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from key flashpoint in the
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TIGERS TAKE HISTORIC SERIES

Fizz bowls nerveless penultimate over to deliver 10-run win against Aussies

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Pacer Mustafizur Rahman was the saviour yesterday, helping Bangladesh complete a remarkable turnaround from a trying situation as they trumped Australia by 10 runs in the third T20I, in the process clinching their first ever series win over the men from down under.

The Tigers, defending a modest 127 for nine, completed a stirring win under lights at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, and now lead the five-match series 3-0.

Australia's man in form Mitchell Marsh, who struck a battling 47-ball 51, looked set to carry his team over the ropes with seven wickets in hand and 34 required from three overs.

Then came one of the turning points when Marsh looked to go big down the ground but departed to Shoriful Islam in the 18th over, not getting the connection he hoped.

The most pivotal point of the game would come in the 19th over bowled by Mustafizur.

Fizz, who had been earmarked as the key by Australia on this kind of pitch, brought out all his skill and guile in a tight scenario, with Australia needing 23 from the last 12 balls. His slower worked their magic, not in producing wickets but crucial dot balls.

The cutters gripped the surface, beguiling Dan Christian, the batsman on strike as he failed to get his bat on three deliveries on the trot. A yorker on the last delivery did not produce any runs either and that is where the game changed as the Aussies managed just one run in that over -- Carey squeezing out a single -- and Fizz ended with only nine runs conceded in his four overs, the pivotal hand in the historic series win.

A six off the first delivery of the final over brought hope for the Aussies but Mahedi Hasan, despite bowling a no-ball in his fourth delivery, held on as the Aussies fell short by 10 runs, needing 22 off the last over.

At the start of Australia's chase, left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed gave Bangladesh the early breakthrough in the second over to see the back of touring skipper Matthew Wade, who

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Bangladesh players celebrate the dismissal of Mitchell Marsh, Australia's man-in-form, on way to clinching a maiden series victory against the visitors. The Tigers defended 127 by restricting the Aussies to 117 for four in the third T20I yesterday after having earlier won the first two matches of the series. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



VEGETABLES	LOCAL PRICE AT BOROBAZAR IN JASHORE (TK)	RETAIL PRICE IN DHAKA KITCHEN MARKETS (TK)
Pointed gourd	8	40
Bitter gourd	12	40
Eggplant	20	40-50
Bottle gourd	10-12	30-40
Green papaya	8-9	30

- Prices of all vegetables dropped by at least 50% in northern region
- Farmers' losses could have been minimised by taking proper measures to check disruptions in the supply chain, experts say
- About 59.6 lakh tonnes of vegetables were produced this summer, up 10.7% from last year

Lockdown shocks vegetable farmers

While prices drop at growers' level, vegetables still dearer in city kitchen markets

AKANDA MUHAMMAD JAHID

Hoping to turn a handsome profit, Jasim Uddin took a Tk 50,000 loan from a local non-governmental organisation to grow pointed and bottle gourds on 40 decimals of land in Rahamatpur village in Jashore.

But the countrywide lockdown since July 23 has shattered all his hopes -- prices are too low for him to even be able to pay the labourers' wages and the transport cost.

At Boro Bazar and Satmail Bazar in the district, a kilogramme of pointed gourd is selling for Tk 3 to Tk 5 and a single bottle gourd for Tk 10 to Tk 12.

Before the lockdown kicked in, the 45-year-old farmer sold the pointed gourd for Tk 20 to Tk 25 per kg and bottle gourd Tk 30 to Tk 40 per piece.

In contrast, the two varieties of vegetables are selling at Tk 40 per kg and Tk 50 to Tk 60 per piece respectively at various kitchen markets in the capital.

Despite a good yield this year, Jasim

and several lakh vegetable farmers across the country are bearing the brunt of the lockdown imposed to curb the second wave of coronavirus cases sweeping the nation.

This summer, about 59.6 lakh tonnes of vegetables were produced, up 10.7 percent from last year on the back of improved seed varieties and the absence of natural calamities, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

"We are devastated by the lockdown," said Amzad Hossain, a farmer in Bogura, a district in Northern Bangladesh.

Amzad cultivated brinjals and okra on 45 decimals of land and might have to incur a loss of Tk 1 lakh this season.

The prices of almost all vegetables dropped by at least 50 percent in the region, according to Manik Mia, a vegetable wholesaler in Dinajpur, another district up north.

"How will I make up the production cost?" asked a tearful Hashem Ali, another

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Dengue infections keep rising

214 more admitted to hospital in a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More and more dengue patients are requiring hospitalisation as the number of dengue cases continues to rise across the country.

At least 214 people with dengue fever were admitted to hospitals in the country in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday. Three of them were from outside Dhaka. This took the total number of dengue patients to 4,115, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Of the infected, only 147 were from outside Dhaka.

Around 1,457 of the dengue patients were diagnosed during the

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COVID PANDEMIC

Delta drives rise in deaths

5 die every hour since the deadly variant found in May

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Nearly five people have died per hour since the Delta variant of the Covid-19 was detected in the country on May 8, shows data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The number of deaths per hour over the last three months is four times higher than that in the previous months of the pandemic.

The DGHS data shows 10,371 people died between May 8 and yesterday, meaning 4.72 people died per hour.

On the other hand, 11,833 deaths were recorded between May 7 this year and March 18 last year when the first Covid cases were detected in the country. On average, the country saw 1.18 deaths per hour.

A total of 22,150 Covid deaths were confirmed across the country till yesterday, with a date rate of 1.66 percent, shows the data.

The World Health Organisation has termed the Delta variant a "variant of concern" as it is more transmissible than the virus' previous strains.

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Police quiz TV director Chayanika

Question her over links with Pori Moni

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives quizzed TV director Chayanika Chowdhury at the DB office in the capital for three hours last night.

Officers interrogated her over her ties with arrested actress Pori Moni, who is accused of possessing drugs and liquor.

"We were receiving many allegations against Chayanika Chowdhury... We felt that we needed to talk to Chayanika Chowdhury and interrogate her," said Joint Commissioner Harun Ur Rashid of Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

If needed, Chayanika might be summoned again to the DB office, he told a press briefing in front of DB office around 10:15pm.

Meanwhile, Pori Moni's costume designer Junaid Karim Jimmy was detained last night from Banani.

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Relatives wheeling Fatema Begum to the Covid ICU unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday, a day after the 70-year-old patient from Barishal was admitted to the hospital. She was shifted from the DMCH's Coronary Care Unit as her oxygen levels dropped.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

6-DAY VACCINATION DRIVE Target revised down to 32 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although the government had initially planned to inoculate around one crore people against Covid-19 during a six-day special drive beginning today, it has revised down the target to 32 lakh apparently due to a shortage of vaccines.

Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), yesterday termed the nationwide campaign a "pilot project" and said it would be launched this morning in rural areas.

"The government would expand the campaign area. A total of 32 lakh people will be jabbed in more than 15,000 centres on August 7-12 during the campaign," he said at a press briefing at the capital's Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons. Health Minister Zahid Maleque was scheduled to address the briefing but he was not present.

Earlier, the government had announced that it would inoculate one crore people in those six days across the country.

However, a top government official on Wednesday said the number of doses would be lowered due to a shortage of vaccines.

The health DG yesterday said people aged 25 and above would get the doses, stepping away from the government's previous statement that those aged 18 and above would be jabbed in the drive.

"Many people aged around 18 don't have NID [national identification] cards. It could create some chaos. So we decided to inoculate people who are aged 25 and over," he said adding that those completing the registration and getting text messages on their mobile phones would be given the shots.

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BANGLADESH UPDATE

12,606
New cases in 24hrs

13,35,260
Total cases

22,150
Deaths

11,72,437
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,285,724
Deaths

202,015,297
Total cases

195 countries okay key UN climate report

AFP, Paris

Representatives from 195 countries yesterday approved a critical UN science report that will provide the most comprehensive and up-to-date assessment yet of the state of Earth's climate.

"Today, #IPCC's latest #ClimateReport -- #ClimateChange 2021: the Physical Science Basis -- was approved and accepted in a historical first virtual approval session," the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tweeted yesterday.

The report is set to be released on Monday.

IPCC delegates have been locked in virtual negotiations for two weeks, vetting a 30-page "summary for policymakers" - line-by-line, word-by-word -- of an underlying scientific report years in the making.

"This was such an amazing experience, so proud to be a small part of this great team and what we have achieved," German climatologist and IPCC contributor Friederike Otto said on Twitter.

On the heels of deadly floods in India, China and northern Europe as well as asphalt-melting heatwaves in North America and southern Europe, the IPCC's report assesses the latest climate science.

The world has changed since its last comprehensive assessment in 2014.

With increasingly sophisticated technology allowing scientists to measure climate change and predict its future path, the report is expected to make for harrowing reading.

It will project global temperature

changes until the end of the century under different emissions scenarios.

Based almost entirely on published research, it could forecast -- even under optimistic scenarios -- a temporary "overshoot" of the 1.5C target of the Paris Agreement, and upwardly revised estimates for long-term sea-level rise.

It is also expected to reflect huge progress in so-called attribution science, which allows experts to link individual extreme weather events directly to man-made climate change.

While the underlying IPCC report is purely scientific, the summary for policymakers is negotiated by national representatives, and therefore subject to competing priorities.

Belgian climate physicist and former IPCC co-chair Jean-Pascal Ypersele, who was party to the negotiations, said the talks were guided by the underlying science.

"I can testify that the authors of the #ClimateReport had the last word on every sentence in the SPM, which really was a Summary FOR (and not BY) policymakers," he said on Twitter.

The report comes less than three months ahead of the COP26 climate talks in Glasgow, which are seen as vital for humanity's chance of limiting the worst impacts of global warming.

French climatologist Corinne Le Quere congratulated the delegates for finalising "the text of what I think will be one of the most important scientific reports ever published".

There will be two further parts to the IPCC's latest round of climate assessments, known as AR6.



The Shimulia ferry ghat in Munshiganj sees a huge rush of passengers on the weekend yesterday as people from southern districts are heading towards the capital breaching health safety rules. The situation was almost similar at Banglabazar ferry ghat in Madaripur across the Padma. A total of 10 BIWTC ferries carried passengers and vehicles on the Shimulia-Banglabazar route throughout the day.

PHOTO: STAR

Tigers take historic series

FROM PAGE 1

tried to paddle over short fine leg but only managing to find the fielder in the circle.

A maiden from Nasum in the fourth over -- the first of the series -- and Fizz conceding three runs in the final over of the Powerplay saw Australia reach 20 for one, but Marsh released the pressure with a swept four and an inside-out six over cover against Nasum. Australia looked in control with Marsh then picking Shakib Al Hasan and Shoriful for boundaries.

With Australia gaining momentum at 68 for one in 12 overs, it appeared the game was going the visitors' way and when Shoriful dropped McDermott off Mustafizur in the first ball of the 13th over, the match was slipping away.

It was then that Fizz began to have his say, bowling a one-run over. The turnaround materialised and Shakib -- who played his first ever match for Bangladesh 15 years ago in an ODI in Harare -- was the one who initiated it, breaking the 63-run stand and casting opener Ben McDermott for a 41-ball 35.

The Tigers were further buoyed when Shoriful struck in the 15th over. Moises Henrique departed for two trying to go over the infield and as the required run-rate crept over nine it was suddenly Australia who felt the pressure.

Fizz and Co then prevailed to notch what is a historic series win. Shoriful bagged two for 29 runs while Shakib and Nasum ended with one each.

Earlier, skipper Mahmudullah's 54-ball 53 took the Tigers to 127 for nine on another tough day for the batsmen. The end of the innings would be marked by Aussie pacer Nathan Ellis getting a hat-trick on debut.

Having won the toss and electing to

bat, Bangladesh did not have the best of starts after rain had delayed the toss by an hour and 30 minutes. Ashton Turner created opportunities with Soumya Sarkar still searching for form and survived a stumping appeal before he was dropped by Carey at square leg.

Next over, Josh Hazlewood created all sorts of trouble for Soumya who dabbled at a few deliveries in the corridor of uncertainty with the ball angling across him. Soumya managed to get off strike on the fifth delivery.

Hazlewood struck next ball with a delivery that seemed slightly after pitching and then sort of held its line with Mohammad Naim only managing to nick it through to the wicketkeeper to depart for one.

Having survived the earlier over, Soumya's slog sweep did not connect on the first Adam Zampa delivery next over and the Aussies got the leg-before decision as it rapped his pads. Soumya departed for an 11-ball two, unable to overturn the decision.

Mahmudullah promoted himself up the order and faced with a slow outfield and the ball seaming a bit, the Tigers had their most experienced duo out in the middle in these conditions. It would result in their most meaningful partnership as Shakib and the skipper kept the runs ticking, reaching 28 for two at the end of the Powerplay.

The eighth over of the innings, bowled by Marsh, saw Mahmudullah and Shakib pick up 15 runs with the former finding the gap between mid-on and long-on for a four before Shakib found the ropes twice with a cheeky scoop and a well-controlled cut shot.

With Shakib looking good and the partnership contributing 44 off 36

deliveries, the Tigers were set back again when the left-hander holed out at long-off after a fluent 17-ball 26 as he tried to make room to hit a Zampa delivery over mid-off.

Aff Hossain, the hero of the last match, looked promising once again, hitting a flighted Agar delivery over mid-on for six. Bangladesh were moving along nicely but Australia created their own chances with skilled fielding.

Aff, looking good on a 13-ball 19, tried to steal a risky single after dabbing the ball to mid-off but Carey hit the bull's eye with only one stump to aim at and the Tigers were down to four for 76 runs after 12 overs.

The next two overs produced just five runs and a wicket as Shamim Hossain tried to heave across the line to a Hazlewood length delivery and holed out to midwicket after an eight-ball three. Nurul Hasan then looked well set for a steady knock, hitting Zampa over long on for a maximum but Australia fielders were right on the money again when a slight confusion from Nurul while running to the danger end saw him well short of the crease as Henriques effected a direct hit.

Mahmudullah had kept the score ticking with plenty of singles and with the outfield being slow, picked his gaps a few times to run doubles. Having only struck one boundary in the first 45 deliveries faced, he found the ropes thrice more to bring up his fifty in the final over before perishing to a full-length Ellis delivery.

The debutant then removed Mustafizur (0) and Mahedi (6) in successive deliveries and completed a hat-trick on debut to finish with three for 34.

Delta drives rise in deaths

FROM PAGE 1

Health experts in Bangladesh too have expressed concern over the overall Covid situation and said the country's healthcare system is grappling with an increased number of infections and deaths caused by the variant.

They also criticised the government for suddenly reopening export-oriented factories amid the ongoing lockdown, saying the restrictions apparently have not been much successful in putting the brakes on the surge in cases due to the government move.

Thousands of workers had to return to their workplaces, mainly in Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur, following the sudden announcement that the factories would reopen on August 1. They had gone to their village homes to celebrate the Eid-ul-Azha with their loved ones.

Most of them suffered miserably on roads as public transport remained suspended amid the lockdown. They could hardly follow the health guidelines.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, experts suggested that the government must expand its inoculation campaign and ensure that people maintain health safety guidelines properly. Otherwise, a "big disaster" lies ahead, they warned.

"The government should scale up its vaccination programmes and give vaccines to as many people as possible," said Prof Dr Mohammad Shahidullah, chief of the government's National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19.

Following the health guidelines is equally important, he said, adding, "People must adhere to the guidelines properly and Covid tests should be increased."

DAILY UPDATE

A total of 248 people -- 138 men and 110 women -- died from Covid in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, according

to a DGHS press release.

On Thursday, the country witnessed the highest daily deaths -- 264.

In the last seven days, 1,647 people died across the country. As many as 12,606 infections were reported during the period, taking the total number of infections to 13,35,260, said the release.

The Covid positivity rate yesterday was 26.25 percent while the overall positivity rate stood at 16.6 percent.

Meanwhile, Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) of the DGHS, said the health department was working extremely hard to tackle the unprecedented health crisis and that doctors and other health professionals were already exhausted.

"They have been working extremely hard. They are burned out... I'm really concerned about the coming days," he told this paper.

Though the government extended the countrywide "strict lockdown" till August 10, a huge number of people are coming out of homes with several city streets witnessing traffic congestions.

Emphasising the importance of an effective lockdown, Dr Mohammad Shahidullah said, "Lockdown harms financially. But there is no alternative to it either. If the situation deteriorates in the future, we will suggest area-wise lockdown instead of enforcing it across the country."

Since April 5, the government has been enforcing restrictions in phases to curb the spread of the virus.

However, it decided to lift the lockdown after August 11. Following an inter-ministerial meeting on Covid-19 on Tuesday, Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque said shops and offices would reopen on August 11.

Operation of public transport will also resume on a limited scale, he added.

Lockdown shocks vegetable farmers

FROM PAGE 1

farmer in Bogura, who is staring at losses of at least Tk 30,000.

Before the lockdown, he was selling the courgettes he grew on his 25 decimals of land at Tk 20 a kilogramme. Now, he gets at best Tk 7.

But the farmers' woes do not just end with the big hole in their wallets. Many might not be able to cultivate vegetables in the winter season.

One such farmer is Kishmat Ali, who grew green peppers on 26 decimals of land in Jamalpur.

He fears a loss of Tk 70,000 as the price of the crop has plummeted by half.

"How would I be able to cultivate next season?" a downcast Kishmat asked.

And yet, given the supply constraint because of the countrywide movement control order, the prices of vegetables are high in the kitchen markets, putting middle-class consumers and the poor, already hit hard by the pandemic, in a tight corner.

This week, most of the common vegetables are selling between Tk 30 and Tk 40 per kg at different kitchen markets in Dhaka.

Mubarak Ali, a wholesale trader of Karwan Bazar wholesale market, bought pointed gourds at only Tk 3 per kg from the Boro Bazar vegetable market in Jashore last week.

But he had to spend Tk 9 for each kg as transport and other costs to bring the vegetable to Karwan Bazar.

Normally, about 50 trucks loaded with vegetables from the Boro Bazar come to Dhaka daily, according to Mubarak, also the president of South Bengal Vegetable Traders Cooperative Society.

Amid the lockdown, the number of trucks has come down to 10-12, meaning the fares have hit the roof.

The government should have thought about the farmers when planning for the lockdown, said Mohammad Jahangir Alam, a professor of the department of agribusiness and marketing at Bangladesh Agricultural University.

There are about 80 lakh vegetable farmers all over the country, according to the DAE's estimates.

Their losses would have been minimised had the government taken steps to avoid disruptions in the supply chain during the lockdown, he said.

Then, Jasim from Jashore would not have let the fruits of his labour rot out in the fields.

Out of sheer anger and frustration, he stopped plucking the gourds.

"This is an unmitigated disaster," said a frustrated Jasim, who is fearing a loss of at least Tk 40,000 this season.

Target revised down to 32 lakh

FROM PAGE 1

The DG said the special vaccination campaign would be conducted in union, municipality and city corporation areas. "People aged over 50, who could not register for the vaccination, can also take the shots this time."

He said people aged 50 years and above, women, differently abled people and those living in remote areas will get priority in this special campaign.

The DG said the vaccination drive would be carried out in all unions, municipalities and city corporation areas. The doses will be administered in remote areas on August 8 and 9, while the forcibly displaced Rohingyas aged over 55 will be inoculated on August 10 and 12.

Although there is a crisis of vaccines, the government is determined to vaccinate all citizens of the country, the DG said.

He urged the people to come forward and take the shots leaving all sorts of "negative thoughts and superstition" regarding vaccination behind to win the fight against the virus.

"You have heard various comments coming from different places. Various issues have come up. We are aware of those things. We will try so that those don't happen again," he said.

The vaccination programme will be carried out simultaneously in 4,600 unions, 1,054 municipalities and 433 wards in city corporation areas across the country with the help of 32,706 vaccinators and 48,459 volunteers.

Stating that around 30 lakh people were vaccinated in the last 10 days, the DG said, "This special drive is a pilot project to us. We will take lesson from this and move forward with our overall vaccination plan."

He said, "We want to test our

capabilities. We want to see how many vaccine jabs we can give to people at the grassroots."

The DG said one crore ninety-nine thousand people received the first dose of the vaccine in the country.

Currently, China's Sinopharm vaccine doses are being administered in rural areas and district towns while the Moderna vaccine shots in city corporation areas.

Mass inoculation against Covid-19 remained suspended in Bangladesh for over two months due to a shortage of doses. The country suspended administering the first dose of the vaccine on April 26. Registration of people for vaccination was suspended nine days later.

The government resumed administering the first dose on June 19 on a limited scale and then gradually expanded it.

Police quiz TV director Chayanika

FROM PAGE 1

"Since we started the investigation, we saw that through drug dealing and other crimes, the activities were going on to ruin the children of upper-middle class families. As we interrogate Pori Moni, we find the names of individuals in this racket. One of them was Jimmy," Harun said.

Around 6:45pm, Chayanika's car was stopped by police on Panthapath minutes after she attended a live programme at a TV station. She was on the passenger seat of the vehicle.

Witnesses said as Chayanika refused to go to the DB office, policemen, some in plainclothes, got into the car. A female officer got into the passenger seat with her before the car left for the DB office on Minto road.

Chayanika had cast Pori Moni in her 2020 film Bishwashundori.

In June, when Pori Moni, whose real name is Shamsunnahar Smrity, at a press conference alleged that businessman Nasir U Mahmood tried to rape and murder her at Dhaka Boat Club. Chayanika was beside Pori Moni at the press conference and conveyed her support for Pori Moni.

Earlier in the day, Joint Commissioner Harun said everyone

involved with the illegal businesses of actress Pori Moni will face legal action.

He then said arrested movie producer Nazrul Islam Raz used to have an insignificant job before he started organising parties at night with different models.

Harun then implied that Raz used the models as escorts for wealthy individuals. "We got information from him."

Rab raided Pori Moni's Banani residence on Wednesday and detained her.

Officials said they recovered drugs and liquor from her flat.

As Rab personnel knocked on the door of her flat, Pori Moni went on Facebook live and said she had called Harun and told him that she wouldn't open the door unless he told her to.

"He [Harun] later called me and said that none of them [DB] had come," the actress said on the live video.

Pori Moni and Raz were shown arrested the next day in two separate cases filed by the Rab.

Raz will also be sued under Pornography Control Act, Rab said.

Rab said Pori Moni used to host regular parties at her flat, where Raz supplied foreign liquor and drugs.

Both of them along with their two associates have each been placed on four-day remand.

Rab earlier said the suspects were in a gang that used to organise parties attended by models at different flats in Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara areas where people used to take drugs.

The suspects then took photos of the well-off guests of the parties and blackmailed them later into paying hefty sums.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday placed arrested model Faria Mahub Pasha on an eight-day remand in three separate cases filed with Gulshan, Bhatara and Khilkhet police stations under the Narcotics Control Act.

In another development, the Criminal Investigation Department has been tasked with the investigation of seven cases filed against Pori Moni, expelled Awami League leader Helena Jahangir, Pasha and model Moriom Akter Mou, CID Chief Mahubur Rahman told The Daily Star.

Rab Additional Director General (Operations) Col KM Azad, told The Daily Star on Thursday: "After interrogating the arrestees, we have got the names of some more people said to be involved in the racket."

Russia formally outlaws Navalny organisations

AFP, Moscow

Russia has formally banned organisations established by jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny as the opposition says the authorities are trying to stifle dissent ahead of parliamentary elections.

In June, Russia declared Navalny's organisations extremist and barred his allies from running in the polls.

Yesterday, the justice ministry added the names of three entities linked to Navalny -- including the Anti-Corruption Fund -- onto its list of banned organisations.

Navalny's regional offices and the Foundation for Protection of Citizens' Rights were also banned.

"Well, we've been put on a list of banned organisations!" the Anti-Corruption Fund said on Twitter. "But that's ok! They've banned us a million times before."

Earlier this year Navalny's regional offices disbanded to shield staff from possible prosecution and many of his allies have left the country.

But Navalny's senior associates have vowed to continue working to transform Russia and rid it of corruption. They have urged supporters to keep supporting their work by donating anonymously.

Navalny, who barely survived a poisoning with a Soviet-designed nerve agent last summer, was imprisoned for two and a half years on old embezzlement charges in February.

In a message from prison late last month, Navalny called on supporters to mobilise ahead of September parliamentary polls and punish members of the ruling party by voting them out of power.

Pandemic pushes millions more Mexicans into poverty

AFP, Mexico City

Millions more Mexicans have fallen into poverty because of the coronavirus pandemic, with people living in one of the country's top tourist destinations hit particularly hard, official data showed Thursday.

The number of people living in poverty rose by 3.8 million between 2018 and 2020, to 55.7 million -- 43.9 percent of the population, according to the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy.

Dengue infections

FROM PAGE 1

current month, which indicates the fast-rising trend of the disease.

As the capital's public hospitals are overwhelmed with Covid patients, those with dengue were finding it hard to get admission there.

The growing number of dengue cases since last month has been an additional pressure for the hospitals.

Though most of the patients who were hospitalised have so far been released, 1,010 are still undergoing treatment at hospitals in Dhaka, and 38 outside the capital, the DGHS data shows.

DGHS spokesperson Dr Md Nazmul Islam said the dengue situation could turn alarming again, but it would be possible to face the situation if necessary measures are taken immediately.

"We have seen the dengue epidemic in 2019, and in 2021, we are in a similar situation," said Nazmul, also a director (disease control) of the DGHS.

At least 2,286 people were hospitalised across the country in July while the number was 272 in June. Forty-three were infected in May.

Meanwhile, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh through a video message yesterday urged city dwellers to provide information about Aedes mosquito larvae or the breeding sources logging into their website or calling their control room numbers.

"We will take immediate steps to destroy the breeding sources after getting the information," said the DSCC mayor.

He said their teams led by ward councillors are going door to door after getting information from DGHS to destroy the Aedes mosquito larvae and breeding sources.

The DSCC mayor added that they are also conducting combing operations and they are monitoring the operation from their control rooms.

He said if any resident of DSCC area gives information about Aedes mosquito larvae or source in the website <https://forms.gle/gPamcWqJNfDZvir6>, the city corporation will destroy those larvae and sources free of cost after getting the information.

He also asked residents to give information in this regard to their control room numbers (0170990888 and 029556014) if they want.

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Is pitha a comfort food?

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Comfort Food vs. Grandmother's Diet

Ten years ago, I wrote a Tangents column called "Grandmother's Diet." The idea was this: in this age of processed and factory manufactured food, how does one choose what's best for health? The notion - originally presented by Michael Pollan - is to avoid items that your great-grandmother (or, in my case, my grandmothers) would not recognize as food. This eliminates many of today's unhealthy inventions such as breakfast bars, reconstituted cereals, sweets and candies, salty snacks and soft drinks, while encouraging consumption of wholesome food, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables.

Then there is comfort food. Comfort food makes us feel good. We crave it in troubled times when we are feeling down, tired or anxious. Eating comfort food, we feel rejuvenated and all seems well with the world. It is simply prepared (usually), presented without ostentation, and may have nostalgic or sentimental connotations. Foods that we loved in childhood are good candidates for comfort food.

Comfort food is culture dependent. Take the dish cooked the world over from simmering beef shanks, where the bone marrow slowly becomes one with the gravy. In Sylhet this dish is made with *shatkora* and called *poncha* - something that my mother made exceptionally well. But cooked without *shatkora*, it is called *paya* in the rest of Bangladesh; a meatier and spicier version is *nehari*. In Italian cuisine, *osso bucco* is a similar dish made from lamb shanks. And at opulent Chinese weddings, a soup of beef shanks simmered in milk is sometimes served as the banquet finale.

I have tried *osso bucco* and that Chinese bone soup. But, while they might be comfort food for the Italians or the Chinese, for me they were exotic. My palette was on guard because I didn't know what taste to expect. It was adventure, not comfort. But with *poncha*, *paya* or *nehari* I know what to expect. That's why they are comfort foods.

But is grandmother's diet and comfort food one and the same? I was a lucky child because both my grandmothers were alive and active. They doted on me. From one I learned about fresh food. She took me to the market and pointed out the varieties, specially the fish. My other grandmother taught me about vegetables because she had a superb kitchen garden. And so to this day, small local fish, sautéed with a hint of spices, as well as robust helpings of fruits, spinach, vegetables and *daal-bhat* - these constitute my grandmother's diet.

Grandmother's diet is concerned with health, comfort food less so. The former is for the long-term; the latter is for immediate relief. Fat is important in comfort food, probably harking back to our hunter-gatherer ancestors who valued fat for its concentrated calories. Comfort food allows us to gratefully enjoy the moment like nothing else while forgetting the troubles of the world. Grandmother's diet, on the other hand, helps reduce the risk of serious diseases and ill-health going forward.

All this talk about food is making me hungry. Now where did I put that bowl of ice cream?

facebook.com/jikabirphotographs or follow "ihtishamkabir" on Instagram.

All set for 'pilot project' in rural areas

STAR REPORT

A "pilot project" of the government's special countrywide mass vaccination drive at grass-roots level kicks off today.

The main campaign will begin on August 14. Authorities of different districts have taken preparations for the drive.

The preparations include setting up vaccination centres, building awareness and arranging on-spot registration.

Senior citizens, women and people with disabilities will be prioritised for jabs, said health officials.

Our correspondents from different districts reported on the preparation.

In Khulna, massive campaigns were launched to make the programme successful.

A total of 307 booths have already been prepared to run the programme. At least 200 people will be vaccinated in each booth daily.

SPECIAL MASS INOCULATION DRIVE



Anyone above 25 years old, who will come to the centre with their NID card, will be able to complete registration and will be provided with the vaccine.

RAJSHAHI CIVIL SURGEON
MD QUIUME TALUKDAR

Two vaccinators and three volunteers will be deployed in each centre. Besides, a supervisor will be assigned for every three centres. All of them have already been trained.

In Rajshahi, authorities aim to inoculate around 77,000 people today, 52,000 from unions and municipalities, and the remaining 25,000 from the city corporation.

One vaccination centre has been set up at each of the 73 union parishads and 14 municipalities of

the district. Besides, 84 centres have been set up in the metropolitan area, said officials.

There will be a separate registration point in each centre. Anyone above 25 years old, who will come to the centre with their NID card, will be able to complete registration and will be provided with the vaccine.

In Sylhet, preparations are going on in full-swing for mass vaccination drives.

Mohammad Yahya, chairperson of Nijpat union of Sylhet's Jaintapur upazila, said, "We've successfully prepared for mass inoculation by installing vaccine centres. We also ran a mass awareness campaign and are hopeful to see a lot of people at the centres."

Tahmilur Rahman, upazila nirbahi officer of Gowainghat upazila, said, "We've mobilised volunteers in all unions to register freedom fighters on a priority basis."

"We've also prepared registration facilities at the centres with help from Union Digital Centres," he said.

In Rangpur division, the inoculation drive will be conducted in all 535 unions under eight districts.

Three vaccination booths have been set up in each union, and 200 people will be vaccinated at each booth daily, said Dr Motaharur Islam, divisional director (health) of Rangpur.

Data discrepancy leaves Sylhet residents puzzled

	DEATH TOLL	TOTAL INFECTED
DGHS	825	42,975
DIV HEALTH OFFICE	761	43,461

Covid data in Sylhet Division (till Thursday)

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

How many people actually died of Covid-19 in Sylhet division since the beginning of the pandemic?

The answer could be 825 or 761 till Thursday morning, depending on who one asks.

The first number is according to data of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), and the second was provided by Sylhet Divisional Health Office.

The discrepancy is not only in the death toll. There are mismatches in the number of total infections, district-wise deaths and infections, daily deaths, infection rate and the bed count at Covid-19 isolation units of hospitals.

For how long this has been happening could not be known, but the mismatch was seen in all daily numbers published recently.

However, officials of DGHS and Sylhet Divisional Health Office could not clarify the reason behind the discrepancy.

According to DGHS's data, published on Thursday, a total of 517 people died in Sylhet district, 106 in Sunamganj, 80 in Habiganj and 122 in Moulvibazar.

But Sylhet Divisional Health Office data shows 574 people died in Sylhet district, 55 in Sunamganj, 36 in Habiganj, 61 in Moulvibazar and 35 at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

DGHS data shows that a total of 42,975 people got infected till Thursday morning, while Divisional Health Office data says the number is 43,461.

According to DGHS data, 26,729 people got infected in Sylhet district, 5,003 in Sunamganj, 5,226 in Habiganj and 6,017 in Moulvibazar.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

M'singh hospital overrun with patients



PHOTO: COLLECTED

MMCH simply has no more space for the incessant rush of Covid patients. Despite repeated extensions to its Covid unit, it still operates beyond capacity, and even had to put up a sign spelling out the situation.

MD AMINUL ISLAM, M'SINGH

"No vacant beds available for Covid-19 patients at ICU and Covid wards" -- reads the sign hanging in front of Mymensingh Medical College Hospital's (MMCH) emergency department.

With the number of Covid-19 patients on the rise, the hospital has been struggling to tackle the situation for quite some time now.

Hospital authorities recently increased the number of Covid beds from 210 to 500, but this still wasn't enough. As of yesterday, the number of admitted patients at the hospital was 580. Unable to find an empty bed, many patients were

seen being treated on the floor.

In the last 24 hours till 8am yesterday, 30 people died at the hospital. Of them, 16 died of Covid-19, while 14 had Covid symptoms, said Dr Mohiuddin Khan Moon, focal person of MMCH corona unit.

Besides, the hospital's ICU beds remain at capacity due to the onrush of critical patients, said MMCH deputy director Dr Md Wayezuddin Farazi.

Though the number of ICU beds has increased from 20 to 25 after an industrialist from Bhaluka donated five beds on August 1, the number is still inadequate to deal with the situation.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

NARCOTICS CASES Piyasha, Mou remanded again

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Model and former TV presenter Faria Mahbub Piyasha and model Mariam Akhter Mou were placed on remand in four narcotics cases yesterday.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Rajesh Chowdhury placed Piyasha on a two-day fresh remand after Investigation Officer Abdul Latif, a CID inspector, produced her before the court in a case filed with Gulshan Police Station, court sources said.

She was also placed on a six-day remand after two investigators submitted a 17-day remand prayer in two cases filed with Bhatara and Khilkhet police stations.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Satyabrata Sikder placed Mou on a four-day remand after IO Probir Kumar Ghosh and also a CID inspector, produced her before the court in a case filed with Mohammadpur Police Station.

Piyasha and Mou were produced before the courts on completion of their three-day remand in two narcotics cases yesterday.

Detectives on August 1 arrested Piyasha from her Baridhara residence, while Mou was arrested from her Mohammadpur residence.

They also seized 780 yaba tablets and foreign liquor from Piyasha while 750 yaba pills and 12 bottles of foreign liquor were recovered from Mou's residence.

Want to work closely with Bangladesh

Says newly-elected Iranian president

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Newly-elected Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi wants to work closely with Bangladesh for mutual benefits of the two countries.

He made the remark when State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam called on him after taking part in the swearing-in ceremony on August 5.

This is the first time any Bangladesh delegation is attending the Iranian president's swearing-in ceremony. Shahriar led a three-member Bangladesh delegation to Iran on August 3. He later paid a courtesy call on Raisi.

During the meeting, Raisi appreciated Bangladesh for hosting more than one million Rohingyas.

Weekend sees quieter day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although the government extended the ongoing lockdown for another five days till August 10 to curb the spread of coronavirus, it seemed to have little to no effect on people as many were out on the street yesterday.

However, the number of vehicles and people was lower compared to the previous days as both public and private offices were closed.

There were fewer private cars, but many motorcycles were seen plying the streets, some of them rented on ride-sharing basis, though informally as ride-sharing apps remain paused. Many rickshaws were seen running on VIP roads.

Law enforcers were seen checking

vehicles randomly at major city points.

However, not all who came out were wearing masks. "It is tough to wear a mask while pulling a rickshaw under the sun," said Anwar, a rickshaw-puller at Gulistan. His passenger Md Sadeque also did not wear a mask. Asked, he said he has it in his pocket and only temporary took it off.

The scenario across different localities of Dhaka resembled a regular weekend with less traffic and people thronging markets to buy their daily essentials.

"We have come out from home to do some shopping as it feels like it's [lockdown] been relaxed a bit," said Nazmul Hossain a resident of Distillery Road in Gandaria, who was seen along with his six-year-old daughter.



Curiosity is ageless, the drive to be aware can be a never-ending pursuit. This veteran's body may be on the decline, his eyesight may be giving up on him, but with sheer spirit he found a way to read his daily newspaper. By cupping his hand, he scopes into the lines, holding the pose until his heart is content. This photo was taken around 11am yesterday in Paltan area.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

NEWS IN brief

Teen stabbed to death in Kishoreganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, M'Singh

A teenager was stabbed to death allegedly by a youth over a trivial matter in Kishoreganj town on Thursday night.

Joy (16), son of Joyral Abedin from the town's Harua area, was a ninth-grader.

He borrowed a cellphone from one Fahim (20), son of Adam Bepari, on Monday, said OC Md Abu Bakar Siddiq of Kishoreganj Sadar Police Station, quoting locals.

However, Joy allegedly refused to return the phone. On Thursday evening, Fahim found Joy in the area and asked for the mobile, leading to an altercation. At one stage, Fahim stabbed him. Joy succumbed to his injuries at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, said the OC.

They arrested Fahim early yesterday, he said, adding that Joy's father filed a case in this regard.

CJ constitutes 12 HC benches for virtual hearing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain yesterday constituted 12 separate High Court benches for virtually hearing and disposing of cases for five working days next week.

The benches will perform judicial functions from tomorrow, but they cannot hear anticipatory bail petitions. Of the benches, nine are divisional (two judges) bench and three are single (one judge) bench, according to a notification issued by the chief justice.

A full bench of the Appellate Division headed by the CJ will conduct judicial functions virtually, says another notification by Supreme Court Registrar General Ali Akbar.

Earlier on Thursday, the chief justice at a full court meeting of the judges decided to run the virtual court functions across the country in a limited scale to deal with urgent cases till August 12 due to the ongoing lockdown.

Two sisters, cousin drown in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

Two sisters and their cousin drowned in the river Jamuneswari in Badarganj upazila of Rangpur on Thursday.

The deceased were identified as Rubina Akter (16) and Rabeya Akter (10), daughters of Rabiul Islam from Osmanpur village; and their cousin Sadia Akter (11), daughter of Saiful Islam.

Family said the three drowned while they were bathing in the river. At that time, there was heavy current.

Locals rescued and took them to the upazila health complex, where they were declared dead. Dr AHM Sanaul Haque said the three were brought dead.

Justice Fazlur Rahman passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Justice AKM Fazlur Rahman, a retired judge of the High Court and former chairman of Administrative Appellate Tribunal, died from Covid-19 on Thursday. He was 75.

He was undergoing treatment at Anwer Khan Modern Hospital in Dhaka.

He left behind his wife, two daughters, a son and a host of well-wishers to mourn his death, Barrister Md Shakawat Hossain Khan, husband of elder daughter of Justice Rahman, told The Daily Star.

He said Justice Rahman was buried at his family graveyard in Pankundo village under Dohar upazila, Dhaka.

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, Law Minister Anisul Huq, Fisheries and Livestock Minister SM Rezaul Karim and Attorney General AM Amin Uddin expressed deep shock at the death.



A policeman inspects an ID of a bus passenger passing through a checkpoint on the first day of a two-week lockdown to prevent the spread of the highly infectious coronavirus Delta variant, in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Two more

FROM PAGE 12 diploma in ophthalmology from the National Institute of Ophthalmology in Dhaka, he added.

Farida left behind her husband, a son, a daughter and a host of relatives, colleagues and admirers to mourn her death. She was buried at her native village in Faridpur on Thursday night.

In another development, 80-year-old retired Capt Sirajul Islam, who once served at the army, died at the Covid unit of Barishal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital, said Mohammad Moniruzzaman, assistant director of the hospital.

He said Prof Sirajul was admitted to the Covid unit with the virus infection on July 26. He was shifted to ICU on the same day with breathing difficulties.

Sirajul Islam, a veteran physician, used to treat 50 to 60 patients every day during the pandemic, risking his life.

He left behind his two children, friends, colleagues, and a host of well-wishers to mourn his death.

The doctor, who treated hundreds of underprivileged patients for free, was buried at the Barishal Muslim graveyard after Jumma prayers yesterday.

Pabna journalist

FROM PAGE 12 organisations in separate messages have demanded withdrawal of the case after the filing of the lawsuit came to light.

"Filing of such a case is a threat to the freedom of a journalist. We demand withdrawal of the case immediately. If the demand is not met, the journalist community will announce a tough agitation," said ABM Fozlur Rahman, president of Pabna Press Club.

Contacted, Azizul yesterday said he was defamed in the news article and that's why he filed the case. He, however, denied the allegation that he sued the journalist to harass him.

Man lands

FROM PAGE 12 She mentioned this to the accused's family members but they did not bother taking any step.

On Thursday night, the accused raped the victim, the case statement read.

The accused also threatened the victim with dire consequences if she had shared her experience with anyone.

Ananda Kumar, sub-inspector of Sherpur Police Station, also the investigation officer of the case, said they arrested the accused after the victim filed a case against him.

The accused was sent to jail via court, he added.

Shahidul Islam, officer-in-charge of Sherpur Police Station, said the victim would be sent to a hospital for medical tests today.

"We tried to send her today but the hospital authorities asked us to send her tomorrow as today is Friday."

Delta fuels new curbs across Asia

FROM PAGE 12 widespread infection in some cities, while cases in some areas show initial signs they could ease.

China reported 124 new confirmed cases for Thursday, the National Health Commission (NHC) said, up from 85 a day earlier. Of the new confirmed infections, 80 were locally transmitted, up from 62 a day earlier, it added.

The latest infections were mainly in the provincial city of Yangzhou on the lower reaches of the Yangtze river, near the commercial hub of Shanghai.

To keep the virus within its borders, Yangzhou closed the passenger entrances of two railway stations yesterday. It has already suspended domestic flights, and the flow of taxis and ride-hailing vehicles with other cities.

Nanjing and Yangzhou now account for more than 70% of local confirmed cases in China since late

July, though not all the local cases are linked to the two cities.

The coronavirus pandemic has killed at least 4,268,017 people worldwide since the virus first emerged in late 2019, according to an AFP compilation of official data.

The US is the worst-affected country with 615,320 deaths, followed by Brazil with 560,706, India with 426,754, Mexico with 243,165 and Peru with 196,760.

MANILA LOCKS DOWN

The Philippines is battling one of Asia's biggest outbreaks and has seen a steady rise in infections over the last two weeks which health officials have attributed to the highly contagious Delta variant of the virus.

"The national government together with local governments should act aggressively, as if there is already community transmission," health ministry spokesperson Maria Rosario Vergeire told a news conference,

referring to the highly contagious variant.

"All of the areas in the national capital region have positive two week growth rates (in cases)," she added.

The surge has pushed the number of confirmed cases in the Philippines to nearly 1.64 million, while the 247 additional deaths recorded yesterday brought the fatality count in the country to 28,673.

Vietnam's capital Hanoi will extend restrictions until August 22, its health ministry said yesterday, after authorities warned of new clusters of infections detected in the city of more than 8 million people.

CASES SPREAD BEYOND TOKYO

Japan reached the milestone of one million coronavirus cases yesterday, domestic media reported, as infections soared in Olympic host Tokyo and other urban areas as the country struggled to contain the Delta variant.

UK's Johnson under fire over 'crass' coal closure quip

AFP, London

Opposition leaders yesterday condemned Prime Minister Boris Johnson as "crass and offensive" for joking that former leader Margaret Thatcher's coal mine closures had given Britain a head start in fighting climate change.

Thatcher, in power from 1979 to 1990, fought a bitter battle with the coal mining industry in the 1980s, delivering its death knell by closing over 100 mines, devastating communities in northern England and South Wales.

A year-long walkout against closure plans by miners in 1984-85 was one of the defining moments of her premiership, eroding union power and triggering her free market reforms.

Johnson made the comments on a visit to an offshore windfarm in Scotland

on Thursday, as he talked about the changes in Britain's energy mix.

"Thanks to Margaret Thatcher, who closed so many coal mines across the country, we had a big early start and we're now moving rapidly away from coal altogether," he said.

But the quip risks backfiring with voters in former mining heartlands of northern England, who switched from Labour to his Conservatives in the last general election in 2019, largely over Brexit.

Keir Starmer, Labour's leader in Westminster, said: "Boris Johnson's shameful praising of Margaret Thatcher's closure of the coal mines, brushing off the devastating impact on those communities with a laugh, shows just how out of touch he is with working people."

Wales' First Minister Mark Drakeford, of Labour, told BBC

radio the comments were "crass and offensive", saying the closures caused "incalculable" damage to local communities.

Johnson failed to meet First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on his two-day visit to Scotland, where feelings still run high against the Tories because of Thatcher's policies.

Under Thatcher, heavy industry and coal mining declined, while Scots widely opposed her introduction of a controversial flat-rate per capita "poll tax" in the late 1990s.

Sturgeon said communities across Scotland were "utterly devastated by Thatcher's destruction of the coal industry".

She has repeatedly criticised Johnson for his handling of the coronavirus pandemic response and his refusal to allow a second referendum on Scottish independence.

Two French nationals charged over bid to kill Madagascar president

AFP, Antananarivo

Two French nationals are among those who have been charged in connection with a plot to assassinate Madagascar's President Andry Rajoelina, their lawyers said on Thursday.

After being held for two weeks the men, named as Philippe F. and Paul R., went before a judge on Wednesday.

The judge decided to formally charge them and detain them in a high-security prison.

"We don't know the reason for this decision," Philippe F's lawyer, Etienne de Villepin, told AFP.

Altogether 21 suspects, including a Madagascar central bank employee, appeared in court in Antananarivo on Wednesday.

Eleven of them were also incarcerated, according to the Taratra government news agency, which published the names only in abbreviated form.

Indira Gandhi writes

FROM PAGE 12 BUNCH OF WHITE LIES

A foreign office spokesman of the Bangladesh government today described Pakistan's white paper on Bangladesh as a "bunch of white lies".

The spokesman said, "The army junta in its heinous move to hoodwink world opinion, so strong against it, has completely distorted contemporary events and facts. The facts were too clear to be reiterated and largely known to the world by the courtesy of the world fraternity of journalists."

88 OF AWAMI LEAGUE KEEP PAKISTAN SEATS

The Pakistan government announced today that 88 members of the National Assembly belonging to the banned Awami League would retain their seats.

The 79 other assemblymen who were members of the Awami League would be given an opportunity to clear themselves of charges against them, the government said. According to reports in the Pakistani press, league members who retained their seats were likely to offer their cooperation to the government, either forming a new political party or joining one of the existing ones.

US' PAKISTAN FOOD PACT

The United States and Pakistan signed a \$15.3 million food-for-peace agreement in Islamabad that was to provide East Pakistan with 100,000 tonnes of wheat and 50,000 tonnes of rice. The aid was designed to ease the effects of last year's cyclone disaster in East Pakistan.

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

Example of applied

FROM PAGE 12

and includes maths that was used by surveyors to define land boundaries.

Lead author Dr Daniel Mansfield described it as a "significant object" due to the fact it includes an example of what is now known as "Pythagorean triples", used to make accurate right angles, but 1,000 years before Pythagoras was alive.

"It's the only known example of a cadastral document from the Old Babylonian period, which is a plan used by surveyors to define land boundaries," said Dr Mansfield.

"In this case, it tells us legal and geometric details about a field that's split after some of it was sold off."

He said the discovery and analysis of the tablet have important implications for the history of mathematics, putting geometry centuries earlier than first thought.

Resurgent Taliban take first

FROM PAGE 12

provinces. A Taliban commander, speaking on condition of anonymity, said it has strategic importance as it is on the border with Iran.

"This is the beginning and see how other provinces fall in our hands very soon," he told Reuters.

In Kabul, Taliban attackers killed Dawa Khan Menapal, head of the Government Media and Information Centre, in the latest in a series of assassinations aimed at weakening President Ashraf Ghani's democratically elected government.

In a tweet, US Charge d'Affaires Ross Wilson said he was saddened and disgusted by the death of Menapal, whom he called a friend who provided truthful information to all Afghans.

"These murders are an affront to Afghans' human rights & freedom of speech," he said.

Scores of social activists, journalists, bureaucrats, judges and public figures fighting to sustain a liberal Islamic administration have been assassinated by Taliban fighters in a bid to silence voices of dissent in the war-torn country.

An official in the federal interior ministry said "the savage terrorists killed" Menapal during Friday prayers. "He (Menapal) was a young man

who stood like a mountain in the face of enemy propaganda, and who was always a major supporter of the (Afghan) regime," said Mirwais Stanikzai, a spokesperson for the interior ministry.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the death, with spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid sending a message to media saying "he was killed in a special attack carried out by mujahideen".

The murder comes after the militants warned Wednesday of more attacks targeting Afghan government leaders, a day after the defence minister Bismillah Mohammadi escaped an assassination attempt in a bomb-and-gun attack.

The Afghan and US militaries have stepped up air strikes in their fight against the insurgents in a string of cities, and the Taliban said Tuesday's Kabul raid was their response.

Fighting in Afghanistan's long-running conflict has intensified since May, when foreign forces began the final stage of a withdrawal due to be completed later this month.

The Taliban already control large portions of the countryside, and are now challenging government forces in several provincial capitals.

Data discrepancy leaves

FROM PAGE 3

But the health office data says 23,544 people got infected in Sylhet district, 5,062 in Sunamganj, 5,249 in Habiganj, 6,030 in Moulvibazar and 3,576 in Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Besides the total count, mismatches were also found in the daily Covid-19 data.

On Thursday, Divisional Health Office data showed 13 people died in the division in the previous 24 hours, while DGHS data said 23 died during the period.

The previous day, health office data showed 20 deaths, while DGHS showed only 5.

In addition to that, DGHS is missing the data of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Sylhet Divisional Health Office shows that 289 people (112 Covid-positive patients in general beds, eight in ICU and 169 Covid-19-suspected) are admitted at the hospital's Covid-19 isolation unit.

M'singh hospital overrun

FROM PAGE 3

According to hospital sources, Covid-19 positive patients and people with symptoms are thronging the hospital from Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Tangail, Sherpur, Netrakona, Kishoreganj, Sunamganj and Gazipur.

The deputy director said the number of patients at the 500-bed Covid ward has started to exceed its capacity since August 1. With the onrush of patients, there is also a crisis of oxygen supply at the hospital, he said.

"The hospital has a 10,000-litre central oxygen facility and we have already appealed to the director general (health) and health ministry to increase it to 20,000," he said.

"We cannot increase the number of beds now as it will require more medical, cleaning and security staff," he said.

Amid the situation, the hospital authorities have urged people to take their patients to nearby hospitals in case of emergency.

Contacted, Mymensingh divisional

director (health) Md Shah Alam said there are 20 Covid beds in each of the 30 upazila health complexes in the division.

Besides, a 50-bed corona unit was opened at Community Based Medical College and Hospital Bangladesh where 12 Covid patients are currently admitted, he said.

Prof Motiur Rahman Bhuiyan, president of Bangladesh Medical Association (Mymensingh), said work for two field hospitals with over 200 beds is also ongoing in Muktagachha and Tarakanda to reduce the pressure on MMCH.

The number of total deaths at MMCH stands at 616. Of them, 245 died of Covid-19 infections while 371 with symptoms since July 1 till yesterday.

According to the health department in Mymensingh, 437 people have died of Covid-19 in the division so far. A total of 591 people tested Covid positive yesterday, raising the total number of infected people to 29,445 since the pandemic.



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এতদ্বারা ঢাকা দক্ষিণ সিটি কর্পোরেশন এর আওতাধীন এলাকায় নিয়োজিত সকল ওয়ার্ডের প্রাথমিক বর্জ্য সংগ্রহ সেবা প্রদানকারী/প্রাইমারী কালেকশন সার্ভিস প্রোভাইডার (পিসিএসপি) এর মেয়াদকাল প্রত্যেক পিসিএসপি প্রতিষ্ঠানের কার্যাদেশে উল্লেখিত তারিখ মোতাবেক সমাপ্ত হবে। এমতাবস্থায়, বর্জ্য ব্যবস্থাপনা কাজের গতিশীলতা ও মানোন্নয়নের লক্ষ্যে নতুন নিবন্ধন কার্যক্রম গ্রহণ করা হয়েছে। সে লক্ষ্যে প্রাথমিক বর্জ্য সংগ্রহ সেবা প্রদানকারী/প্রাইমারী কালেকশন সার্ভিস প্রোভাইডার (পিসিএসপি) এর নিবন্ধনের জন্য আবেদনপত্র সংগ্রহের মেয়াদকাল আগামী ২৫ শ্রাবণ ১৪২৮ বঙ্গাব্দ (০৯ই আগস্ট ২০২১) পর্যন্ত বৃদ্ধি করা হলো। সেলক্ষ্যে, অগ্রহী প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহকে প্রধান বর্জ্য ব্যবস্থাপনা কর্মকর্তার দপ্তর হতে টাঃ ৫,০০০/- (টাকা পাঁচ হাজার মাত্র) মেয়র, ঢাকা দক্ষিণ সিটি কর্পোরেশন বরাবর পে-অর্ডার (অফেরতযোগ্য) জমা প্রদান পূর্বক আগামী ২৫ শ্রাবণ ১৪২৮ বঙ্গাব্দ (০৯ই আগস্ট ২০২১), বেলা ৪.০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে আবেদনপত্র সংগ্রহ এবং বাৎসরিক এককালীন টাকার পে-অর্ডারসহ উক্ত সময়ের মধ্যেই তা জমা প্রদানের জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো। উল্লেখ করা যাচ্ছে যে, প্রত্যেক ওয়ার্ডে একটি পিসিএসপি প্রতিষ্ঠান বাৎসরিকভিত্তিতে নিবন্ধন এবং নিয়োগ করা হবে। যা প্রত্যেক বছর নতুনভাবে নিবন্ধিত হবে। একটি প্রতিষ্ঠান একাধিক ওয়ার্ডে আবেদন করতে পারবে।

আকরামুজ্জামান

সচিব

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VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT



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Hezbollah, Israel trade cross-border fire for 3rd day

REUTERS, Tel Aviv/Beirut

The Iranian-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah fired barrages of rockets towards Israeli forces on Friday, drawing retaliatory fire from Israel into south Lebanon, in a third day of cross-border salvos amid wider regional tensions with Iran.

Suggesting its attack was calibrated to avoid further escalation, Hezbollah said it had targeted open ground near Israeli forces in retaliation for Israeli air strikes that had also struck open areas.

Israel said it did not wish to escalate to a full war, though it was ready for one.

The flare-up, which has caused no casualties, followed an alleged Iranian attack on an Israeli-managed oil tanker in the Gulf last week in which two crew members, a Briton and a Romanian, were killed. Tehran denied involvement.

With the Islamic Republic facing the possibility of Israeli or international action in response to the Gulf incident, the violence has flared across a border that has long been a theatre of conflict between the Iran-backed Hezbollah and Israel.

The salvos began on Wednesday with a rocket strike on Israel from Lebanon for which no group claimed responsibility. That attack, on which Hezbollah has not commented, drew retaliatory Israeli artillery and air strikes.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) said the situation was very serious and urged all parties to cease fire.

The Israeli military said its Iron Dome system intercepted 10 of 19 rockets on Friday, with six falling in open areas and three landing inside south Lebanon.



People offer prayers by the Atomic Bomb Dome, formerly the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall, at 8:15am marking the time of detonation when the bomb was dropped by the US over the city in 1945 during World War II, on the 76th anniversary of the attack in Hiroshima, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

TALIBAN OFFENSIVE EXPLOITING SECURITY VACUUM

Central Asian leaders fear regional chaos

AFP, Avaza

Leaders of five Central Asian countries sounded the alarm over the spiral of war in neighbouring Afghanistan at a regional summit yesterday, as US-led forces withdraw from the country and the Taliban advances.

The talks in the Caspian Sea town of Avaza in Turkmenistan come as the militant group challenges Afghan government forces in several large cities after weeks of gains in the countryside, including in provinces next to the three former Soviet 'stans' that border the country - Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The Taliban has established official contacts with both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as well as Russia and China, two important players in the region.

That differs markedly from the last time it was in power, when countries in the region - neutral Turkmenistan aside - had offered support to the local and

international forces trying to unseat the militant group.

But analysts argue that a growing security vacuum in the country can pose its own threat to the region and its growing economic cooperation with Kabul.

Tajikistan's President Emomali Rakhmon yesterday noted that the Taliban now controlled the entirety

CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN

of Afghanistan's border with his mountainous country of 9.5 million people.

"A number of terrorist organisations are actively strengthening their positions in these areas," Rakhmon claimed in his address to the summit.

Uzbek counterpart Shavkat Mirziyoyev called for a full ceasefire and "mutually acceptable negotiated compromises" at talks.

Tajikistan is one of the few neighbours of Afghanistan that has not hosted a delegation from the Taliban as it presents itself as a government-in-waiting.

As the Central Asian leaders were holding talks in Avaza, Moscow was involved in joint military drills close to Afghanistan's borders in both Tajikistan, where it operates a military base, and Uzbekistan.

Valery Gerasimov, chief of the Russian military's General Staff, flew into Uzbekistan to observe the exercises that are expected to wrap up next week.

During a meeting with Uzbek counterpart Shukhrat Khalmukhamedov, Gerasimov said the drills took place "to practise actions to repel terrorist threats".

Gerasimov and other Russian officials have criticised the United States for what they have described as a "hasty" exit from Washington's longest-ever war.



A house is fully engulfed by flames at the Dixie Fire, a wildfire near the town of Greenville, California, US, on Thursday. Evacuation orders were widened Thursday as California's biggest wildfire raged through the state's tinder-dry landscape, laying waste to hundreds of square miles (kilometers).

PHOTO: REUTERS

UN warns of hunger crisis in Myanmar

Civil society groups reject Asean envoy

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations yesterday said it urgently needed funds to feed people in Myanmar amid fears that up to 6.2 million could be plunged into hunger by October.

The UN's World Food Programme said it was 70 percent short of the \$86 million needed over the next six months, as the country goes through multiple crises.

A major wave of Covid-19 infections is surging through Myanmar, compounding hunger, rising food and fuel prices, political unrest, violence and displacement, the WFP said.

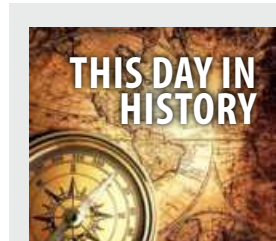
"We have seen hunger spreading further and deeper in Myanmar," said the WFP's Myanmar country director Stephen Anderson.

Myanmar has been in chaos and its economy paralysed since the military seized power from civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1. The country has experienced mass protests and a brutal military response since the coup.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Myanmar civil society groups yesterday rejected the appointment of a special envoy by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), saying the regional organisation should have consulted opponents of the ruling junta and other parties.

Asean foreign ministers on Wednesday appointed Brunei's second minister for foreign affairs, Erywan Yusof, as a special envoy to Myanmar to try to resolve the crisis.

The government headed by army chief and prime minister Min Aung Hlaing has approved the appointment, state-controlled media have reported.



AUGUST 07

1942 - The first US land offensive of World War Two in the Pacific started in the Southern Solomon Islands, on Guadalcanal.

1990 - Nelson Mandela's African National Congress suspended a 29-year guerrilla campaign against white rule.

1990 - US deploys troops to Saudi Arabia beginning Operation Desert Shield.

1998 - Car bombs exploded at the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing at least 213 people in Nairobi and 11 in Dar es Salaam.

SOURCE: REUTERS

Biden offers safe haven to Hong Kongers in US

AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden announced Thursday that Hong Kong citizens currently in the United States who fear for their safety amid the political crackdown back home will receive temporary safe haven.

Biden said the move recognizes "the significant erosion" of rights and freedoms in Hong Kong by the Chinese government.

"By unilaterally imposing on Hong Kong the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the People's Republic of China has undermined the enjoyment of rights and freedoms in Hong Kong," he said in a statement.

Biden cited the "politically motivated arrests" of more than 100 opposition politicians, activists and protesters on charges under the national security law, including allegations of secession, subversion and terrorist activities.

More than 10,000 others have been arrested in relation to anti-government

protests, he said.

The new decision extends "deferred enforced departure" (DED) to Hong Kong residents currently in the United States, allowing them to remain for 18 months even if their visas have expired.

It differs from the more formal immigration class of "temporary protected status" (TPS), which is given to foreign nationals stuck in the United States due to natural disasters or political upheavals back home.

China's embassy in the United States slammed Biden's announcement. "Such moves disregard and distort facts, and grossly interfere in China's internal affairs," spokesman Liu Pengyu told AFP.

China introduced the national security law in Hong Kong on June 30, 2020, giving Beijing more power over the territory's judiciary and criminalizing many types of political activity.

Critics say it is being used to undermine the "one country, two systems" architecture for the city's governance, established when Britain handed its former colony back to China in 1997.



INDIA, CHINA MILITARY STANDOFF IN EASTERN LADAKH

Rivals disengage from key flashpoint

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

In a major step towards de-escalating their military standoff, India and China have carried out disengagement of their troops from eyeball-to-eyeball position at the key patrol point at Gogra Post in eastern Ladakh.

The disengagement process was carried out on August 4 and 5, the Indian Army said in a statement yesterday.

The agreement to move back from the friction point was reached during the 12th round of military commander-level talks held on the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control, which is the de facto border between the two countries across the Himalayas, last Saturday.

Troops of both sides have now moved

to their respective permanent bases from Gogra.

"All temporary structures and other allied infrastructure created in the area (Gogra) by both sides have been dismantled and mutually verified. The landform in the area has been restored by both sides to the pre-standoff period," the Army said in a statement.

With the latest disengagement, India and China have so far stepped back from three flash points—Galwan river valley and north and south banks of Pangong Tso lake.

Galwan valley was the site of a deadly confrontation between Indian and Chinese armies in June last year when 20 Indian troops and an unspecified number of PLA soldiers were killed. However, the faceoff continues at two other friction points in eastern Ladakh—Depsang and Hot Springs.



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Dated: 05-08-2021

e-Tender Notice: 03/2021-22

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for The Procurement of Following Tender ID & Schemes. (For LTM, Only Enlisted Constructors of The Jashore Region (Jashore, Jhenaidaha & Magura District), LGED are eligible in that case, Tender must be submitted updated tenders Enlistment book of LGED).

Sl. No.	Package No., name of scheme & tender ID No.	Tender method	Last date & time of selling document	Last date & time of submission document
1	KDRIDP/Jess/W-183/2020-21 Improvement of Bagarchara (GC)-Basatpur Bazar Road Ch.1000-1500m by BC (Road ID 241904003) Under Sarsha Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595183)	LTM	24-Aug-2021 14:00	25-Aug-2021 15:00
2	KDRIDP/Jess/W-184/2020-21 Improvement of Saratola Bazar-Beltaghat Road Ch.00-1503m by BC (Road ID 241904070) Under Sarsha Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595184)	LTM	24-Aug-2021 14:00	25-Aug-2021 15:00
3	KDRIDP/Jess/W-185/2020-21 Improvement of Gatipara Bazar-Primary School back side via Kulpala Pucca more Road Ch.00-1723m by BC (Road ID 241905176) Under Sarsha Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595185)	OSTETM	07-Sep-2021 14:00	08-Sep-2021 15:00
4	KDRIDP/Jess/W-186/2020-21 Improvement of Simakhali RHD-Narikel Baria GC Road Ch.3210-4420m by BC (Road ID 241092006) Under Bagherpara Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595186)	LTM	24-Aug-2021 14:00	25-Aug-2021 15:00
5	KDRIDP/Jess/W-187/2020-21 Improvement of Simakhali UP- Jorhupur UP via Betalpara Bazar, Premchara Road Ch.5128-8108m by BC (Road ID 241093017) Under Bagherpara Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595187)	OSTETM	07-Sep-2021 14:00	08-Sep-2021 15:00
6	KDRIDP/Jess/W-188/2020-21 Improvement of Dhalgram UP-Garehat Bazar via Antaikhola Road Ch.2820-4060m by BC (Road ID 241093018) Under Bagherpara Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595188)	LTM	24-Aug-2021 14:00	25-Aug-2021 15:00
7	KDRIDP/Jess/W-189/2020-21 Improvement of Khajura GC-Pulerhat Road Ch.00-1830m by BC (Road ID 241092016) Under Bagherpara Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595189)	OSTETM	07-Sep-2021 14:00	08-Sep-2021 15:00
8	KDRIDP/Jess/W-190/2020-21 Improvement of Kadamtola-Banadabila hat Road Ch.650-1980m by BC (Road ID 241094034) Under Bagherpara Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595190)	LTM	24-Aug-2021 14:00	25-Aug-2021 15:00
9	KDRIDP/Jess/W-191/2020-21 Improvement of RHD Sadipur Primary School-Paschim Para Himangsu House Road Ch.00-350m by BC (Road ID 241095285) Under Bagherpara Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595191)	LTM	24-Aug-2021 14:00	25-Aug-2021 15:00
10	KDRIDP/Jess/W-192/2020-21 Improvement of Catiantala bazar-RHD at Dadpur Bazar via Sayed Mahamudpur Road Ch.00-1018m & Ch.1394-2328m by BC (Road ID 241094018) Under Bagherpara Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595192)	OSTETM	07-Sep-2021 14:00	08-Sep-2021 15:00
11	KDRIDP/Jess/W-193/2020-21 Improvement of Sarakati Pacca road-Borandali vill. (Mirdanga H/O Sattar Khan) Road Ch.00-2500m by BC (Road ID 241385047) Under Keshabpur Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595193)	OSTETM	07-Sep-2021 14:00	08-Sep-2021 15:00
12	KDRIDP/Jess/W-194/2020-21 Improvement of Lebutala UP Office-Shyamnagar via Fulltola Bazar Road Ch.7723-8483m by BC (Road ID 241473003) Under Jashore Sadar Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595194)	LTM	24-Aug-2021 14:00	25-Aug-2021 15:00
13	KDRIDP/Jess/W-195/2020-21 Improvement of Jgodishpur-Arpara GC Road Ch.3525-5530m by BC (Road ID 241113012) Under Chowgacha Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595195)	OSTETM	07-Sep-2021 14:00	08-Sep-2021 15:00
14	KDRIDP/Jess/W-196/2020-21 (a) Improvement of Dewly UZR-Shamta bridge Road Ch.00-1250m by BC (Road ID 241234075) (b) Improvement of Sreerampur Mokbul House-Biswaspara more Road Ch.00-800m by BC (Road ID 241235305) Under Jhikargacha Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595196)	OSTETM	07-Sep-2021 14:00	08-Sep-2021 15:00
15	KDRIDP/Jess/W-197/2020-21 Improvement of Godkhali UP-Bodhkhana Bazar Road Ch.1800-2820m by BC (Road ID 241233017) Under Jhikargacha Upazila District Jashore. (TID No-595197)	LTM	24-Aug-2021 14:00	25-Aug-2021 15:00

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 system 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 on line through any registered banks branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system portal and also from E-mail: xen.jashore@lged.gov.bd Or Call to 0421-68951. For any queries interested Tenderer are requested communicate with the undersigned during office hours.

A.K.M. Anisuzzaman
Executive Engineer
LGED, Jashore
Phone No.: 0421-68951
E-mail: xen.jashore@lged.gov.bd

GD-1420



Vicky Zahed

PHOTO: COURTESY

Inside the mind of Vicky Zahed

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Vicky Zahed started his career as a director with short films. Striving towards his passion, he soon rose to fame on television. He is known for redefining the thriller, supernatural, and suspense genres on screen. His Eid-ul-Azha television productions, "Chirokaal Aaj", "Punorjonmo", "Ditiyo Shuchona", "Priyo Anan" and "Kaykobad" were well-received by viewers. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, Vicky Zahed talks about what his process of directing looks like, and more.

When and how did you begin directing?
I always wanted to explore how it felt to be behind the camera. After my debut short film "Moments", featuring Jovan in the lead role received a positive response. I started to explore short films more with my following projects, such as "Maya", "Deyal",



Afran Nisho and Mehazabien Chowdhury in 'Chirokaal Aaj'.

expectations of my viewers.

Your Eid tele-fiction "Chirokaal Aaj" has been widely appreciated. Tell us about your experience of making it.

The success of "Chirokaal Aaj" marks a milestone in my career. Many notable personalities from the entertainment fraternity have congratulated me for it, which was inspiring. Two scenes that I enjoyed while shooting for "Chirokaal Aaj" were the proposal scene in the rain, and the scene where Rocky (played by Afran Nisho) keeps expressing his love for Tithi (played by Mehazabien Chowdhury) and she keeps forgetting it every few seconds. That scene left me in tears. Mehazabien Chowdhury was phenomenal in "Chirokaal Aaj".

Your Eid productions this year have mostly been psychological thrillers. Most of your tele-fictions end with unexpected twists that leave the audience in awe. How do you come up with such interesting endings?
Each time I plan a script, I start with a keyword. Then I start researching that word to broaden my knowledge of that particular topic or theme. Based on my knowledge, I start developing a storyline which leads to the creation of a full-fledged script. I always

prefer working with a particular team for any production as their unity makes the production process easy. Being a Hitchcock fan, I love crime and physiological thrillers, and most of my work is inspired by such themes. Speaking of the unexpected twists, I love to play with the audiences' minds, and provide them with thrilling experiences.

Most of your releases this Eid feature Afran Nisho but in totally different roles. How was your experience of working with him?

My first tele-fiction featured Afran Nisho. Since then, he has always been a favourite. I feel that rather than acting, he absorbs the personalities of every character he plays. As a result, he always responds and reacts the way that his character naturally would in different scenarios. I feel proud to have successfully presented him in four different roles, and I believe he has acted them all. Above all, he is a very endearing and professional person. He is fun to be around.

What are your upcoming ventures?
This Eid has been rather tedious for me, as I had five productions. I am planning to take some time off yet again. However, I promise to come back soon with something worthwhile.



Mehazabien Chowdhury in 'Punorjonmo'.

"Durbeen", and "Aaj Amar Pala". I ventured out to television with the production, "The Life of Jalil", featuring Afran Nisho and Safa Kabir, in 2019. After "Rehnuma" in 2020, I took a break due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, like every dawn is followed by a bright sunny day, my time off led to the creation of many successful ventures such as "Irina", the "Jonmo" series, and "Majnu". This Eid, my telefilms earned a lot of appreciation, which has only doubled my dedication, and the

FEROZA BEGUM immortalised through dedicated website by ACI Foundation



A snippet from the website.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Feroza Begum was a once in a generation artiste, having devoted her life to promote and teach Nazrul Sangeet, as well as becoming one of the most well-known exponents of the craft in South East Asia.

To mark the legend's 91st Birth Anniversary on July 28, ACI Foundation recently took the initiative to launch the "Feroza Begum Archive", a website dedicated to her, highlighting her legacy for generations to come.

By logging in to www.ferozabegum.com, one can access a wealth of music, videos, albums and verified information, among much more, in the finely curated site.

Bilingual biographies, as well as the awards that Feroza Begum has received during her lifetime, are also present in a neatly managed tab, including rare pictures barely seen before by the public.

Full volumes of songs, including valuable staff notations, can be found, as well as hand-written letters by the legend herself.

The opening ceremony on July 28, which was hosted by renowned Nazrul Sangeet exponent Sadya Afreen Mallick, was heartfelt and emotional. ACI Chairman and brother of Feroza Begum, M Anis Ud Dowla and disciple and niece Shusmita Anis, could not be present due to the loss of a family member.

Shusmita Anis had worked incredibly hard to make the three-year project a reality, earning praise from all the guests in the ceremony.

The Chief Guest of the programme, Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Honourable Speaker of Parliament, had emphasised on the importance of such website, as did former cultural minister and eminent actor, Asaduzzaman Noor. Renowned names from both Bengalis, including Ferdousi Rahman, Mustafa Monwar, Shafiq Ahmed, Srikanta Acharya, M Asafuddowla, Matiur Rahman, Haimanti Sukla, Arati Mukherji and Anup Ghoshal also paid their tributes during the programme.



From the opening ceremony on July 28.

RAMENDU MAJUMDAR

Milestones mere alibi for this remarkable man

ANSHUMAN BHOWMICK

"I was born two days after the passing away of Rabindranath Tagore. That was the 24th day of Sravan in the year 1348 of Bengali calendar, or 9th August, 1941, in Christian calendar," reads the first two lines of Ramendu Majumdar's autobiography, the English translation of which is slated for release this month. As the man turns eighty this year, his family and friends across generations and nations have reasons to feel elated. Not just because eighty is a milestone, but also because Ramendu Majumdar is special for all of them, in distinguished ways.

Ramendu *Da*, or simply *Dada*, as the whole of Bangladesh loves referring to him, would wake up this morning a contented man, perhaps listening to a Dwijendra Lal Roy composition sung by Luva Nahid Choudhury and sip his favourite cup of coffee. Contentment comes naturally to him. With that, comes a general sense of warmth and generosity – both his second name. One feels like using two other expressions, made immortal since Mathew Arnold used them together, 'sweetness and light' about Ramendu *Da*. We rarely come across a thoroughbred gentleman whose appearance at one end of the corridor or at a lecture podium makes one feel comfortable. He is not known for raising his voice. He is always seen smiling, a cordial gesture that transforms the colour of every assembly he attends. Add to this frame his ever-supportive wife Ferdousi Majumdar, a legendary actor in her own right, and what you receive is a pristine gift of positivity – a cure for every malady in these trying times. Conjugal bliss is not something we Bengalis are used to flaunting.

However, the Majumdar, together ever since their eyes met at the University of Dhaka, wear happiness so effortlessly that one craves for more. Seeing them together –

never reminded of their different religious identities – is among the most alluring romantic escapes in a time fast grappling with the ferocious intensity of communal politics.

Born and raised in a family of legal professionals at Lakshmipur in Noakhali, Ramendu *Da* has seen the best of times and the worst of times, at least twice over. He has witnessed the Bengal Partition, the trauma of which never really left him. He has felt the repercussions of Noakhali riots. And of course, he has seen the emergence of Bangladesh from the clutches of cultural and military oppression. Having made his name in the advertising industry and nurtured a leading advertising agency, Ramendu *Da* has maintained a vigorous public life. A life dedicated – generally speaking – to the cause of Bengali culture, and Bangladesh's theatre. I believe this singles him out among many others.

The epithet, 'Sanskritik Byaktiktwa', or loosely translated as a man of culture, sits so pretty on him that he does not require a hat at all. Yet, there are many feathers adorning this invisible hat. He has been a popular news reader to a generation glued to the BTV screen. In recent decades, he has carved a niche as a talk-show host. Last heard, he featured in a significant Bengali feature film awaiting a commercial release. Given his unmistakable presence in Bangladesh's public life, a status that only kept sky-rocketing over the years, irrespective of the regimes, Ramendu *Da* always looks poised for positions of power, but he never hankers for any. His age-old friends at the Dhaka Club and trusted aides in the vicinity of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy would correct me if I go wrong at this, but I have always seen authority hanging loosely about him, and this has nothing to do with power. He is someone who never boasts about his achievements as an art administrator, and loves underplaying his stellar role in

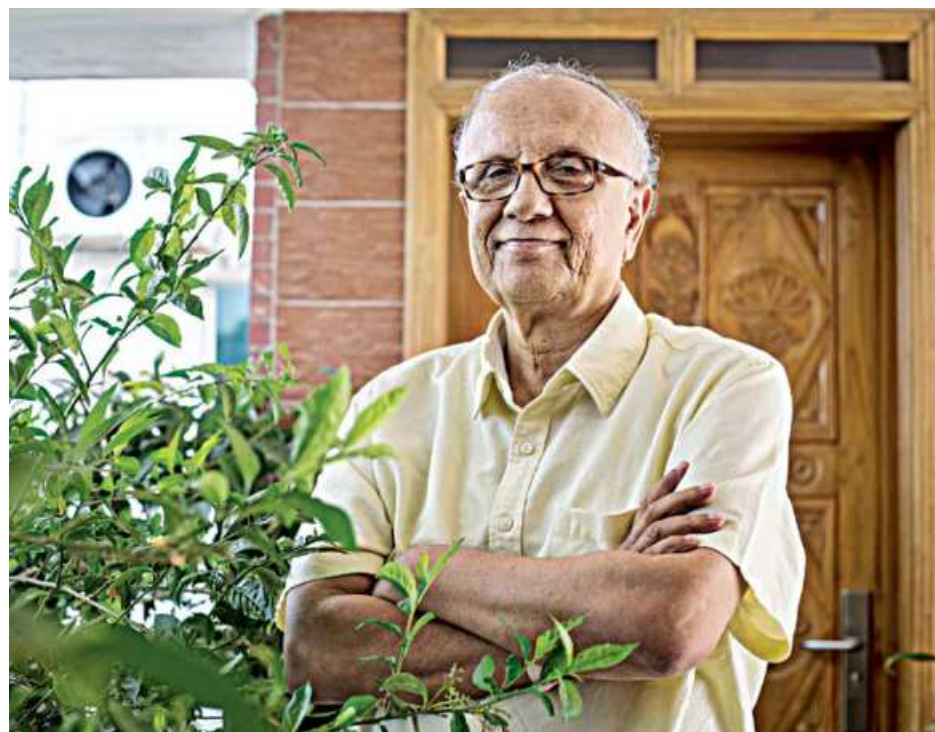


PHOTO: STAR

shaping post-1971 Bangladeshi theatre, and projecting it internationally.

Yet, the world outside Bangladesh, my city Kolkata including, knows him as the face of Bangladeshi theatre. An avid reader, he loves coming to Kolkata at regular intervals, with the Book Fair being the major attraction. Whenever he arrives in Kolkata and settles himself in a Hindustan Park guest house that happened to be the residence of Jyoti Basu, the legendary Communist leader and a former Chief Minister of West Bengal, people from several generations come to visit him not to ask for any particular favour but simply for the joy of interacting with the man equally comfortable in a chequered *lungi* and beige trousers. When he visits the Academy of

Fine Arts auditorium to experience a play, a general sense of reverence is palpable in the air. From octogenarians like Rudraprasad Sengupta, Bibhash Chakraborty, and Manoj Mitra, to their juniors like Bimal Chakraborty and Goutam Halder, everyone loves sharing a word with him. Many of his age love reminiscing about the past, but Ramendu *Da* is very much a today's man, appreciating every expression of brilliance in contemporary theatre.

This is reflected in the pages of *Theatre*, a magazine he has been editing and publishing for the last five decades, a magazine that has recorded every possible register of Bangladeshi theatre as it moved ahead in time, securing a distinguished place among the nations producing plays

while remaining rooted to her indigenous performance forms. His Kolkata visits entail, quite invariably, freshly printed and bound copies of *Theatre*, made available freely to anyone interested in Bangladeshi theatre. For many of us, Ramendu *Da* is Bangladeshi theatre itself.

This identity has been carried forward to distant shores. Ever since he joined the International Theatre Institute (ITI) and played the pivotal part in setting up the Bangladesh centre of ITI, his passion knew no bounds. This centre, ably supported and lapped up by his contemporaries, has given Bangladeshi theatre an international exposure, hitherto restricted to the National School of Drama, New Delhi. It is remarkable that within a decade he, along with his friend Mofidul Hoque, started editing the prestigious *World of Theatre* volume, and he went on to become the President of ITI, a status almost exclusively preserved by European nations and cash-rich economies till that point. He held the chair for two terms, and continues to hold the President Worldwide position – a recognition that looks tailor-made for him.

Having seen him chairing a few ITI sessions in the recent past, I have reached an estimate of this man. He hogs the limelight without realising it, and never gets weary of it. He manages any crisis – often involving supremely sensitive cultural issues with diplomatic repercussions – like a self-assured referee of a football match. Thereby, one gets the ultimate Ramendu Majumdar, a referee with one foot rooted in the Lakshmipur High School grounds, and the other in any playing turf across the globe. With a whistle that hardly blows, for his authority is omnipresent, irrespective of his power.

The author is a member of the executive board in Traditional Performing Arts Forum, International Theatre Institute.



Take that, mate: Alien cricket team's 4-point demand leaked

THE CLUELESSPONDENT

In the latest press conference following the third T20I of the bilateral T20I series, the Alien cricket team introduced an outrageous Four-Point Demand at the hosts amid the pandemic, saying they will only continue playing if they are met.

However, they had only revealed the first of their four demands while stating that once they are pleased with the arrangements that fulfil their number one demand, they will proceed to reveal the rest. Another challenge for hosts Earth is that they have only been given 3 hours to come up with a plan that will raise the probability of the participation of aliens on earth by a whopping 25 percent.

The men from Up Above have demanded that they will only grace their presence in the remainder of the series -- taking place in the recently-declared independent country of Merepoor -- if, and only if, both teams are forced to play with: separate balls.

It was not clear what they had really meant by this demand, which has been the usual case with alien interactions throughout history. And a journalist from Earth's light-years-ahead leading newspaper -- The Daily Nebula -- had

the audacity to even ask what they had meant by "balls" in this context.

"It is what it is, mate! Take it or leave it!" replied Even Stevens, the spokesperson of Cricket Aliens (CA), when asked to expand upon their latest demand.

Mother Earth Cricket Board's (MECB) chairperson Tobda Khan responded to the situation, saying: "Obviously, situation is under control as usual. After all, this is the era of the new normal! But having said that, it's not that much of a new thing unless you happen to be unfamiliar with alien invasion -- I mean, alien participation. We'll do whatever it takes to set this series in slingshot motion. I mean, whatever! Moreover, through hosting this unprecedented cosmic event, we can also earn multiple cookie points among the Intergalactic Cricket Council's (IgCC's) Big 3."

It has been one hour (at the time of writing this report) since the press conference and already speculations are bouncing off everywhere like Brownian motion.

However, a MECB member, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Nebula that for the first time in history, a bowling machine will be involved in a cricket match to meet the Aliens' demand.

In this supposedly state-of-the-art



bowling machine, a bowler will feed the ball into the machine wearing sanitised gloves, and even PPE, and will be able to select the type of delivery from a range of options- all customised based on the individual bowler's profile. Once the ball enters, it will pass through the machine

in which it will be decontaminated and later come out after the bowling machine generates a sound from its loudspeaker that shouts out: "TAKE THAT, MATE!"

Rumour has it that The Daily Nebula's team is moments away from releasing a scoop after one of their sports sub-

editors had received a seemingly strange, encrypted holographic image on his microchip right after the press conference ended; however, it turns out that the message was written in good old Morse Code.

Apparently, the contents of the scoop had already leaked and begun floating inside various social media platforms at the same time the rumour surfaced. Upon analysing the leaked materials, three demands (along with "separate balls") from Cricket Aliens were found to be the most common

These are:

1. The residents of Merepoor, within a 2-kilometre radius from the Stadium, have to be evacuated before the fourth T20I. Those couple of million souls will only be able to return to their homes after the Alien cricket team, following the series' completion, board their UFO on their way to space.

2. Wicketkeepers from both teams will have to be barred from standing up to the stumps, so that a minimum six feet distance is maintained with the batsman.

3. Installation of several helipads, preferably around Cow Corner, so that the Alien cricket team and their staff can quickly flee from the stadium in the event of any of the demands from the Four-Point Demand get violated.



Retraction Act allowing govt to change decision any time passed in parliament

BACK-AND-FORTH CORRESPONDENT

Flipflopping on decisions and positions has become enshrined in law in Chapasthan.

A parliament session decided that under the Retraction Act, which has wide-ranging and ever-evolving power, the government will be able to change any policy decision at any time.

Also under the act, no one will be allowed on the streets unless they go right back in again, and then emerge outside again, said a lawmaker who had nothing to do with the decision.

Amid the pandemic, no one can wear masks for more than a minute, said the lawmaker -- also a minister of a ministry that too had nothing to do with the decision or its implementation -- on Tuesday.

The following day, he flipflopped and said people have to wear masks on Sundays,

Tuesdays and Thursdays and go without masks on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Every other month, the days of the week to wear and not wear masks will flip, he added.

"I did not say that," he said an hour later. The development, as far as this correspondent can recall, has its roots in the arrest of some rape accused, the release of the said accused and the subsequent arrest of the complainant.

"We found the people who were first arrested to be very powerful," a government official had said on condition of anonymity. "Arresting them would have hurt our country economically. Moreover, keeping them unhappy would have been no better. So we arrested the source of their unhappiness."

It was then that the value of the flipflop was realised. The government found they could be

on both sides of an issue, and so keep both sides happy -- although not simultaneously.

There were some who criticised the lack of clarity in decisions, and to neutralise those backward-thinking people, ruling-party lawmakers decided to introduce the new law in parliament.

Whenever the more powerful side in a debate or issue is unhappy, government decisions can be changed, according to article 4 (or was it 8?) of the Retraction Act.

An amendment is already in the works to criminalise non-flipflopers, sources said.

"As a nation of flipflopers, we can be ever flexible and therefore can react to all outcomes," the unrelated minister said.

Under the new law, Star Satireday reserves the right to say it did not publish this article

READERS' CORNER

Engineering student baffled after being turned down by girl online

GULRUKH M FEEMA

As far back as Shadman Sakib* could remember, he had always been a shy boy. For some reason, he wasn't good at making friends, let alone become popular in school.

But one thing Sakib was good at, and that was academics. He always managed to outdo everyone in class but his academic success meant nothing to him as he had no one in school to cheer him up, to tell him he did a good job.

In his early teens, he was exposed to social media and along with it came an array of content including the ever-present joke that if you studied at the best engineering school or the best medical school in the country, you're automatically considered attractive.

That was a ray of hope shone for Sakib as he toyed with the idea in his head and eventually started viewing the joke as a realistic possibility. All his anguish about his social inadequacies dissolved as he found himself grinding day and night to get into the best engineering school in the country.

And Voila! Shadman Sakib was now officially a student in of the Best Engineering University (BEU). All he had to do now was reach out to anyone he desired, and that person will bend themselves to his command. After all, he was a student in an extremely competitive school

which naturally represents the best of the best adjectives that exist in the dictionary.

If anyone can "score" a girlfriend, it was Sakib.

He decided to text a girl he saw on Facebook and to make sure she understood how incredibly fortunate she was that Sakib, a top student from BEU, is texting her, he explicitly expressed his tireless work on one of his assignments with a friendly hint that he is interested in her.

Much to his chagrin, she ignored him.

Did she not see that he goes to BEU or was she just an abnormal human being who doesn't judge people based on what institution they go to? The latter seemed very irrational, so Sakib decides to hit her up a second time.

Not only does she ignore him; this time she blocks him.

He expresses his frustration to others in his class and they all agree that she is simply intellectually incapable of appreciating his supremacy, as she should, given that he is clearly better than her as he goes to BEU and she to some private university.

Sakib is further comforted by his mother when she assures him that he is a good boy who definitely deserves better.

**Names used in this article are entirely fictional*



A man is silhouetted against a video screen with a Facebook logo.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

Last-minute changes to inoculation plans display lack of foresight

Govt must have a long-term strategic plan for its vaccination drive

WE are disappointed, but not at all surprised, to find that the government's ambitious six-day vaccination programme, which aimed to inoculate around one crore people in six days from August 7, has had to be revised even before it could take off. From its onset, we have seen the vaccination drive plagued with uncertainty, with it grinding to a halt in April due to a shortage of vaccines. At the time, the government was criticised for not planning for this eventuality. Although the arrival of more vaccines restarted the programme in July, the last-minute retreat from a massive vaccination campaign has again raised questions about the government's lack of coordination and planning when it comes to Covid-19 inoculations.

What is the reason behind this change of plans? According to a *Straight from Star Newsroom* report, the government was expecting to receive more vaccines from China and COVAX at the beginning of this month, which have been delayed. However, since such delays have already happened before, we are confused why the government did not keep this in mind while planning the drive. Given that over half of the people who have received the first jab are yet to receive the second dose, some simple calculations would have yielded the fact that aiming to distribute almost all of the vaccines currently at hand to new candidates at the ward and union levels might be impractical, especially since the government had said it would prioritise vaccinating other groups as well.

The main special vaccination campaign is now set to begin on August 14, whereas today the government will be conducting a trial run aimed at vaccinating the elderly and people in rural areas. Given that we have seen the recent wave of coronavirus hit the rural areas of Bangladesh, with the highest mortality rate being among populations over the age of 50, it is a good decision to focus on the elderly in rural areas in today's vaccination run. However, we must also remind the authorities involved that there has to be a long-term strategic plan involved in achieving its inoculation target.

So far, the government seems to have made many open-ended promises about inoculating almost all of the adult population, without outlining any concrete plans on how it will be done. At different points, the authorities have said they will prioritise different groups (the elderly, disabled, migrant workers, families of frontline workers, students, etc)—but with limited supply, how exactly will this work? Will this be done in phases? Will Covid-19 hotspots be specifically targeted?

The health minister has said the government will use this trial run to identify the problems of vaccine rollout and fix those accordingly before the main drive, and that there will be a special focus on raising awareness in rural areas. We sincerely hope that this will be the case, and that today's vaccination drive will operate smoothly and efficiently. We urge the authorities to ensure that the August 14 programme goes forward as promised. Otherwise, this constant back and forth and confusion over its plans, not just in terms of the vaccination drive but with regard to lockdowns and other Covid-related decisions as well, could place the government in a credibility crisis.

The time to combat dengue surge is now

Govt, citizenry must all be vigilant in preventing more cases

ONE of our worst fears of current times is too close to realisation for comfort, as the cases of dengue infections keep rising. The last major dengue upsurge was in 2019—when 101,354 people had contracted the virus and at least 179 had died—and the situation this year appears to be even more frightening given the accompanying Covid-19 pandemic and how it has all but crippled our healthcare system.

In case of the dengue surge, the numbers from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) speak for themselves. For instance, in May, there were only 43 hospitalised dengue patients. The number shot to 272 in June, and to an alarming 2,286 in July. Besides, it has also been observed that most of the patients are in Dhaka. Of the 218 people hospitalised with dengue in the 24 hours till Thursday morning, only 10 were from outside Dhaka.

What's worse is that the particular variant of dengue which has been prevalent this year is Serotype-3. According to experts, this variant is one of the more dangerous ones and increases mortality risks in infected patients. Since the dengue surge began last month, we have tried to highlight the severity of this situation given that it is deteriorating at a time when the deadly Delta variant of the coronavirus is also sweeping across the country. If a patient becomes infected with both viruses, not only will it increase their chances of mortality, but their recovery will also be challenging as the treatment for one may interfere with that for the other.

In order to combat the dengue virus, there are no better alternatives to early detection and hospitalisation. Apart from the city corporations' spraying of larvicides/insecticides, citizens should also make sure to not store water (clean or stagnant) anywhere for more than a few days at a time, so that Aedes larvae do not get the chance to breed.

We commend the DNCC's initiative of arranging free dengue testing facilities at 46 centres across its territory. However, we would also like to stress the importance of making similar arrangements elsewhere in the country, especially in all other parts of Dhaka where the concentration of this virus seems to be the most widespread. Testing facilities alone are also not enough to combat the dengue virus. Given the ever-worsening Covid-19 situation, authorities' top priority right now should be to bulk up healthcare resources—and to assist our already overburdened doctors and healthcare staff—in any way possible. We would urge the government to handle the dengue epidemic more seriously than it has done so far, because the challenge is huge and the consequence could be catastrophic if not handled with the urgency it demands.

The never-ending charade of vaccine calculations



GOLAM MORTOZA

LET us begin with three news highlights related to our vaccine procurement scenario—No one can show an accurate breakdown of how many doses of vaccines have

been procured by Bangladesh; astonishing anomalies lie in the price-related information of vaccines; and apparently, despite what the official narrative tells you, there is no workable vaccine procurement plan including precise timelines and quantities.

For the last few days, we have been constantly bombarded with announcements that within the six-day period between August 7 and 12, one crore people would be vaccinated. We were also told that there was a stockpile of

a little predictable turn of events, we can understand that there are doubts and confusion regarding the timing and quantity of any subsequent consignments of vaccines. The question is, why then, despite having doubts and uncertainties, was such a massive promotion made and that too by multiple individuals?

Given the scenario, it appears that neither the relevant ministry nor the minister has an accurate idea of the actual inventory of vaccines. Coming against this backdrop, the threat to punish the unvaccinated by another minister and subsequent dismissive statements made to cushion its fallout—that "it was not our statement", or "we are withdrawing the statement", etc.—rather made a mockery of the whole situation which could be, frankly, done without at this critical time in our fight against the coronavirus.

Let's also recall that an announcement was made about importing 21 crore vaccine doses but no other information was given. Despite questions raised about

crore vaccines. The government did not respond to that proposal. The government did not make a deal on its own either. In that case, how will these seven crore doses of Russian vaccine arrive? And when will they, if at all?

Now the question is about the seven crore doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. There is a big question mark on Johnson & Johnson's capability to export such a large quantity of vaccines. Bangladesh did not even sign a contract with them. That means, all this talk of the Johnson & Johnson's seven crore vaccines is probably just a charade. A source tells us that Bangladesh will get seven crore doses of Johnson & Johnson as part of the COVAX initiative. Even if this information is accurate, it cannot be claimed with certainty that we will get the vaccines. Production of vaccines by Johnson & Johnson, their storage at COVAX and then the chance of getting it—the whole thing is based on possibilities. Even if we end up getting our hands on the doses, those

of procuring one lakh and 50 thousand doses of vaccines at a price of Tk 3,045 crore. The claim was made through a newspaper advertisement some time ago. On that advertisement, approximately 11 lakh free doses of vaccine received from COVAX were also included in the price calculation of paid vaccines. According to that flawed calculation, the price of each dose was shown as Tk 3,000 (or USD 35-36). However, the government procured seven million doses of vaccine from India's Serum Institute at a cost of USD 5 per dose, including carrying costs. Also, it bought vaccines from China at a price of USD 10 per dose, with carrying costs to be added to it. Thus, it's evident that the health ministry in its ad inflated the prices of each dose by at least USD 25 to 30. Till date, the health ministry has offered no explanation for this anomaly.

Now, Bangladesh government is vaccinating people from the age group of 25 and above. The possibility of further lowering the age bar to 18 has been discussed but is yet to be put into effect. In our country, the number of people above the age of 18 is almost 14 crores, and all of them need to be vaccinated. Given the two-dose requirement for each individual, we need at least 28 crore doses of vaccine. Till now, one crore and 40 lakh people have received a single dose, while 40 lakh people received both doses. Still, another 13 crore people need to be included in the vaccination drive. Even if we manage to deliver one crore doses per month, 26 months will be required to cover the entire target population. This, too, depends on an uninterrupted supply of vaccines. At this point, we neither have the required stockpile nor can we hope to have the needed amount in the near future.

What, then, are the next steps for Bangladesh?

We need to urgently learn how to add and subtract properly, and we also need to eliminate all anomalies within the calculations in order to establish transparency. The most important factor is to increase the national capacity. We have to take effective steps for collecting the required amount of vaccines—mere words will not suffice. Even if we manage to do that, we still cannot save everything. The only path to our survival and recovery is through producing vaccines locally. It doesn't matter whether the formula comes from China, Russia or any other country. Going ahead, Bangladesh has no other choice but to produce its own vaccines.

Golam Mortoza is a journalist at The Daily Star. The article was translated from Bangla by Mohammed Istiaque Khan.



PHOTO: REUTERS

one crore and 25 lakh doses, in addition to another 21 crore doses that would arrive in the country by the beginning of next year. We were assured that the trend of vaccinating one crore people per month would continue. "There are no shortages of vaccines, nor will there be any"—this message was generously and enthusiastically spread on behalf of the government, by both those you would expect to hear it from and those you wouldn't. But then, just one day before the inauguration of this massive drive, we were told that the promised vaccination campaign period has been cut short. No, it is not going to continue for six straight days. Instead, it'll simply be a daylong affair.

From this bizarre and by now perhaps

the authenticity of this statement, we were given no subsequent information or explanation. It has been claimed that among the 21 crore doses, seven would come from Russia and seven from Johnson & Johnson. We have had no information thus far—from public, private or foreign sources—validating the claim that Bangladesh has struck a deal to buy seven crore doses of the Russian vaccine. What we know instead is that Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK) had sent a letter to the foreign minister along with supporting documents and informed him that Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital had been nominated as the official agent of Russia's Sputnik-V vaccine in Bangladesh. They reportedly gave a proposal to the government for the procurement of two

From this turn of events, we can understand that there are doubts and confusion about the timing and quantity of any subsequent consignments of vaccines expected.

are likely to arrive in consignments of lakhs, not crores.

Among the 21 crore doses, it has also been mentioned that three crores will come from India. India, as we all know, is itself in a bind in terms of vaccinating its own populace. It is highly unlikely that it will lift the export ban on vaccines this year.

All this simply means that the possibility of getting 17 out of the 21 crore vaccine doses is completely uncertain. Bangladesh might get some vaccines from COVAX and China, but that will not be sufficient enough to keep a massive countrywide vaccination drive running.

Now let us come to the issue of pricing. A glaring calculation error was identified in the health ministry's claim

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Among India's Believers



SHASHI THAROOR

IT is rare for a public-opinion survey to shake established perceptions of a country in the way a recent Pew Research Center study of religion in India has done. The revelations in Pew's

comprehensive survey, based on interviews with 30,000 adults in 17 languages between late 2019 and early 2020, have astonished many.

In particular, this nationwide, multi-faith study finds that Indians value both religious tolerance and co-existence, on the one hand, and religious exclusivity and segregation, on the other. But this apparent contradiction is in fact not entirely surprising.

For over 25 years—notably in my 1997 book *India: From Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond*—I have argued that India is not a melting pot like the United States. Rather, it is a *thali*—a collection of different dishes in separate bowls that don't necessarily flow into one another, but nonetheless combine satisfyingly on your palate. Pew's study, titled "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation," appears to confirm my hypothesis.

For starters, India is deeply religious: 97 percent of Indians say they believe in God and about 80 percent are certain

that God exists. "Not only do most of the world's Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs live in India, but it also is home to one of the world's largest Muslim populations and to millions of Christians and Buddhists," the Pew study observes. "Indians of all these religious backgrounds overwhelmingly say they are very free to practice their faiths." Some 53 percent of adults say religious diversity benefits India.

An overwhelming majority (84

two-thirds of Hindus feel the same way.

Disappointingly, Indians also prefer making friends within their own religious community. Religious identity has a strong hold: 64 percent of Hindus say it is very important to be Hindu in order to be "truly Indian." North Indian Hindus say speaking Hindi, a language fiercely resisted in the country's south and northeast, is essential, too.

Although Indians have many beliefs



A Pew survey reveals that India is a highly religious country that is profoundly committed to respecting its diversity while practicing what Pratap Bhanu Mehta calls a "segregationist form of toleration."

PHOTO: AFP

percent) of respondents say that respect for other religions is a fundamental aspect of their identity. "Indians see religious tolerance as a central part of who they are as a nation," say the study's authors. "Across the major religious groups, most people say it is very important to respect all religions to be 'truly Indian.'" Tolerance is also a religious value: "Indians are united in the view that respecting other religions is a very important part of what it means to be a member of their own religious community."

But for all this mutual respect, segregationist impulses remain strong. For example, 36 percent of Hindus do not want Muslims as neighbours (though that does mean 64 percent are willing to accept them). Likewise, opposition to interfaith and inter-caste marriages is widespread. About 80 percent of Indian Muslims disapprove of, and wish to prevent, interfaith marriages. Roughly

in common—there are startling overlaps among all faiths on topics such as reincarnation, karma, identification with a caste, and the purifying power of the sacred Ganges River—there is a marked preference for religious segregation. Adherents of every religion want to maintain a safe distance from those of other faiths.

What are the national political implications of all this, at a time when the ruling party's Hindutva dogma has put identity politics in the ascendant? Many supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has long propagated a "Hindu-Hindustan" version of Indian nationalism, strongly believe that being Hindu and speaking Hindi are vital to being truly Indian.

That suggests a risk of discrimination against India's minorities. Yet according to the Pew survey, only one in five Indian

Muslims say they have faced religious discrimination. People in the south, where the BJP struggles to win votes, emerge in the study as less religious and more inclusive and accommodative.

At the same time, 95 percent of India's Muslims say they are proud to be Indian and 85 percent agree with the statement that "Indian people are not perfect, but Indian culture is superior to others." Those Hindutva ideologues casting doubt on the patriotism of India's Muslims should take note.

Other religious fault lines in Indian politics also appear less troubling than previously imagined. Although Pakistan has sought for three decades to foment disaffection toward India among Sikhs in Punjab, the study finds that 95 percent of Sikhs say they are very proud to be Indian, while 70 percent say that a person who disrespects India cannot be a Sikh.

Overall, the study reveals that India is a highly religious country that is profoundly committed to respecting its diversity while practicing what Pratap Bhanu Mehta calls a "segregationist form of toleration." Given this, reviving and reaffirming the civic nationalism enshrined in India's constitution, with its commitment to empowering the individual citizen rather than privileging his or her religious group, is all the more important.

This is the thesis of my most recent book, *The Battle of Belonging* (to be published internationally in October as *The Struggle for India's Soul*). The Pew survey confirms some of my concerns, but also offers hope for affirming a liberal constitutionalism that the BJP's nationalism has sought to eclipse.

There is one more straw in the wind for those, like myself, who would like India's current religious-identity politics to yield to a focus on governmental performance and issues that affect citizens of all faiths. The Pew survey shows that unemployment, corruption, and crime are the top concerns for people of all religious groups. A government that tackles those effectively, irrespective of whether it does so in Hindi or after offering prayers at a Hindu temple, is bound to win gratitude—and votes.

Shashi Tharoor, a former UN under-secretary-general and former Indian Minister of State for External Affairs and Minister of State for Human Resource Development, is an MP for the Indian National Congress.

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(Exclusive to The Daily Star)

CELEBRATING AHMAD SHAMSUL ISLAM'S 97TH BIRTHDAY

A pioneer of biotechnology and jute genomics in Bangladesh

PARVEZ HARIIS

THIS year marks the 50th anniversary of the independence of Bangladesh and 100 years since the establishment of Dhaka University. On this occasion, it is important to highlight the stories of our achievements, successes and progress as a nation. One such success story is the sequencing of the jute genome, which was published in 2017. This is a landmark achievement in Bangladesh's science history, and probably the most significant scientific breakthrough for the country since its independence in 1971.

This major achievement was possible thanks to the support of the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who needs to be applauded for seizing the opportunity in a timely manner. The fruits of this great achievement are already being seen, including the granting of an international patent and triggering of further research exploiting the jute plant. It stands as an example of how government support can accelerate scientific progress by bringing together the best scientific minds to work synergistically and tackle complex scientific challenges. A notable aspect of the jute genome project was recruiting and harnessing the talent and skills of an exceptionally brilliant non-resident Bangladeshi scientist, Maqsood Alam (who, sadly, passed away in December 2014) from the University of Hawaii in the USA. He effectively worked with researchers from several Bangladeshi organisations including Bangladesh Jute Research Institute, Dhaka University, and DataSoft Systems Bangladesh Limited.

To understand how this success came into being, one has to delve into the history of genetics research in Bangladesh and those who played key roles in different spheres of activities that eventually led to the establishment of the field of biotechnology in Bangladesh, and thereafter the decoding of the jute genome. In this context, the name of

Prof Ahmad Shamsul Islam is prominent for several reasons, although many others have contributed in different ways.

Prof Islam was born on August 6, 1924. As we celebrate his 97th birthday, it is an opportune moment to highlight some of his roles in the development of biotechnology in Bangladesh. He studied Botany and gained BSc (1945) and MSc (1947) degrees from Presidency College, Kolkata. The training received by Islam at Dhaka University and subsequently in the UK, the USA and Japan played an important role in his development as a pioneering scientist.

While working at Dhaka University, he published one of his first scientific articles in 1949, on the cytogenetics of some common fruit trees. He was extremely fortunate to have Prof Panchanan Maheswari—one of the most eminent Indian scientists, famous for his invention of test-tube fertilisation of angiosperms—as his guide and mentor. Prof Maheswari was the head of Biology



Prof. Ahmad Shamsul Islam

returned to India in 1949 which was a great loss for Dhaka University. He passed away in 1966.

Prof Ahmad Shamsul Islam went to the UK and obtained a PhD degree from the University of Manchester in 1954. There, he received the Currie Memorial Prize for his outstanding contribution to the cytogenetics of strawberry. His PhD supervisor was a renowned scientist, Prof Sydney Cross Harland FRS, who was a pioneer in the genomic analysis of the cotton plant. During his PhD, he was also guided by another scientist, Dr Philip Frank Wareing, an expert in tree physiology, who later co-discovered abscisic acid.

One can cite several important papers of Prof Islam to justify his pioneering role in the foundation of biotechnology in Bangladesh, including the early work on jute genomics and breeding. In a paper published in 1960 in the *Nature* journal, he and his colleague were the first in the world to successfully

produce a hybrid between two jute-yielding species, which continues to make impact in current research. Between 1952 and 1964, he produced three more papers in *Nature* on cytogenetics and embryo culture by use of plant hormones.

In 1971, after the independence of Bangladesh, Prof Islam became the head of the Department of Botany. This was an opportunity for him to demonstrate his leadership skills and create an ideal research environment for the use of latest techniques in the field of biotechnology with a view to improving Bangladeshi crops, including jute. It is, therefore, not surprising that in 1984, he and his colleagues published the first paper from Bangladesh on plant tissue culture focusing on sugarcane. Subsequently, he published a paper with Prof Zeba Seraj and others on tissue culture and micro propagation of jute. This set the scene for wider use of this technique in Bangladesh and was important for proliferation of biotechnology in different institutions across the country. He not only arranged funds for establishing a tissue culture laboratory but also for numerous international conferences and workshops with experts to train scientists in tissue culture techniques at the Botany Department.

Many scientists from agricultural institutes from all over Bangladesh attended these and in turn started tissue culture activities themselves. Through his plant tissue culture research, Prof Islam was recognised as a pioneer in biotechnology research in Bangladesh. For example, Prof Naiyyum Choudhury, who was responsible for producing the National Biotechnology Policy of Bangladesh, noted that "the programme on plant biotechnology in Bangladesh was initiated in late 1970s in the Department of Botany, Dhaka University with tissue culture of jute." Furthermore, the history section in the website of the Botany Department of DU notes the following: "Dr. Ahmad Shamsul Islam initiated Plant Tissue Culture and

Biotechnological research in Bangladesh."

He retired from DU in 1990 but his ceaseless passion for science and education continued and he remained active in research. In 2005, while working at the University of Texas, Austin, Professor Islam published a paper reporting preliminary work on the jute genome analysis, and this provided the momentum that ultimately led to the sequencing of the full genome. He has been active in research for over 55 years, publishing over 100 scientific articles and two text books on genetics, one of which is in Bangla. Many students completed their PhD degrees under his supervision. He was also active as the founding editor of several journals, including *Bangladesh Journal of Botany* and *Journal of Plant Tissue Culture and Biotechnology*, the latter now in its 31st year of publication.

His leadership skills and visionary thinking led him to work with others to establish the Global Network of Bangladeshi Biotechnologists (GNOBB) in 2004. The author of this article was invited by Prof Islam to join GNOBB as one of the founding members along with Dr Abidur Rahman (Japan), Prof Hemayet Ullah (USA), Prof Zeba Islam Seraj, Prof Haseena Khan, Prof Ahmad Abdullah Azad (Australia) and Prof Enamul Huq (USA). Prof Islam's leadership was pivotal in bringing together Maqsood Alam from the USA and Bangladeshi jute genetics researchers like Prof Haseena Khan and others to fully unravel the jute genome. Although Prof Islam was not listed as an author in the *Nature Plants* paper published in 2017, the acknowledgement section rightly dedicated the paper to his memory. This work completed his dream of seeing what he initiated finally accomplished. There is no doubt that he is not only an exceptionally brilliant scientist but also a great scientific leader, enabler and above all a great human being. I wish him a long, happy and healthy life.

Parvez Haris is a Professor of Biomedical Science at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK.

One can cite several important papers of Prof Islam to justify his pioneering role in the foundation of biotechnology in Bangladesh, including the early work on jute genomics and breeding.

Department at Dhaka University. In one of his articles, Prof Islam acknowledged Maheswari's contributions in the following manner: "I offer my heartfelt gratitude to Prof. P. Maheswari who supplied most of the slides and under whose guidance I carried out the present investigation". Maheswari

Lizards Losing Their Tails

Statutory Warning: No animal has been harmed in writing this essay.



SHAMSAD MORTUZA

WE are all glued to the megaspectacle involving the flickering of the dropped or lost tails of some lizards who have tactically dissociated from a disposable part of their bodies to protect themselves from their attackers. These dancing tails have seductive names to live up to their alleged reputation of being honeytraps. They are presented as creatures of a dark fantasyland that exists on the fringe of our concrete jungles. They are presented as nymphs who lure men into their lairs, entertain them with narcotic and carnal substances, and retain memorabilia for future profiteering.

Breathless media coverage of the dancing lizard-tails drowns out stories that affect us more. The spike in coronavirus-related deaths, after some super-spreader events when the lockdown was relaxed during the Eid-ul-Adha festival, is a case in point. The frozen education sector with all its uncertainties serves as another example. The irregularity and irresponsibility of government officials and contractors that led to the crumbling down of the noble gesture of the prime minister's housing project in Mujib Year can be listed as another big issue. The misfortune of the fortune-hunters from the country who try to cross the Mediterranean—hitting the headlines on a regular interval—can be deemed as yet another big news. Workers walking miles to return to their workplace amid Covid-19 movement restrictions; the highway roads that look like snapshots of Mars sent by some spacecraft; the waterlogging in the city that

momentarily brings riverbanks to the comfort of our households; the pesky mosquitoes that simply refuse to go away; the brewing tension among the nationalist Rohingyas; the back-to-back win over the Kangaroos on home soil; the leap-year grand gala of sports in the Land of the Rising Sun—all deserve to be treated as big news.

Instead, the dancing tails are getting into our excited heads.

When scores of armed men carried out an all-out raid in the greenery (Banani) to capture one such unarmed nymph, the tail started dancing according to the playbook of a cornered victim: go "live", grab attention even if it requires half-revealing yourself to titillate your audience, and cry "dacoits". Only months back, we were learning about the secret lives of religious leaders and now we are given access to the other quarters. It is no secret that there is no secret. In Greek mythology, Zeus had to visit his favourites in dreams to counsel them, teach them tricks. His agents would hide behind a wooden horse to undo the Helens of society; today, he can flash his winged horse, Pegasus, and strike out anyone at lightning speed. The moment someone has fallen out of favour, there are ample stored images and sound bites to discredit her or him.

The newly revealed facts remind me of one of my favourite fiction works of all time: Mirza Muhammad Hadi Ruswa's 1904 novel *Umrao Jan Ada*, depicting the gracious ambience of old Lucknow and its wealthy nawabs, the hideouts of colourful drifters, and the lavish quarters of the city's courtesans. Umrao Jan displays strange sophistication in dealing with the nawab who refuses to marry her or the dacoit who offers stolen jewellery to buy her love. The tails then can have many hidden tales that can be our fascinating guide to uncharted territories. The nymphs of the leafy part of the town recount a contemporary version.



"When the real world changes into simple images, the simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behaviour."

PHOTO: MUNTAKIM SAAD

But there is something Machiavellian in the way the narrative is being presented as a media spectacle. Machiavelli advised his modern prince to maintain the rituals of governance and power through the productive use of cultivated spectacles. The gladiators fighting for their lives in an arena to unleash the violent desire of the mob and making them a party to the power struggle is an example of spectacle. One can argue that the demand for such violence necessitated the supply of the bloodthirsty event in the first place. The reverse can also be true. The supply of violence created the demand. Whatever the case is, the production, construction, circulation and function of media spectacles hint at some deep-rooted social values. Once we consider the recent media sensationalism as a reaction to a similar action in which a male figure was exposed with bottles of liquors, we will probably be able to assume

that the spectacle has an anti-women agenda. Instead of exposing one fairy, can we publish the list of visitors to the fairyland?

What is actually her crime: an expired liquor license, hoarding mind-altering substances, arranging house parties, entertaining guests? According to one responsible police officer, there are many such "night queens". If employing full force to eradicate the night queens is the top priority of law-enforcing agents at a time of national emergency when the whole world is suffering from a pandemic, then, "Houston, we have a problem!" If we really consider these night queens symptomatic of a social disease, then it would be wise to run a full diagnostic test of the social body to address the disease that has caused the fever. The tail of the lizard is more important than these abandoned dancing parts. I am sure by now

the lizards have changed their colours, and finding them will be no mean task. They have either left their territories or are hiding in plain sight, camouflaging themselves in their given surrounding. Who knows, some of these lizards may have already been eaten up by bigger predators.

As the audience of the media spectacle, we need to be aware of the information and entertainment (i.e. infotainment) that is being provided in this technologically dazzling, multimedia culture. Our thoughts and actions are influenced by seductive media spectacles. We scandalise the nymphs to strengthen the patriarchy that would like to avenge the humiliation it suffered recently. In the process, the general public becomes nothing but the grass under the feet of two fighting rhinos mentioned in an African proverb.

I shall end with the observations of the French theorist Guy Debord who in the 1960s talked about the Society of the Spectacle. He wrote, "When the real world changes into simple images, the simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behaviour. The spectacle, as a tendency to make one see the world by means of various specialised mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly), naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs." (Section 18).

We are fast losing control over what could once be touched and grasped. We have become mere witnesses deriving voyeuristic pleasures out of seeing things, with no sensation of human touch. We can't pin down why the lizard actually dropped its tail. It's important to ask: what caused the lizard to lose its tail, instead of being entertained by its dance?

Shamsad Mortuza is Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), and a professor of English at Dhaka University (on leave).

QUOTABLE Quote

JHUMPA LAHIRI
(born July 11, 1967)
American author

Why do I write? To investigate the mystery of existence. To tolerate myself. To get closer to everything that is outside of me.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Goes for
- 6 Rho follower
- 11 Left, on liners
- 12 Flynn of film
- 13 Contradict
- 14 Zigzag
- 15 Complete
- 16 Serving feat
- 18 Pricing word
- 19 Wish undone
- 20 Ruin
- 21 Place
- 22 Benders
- 24 Heidi's home
- 25 Tel Aviv native
- 27 Jumbles of noise
- 29 Cattle marks
- 32 Easter quest
- 33 Pickle

purchase

- 34 Opening
- 35 Numerical prefix
- 36 Can. neighbor
- 37 Suffix for hero
- 38 Pink shade
- 40 Hospital worker
- 42 Eat away
- 43 Dickens' Edwin
- 44 Transmits
- 45 Bright

DOWN

- 1 Scottish poles for tossing
- 2 Bare one's soul
- 3 Tool for joining
- 4 Numerical prefix
- 5 Traveling trunk
- 6 Rat's home
- 7 Steamed state
- 8 Tool for breaching
- 9 Accelerate
- 10 Tips off
- 17 Winter melons
- 23 Scrollwork shape
- 24 As done by
- 26 Gopher's work
- 27 Wild cards, sometimes
- 28 Disregard
- 30 "The Good Place" actor
- 31 Swift
- 33 Writer Verne
- 39 Find a sum
- 41 Braz. neighbor

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinon@gmail.com.

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

HE! I TOLD YOU TO WASH THAT GRAFFITI OFF THE WALL!

WE KNOW

BUT AN ART DEALER AT A GALLERY IN TOWN THINKS HE CAN SELL IT

GREG THORNTON WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE FOR MOTHER'S DAY? OH, GOSH...

AFTER THE PAST YEAR, I'D BE HAPPY WITH ANYTHING THAT'S NOT A VIRUS.

YOU'RE BUYING MOM AN AIR COMPRESSOR?? SHE SAID IT WOULD MAKE HER HAPPY.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

MOUSE OF FAGE
OWNER BOWER
OLDER AXLES
US ARMY
VAL T E A M I D
I T A L I C E U R O
A R T I C U L A T E D
L I E D S A T I N G
S A D J E T L E E
B E L O W R O T O R
A G A P E A R E N A
T O W E L L E D O N

POETRY

Ahsan Habib's

On the First-floor Landing: a Duologue

TRANSLATED BY MD MEHEDI HASAN

Two flats facing each other
He's on the stairs, she's at the door

: Leaving, aren't you?
: Yes, all packed up.
: It's been around two years, no?
: More than that; your nickname is Shanu, full name?
: Shahana, yours?
: Mabu.
: I know.
: Mahbub Hossain. You sew well.
: Who told you? You're in Honours final year, no?
: Yes, final—this year.
: Honours in Physics.
: It's surprising! Why did you quit suddenly?
: Mom doesn't want it. I mean—sitting with the boys and all...
: Forget it, has your foot healed?
: How did you know?
: Whatever. Healed?
: That's nothing, slipped in the passage, I mean...
: Not true, falling down from a height...
: Fudge! Is provoking your mother every day at the dining table really necessary?
: Has my mom told you?
: Overheard, many a time. It's been around two years, no?
: More than that; has your tub-plant flowered?
: Want one? Let it go. Rickshaw has arrived, mom's here, bye.
: In the evening, don't read in dimmed light that way—it'll harm your eyes, bye.
: The button at the middle of your yellow shirt is missing, have it sewed, bye.
: Go, your mother's coming. My mom's also calling me, bye.

Ahsan Habib is a Bangla Academy Literary Award and Ekushey Padak winning Bangladeshi poet and literary figure.

Md Mehedi Hasan occasionally contributes to the Star literature page; he is a lecturer of English at North Western University, Khulna.



Aegri Somnia

HISHAM M NAZER

Darkness on a piece of paper
Black soaks the white
In a motion slower than the ceiling fan
That struggles to cool
With heat inside that's untouchable
Unreachable.

And in the corner of the eye
In the clear corner of the tired eye
That wants to surrender to sleep
The tall dark apparition of the cabinet
Comes alive every second,
Gets larger and creeps in
Through the crevices curved by tiredness
Administering the excitement of fear
That recognizes the unknown
After knowing the unrecognizable:
The dark ghastly figure of a disfigured thought
Darker than darkness, there and not there
The excitement of witnessing
The real and not real
In the territory of time
Claimed by dreams

I keep my eyes open
To see nothing
And after seeing it
I cannot close my eyes.

But in this little room that melts the bones
This room with walls that move
Could distant themselves like humans do
Yet they chose to close in,
Standing where they stand:
Square domes, Fibonacci spiral
The sound of sweat—an image from dream
Escapes the eyes and there
There on the ceiling
A certain slant of light
For a moment briefer than a second
Finds its way through the curtain
That conspires with the wind to conjure
A reality that is as unreal
As life itself.

Hisham M Nazer is Assistant Professor, Department of English, Varendra University.

They Took Away My Land

AHMAR MAHBOOB

They took away my land, I said:
Thank you for building the railroad.

They took away my wealth, I said:
Thank you for giving me loans.

They took away my language, I said:
Thank you for teaching me to speak.

They took away my traditions, I said:
Thank you for giving me culture.

They took away my wisdom, I said:
Thank you for building us schools.



They took away my values, I said:
Thank you for making me civilised.

They took away my honour, I said:
Thank you for being so kind.

They took away my people, I said:
Thank you for giving us jobs.

They took away my life, I said:
Thank you, you have saved my life.

Ahmar Mahboob is a Linguist. Currently, he is Associate Professor at the Department of Linguistics at the University of Sydney.

FICTION

The Burnt Forest

SAMR HOSSAIN KHAN

Shengdey awoke suddenly on a bed with an old man sitting beside him.

"Are you okay, my child?" He asked, idly stirring a boiling pot of tea.

"I think so," the boy replied, rubbing his head. He sat up and looked around the place, trying to remember how he ended up there. The next thing he was met by was a slap.

"Stupid boy! How could you go there!"
"Ah! Ma, I'm sorry! I won't do it ever again!" He begged as pain flared in his swollen cheek.

His mother sighed and the old man handed her a cup of tea. "Here, drink this. It will help you gain your energy back." She gave it to her son and he shakily took the drink, sipping the spicy liquid. "Don't tell anyone where you've been, especially your father. And promise me you'll never return there. Understand?"

Shengdey just nodded, sipping his tea. And then the memories came flooding back.

He had gone out alone to explore the burnt forest. It was a patch of land consisting of burnt trees as far as the eye could see. No new plants grew there, and nobody knew how any of them burnt down. The parents of the village all agreed that this was not normal. All the parents would tell their children there was some monster out there and everyone should stay away from that place.

But Shengdey was not convinced. He had set out the previous afternoon, alone, to explore what he could find. He saw the burnt trees, just like the adults had described. And that's all he could remember. His memory was all blurry after that.

After drinking the tea he got up and walked out of the old man's tent. He heard barking and a bundle of grey fur ran up to him. "Hey, Chengkil! You really missed me, huh?" He said as he stroked the dog's fur all over. "Okay, boy, let's go."

Later that day, Shengdey was with his trusty axe, chopping some wood for the fire. As he swung his blade, he heard someone approaching. The boy was also carrying firewood accompanied by a girl the same age as him. "So, Shengdey, how did it go?"

He just huffed and continued chopping. "Haha, you got a big scolding from your parents, didn't you?" The other boy laughed out loud.

"Oy, Radzonday, don't be so mean!" The girl nudged him. "Go there yourself if you think you're better than him!" She teased.

"Ah, sister Badma, you're always so sharp with your words. Anyway, Shengdey, did you



find anything?"

The boy shook his head. He recalled what little he had seen before he had fainted and they both listened intently. After that, they went their ways.

Later that night, Shengdey put on his scarf and headed outside his tent. In a piece of cloth, he had wrapped some pieces of boiled meat from dinner. Chengkil followed behind closely, led on by the food. He walked for some time until he reached the trees by the small stream where somebody was already waiting for him. Badma wrapped her shawl tightly around her head against the cold wind. Her eyes lit up as she saw the two figures approaching.

"Good that you brought him along. Okay, so remember what we planned?"

Shengdey nodded. "But are you going to stay here all night in the cold?"

She smiled softly. "You know I can endure the cold. Just get me that silver flower."
The myth of the silver flower was never shared with children for whatever reason but Shengdey had heard about it when he was spying on his parents and the old man one day. Even Badma had confirmed his suspicions. She told him that at night, under the full moon, she had seen a glow when she started out in the distance in the direction of the burnt forest.

And she had seen it multiple times. However, it only happened a few times a year and only under the full moon. She believed it was the silver flower she had heard whispers about.

This is why Shengdey was out at night. For quite a while now, they had been planning to get the flower, then run away and get married.

Carrying his dagger for protection and leading his dog, Shengdey made his way to the burnt forest under the light of the moon. Badma watched as she saw the familiar glow of the silver flower and the little light illuminated the two figures running through the night. She stood there, hugging the tree for support as the moonlight illuminated her figure. And she continued hugging it all through the night.

When she opened them, she saw the sun rising as dawn came. She looked around to check for Shengdey and Chengkil but saw nothing. Suddenly, from behind her, she heard a voice.

"Here you are! I got the flower!" Shengdey looked at her, smiling softly as he held a flower in his hand. The entire thing was made of silver, from the stem to the petals and it glistened in the dawn light. Badma held it in her hands, just admiring its form. It was as hard as metal itself. "We got the flower, should we run away now, my lady?"

"You flatter me," she shook her head. "But first we need to pack some things. Maybe we can leave tonight, or tomorrow night." Shengdey nodded and the three of them made their way back.

The rest of the day passed as normal for the most part. Chengkil, the dog, would growl sometimes, looking straight ahead at Shengdey or Badma, even barking, then after a few seconds, this behaviour would suddenly stop.

Night came. Both of them made sure to pack their daggers and one of them even carried an axe. With thick furry clothes hugging their bodies and some more in their bags, the two fled in the middle of the night. That night, the girl made sure to wear something that made her look exceptionally beautiful. She had put the silver flower on a string decorated with pearls which her mother had bought "from a merchant from the cities in the south" for her birthday some time ago.

The trio walked until they reached the river that wound through the border of the burnt forest. They were hungry so they came to the edge of the river, looking for anything to eat. A fish swam too close and Shengdey stabbed it

But Shengdey was not convinced. He had set out the previous afternoon, alone, to explore what he could find. He saw the burnt trees, just like the adults had described. And that's all he could remember. His memory was all blurry after that.

hard with his dagger. It struggled, bleeding for a few moments until it finally died, staying still in the red water.

Badma pulled up the fish, using the dagger to remove the tough scales while Shengdey went to gather some wood. They lit up a fire and cooked the fish there and shared it between them, complaining how there was no seasoning. They smiled as they watched Chengkil gobble up the scraps hungrily.

"Soon we'll find a town and get honest work," Shengdey said while watching Chengkil. "Then we can afford better food." Shengdey said as he put blankets on the grass, setting up for the night. "Then finally we can enjoy ourselves, my dear wife."

"Wife!?" She blushed and gasped as she crawled up to him under the blankets. "Okay, I'll bear with you for now." She said as she closed her eyes.

When dawn came, the girl opened her eyes slowly, still feeling drowsy. In her hands, she felt a small, hard, round object. Looking down, she saw it was a pearl. She reached for her neck and there was no necklace there anymore. She sat up with a start and every pearl that was on her necklace lay messily strewn across the blankets. And the silver flower was gone. She turned her head and gasped as she saw there was nobody there. She got up and almost vomited what she before her.

A dog's body lay lifeless on the grass. Its light grey fur was all ruffled and it was streaked all over with blood. It had no head.

Badma wasted no time; she got up and ran for home. She did not care about the bitter wind cutting at her body as she ran. She just wanted to see her family, her house, anything familiar to her. When she finally reached her village, she realised she was alone. Shengdey was not with her.

"What's wrong with you, child? You could have died!" Her mother scolded her as her daughter hugged her tightly, tears streaming down her face.

"What happened to... to my future husband!?" She wept.

The mother sighed, just holding her daughter. "Give up on him. That part of your life is past."

Nobody ever saw the boy or the dog again. A year later, some people came across the place where the young couple had slept. The river had changed direction. Instead of a straight stream, it was winding and twisting in the direction of the burnt forest, disappearing into the swamp like a huge snake. Silver pearls lay strewn all along the path. The water of the river had the colour of blood, overflowing with the half-eaten bodies of dead fish. It looked just like liquid garnet. And from the dead bodies of the fish, sprouted silver lotuses, lighting the entire river as far as the eye could see.

A pile of stones was erected on that scene and decorated with the silver jewellery. After that day, one day every year, the river would bloom silver lotuses and be overflowing with liquid garnet. Nobody entered the burnt forest though, knowing to respect the place.

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Star mail: sports@thedailystar.net
DHAKA SATURDAY AUGUST 7, 2021, SRABAN 23, 1428 BS

SPORT



Bangladesh captain Mahmudullah Riyad pumps his fist in ecstasy following his side's 10-run victory against Australia in the third T20 international at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Having already won the first two matches of the five-match series, the close win helped the Tigers clinch the series 3-0 – their first ever series victory in any format over the Aussies. (Inset) Left-arm pacer Shoriful Islam struck the decisive blow during the 18th over of Australia's chase with the dismissal of in-form batsman Mitchell Marsh. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



IT'S OVER

AFF, Barcelona

MESSI'S BARCELONA CAREER IN NUMBERS

Barcelona's negotiations with Lionel Messi are over and the striker is considering other offers, the club's president Joan Laporta said on Friday.

Laporta said in a press conference he was not prepared "to put the club at risk" by renewing Messi's contract, with Barca facing huge financial problems ahead of the start of La Liga.

"Yesterday we realised it was over. I had the last conversation with Leo's father," said Laporta.

"I do not want to give false hope. The player has other offers and there is a time limit because La Liga starts soon and he needs time to assess his other options."

Messi reached an agreement with Barcelona to sign a reported five-year contract but with the trade-off that he would earn 50 per cent less per year.

But La Liga's financial fair play rules, which are expected to reduce Barca's salary limit to less than 200 million euros this season, led Laporta to conclude they were unable to complete the deal.

"We could not accommodate Messi's contract," said Laporta, who was re-elected as club president in March.

"The situation we have inherited is abominable and the sports salary bill represents 110 per cent of the club's income. We have no margin for salaries."

"La Liga's rules set limitations and we have no margin. We knew the situation since we arrived but the numbers we have seen are even worse than we thought."

Laporta said Barca could have registered Messi by agreeing to the deal but insisted it was a risk he was not prepared to take.

"We were not prepared to put the club at risk in this way," said Laporta.

"Barça had to be in favour of a contract that would mortgage our television rights for half a century."

"I am not willing to mortgage the club for anyone. We have an institution that is above everyone, even the best player in the world."

Laporta said he felt "sadness and disappointment" but that he "did everything possible" to keep Messi, who joined Barcelona aged 13 and went on to score 672 goals in 778 appearances for the club.

"There is a before and after Leo," Laporta said. "Leo Messi has been an icon and has left some historic moments. We have eternal gratitude to him."

778 GAMES

672 GOALS

305 ASSISTS

10 LA LIGA

7 COPA DEL REY

7 SUPERCOPA DE ESPANA

4 UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

3 UEFA SUPER CUP

3 CLUB WORLD CUP

6 BALLON D'OR

6 EUROPEAN GOLDEN SHOE

6 LA LIGA BEST PLAYER

'Always felt we were a balanced side'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh required something extraordinary to earn a victory in the third T20I against Australia in defence of a small 127-run total and the Tigers did it in style to re-write history at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

It was the lowest total in the shortest format of the game that Bangladesh have ever successfully defended, coming courtesy of some disciplined bowling that restricted the Aussies to 117 for four and sealed a memorable 10-run win.

For Australia, it was a continuation of a poor run in T20Is, the series defeat against Bangladesh their fifth consecutive series loss in the game's shortest format.

After bringing down the equation to 22 required off the final two overs, Mustafizur Rahman conjured a special performance. The left-arm seamer gave away just one run in the 19th over, changing the course of the game.

Off-spinner Mahedi Hasan held his nerve despite Alex Carey smashing him for six off the first

ball of the final over, but things went his way thereafter and he conceded just five further runs.

Mustafizur ended with the most economical figures of his career, conceding just nine runs from four overs and picking up a wicket. It was also the most economical bowling performance by a Bangladeshi in T20Is over the past seven years.

Mahmudullah scored a vital fifty to help the Tigers post a winning total and the Bangladesh skipper was rewarded with a man of the match award.

The 35-year-old informed that he had a chat with the team after the series in Zimbabwe, urging the players to play with big hearts and to express themselves and that it had worked out.

"We had a chat in Zimbabwe after we finished the T20Is about needing to step up. We felt we were a very good side, but the rankings did not reflect that. We always felt we were a very balanced side. We just needed to play with big hearts and balanced minds while executing our skills,"



Australia pacer Nathan Ellis (C) is the toast of his teammates following the debutant's hat-trick against Bangladesh in the third T20I at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

SCORES IN BRIEF

Bangladesh:

127 for nine in 20 overs (Mahmudullah 52, Shakib 26, Afif 19; Ellis 3-34, Hazlewood 2-16, Zampa 2-24)

Australia:

117 for four in 20 overs (Marsh 51, McDermott 35, Carey 20 not out; Mustafizur 0-9, Shoriful 2-29, Nasum 1-19)

Result: Bangladesh win by 10 runs and lead the series 3-0

Player-of-the-match: Mahmudullah

Mahmudullah said during the post-match presentation yesterday.

The Tigers T20I skipper waxed lyrical about his bowling unit and added that he wanted Shakib Al Hasan to have a chat with the team before going out to defend the low total.

"I think the boys stood up at important times. The way they fought tonight was incredible. But (our) bowlers did the job really well, lot of cutters and slower balls. When we were about to go back on the field, I wanted Shakib to have a chat with the team. He said that no matter what happened, we would have to take an early wicket and get the pressure up. Mustafizur did a brilliant job once again, he was outstanding tonight," he said.

OLYMPICS MEDALS TABLE (TOP FIVE)

COUNTRY	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
China	36	26	17	79
USA	31	36	31	98
Japan	24	11	16	51
G. Britain	18	20	20	58
ROC	17	23	22	62



Shaunae Miller-Uibo of the Bahamas celebrates winning gold in women's 400 metres at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. She clocked 48.36 seconds to retain her Olympic title as American Allyson Felix took bronze for a record 10th Olympic medal. PHOTO: REUTERS



Kenya's Faith Kipyegon retained her title in women's 1,500 metres as she denied Dutchwoman Sifan Hassan her dream of winning an unprecedented Olympic treble. The Kenyan won in an Olympic record time of 3:53.11. PHOTO: REUTERS

What to WATCH

BTV, T SPORTS & GTV
Bangladesh vs Australia
Fourth T20I
Live from 6:00 pm

BTV

Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games
Live from 7:15 am, 8:25 am & 11:00 am

TEN 1, TEN 2, TEN 3 & SONY SIX

Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games
Live from 8:00 pm & 4:00 am (Sunday)

SONY SIX & TEN 3

India vs England
First Test (Day 4)
Live from 4:00 pm

T SPORTS

THE HUNDRED
Men's
Southern vs Northern
Live from 12:00 am (Sunday)

Right now it is not in our thoughts (to sign Messi), absolutely not. It looked like it finished well in terms of (Messi) continuing with Barcelona. In the end it was a surprise for everyone, me included of course, but I think Laporta was clear today the reason why.

PEP GUARDIOLA
MANCHESTER CITY MANAGER

We are focused on the club, which is working on the transfer window in a discreet way, and working to improve the team in whichever way possible to achieve the targets we set at the start of the season.

MAURICIO POCCHETTO
PSG MANAGER



Lionel Messi was recently pictured on a social media post alongside Neymar, Leandro Paredes, Angel di Maria and Marco Verratti – all of Paris Saint-Germain, the most likely destination for the former Barcelona star. PHOTO: TWITTER

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Resurgent Taliban take first Afghan provincial capital

Kill top Afghan govt media official; UN says war has entered 'deadlier phase'

AGENCIES

The Taliban captured an Afghan provincial capital and assassinated the government's top media officer in Kabul yesterday, dealing twin high-profile blows to the Western-backed administration.

The developments come as UN special envoy for Afghanistan, Deborah Lyons, yesterday told the Security Council that the war in Afghanistan has entered a "new, deadlier, and more destructive phase" with more than 1,000 civilians killed in the past month during a Taliban offensive.

"A party that was genuinely committed to a negotiated settlement would not risk so many civilian casualties, because it would understand that the process of reconciliation will be more challenging the more blood is shed," Lyons said.

A police spokesman in southern Nimroz province said the capital Zaranj had fallen to the hardline Islamists because of a lack of reinforcements from the government.



DK Menapal

Fighting to reimpose strict Islamic law after their 2001 ousting by US-led forces, the Taliban have intensified their campaign to defeat the US-backed government as foreign forces complete their withdrawal after 20 years of war.

The insurgents have taken dozens of districts and border crossings in recent months and put pressure on several provincial capitals, including Herat in the west and Kandahar in the south, as foreign troops withdraw.

Zaranj was the first provincial capital to fall to the group since the United States reached a deal with the Taliban in February 2020 for a US troop pullout. A local source said the Taliban had seized the governor's office, the police headquarters and an encampment near the Iranian border.

Taliban sources said the group was celebrating, and Zaranj's fall would boost the morale of their fighters in other

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Guava farmers gather at the Bhimruli canal on boats laden with the fruit in Jhalakathi yesterday. Every year, the largest floating market of guava can be seen on this canal, with farmers from surrounding villages bringing their produce here. Traders from all over the country converge upon the site to buy the fruit and take it back to the capital and other districts.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Two more doctors die from Covid

STAR REPORT

Two more physicians died from Covid-19 while undergoing treatment in Dhaka and Barishal on Thursday.

Of them, ophthalmologist Farida Yeasmin breathed her last at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, while Prof Sirajul Islam died at Barishal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

Farida, associate prof of ophthalmology department at Community-Based Medical College Hospital Bangladesh (CBMCHB) in Mymensingh, had been receiving treatment at DMCH for around 12 days.

She passed away around noon on Thursday.

Farida passed her MBBS from Barishal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital and joined CBMCHB in 1996, said Prof Mirza Manjurul Haque, principal of CBMCHB.

Later, she did her

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Example of applied geometry found on 3,700-yr-old tablet



MAIL ONLINE

The oldest example of applied geometry has been discovered on a 3,700-year-old clay tablet featuring maths attributed to Pythagoras 1,000 years later.

The tablet, known as Si.427 was discovered in the late 19th Century in central Iraq, but its significance had remained unknown until it was analysed in more detail by mathematicians from the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia.

The tablet dates from the Old Babylonian period, which was between 1900 to 1600 BC.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Man lands in jail over rape of girl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

A Bogura court yesterday sent a man to jail for his alleged involvement in the rape of a teenage girl in the district.

The accused Monju Mia, of Bogura's Sherpur upazila, is a transport worker by profession, said police.

The victim filed a case against Monju on Thursday and police managed to arrest him early yesterday.

According to the case statement, the accused is a relative of the victim's husband and sexually harassed her once more earlier.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



PRAYER TIMING AUGUST 7

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4:20 12:45 5:00 6:47 8:15
JAMAAT 4:55 1:15 5:15 6:50 8:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

ROAD TO FREEDOM THIS DAY IN BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR HISTORY

Indira Gandhi writes to Nixon

AUGUST 7, 1971

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEM

INDIRA GANDHI'S LETTER TO NIXON

India Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in a letter to US President Richard Nixon, expressed her dissatisfaction over the initiative of deploying UN observers in India and Pakistan.

She said, "It is unrealistic to think that the presence of a group of UN observers could give any feeling of assurance to the evacuees when every day they see new evacuees pouring in with stories of atrocities.

Would the League of Nations observers have succeeded in persuading the refugees who fled from Hitler's tyranny to return even whilst the pogroms against the Jews and political opponents of Nazism continued unabated?"

"In our view, the intentions of the UN observers might be more credible if their efforts were directed at stopping the continuing outflow of these unfortunate people and at creating conditions which, to any reasonable person, would assure the safety of life and liberty of the refugee who wishes to return to East Bengal," added Indira Gandhi.

The Indian premier further said the news of fresh supply of US arms to Pakistan was a great embarrassment for her government since the US authority repeatedly assured India of not abetting the Pakistani junta in continuing their killing mission in East Pakistan.

She added, "It was a sad chapter in the history of our subcontinent when the United States began to supply arms to Pakistan in 1954 and continued doing so up to 1965. These arms have been used against us, as indeed we feared they would be. And now these arms are being used against their own people whose only fault appears to be that they took seriously [Pakistan] President Yahya Khan's promises to restore democracy."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Pabna journalist sued under DSA

Ex-AL lawmaker files case for defamation thru' news report

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Former Awami League lawmaker Azizul Haque Arzu has filed a case against Pabna Press Club Secretary Soikat Afroz Asad under the Digital Security Act over defaming him in a news report.

The accused only came to know about the matter this week, about two months after the filing of the case.

Soikot is the district correspondent of Somoy TV, the Bangladesh Pratidin and bdnews24.com.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Soikot said the former MP from Pabna-2 lodged the case with the Cyber Tribunal in Dhaka on June 9 under section 25(2) of the DSA.

"I came to know about the case a couple of days ago when an official of the Police Bureau of Investigation from Dhaka called me regarding the investigation of the case. On Thursday, I managed to have a copy of the case statement from the Dhaka court," he said.

According to the case statement, the accused defamed Azizul by publishing a news on local web portal pabnamail24.com. The journalist also defamed the complainant on social media, it added.

Soikot, also the editor of pabnamail24.com, said: "I talked to Azizul Haque before publishing the news as per journalistic norms. Reports on the same issue were run by different media outlets, but he filed the case to purposely harass me."

Meanwhile, different journalist

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Two workers feed oxygen from an oxygen tanker into the central supply of the life-saving gas at the Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital in the capital. Amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, oxygen produced at home and imported from abroad is similarly stored at different hospitals all around the country to be supplied to wards and ICUs. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

COVID PANDEMIC

Delta fuels new curbs across Asia

Hospitalisations soar in Sri Lanka as China sees highest daily figure of patients; Manila locks down

AGENCIES

The highly contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus is surging through Asia, prompting some countries to tighten curbs and others to hasten vaccination.

Sri Lankan authorities tightened restrictions yesterday as reports emerged of Covid patients dying while

awaiting admission to overcrowded hospitals.

The government said state ceremonies and public gatherings were banned until September 1 because of the growing health crisis.

Public servants had previously been asked to return to work from Monday but that order has now been revoked and bosses told to decide who should

report for duty on-site.

China yesterday reported its highest daily count of new Covid-19 patients in an outbreak that began in late July, fuelled by a surge in locally transmitted infections.

Officials blamed the latest clusters mainly on the highly transmissible Delta variant, though it has not led to

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

বিশ্ব শুনলো বাঘের গর্জন

অষ্টদৈনিয়ার বিপক্ষে ঐতিহাসিক সিরিজ জয়ে অভিনন্দন বাংলাদেশ ক্রিকেট টিম

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