

Violence rules first phase

FROM PAGE 1

During the clash, several crude bombs went off. Ali, who was going to cast his ballot at the centre, was critically injured in one of the blasts.

He was rushed to a local health complex where doctors declared him dead, said Md Maruf Hossain Khan, superintendent of police in Barisal.

Returning Officer Mamunur Rahman said voting at the centre was suspended for around one hour.

In a separate incident in Barishal, a youth was killed and another injured in post-polls violence in Khanjapur union of Gournadi upazila.

The dead was identified as Abu Fakir, 25, a supporter of member candidate Md Giasuddin, said police.

After voting, the presiding officer at Pangashia Secondary School Centre announced Giasuddin victorious.

Following the announcement, the supporters of member candidate Arot Ali Sarder swooped on the followers of Giasuddin and exploded crude bombs around 6:00pm, leaving Abu Fakir fatally injured.

He was rushed to hospital where he died from his wounds, said Inspector Touhiduzzaman of Gournadi Police Station.

Meanwhile, a man was killed and two others were injured in a clash between supporters of two member candidates in Hazariganj union in Bhola.

The deceased was identified as Monir Hossain (23) of the same union.

The clash took place between supporters of two member candidates around 11:30am when voting was going on at Dakkhin Char Fakira Kuayed Primary School Centre in Char Fasson upazila.

Monir suffered bullet wound in the clash. He was taken to hospital where doctors pronounced him dead, said police.

"The deceased was probably a supporter of a candidate. But it is yet to be confirmed..." said Sarkar Md Kaysar, SP of Bhola.

Besides, two persons were hit by bullets in Barguna as supporters of two chairman candidates clashed in Badarkhali union of sadar upazila.

The clash broke out over establishing supremacy near South Badarkhali Government Primary School Centre around 3:45pm, said KM Tariqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Barguna Sadar Police Station.

In the meantime, at least 15 AL men were injured in Laxmipur as supporters of an AL-nominated chairman candidate clashed with followers of a rebel candidate in Torabganj union of Kamalganj upazila.

In Patuakhali, three supporters of two chairman candidates were stabbed outside Keshabpur High School centre in Keshobpur union of Bauful upazila.

Voting at the centre remained suspended for about one and a half hours following the incident.

In the same upazila, two independent chairman candidates of Konakdia union boycotted the polls, bringing allegations of vote rigging.

Besides, seven out of eight chairman candidates in Sapleza union in Pirojpur's Mathbaria upazila boycotted the elections over allegations of vote rigging by the AL-nominated candidate.

An independent chairman candidate alleged that he was assaulted by the supporters of an AL-backed candidate, who refuted the allegation.

In Indurkani upazila, a mobile court sentenced a youth to eight months' imprisonment for trying to cast a fake vote at Patherhat Government Primary School Centre.

[Our correspondents from respective districts contributed to this report]



People take part in a yoga session at the Kanheri Caves on the outskirts of Mumbai, India to mark International Yoga Day yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

India begins free vaccination drive

FROM PAGE 12

The government aims to inoculate all of India's almost 1.1 billion adults by the end of the year.

"The vaccination drive is expected to pick up speed now... the daily vaccination has picked up over the last week and is expected to strengthen further," community health expert Rajib Dasgupta told AFP.

"However, both existing inequities as well as hesitancy merit deeper attention to make this a success."

YOGA PUSH

The free roll-out came as Modi marked the annual Yoga Day event with an early-morning address to the nation as it emerges from the surge, saying the practice had again proved itself to be a source of "inner strength".

"When I speak to frontline warriors, they tell me that they have adopted yoga as a protective shield in their fight against coronavirus. Doctors have strengthened themselves with yoga and also used yoga to treat their patients," Modi said.

Public parks were re-opened in Delhi yesterday, but the number of events for Yoga Day was cut back around the country for the second year running because of the pandemic.

Yoga Day -- proposed by Modi and adopted by the United Nations in 2014 -- is observed mostly in India, but also worldwide on the Northern Hemisphere's longest day.

Throughout the pandemic, India's government has touted yoga and

herbal medicines -- sales of which have boomed -- to protect and give relief to people infected with the virus.

But evidence is scant and the claims have faced pushback from India's doctors, who wore black armbands last month to protest Baba Ramdev, a guru with ties to the Modi administration who has said yoga can cure Covid-19.

India is the world's second most infected nation with nearly 30 million cases and more than 388,000 deaths, although experts say the actual toll could be much higher due to underreporting.

Authorities said late yesterday that the Amarnath Yatra -- an annual Hindu pilgrimage to a cave shrine in Kashmir that draws some 300,000 participants -- would be cancelled for the second straight year due to the pandemic.

INDONESIA HITS 2M CASES

Indonesia passed two million coronavirus cases yesterday as infection rates soar and hospitals are flooded with new patients, prompting warnings that the Southeast Asian nation's health crisis could spiral out of control.

The unwanted milestone comes after daily case rates more than doubled in recent weeks and authorities identified the presence of highly infectious Covid-19 variants.

The authorities announced tighter curbs to contain the spread of virus. The regulations will apply for two

weeks in 29 "red zones" nationwide where infection rates are high, with religious activities at houses of worship suspended and restaurants, cafes and malls required to operate at 25% capacity, Coordinating Economic Minister Airlangga Hartarto said.

Yesterday, official figures showed that Indonesia had recorded a daily record high of 14,536 cases, taking the total to just over two million with nearly 55,000 deaths, among a population of nearly 270 million.

But those figures are widely thought to be a severe underestimate, due to low testing and contact tracing -- some experts have said that official cases may only be about 10 percent of the real number.

The Indonesian Medical Association said the variants appeared to be sickening younger people.

"Previously, Covid-19 patients were elderly or those with [pre-existing conditions]," the association's Covid-19 spokeswoman Erlina Burhan said earlier.

Meanwhile, South Africa was set to host a "technology transfer hub" for coronavirus vaccines to scale up production know-how in Africa's worst-hit nation, President Cyril Ramaphosa said yesterday.

Ramaphosa said French President Emmanuel Macron and World Health Organisation chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus would join him at a media briefing to announce the initiative.

It's unfortunate if confession

FROM PAGE 12

HC bench that a father in Bogura has lost his eight-year-old son, but his another son aged 12 has been implicated in the murder case.

The father and his family have been compelled to leave their home, he said.

The lawyer said the 12-year-old boy was tortured and forced to give confessional statement, but the juvenile court concerned in Bogura has not taken any legal steps to this effect although there is a law in this regard.

He added that his clients have submitted this criminal revision petition to the HC for necessary directives on the authorities concerned to conduct a fair inquiry into the incident.

Deputy Attorney General Md Bashir Ullah opposed the criminal revision petition saying that the petitioners could have sought necessary directives through a writ petition.

Five Supreme Court lawyers

-- Ahammed Abdullah Khan, Md Zahurul Islam, Md Mustafizur Rahman, Md Zobaidur Rahman and Imrul Kayes -- jointly filed the criminal revision petition as a public interest litigation before the HC on Sunday challenging the legality of the trial proceedings at the Juvenile Court in Bogura.

Lawyer Shishir placed the petition before the HC bench along with a copy of The Daily Star report on the matter, as well as its video report, as supportive documents.

In the petition, the petitioners prayed to the HC bench to summon case documents from the juvenile court and take necessary steps to give remedy for the "gross injustice".

On June 11, The Daily Star published a report titled "Bearing the unbearable", and a follow-up video about the ordeal of the family.

On August 25, 2015, the body of eight-year-old was found in a jute field in Bogura's Katakhal. A day later, the father filed a case with Sariakandi Police Station.

Moves ahead finally

FROM PAGE 12

National Highway, Dhaka-Sylhet National Highway, Dhaka-Mymensingh National Highway along with some regional highways and district roads.

Once the project is completed, buses, trucks and other vehicles will be able to easily travel from northern and western parts of the country to eastern and southern parts without entering Dhaka city.

In September 2012, Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs gave approval in principle to the project to be implemented under PPP.

The Ecneec in March 2016 had approved the support project for land acquisition, resettlement and shifting of utility lines for the expansion works.

The RHD on December 6, 2018 signed a contract with a China-Bangladesh consortium to upgrade the road to a four-lane access-controlled expressway.

The companies are: Sichuan Road and Bridge (Group) Corporation Ltd of China (60 percent), and Shamim Enterprise (Pvt) Ltd (30 percent) and UDC Corporation Ltd (10 percent) of Bangladesh.

WHY THE DELAY, COST ESCALATION?

As per the deal, the road authority will provide land, carry out resettlement and shift utility lines while the private partner will finance, build, operate and maintain the road for a concession period of 25 years.

The partner will collect toll from vehicles following a fixed rate.

At the time of signing of the agreement, the estimated cost of the physical project was Tk 3,039 crore. Of the amount, the government was supposed to provide Tk 224 crore as viability gap financing.

The work for expansion of the highway, with service lanes on both sides, was supposed to be begin within nine months of signing of the deal and the road was expected to be

opened to traffic by 2022, officials said previously.

But the private partner could not manage funds until April this year and the RHD could not complete land acquisition, causing the delay in project implementation.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader had laid the foundation stone of the project in December 2019, but it did not see any progress mainly due to Covid-19 pandemic, said officials.

Asked why the support project cost is going to increase, Sertajur said when the project was approved in 2016, they had to pay the affected people two times the actual price of their land.

But a new land acquisition law came into force in 2017 and now the government has to pay the affected people three times the actual price of their land and two-times the actual price of the existing structures on the land, the deputy director of the project said. "So, the government has to bear the additional costs."

The RHD has to acquire 13 acres more land for the project due to some modifications of the road design, leading to escalation of the cost.

On April 23 this year, the private partner, formally known as Dhaka Bypass Expressway Development Company Ltd, signed a financing agreement with China Development Bank (CDB) and Bangladesh Infrastructure Finance Fund Ltd (BIFFL). As per the deal, CDB will provide Tk 1,614 crore and BIFFL Tk 1,075 crore, source said.

Earlier, Asian Development Bank agreed to provide a credit of \$100 million to BIFFL for granting the loan to the private partner.

However, the private partner started the physical work of the project in October last year with its own fund. The company is expecting to start getting bank loan from August, the sources added.

Senator urges Nixon to halt Pakistani ship

FROM PAGE 12

SEN CHURCH URGES NIXON TO HALT AMRS SHIPMENT

Senator Frank Church urged President Richard Nixon in a letter to order the Coast Guard to intercept the freighter Padma, which left New York on June 21, to prevent the delivery of military equipment to Pakistan. He said if this could not be accomplished, the United States should seek Canada's co-operation in halting the ship. The Padma's first port of call is Montreal.

REFUGEE PROBLEM NOT JUST A MATTER OF CHARITY: INDIRA GANDHI

The international community should concentrate on all aspects of the Pakistani refugee problem, not only relief aid, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said in an interview on the Italian Television today. She added that India was bearing the brunt of the burden although it was one of the poorest countries in the world, but the situation was not simply a matter of charity.

"Future peace is at stake along with stability in that part of the world. If there is no peaceful stability, I believe there will be repercussions on the rest

of the world," she said. There was already huge unemployment, she added, and work could not be given to non-Indian nationals.

BANGLADESH CABINET MEETS

Cabinet meeting of the exiled Bangladesh government was held today. The members discussed various issues including war strategies and selection and training of freedom fighters. It may be noted that the cabinet used to meet regularly on Monday and Friday.

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

Retail power price went up 90pc in 11yrs

FROM PAGE 1

Shares of various government-owned companies are being sold to private owners. The money earned this way is kept as fixed deposits (FDR), but no one knows where the money goes, he said.

He also said the check and balance was being disrupted as government secretaries were being made members of such companies' board of directors. "Sometimes, it is the same persons who represent the regulator and the companies while setting electricity prices."

Cab Advisor (energy) Prof M Shamsul Alam said, "Getting electricity at fair prices is our right."

Slamming the government for hiking electricity prices so many

times, he claimed that people in some European countries were paying less than Bangladeshis for electricity.

He also said reformation of the power sector had become essential. "The country started reforming the sector 17 years ago, but the government has not been able to effectively control the companies. Those companies are not caring about the minimum prices set by the government."

Shamsul also said it was the basic duty of the regulatory commission to protect consumer rights and attract investment for the sector.

"But the authorities have fixed the profit margin so high that both foreign and local companies compete to invest. In the meantime, people are having to buy electricity at two to two-

and-half times higher than what they are supposed to."

Dhaka University's Economics department Chairman Prof MM Akash said the increasing bulk and retail prices of electricity were impacting on the consumers.

"No one knows the actual cost of generating electricity in the private sector. The government has enacted an indemnity law in the sector, which is unacceptable."

CAB President Golam Rahman presided over the webinar conducted by Voktakantho Editor Kazi Abdul Hannan and a CAB organiser Syed Mizanur Rahman.

Rajshahi University Prof Malay Bhowmik and journalist Musa Mia also spoke at the webinar.

Ethiopians vote in poll overshadowed by Tigray

AFP, Addis Ababa

Ethiopians yesterday began voting in a closely-watched election taking place as famine grips the war-torn Tigray region and doubts linger about the credibility of the twice-delayed vote.

It is the first electoral test for Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, 44, who rose to power in 2018 championing a democratic revival in Africa's second most populous country, and a break from its authoritarian past.

The Nobel Peace laureate, who freed political prisoners and welcomed back exiles, promised this election would be Ethiopia's most competitive in history, free of the repression that marred previous ballots.

At a polling station in the centre of

the capital Addis Ababa, voters began casting their ballots at 6:10 am (0310 GMT), an AFP journalist saw, while at another polling station workers finalised preparations.

"I believe this election will shine a light of democracy on Ethiopia," said Yordanos Berhanu, a 26-year-old accountant who was first in line to vote.

"As a young Ethiopian, I (have) hope for the future of my country, and believe voting is part of that," she said as around 100 other voters queued behind her, wrapped in blankets against the pre-dawn chill.

The elections will choose national and regional parliamentarians. The national MPs elect the prime minister, who is head of government, as well as the president -- a largely

ceremonial role.

Abiy's ruling Prosperity Party has fielded the most candidates for national parliamentary races, and is the firm favourite to win a majority and form the next government.

Security has been ramped up, with police marching in force in Addis Ababa over the weekend, and reinforcements deployed "to all corners of the country" of 110 million inhabitants, Abiy's office said.

A small contingent of police standing beneath a large Ethiopian flag helped prepare the polling station where Yordanos waited to vote.

The election was twice delayed -- once for the coronavirus pandemic, and again to allow more time to organise the ballot across a huge nation.

Mannan for

FROM PAGE 12

-- Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) -- for bringing more dynamism in it.

The minister also hinted at a massive reform in Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) to equip with adequate manpower and resources so that the BBS can conduct more research and surveys.

He also said the VAT (value-added tax) law of 2012 came into effect in 2018 but the government's revenue collection remains short of the target.

The discussion titled "Budget 2021-22: Bangladesh Towards a Resilient Future, Protecting Lives and Livelihoods" was jointly organised by the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) and the Policy Research Institute (PRI).

On several occasions in the past, Mannan blamed inefficient bureaucracy for several ministries' failure to ensure quality spending of budgetary allocations.

The average spending capacity of the ministries has been around 70 percent of the allocated funds for the last few years.

The ministries' inability to spend the funds has deprived people of the full benefits of the government's budgetary allocations.

Prime suspect

FROM PAGE 12

Mamunul Haque allegedly led to the mayhem in the village, where about 90 Hindu houses were vandalised and looted.

The next day, two cases were filed with the Shalla Police Station -- one by Habibpur union chairman and a victim of the attacks Bibekananda Majumdar Bakul, and another by Sub-inspector Abdul Karim of the station -- naming Shahidul as prime accused along with several other named accused, and hundreds of unnamed accused.

Shahidul, a member of Sarmangal union parishad in Derai upazila, was arrested by Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) on March 20 from Moulvibazar.

He is a resident of Nachni village adjacent to Naogaon and locally known as a leader of Jubo League, the ruling Awami League's youth front. Jubo League, however, claimed that he was not a leader of the organisation.

Meanwhile, Jhumon Das Apon was also detained by police the night before the attack and the police on March 22 filed a case against him under the Digital Security Act.

He is still in jail as the same court repeatedly denied his bail plea, his lawyer Debangshu Sekhar Das said.

Microchip

FROM PAGE 12

As per the salon, a simple tap on the chip-bearing, the finger will transfer personal data such as WhatsApp details, a digital business card, or social media details within seconds.

Makarem started to offer "smart nails" after the pandemic hit.

"We came up with this idea because we were thinking, how to support social distancing in beauty services using technology," she explained. "The only challenge was to make it small enough to fit the fingernail."

The chip has to be placed between one to two centimetres from a smartphone to be activated. This microchip is also claimed to be safe and cannot be tracked or hacked. The data storage capacity of the chip is quite low for now.

Labour Beauty Lounge said it has completed more than 500 microchip manicures. Makarem hopes the nail microchip will have other uses in the future, from digital restaurant menus for waiters to contactless payments.

"Dubai, it's an innovative city. Usually the people they like the weird and creative ideas," she added.

Syria regime

shelling on

Idlib kills 9

AFP, Beirut

Syrian government shelling on the rebel-controlled enclave of Idlib yesterday killed at least nine people, including four civilians, a war monitor reported.

The violence was the latest in a spate of violations of a ceasefire deal that was brokered by Turkey and Russia in March 2020 and had largely held since.

Yesterday's artillery fire struck several locations near the ceasefire lines and one Syrian soldier was killed in retaliatory fire, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

In one incident in the village of Al-Bara, two women were killed by regime shelling, the Observatory said.

In the village of Ithem, shelling struck a police station, killing one policeman and four members of armed groups opposed to the government of President Bashar al-Assad and its allies.

Another 13 people were wounded, the monitor said.

Both areas are under the control of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a jihadist organisation that includes ex-members of Al Qaeda's former Syria affiliate.

Smaller factions are also present in those areas, said Rami Abdul Rahman, the head of the UK-based Observatory.