

POST-COUP CRISIS IN MYANMAR

A leading Myanmar ethnic rebel army said it had shot down a military helicopter
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"The people have stopped the ruination... the spine is straight."
MAMATA BANERJEE ON WEST BENGAL VOTERS AFTER POLLS VICTORY



"Considering defamation as a criminal offence is a violation of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."
PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS CR ABRAR OF DHAKA UNIVERSITY



"What we've witnessed over the last several years is China acting more repressively at home and more aggressively abroad."
US SECRETARY OF STATE ANTONY BLINKEN

MASSIVE LAND ACQUISITION FORGERY

Tk 29cr goes to 15 fake owners

Public money embezzled using false papers for 80 decimals acquired to build PBI office in Cox's Bazar

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, back from Cox's Bazar

Nizam Uddin, a 55-year-old Cox's Bazar resident, was attending a relative's wedding at a hotel in the tourist town on December 23, 2019 when he received a phone call informing him that a powerful syndicate had sold his land to a government project posing as its owner.



A perplexed Nizam appeared at the district land acquisition office the next day to submit his hastily gathered land documents with the hope of receiving compensation as the rightful owner of his two-decimal land.

Since then, he has visited the land acquisition office numerous times -- a hundred visits, in his estimation -- but his pleas were met with indifference and neglect with no cooperation to provide him any compensation.

He claimed that he is now living under threat from the people who sold off his property to the government.

"It is unbelievable. I have got all the legal documents against my land, yet the syndicate robbed the money in collaboration with land acquisition officials, surveyors, and top brass of Cox's Bazar district administration," Nizam told The Daily Star on March 14.

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Locals carry a body in Bangla Bazar Ferry Ghat area of Madaripur's Shibchar upazila after a speedboat crashed into a sand-laden bulk carrier in the Padma around 7:00am yesterday, leaving 26 people on board the motorboat dead. *Inset*, a relative of one of the victims cries at a local primary school where the bodies were kept. PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS



Khaleda in CCU with breathing difficulties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, now undergoing treatment for Covid-19, was moved to the coronary care unit of Evercare Hospital in the city yesterday with breathing difficulties.

Her personal physician AZM Zahid Hossain said the former premier was moved to CCU from the cabin around 4:00pm after she developed breathing difficulties in the morning.

Khaleda's condition was stable and her breathing problems later eased a little, Zahid told The Daily Star.

The BNP chief was admitted to the hospital on April 27 night for some medical tests after she received second positive

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BEXIMCO-SERUM Talks on to make Oxford vaccines here

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Serum Institute of India has been in talks with Beximco about producing the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine in Bangladesh.

Serum's discussion with its Bangladeshi agent Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd is part of an effort to ramp up production as the former struggles to meet the demand in India and the global supply commitments.

Beximco has asked Serum about the amount of doses that can be produced here and where the doses would be supplied to, Beximco Managing Director Nazmul Hassan Papon said.

"Local production requires a large investment. Before making the investment, we need to study its feasibility. It won't be viable if we produce only for the local market... We are waiting for a formal proposal [from Serum]," Papon told The Daily Star yesterday.

It will be a milestone in the pharmaceuticals sector of Bangladesh, if Beximco produces the vaccine here, he added.

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No homegoing for Eid this time

Govt decides to keep all inter-district services suspended; 'lockdown' stretched till May 16; no extra Eid leave in addition to three days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to extend the ongoing lockdown till May 16 to contain the spread of Covid-19, keeping suspended inter-district bus, launch and train services during the period.

However, public transport will be allowed to operate within the cities and districts from May 6.

Besides, there will be a three-day holiday for the Eid-ul-Fitr. No extra holidays will be given.

The decisions were made yesterday at a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. She joined the meeting at the Secretariat via video conferencing.

The government has put restrictions on operation of public transport since April 5 amid a spike in Covid-19 cases.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said no inter-district buses, launches or trains will operate during the period.

In normal times, 80 lakh to 1.2 crore people leave Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur for village homes to celebrate the Eid with their loved ones, according to passenger welfare organisations.

Anwarul also said the government will be tougher to make people wear masks to curb the spread of the virus.

The local administration will conduct drives in markets and shopping malls across the country and monitor whether the market authorities are following the health safety guidelines properly, he mentioned.

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PRESS FREEDOM DAY 'Never thought I'd be forcefully disappeared'

Says journo Kajol

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"I still don't have the courage to say whether I was forcefully disappeared or I was lost," said photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol at a webinar yesterday.

Kajol was "found" in Benapole near the India border in the middle of the night on May 3 last year, 53 days after he went missing.

"I was assaulted for doing my job. But I never thought I'd be forcefully disappeared," he said at a webinar, hosted by citizen's platform "Nagorik", marking the World Press Freedom Day yesterday.

"I cannot describe how my family and I went through the cruel times."

He said he never thought he would be able to return among his acquaintances and talk. "I did not have any power or any political backing to help me return."

Moderating the event, Supreme Court lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua said, "Kajol has

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26 die as speedboat overturns in Padma

It hit a sand-laden bulkhead in Madaripur

SUZIT KUMAR DAS and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Twenty-six people were killed as a speedboat capsized after it crashed into a sand-laden bulk carrier in the Padma river in Madaripur yesterday.

All the deceased -- three women, two children and 21 men -- were passengers of the speedboat.

Bodies of 22 victims were handed over to family members till 6:00pm yesterday, said Ashiqur Rahman, inspector of Banglabazar ferry terminal traffic police in Madaripur.

Five persons, including the driver of the speedboat, were rescued alive. They were undergoing treatment at different hospitals, he added.

The accident took place around 7:00am near the old terminal at Kathalbari, around one kilometre away from Banglabazar terminal in Shibchar upazila of Madaripur.

The speedboat, which was carrying 30 passengers, had started from Shimulia terminal of Munshiganj and was heading towards Banglabazar terminal, said Abdur Razzak, in-charge of naval police's Char Janajati outpost.

When it arrived near Kathalbari, the motorboat collided with the bulk carrier, causing it to capsize, he added.

Ahuri Begum, 35, a passenger of the speedboat who survived the accident but lost her husband and one-and-a-half-year-old son, said, "Since the beginning, the driver was operating the speedboat haphazardly. It was clear to all of us that the driver was not skilled. We were all anxious. Finally, our speedboat hit the bulk carrier and I saw everyone going under water."

"I became unconscious and when I regained my senses, I found myself in a hospital bed," she told The Daily Star near the site of the accident, where she had returned to receive the bodies of her husband and son.

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BUSINESS
MFS industry swells riding on low-income groups

Mobile financial services have gained immense popularity in Bangladesh, particularly among lower-income groups, but the charge to withdraw funds has remained almost unchanged since the inception of the digital platform.

As a result, most clients have to fork out Tk 18.50 to withdraw Tk 1,000 from their accounts. It was the same in 2011 when the service was rolled out.

Some MFS providers have recently slashed the charge to Tk 14, but users and analysts say the rate is still high, and a further reduction will benefit the poor, who use the service most.

STORY ON B1



Without maintaining physical distancing, people travel on a pickup in the capital's Shanir Akhra area on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway. As public transport remains suspended due to the Covid-19 restrictions, many city dwellers are heading home this way every day ahead of Eid, ignoring the risks involved. The photo was taken around 1:00pm yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Mamata relegates Left to footnote

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

The landslide victory of Mamata Banerjee has not only thwarted the Modi wave that has swept over India but also relegated the Left and Congress to a footnote in West Bengal polls.

Trinamool Congress, which is all set for a third consecutive term in West Bengal, also brought hope for major regional political parties to check Modi's populist sway and posed a challenge to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party ahead of the next general elections due in 2024.

Samyukta Morcha, the alliance of the Congress, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Indian Secular Front (ISF), managed to get only 8.61 percent of the votes and most of the candidates of Left parties and Congress lost their security deposits.

The only success for the Morcha came through the ISF, formed only months before the elections, which won just one seat in South 24 Parganas district.

On the other hand, the BJP has made a big leap by winning 77 seats, especially since it won three in the last assembly polls in 2016.

According to analysts, Modi's saffron party failed to produce a credible chief ministerial face of its own to match Mamata's charisma. Besides, the party had set an ambitious target of 200-plus seats in West Bengal. Besides, the conflict between the old and new comers in West Bengal BJP came to a head before the election on the issue of choosing nominees.

Many BJP nominees were defectors from other parties -- 36 from the TMC alone -- but only five of them, including Suvendu Adhikari, could win.

Polls result showed that the West Bengal people mostly preferred Mamata's welfare schemes like duare sarkar (government at the doorstep), Kanyashree, Rupashree, Khadya Sathi, Krishak Bandhu and Swasthya Sathi over the central government sponsored PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi and Ayushman Bharat medical insurance scheme.

On the other hand, an unprecedented consolidation of Muslim votes in most of the 141 assembly constituencies

ANOTHER STORY ON PAGE 6

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