

Fictitious and fishy

FROM PAGE 16

Anwar said Halder, former managing director of NRB Global Bank, created several fictitious companies. "About Tk 426 crore is found in his accounts and those of the fictitious companies," he said.

In the investigation, the anti-graft watchdog also found the accused maintained 178 bank accounts in his and companies' names.

"We've found abnormal transactions worth about Tk 6,076 crore in these accounts," said ACC's secretary.

PK Halder in collaboration with his brother Pritish Kumar Halder and 12 others laundered about CAD 11.7 million.

The money was first transferred to Singapore, the UAE and India and later to Canada, said Anwar.

The allegation of embezzlement

against Halder surfaced after the ACC launched an enquiry into the wealth of illegal casino owners in 2019.

Earlier, the anti-graft watchdog filed 15 cases against 70 persons for misappropriating about Tk 1,132 crore of International Leasing and Financial Services Limited.

In these cases, PK Halder has been made the prime accused.

He took loans from financial institutions against at least two dozen non-existent companies created by him.

In some cases, he used part of the funds to repay instalments of loans taken against his several fictitious firms.

PK Halder put his men at the helm of the financial institutions so that he could easily borrow and misappropriate the funds.

Apple's original computer

FROM PAGE 16

computer is encased in koa wood -- a richly patinated wood native to Hawaii. Only a handful of the original 200 were made in this way.

Jobs and Wozniak mostly sold Apple-1s as component parts. One computer shop that took a delivery of around 50 units decided to encase some of them in wood, the auction house said.

"This is kind of the holy grail for vintage electronics and computer tech collectors," Apple-1 expert Corey Cohen told the Los Angeles Times ahead of the bidding. "That really makes it exciting for a lot of people."

John Moran Auctioneers said the device, which was sold with a 1986 Panasonic video monitor, has only ever had two owners.

"It was originally purchased by an electronics professor at Chaffey

College in Rancho Cucamonga, California, who then sold it to his student in 1977," a listing on the auction house's website said.

The Los Angeles Times reported the student -- who has not been named -- paid just \$650 for it at the time.

While the \$400,000 hammer price represents a healthy return on investment for that former student, it is a long way short of the record for such a device.

A working Apple-1 that came to the market in 2014 was sold by Bonhams for more than \$900,000.

"A lot of people just want to know what kind of a person collects Apple-1 computers and it's not just people in the tech industry," Cohen said.

Apple raced to success in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but foundered after the departure of Jobs and Wozniak.

BNP sees gain from boycott

FROM PAGE 1

that the EC with the help of the government would hold polls in a free and fair manner.

But the local government elections, particularly those to municipalities and upazila parishads, frustrated them and the BNP decided to stay away from future UP polls.

A total of 835 UPs will go to polls today and elections to another 1,004 will be held on November 28 in the second and third phases.

BNP Organising Secretary Ruhul Qudus Talukdar Dulu said, "What did we achieve through taking part in the previous polls? Nothing at all, but a number of cases have been filed against our leaders and activists. So why should we contest polls?"

He said the party's biggest benefit from boycotting the UP polls is that its leaders and activists did not incur financial losses and face any new polls-related cases.

"The general election is ahead. Now we need to keep our unity intact. There is a huge competition within the parties like BNP for nominations and it sometimes creates division within the party. Why should we weaken our organisational strength by taking part in such farcical polls when we know the results beforehand?" he said.

BNP leaders also said they consider boycott of the ongoing UP polls by almost all major parties as a big achievement for the party as the other parties followed them.

According to the BNP, more than five lakh cases have been filed against 35 lakh leaders and activists of the

party, about 500 have been made victims of enforced disappearances and more than 1,000 have been killed since 2009.

Statistics of Ain o Salish Kendra show at least 44 people were killed in clashes centering local government polls between January and October this year. Of them, 40 were killed in clashes over UP polls.

This month, at least nine people have been killed in pre-polls violence in Narayanganj, Cox's Bazar, Narsingdi and Dhaka's Dhamari upazila, according to media reports.

Most of the clashes took place between supporters of the ruling Awami League chairman nominees and party "rebels".

BNP LEADERS IN POLLS RACE
Although the BNP is boycotting the UP election, many party men are running as independents.

Take for example the case of Wakkas Kanchan in Murshid Hat union of Dinajpur's Bochaganj upazila.

"I am contesting the polls as an independent as the local party leaders and activists wanted me to take part. I cannot deny the request from the locals," he said.

In the same upazila's Ishania union, no BNP men are taking part in the UP elections. Alamgir Shah, a local BNP leader, had contested the last UP polls with the party's ticket, but he is staying away this time around.

"For me, taking part in the polls is meaningless. People know that if a candidate is running with 'boat' symbol, he will win. So what is the benefit of contesting the polls?" he said.

No reason to put blame

FROM PAGE 16

It said it would give certain guidelines on this matter later in a written verdict.

Earlier, in the day's proceedings, the CJ said the SC had disposed of 102 cases involving death penalty till this November 3 (from a certain date) and that half of the convicts' capital punishment was commuted to life imprisonment.

"Cases related to death sentences filed even in 2009 had remained pending. But lawyers of many of them [convicts] had not mentioned it... I have sorted those cases out for holding hearings and disposing of them on a priority basis so that people don't have to suffer," he said.

The two appeals filed (by lawyers of Mokim and Jharu) in 2013 had remained pending, but their lawyers

did not place the matter before the court. "But why has this happened?" the chief justice questioned.

The Appellate Division yesterday also criticised Helal Uddin Mollah, lawyer for a death-row convict named Shukur Ali. Helal on November 7 told the court that the Kashimpur jail authorities were trying to execute his client even though the full text of the court's verdict in the case has not been released yet.

Without the full text, the lawyer could not seek a review, he told the court that day.

The top court told Helal that he had placed the matter before it in such a manner that it caused sensation and the judges felt embarrassed.

Helal offered an unconditional apology to the court for his manner.

Russia fires prison officials after torture videos leaked

AFP, Moscow

Russia's prison service yesterday said it had dismissed 18 officials after a whistleblower leaked videos of rape and torture inside its facilities.

Last month, the Gulagu.net NGO published footage of abuse at a jail in the central city of Saratov. The videos were leaked by former inmate Sergei Savelyev -- a Belarus national -- who then fled Russia and asked for asylum in France.

Savelyev had been serving 7.5

years for drug trafficking. He is now wanted in Russia for "illegal access to computer information".

Yesterday, the head of the prison service in the Saratov region, Anton Yefarkin, said 18 officials had been fired and 11 had faced "the strictest" disciplinary measures.

Five criminal cases have been opened in connection to the videos, he said.

"We are doing everything to work things out and draw the appropriate conclusions," Yefarkin told regional state television.



People line up for nucleic acid testing at a residential compound following local cases of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in Dalian, Liaoning province, China yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Speed up

FROM PAGE 16

Soberingly, the Climate Action Tracker research group said on Tuesday that all the national pledges submitted so far to cut greenhouse gases by 2030 would, if fulfilled, allow the Earth's temperature to rise 2.4C by 2100.

It said if longer-term targets, so far less supported by concrete action plans, were also fulfilled, warming could be held below 2C.

The talks are widely viewed as unlikely to clinch enough pledges to nail down the 1.5C goal this week.

But by locking in rules to require countries to upgrade their pledges further next year -- a key request from nations most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change -- it aims to at least keep the target in sight.

NO EXTENSION OF SUMMIT

The COP26 president, Alok Sharma, said on Tuesday the talks had "a mountain to climb" to secure the necessary commitments. After the draft was released he said he would not seek an extension of the conference beyond Friday's scheduled closure.

The document urged countries to speed up efforts to stop burning coal and to phase out fossil fuel subsidies -- taking direct aim at the coal, oil and gas that produce carbon dioxide, the primary contributor to manmade climate change, though it did not set a

fixed date for phasing them out.

Helen Mountford, a vice president at the World Resources Institute, said the explicit reference to fossil fuels was an advance on previous climate summits. "The real issue is going to be whether it can be kept in."

Manuel Pulgar-Vidal of the environmental campaign group WWF said the text "recognizes the shortfall of current ambition and the scale of the task we have in front of us", and that it must be "a floor, not a ceiling".

He welcomed its mechanisms for enhancing ambition in the future and the mention of fossil fuels.

Greenpeace dismissed the draft as an inadequate response to the climate crisis, calling it "a polite request that countries maybe, possibly, do more next year".

The final text will not be legally binding, but will carry the political weight of the nearly 200 countries that signed the Paris Agreement.

"I believe that it includes all of the elements that me and my bloc have been fighting for," said Juan Carlos Monterrey Gomez, lead negotiator for Panama. "The next step for us is to defend the provisions on ambition, keeping 1.5 alive."

WHO PAYS?

The draft reminds countries that to

stop the planet heating beyond the critical 1.5C threshold, global CO2 emissions must drop 45% by 2030 from 2010 levels, on the way to halting their rise altogether by 2050 -- so-called "net zero".

Under the national climate pledges submitted to the United Nations so far, emissions would be 14% above 2010 levels by 2030.

The draft dodges poorer countries' demands for assurances that rich nations, whose greenhouse gas emissions have been largely responsible for historic climate change, will provide far more money to help them cope with its consequences and cut their own emissions.

The draft "urges" developed countries to "urgently scale up" aid to help poorer ones adapt to climate change, and says more funding needs to take the form of grants, rather than loans that burden poor nations with more debt. But it does not include a new plan for delivering that money.

Rich nations failed to meet a pledge made in 2009 to give poorer countries \$100 billion a year in climate finance by 2020, and now expect to deliver it three years late. That broken promise has damaged trust, and prompted poor countries to seek tougher rules for future funding.

835 UPs go to polls today

FROM PAGE 1

A tense situation prevailed in Sujanagar upazila ahead of the election due to the series of clashes between AL and its rebel candidates' supporters.

Law enforcers have taken high alert position there, sources said.

Last week at a meeting with the Election Commission, top police officials warned of "possibilities of violence" in several places during the election.

In the absence of BNP in the polls, the main contest would presumably be between the Awami League, its "rebel group" and the Jatiya Party.

A total of seventeen political parties are participating in the second phase, EC data shows.

Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda, however, ruled out possibilities of violence. He rather said that it would be held in a "festive mood".

"Instructions have been given to law enforcers to control the law and order situation with an iron fist," he said while speaking to reporters at the EC office after a commission meeting yesterday.

He said that law enforcers can't be blamed for the violence. "It is a reality that you cannot stop such untoward incidents by guarding localities. To stop such incidents, tolerance among people participating and connected with the election is necessary."

ONE MORE DIES IN PABNA
Tension gripped the UPs of many districts, including Narsingdi, Narayanganj, Pabna, Meherpur, Noakhali, as a series of clashes took

place around the country centring the polls, reported our district correspondents.

Sobuz Hossain, 28, who was injured in a factional clash between AL and its rebel candidates for the Vaina union parishad election in Pabna's Sujanagar upazila, died in Rajshahi Medical College Hospital on Wednesday night, according to Mizanur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Sujanagar Police Station.

Sobuz sustained injuries when supporters of AL backed candidate Amin Uddin and its rebel candidate Omar Faruk, locked in a clash on Monday.

"I am worried about what will happen on election day. Clashes have been taking place regularly ahead of it," said Anwar Hossain of Satbaria union of the upazila.

Panic has also spread among the voters of other unions, especially Alokballi in Narsingdi Sadar.

At least six people were killed in clashes between two AL groups on October 26 and then November 4.

Our district correspondents reported that violence continued ahead the second phase of the UP polls and, in most cases, supporters of AL nominees and party "rebel" candidates have been involved.

Sources in the ruling party said around 690 "rebel" candidates are contesting the elections.

Police officials, speaking at a meeting organised by the EC with police and admin officials on November 4, warned the commission of further violence in at least seven districts of the Dhaka and Khulna

divisions.

Habibur Rahman, deputy inspector general of police (Dhaka range), told the meeting that there were possibilities of violence in 90 unions of Dhaka division. As many as 170 of them are going for polls today.

Statistics of Ain o Salish Kendra show at least 44 people were killed in clashes centering local government elections between January and October this year. Of them, 40 were killed in clashes over UP polls.

UNOPPOSED
On September 29, the EC announced that 848 UPs from 64 districts will go for polls in the second phase. But today 835 will go for polls.

Election to the four UPs was postponed due to cases and the schedule of one union was cancelled due to "irregularities" by returning officer, EC official said.

Besides, the election to five UPs in Cumilla's Laksham upazila will be held again as chairman, general member and member for reserved seats for women were elected unopposed.

These unions are Kandhirpar, Govindpur, Uttarda, Ajgora and Laksam Purbo.

A total of 81 chairman candidates, 203 member candidates and 76 member aspirants for reserved seats for women were elected unopposed.

There are 3,310 chairman candidates, 28,747 members and 9,161 women's reserve seat candidates. About 1.66 crore voters are expected to cast their votes at 8,492 polling centres.

Now jet fuel price hiked

FROM PAGE 1

The development comes at a time when the aviation industry is bouncing back from the troughs it hit for the global coronavirus pandemic with the relaxation of travel restrictions.

Air travel will inevitably get costlier as a consequence and it is the passengers who will have to shoulder the burden at the end of the day, said Kamrul Islam, general manager of public relations at US-Bangla Airlines.

Different airlines around the world are getting support from their governments to stay afloat during the Covid-19 period.

"When we need support from the government on an emergency basis, the BPC has been increasing the jet fuel price regularly in the last one year," he said, adding that fuel costs account for 40 to 46 percent of an airline's operation outlays.

The jet fuel price is higher in

Bangladesh than elsewhere in the region and this hike will make survival even more challenging for the two private airlines, said Kazi Wahidul Alam, an aviation expert and editor of Weekly Monitor, a travel magazine.

"Our government has done nothing so far to ensure the aviation industry survives the pandemic storm. Instead, it has increased jet fuel price without any logical reason," he said.

But Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal disagrees.

"It is completely reasonable," he said at a virtual briefing after a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Public Purchase yesterday.

The government provided as much subsidy as it could on the fuel price, so the rest of the burden has to be borne by the public.

"Judge yourself. Where will the government get money? The government has to spend by collecting

revenue -- the government does not print money. It is the international market that has caused the fuel price hike -- the government has not done anything."

Fuel accounts for only 40 per cent of the cost of operating a bus, according to a study by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). But due to the 23 percent hike in diesel price, the bus fare has been increased by 28 percent, which actually should have a 10 percent hike, according to the CPD.

When prodded on the matter, Kamal said: "I will talk to the concerned ministry on how the fare has been calculated. I will come up with a detailed answer in the next meeting."

Asked if there is any scope to reconsider the decision on the hike in fuel price and transport fares, he said: "I don't think the government has abruptly increased the price."

Arrested

FROM PAGE 16

additional superintendent (crime and administration) of Narsingdi police, said Sujan attacked police and jumped into the river to escape while being taken to Narsingdi Model Police Station.

The police officer said Sujan stood accused in at least 10 cases, including over theft, robbery and mugging.

An unnatural death case was filed with the police station in this regard, he added.

Students to get

FROM PAGE 16

mismanagement in the vaccination centres and multiple difficulties in the registration process have dampened the excitement surrounding the government's initiative.

The whole vaccination programme was going very smoothly until it was taken to the schools, said a top official of the Directorate General of Health Services asking not to be named as he is not authorised to speak with media.

"Several flaws cropped up. So, if we go to schools and administer the jabs there, students waiting in the queue for long will come to an end," he added.

Contacted, Md Shahedul Khabir, director of the administration at Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), said: "We have a taken decision in principle that vaccination will be taken to other schools where there are cooling facilities and the student numbers are high. We will start soon."

A list of more than 4 lakh students of schools in Dhaka aged between 12 and 17 years was sent to the ICT Division for vaccine registration, according to the DSHE.

Of them, about 2.5 lakh have registered. There are about 6.5 lakh students of 12-17 years enrolled at schools in Dhaka.

Heavy rains

FROM PAGE 16

The Indian Meteorological Department issued a red alert to parts of Tamil Nadu and the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh state, asking fishermen not to venture to sea.

Tamil Nadu state officials evacuated hundreds of people from low-lying areas and distributed rations and food to those already affected by the rains.

The state's Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said on Twitter he had requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to release funds from the National Disaster Relief Fund, adding that previously-allocated money was exhausted.

Bangladesh govt

FROM PAGE 16

left their homes earlier. He said that in case of those who went to India before March 25, the government would restore their property if not already "exchanged or sold". The minister said that the government and the people of Bangladesh would in no case compromise on the issue of independence. He categorically ruled out any possibility of a solution of the Bangladesh issue within the framework of Pakistan.

CABINET MEETING HELD

The Bangladesh Cabinet held a meeting today which was presided over by acting president Syed Nazrul Islam. All the members of the Cabinet, including the prime minister, were present at the meeting, and the problems in setting up civil administrations in the liberated areas were discussed. It was pointed out that law and order, rehabilitation, arrangement for food and other essential supplies, housing, medical facilities etc. would pose problems of inconceivable dimensions. It was also suggested that during screening of collaborators, very large-scale purge of the government employees might create an administrative vacuum which might be difficult to fill in. The Cabinet decided that a sub-committee of the secretaries would be formed to examine various facets of the problem of setting up civil administration in liberated Bangladesh. The sub-committee would submit a comprehensive report containing their findings and recommendations to the government as early as possible.

US URGES INDIA, PAKISTAN TO AVOID ALL-OUT WAR

Alarmed by what one US official described as a "dramatic escalation of fighting" along the India-Pakistan border in the last few days, the United States called on the two sides to avoid an all-out war.

Joseph J Sisco, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, summoned the Indian and Pakistani ambassadors to the State Department to express the Nixon administration's heightened concern. He urged both sides to take such steps as they could defuse the situation.

The American appeal was prompted by cables received recently from United States representatives in India and Pakistan expressing concern about the upsurge in fighting.

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