the National Assembly, a premonition of ominous events loomed large in Bangladesh. Yet, infuriated Bengalis took to the streets spontaneously, chanting the slogan *Bir Bangali oshro dhoro, Bangladesh swadhin koro* (Brave Bengalis take up arms, and liberate Bangladesh). The demonstrators often carried bamboos and sticks and did not hesitate to defy the curfew imposed by the military administration. On certain occasions, the army opened fire on the protestors and inflicted casualties. As a confrontation with the military administration seemed imminent, trepidation grew amongst people that innocent blood might be spilled in the days to come. Yet, thousands of Bengalis, especially students and the youth, were filled with an impatient desire to hear the declaration of independence of Bangladesh by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

In this tumultuous situation, the public meeting scheduled to be held on March 7 at Ramna Race Course became extremely important. People from all walks of life in Bangladesh were eager to know Bangabandhu's position in that perilous situation and to receive instructions. The meeting, held in the very heart of Dhaka city, was attended by millions. Even blind young men marched in procession to the meeting. Standing before a sea of people, Bangabandhu made a speech that was characterised by a sense of justifiable anger as well as incredible poise. The 19-minute long extempore speech has gone down in history as one of



Bangabandhu's historic speech on March 7, 1971.

PHOTO: JALALUDDIN HAIDER

the most memorable and powerful political speeches ever delivered in a grievously unstable situation. The speech also inspired people to remain resolved to fight for the much-coveted independence of Bangladesh.

Because of its enormous success in instilling courage in people in a crisis situation and in rousing them to fight oppression, Bangabandhu's March 7 speech can rightly be considered the equal of the other greatest speeches of the world—such as "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" by Winston Churchill in 1940, "I have a Dream" by Martin Luther King Jr in 1963, "Give Me Blood and I Shall Give You Freedom" by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose in 1944, "The Hypocrisy of American Slavery" by Frederick Douglass in 1852, "I am Prepared to Die" by Nelson Mandela in 1964, and the Gettysburg Address, delivered by Abraham Lincoln in 1863. Many people anticipated and wanted that Bangabandhu would make a unilateral declaration of the independence of Bangladesh in

his speech on March 7. However, Bangabandhu and the senior leaders of the Awami League realised that declaring independence would provide the government with an opportunity to unleash a vicious military assault on innocent civilians on the pretext of protecting the integrity of Pakistan. So, the speech perspicaciously avoided making the declaration, yet Bangabandhu demonstrated his fierce determination to support and strengthen the struggle of the Bengalis for freedom by declaring that *Ebarer Sangram Amader Muktir Sangram, Ebarer Sangram Swadhinotar Sangram* (The struggle this time is for our liberation, the struggle this time is for independence).

These valiant statements succinctly summed up the speech of Bangabandhu and also signalled his stand on the existing predicament. By describing the current rising up of the Bengalis as the struggle for freedom and independence, Bangabandhu made his directions quite explicit

for the people eagerly looking forward to hearing the declaration of independence. Although independence was not formally declared in that meeting, these lines were equivalent to a declaration of independence. Bangabandhu's speech blended both agony and outrage. He lamented the cruelty and subjugation to which the Bengalis were subjected since 1952. He also informed people of the unwillingness of the Pakistani authorities at the time to ensure the creation of a democratic system. By expressing intense anger towards the way the Pakistani army had been shooting unarmed Bengalis, Bangabandhu requested the people to build fortresses in each and every house if a single more bullet was fired. He urged the people to confront the enemy with whatever they had.

By mentioning in his speech the necessity of ensuring the rights of the Bengali population, the immense strength of the unity of the 75 million people of this country and

the killings of innocent civilians, Bangabandhu raised the courage and consciousness of the people of Bangladesh. He emphatically asserted that since we had given blood already, we would not fear further bloodshed but, we would liberate the people of this country by the grace of God. The unfair treatment of the Bengalis by the Pakistani authorities was scathingly denounced in this speech. However, Bangabandhu also requested the Pakistani authorities to be sensible enough to solve the problem in a peaceful manner. He requested the authorities not to try to govern Bangladesh via military rule, but later events revealed that these requests were bitterly resented by the Pakistani military junta.

Apart from the use of incandescent and courageous words, Bangabandhu's extraordinary oratorical skills lent a phenomenal quality to the March 7 speech. In that confused and agitated time, the people of Bangladesh were badly in need of the able guidance of a leader. Bangabandhu's speech not only provided the people with explicit instructions but also inspired them to face adversity with courage and determination. The Pakistani junta ignored the warning of Bangabandhu that 75 million people could not be suppressed. They launched an all-out military offensive on the Bengalis on March 25, 1971. But the Pakistani military government had not bargained for the great fortitude of the people of Bangladesh. Bangladesh won its independence from Pakistani rule after nine months through a Liberation War involving much bloodshed. The unflinching resolution reflected in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic speech of March 7 was an infinite inspiration to our freedom fighters.

Dr Naadir Junaid is Professor of Mass Communication and Journalism at the University of Dhaka.

The speech that galvanised a nation

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE significance of the historic March 7 speech of Bangabandhu lies in the fact that it was extempore—that is, without any prior preparation—but which in effect prepared an entire population for an epic struggle leading to its emancipation from the shackles of a brutal, obstinate and autocratic establishment. The deprivation, desire, intent, anger and expectations of a rejuvenated population found an eloquent and poignant expression in the soul-stirring captivating speech of 19 minutes at the historic Race Course Maidan.

As a public speaker, Bangabandhu never failed to appropriately capture the emotions and expectations of his audience and on March 7, 1971, he was at his eloquent best—stopping short of an outright declaration of independence, he said what needed to be said at that historic juncture. We have to bear in mind that he was a constitutional politician and had to be aware of the limiting factors. Although by March 7 many began to realise that independence was the only acceptable goal, the burden of responsibility rested on Bangabandhu. The full implications of an outright declaration of independence on March 7 had to be carefully weighed.

The cynics who point to the absence of a unilateral declaration of independence on March 7 conveniently forget that such a



Bangabandhu's speech gave the Bengali people courage and inspired the birth of an entire nation.

PHOTO: ARCHIVES

declaration would have meant the direct engagement of the full force of the Pakistani military. Quite naturally, such a move would have given the army a pretext for applying force to impose their will. In such an eventuality, the premonition that an unarmed population could not have absorbed the shock of a massive onslaught cannot escape a rational strategist. There was also the issue of the holding capacity of Bengalis against an organised military operation; and given the different global and regional interests of the world powers at the given

time, there were credible doubts on whether recognition and acceptance of an independent Bangladesh could become a reality.

For Bangladesh, it is indeed a matter of honour to know that on October 30, 2017, UNESCO added this speech to the Memory of the World Register as a documentary heritage. On March 7, Bangabandhu stood up at the Race Course Maidan and delivered a thunderous speech that laid the foundations of Bangladesh. His opening utterances effectively highlighted recent happenings and appealed to the audience when he said; "My dear

brothers, I have come before you today with a heavy heart. All of you know and understand how hard we have tried. But it is a matter of sorrow that the streets of Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna, Rangpur and Rajshahi have today become coloured with the blood of my brothers. Today, the people of Bengal want freedom, they want to live, the people of Bengal want their rights."

According to one observer, "if the contents of the speech are analysed, it is seen that it was basically a message about the emergence of a new State on the global map and a notification cum narrative on the winding up of the eastern region of the then Pakistani State as a natural progression."

This speech was a psychological and morale booster during the nine months of the liberation struggle

"The arms that were purchased with our money to protect the country from attacks by external enemies are now being used against the poor, sad and suffering people of my country."

and Bengalis, young or old, were energised with the patriotic zeal to achieve the desired emancipation. One could say that this memorable address was a de facto declaration of Bangladesh's independence.

If one sees through the lens of a mass communication expert, one would find that "it was a dialogue between the people of Bangladesh and their undisputed leader on the eve of Bangladesh's birth". In effect, the speech became a historic document of our liberty. One could not but be moved by the conversationalist style of the speech in which Bangabandhu raised five questions at different stages, and those were, "What wrong have we done? What did we get? What Round Table Conference? With whom shall we sit? Shall we sit with those who have taken the blood of my people?"

When it came to the issue of giving orders, directives or warnings, the expressions in the speech were short and direct like "the employees will fetch their salaries on the 28th. Turn all your homes into fortresses. I say to the government employees: what I say has to be obeyed. As long as this country does not become free, no revenues/taxes will be paid. Nobody will pay."

The speech placed on record undeniable facts of history and roused the patriotic zeal of the people when Bangabandhu, in an emotion-charged voice, said: "The arms that

were purchased with our money to protect the country from attacks by external enemies are now being used against the poor, sad and suffering people of my country. Bullets are being fired into their chests. We are the majority in Pakistan, but whenever we tried to assert our rights, they pounced upon us."

Dale Carnegie has famously said that "The best argument is one, which seems merely an explanation." Viewed in this light, "A lucid and detailed explanation about the events unfolding at the time made this speech withstand the test of logic for all times to come."

The last sentence of Bangabandhu's March 7 speech—"The struggle this time is for emancipation! The struggle this time is for independence!"—was effectively a declaration of independence expressed with a firm resolve, which had, in fact, defined the speech. The way he concluded the speech tallied exactly with textbook communication theory. It is said, don't drag out your conclusion. We often use words like "in conclusion" or "we must say one thing" while concluding a speech. But Bangabandhu directly entered the "speech definition" in his historic address—through an appropriate application of communication theory, which was quite unthinkable 50 years ago.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a former IGP of Bangladesh.

QUOTABLE Quote



CONFUCIUS
Chinese philosopher (September 28, 551 BC—April 11, 479 BC)

It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Singer Tori
- 5 Cowboy wear
- 10 Had supper
- 12 Ibis's cousin
- 13 Dull finish
- 14 San Antonio mission
- 15 "Believer"
- 16 Delivery company
- 18 Generous patron
- 20 Brewpub order
- 21 Bear in the air
- 23 Brick carrier
- 24 Parental warning
- 26 New Mexico resort
- 28 Agent, for short
- 29 Toppers

DOWN

- 1 Let on
- 2 Marlins' home
- 3 Available
- 4 Filming location
- 5 Spiced drink
- 6 Beatles movie
- 7 Plains Indian
- 8 Big citrus fruits
- 9 Was a noisy sleeper
- 11 Dry areas
- 17 Day pts.
- 19 Bit or wordplay
- 22 Not nude
- 24 Regret
- 25 Best
- 27 Nile slitherer
- 28 Traveled the river
- 30 Exalted verse
- 33 Pitcher Satchel
- 34 Spanish hero
- 35 Insurance figures
- 37 Mosquito, e.g.
- 38 Baked buys
- 42 Oath

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TUESDAY'S ANSWERS

A	S	H	R	A	M	S	W	I	G
P	H	O	E	B	E	P	A	L	E
R	E	G	A	L	E	I	S	L	E
D	E	T	A	C	H				
D	A	D	S	P	A	I	D	B	R
E	R	A	P	A	I	D	O	U	T
L	E	S	I	D	O	A	L	L	
I	N	H	A	L	E	S	R	E	A
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O	L	D	S	A	W				
C	I	A	O	R	A	T	E	S	
A	W	R	O	D	E	S	I	R	E
P	O	D	S	A	S	H	O	R	E

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



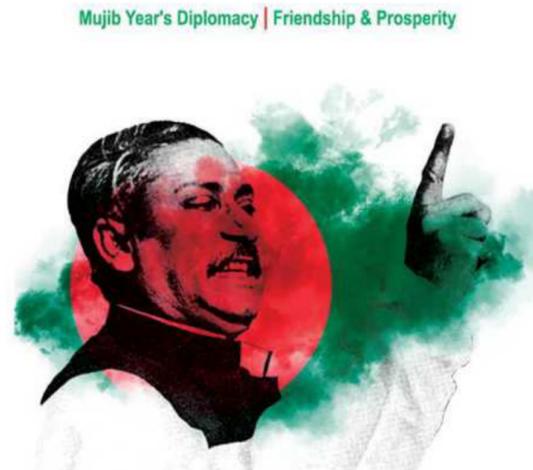
Ministry of Foreign Affairs



If there is a day which categorically marks the commencement of a journey towards the final freedom of a nation - our nation - the Bengali nation - it is the Seventh Day of March Nineteen Hundred Seventy One. This was the day when the Greatest Bengali of All Times - Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman unequivocally declared the very characteristic, independent and sovereign presence of the Bengali national identity on the face of the planet. This was the day when an entire nation understood at its heart that it is one and that it is unique and that its immutability as a nation is non-negotiable. This was the day that an entire nation - newly conscious of its thousand year long birth - came to believe in the power of one word! Freedom! 7 March 1971 remains etched in the tunnels of time that we pass through as a species - as humans. This is not merely a day of freedom for the Bengali only. Rather, it is a day for the reconnaissance for humanity itself and remember what it means to assert the right to live with pride and dignity. Against the clutches of colonialism, oppression, and indeed, against the very idea of 'injustice' this remains a bulwark for the human individual - collective or single - white or brown or black or yellow - Muslim or Hindu or Christian or Buddhist or indeed anyone of any faith system that the idea of humanity is immutable and irrevocable. It defined what a state ought to be. A shelter. A home. A refuge. Bangabandhu was assassinated. His life came to a premature end at the hands of marauding and defeated killers sponsored by a failed state. But his ideas and his dreams of a Golden Bengal survived. It is his immortal voice which echoed through the corridors of power and was carried by mortal men and women on the fringes, and lo and behold, resonated to the collective pinnacle of human memories as a heritage of mankind itself. On this auspicious day - let me wish that we renew our pledge to the immortal vows that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made us take fifty years before and despite all constraints March ahead towards the promised lands of time - where no one will be left alone - hungry, weak or sick. Let us March ahead to the place in time where no one soul will remain devoid of the power of knowledge. Let us March towards an unending era of resplendence and of inclusivity. We don't aspire to be rich. Rather, we aspire to be a true home to humanity and all its glory. We have given shelter to the 1.1 million plus disenfranchised Rohingyas from Myanmar - and we stand ready to give shelter to anyone who needs one for the sake of truth and justice. That is the idea of the Seventh Day of March. That is the idea of Bangladesh.

Joi Bangla
Joi Bangabandhu

Mohammad Abdul Hamid



Mujib Year's Diplomacy | Friendship & Prosperity

The Significance of 07 March Speech and the 'story' of its UNESCO Recognition

Amb. Shahidul Islam, Washington DC

Inscription of the Historic 7th March Speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the Memory of the World International Register
The historic 7th March speech of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, is one of the greatest speeches in human history in terms of style, substance, and impact. The speech effectively declared the independence of Bangladesh and inspired millions to take up arms against Pakistani occupation. In recognition of the far-reaching impact of the speech, UNESCO inscribed the Historic 7th March speech on the Memory of the World International Register as a precious documentary heritage of humanity.

For every human being and indeed for every nation, there are moments which acquire distinctly more significant attributes than many or even all other moments and days and often lifetimes. 7th March 1971 was the day for Bangabandhu and for his dearest Bengali people and for his Bangladesh. On this day, the greatest Bengali of all times, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman irrevocably put forward the codified idea of an independent nation and of a sovereign state. In clear terms, on this day, Bangabandhu outlined the nature, contour and context of that nation state. In an unmistakable demeanour, Bangabandhu declared the unstoppable emergence an identity which is rooted in the heathen traditions of the land and the water which mark the sovereign boundaries of Bangladesh. The 7th March 1971 speech of Bangabandhu is not only a milestone in the millennia old March for freedom of the Bengali nation. Rather, it's a clear delineation of what a modern post-Westphalian sovereign state ought to be. Anywhere. The speech laid out the unity of the land with the men and with the women and the children that it feeds. The speech laid out the many avenues through which such a unity connects to the idea of the state. And in addition to that, the speech laid out the roles that the farmer or the labourer or the soldier or the officer played in the affairs of the state. When we look back after fifty years - on the auspicious occasion of the Birth Centenary of Bangabandhu and indeed on the eve of the Golden Jubilee of the freedom of Bangladesh and the glorious war of liberation of 1971 - we can only look at this day in awe and in wonder. The struggle between good and evil, the contest between truth and falsehood, the clash between all that is pure and humble and all that is ugly and arrogant will never cease to exist. We as humans can only partake in the journey which defines who we are as individuals and possibly who we are as a people in the great Comity of Nations. It's a great privilege and at the same time a greater responsibility. The responsibility to act responsibly. To take the burden of the world and all that men and heavens give us and turn it into sweet poetries for truth, justice, equitability and inclusivity. This day - lives on to remind us that we are a free nation of free humans. That we are unbound and that we have a home. And that anyone who needs a home is welcome to our land. Not as masters but as friends. As equals.

Joi Bangla
Joi Bangabandhu

Sheikh Hasina

The initiative to bring international recognition to the historic 7th March speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman began largely unnoticed in Paris. I was then serving as the Ambassador to France and Permanent Representative to UNESCO. Alongside the government's initiatives to inscribe our cultural elements like Jamdani, Mongol Shovajatra and Sheetal Pati on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the International Mother Language Institute in Dhaka gained the status of a UNESCO Category II Institute on my watch. But I was feeling the need to inscribe at least one important Bangladeshi document on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register that aims to preserve and protect valuable documentary heritages of the world and it would be the historic 7th March speech. The 7th March speech was extempore and there was no written script; it survived in the audio as well as AV versions. I met Dr. Indrajit Banerjee, Director of Knowledge Societies Division of UNESCO to seek his advice and support. When I told him about my intention to inscribe the 7th March Speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Dr. Indrajit Banerjee, an Indian national whose ancestors were from Faridpur, became emotional. He recounted the story how he saw his father crying at the news of Bangabandhu's assassination. He readily assured me of his full support. A couple of days later, Dr. Banerjee confirmed that audio-visual and digital forms of documents would qualify for inscription on the Memory of the World Register. Dr. Banerjee also introduced me to his junior colleague Mr. Boyan Radoykov, Chief of the Memory of the World Program. Our two friends Indrajit and Boyan would remain supportive during the entire process of inscribing the 7th March speech. The next step was the preparation of nomination file on the 7th March speech. Who is the legitimate owner of the document? How to prove that the existing form of the document is authentic? What is the world significance of this speech to qualify as part of memory of the entire humanity? The breakthrough came when Mr. Monjur Hossain, then Secretary of Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO came to attend the spring session of the UNESCO Executive Board in April 2016 in Paris. Monjur Hossain told me that Mr. Mofidul Hoque, a Trustee of Liberation War Museum had submitted a draft nomination file on the Historic 7th March Speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the organizers of Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Memory of the World (MOW) Program in Cambodia in 2013. I lost no time to call Mr. Mofidul Hoque, a valiant freedom fighter and intellectual known to me from my Kolkata days in the early 1990s. A document is deemed to have two components: the information "content" and the "carrier" on which it resides. Both are equally important as part of the "memory". A good nomination file must establish authenticity of both the carrier and the content of the document to be inscribed on the Memory of the World International Register. The nomination file drafted by Mofidul Hoque was based on a single carrier; a 45 RPM record

kept under the custody of the Liberation War Museum. We also found that in addition to the 45 RPM record belonging to the Liberation War Museum, there were some other authentic carriers of the 7th March speech, including: a) Unedited Audio recording by Mr. Nasar Ahmed Chowdhury, Programme Officer of the then Dhaka Radio station; b) Original film version of the speech, recorded and shot by Mr. Mohibur Rahman Khoyr, the then Chief of Film Division (also an actor); and c) All equipment (ARRI Camera for 35 mm, lens, tripod, microphone, Nagra recorder etc.) used for covering the speech in audio-visual form. Accordingly, Mofidul Hoque's initial draft nomination file was revised and expanded as a joint nomination by the Government of Bangladesh (owner of at least three "carriers") and the Liberation War Museum (owner of one "carrier"). After establishing the authenticity of the "carriers", we began to work on the "content" of the speech. While the national and regional significance of the 7th March speech was self-evident, some additional research was done to strengthen its international significance to qualify for inclusion in the Memory of the World International Register. Mofidul Hoque remained involved all along. The revised nomination file was ready by 24 May 2016. We also met UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova to seek her support for our nomination. On 10 April 2017, UNESCO informed in writing that the MOW Register Sub-Committee (RSC) found the 7th March speech "of great historical significance and critical to the history of Bangladesh". The revised nomination was submitted on 17 April 2017 and the International Advisory Committee (IAC) meeting was scheduled for 24-27 October 2017. In the meantime, I came back to Dhaka to join the BIMSTEC Secretariat in September 2017. I left Paris but kept in touch with the work we had commenced. Finally, the International Advisory Committee meeting held on 24-27 October 2017 recommended "The Historic 7th March Speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman" for inscription on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. The recommendation was endorsed by the Director General of UNESCO on 30 October 2017, formally confirming the inscription. Thus, the historic 7th March speech by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became an inseparable part of world's documentary heritage for all ages to come. PS: Dr. Indrajit Banerjee died in 2019. May his soul rest in peace.

Mega Projects Initiatives of the Government

- Padma Bridge**
 - Estimated Cost: USD 3.6 Billion • Construction began on December 2014 and is expected to be completed by June 2022 • Economy will get a huge boost with the expected "industrial revolution" of the southwestern districts when the long-cherished "Padma Multi-Purpose Bridge" opens to traffic;
- Dhaka Metro Rail**
 - Estimated Cost: USD 2.8 Billion • Construction began on 26 June 2016 and is expected to end by 2021 • The project will save \$2.4 billion (200 billion takas) a year, equivalent to 1.5% of GDP and 17% of the total tax revenue of Bangladesh;
- Karnaphuli Tunnel**
 - Estimated Cost: USD 1.2 Billion • The Construction is expected to be completed by December 2022 • The project will also make connection between the proposed Asian Highway and the Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox's Bazar Highway aiming to make regional connectivity easier.

- Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant**
 - Estimated Cost: USD 13 Billion • Capacity: 2400 MW (Two Units) • It will be the country's first nuclear power plant, and the first of two units are expected to go into operation in 2023.
- Other Mega Project Initiatives:**
 - Padma Rail Link Project • Chattogram- Cox's Bazar Rail Line • Rampal Power Project • Matarbari Coal Power Plant • Payra Deep Sea Port (First Phase) • HazratShahjalal (R) International Airport Terminal 3 • Bangabandhu Railway Bridge



Message from Hon'ble Foreign Minister H.E. Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, M.P.



The greatest Bengali of all time, the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, flows with our history and tradition like nature. The origin of the independent Bangladesh is from a revolutionary voice that sparked on 7th March 1971 and recited the unforgettable poem of Bangladesh's independence. The irresistible thunder in the afternoon of 7th March 1971, ignited the fire of freedom over 56,000 square miles. "After hundreds of years of struggle," Bangabandhu said, "This time the struggle is for our Liberation, this time the struggle is for our Freedom." Standing in front of millions of people on the Racecourse ground of Dhaka, that day Bangladesh was born by the utterances of glimmering words from the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Bangladesh was born from the stream of blood that flows in the fertile land, in the river and in the street. The flag we see flying across the world, the red and green flag of independent Bangladesh which is earned with so much blood and human sacrifice; Bangabandhu's historic speech on 07th March 1971 still resounds in the murmur of that flag. The Awami League won a landslide victory in the 1970 National Assembly elections in the then Pakistan. But without handing over the power, the Pakistani rulers augmented the level of oppression on the Bengalis by making various allegations against the people. In that dark time, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman realized that without independence the liberation of the Bengali nation was not possible. Although many aspects were observed in the historic 7th March speech; two aspects of that speech are very important. One is patience, the other is courage. That day Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave clear messages to the oppressive ruler and to his own people about autonomy and liberty of the Bengali nation. Bangabandhu's immortal speech was recognized by UNESCO as a historical document on October 30, 2017. This is the first time UNESCO has recognized a speech that was unwritten. The voice that was raised on 7th March 1971 against the long-accumulated despair, exploitation and deprivation - there is no comparison with the epic that Bangabandhu composed on that day. Each of its words, every sentence carries a unique meaning, gives a new message. Poet Nirmalendu Goon has given an impeccable picture of Bangabandhu's speech at the Racecourse ground in Dhaka in his poem. The poet writes, "Since then the word freedom is ours."

Joi Bangla
Joi Bangabandhu

Message from Hon'ble State Minister H.E. Mr. Md. Shahrar Alam, MP



In a thousand years of human history it is not very often that one man - against all odds and situations - rose up with courage and breathed the exact yearnings of millions and managed to rally up fresh minds, ardent intellectuals, farmers and serving soldiers to sacrifice everything for those cravings. For that to happen, the reasons need to come from the deepest roots of the soul. Our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was such a man and those words on 7 March 1971 were of such captivating powers. His words were the first and final iterations of the common belief of the erstwhile East Pakistani people - for justice - for equality and for freedom. Bangabandhu spoke against the illegal killings, unjust administration and a fascist government who used all the powers of a modern state against the will of its majority - the Bengalis. A man devoid of the thirst for power, money or personal gain was required in this case who had to rise against all the constituent risks. Bangabandhu - a man of the soil and the rivers - stepped up for the cause and his 7th March speech is the perfect embodiment of those convictions - forged in self-belief to establish justice and dignity. Even now, when Bangladesh plans to maintain its impressive growth, reiterates its commitments towards world peace and rolls out strategies for becoming a viable innovative hub - the spirit of 7th March speech keeps guiding the country forward. The speech is ever remembered - for the important essences it holds and the never-yielding spirit it so delivers. Bangabandhu's 7th March speech was the epitome of those feelings which can only be uttered by the purest of the pure, bravest of the brave and the noblest amongst the humans. May those word echo in eternity!

Joi Bangla
Joi Bangabandhu

Message from Lt. Col. Muhammad Faruk Khan (Retd.)



The historical March 07, 1971 came against the backdrop of a series of political movements - which could be termed phenomenal when we look back in time. West Pakistan's twenty-four years reign was an example of misdirection, degeneration, exploitation and deprivation. The Bengalis of the East had continued to fight for their rights and dignity. At this stage Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became the symbol of hope and aspiration of the Bengali nation. On 01 March 1971, the then military government had declared that the 03 March session of the national assembly would be postponed and this declaration ignited the flame of aspiration for liberty across the country. Bangabandhu became the undisputed leader of the nation. In the history of the best political speeches in the world Bangabandhu's speech stand spectacularly extraordinary and distinct. All other best speeches were written but the speech of Bangabandhu was not written. He spoke spontaneously the reading of his mind to the crowd. Bangabandhu's speech was a blistering torch, which ignited the flames of the liberation war, against which the invading Pakistani army could not stand. Bangabandhu's historic speech not only touched the hearts of the people of Bangladesh, the speech caused a stir all over the world. With this speech, Bangabandhu organized the whole nation to stand on the brink of liberation. In the 18 days from March 07 to March 25, 1971, this speech has prepared the 70 million people of Bangladesh to fight for liberation, to jump into the struggle for independence. Cuba's undisputed leader Fidel Castro said, "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's speech on March 07 is not just a speech, it is a unique (battle) tactic". Bangabandhu's speech has kept people engaged throughout the liberation war and even till this day so long as the idea to fight for the country and the Bengali identity is concerned. Bangabandhu's historic 7th March speech has been recognized by UNESCO as an important heritage of the world. The speech has been included in the Memory of the World International Register. This recognition is an achievement of the people of Bangladesh. The thunderous voice of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will always light the way towards the emancipation of our people and people from all over the world - for a world based in justice and dignity for the human spirit.

Joi Bangla
Joi Bangabandhu

Message from Foreign Secretary Mr. Masud Bin Momen



7th March provides a core impetus to the method in which Bangladesh Foreign Office and its Missions abroad operate both at the strategic and at the tactical levels. This day does not only remind us in the Foreign Office of the Greatest Bengali of a Thousand years, Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his sacrifices, his fiery speech, his leadership or the glorious War of Liberation which was fought under his directives - rather, this day reminds us of the identity and of the spirit which makes us who we are as a nation - both collectively and individually. The primary functions of the Foreign Office revolves around projecting the 'identity' of the nation and to protect, preserve, protect and enhance the legitimate, sovereign national interest of the country abroad. Every year, the memories and the emotions of the 7th March reminds us vividly of the roots from where we rose as a nation-state. They serve as a never-ending spring well of inspiration when dangers lurk around like shadows in the dark - as we continue to march ahead under the leadership of the Hon. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina towards the dream of Sonar Bangladesh - a land of prosperity and happiness - where no one will be left behind and where Bangladesh will emerge as the unparalleled champion of all that is good in the human existence. We remember each word that Bangabandhu said and tally them against the directives that we receive from the Hon. Prime Minister so that we are never off-track. Bangladesh Foreign Office and its missions abroad are a home to all Bangladeshis - both resident and non-resident. We have always been there and we shall remain there with each one of our citizens. This is our promise on the 7th of March.

Joi Bangla
Joi Bangabandhu



FARIHA STARS ON OPENING DAY

Fariha Islam was the star performer in the opening match of the 9th Bangabandhu Bangladesh Games cricket event, which got underway at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. The left-arm pacer picked up six wickets for 14 runs in her 10-over spell as Bangladesh Blue defeated Bangladesh Red by 10 wickets. The National team, Under-19 and the Emerging team players have been divided into three teams -- Bangladesh Red, Bangladesh Blue and Bangladesh Green -- to take part in this round-robin league format tournament.

PHOTO: BCB

March window solved, what about May?

Booters set for Nepal tourney as Afghanistan fixture all but postponed

ATIQUE ANAM



On Friday night, the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) issued a press release saying it will organise a tri-nation tournament involving Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan Olympic team and the host country.

This should have come as good tidings at any other time, but in the current context it is not so as it means that Bangladesh have all but given up hope of hosting Afghanistan on March 25 in a crucial World Cup/Asian Cup qualifying fixture in Sylhet.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has not officially ruled out the possibility yet but the postponement looked imminent ever since Asian football's governing body, AFC, passed the buck on to Bangladesh and Afghanistan to come to a settlement over the issue.

Last Wednesday when BFF president Kazi Salahuddin was asked whether they were intent on playing in Nepal or still hopeful about hosting Afghanistan in March, he claimed the issue with Afghanistan was still in the balance and that they were focusing on that match. "There is Plan A, B and C. Let's say we are still sticking to Plan A (playing at home against Afghanistan)," he said.

But with ANFA officially confirming Bangladesh's participation in the three-nation tournament, it seems the fate of the Bangladesh-Afghanistan match was already sealed and Bangladesh were indeed pursuing Plan B.

The bottom line is that Bangladesh will not get to host Afghanistan in March and that all the seven remaining qualifying matches of Group E, including the three featuring Bangladesh, will be played between May 31 and June 15 at a centralised venue.

While the consensus is to have these matches in either Qatar or Oman, technically there is still the opportunity to stage all the matches in Bangladesh. All five teams are eligible to bid for the hosting rights, and despite the hurdles facing Bangladesh in winning the bid -- the facilities or lack thereof in Bangladesh, the

expenses involved and the consensus of majority -- the BFF should desperately seek to preserve its home advantage.

Losing the right to host the matches, especially the one against Afghanistan, could be a massive blow as far as progressing to the next stage of Asian Cup qualifiers is concerned. A win in this fixture could have drastically altered the equation in Bangladesh's favour.

All is not lost though. The players can still turn this seemingly uphill task in their favour with some rousing performances in June. But in order to achieve that there needs to be well-laid plans in place -- Plan A, Plan B, Plan C -- any number of plans needed to succeed.

It is commendable that the BFF was quick to pounce on the opportunity to have some much-needed match practice in the now-vacated March FIFA window, but plans should already be in place for May too.

Although the fixtures of the seven matches of Group E have not been revealed by AFC yet, it is believed that the matches will be held on June 3, 7, 11 and 15.

Bangladesh will likely play their three matches on any of those four days. If Bangladesh are to play their first match on June 3, coach Jamie Day will not have all his players at his disposal for more than 10 days because the AFC Cup South Zone group stage runs from May 14 to 20 in Maldives.

Bangladesh champions Bashundhara Kings, who boast close to half of the players of the national team, will play in the AFC Cup. Runners-up Abahani, too, will join them if they qualify through playoffs.

Taking into consideration the traveling time to and from Maldives and the quarantine protocols both in Maldives and the proposed centralised venue, majority of the players of the national team might be left with very little time for team training, let alone playing practice matches ahead of those three matches.

Hence it will be of paramount importance to first negotiate for the hosting rights, and if that effort fails, then negotiate with the scheduling of the June matches so that the team gets a considerable amount of time together to prepare for the challenge.

Not just about adjusting to conditions

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan had earlier expressed his concern over Tigers' lack of preparation time for the New Zealand tour keeping the difficult seaming conditions in mind.

Adapting to tough conditions in New Zealand always remains the prime topic of discussion whenever Bangladesh tour New Zealand.

New Zealand have always produced fast and bouncy pitches and it's their seam-friendly weather and the windy conditions that play a big role in troubling the visiting batters.

Bangladesh's record in New Zealand clearly indicates how difficult it has been for the Tigers in the past. Bangladesh are yet to register a single win in 26 international games in New



Zealand.

However, it was not just about adjusting to conditions as the Tigers had failed to execute their game plan on their previous tours. Especially the batsmen failed to produce good scores even when the pitch played sportingly, demanding proper application.

Much like in the past, Bangladesh on their current tour of New Zealand will get enough time to adjust to the conditions. The Tigers

are scheduled to conduct a five-day training camp in Queenstown after completing their 14-day quarantine in Christchurch.

Tamim Iqbal's side will take on New Zealand in their first of the three-match ODI series on March 20 in Dunedin. And according to national selector Habibul Bashar, the Tigers will be able to utilise the extra time for preparing better and to adjust to the condition and pitch before the series commences.

"Whenever you are in New Zealand, it is very important how quickly you can adjust with the conditions here. So far, after having a look at the pitch, it seems pretty normal as the pitch has remained the same in New Zealand in the past.

"We will conduct a camp in Queenstown for a few days. So, I think the amount of hard work we have put in to come a bit early here in New Zealand will be utilised well. It will be very important to adjust to the condition here as it is totally different from our condition. It may be a bit colder in Dunedin but I think the wicket will remain similar to the one we have been practicing in," Bashar told BCB through a video message from Christchurch yesterday.

Aside from adjusting to overhead conditions and other external factors in New Zealand, the Tigers will also require to make mental adjustments in order to be ready for typical Kiwi challenges.

Ctg Abahani edge past Mukhtijoddha

SPORTS REPORTER

Chattogram Abahani finished the first phase of the Bangladesh Premier League yesterday in seventh position following a 1-0 victory over Mukhtijoddha Sangsad KC, taking their tally to 19 points from 12 matches.

Nixon Guyllherme scored the decisive goal in the 77th minute at the Bangabandhu National Stadium as the port city side registered their fifth win alongside three defeats and four draws to stay 15 points behind runaway leaders Bashundhara Kings.

The match offered very little goalmouth action, with Mannaf Rabbi's miscued attempt on 54



minutes the first real chance for the winners.

The visitors took the lead when Nixon slammed home a loose ball inside the six-yard box after Rakib Hossain's header on a cross from Kawsar Ali Rabbi had bounced off the back of Mukhtijoddha defender Sujon Mia.

Maruful Haque's charges could have got a second goal in the 87th minute, but substitute Shakhawat Hossain Rony's effort on Rakib's cutback came off the post, with Nixon shooting the rebound wide of target.

The defeat saw troubled Mukhtijoddha remain in ninth position with nine points from 12 matches.

Spain braces for Madrid derby

AGENCIES



Atletico Madrid's bid for a first La Liga title since 2014 hits a pivotal point as it hosts city rival Real Madrid tonight.

La Liga leader Atletico Madrid has an opportunity to deal a hammer blow to Real's attempts to retain the league title in a potentially decisive Madrid derby.

Zinedine Zidane's Madrid is in third, level with Barcelona but five points behind Atletico thanks to its 1-1 draw with Real Sociedad last Monday, and defeat on Sunday would leave it eight behind having played a game more.

Barca will be waiting in the wings to consolidate second place with its trip to Osasuna on Sunday, one day after the presidential elections which will beckon in a new era for a team in turmoil off the pitch but showing signs of life on it.

Defeat at the Wanda Metropolitano for Atletico would likely leave it with not just Madrid but also Barca breathing down its necks as the season moves towards its final straight.

"We need to remain calm and show patience, too," Zidane said. "This (Sociedad) result won't affect how we prepare for the derby. We need to go there and play a really good game.

"All sides are losing points, and we know that we have to go there and get something. There's still a long way to go in the title race."

Atletico, without a Liga derby win since 2016, welcome Kieran Trippier back

to the first team squad after a 10-week suspension for violating betting rules in England.

Yannick Carrasco also returns after a leg injury, while Jose Maria Gimenez and Thomas Lemar will face late fitness tests.

Zidane has said French forward Karim Benzema could be fit, however captain Sergio Ramos, Eden Hazard and Dani Carvajal will all miss the trip across the Spanish capital.

Barcelona, meanwhile, can put the pressure on both Madrid outfits when they visit Osasuna in Saturday's late game.

Fresh from a dramatic Copa del Rey semi-final comeback win over Sevilla, the Catalans, who have not lost in La Liga since December, will be full of confidence that they can mount a challenge in the title race.

HIGHLIGHTS

Last 6 Competitive Meetings: 3 Real Madrid Wins, 3 Draws.

Atletico haven't won a competitive Madrid derby since the 2018 UEFA Super Cup which they won 4-2 after extra-time.

2 of the 3 meetings at the Wanda Metropolitano have ended goalless. The exception was a 3-1 Real Madrid win in February 2019.

Atletico haven't tasted a single win in their last 9 La Liga clashes against Real.



Atletico Madrid striker Luis Suarez vies for the ball with his teammates during a practice session ahead of tonight's La Liga encounter against Real Madrid.

PHOTO: TWITTER



PHOTO: AFP

India captain Virat Kohli is ecstatic while spinner Axar Patel and wicketkeeper batsman Rishabh Pant pose with the trophy after winning the fourth and final Test against England inside three days in Ahmedabad yesterday.

India inflict innings defeat on England

The comeback was very heartening, says Kohli

AFP, Ahmedabad



Spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel took all 10 wickets on

Saturday as India crushed England inside three days to win the fourth Test and seal the series 3-1.

After the latest emphatic innings and 25-run victory, India captain Virat Kohli hailed the way his side came back from a game down to dominate the series and book their place in the World Test Championship final against New Zealand.

India completed three victories in only nine of the 15 days available. "The comeback in Chennai (the 2nd Test) pleased me the most. The first game was an aberration and England outplayed us," Kohli said.

"We bowled and fielded with more intensity and so the comeback was very heartening. Our bench strength is extremely strong and that's a good sign for Indian cricket."

England captain Joe Root admitted his side, who suffered a two-day humiliation in the third Test, had been "outplayed" again. "There are a few key areas of the games where

India managed to grab them and we didn't," he said.

Ashwin bowled Dan Lawrence for 50 and ended England's second innings on 135 to seal the match, in the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad. Ashwin, who was named player of the series, led the bowling chart with 32 wickets followed by Patel, who played one game fewer, on 27.

England spinner Jack Leach was

HIGHLIGHTS

India's 13th consecutive Test series victory at home secured their place in the June final of the World Test Championship against New Zealand. India finished the league phase with 520 points, which includes 12 wins, four losses, and one draw. New Zealand finished in the second spot with 420 points, including seven wins and four losses.

Rishabh Pant was awarded the man-of-the-match for his belligerent 101, while Ravichandran Ashwin's series haul of 32 wickets, along with a century in the second Test, earned him the player-of-the-series award. This is Ashwin's eighth man-of-the-series award and only two players -- Muttiah Muralitharan (11) and Jacques Kallis (9) -- have won more such awards.

third with 18 scalps. Kohli praised Rohit Sharma for his 161 which proved decisive in the second Test in Chennai and Ashwin, who he described as India's "most bankable player over the years".

This win was set up by wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant, who made 101 on day two, and Washington Sundar, who hit an unbeaten 96 as India made a commanding 365.

Pant scored his third Test ton in a 113-run stand with Sundar to lift India from a precarious 146-6 in response to England's first innings of 205.

India coach Ravi Shastri singled out Pant's performance with the bat and behind the wickets as "magnificent". "He was told in no uncertain terms that he has got to respect the game a little more. He's got to lose a bit of weight and work hard on his keeping," said Shastri.

"Yesterday's innings was the best counter-attacking innings I have seen in India. He built a partnership with Rohit playing against his nature - to do that is not easy."

The two teams now head into five Twenty20 internationals starting March 12 at the same Ahmedabad venue.

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DHAKA-TANGAIL-RANGPUR HIGHWAY

Govt to turn it into tolled road

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The two-lane Dhaka-Tangail-Rangpur highway that is being turned into a four-lane one has been selected for charging toll from those plying it.

This would be the second highway to be included in the list of roads from which the government would be charging toll after the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway.

The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) has also formed a committee last week to do some preliminary works such as selecting places for toll booths and asked the committee to submit a report within 15 days.

"We have started taking necessary preparation for collecting toll from the highway. But it may not be possible before the completion of the project works," RHD's Chief Engineer Abdus Sabur told The Daily Star on Thursday.

The government is implementing SASEC Road Connectivity Project-1 to expand 70km road from Joydevpur to Elega into four-lane, with service roads on both sides at the cost of Tk 6,214.41 crore.

The project is scheduled to be completed in June next year.

On the other hand, SASEC Road Connectivity Project-1 is now under implementation for upgrading 190km highway from Elega to Rangpur into a four-lane one at the cost of Tk 16,662 crore.

The deadline of the project is December 2024 with a one-year defect liability period.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Discharge from a dredger is being dumped straight into the Payra river near Amtali Ferry Terminal in Barguna making the dredging efforts futile as the silt will eventually clog up another part of the river key for water transport. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Nine int'l rights bodies urge govt to repeal DSA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nine rights organisations on Friday urged the Bangladesh government to respect and protect people's rights to freedom of expression and to end what they said was an escalating crackdown on human rights.

They also urged stopping the crackdown on peaceful assembly to curb protesters demanding justice for writer Mushtaq Ahmed's death in custody.

The organisations are: The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), Asian Network for Free Election (ANFREL), CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Eleos Justice - Monash University, FIDH: International Federation for Human Rights, OMCT: World Organisation Against Torture and Robert F

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

'I was made a scapegoat'

Says cartoonist Kishore

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore, now on bail in a case filed under the Digital Security Act, yesterday said he did not do anything wrong or commit any offense by drawing cartoons but he still became a "victim of the situation".

"I was made a scapegoat," said the ailing cartoonist, now undergoing treatment at a city hospital.

Speaking to The Daily Star last night, Kishore said he draws cartoons as part of his professional responsibilities and he has passion for it.

He said Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had never been the subjects of his cartoons.

"I did not draw cartoons with a motive to act against any individual," he added.

Asked about his health, Kishore said he was still experiencing pain in his hands, legs and right ear. Besides, he was feeling dizzy.

He said he was suffering from trauma and he could not hear on his right ear.

Expressing concern over the misuse of the Digital Security Act, the cartoonist said innocent people had been detained since the act came into force.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

'Our revolution must win'

Anti-coup protesters in Myanmar defiant amid brutal crackdown

AGENCIES

Myanmar security forces used tear gas and stun grenades to break up a protest in Yangon yesterday, a day after a United Nations envoy urged the Security Council to hear the nation's "desperate pleas" and take swift action to restore democracy.

The country has been in turmoil since a February 1 putsch ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from power, triggering a massive uprising from hundreds of thousands angered to be returned to military rule.

Security forces have escalated an increasingly brutal crackdown on demonstrators -- killing more than 50 people since the coup -- but protesters rallied again yesterday.

From the dusty roads of northern Lashio -- where young protesters stared down police behind homemade shields -- to central Loikaw city in view of Myanmar's eastern mountains, demonstrators continued to march for democracy.

"Our revolution must win," chanted protesters in Loikaw. Civil servants such as teachers in their green and white uniforms were among the protesters.

The country's vital sectors have been crippled by an ongoing "Civil Disobedience Movement" -- a campaign urging civil servants to boycott working under a military regime.

The impact has been felt at every level of the national infrastructure, with shuttered hospitals, empty ministry offices, and banks unable to operate.

Yesterday, state-run media announced that if civil servants continued to boycott work, "they will be fired" with immediate effect from March 8.

But protesters in Myanmar's commercial hub of Yangon continued to defy authorities, gathering especially in San Chaung -- a once-buzzing

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

ROHINGYA CRISIS US, Australia, Japan to keep supporting Bangladesh

Envoys say after visiting Cox's Bazar camps

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US pledged continued support to the Rohingya and their host communities in Bangladesh and called for the Myanmar military to restore power to the democratically elected government and refrain from further violence.

"The international community has not forgotten the refugees or host communities supporting the Rohingya refugees," US Ambassador Earl R Miller said.

He made the statement after a visit to Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar from March 3-4. Australian High Commissioner Jeremy Bruer and Japanese Ambassador Ito Naoki were also in the delegation that visited the camps.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

Astonishing nearby super-Earth found



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have found a new super-Earth, relatively nearby -- and it is the kind of planet they say they have been dreaming of for years.

The world could be the perfect place to better understand how atmospheres exist on rocky planets like our own that are outside the solar system, researchers say.

The new world is called Gliese 486b and is referred to as a super-Earth because it is solid and rocky like our own world, but much bigger.

Despite the name, it is in many ways not like Earth: it is 30 per cent bigger and nearly three times heavier, and it is so hot that its surface could melt lead and lava rivers cover its surface.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

DSA should be abolished

Says Dr Kamal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gonoforum President Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday said the Digital Security Act (DSA) should be abolished, adding that it is one of those "black laws" which was enacted "to extend the tenure of this isolated government".

Kamal, an architect of the country's constitution, made the comments at a press conference at Jatiya Press Club.

Gonoforum lawmaker Mokabbir Khan read out Kamal's written statement.

"People -- the owners of the state -- become helpless where there is an absence of their effective participation in the process of formulation and impartial execution of laws," he said, adding, "It is possible to ensure people's role in the process of the formulation and impartial execution of laws only if they could choose their representatives through a neutral election."

On whether they are

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Inmate goes missing from Chattogram prison

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A murder accused inmate in Chattogram Central Jail is missing since yesterday morning.

Failing to find him, the jail authorities lodged a general diary with Kotwali Police Station, said police.

Quoting the GD, officer-in-charge (OC) Md Nezam Uddin of Kotwali Police Station said prisoner Farhad Hossain Rubel was found missing after the jail authorities opened the lock of his cell yesterday morning.

"He has been languishing in jail since February 9 in connection

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



PRAYER TIMING MARCH 7

Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
JAN 5-15	12-45	4-30	6-05	7-30
JAMAT 5-50	1-15	4-45	6-10	8-00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



A thick layer of dust on the solar panels that recharge the street lights in Fakirpool area of the capital. If the panels are not cleaned properly at regular intervals, it renders them unable to generate adequate power from the sun.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Don't let your guards down

Warns WHO

AFF, Geneva

Covax will distribute 14.4 million Covid-19 vaccine doses to 31 more countries next week, the WHO said as it warned people not to waste, through complacency, the hope that vaccines bring.

The WHO warning came as the death toll from the novel coronavirus hits 2,581,034 since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT yesterday. At least 116,031,470 cases of coronavirus have been registered.

On Friday, 10,685 new deaths and 450,657 new cases were recorded worldwide.

The Covax global vaccine-sharing facility shipped more than 20 million doses to 20 countries as the scheme aimed at ensuring poorer nations get access to jabs took off this week.

But the World Health Organization voiced fears that further waves of the coronavirus pandemic could be on the way if people think the roll-out of vaccines around the globe means the crisis is over.

"The arrival of vaccine is a moment of great hope. But it potentially also is a moment where we lose concentration," WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan told a press conference.

"I really am very concerned that... we think we're through this. We're not.

"And countries are going to lurch back into third and fourth surges if we're not careful.

"We should not waste the hope that vaccines bring... by dropping our guard in other areas."

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus praised the first full week of the Covax roll-out, but said

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5