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## HEALTH COSTS DURING PANDEMIC

# Half a billion pushed into extreme poverty

More than half a billion people globally were pushed into extreme poverty last year as they paid for health costs out of their own pockets during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization and the World Bank said yesterday.

The pandemic disrupted health services globally and triggered the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, making it even more difficult for people to pay for healthcare, according to a joint statement from both the organizations. "All governments must immediately resume and accelerate efforts to ensure every one of their citizens can access health services without fear of the financial consequences," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

Tedros urged governments to increase their focus on health care systems and stay on course towards universal health coverage, which the WHO defines as everyone getting access to health services they need without financial hardship.

Healthcare is a major political issue in the United States, one of the few industrialised countries that does not have universal cover for its citizens.

Globally, the pandemic made things worse and immunisation coverage dropped for the first time in ten years, with deaths from tuberculosis and malaria increasing.

"Within a constrained fiscal space, governments will have to make tough choices to protect and increase health

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Workers of private jute mills yesterday observe a hunger strike in front of the office of Khulna deputy commissioner to press home their six-point demand, including reopening of closed jute mills and payment of their arrears.

PHOTO:  
HABIBUR RAHMAN

## EC FORMATION LAW HC refuses to order govt to do it

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday refused to order the government to formulate a law for formation of the Election Commission saying that it would not make any interference in this issue at present, because the government is sincere about it.

"The law minister has reportedly said the government will formulate a law for formation of the Election Commission later in line with the mandate of the constitution. Let's see what the government does," said the bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman while hearing a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Gobinda Biswas.

The petition seeks the court directive on the authorities concerned to formulate a law for formation of the EC and determine the qualifications of chief election commissioner and election commissioners.

With the observation, the bench kept the petition standing over (waiting for hearing) until January 10 next year.

Justice Enayetur said the CEC and ECs are appointed through the search committee whose chairman and members hold constitutional posts, and their choosing for the posts of CEC and ECs are not unacceptable at all.

Lawyer Yusuf Ali appeared for the petitioner, while Deputy Attorney General Bepul Bagmar represented the state.

On November 19, Law Minister Anisul Huq said the government is sincere about formulating a law for the EC formation, but it would not be right to make it in a hurry.

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## Man 'dies in DB custody'

Family says he was tortured to death; cops claim he died by suicide

A CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A man died in the custody of the Detective Branch of police in Satkhira, hours after DB arrested him in his home in Debhata upazila on Saturday.

Family members alleged that he was tortured to death. Police, on the other hand, said he died by suicide. They claimed that he hanged himself by the DB lockup door's iron rod with a piece of rope he wore around his waist.

Snoara, daughter-in-law of deceased Babul Sardar, 56, son of valiant freedom fighter late Jurun Sardar, dismissed the police claim and said Babul never wore any such rope.

Talking to journalists, she said police beat her father-in-law indiscriminately following his arrest. He died because of being tortured.

Police said they arrested Babul in his home in Satkhira's Basantapur village



Babul Sardar

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**ROAD TO FREEDOM**  
THIS DAY IN BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR HISTORY

## Third Soviet veto bars truce plan

DECEMBER 13, 1971  
SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

**INDIRA'S LETTER TO U THANT**

In a letter to the UN Secretary General U Thant, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said "there can be a ceasefire and withdrawal of Indian armed forces" if Pakistan withdraws its troops from Bangladesh and reaches a political solution with the leaders there. She added if there was an assurance that the basic causes would be objectively examined, India "will not be found wanting in offering its utmost cooperation".

Indian Finance Minister YB Chavan announced in a speech to the Lok Sabha today, a special emergency tax programme to raise \$188 million in extra revenue to meet the expenses of the war.


**MOSCOW ASSAILS US STEP**

The Soviet press agency Tass accused the United States today of "gunboat diplomacy" and "gross blackmail" against India with its reported movement of an American naval squadron towards the Indian Ocean from the Gulf of Tonkin.

The Soviet Union also vetoed in the Security Council tonight a United States resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of Indian and Pakistani forces to their own sides of the border. Within a span of nine days, it was the third Soviet veto of such a resolution. Eleven council members voted for the resolution; Britain and France abstained. Poland joined the Soviet Union in opposition.

Yakov A Malik, the Soviet delegate, said he rejected the American

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## Failing to blackmail, 3 men rape woman

Third grader raped in Rupganj  
STAR REPORT

A third grader in Narayanganj's Rupganj and a woman in Joypurhat were both gang raped in separate incidents on Friday.

Cases were filed in these connections with Rupganj Police Station and Joypurhat Sadar Police Station.

Humayun Kabir Molla, inspector (investigation) of Rupganj Police Station, said the father of the third grader filed a case accusing three people.

"Three people picked up the victim from on her way back home from a local mall with her cousin on Friday evening.

"We are trying to arrest the culprits. The child was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for better treatment."

Meanwhile in Joypurhat,

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## How the largest animal ever flew



CNN ONLINE

The bones of an extinct reptile tell a story of how this ancient creature took an 2.4-metre leap of faith in the air to take flight, new research has revealed.

The pterosaur Quetzalcoatlus, the largest known flying animal that ever lived, boasted a 12-metre wingspan that would allow it to soar through the sky, according to a research collection published Wednesday by the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology.

Scientists were puzzled for decades at how such a large creature could fly, said coauthor Matthew Brown, director of vertebrate paleontology collections at The University of Texas in Austin.

After years of research, Brown's team discovered

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## Liberation War to feature in Qawmi books

Decides the board  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Authorities of a section of Qawmi madrasas are set to include topics of Language Movement, Liberation War struggle as well as Liberation War in the textbooks for primary-level students.

At a press conference yesterday, leaders of Jatiya Qawmi Madrasa Shikkha Board, Bangladesh, said students of pre-primary to class-III would get the textbooks containing the topics from January 1.

"About 1.11 lakh students enrolled in more than 500 [madrasas under the board] will get the books ... this is unprecedented steps for the Qawmi madrasa. It is really a matter of regret that the nation has to wait for 50 years for having such important topics in the textbooks," Mufti Syed Usama Islam, secretary general of the board, said at the briefing held at the

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The new textbooks have started reaching schools as students usually get these on the first day of the new year. The books were being unloaded from a truck at Rampura Ekramunessa High School in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO:  
PRABIR DAS

## TORNADOES IN US

# At least 93 killed across six states

Race on to rescue survivors; death toll may rise

AFP, Mayfield

US rescuers desperately searched for survivors yesterday after tornadoes killed at least 93 and left towns in ruin, with emergency crews racing against time to find dozens still missing from a collapsed Kentucky factory.

President Joe Biden called the wave of twisters, including one that travelled more than 200 miles, "one of the largest" storm outbreaks in American history.

"It's a tragedy," a shaken Biden, who pledged support for the affected states, said in televised comments. "And we still don't know how many lives are lost and the full extent of the damage."

With the death toll all but certain to rise, scores of search and rescue officers were helping stunned citizens across the US heartland sift through the rubble of their homes and businesses overnight.

More than 80 people are believed to have been killed in Kentucky alone, many of them workers at a candle factory. Meanwhile at least six died in an Amazon warehouse in Illinois where they were on the night shift processing orders ahead of Christmas.

Emergency crews worked through the night into Sunday at both locations, but a Kentucky official's somber remarks suggested his state's residents should brace for the worst.

"There's been no new news," Kentucky emergency management director Michael Dossett told CNN. "It is a

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