

A 'GIANT STEP' TOWARD JUSTICE
Says Biden after ex-cop Chauvin found guilty of George Floyd's murder
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"The international community must not shy away from their responsibility to resolve the crisis and relieve Bangladesh from the burden that Myanmar has imposed upon us."
STATE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS SHAHRIAR ALAM ON ROHINGYA REPATRIATION



"Vaccination is now of paramount importance... to allow herd immunity to develop in the fall."
RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN ON COVID



"Artificial intelligence will open up new worlds for us. But this world also needs rules."
EU COMMISSION CHIEF URSULA VON DER LEYEN ON REGULATING THE SPRAWLING FIELD OF AI

CRITICALLY ILL COVID PATIENTS ICU bed, ventilator ever more elusive

ZYMA ISLAM

Only families with critically-ill Covid-19 patients know the pain of trying to find an intensive care unit (ICU) bed at this point. ICU wards are chock-full all over the city, while critical patients have their clocks ticking.

Unless one is an inpatient already, getting an ICU bed at a public hospital at the eleventh hour is a pipe dream.

After talking to several such families outside the ICU at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, one thing that became clear is many doors needed to be knocked upon before an ICU seat could be managed.

At the 10-bed ICU at Kurmitola General Hospital, 30-32 patients from the wards vie for a bed every single day, according to doctors there.

The only option left are the private hospitals.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) has listed 29 private hospitals with 476 ICU beds in Dhaka city that treat Covid-19 patients, but the actual number is a bit higher.

The relief of finally finding a bed, however, is insurmountable.

One would think that the patient has finally found safety. But then imagine the condition of the patient getting worse, the patient needing concentrated oxygen or intubation and the family discovering that the ICU bed given to them does not have a ventilator.

The search for another bed then begins all over again -- the same frantic phone calls to an endless list of hospitals, all of whom seem to have the same thing to say -- they do not have any beds empty, any ventilators free.

The World Health Organisation put invasive ventilators, continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP), bi-level positive airway pressure unit (BiPaP) and high-flow nasal cannulas in its list of priority medical devices a hospital must have to provide care to Covid-19 patients.

The situation is dire in ICUs for Covid-19 patients across most private hospitals in the country. There are of course exceptions with some of the oldest, legacy hospitals or franchise hospitals having as many ventilators as ICU beds.

Samorita Hospital, for example, has 12 ventilators and four high-flow

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THE NIGHTMARE PEOPLE ENDURE

For a medical test, family members are pulling the gurney to take the Covid-19 patient from one building of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital to another under the glaring sun. Such sights have been all too common on the hospital premises in recent weeks.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Movement restrictions working

Say experts on Covid transmission; 95 more die

MOUIDUD AHMED SUJAN

With the number of new cases and the daily positivity rate sliding, experts said the novel coronavirus transmission has started to slow down due to the ongoing restrictions on movement.

Yesterday, the health directorate reported 4,280 new cases against 28,408 tests.

On the previous day, 4,559 people tested positive, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) data.

The positivity rate yesterday was 15.07, down from the previous day's 16.85 percent.

In the last six days, the highest positivity rate was 23.36 percent on Friday. Since then, it continued a downward trend.

With the latest figures, the total number of confirmed cases rose to 7,32,060.

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Minimum Fitra fixed at Tk 70 per person

UNB, Dhaka

The minimum Fitra for this year has been fixed at Tk 70 per person while the maximum at Tk 2,310.

The decision was taken at a virtual meeting of the National Fitra Fixing Committee yesterday. Committee Chairman Hafez Maulana Mizanur Rahman, also the senior pesh imam of Baitul Mukarram national mosque, presided over the meeting.

Fitra, a compulsory charity, is paid to the needy before the jamaat (congregation) of Eid-ul-Fitr.

This year, Eid-ul-Fitr, one of the two major festivals celebrated by Muslims, is scheduled to be celebrated on May 13, subject to sighting of the moon.

COVISHIELD EXPORT Uncertain till June-July

Says India's Serum Institute CEO

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nationwide vaccination campaign in Bangladesh is set to suffer a major setback as Serum Institute CEO Adar Poonawalla yesterday said "there is no clarity" on vaccine exports at least before June-July.

"There is no clarity on exports and we also right now feel that we should not look at exports for two months during these cases. Maybe in June-July, we could start looking at small exports starting again. Right now, we are going to prioritise the needs of the nation [India] first," Adar Poonawalla told NDTV in an exclusive interview published yesterday.

The development comes when 75,77,889 jabs of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine -- made in India as Covishield -- out of 1.02 crore shots in stock were administered in Bangladesh as of yesterday.

Last week, health officials said with the remaining stock of jabs, they will be able to continue the vaccination campaign for the next 15 days.

Bangladesh on December 13 last year signed an agreement to purchase three crore doses of Covishield from Serum through its local agent Beximco Pharmaceuticals.

As per the deal, the government was supposed to get 50 lakh doses a month. But till yesterday, it only received 70 lakh doses in two instalments.

In addition to that, the Indian government sent 32 lakh doses as a gift. Amid a steep rise in Covid cases in India and reports of shortage, the Indian government reportedly paused vaccine exports last month to meet domestic demand.

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Leaders Summit on Climate begins today

PORIMOL PALMA

Leaders Summit on Climate called by US President Joe Biden is beginning today with hopes for cutting carbon emission and raising the funding for the countries vulnerable to climate change.

Forty global leaders of 17 major economies responsible for approximately 80 percent of global carbon emissions and global GDP and 23 heads of other countries that are demonstrating strong climate leadership will join the summit. A small number of business and civil society leaders will also participate in it.

From the economies, Chinese President

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DAMAGED BY CYCLONES, TIDAL SURGES

Fragile embankments put lives at risk

PORIMOL PALMA

Against the backdrop of the country's coastal regions facing devastation from cyclones and tidal surges over decades, work of protecting people's lives and livelihoods through strong embankments and afforestation goes slow due to funding and policy constraints.

According to officials and water experts, a majority of some 5,700 kilometres of embankments in 19 coastal districts are not sufficient in preventing inundation by high tides, salinity intrusion and tidal surges from cyclonic storms.

This is because the embankments around the 139 polders (low-lying tract of land protected by embankments), constructed in the 1960s and 1970s, have been damaged in the recurring natural disasters in the coastal region, which is home to 35 million people -- 28 percent of the country's population.

The Water Development Board (WDB) at different times repaired the embankments but did not upgrade them in a way that

DAMAGES CAUSED BY MAJOR CYCLONES

2007 Cyclone Akash	\$982m
2007 Cyclone Sidr	\$1.7b
2009 Cyclone Aila	\$1b
2019 Cyclone Fani	\$63m
2020 Cyclone Amphan	\$130m

proved sustainable.

Increasing height, using latest technologies including geo-bags and geotubes, afforestation, involving local people and local government in maintenance of the banks can greatly increase their longevity, experts said, fearing that the already-bad situation would worsen otherwise.

A World Bank study estimated 8 million people in the coastal region are vulnerable to inundation depths greater than three metres due to cyclonic storm surges. By 2050, this number may increase to 13.5

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Poet Shankha Ghosh passes away

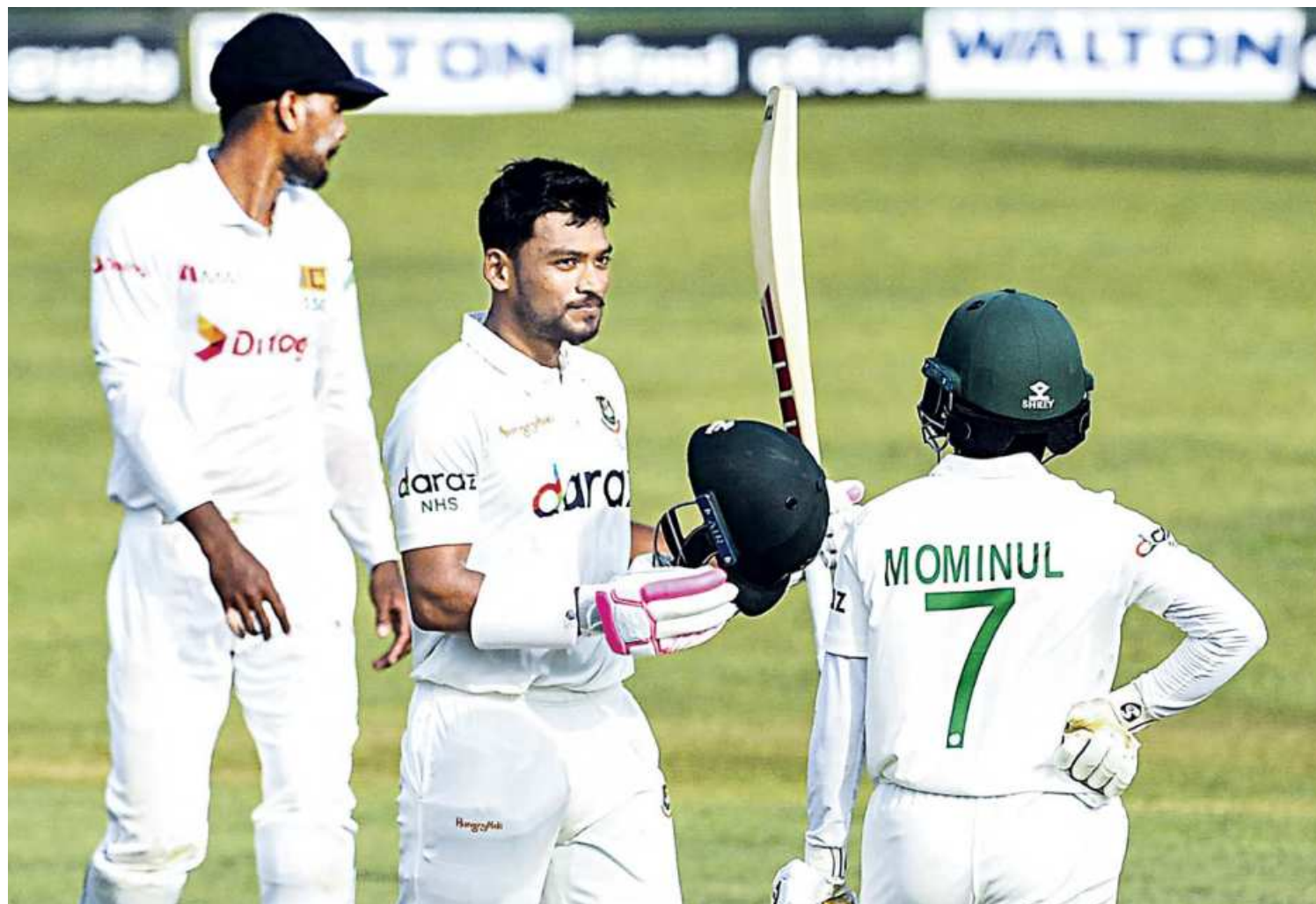
PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

Shankha Ghosh, the last of the five cult figures of modern Bangla poetry post Jibananda Das, died at his Kolkata residence after losing a week-long fight against Covid-19, bringing an end to a golden phase of Bangla literature.

He was 89. Ghosh, along with his contemporaries like Shakti Chattopadhyaya, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Utpal Kumar Basu and Benoy Majumdar, had formed what came to be known as the "pancha Pandav" of Bangla poetry in the post-Jibananda era.

But Ghosh clearly towered over the rest

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Bangladesh batsman Najmul Hossain celebrates his maiden Test hundred at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy yesterday. The Tigers capitalised on batting-friendly conditions on the opening day of the first Test against Sri Lanka. Najmul was unbeaten on 126 while captain Mominul Haque was not out on 64 as Bangladesh ended the day on 302 for 2.

PHOTO: AFP

PHASE-6 WB POLLS Matua votes may turn out to be X factor

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Matua voters are expected to play the pivotal role in today's sixth phase of the West Bengal assembly polls for both India ruler Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Trinamool Congress (TMC).

The 43 Assembly seats spread across four districts -- North 24 Parganas, Nadia, Purba Bardhaman and North Dinajpur -- are home to most of the 1.5 crore Matua voters. Around 3.5 crore Matua people live across the WB.

Matua, a sect of folk Hinduists, who are Namasudras -- a scheduled caste group, left the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) after the 1947 partition and migrated to West Bengal and was scattered mainly across three bordering districts with Bangladesh, with the exception of Purba Bardhaman.

Of them, in North 24 Parganas and also in parts of Nadia like Bongaon Uttar, Bongaon Dakshin, Swarnnagar, Bagda and Krishnanagar Dakshin, there is a high concentration of Matuas.

The sect took a left turn in 1977 and shifted its position in favour of the TMC in 2009. But in the 2019 general elections, they showed their loyalties to BJP. Now BJP is hoping to repeat its 2019 performance and has made every effort in its campaign leading up to the polls.

Apart from the geographical location and Matua voters, WB ruler TMC and its challenger BJP are also considering the voting ratio of the last Lok Sabha election (National Polls) for a tough fight.

In the last assembly election in 2016, the TMC won 32 seats, while National Congress won seven and the

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