

## Demand for commercial vehicles climbing after Covid

JAGARAN CHAKMA

The demand for commercial vehicles in Bangladesh has increased as economic activities in the country boomed soon after a prolonged nationwide lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of Covid-19 ended earlier this year.

Besides, the use of commercial vehicles has grown exponentially over the past decade, according to market players.

the 3,000 units sold annually ten years ago.

"But the demand was 50 per cent less in 2020 due to the economic impact of Covid-19," Ahmad said.

At present, the domestic market size of commercial vehicles is about Tk 4,400 crore while it was about Tk 2,000 crore in 2010, he added.

Of the total demand for commercial vehicles, truck, pick-ups, lorries, and covered van's hold a commanding

following the implementation of health safety guidelines in coping with the pandemic.

Various market players say that Indian automakers TATA, Ashok Leyland and Eicher cater to most of the demand for trucks in Bangladesh.

However, the presence of Japanese and Chinese truck manufacturers is very insignificant.

The Indian companies were able to solidify their foothold in Bangladesh

increasing contributions to the commercial vehicle industry as they need to transport numerous heavy raw materials.

Moreover, the booming e-commerce industry is directly fuelling vehicle purchases as they need to transport goods all over the country.

Meanwhile, the government policy on axle loads that limits the weight carried by each truck in order to reduce damage to roads forces the use of more trucks and other such vehicles.

Echoing Ahmad, Taskeen Ahmed, managing director of IFAD Autos Limited, said sales started to boom after economic activities resumed in the country.

As such, the commercial vehicle segment of the automobile sector will continue to blossom in line with the rising economic activities.

"But the sector needs at least another year to recover from the pandemic-induced losses," Ahmed said.

However, there is no reliable data on how much money was lost by the industry.

"Not only the sellers but also the operators of transport faced huge losses," he added.

Hafizur Rahman Khan, chairman of Runner Group, had previously told The Daily Star that Bangladesh is a potential market for commercial vehicles as its economy is booming.

"The demand for commercial vehicles will continue to grow as you need vehicles for moving products as well as people's movement," he said.

The market size of commercial vehicles grew 15 per cent to 20 per cent annually over the last one decade, Khan added.

Around 7,808 trucks were registered in the seven months leading up to July this year, shows data from the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority.

The total number of trucks registered stood at 21,212 units in 2019, 7,275 in 2016, 6,330 in 2015, and 8,136 in 2014.

As of August this year, the state agency has registered 3,504 trucks,

2023 covered vans, 819 delivery vans, and 6,399 pickups.

The commercial segment of the automotive industry in Bangladesh is dominated by imports, mostly from India, China and Japan.

Commercial vehicles are imported from India mainly due to competitive pricing and availability of spare parts, Khan said.

He went on to say that Indian commercial cars are viable due to their lower price and fuel efficiency compared to Japanese vehicles.

The local automobile manufacturing and assembling industries in Bangladesh have not grown adequately in the last three decades because of a lack of raw materials, according to a review of IDLC, a non-bank financial institution.

Now, Runner Motors, Nitol Tata, Ifad Autos and Rangs Motors have set up small-scale assembly plants in collaboration with foreign companies such as Hino, Mitsubishi, Tata Motors, and Ashok Leyland to assemble cars, trucks, pickups and buses.

In the commercial vehicle segment, Nitol is the market leader in Bangladesh followed by Ifad Auto Runner Motors, according to the IDLC review.

Khan of Runner Group said local entrepreneurs will soon go for automobile manufacturing in the country.

"The first step for an automobile manufacturer is to set up an assembly plant before going for manufacturing. Some local entrepreneurs have set up assembly plants and now, the country is on track to manufacture automobiles," he added.

There are 14 to 16 large automobile retailers in the country. Of them, five or six have assembly plants while the rest are sole distributors or importers of selected international brands, according to industry insiders.

Ifad Autos, Aftab Auto, Navana, Rangs, Rancan Motors, Nitol Motors, Runner Motors and AG automobiles are major distributors in Bangladesh.



"Around 2,500 trucks, cargo vans, pickups and tankers have been sold in September, up about 70 per cent from 1,200 units to 1,500 units previously," said Abdul Matlub Ahmad, chairman of Nitol-Niloy Group.

"But we still cannot cope with the full demand," he added.

At least 38,000 units of commercial vehicles, including buses, trucks, auto-rickshaws and tankers were sold in 2019, which is significantly higher than

share of between 60 per cent to 65 per cent.

The chairman of Nitol-Niloy Group went on to say that the commercial vehicle sector will be able to recover from the coronavirus-induced losses incurred in the past 18 months by this year as market demand increased with the country's return to normalcy.

In addition, people have realized that ensuring smooth continuation of economic activities takes first priority

as they entered the country back in the 1980s and have since gradually overtaken their fellow Asian and European counterparts.

Market players in the commercial vehicle segment said most of their demand comes from the country's garments industry, which uses a vast number of trucks and other cargo carriers to transport products.

The growing cement, steel, and shipbuilding sectors are also making

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# Growing demand encouraging local manufacturing

**AHSAN HABIB**

Thanks to continuous economic growth and increasing connectivity in Bangladesh, the domestic demand for commercial vehicles is soaring rapidly. As a result, local entrepreneurs are investing in establishing assembly plants in the country, which would make the economy more vibrant as well as generate new jobs.

"As Bangladesh's economy is growing rapidly, so too is the demand for commercial vehicles," said Abdul Matlub Ahmad, chairman of Nitol-Niloy Group.

Besides, since the government has taken measures to phase out illegal commercial vehicles such as Nasimons

and Korimons, the demand for legal replacements is surging.

"In fact, the demand has risen to such an extent we are now moving towards manufacturing rather than simply assembling," he added.

The company assembles pickup trucks at a factory of the Nita Company, a joint venture of Nitol-Niloy Group and Tata, in Kishoreganj.

Consumers will benefit more from local manufacturing as prices would be lower and remain unaffected by abrupt changes in the foreign exchange rate.

Regarding the recent trend in commercial vehicle purchases, Ahmad said the market was impacted by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic but the

situation is now getting better.

"I hope 2022 will be a great year for the commercial automobile sector," he added.

Tasken Ahmed, managing director of IFAD Autos, also opined, "since the local infrastructure is improving, the domestic demand for commercial vehicles is rising as well," he added.

Since 1988, IFAD Autos has been distributing commercial vehicles of India's leading automobile manufacturer, Ashok Leyland.

Ahmed went on to say that demand will continue to rise in the coming years.

People in the country's south currently depend on launch services but connectivity of at least seven districts in

the region will change after the Padma Bridge is complete.

"So the demand for commercial vehicles would be higher," he said.

Similarly, the opening of Payra port within a few years will have the same effect while increasing trade with neighbouring countries will also continue to boost demand.

Realising the potential, many companies are trying to assemble their products in Bangladesh.

As such, foreign investment will come to the country and a huge number of jobs will be created, Ahmed added.

The Energypac Power Generation Company recently announced that it would assemble double cabin pickup

in association with a Chinese carmaker at Energypac's state-of-the-art industrial park at Sreepur in Gazipur. They inaugurated the industrial park earlier this year.

"The demand for commercial vehicles moves with the movement of an economy," said SM Jashim Uddin, chief business officer of the motor vehicle division of Energypac Power Generation.

"Seeing a good prospect in our economy, we started our commercial assembly in 2015. Now, we are launching new models like the T8. In the last six months, the sale of commercial vehicles rebounded as the industrial wheel started turning," he added.

## Walk the talk

### Subrata Ranjan Das

Executive Director,  
ACI Motors Limited



Currently, the commercial vehicle market is experiencing a negative growth, but the light commercial vehicle market is growing at 5 percent. However, the industry will certainly experience growth in the future with the opening of the Padma Bridge and as we improve our traffic management system.

To facilitate this growth, the government should review the duties on commercial vehicles. Additionally, they should set up training institutes to encourage more people to become heavy vehicle drivers.

Regarding future plans, ACI Motors is planning to set up an assembling plant for Foton vehicles in Bangladesh as we see a great potential in this market.

### Faiaz H Chowdhury

Chief Business Officer (Institutional Sales), Motor Vehicle  
Division, Energypac Power Generation Ltd. (EPGL)



The last decade has seen advancement in the automobile industry as luxury, utility and multipurpose vehicles have become quite popular in Bangladesh.

Energypac has been the sole distributor of JAC Motors of Anhui Jianghuai Automobile Group Co. Ltd., since 2006. JAC develops fuel-efficient vehicles, new energy vehicles, and intelligently connected vehicles.

EPGL started assembling commercial vehicles in their state-of-the-art Energypac Industrial Park located in Gazipur in 2015. Over the years, we have introduced many JAC trucks and vehicles in the country. Considering the needs of customers around Bangladesh, we are continuously striving to bring vehicles with latest technology.

### Nayeemur Rahman

Head of Business Planning  
Uttara Motors Ltd.



Since 1972, Uttara Motors Limited (UML), the flag bearer of Uttara Group of Companies, has been one of the leading automobile companies in Bangladesh.

It has been proudly affiliated with the world famous Isuzu Motors Limited of Japan since 1980 as its sole distributor. It is also the sole distributor of India's SML ISUZU Limited. UML is engaged in assembling of ISUZU and SML brands at its Chattogram factory. UML is committed to provide the best quality service through its experienced service team, well-equipped workshop and trained engineers. It maintains international standards, ensuring quality products and effective help to esteemed clients. We want to make a revolution in the automobile industry of Bangladesh.

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**"This dialogue is nothing but a farce. It's also a joke for the nation."**  
BNP SENIOR JOINT SECRETARY GENERAL RUIHUL KABIR RIZVI

**"None of our proposals placed in 2012 and 2016 were implemented. That's why we think holding dialogue with the president is meaningless."**  
CPB PRESIDENT MUJAHIDUL ISLAM SELIM ON PRESIDENT'S DIALOGUE ON THE FORMATION OF EC

**"Let us ask him [God] for the strength to be open to dialogue. On this festive day, let us implore him to stir up in the hearts of everyone a yearning for reconciliation and fraternity."**  
POPE FRANCIS IN HIS CHRISTMAS DAY MESSAGE

## LAUNCH FIRE ON SUGANDHA RIVER

# Everything they did was wrong

### Faulty engine, pathetic responses to blame

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and SUSANTA GHOSH

An overheating and larger-than-approved engine running at full-throttle was probably what caused the fire in the illegally modified engine room of the MV Abhijan-10, officials said.

Besides, the crew members simply abandoned the vessel, letting it drift downstream for over half an hour, an inferno on the Sugandha river with hundreds of people on board.

Death toll from the fire reached 41 as of last night.

The owner, Hanjalal Sheikh, mounted two new engines on the launch last month, replacing the government-approved ones that could produce a total of 1,100 horsepower. The owner had the structure of the vessel tweaked to be able to mount the engines, said probe committee members investigating the deadly fire.

Hanjalal did all of these without permission of the design committee led by the Shipping Department's chief engineer, which in itself is a punishable offence.

Only one of the engines was running on the fateful night of Friday. There was not enough lubrication, causing the engine to heat up, said Mostafa Miah, a master of the Sundarban-13, who was with the probe committee members when they inspected the launch in Jhalakathi.

At least 100 people were injured in the fire and a total of MORE ON PAGE 3 SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Lining up coffins of the victims of the launch fire tragedy, people take part in a mass namaz-e-janaza at the Eidgah ground near Circuit House in Barguna town yesterday. The bodies, the identified and unidentified, were later buried in a graveyard of Potkakhali in the district.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## In hospital bed, they recall the horror

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

When the massive fire engulfed the ill-fated MV Abhijan-10 early Friday, Monika Rani Halder, 40, a high-school teacher of Barguna, could not find her 16-year-old son after a desperate search for 30 minutes in the launch.

Although three of the family members including her husband Bankim Majumdar, 60, and son Bikash Majumdar could swim, Monika decided that she would not leave her son in the burning vessel. By then, the couple was burnt severely.

The couple finally jumped into the Sugandha river while the villagers rescued them and took them to Barishal's Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital where they found their son with mild injury.

But Monika's condition took a turn for the worse. She is now fighting for life at the intensive care unit of Sheikh Hasina Burn

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## 4th phase UP polls today

1 killed, 10 hurt in violence

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

In the fourth phase of union parishad polls, some 1.63 crore voters in 838 unions are expected to cast their votes today amid fear of violence.

According to media reports, at least 67 people were killed and several hundred injured in the pre-and post-polls violence this term.

Ahead of the fourth phase, seven people were killed in violence. Some 24 more were killed in the second and third phases of the polls that took place on November 11, 28, and 30.

Six people were killed in the first phase that held in two parts on June 21 and September 21.

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## EC breaches law

Accepts nomination in a Mymensingh union after stipulated time

ASIFUR RAHMAN

The Election Commission, in a clear violation of the law, accepted nomination papers after the stipulated time for the Chandipasha Union Parishad polls in Mymensingh's Nandail upazila.

The last date for nomination paper submission was December 9.

On December 8, Iftekhar Hossain had submitted his papers as an independent candidate while the next day Amdadul Haque Bhuiyan submitted his with Awami League's recommendation attached.

However, on December 10 -- the day after the final date for submission, Iftekhar again submitted nomination papers but this time with AL's recommendation.

The EC received it and also cancelled Iftekhar's independent candidacy after accepting the new papers. They also cancelled Amdad's AL nomination. According to locals, the union's polls officials initially refused to receive the paper after the scheduled time but local MP Anwarul Abedin Khan put them under pressure.

They then received the papers without issuing any "receipt" and sent a letter to the EC for a decision in this regard.

On December 12, the EC secretariat accepted Iftekhar's papers, after which Awami League's candidacy was given to him.

Amdad said Iftekhar was a rival candidate after the party's decision was already announced. "Due to the local lawmaker's personal interest,

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3



## RAPE OF TOURIST

### Lone arrestee placed on remand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A Cox's Bazar court yesterday placed manager Riaz Uddin Chhoton of the Zia Guest Inn on a four-day remand in the case filed over the gang rape of a tourist on Wednesday.

Md Zillur Rahman, superintendent of Tourist Police in Cox's Bazar zone, said police produced Chhoton before the court of Cox's Bazar Senior Judicial Magistrate Hamimun Tanjin with an appeal for a seven-day remand.

Chhoton was arrested early Thursday when law enforcers rescued the victim from the hotel.

Md Ruhul Amin, the case's investigation officer and inspector of Tourist Police, said the victim placed her statement

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## WORKERS' MIGRATION TO MALAYSIA

### Some old issues still remain

PORIMOL PALMA

Kuala Lumpur is set to resume hiring Bangladeshi workers, more than three years after the then Malaysian government, led by Mahathir Mohamad, froze fresh recruitment from Bangladesh citing forced labour and high migration costs.

Both sides struck a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in this regard on December 19 and if everything goes well, Bangladeshis will start joining their new jobs in the Southeast Asian country in January, say officials.

Those working to protect the rights of migrants, however, pointed out that some key issues, which led to forced labour and high costs in the past, remain unaddressed.

The MoU, signed in Kuala Lumpur on December 19, has not been made public, they also said.

In a statement, the Bangladeshi expatriate ministry said the recruitment costs in the Malaysian end would be borne by the Malaysian employers. These include flight fares, health examination, visa and immigration fees as well as costs for Covid-19 tests and quarantine.

But the statement does not say who will pay the migration costs at the Bangladeshi end. Neither does it answer what will happen in case the workers face exploitation or are not paid properly in Malaysia.

In such a situation, chances are there that the migrants are set to find themselves in trouble again, the rights activists said.

As per the ethical recruitment model of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), all recruitment costs should be paid by the employers.

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## Reazuddin Ahmed no more

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Senior journalist Reazuddin Ahmed passed away yesterday at a city hospital while undergoing Covid-19 related treatment.

He was 77. He breathed his last around 1:30pm, family sources said.

A luminary in the field of journalism in the country and a recipient of the Ekushey Padak, Reazuddin was the editor of English daily Financial Herald at the time of his demise.

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LOSS OF A LUMINARY PAGE 3

## PRESIDENT'S DIALOGUE

### CPB, BSD will not join

RASHIDUL HASAN

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) will not join the dialogue with President Abdul Hamid over the formation of the next Election Commission.

This is for the first time since 2012 that any political parties refused the president's invitation on holding dialogue with the President on the formation of the EC.

Although BNP is yet to get an invitation for the dialogue, top leaders of the party hinted that they are unlikely to attend the talks.

CPB, a leading left-leaning party, was scheduled to sit on January 3 while BSD was scheduled to hold dialogue today with Abdul Hamid at the Bangabhaban, according to the press wing of Bangabhaban.

Talking to The Daily Star, CPB President Mujahidul Islam Selim yesterday said, "We don't see any necessity on holding dialogue with

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People in festive mood catch fish in a waterbody in Companiganj upazila of Sylhet yesterday. Every year people gather at this time of the year to catch fish there as the water level drops.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## Omicron threat mars Christmas

Thousands of flights canceled globally; UK sees record number of cases

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Francis yesterday called for dialogue to counter the isolation wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic as billions around the world marked a second Christmas under the shadow of the coronavirus.

An explosion in cases driven by the rise of the Omicron variant has meant a Christmas season tainted by the pandemic for a second year running, with longed-for family reunions overshadowed by the prospect of yet more Covid-19 restrictions.

During the Christmas Eve mass attended by some 2,000 members of the public wearing masks and respecting social distancing, the pope urged people to appreciate the little things in life.

In Bethlehem's Manger Square, visitors in Santa hats and scouts beating drums marked Christmas Eve, but numbers were lower than usual.

The city where Christians believe Jesus was born is usually a focal point of the holiday, with thousands packing the streets and filling hotels.

But Israel, which controls all entrances to the occupied West Bank where Bethlehem is located, has also barred its borders to foreigners in an effort to rein in infections from the Omicron strain of the coronavirus.

In his homily for midnight mass celebrated in St Catherine's Church in Bethlehem, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Pierbattista Pizzaballa said celebrations were "certainly more joyful this year."

"Compared to last year's Christmas, the participation is

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**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



275

New cases in 24hrs



15,82,985

Total cases



28,056

Deaths



15,47,180

Recoveries

**GLOBAL UPDATE**



5,411,925

Deaths



279,499,318

Total cases

## Adolescents to get Covid jabs in India from Jan 3

At-risk adults to get boosters

AFP, New Delhi

India will open its Covid vaccination drive for adolescents and start administering booster doses to its at-risk adult population, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced yesterday.

The highly-infectious Omicron variant has gained a foothold in the country, and the health ministry has raised concerns about its onward spread.

"Omicron is a matter of discussion right now," Modi said.

"After looking at global developments and examining the last 11 months of our Covid-19 vaccination drive, our scientists have taken key decisions today," he said in his national address.

It is time to be "careful and cautious", he added, announcing that vaccines will be available for children aged 15 and up from January 3.

The country's healthcare and frontline workers, people above 60

years and citizens with underlying conditions will also start receiving their "precaution dose" a week later, the premier added.

India's vaccination drive got off to a slow and glitchy start in January but picked up pace after the devastating second wave in May that thoroughly exposed the national health infrastructure.

New Delhi has since administered more than 1.41 billion, mostly domestically produced, Covid-19 vaccine doses.

"We understood the importance of vaccines early and because of that more than 61 percent of adults have received both their doses and 90 percent have received at least one dose," Modi said.

The country's nearly 480,000 Covid deaths are the third-highest, behind the tolls in the United States and Brazil.

But under-reporting is widespread and some studies have estimated India's true toll could be up to ten times higher.

## CPB, BSD will not join

FROM PAGE 1

President Abdul Hamid on the formation of the Election Commission as the president has no power to work independently in this regard.

"The President told us that he wants to take advice from us on the formation of the Election Commission. But the fact is he has no power to work on his own as per the constitution. He will have to work on the advice of none but the prime minister," he added.

The CPB president also said his party had held a dialogue with the president in 2012 and 2016 on the same issue.

"In those meetings, CPB had categorically called upon the president to take measures to enact a law in the Constitution on the formation of the Election Commission. We also have submitted several other proposals on bringing change in the electoral system in a bid to hold elections in a free, fair and neutral manner," added Selim.

"None of our proposals placed in 2012 and 2016 were implemented. That's why we think holding a dialogue with the president is meaningless," he added.

Selim also said, "If the [Abdul Hamid] needs our recommendations on the formation of the Election Commission, he can go through our previous files."

Ruhin Hossain Prince, secretary, CPB, said, "We will welcome the president's dialogue if it is held on strengthening and reform of the electoral system."

BSD, another leftist party on December 24 sent a letter to the Bangabhaban and informed the party's "unwillingness" to join the ongoing

president's dialogue, SPB central leader Razequzzaman Ratan told the Daily Star.

In the letter, BSD said that they have not seen the implementation of the party's proposal made to the president's dialogue in 2012 and 2016. The party does not want to see repetitions of previous incidents.

The party said that their previous proposals were still relevant and they wanted the president's steps to implement such recommendations.

"We have sent a letter to the Bangabhaban on December 24. We have enclosed our five points recommendations we made during the dialogue held in 2016 for president's consideration," Ratan said.

President Abdul Hamid began the dialogue with registered political parties from December 20 and so far held dialogue with the main opposition party in parliament -- Jatiya Party and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, a component in the Awami League-led grand alliance.

As of yesterday, the president has invited 13 political parties to join the dialogue till January 3.

The five-year tenure of the incumbent Election Commission, led by Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda, will expire on February 14 next.

Now there are 39 registered political parties, according to the EC website. But only nine parties have representation in the parliament.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh National Awami Party is scheduled to sit in dialogue with the President at 4:00pm.

## Reazuddin Ahmed no more

FROM PAGE 1

Earlier, he served as the chief editor of English daily Financial Express and was also the editor of News Today.

He was also a four-time elected president of the Jatiya Press Club and a founding member of the Sampadak Parishad (Editors' Council).

He left behind his wife, a son, a daughter, grandchildren and a host of relatives and well-wishers to mourn his death.

His son M Masrur Reaz is a former World Bank official and the current chairman of Policy Exchange of Bangladesh, an independent think-tank.

His namaz-e-janaza will be held at 11:00am today at the Jatiya Press Club premises. He will be buried at the capital's Banani Graveyard in the afternoon.

Family members said Reazuddin was infected with Covid-19 recently.

Primarily, he was undergoing treatment at home. As his condition deteriorated, he was admitted to United Hospital on December 16, where he was kept in the ICU.

Reazuddin, who served as the deputy editor of The Daily Star during 1991-1992, received the Ekushey Padak in 1993 for his contribution in journalism.

He was a frontliner among those who made significant contributions

during different movements to establish journalists' rights in the country.

Besides, he was also on the frontlines during the country's anti-autocracy movement.

Reazuddin was elected a member of the Bangladesh Press Council on December 21 this year.

He also served as the general secretary of undivided Dhaka Union of Journalists and president of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists.

Born on November 30, 1945 at Narandi village of Monohardi upazila of Narsingdi district, he got his master's degree in economics from Dhaka University in 1967.

He completed LLB in 1972. After primarily being involved in teaching, he started his journalism career with the daily Pakistan Observer in 1968.

He was an executive member of the then East Pakistan Union of Journalists in 1970.

On March 25, 1971, he resigned from the Pakistan Observer to extend his support for Bangladesh's Liberation War.

After the country's independence, he joined The Observer and continued there till November, 1990.

Reazuddin's published books include "Shotyer Shondhaney Protidin".

measures that are draining the fun from Christmas for many.

The Netherlands is back in lockdown, while Spain and Italy have made wearing masks compulsory outdoors.

And with Britain hitting a record high number of Covid-19 infections again on Friday for a third day in a row, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson suggested getting a vaccine booster shot as a Christmas gift for relatives.

Still, Christmas gatherings will be easier than a year ago in many other places around the world.

Most Australians are allowed to travel interstate over the festive break for the first time in two years, with Sydney's Catholic Archbishop Anthony Fisher saying that Christmas was "a ray of light" in dark times.

And Santa Claus was not deterred from doing his rounds, after showing proof of vaccination and a pre-flight negative Covid test, Ottawa's transport minister said.

According to the North American Aerospace Defense Command's (NORAD) Santa-tracking website, Father Christmas had delivered 7.6 billion gifts during his 2021 sleigh ride around the world.



An investigation team inspects one of the engines of Abhijan-10. The engines have been claimed to be faulty, larger than permitted and installed without prior approval of the authorities concerned.

PHOTO: STAR

## Everything they did was wrong

FROM PAGE 1

68 people are missing. Officials said many of those missing could be among the dead who have yet been identified.

The victims' family members, locals, and the launch owner said deaths and injuries could have been fewer had the master moored the vessel to a tree on the bank in Charkathi area of Jhalakathi.

Besides, judging by the time it took to reach Barishal from Dhaka, it seemed that the launch was speeding. It left Sadarghat around 6:00pm and reached Barishal by 1:30am.

Probe committee members said the main gate of the launch was locked, reducing the chances of people escaping.

The authorities have yet to identify 23 of the severely burnt bodies. They were buried in Barguna after officials collected their DNA samples.

Over 50 injured passengers are being treated at hospitals in Dhaka and Barishal.

An unnatural death case was filed with Jhalakathi Police Station yesterday. **ENGINES CHANGED WITHOUT APPROVAL**

Built in 2019, the MV Abhijan-10 started

operation last year.

Hanjajal Sheikh, the owner, told The Daily Star yesterday that he changed the Chinese engines last month because they weren't fuel efficient.

But, he did not inform the Shipping Department, said Manjurul Kabir, chief engineer and ship surveyor of the department.

Hanjajal claimed that he was not aware that prior permission was required to change engines.

The launch authorities mentioned on papers in Sadarghat terminal that the vessel had 310 passengers, but the probe committee said the actual number was much higher.

Officials at the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority said the launch was supposed to have a first-class master but it had two second-class ones.

The seven-member probe yesterday visited the launch anchored in Diakul, inspected different parts of the vessel and talked with witnesses and locals.

After visiting spot, probe committee chief and Shipping Ministry's Joint

Secretary Tofayel Islam said, "We have preliminarily detected some faults in the engines..."

A member of the committee said they were almost certain that the fire originated in the engine room. "People working there were supposed to solve the engine issue easily. We don't know why the fault couldn't be solved," he said, requesting not to be named.

Family members of those who were onboard the vessel said after the launch caught fire, it was steered to the bank in the Charkathi area. The crew then fled without mooring it.

But the launch drifted away and reached Diakul on the other side of the river half an hour later. By then, the whole launch was burnt.

The launch owner said his manager called him after fleeing the launch.

A probe committee member said the casualties might have been more had the launch not floated to the bank at Diakul.

The committee, formed on Friday, is supposed to submit its report in three work days.

[Our correspondent in Pirojpur contributed to this report]

## Some old issues still remain

FROM PAGE 1

The statement said the employers would take care of the workers' accommodation, and health and medical insurances. The migrants will get one weekly day off and be paid overtime if they have to work more than eight hours a day. They will be entitled to annual leaves as well.

If a worker is injured at work, they will be compensated. In case the injury is permanent, they will get a lifelong pension upon arrival in Bangladesh. If a worker dies in an accident at work, their family will get a one-time compensation as well as a long-term pension, the statement also said.

Asked about the high migration costs and what will happen in case workers are exploited, Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Imran Ahmad said those would be significantly less this time.

Rights activists said each Bangladeshi worker, on average, had to spend Tk 4 lakh for a job in Malaysia during 2016-18, whereas the agreed amount was Tk 39,500. It was Tk 2 lakh during 2007-08 period against the agreed Tk 84,000.

During both periods, the private sector was engaged in recruitment. This time, private agencies are being involved again. A new addition to the process is the Malaysian recruiting agencies.

According to the recruiting agencies, if the MoU is enforced properly, the actual migrant cost in the Bangladesh end will be less than Tk 50,000 -- recruiting agency's fees Tk 30,000 and a maximum of Tk 20,000 for medical check-up, documentation, and government charges.

Rights activists said recruitment fees in both countries should be borne by the employers under the IOM's ethical recruitment model.

Violating the model, unauthorised recruitment agents in Bangladesh made migrants pay the fees to secure job contracts from Malaysian companies.

This time too, the unauthorised agents will be there. They will work along with licenced Malaysian recruiting agencies, the experts said.

At the Bangladesh end, it has been a long-held business practice that several layers of unauthorised brokers are engaged in enticing jobseekers and charging high fees from them.

At the Malaysian end too, there are unauthorised agents. Even the human resources managers of the employing companies charge illegal fees from those agents. That's how the cost of recruitment went up in the past years, they said

Joseph Paul, director of Tenaganita, a rights body based in Kuala Lumpur, questioned why the recruitment cost at the Bangladesh end would be borne by the workers. This is an element of

forced labour, he said.

The other malpractices during 2016-18 that worsened the recruitment process was a syndicate of 10 agencies picked by the then Nazib Razak government, despite Bangladesh offering a list of more than 700 agencies for the job.

Andy Hall, an independent migrant rights expert on Malaysia, said there are serious concerns that a syndicate of agencies will be dominating the recruitment this year as well.

The previous malpractice, in that case, could return, said Hall, now based in Nepal.

He also said this fear was there because the previous experience suggests that the employers pass on all the costs to the migrant workers.

Some experts believe that Malaysia is now facing pressure from foreign buyers, including those from the US, the UK, and other European countries, over labour rights issues. In the last two years, seven Malaysian firms faced US import bans over allegations of forced labour. Last month, home-appliance maker Dyson cut ties with its biggest supplier, a Malaysian firm, over labour conditions.

Under pressure from the US, Top Glove Corp, the world's biggest medical glove maker, agreed to pay \$33 million to migrant workers to reimburse recruitment fees they paid in their home countries.

Malaysia fell to "Tier 3" in this year's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report as it continued to conflate human trafficking and migrant smuggling crimes, and did not adequately address or criminally pursue credible allegations on labour trafficking.

"Malaysia, therefore, is under global scrutiny over the forced labour issue that could affect foreign investment in the future," Joseph Paul told this correspondent on Thursday.

He suggested that Malaysia regularises some four million undocumented migrants before making fresh recruitment. "There are thousands of Bangladeshi migrants who paid money to agents in the last several years for getting documented but failed due to corruption of the agents."

Migrant rights researchers in Malaysia said it needs about Malaysian Ringgit 7,000 (including agent fees) for regularisation, which the migrants affected by the pandemic, cannot afford.

Joseph said if new recruitment is really necessary, the arrangement should be such that the employers pay the full recruitment fees. Otherwise, the new MoU means nothing but earning money by certain vested quarters.

He also said he has no information that the MoU contains any provision on how to deal with migrants facing abuses by their employers, and

questioned why the MoU was not made public.

"We don't want any secret way of dealing in labour recruitment and the consequent forced labour."

A Bangladeshi recruiting agent said previously many bogus companies secured job demand letters from the Malaysian home ministry, using bribes. The Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur also approved those without verification.

"That resulted in a situation where workers went there and faced exploitation, including joblessness, non-payment, and underpayment," he said, adding that some agents also sent workers to Malaysia but those workers found no employment because they were recruited for non-existent jobs.

"The Malaysian government and Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia must be very alert to make sure that the jobs are genuine," he said.

"Otherwise, both Malaysia and Bangladesh will be in trouble in the future. Authorities cannot and should not take that risk," said the agent, preferring anonymity.

Earlier, Zillur told journalists that after talking to the victim they learnt that she was acquainted to the prime accused Ashiqul Islam Ashiq. She along with her husband and children had been staying at different hotels in Cox's Bazar for around three months.

However, the victim and her husband told journalists on Thursday that they reached Cox's Bazar on Wednesday morning.

Meanwhile, Cox's Bazar deputy commissioner on Friday held a meeting with law enforcers, owners of hotels, motels, restaurants, and cottages, and tour operators.

At the meeting, they decided not to rent out any room to any tourist without a national identity card.

Several other decisions were taken to ensure security of tourists, meeting sources said.

According to the case statement, the woman was gang raped twice by a group of youths on Wednesday. Later, she was kept confined to a room in Zia Guest Inn.

The victim managed to open a window of the room and contact a hotel guest who unlocked the door.

Rab rescued her around 1:30am early Thursday and arrested Chhoton.

On Thursday night, the victim's husband filed the case with Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station accusing seven people.

Of them, the four of the named accused are Ashiqul Islam Ashiq, 28, Israfil Huda Joy, 26, Mehedi Hasan Babu, 24, and Riaz Uddin Chhoton.

## Man brakes into couples home, stabs them

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man dressed as a chimpanzee broke into a house in Char Khambar Mor area of Jashore and stabbed a couple early yesterday.

The man cut the iron grill of the first-floor balcony of the three-storey building and stabbed Mostafizur Rahman, 65, and his wife Charmina Khanam, 42, multiple times.

The incident happened around 3:00am, Charmina said.

"He first stabbed my husband. As I screamed for help, he stabbed me," she said.

The man fled as neighbours rushed there, hearing the screams.

The neighbours later took them to a hospital.

The family said nothing had gone missing from the flat and they had no idea who the attacker was.

Tajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said police had visited the spot.

## Hong Kong police make record 1.3 tonne ketamine bust

AFP, Hong Kong

A haul of ketamine worth over \$100 million has been seized by Hong Kong officials, police said yesterday.

The record-breaking 1.3 tonnes of the drug, valued at around HK\$840 million (\$108 million), is the largest bust of its kind in the city's history.

Travel restrictions related to Covid-19 have forced smugglers to make riskier bulk shipments instead of using drug mules travelling through airports, police said.

On Friday morning, officers intercepted the narcotics as they were being offloaded from a speedboat in the seaside Lei Yue Mun district.

"Drug trafficking syndicates would use fishing boats or oceangoing vessels to transport the drugs to the high seas near Hong Kong waters. Then they will arrange speedboats to smuggle the drugs to shore," Chief Inspector Ip Sau-lan said at a press conference.

## 4th phase UP polls

FROM PAGE 1

The situation remained tensed in the unions ahead of the polls because of clashes that mostly occurred between supporters of the ruling Awami League and its rebel candidates.

According to the party sources, several hundred party rebels are contesting the polls.

Although 18 registered political parties are participating in the fourth phase of the polls, the contest would presumably be between the AL, its "rebel groups" and the Jatiya Party in absence of the BNP.

Elections to the chairman posts of 48 UPs will not be required as candidates have already been elected unopposed, according to the Election Commission data. Most of the unopposed mayors are of the AL, said the party sources.

Meanwhile, Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam said there was nothing to worry about violence.

Talking to The Daily Star, he said, "Instructions have been given to law enforcers to control the law and order. Adequate numbers of law enforcers have also been deployed to avert any untoward incidents."

According to the EC, they have taken all kinds of preparations to hold polls to the 838 UPs in 58 districts.

The EC data shows 135 UP members and 112 candidates for women's reserved seats were also elected uncontested.

The EC says that 3,814 candidates are running for chairman posts, 9,513 for reserved member seats for women and 30,106 for member posts.

Around 82.51 lakh male and 80 lakh female voters are expected to cast their votes at 9,224 polling centres.

So far the AL dominated the elections in terms of winning the chairman positions in the UP polls. The EC announced unofficial results of 2,189 UPs in three phases.

Of them, the AL chairman candidates were victorious in 1,278 unions and independent candidates were mostly the AL rebels in 861 UPs.

AL candidates, however, performed not as well in the third phase of the union parishad elections compared to previous two phases.

In the third phase, the ruling AL candidates won 53 percent of the chairman posts, in the second phase, they won 56 percent of the posts. They won 76 percent chairman posts in the first phase.

A total of 707 UPs will go to fifth phase of polls on January 5 and a total of 219 union parishads will go to the sixth phase of polls on January 31.

Meanwhile, a supporter of a UP chairman at Shablat village in Magura's Shalikhpa upazila was killed in polls violence yesterday. At least 10 were injured.

The dead is Shariful Mollah, 55, son of Ibrahim Mollah, said Shalikhpa Police Station Officer-in-charge Tarak Nath Biswas.

Our Jhenidha correspondent contributed to this report.

## Who will marry off Hafsa now?

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

Pakhi and Hakim Sharif were done choosing a groom for their elder daughter Hafsa.

Pakhi went to her husband Hakim, who works for the Social Marketing Company (SMC), in Dhaka around a week ago with her two-and-a-half-year-old son Nasrullah to shop for the wedding. While in Dhaka, Pakhi also withdrew money from a bank to meet the expenses of the programme.

In a joyous mood, they started their journey back to Barguna on Thursday evening by MV Abhijan-10. Though they usually travel on deck, they rented a staff cabin this time to keep all the things they brought from the capital. The couple was supposed to fix the date of the wedding once returning home on Friday.

But none of this was to see the light of day. In the aftermath of the passenger launch catching fire on

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PHOTO: STAR

## LAUNCH FIRE TRAGEDY: TALES OF SUFFERING AND LOSS



PHOTO: STAR

## Bodies of twins identified, mother still missing

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

They were on their way to visit their grandfather's house in Barguna's Taltoli upazila. But as luck would have it, four year old twins Samia and Lamia never reached there, as they died in the MV Abhijan-10 launch fire.

Daughters of Shimu Akhter and Rafiq Hossain of Taltoli's Agapara village, the twins were accompanied by mother Shimu and grandmother Dulu Begum as the tragic incident occurred.

After recovering and identifying their bodies, Barguna District Relief and Rehabilitation Officer Lutfar Rahman handed them over to the twins' relatives from the morgue of Barguna General Hospital yesterday morning.

Police said Samia and Lamia died on the spot after being badly burnt in the terrible fire, while their mother has gone missing. Meanwhile, their grandmother was

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

## She slipped right through my fingers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

As Hafeez Tuhin leapt from the launch after it had caught fire, he was still holding his wife Rizia Begum and their baby girl Tabassum's hands.

But swimming through the ice-cold Sugandha river in the early hours of the day proved to be a herculean task, and by the time Hafeez and Rizia reached ashore, they could no longer trace their two-and-a-half-year-old. As Friday rolled by, she was yet to be found.

Passengers of the MV Abhijan-10, the family were on their way to their village in Barguna sadar upazila's Dholua from Dhaka when the launch caught fire in the middle of the river.

Hafeez frantically searched for Tabassum everywhere, but could not find her initially. She was eventually found, at the last place where Hafeez wanted her to be.

Early yesterday, she was found as an "unidentified" body in one of the coffins that was being prepared for burial.

She was among 29 other such bodies that were being prepared for the mass burial.

A namaz-e-janaza was held for them at 11:00am yesterday at Barguna Circuit House ground. Except Tabassum, the others were buried in Potkakhali area of the sadar upazila.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



PHOTO: STAR

## Diakul villagers step up for victims

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

"Hearing screams emanating from Sugandha river, my neighbours and I got up from our beds. It was obvious that something was wrong," Md Aliul Islam Akan, a local of Diakul village of Jhalakathi Sadar upazila, recounted.

"As we rushed to the riverside, we discovered the passenger launch burning," he said. As the situation became clearer, almost everyone from the village rushed to the river, carrying clothes for the passengers, he added.

This little call of wit helped the victims who were rescued, as they could change their wet clothes to fend off the biting cold of the night.

As the burnt launch remained anchored at Diakul, the entire village turned into a makeshift shelter home for the victims.

"From 3:00am to until the fire was put out, we tried

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## 'It's nothing but a farce'

Says Rizvi about dialogue on EC reconstitution

UNB, Dhaka

BNP yesterday termed the ongoing dialogue on the reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC) a farce, as the party thinks it will not pave the way for holding a credible national election in the country.

"This dialogue is not meant for holding a free, fair and transparent election at all," alleged BNP senior joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi.

Speaking at a programme at BNP's Nayapaltan central office, he said absolutely no one believes that the government -- which does not allow its opponent to go to polls and voters to go to polling stations -- will form a neutral EC and hold a credible election.

"But the state is holding a dialogue to stage a farce... It's a joke with the nation," the BNP leader said.

He alleged that the dialogue has been arranged to merely show the country and the international community the government is reconstituting the EC through a search committee after holding talks with political parties.

Rizvi said the purpose of the talks is to reconstitute a pro-Awami League EC which will remain subservient to the government.

The president began the talks with the registered political parties over the formation of the new EC on December 20.

Though BNP leaders are making various comments against the dialogue on the EC, its secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir on December 22

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## Breaking through concepts

Pathshala celebrates 23rd anniversary



PHOTO: COURTESY OF PATHSHALA

PRIVANKA CHOWDHURY

"Those who come to Pathshala strive for more than just a comfortable living. The works at display here is a demonstration of how far we have come in these 23 years," said Chairperson of Pathshala Trust Shahidul Alam during his inauguration speech of five days of festivities to mark the institution's 23rd founding anniversary.

"What I admire about these artists' work is their courage to break through concepts. This will surely help them grow," he also said.

Featuring a photography exhibition titled "Tibro", Pathshala South Asian Media Institute opened the five-day programme at the premises of Drikpath Bhaban in the capital's Panthapath yesterday.

Pathshala is also scheduled to hold artist talks, panel discussions, book shows, film screening sessions and more.

Artiste and curator of the show Munem Wasif, curator of Chobi Mela ASM Rezaur Rahman, Pathshala's Head of Photography Khandaker Tanvir Murad and artists Shahria Sharmin and

Sarker Protick were present during the opening of the exhibition.

The photography exhibition Tibro showcases the work of seven artists expressing empathy, collective concepts of trauma and violence, personal grief or an attempt to express their surroundings.

The seven featured artists are Pranabesh Das, Sagar Chhetri, Salma Abedin Prithi, Sarker Protick, Shadman Shahid, Shahria Sharmin, and Soumya Sankar Bose.

Curator of the show visual artist Munem Wasif shared the concept of the show, "While planning it, I intended to capture the time that we are living in. Through the works of the artists, I wondered if it could be captured through one scale and not categorise it under a particular theme."

"We are constantly moving in time, the scale thus oscillates with our experience of time. The movement of this scale is what we are calling Tibro. What is different about curating this show is that, I am well acquainted with the artists, almost to a personal level because we shared the same institution," Munem said.

## Loss of a luminary

Journalists, political parties mourn death of Reazuddin Ahmed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different journalist organisations and political parties mourned the death of senior journalist Reazuddin Ahmed yesterday, saying he was a "luminary" whose vast knowledge and experience helped flourish the country's journalism.

They said the Ekushey Padak-winning journalist was a front-liner in establishing journalists' rights in the country and a "guardian" to the journalist community.

After contracting Covid-19 recently, Reazuddin passed away at a city hospital yesterday. He was 77.

Reazuddin, who received Ekushey Padak in 1993 in journalism, was serving as the editor of English daily



Financial Herald at the time of his demise.

Expressing deep shock at his death, Sampadak Parishad (Editors' Council) in a condolence message said Reazuddin was one of the front-liners who contributed to independent journalism in an independent Bangladesh.

"His vast experience in journalism and leadership skills helped the parishad flourish," it said in a statement, issued by its president Mahfuz Anam and acting general secretary Dewan Hanif Mahmud.

In a condolence message, Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab), in which Reazuddin was a senior member, said in his over five-decade-long journey in journalism, he immensely contributed to flourishing the profession.


Attributing him to be a "truthful and wise" editor, Noab said with his death, the country's journalism as well as the newspaper industry will have to count an irreplaceable loss.

It added that Reazuddin left signs

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Even in the digital age, the demand for traditional paper calendars is far from dying out. Freshly printed calendars are still synonymous with the new year. As December comes to an end, workers at printing mills are hard at work trying to meet the demand. This photo was taken yesterday from Chattogram city's Anderkillia. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN



**50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**  
4th January 2022  
1972-2022

বিমান-এর ৫০ বছর পূর্তি

০৪ জানুয়ারি ২০২২

(উদ্বোধনী অনুষ্ঠান)

বিমান বাংলাদেশ এয়ারলাইন্স বিগত ৫০ বছর ধরে বিশ্বব্যাপী গৌরবের সাথে জাতীয় পতাকা বহন করছে।

এই গৌরবময় ইতিহাসের অংশ হয়ে আমাদের সাথে থাকার জন্য আপনাকে জানাই আন্তরিক ধন্যবাদ।

বিমানের একজন অবসরপ্রাপ্ত গর্বিত সহকর্মী হিসেবে ৫০ বছর পূর্তির উদ্বোধনী অনুষ্ঠানে আপনাকে আমন্ত্রণ। আপনার উপস্থিতি নিশ্চিত করতে ২৮ ডিসেম্বর ২০২১ এর মধ্যে নিচের লিংকের মাধ্যমে নিবন্ধন সম্পন্ন করুন।

<http://biman.gov.bd/forms/form/Anniversary%20of%20Biman>

অথবা যোগাযোগ করুন ০১৯৩১১৩১৬৯০ বা ০১৫৩৩০৩৬৮৪০ নম্বর-এ

বহুব্যাপী চমকপ্রদ অফার ও ডিসকাউন্ট!

বহুব্যাপী চমকপ্রদ অফার ও ডিসকাউন্ট!

বহুব্যাপী চমকপ্রদ অফার ও ডিসকাউন্ট!



With a smile spreading from ear to ear, a toddler swings on a makeshift hammock carefully crafted by his mother. One can say this was his way of making the best out of the fog-covered winter morning. This photo was taken recently from Khulna's Dumuria area. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## 'RIFTS IN AWAMI LEAGUE' Ctg ward councils postponed

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

The ward-level councils of Chattogram city Awami League, which was supposed to begin today, have been postponed at the last moment due to "intra-party rifts".

AL's central committee took the decision after several party leaders raised allegations against a top leader of the city unit, according to sources.

This correspondent spoke to a number of AL leaders in the central and city committees, who pointed to intra-party rivalry for the postponement.

AL's 41 ward committees in the city have three organisational units on average. Out of the total 129 organisational units, the formation of the councils of 93 units have already finished.

It was decided in a recent meeting of AL's working committee that ward-level councils would be held after holding meetings at the unit level.

In the meantime, a number of AL leaders lodged complaints with the central committee regarding violation of instructions of the party's constitution.

According to sources, the AL city unit has three factions at present. One is a follower of AL city unit general secretary and former Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) mayor AJM Nasir Uddin; another follows AL city unit vice president and former administrator of CCC Khorshed Alam Sujan; and the other one follows deputy minister for education Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury Nowfel.

The leaders loyal to Sujan and Nowfel

filed complaints with the central committee, saying that the unit committees have been formed, violating the party constitution. They are being formed to make committees loyal to a specific leader, alleged sources in AL.

Contacted, Badiul Alam, joint secretary of AL's city unit, said during formation of organisational unit committees, it was seen that a special form, made locally, was provided for new membership, and those who became members through the forms later on became councillors for the ward-level councils as well.

"It is violating the party constitution. The central committee gave forms for primary membership, and there is no scope to provide locally-made forms," he said.

"After the complaints, the councils got postponed," he said.

Contacted, Sujan said, "Some leaders in Chattogram are trying to run the city unit like it's their private property. No leader can violate the party constitution."

AJM Nasir could not be contacted for comments. Contacted, AL joint general secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif said they received some complaints over forming unit committees.

"A misunderstanding occurred among leaders, and so a central delegation team would go to Chattogram to sit with them on January 8 to resolve the issues," he said.

"The ward-level councils will be held after consulting with all the leaders in Chattogram," he added.

## CTG SHIPBREAKING YARD 4 workers burnt in gas explosion



STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

At least four workers sustained burn injuries in a gas explosion at Jamuna shipbreaking yard in Chattogram's Sitakunda upazila yesterday morning.

The injured are Sohel Rana (26), Md Jahid (27), Mizanur Rahman (40) and Firoz Pramanik (22), said SI Faruq Hossain of Sitakunda Police Station.

Dr S Khaleed, associate professor of burn and plastic surgery unit of CMCH, said, "Two workers who sustained 10 and 12 percent burn injuries were referred to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in the capital."

All the victims were initially admitted to Chattogram Medical College and Hospital, he said.

"The four were injured after the tank of a scrap ship, which the workers were cutting, exploded around 8:30am," the SI said.

"There were lack of proper safety measures at the scrap ship where the explosion took place," the SI added.

He also informed that on April 3, another gas explosion at the same shipbreaking yard injured three workers.

Contacted, Mesbah Uddin, manager of the yard, denied the allegations and said there are no lack of safety measures in the yard.

## It's nothing

FROM PAGE 3

said their party still did not take any decision on joining or boycotting the talks. He said their party standing committee will finalise the decision on the matter once they get an invitation letter from Bangabhaban to join the talks.

The five-year tenure of the incumbent commission, led by Chief Election Commission KM Nurul Huda, will expire on February 14 next year. The new EC -- to be formed by the president through a search committee after the dialogue -- will have to arrange the 12th national election within November 2023 to January 2024.

## Puja Udjapan Parishad gets new committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hindu community leaders yesterday reiterated their demand for punishing those behind the recent spate of violence against religious minorities.

They also demanded that the government immediately provide compensations to reconstruct the Hindu temples, business intuitions, residences and other establishments affected by the attacks, said a press release.

They said this at the biennial conference of Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad at Dhakeswari National Temple in the capital.

In the conference, the Parishad's new committee was formed, with social worker JL Bhowmick appointed as president and Dhaka University Professor Chandra Nath Podder as general secretary.

## Yaba syndicate in guise of rent-a-car operator!

Says ATU after arresting racket member

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Just to smuggle yaba from Teknaf to North Bengal, they attached a special chamber to the SUV's gas cylinder.

Pretending to be a rent-e-car operator, the syndicate used to carry passengers on trips to Cox's Bazar from different districts of North Bengal.

After dropping off the passengers, the vehicle would be taken to a workshop in Teknaf, known as the traditional gateway for yaba to enter Bangladesh from Myanmar. The syndicate would then swap the SUV's cylinder, and in the process, remove the package of yaba.

For the last three to four years, the syndicate has smuggled the pills and sold them in different districts, including Bogura, Nilphamari and Gaibandha.

Anti Terrorism Unit (ATU) of police yesterday claimed to have learned about the syndicate after arresting a member from Nilphamari on Friday night.

The arrestee was identified as Imran Hossain.

The ATU team seized 91,000 yaba pills

and Tk 72,000 in cash from his possession, as well as the SUV, MM Hasanul Zahid, special superintendent of ATU, told The Daily Star yesterday.

On information, law enforcers conducted the drive and made the arrest, he said.

"We have come to know that Imran used to collect the pills from one Jubayer Jewel, a notorious narcotics dealer at Teknaf's Sabrang area," Zahid said.

After collecting the pills, Imran used to deliver many of them to Bipul in Bogura and Jony in Nilphamari, he said.

"We have received information that Imran has transported several consignments of yaba from Teknaf to Bogura and Nilphamari. With the latest consignment, he had started the journey on Friday morning but got arrested at Nilphamari," he revealed.

Zahid said they are now looking for Imran's absconding associates. "We will also interrogate Imran after taking him on remand."

A case was filed against Imran and his associates with Nilphamari Sadar Police Station.

## FORMATION OF EC President invites four more political parties for dialogue

STAR REPORT

President Abdul Hamid has invited four more political parties for dialogue with him at Bangabhaban -- over formation of the next Election Commission.

The five-year tenure of the incumbent commission, led by Chief Election Commission KM Nurul Huda, will expire on February 14.

According to the Bangabhaban Press Wing, Gonoforum was invited to sit in dialogue at 6:00pm on January 2 while Bicolpodhara Bangladesh was invited to hold dialogue at 7:00pm on the same day.

Gonotntri Party was invited to hold dialogue at 6:00pm on January 3 while Communist Party of Bangladesh at 7:00pm on the same day.

The president began the dialogue with registered political parties from December 20 and so far held dialogue with the main opposition party in parliament -- Jatiya Party -- and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, a component in the Awami League-led alliance.

As of yesterday, the president has invited 13 political parties to join the dialogue till January 3.

There are 39 registered political parties at present, according to the EC website. But only nine parties have representation in the parliament.



Workers load discarded cartons collected from scrap sellers in Barishal city on to a cargo trawler. The consignment will be sent to traders in Dhaka, who will take it to factories that repurpose the material as fresh cartons. This photo was taken recently from Port Road area.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

## Loss of a luminary

FROM PAGE 3

of his merit and success in every organisation and institution he got involved with.

Noab prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed sympathy to the bereaved family.

Jatiya Press Club President Farida Yasmin and General Secretary Elias Khan in a statement said Reazuddin was a guardian of the country's journalist community.

In a condolence message, Workers Party of Bangladesh President Rashed Khan Menon said his death is an irreplaceable loss in the field of progressive journalism.

Gonoforum in a statement said with his death, the nation lost one of its brightest

sons.

In a joint statement, factions of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists and Dhaka Union of Journalists said Reazuddin was a "luminary" in the country's journalism.

His courageous role in upholding the dignity of journalism and contribution in different democratic movements will be remembered forever, the organisations said.

Dhaka Reporters' Unity in a message expressed deep shock at the death of the senior journalist, who served as the chairman of DRU's election commission.

Bangladesh Health Reporters Forum also expressed deep condolences on his demise.

## She slipped right

FROM PAGE 3

Tabassum's body was handed over to her grief-stricken family, who were also provided Tk 25,000 in financial assistance, said Barguna DC Habibur Rahman.

He also said the 29 unidentified bodies had gone through autopsy and DNA testing. If they can be recognised, their graves will come to feature plaques containing their identities.

Contacted, KM Tariqul Islam, OC of Barguna Police Station said 36 bodies had been recovered when he spoke. Barguna

district administration has compiled a list of 21 people who are still missing in the launch tragedy. Md Saiful Islam, an official of Barguna DC office control room, said relatives of the missing people have been flocking to their office over the last two days.

With the latest update as of the filing of this report yesterday evening, at least 41 have died in the devastating fire.

When this correspondent spoke to Hafeez, he wailed uncontrollably, and kept repeating, "My baby slipped right through my fingers."

## Diakul

FROM PAGE 3

our best to help the victims," said local Md Shamim Hossain. "We arranged shelter for at least 150 passengers in our houses," said Ripan Akan of the village, adding that over 800 passengers took shelter in their village in the aftermath of the fire.

## Who will marry

FROM PAGE 3

Friday morning, all three members of the family have gone traceless. No one knows what has become of them yet. They may have drowned in the river or burnt to death beyond recognition. Yesterday morning, Pakhi's mother Farida Begum discovered the charred remains of the clothes her grandson wore, along with the dresses brought for Hafsa's marriage. They were found inside a staff cabin on the ground deck of the launch.

She broke down while talking to this correspondent, holding the burnt clothes of her loved ones. She was accompanied her son Nazrul Islam and son-in-law Shariful Islam. "We searched for Pakhi, Hakim and Nasrullah everywhere, including hospitals in Jhalakathi and Barishal. But we still can't find them," she said, adding that they're not completely sure if the recovered clothes indeed belong to the family.

Like Farida, the banks of Sugandha river were crowded by many others yesterday morning, all of whom were desperately searching for family members who went missing in the aftermath of the launch fire tragedy.

## Bodies of

FROM PAGE 3

seriously injured and is currently undergoing treatment at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

Lamia and Samia's uncle Abdul Hannan said they have received the bodies and will arrange for their burial soon. He also informed that their father Rafiq is still at the banks of Sugandha looking for his missing wife.

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**Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
District Primary Education Office, Dinajpur

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The land donor of Kalikapur Community Clinic' in Barishal's Hizla demolishes it without the approval of the health department.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Land donor demolishing community clinic without approval

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Health services for the villagers in Guabaria union of Barishal's Hizla upazila are being hampered as the land donor of 'Kalikapur Community Clinic' has been demolishing it without the approval of the health department.

However, the land owner Dalilur Rahman Shikdar of Guabaria union is building another structure some hundred yards away from the clinic in a bid to shift it without taking prior permission of the authorities concerned, confirmed the upazila health officer.

According to the office of the upazila health officer, the community clinic has been operating on five decimals of land donated by Dalilur Rahman Shikdar of the union.

The land donor wanted to shift the hospital to some hundred yards away from the boundary wall of his residence which was not officially approved, said Upazila Health and Family Planning Welfare Officer Dr Mamunur Rashid.

Guabaria Union Parishad (UP) Chairman principal Shahjahan Talukder said the land donor in a meeting at the UP sought permission to relocate the clinic in order to continue the beautification works of his residence.

He (the land donor) pledged to construct the building where the old clinic will be housed and that is why he was given the primary permission, said the chairman.

"What is the problem with the person who has given the land and funding the relocation of clinic elsewhere?" he asked.

Visiting the spot, it was found that the old clinic was being demolished and a one-storey building was being constructed some one hundred yards away from it.

The land donor has been constructing a two-storey building 'Moni Palace' adjacent to the building of the old community clinic.

Construction workers said it would take at least two more months to complete the works of the new hospital building.

A number of villagers said that they were being denied of necessary services of the clinic as it remains inoperative due to the relocation of the clinic.

Hizla Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Bakul Chandra Kabiraj said, "I am not aware of the matter."

However, when the UNO was contacted again over his phone, he advised talking to the civil surgeon.

Shikdar, land donor of the community clinic and also the former president of the Upazila Awami League, said that there were some problems running the hospital in its old place and so they were constructing a hospital next to it.

Dr Monowar Hossain, the civil surgeon of Barishal, said that the relocation of a hospital requires the approval of the ministry.

No approval was taken in this regard and the land donor cannot relocate the hospital if he wants, he said.

"I have instructed the upazila health officer to file a general diary with the police station in this regard," he added.

## BARI-2 VARIETY

# Jhenidah orange farmers counting losses

Growers claimed they cultivated BARI-2 china variety after watching a video on Youtube

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Farmers, who cultivated BARI-2 China variety of orange, in Jhenidah, Chuadanga and Jashore districts are now counting losses due to low prices and less demand in the market.

Out of frustration, many farmers in those district have cut down their fruit bearing orange plants.

Growers said the demand for the china variety is very little in market as it bears seeds inside and its juice gets shrunken.

While talking this correspondent many growers said they got inspiration in farming this variety after watching a video on Youtube uploaded by Chuadanga Sadar Upazila Agriculture Officer Talha Jubayer Masrur.

In his video, the upazila agriculture officer said this variety is tasty and more profitable than the other China varieties available in the market.

Masrur also said that those who are interested in farming this variety can collect the orange plants from one Omar Faruk of Nidhikundo village in Chuadanga's Jibonnagar upazila.

Golam Rasul, an ASI of police, of Mashlia village in Jhenidah's Kaliganj upazila said he watched the video on China orange farming

on Youtube in 2018 and came to learn that Tk 4 lakh can be earned from only a hundred plants.

He then took Tk 4 lakh loan and planted the China orange plants on his five bighas of land.

Although the plants bore huge fruits, he could not sell those due to its bitter taste.

Alamgir Hossain of Shishutala village in Jashore's Chougachha upazila said he collected china orange plants from Faruk and planted those in two bighas of land.

The yield was good, but traders in Dhaka failed to sell his produces as it bears seed inside and also taste bitter.

After incurring loss of Tk 4 lakh he became frustrated and cut down all his orange plants last month, Alamgir added.

Contacted, Omar Faruk said farming of this variety mostly depends on soil and weather, adding that he sold 120 mounds of the orange variety at Tk 70 to Tk 80 per Kg in the last two months.

Chuadanga Sadar Upazila Agriculture Officer Talha Jubayer Masrur said none of the affected farmers, who cultivated the orange variety, contacted him yet in this regard.

BARI-2 China variety orange plants needs shade to avoid bitter taste, added the officer.



Failing to sell his produces in the market, frustrated Asad Sheikh of Dadpur village in Jhenidah's Kaliganj upazila cut down all his BARI-2 China variety orange plants. The photo was taken a week ago.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

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### নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

সড়ক পরিবহন ও সেতু মন্ত্রণালয়ের সেতু বিভাগের আওতায় বাংলাদেশ সেতু কর্তৃপক্ষের অধীনে "সাপোর্ট টু ঢাকা এলিভেটেড এক্সপ্রেসওয়ে পিপিপি প্রকল্প" এ সম্পূর্ণ অস্থায়ী ভিত্তিতে (সরকারি বিধি মোতাবেক) জাতীয় বেতন স্কেল ২০১৫, অনুযায়ী সাকুল্য বেতনে নিম্নবর্ণিত শর্তে জনবল নিয়োগের জন্য প্রকৃত বাংলাদেশী নাগরিকদের নিকট হতে দরখাস্ত আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে:

ক্রমিক নং	পদের নাম ও সর্বসাকুল্য বেতন (জাতীয় বেতন স্কেল ২০১৫ অনুযায়ী)	গ্রেড	পদ সংখ্যা	বয়সসীমা	শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা/অভিজ্ঞতা
০১.	অফিস সহকারী কাম কম্পিউটার অপারেটর সর্বসাকুল্য বেতনঃ ১৭,৩৪৫/-	১৬	০১	১৮-৩০	ক) কোন স্বীকৃত বোর্ড/বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় হতে স্নাতক সার্টিফিকেট বা সমমান পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণসহ টাইপিং এ প্রতি মিনিটে ইংরেজি ও বাংলায় যথাক্রমে ৩০ ও ২০ শব্দ। খ) কম্পিউটার ওয়ার্ড প্রসেসিং এ জ্ঞান অতিরিক্ত যোগ্যতা হিসেবে বিবেচিত হবে।

### শর্তাবলী:

- ১। বর্ণিত পদে সম্পূর্ণ অস্থায়ী ভিত্তিতে মাসিক সাকুল্য বেতনে প্রকল্পের মেয়াদকালীন সময়ের জন্য চুক্তি ভিত্তিক নিয়োগ করা হবে।
- ২। আবেদনপত্রে আবেদনকারীর নাম, পিতা/স্বামীর নাম, মাতার নাম, স্থায়ী ও বর্তমান ঠিকানা, জন্ম তারিখ ও ২৫ মার্চ ২০২০ইং তারিখে বয়স, শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা, জাতীয়তা, ধর্ম, অভিজ্ঞতা, ইত্যাদি উল্লেখপূর্বক প্রকল্প পরিচালক "সাপোর্ট টু ঢাকা এলিভেটেড এক্সপ্রেসওয়ে পিপিপি প্রকল্প" সেতু ভবন, নিউ এয়ারপোর্ট রোড, বনানী, ঢাকা-১২১২ বরাবর আবেদন করতে হবে। আবেদনপত্র জিইপি/রেজিস্ট্রি ডাক/কুরিয়ার সার্ভিস যোগে/সরাসরি অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে গ্রহণ করা হবে।
- ৩। আবেদনপত্রের সঙ্গে সকল শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা ও অভিজ্ঞতার মূল সনদপত্রের সত্যায়িত অনুলিপি, সংশ্লিষ্ট ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/পৌরসভা/সিটি কর্পোরেশন এর চেয়ারম্যান/কর্মকর্তার স্বাক্ষরিত নাগরিকত্ব সনদপত্র, একজন প্রথম শ্রেণীর গেজেটেড কর্মকর্তা কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত চারিত্রিক সনদপত্র এবং প্রথম শ্রেণীর কর্মকর্তা কর্তৃক সত্যায়িত সদ্য তোলা পাসপোর্ট আকারের ৩ (তিন) কপি ছবি সংযুক্ত করতে হবে।
- ৪। সরকারি/আধা-সরকারি ও স্বায়ত্তশাসিত প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহে কর্মরত প্রার্থীদের যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষের মাধ্যমে আবেদন করতে হবে।
- ৫। আবেদনপত্রের সাথে "প্রকল্প পরিচালক, সাপোর্ট টু ঢাকা এলিভেটেড এক্সপ্রেসওয়ে পিপিপি প্রকল্প" এর অনুকূলে ১০০/- (একশত) টাকার পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক ড্রাফটস (অফেরতযোগ্য) সংযুক্ত করতে হবে।
- ৬। অসমাপ্ত ও নির্ধারিত তারিখের পরে কোন আবেদন গ্রহণ করা হবে না।
- ৭। জনপ্রশাসন মন্ত্রণালয়ের স্মারক নং-০৫.০০.০০০০.১৭০.১১.০১৭.২০-১৪৩; তারিখঃ ১৯/০৮/২০২১ মোতাবেক ২৫/০৩/২০২০ তারিখে প্রার্থীর সর্বোচ্চ বয়সসীমা ৩০ বছর হয়েছে তারা আবেদনের যোগ্য মর্মে বিবেচিত হবেন। তবে বীর মুক্তিযোদ্ধা/শহীদ বীর মুক্তিযোদ্ধার পুত্র-কন্যা ও শারীরিক প্রতিবন্ধীদের ক্ষেত্রে বয়স ২৫/০৩/২০২০ তারিখে ৩২ বছর পূর্ণ হয়েছে তারাও আবেদনের যোগ্য মর্মে বিবেচিত হবে। বয়স প্রমাণের ক্ষেত্রে এফিডেভিট গ্রহণযোগ্য নয়।
- ৮। খামের উপর পদের নাম স্পষ্টাক্ষরে উল্লেখ করতে হবে।
- ৯। বর্ণিত পদের ক্ষেত্রে লিখিত পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণদের ব্যবহারিক এবং মৌখিক পরীক্ষা গ্রহণ করা হবে।
- ১০। নির্বাচনী/মৌখিক পরীক্ষায় অংশগ্রহণের জন্য কোন প্রকার টিএ/ডিএ প্রদান করা হবে না।
- ১১। নির্বাচিত প্রার্থীদের বেতন-ভাতা ও অন্যান্য সুযোগ সুবিধা প্রকল্পে নিয়োগ সংক্রান্ত সরকারি বিধি-বিধান দ্বারা নিয়ন্ত্রিত হবে।
- ১২। প্রকল্প সমাপ্তির সঙ্গে সঙ্গে চাকুরী হতে অবসান হবে। সে অনুযায়ী সংশ্লিষ্ট নিয়োগপত্রই চাকুরী অবসানের নোটিশ হিসাবে গণ্য হবে।
- ১৩। নিয়োগ পরীক্ষা সংক্রান্ত যে কোন বিষয়ে নিয়োগকারী কর্তৃপক্ষের সিদ্ধান্ত চূড়ান্ত বলে গণ্য হবে।
- ১৪। পদ সংখ্যা কম/বেশী/বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা কর্তৃপক্ষ সংরক্ষণ করে।
- ১৫। বিজ্ঞপ্তি বাংলাদেশ সেতু কর্তৃপক্ষের ওয়েবসাইট [www.bba.gov.bd](http://www.bba.gov.bd) তে পাওয়া যাবে।
- ১৬। আবেদনপত্র গ্রহণের শেষ তারিখ ২২ জানুয়ারি ২০২২ইং তারিখ বিকাল ০৫:০০ ঘটিকা।

এ এইচ এম এস আকতার  
প্রকল্প পরিচালক  
ফোনঃ ৫৫০৪০৪০১  
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জিডি-২৩৭৭

## Housewife raped, 1 held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A housewife was raped allegedly by the son of a newly elected union parishad (UP) chairman at Mahendranagar village in Sadar upazila of the district on Friday.

Meanwhile, local people caught the alleged rapist while he was fleeing the spot and handed him over to the police. Officers in Charge (OC) of Sadar Police Station Shah Alam said.

The arrestee, Mahi Mandal, 25, is son of newly elected Mahendranagar UP Chairman Abdul Majid Mandal.

**জেলা পরিষদ, সিলেট**  
([www.zp.sylhet.gov.bd](http://www.zp.sylhet.gov.bd))

Memo No. 46.60.9100.001.01.002.21-764(40) Date: 23/12/2021

**e-Tender Notice No. 04/2021-2022 (OTM)**

e-Tenders are invited for 03 (three) Nos. package in National e-GP System Portal ([www.eprocure.gov.bd](http://www.eprocure.gov.bd)) for the procurement of following works under Zila Parishad, Sylhet.

S/L	e-Tender ID & Package No.	Name of works
01.	641833 BCCTZPS139D2EP/DP-01	Installation of 93 Nos. (ninety-three) Arsenic free Tube well in Biswanath Upazila under Sylhet District.
02.	641834 BCCTZPS139D2EP/DP-02	i) Installation of 03 Nos. (three) Arsenic free Tube well in Balaganj Upazila under Sylhet District. ii) Installation of 43 Nos. (forty-three) Arsenic free Tube well in Osmaninagar Upazila under Sylhet District.
03.	641835 BCCTZPS139D2EP/DP-03	i) Excavation of Zilla Parishad owned pond (Kaliganj) to ensure uses of the surface water in Biswanath Upazila under Sylhet District. ii) Excavation of Zilla Parishad owned pond (Dighli) to ensure uses of the surface water in Biswanath Upazila under Sylhet District.

Tender publication date & time : 26/12/2021 11:00pm  
Tender documents last selling date & time : 10/01/2022 08:00pm  
Tender closing & opening date & time : 11/01/2022 11:00pm

These are 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 ([www.eprocure.gov.bd](http://www.eprocure.gov.bd)) as well as any valid Contractor License (2021-22) shall be required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks branches. The authority reserves the right to reject all the tenders or annul the tender proceedings. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)).

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GD-2386

## Example of miscarriage

FROM PAGE 14

law and order runs its own course. But that is not the case. Those who are in the higher positions, or who are highly wealthy, spread their web of influence to justify their own crimes by different ways and means," Barua added.

Police should have taken the case immediately, said Muhammad Nurul Huda, a former inspector general of the police.

"As a rule of thumb, it is the police's duty to accept and record assumed cases as they come. Next comes an investigation to determine the truth. Not accepting the case is a weakness."

Huda went on to call for a thorough investigation of the issue.

Supervising officers or the court can ask for an explanation in this regard, he added.

Nur-e-Azam Mia, the OC of Banani police station, said an all-out investigation is going on. "We can share the details after the investigation is complete," he told The Daily Star.

The media also was complicit in the violation of basic rights of Hajong, a retired Border Guard Bangladesh member: it did not take Hasan's name at all.

"Here, a power abuse took place due to the existence of power play. His name was not published because the media is biased towards the powerful," said Robayet Ferdous, a professor of the University of Dhaka's mass communication and journalism department.

Another reason behind not publishing his identity could be the media's fear of the court.

Had Mohua Hajong been higher-ranked police, a senior official from a different force or a prominent businessman instead of being a lower-ranked sergeant, her case would have been filed and she or her family would not have faced any kind of harassment,

Ferdous said.

"Monoranjan Hajong faced boundless injustice. He became a victim of an accident. He was wounded, he was suffering in the hospital bed, and yet, virtually no one stood in favour of him."

Instead, a GD was filed against him and his daughter with the intent to harass and intimidate.

"Our administration works in favour of people like the accused -- those in the upper echelons of the power structure. Our media too works in favour of the powerful, the rich, the Dhaka city inhabitants and the men. Those who are women, marginalised and poor are always given less importance by the media," Ferdous added.

Gitiara Nasreen, also a professor at the DU's MCJ department, echoed the same.

While the digital security act and several other harassing and silence-inducing procedures can be blamed for its silence, a bigger reason is the involvement of the media with the power centres.

"In order to stay connected with the power centres or to enjoy certain benefits, the media is becoming more of a 'lapdog' instead of playing the role of the 'watchdog', which they are supposed to play."

The government's wings that are supposed to ensure safety and justice for its citizens are not performing their duties, Nasreen said.

"Under the current circumstances, the citizens are living in constant trepidation. The influential people are holding the common people at gunpoint and for this, they don't have to face any kind of accountability, either."

Translated by Mohammed Ishtiaque Khan



A health worker (L) looks on as people wait to receive a dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at a pop-up coronavirus vaccination centre at the Redbridge Town Hall, east London on December 25, 2021.

PHOTO: AFP

## In hospital bed, they recall

FROM PAGE 1

Institute with 30 percent inhalation burn.

Her husband was also admitted to the burn institute with 12 percent burns.

At the same hospital with 10 percent burns is Habibur Rahman Hasan, 17, a madrasa student from Barguna, who was in the ill-fated MV Abhijan-10 with his 14-year-old sister Suraiya Akhter.

As the fire engulfed the vessel, Habib decided to jump from the deck's first floor. But his sister hesitated as she cannot swim.

"I jumped as I could not bear the heat of the fire. But when I looked back, I saw my sister crying for help. Please save me, brother...don't leave me alone," Suraiya pleaded to her brother.

Then Habib swam back to the launch. It took a couple of minutes to find her in the chaos.

"Then we both jumped. But my sister was struggling to swim and was sinking again and again," Habib said, adding that he struggled to take her to the shore.

Suraiya was taking treatment at Barishal's Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

Habib, Bankim, Monik and the 12 others who are undergoing treatment at the Sheikh Hasina National Burn and Plastic Surgery Institute are not out of danger yet as they have

inhalation burns, Samanta Lal Sen, coordinator of the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, told reporters yesterday.

It is important that the patients get enough fluid immediately, he said, adding that subsequent treatment depends on it.

A seven-member team from the hospital has gone to Barishal to attend to the launch victims.

The critical patients will be sent to Dhaka if needed while the rest will be treated in Barishal, he said, adding that they would hold a virtual meeting with the medical team today to take further steps.

The government has taken responsibility for the treatment of the injured in the launch tragedy, said Sheikh Selim, presidium member of Awami League, at an event yesterday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is inquiring about their treatment and other matters, he added.

Some 40 fire victims were taking treatment at the Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in Barishal yesterday, according to its Director AHM Saiful Islam.

At least seven to eight of them are critical, he said, adding that the seven-member medical team from Dhaka were looking after them.

The tragic fire at MV Abhijan-10 on early Friday claimed at least 41 lives and about 100 sustained burn injuries.

## Ethiopia govt says no further advance into Tigray

AFP, Nairobi

Ethiopia's government said on Friday that its troops would not advance further into the war-torn region of Tigray but warned that the decision could be overturned if "territorial sovereignty" was threatened.

The announcement comes days after the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) rebel group declared a retreat to their Tigray stronghold, and signals a pause in fighting following a series of battlefield victories claimed by the government.

Although unconfirmed, the TPLF pullout from the Amhara and Afar regions had raised hopes there would be talks to end a 13-month conflict that has killed thousands and left parts of the country on the brink of famine.

On Friday, the government communication service released a statement saying federal forces had secured eastern Amhara and Afar and been ordered to "vigilantly remain in areas under our control".

"The Ethiopian government has decided not to command its forces to further advance into the Tigray region," it said in the statement shared on Twitter.

UN chief Antonio Guterres welcomed the Ethiopian government's announcement and the message from the Tigrayan forces, his deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said.

"The secretary-general urges the parties to grasp this opportunity, cease hostilities in the year-long conflict, take all steps to ensure the provision of much-needed humanitarian assistance, the withdrawal of foreign fighters, and address political differences through a credible and inclusive national dialogue," Haq said

in a statement.

The temporary halt to fighting may help lower the temperature after months of battles that have seen both sides claim major territorial gains.

At one point, the rebels claimed to be only 200 kilometres (125 miles) by road from the capital Addis Ababa, sparking alarm among foreign governments who urged their citizens to leave the country as soon as possible.

But since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed -- the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner -- headed to the front last month, according to state media, the government has claimed to have retaken a string of key towns.

The government has dismissed Monday's withdrawal announcement by the TPLF as a cover-up for military setbacks.

Communications have been cut in the conflict zone and access for journalists is restricted, making it difficult to verify battlefield claims.

The fighting in Africa's second most populous nation has displaced more than two million people and more than nine million are in need of food aid, according to UN estimates.

There have been reports of massacres, mass rapes and other atrocities by all sides, and the UN Human Rights Council last week ordered a probe into a wide range of alleged abuses, a move condemned by Addis Ababa.

The war broke out in November last year when Abiy sent troops into Tigray to topple the TPLF, accusing its fighters of attacking army camps.

He vowed a swift victory, but the TPLF mounted a shock comeback, recapturing most of Tigray by June and then advancing into Afar and Amhara.

## At least 30 killed in Greece

FROM PAGE 14

The UN refugee agency said the Folegandros accident could end up being the worst in the Aegean this year, as an unknown number of people were still missing.

"This shipwreck is a painful reminder that people continue to embark on perilous voyages in search of safety," said Adriano Silvestri, the UNHCR's assistant representative in Greece.

Earlier Friday, the coastguard had intercepted another boat with 92 men and boys on board after it ran aground

on the coast of the Peloponnese peninsula.

Three suspected smugglers who fled the boat on foot were later arrested.

The UNHCR estimates that more than 2,500 people have died or gone missing at sea as they tried to reach Europe from January through November this year.

Nearly one million people, mainly Syrian refugees, arrived in the European Union in 2015 after crossing the sea to the Greek islands close to Turkey.

"These days, the criminal activity

of smugglers, who are indifferent to human life, has intensified, stacking dozens of distressed people, without life jackets, on boats that do not even meet the basic safety standards," Gianni Plakiotakis, Maritime Affairs Minister said late Friday pointing the finger at Turkey, saying Ankara "lets smugglers act unchecked."

Rivals Greece and Turkey regularly spar over the issue of migrants, with Athens accusing Ankara of turning a blind eye to people attempting to cross into EU member Greece and Turkey denying the charges.

## Most powerful telescope launched

FROM PAGE 14

Named after a former Nasa director, Webb follows in the footsteps of the legendary Hubble -- but intends to show humans what the Universe looked like even closer to its birth nearly 14 billion years ago.

Speaking on social media, Webb project co-founder John Mather described the telescope's unprecedented sensitivity.

"#JWST can see the heat signature of a bumblebee at the distance of the Moon," he said.

All that power is needed to detect the weak glow emitted billions of years ago by the very first galaxies to exist and the first stars being formed.

The telescope is unequalled in size and complexity.

Its mirror measures 6.5 metres (21 feet) in diameter -- three times the size of the Hubble's mirror -- and is made of 18 hexagonal sections.

It is so large that it had to be folded to fit into the rocket.

That manoeuvre was laser-guided with Nasa imposing strict isolation measures to limit any contact with the telescope's mirrors from particles or even human breath.

Once the rockets have carried Webb 120 kilometres, the protective nose of the craft, called a "fairing", is shed to lighten the load.

To protect the delicate instrument from changes in pressure at that stage, rocket-builder Arianespace installed a custom decompression system.

Crew on the ground will know

whether the first stage of the flight was successful about 27 minutes after launch.

Once it reaches its station, the challenge will be to fully deploy the mirror and a tennis-court-sized sun shield.

That intimidatingly complex process will take two weeks and must be flawless if Webb is to function correctly.

Its orbit will be much farther than Hubble, which has been 600 kilometres above the Earth since 1990.

The location of Webb's orbit is called the Lagrange 2 point and was chosen in part because it will keep the Earth, the Sun and the Moon all on the same side of its sun shield.

Webb is expected to officially enter service in June.

## EC breaches law

FROM PAGE 1

The EC officials violated the law and took part in this conspiracy... The High Court declared my nomination papers legal and I will fight to get my symbol back."

Itefkar, first a rival and now an AL candidate, said, "These are all old issues. I am now only focusing on the election."

A similar incident took place in Rajgati union in the same upazila, where Shahadat Hossain submitted his papers with the AL recommendation and Abdur Rauf submitted his independently. However, Rauf got the "boat" candidacy and Shahadat's nomination was cancelled.

Challenging the EC's decisions, both Amdad and Shahadat first appealed to the commission and then to the HC.

On December 20, the HC bench of Justice Md Khasruzzaman and Justice Md Khairul Alam declared their nomination papers valid and directed the EC to accept their nominations.

Till yesterday, neither of them got their nominations back, while the election is expected to be held on

January 5.

Contacted, lawmaker Anwarul Abedin Khan claimed the candidates were changed as per Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's directions.

**VIOLATION OF LAW**

According to a circular issued by the EC on November 27, no political party can nominate more than one person for the chairman post in the Union Parishad polls.

"If more than one person is nominated by a party, the nomination paper will be considered void," it wrote.

Section 12 (7) of Local government (Union Parishad) regulations 2010 (amended in 2015) states that if any person signs more than one nomination paper, all their papers, except the first one submitted, will be cancelled.

Election analysts' say the Returning Officer and EC have violated the law.

Badiul Alam Majumder, secretary of Sujun -- Citizens for Good Governance --, who has been observing the UP polls for long, told The Daily Star that the EC has no jurisdiction to receive any party nomination paper after the

scheduled time.

"In this case, the law has been completely violated. This cannot be tolerated in any way," he said Badiul.

Muhammad Fakhruzzaman, upazila election officer and Chandipasha UP polls' RO, told The Daily Star that they are waiting for the certified copy of HC verdict.

"We had received photocopies of the party nomination papers before the due date. The original copies were submitted after some time," he claimed.

The Daily Star, however, obtained a copy of a letter, signed by him, sent to the EC saying they received the paper after the due date without any receipt.

Fakhruzzaman said, "The symbol has already been allotted, now we will do what the court has says."

Rajgati Union RO Mashiur Rahman told The Daily Star, they will follow the HC verdict.

Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam told The Daily Star that he was not even informed of these incidents. "Since the High Court is involved in the matter, we will follow whatever it says."



Afghan boys warm themselves by a bonfire on a street in Kabul, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Daily Covid

FROM PAGE 14

the total number of people infected to 15,82,985, added the release.

The current positivity rate is 2.01 percent while the total positivity rate stands at 13.92 percent.

A total of 13,699 samples were tested across the country in the 24 hours.

At least 224 Covid-19 patients have recovered during the period.

The total number of recoveries now stands at 15,47,180 and the recovery rate at 97.74 percent.

The deceased was a man, between 61-70 years old, added the release.

## Ten killed in Iran road crash: state media

AFP, Tehran

Ten people were killed and more than a dozen injured in Iran yesterday when a truck collided with a minibus transporting workers in southwestern Khuzestan province, state media said.

The accident occurred at around 7:15 am (0345 GMT) on the road between the cities of Ahvaz and Khorramshahr, Khuzestan's traffic police chief Reza Dolatshahi said.

"The number of people killed in the crash on the old Ahvaz-Khorramshahr road has reached 10," Dolatshahi said, according to the official IRNA news agency.

The collision caused a pile-up involving three other vehicles, Dolatshahi added.

At least 13 other people were injured, IRNA said, citing a Khuzestan emergency services spokesperson.

Those who died were the truck driver and passengers on the minibus, Fars news agency reported, citing an official from the province's Red Crescent.

The Ahvaz-Khorramshahr road is 100 kilometres (62 miles) long and sees significant truck activity to and from the Shalamshah border crossing with Iraq, according to Iranian media.

## Governor of Iraq's Najaf resigns after protests

AFP, Najaf

The governor of Iraq's Najaf province resigned on Friday, a day after another governor also quit following demonstrations against living conditions and corruption.

Louai al-Yasseri resigned from his leadership in Najaf, in central Iraq, a day after the governor of Nasiriyah province in the south quit following the violent suppression of protesters.

Their departures underline the challenges facing war-scarred Iraq and how little has changed despite protests that swept Baghdad and the South two years ago.

Tens of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets to express their anger at corruption, unemployment and crumbling public services, and hundreds lost their lives in protest-related violence.

Yasseri announced at a press conference that he was leaving his post in the holy Shiite city, according to the official Iraqi News Agency.

His resignation follows harsh criticism from prominent Shiite leader Moqtada Sadr, who emerged as kingmaker following legislative elections in October.

Sadr paid a public visit to the municipality in Najaf on Wednesday after "reports of corruption and shortcomings in this institution", according to the news agency.



# Common long COVID symptoms

DR ZUBAIR KHALED HUQ

Long COVID is not medically definitive but a term that describes a portion of the population struggling with symptoms for weeks or months after being infected with COVID-19, not just those who were seriously ill.

Fatigue is the most common, but breathlessness, chest tightness, brain fog, gastrointestinal issues, joint pain, headaches, and vertigo are other reported manifestations, ranging from mild to debilitating. For many, the psychological effects are profound. Some people are still suffering symptoms seven months after infection, and those who had a mild illness at the start can have worse ongoing symptoms than patients who needed intensive care treatment. Meanwhile, some people are living with symptoms that move around the body.

Researchers from the National Institute for Health Research who reviewed the available evidence said ongoing symptoms examined reports from people of all ages and backgrounds. While most cases of coronavirus resolve in 3-4 weeks, long COVID is a reality for a lot of COVID-19 patients. Also referred to as post-COVID. It can last for several weeks and impact recovery in the long run.



Post-multiplication viral debris can cause fatigue. The body's response to a virus can be overdriven, tiring the system. Some say fatigue and exhaustion take the longest to recover from infection. So, give your body plenty of rest and fluids to re-energise it. Maintain a healthy diet and avoid chores after recovery. Working too hard will only worsen the situation. After COVID fatigue, people experience lethargy, muscle ache, pain and exhaustion.

Again, increased inflammation in the body from COVID-19 can

cause body pain. Muscle pain is caused by virus-induced damage to muscle fibres and abnormal tissue breakdown in some COVID patients. Cough, one of the most common COVID symptoms, can last for five to six weeks or longer if the virus is still present in the upper respiratory tract.

Coughing can be dry and productive, causing more stress to the respiratory tract and throat. Steam inhalation, saltwater gargles, herbal teas, and a vitamin-C-rich diet can help you recover faster. Shortness of breath or pain or discomfort while

breathing can indicate worsening COVID symptoms. It may be a long-term issue affecting their quality of life for many long-haulers.

Brain fog, confusion, delirium are some of the common ways COVID-19 could impact your brain and make it age by at least ten years, studies say. They also make for some of the most commonly recognised post-COVID symptoms, which could degrade the quality of life for some with severe symptoms.

Many people believe that brain fog and other symptoms of post-

COVID brain damage are signs of mental illness, which is why doctors stress the importance of post-COVID brain checks and exercises. Insomnia or chronic sleep issues are another common COVID-19 symptom; nearly half of the recovered psychiatrists complain the same. Psychiatrists are also seeing recovered patients with sleep issues, fear and panic, leading to sleepless nights. Meditation, calming teas, and rest can help reduce stress and rehabilitation. If these issues become too frequent, patients should seek help.

People who suffer from anosmia and loss of taste find it challenging to regain this vital function for weeks or months. Smell training is a non-pharmaceutical therapy that helps patients regain their smell and taste. Long covid is not just people recovering from intensive care. Even mild infections can cause severe health issues.

To conserve energy, avoid overdoing it and get plenty of rest. Think about what you need to do and what can be put off, and plan your days accordingly. If you are not recovering as quickly as you would like, ask your hospital team or doctor for assistance.

The writer is a gerontologist and a public health specialist.  
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## DIET



### Healthy diet for your heart

TAHSIN BINTE MAKSUD

When it comes to a healthy heart, diet is a daily routine. A healthy lifestyle, especially a healthy diet, can help prevent heart disease. The Mediterranean Diet may support a healthy heart. It is a diet influenced by Mediterranean eating habits. The American Heart Association recommends this diet as a healthy eating plan.

The Mediterranean diet is characterised by a high intake of vegetables, fruits, and olive oil and a moderate protein intake. A diet rich in plant-based foods is a good start. Fish, seafood, dairy, and poultry are moderated. Olive oil is the primary source of monounsaturated fatty acids.

So, start using extra virgin olive oil instead of other fats today to lower your cholesterol. Take desserts made with fresh fruits and low-fat yogurt. Begin eating the '5 A DAY' pattern of fruits and vegetables. The campaign is based on the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations to eat at least 400 grams of fruits and vegetables per day to reduce the risk of severe health issues like heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

Every day is a new beginning, a new opportunity to get stronger, to eat better, to be healthier and to be the best version of yourself.

The writer is a medical student at Cumilla Medical College.

## HEALTH bulletin



### Chronic opioid users are at excess risk for initiating injection drug use

The opioid epidemic is driven largely by use or misuse of prescription oral opioids, but injection drug use also has increased in recent years. Qualitative studies suggest that injection drug use in prescription opioid users might be precipitated by events such as developing tolerance or interrupted access to medications.

To assess the association between long term prescription opioid treatment medically dispensed for non-cancer pain and the initiation of injection drug use (IDU) among individuals without a history of substance use, Canadian investigators evaluated a retrospective cohort of almost 60,000 patients without cancer but with periods of chronic prescription opioid use between 2000 and 2015.

These patients were matched to patients with periods of episodic use, acute use, or no use during the same interval. After adjustment, initiation of injection drug use was 8 times more common among patients with chronic opioid use than among those with no use. Such initiation was more frequent among younger patients and those using higher opioid doses.

The authors of the research published in the British Medical Journal caution that chronic prescription opioids should not be involuntarily tapered or discontinued. Clinicians should be alert to initiation of injection drug use among chronic opioid users, particularly those who are younger or using higher opioid doses.

## Manage your osteoarthritis of knee

DR JAGODISH CHANDRA GHOSH

Osteoarthritis affects millions of older adults globally. Knee, hip, hand, and foot joints are commonly affected. It causes knee pain and stiffness, but it can also cause severe disability and loss of quality of life, especially in the elderly. Gradually, it is becoming clear that osteoarthritis is not just a mechanical or age-related condition. Certain factors accelerate the disease, such as diet, trauma, and other comorbidities.

Although older adults usually suffer from osteoarthritis, young people can also get it. It may be familial or acquired (injury, infection, overweight).

The following common risk factors increase the chance of developing arthritis and the severity of the disease.

- Osteoarthritis is directly connected to wear and tear on joints. More than one-third of adults over the age of 65 have symptoms of osteoarthritis (OA). The ability of cartilage to heal decreases as the persons get older.

- Weight increases the pressure on all joints, especially the knees. Every pound increase in weight adds three to four pounds to the knee.

- Genetic mutations make a person more likely to develop osteoarthritis. It may be due to inherited abnormalities in the shape of the bone that surrounds the joints.

- Women aged 55 years and older are more likely than men to develop osteoarthritis.

- People with jobs that need a lot of stress on joints, such as kneeling, squatting or lifting heavy weights (55 pounds), are more likely to



develop osteoarthritis because of constant pressure on joints.

- Athletes involved in soccer, tennis or long-distance running may be at higher risk of developing knee osteoarthritis in later life.

- For people with rheumatoid arthritis, certain metabolic disorders such as an iron overload or excess growth hormone are at a higher risk of osteoarthritis.

Changing your lifestyle can help improve joint health and prevent osteoarthritis.

- Regular moderate exercise strengthens joints and can decrease the risk of osteoarthritis. It can help maintain healthy joints, reduce pain and fatigue, relieve joint stiffness, and increase muscle and bone strength. Excess weight puts extra stress on joints, speeding the deterioration of joint cartilage. Losing weight also helps to reduce pain and improve symptoms.

- After a prolonged sitting, journey or work, the joints involved become swollen or achy, rest them and try to avoid using a swollen joint for at least 12-24 hours which will reduce the risk of developing OA in future.

- High glucose levels can speed up the formation of molecules that make cartilage stiff; it also triggers inflammation that can accelerate cartilage damage. Keeping diabetes under control can help to prevent OA.

- Food heated in very high temperature, grilled or even pasteurised a toxin known as advanced glycation end product appears which can damage specific protein enhancing damage to the tissue.

There is no such cure to osteoarthritis except maintaining lifestyle modifications.

The writer is a Professor of Orthopedics.  
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## Make up for vitamin D deficiency

ZAHID BIN SULTAN

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin that promotes calcium absorption in the gut and maintains adequate serum calcium and phosphate for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. Now-a-days, vitamin D deficiency is a silent and neglected global public health problem. Almost one billion people worldwide suffer from vitamin D deficiency or insufficiency.

Vitamin D deficiency symptoms have been linked to different health problems, including heart disease, depression, and cancer. Signs you are not getting enough vitamin D are -- bone softening of fractures, fatigue and generalized weakness, muscle cramps, joint and bone pain, impaired wound healing, dizziness, anxiety, hair loss.

To fulfil the deficiency of vitamin D, the following measures can be adopted:

- Go out in the sun
- Take vitamin D rich food every day, for example-mushrooms, liver, meat, fish, liver oil, shrimp, egg yolk, oatmeal.

- Take supplements by consulting with doctors
- Routinely test the 25-hydroxy vitamin D blood.
- Spending enough time in the sun and eating vitamin D rich food is the best way to get a daily dose of vitamin D. Only eating vitamin D rich food is insufficient to fulfil your daily dose.

Check your vitamin D level twice a year and consult with your health care professional before taking a vitamin D supplement.

The writer is a neurodynamic specialist and clinical physiotherapist at BRB Hospital Ltd.  
Email: ranacrpphysio@gmail.com



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## A tragedy of our own making!

*Blatant disregard for passengers' safety led to so many deaths and injuries*

We are saddened and outraged at the deadliest incident of launch fire in our history that has taken at least 40 lives until now, with over a hundred passengers injured and many more still missing. According to our reports, a few hours after the launch, MV Abhijan-10, left for Barguna with over a thousand passengers on board from Dhaka—at 6pm on Thursday—the staffers of the launch noticed some problems. However, they kept the vessel going while trying to fix them. Many of the passengers noticed that the engine of the launch was acting strange—it was making loud noises from time to time, black smoke was emanating from the engine room and sometimes, flashes of fire were exiting the exhaust pipe. With all the signs of an imminent disaster, the launch, however, kept going. Even when the people on the bottom floor of the vessel felt the deck getting hotter—after it left the Barishal Launch Terminal around 1:30am—the master still kept the launch moving towards its destination. Then, at 2am, there was an explosion which caused the huge fire that engulfed the entire launch.

The questions that we have regarding this deadly fire incident are many: Why didn't the launch master and staffers do the routine check-up of the engine and other machinery before starting the journey? Why did the launch master not cancel the trip when they found out that the engine was giving trouble? Why were barrels of fuel kept in the engine room and on a major portion of the lower deck? Why was there a kitchen right next to the engine room? Why didn't the master stop the vessel at the Barishal launch terminal when the heat at the lower deck was so obvious and could be felt by all? Lastly, why were there more than a thousand passengers on board, when the launch had the capacity of carrying only 420? This fatal fire could have been easily avoided if some basic rules had been followed by the launch master and staffers, and if only they cared a little about the passengers' safety.

It is heartbreaking to see the cries and screams of the relatives of those who died on the spot, being burnt alive or having suffocated to death. Many are still waiting for their loved ones who went missing after they jumped into the river to save themselves from the fatal blaze. The hospitals in Barishal, Jhalakathi and Dhaka that are providing treatment to the burn victims are struggling with so many critically wounded patients. We hope all of them will get the best treatment in the country and that no more lives will be lost.

Apparently, some committees have been formed to investigate the incident and find out the real cause of the fire. Although the fire officials have primarily identified the engine room to be the source of the blaze, we will know for sure when the committees give their reports. And regarding the negligence of the launch master and the staffers, we think all of them should be brought under the law for not playing their due roles. Such blatant disregard for passengers' safety should never be tolerated.

## Bring children back to school

*Govt action needed to make education inclusive and accessible for all*

THE fact that at least 2.5 million children of school-going age are not receiving formal education is deeply concerning. As this daily has recently reported—citing data presented at a CSO Alliance, CAMPE and Dhaka Ahsania Mission webinar titled "Achievement, challenges and way forward in Bangladesh's Golden Jubilee"—the dropout rate for primary education is currently 17.9 percent, but even higher for secondary education. It was also found that the student-teacher ratio remains too high with there being only one teacher for every 46 students. This, coupled with the dropouts and learning loss caused by Covid-19 pandemic-induced school closures of the past nearly two years, certainly casts a shadow on the future of school education in Bangladesh.

Amongst those excluded from education, most belong to vulnerable groups either due to their financial conditions or because of various disabilities. It is unfortunate that our education sector does not cater well enough to children with disabilities, with a uniform education system for those with disabilities still nowhere in sight. What is more disappointing is that teachers, headteachers and managing committees of many schools are apparently unwilling to allow such disadvantaged students to fully integrate into schools. It was also mentioned during the webinar how only 26 percent of teachers had acquired leadership training while very few were proficient in braille. As a country that is in the process of stepping into the category of being "developing", our educators need to be actively working towards accommodating students from all backgrounds instead of doing the opposite.

In order for progress to take place, it is crucial that such issues in our education sector are remedied on a priority basis. We would urge the government to work on recruiting and training teachers in a manner which would help make education completely accessible for all primary and secondary school-aged students. As experts have suggested, there also needs to be a comprehensive set of national education targets, the progress towards which would be monitored regularly by teachers, NGOs and government bodies. Specialised education materials should be produced for children with disabilities. It should also be ensured that, not only urban students, but children in remote areas and those from underprivileged families are also being taught with up-to-date educational techniques. The government must buckle up now to bring back to school those students who have dropped out due to pandemic-related reasons, and to also make sure the enrolment rate does not decline further. Otherwise, the nation may be set back by years' worth of educational and socioeconomic progress.

# Let us not become dependent on LNG import



BADRUL IMAM

A decreasing volume of annual natural gas production from the gas fields of Bangladesh means that the country is moving towards joining the net energy importers club sooner than one would have liked to think. Import dependency for oil and coal are well set as major primary energy sources in the country and imports of natural gas, in the form of LNG, has begun to fill the shortfall of supply from local gas fields. The annual production of indigenous natural gas has decreased from a peak of 973 bcf (billion cubic feet) in FY2016 to 882 bcf in FY2020, according to Petrobangla. It is forecasted that the volume of local production will continue to decrease further into the future. Bangladesh started LNG imports in late 2018 and since then, has faced the uphill task of procuring the fuel from an unstable and volatile market.



The Bibiyana gas field in Sylhet may reasonably be referred to as the jewel in the crown of Bangladesh's local gas supply.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

With no new discovery of any significant gas reserves over the last two decades, the decreasing rate of gas production has set alarm bells to ring in earnest. Most of the major gas fields show signs of aging in forms of reservoir pressure drop and a downward trend in gas output. Titas, the largest gas field in the country, has had its production rate reduced from a peak of 500 mmcf (million cubic feet per day) in 2016 to 384 mmcf in December 2021. Similar or even larger drops in production rate have been recorded in other major gas fields such as in Habiganj, Kailashitla, Rashidpur and Bakhrabad. Generally speaking, a gas field runs with robust production at an initial stage and gradually becomes less productive, before it eventually "waters out"—meaning it produces water rather than gas. A

quicker way of demise for a gas field is often noticed as in the Sangu offshore gas field, which had its production rate slashed over a much shorter period of time before being abandoned. Reasons for such quicker demise may be varied, but is usually due to a sudden drop of reservoir pressure, engaging in over-production and/or disregarding of healthy reservoir management.

There are, at present, 20 producing gas fields in the country. The Bibiyana gas field in Sylhet, operated by Chevron Oil company, may reasonably be referred to as the jewel in the crown, for this gas field alone supplies 1200 mmcf, which is about 51 percent of the total 2310 mmcf from all gas fields in the country. For how long Bibiyana can sustain its present level of production is of paramount importance. The daily gas production reports of Petrobangla showed the production rate of the field exceeding its capacity for several years in the past. How it is translated in terms of reservoir management is perhaps better judged by Chevron personnel. But sceptics wonder if this is a case of over-production, a possibility suspected by many in the offshore Sangu gas field. Whatever may

March, Bangladesh bought LNG at USD 7 per mmBtu from the spot market. In October, Bangladesh had to pay USD 36 per mmBtu for the same LNG. The fivefold increase in the LNG price within months put Bangladesh's gas import plans in disarray. The government had to stop buying LNG from the spot market due to this high price, which led to a fall in gas supply—forcing some power plants to run on oil in place of gas. The government has two long-term contracts for LNG supply, one with Qatar and the other with Oman, to procure the fuel at a stable price of about USD 10 per mmBtu, cheaper than if bought off the spot market. But even long-term suppliers have decided, as per media reports, to reduce their supply in 2022 by resorting to supplying only the minimum contractual obligation amount to Bangladesh. Apparently, the suppliers are more interested to trade LNG in the high-priced spot market than through long-term lower and stable price contracts.

So what makes LNG price surge in the international market? It is the increase in LNG demand worldwide due to renewed economic growth, and following recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, that is the main cause of this surge. In addition, a colder winter in the northern hemisphere and a disruption in LNG production by major producers have both helped the price go up. How the LNG price will behave in the future also depends on several of these factors.

In case the LNG price remains volatile, the immediate to near future seems bleak for Bangladesh's gas supply scenario. A long-term contract of a USD 10 per mmBtu price means Bangladesh is paying more than three times the price of the local gas (USD 3 per mmBtu or less), and buying LNG at USD 35 per mmBtu was perhaps not in the calculation of policy agencies.

Whatever may be the case, future energy supply in Bangladesh is forecasted to be increasingly dependent on imported LNG. If the present trend of decreasing supply from own gas fields continues, volume LNG import may one day outweigh indigenous gas supply. How the economy would face such a precarious situation is anybody's guess. If the above situation occurs, a temporary halt of LNG import due to fund crunches will certainly put a lot of gas-powered plants in the dark.

The solution to this problem is simple. Bangladesh has for a long time ignored its gas exploration activities and let the gas demand-supply mismatch grow. The deltaic build of mainland Bangladesh and its offshore, for all geoscientific reasons, have been rated as highly prospective areas for natural gas. Proof of such rating is evidenced in the adjacent areas bordering Bangladesh, notably the offshore Rakhaine basin in Myanmar where large-scale gas fields have been discovered since the maritime dispute with Bangladesh was settled in 2012. Bangladesh, on the other hand, has hardly taken any steps to explore its offshore since that time. As such, Bangladesh should move faster with its exploration activities to lift its gas out of the ground. A quick fix of the gas supply problem with imported LNG may work out in the short-term, but in the long-run, the price volatility and economic uncertainty would make import unsustainable. It will be much more rational for Bangladesh to depend on its own gas resources rather than on the import of expensive LNG as long as such a resource base is scientifically reckoned.

Dr Badrul Imam is Honorary Professor (retired) at the Department of Geology, University of Dhaka.

## New variant, same old travel woes



ABDULLAH SHIBLI

AN OPEN DIALOGUE

COVID-19 has taken a big toll on the tourism industry in countries that rely on foreign visitors. As new waves of infections take hold and ever-changing rules to curtail the spread of the disease are put in place, the overall effect is increased uncertainty—which undoubtedly is harming global tourism. "I'm so frustrated that they keep changing the travel rules," Cath Colbridge of the UK told a reporter. "It's got to the point now that we've given up planning holidays abroad and bought a camper van, so we can at least get away for a few days."

In this piece, I will offer tidbits of news, some bad and some good. The bad ones pertain to how the Covid-19 variants have been endlessly eating away at the travel and tourism (T&T) industry. The good news is about how, in the midst of the busy travel season, the valiant workers at the Dhaka Airport are making every effort to give the weary travelers a helping hand.

As if the T&T sector hasn't had enough, on December 20 many nations announced new rules on gatherings and travel ahead of the busy holiday season. With the Omicron variant spreading fast across the globe, governments and health organisations, including the WHO, are now advising travelers to exercise caution, and if necessary, to postpone their trips within their respective countries and abroad. Aircraft passengers have been twice or even three times more likely to catch Covid-19 during a flight since the emergence of the Omicron variant.

One hardly needs to be reminded that last summer, as people got vaccinated and started to move about after more than a year of "confinement", the Delta variant put a damper on the travel plans for many, and as governments tried to cope with a resurgence of illnesses, infections, and spread of Covid-19, the initial optimism soon gave way to another round of frustrations.

We are now in the midst of winter and the holidays, which is a busy travel season in the northern hemisphere. The tourism industry is trying to get back on its feet. While talking with many of my associates in Bangladesh, I have gathered that the average tourism revenue is low except for

a few large and resourceful resorts. Locals are travelling, but visitors from abroad have dwindled to a trickle. Eco-tourism is almost nil, and the Hospitality and Tourism Sector (HTS) has been crying out, unsuccessfully, for government support since the pandemic started in March 2020.

### Tourism takes another hit

The new Omicron variant, the changing rules for travel, and the continuing uncertainty are adversely affecting tourism once again. The rules for traveling to each country are different. The quarantine do's and don'ts, the tests, the vaccination

Omicron variant. Even if infections prove mild, the variant's speed will have grave consequences. The big reason is that Omicron appears to spread far more readily than the delta variant that has been dominant worldwide since the summer—Omicron is 25 to 50 percent more transmissible, according to some UK estimates.

The protection offered by the Chinese vaccines will not be enough to prevent Omicron from causing global disruption, said J. Stephen Morrison, director of the Global Health Policy Center at the Center for International and Strategic Studies.

"The sheer scale of infection will



Aircraft passengers have been twice or even three times more likely to catch Covid-19 during a flight since the emergence of the Omicron variant.

PHOTO: REUTERS

requirements, and other protocols and practices have created a chaotic situation. Also at different airports, the local rules are varied. For example, at some locations, you can eat freely and not have your masks on. At others, you need to prove you are vaccinated, and so on.

One of my relatives travelled from Dhaka to Bangkok with his family. The next few days while in quarantine were chaotic for them. There were tests every day, self-isolation, and food was delivered to the hotel room. And all this at your own expense!

Coming back to the plight of the T&T industry in developing countries, research suggests the Covid vaccines used in many parts of the world offer almost no defense against the highly contagious

overwhelm health systems, simply because the denominator will be potentially so big," he said. "If you have a burst of infection worldwide, a shock, what does the world look like on the other side of it? Is it, 'The war is over,' or, 'The war has just entered another phase?' We haven't begun thinking about any of that."

### Getting a PCR test in Dhaka

Earlier this month, I was in Dhaka when the American government announced that, effective from December 6, all passengers traveling to the USA would need to have a PCR test done one calendar day before travel.

When I contacted the testing clinic in Dhaka operated by PRAAVA, I was told

that if I was travelling, say, on December 15, that I *could not* get my test on December 14. So, I inquired about taking the test on the evening of December 14 to be within the 24-hour window. But I was informed that PRAAVA did not take any samples after 12 noon. Therefore, I had to take the test on the morning of December 15. When I told them that I planned to fly out on the night of December 15, a staff member asked me to stop by the clinic at Banani to pick up the result at 5pm, just before I was to head out for the airport.

The reason I mention all this in great detail is to relay my belief that the average Bangladeshi (and I later learned many foreign travelers) would be misled by the wrong information that the clinic was operating under. On the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website, it was announced that the new Global Testing Order shortens the timeline for required testing for all international air travelers to one day before departure to the United States. But, there is a big difference between 24 hours and the one calendar day requirement, as the CDC itself clarifies, "A passenger whose flight to the United States is at any time on a Sunday would need to have a negative test taken at any time on Saturday."

At Dhaka airport, a fellow passenger mentioned that we needed to get a stamp from a DGHS official in one remote cubicle. We then realised that the counselor at PRAAVA had failed to inform us of two important steps after the results (in PDF form) were available: 1) Unlike in the USA, a hard copy of every test result must be printed from a government database, and 2) The printout had to be stamped at the DGHS counter in the airport.

There was a long queue at the departure lounge with almost 50 people ahead of me waiting to get a seal on their printout. Compounding our problem, PRAAVA failed to upload our results on the official database. A DGHS staff member directed us to Room 2 at the end of the departure lounge. There, Ashiq and his co-workers were very eager to help, but could not find our test results using either our passport numbers or phone numbers. Ashiq made calls to PRAAVA, and after two hours of running around, we finally got the documentation we needed.

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist. Two of his new books, "A Fairy Tale" and "Economic Crosscurrents", are available on rokomari.com

# As Myanmar is shred into pieces, can its people unite to stop the Tatmadaw?

A CLOSER LOOK



TASNEEM TAYEB

**W**E couldn't stand to watch it so we kept our heads down, crying. . . We begged them not to do it. They didn't care. They asked the women, 'Are your husbands among them? If they are, do your last rites,' a woman from Myanmar's Keni

Deputy Minister for Information and military spokesperson, holds ominous portents for the future of democracy and human rights in the country.

The Myanmar junta carried out multiple air strikes since December 22, on the Karen State's Lay Kay Kaw town, in southeastern Myanmar—a stronghold of the Karen National Union. This was the result of fresh raids by military soldiers to subdue the Karen fighters, protesting against the military rule. The clashes since last week and the subsequent air

San Suu Kyi, in the early hours of February 1, 2021. Since then, the country has been embroiled in a bloody struggle between the usurpers and the civilians calling for the return of democracy. At least 1,300 protesters and civilians have been killed since then, as conflicts between the two parties continue, according to data from Assistance Association for Political Prisoners—a Thailand and Myanmar based human rights organisation—as cited by UK-based news outlet The Independent.

In response to the attacks on the Karen community, the Ambassadors, Chargés d'Affaires, and Heads of Mission from Australia, Canada, the Delegation of the EU and European Union Member States with presence in Myanmar—Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden—as well as New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, have signed a joint statement in which they have reiterated "condemnation of the serious human rights violations committed by the military regime across the country" and called on the "regime to immediately cease its indiscriminate attacks in Karen State and throughout the country, and to ensure the safety of all civilians in line with international law".

While the international community has condemned the misadventures of the Myanmar military after the coup, with the US and some other countries even imposing sanctions against the military generals involved, the measures are too little, too late.

Myanmar has a history of bloody military rule and suppression of civilians. Starting from the regime of General Ne Win to the dissolution of military rule in 2011, the country has witnessed numerous clashes between the military and civilians. During this time, the Rohingya, along with some other minority groups including Karen and Kachin, have been systemically cornered and persecuted by the country's military. The Rohingya especially had been forced to endure genocidal and ethnic cleansing attempts by the country's military. And the Tatmadaw continued these atrocities almost unchecked, with muted, templated responses from the international community.

Over the years, the Tatmadaw has wielded enormous power and in the process has amassed even more. The vicious crimes of the Tatmadaw now feels like a déjà vu, at times it even reminds one of Nietzsche's philosophy of the Eternal Return: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain

and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!"

The silence of the international community over the ethnic cleansing of the minority communities in Myanmar, and in the heydays, their bolstering trade tied with the Myanmar military held business conglomerates and holdings—some countries have also directly invested in the economic zones in Myanmar, built on lands once belonging to the now uprooted Rohingya—have empowered them with not only the acknowledgment but also economic resources to carry on with their nefarious activities.

In addition, the inaction of the majority during the persecution of the minority communities has also added to the Tatmadaw's power. The communal divide within Myanmar has created just the right environment for the military to continue to belligerently violate the basic human rights of its people.

The Tatmadaw has turned into a monster—a Wendigo to be specific—that is now feeding on its own people to quench its insatiable craving for human flesh. And now this monster cannot be controlled, neither with sanctions nor any other form of threats from external actors. The only way this monster can be contained is by creating a united internal front against it. It is only the people of Myanmar—majority and minority alike, irrespective of religion or ethnicity—united together that can put up a resistance against the crimes of this monster and put an end to its killing spree. That is the only way out for the civilians.

But the question remains, can the people of Myanmar rise above their communal rifts for the greater benefit of the nation, of the future generations? Only time will tell.

Tasneem Tayeb is a columnist for The Daily Star. Her Twitter handle is @tasneem\_tayeb



The Tatmadaw not only unleashed a bloody nightmare on the civilians but also ensured that they do not get access to medical care, as they attacked hospitals and medical staff tending to the injuries of the protestors.

PHOTO: REUTERS

raids—in which the military has not only been firing artillery at the locals but also dropping bombs—have led to the displacement of more than 4,200 Karen people, who fled to Thailand. Unofficial estimates put the figure at nearly 10,000. Some shells even fell on the Thai side, according to The Irrawaddy news site.

The Tatmadaw, in a swift coup d'état, ousted the democratically elected government of National League for Democracy led by Aung

San Suu Kyi, in the early hours of February 1, 2021. Since then, the country has been embroiled in a bloody struggle between the usurpers and the civilians calling for the return of democracy. At least 1,300 protesters and civilians have been killed since then, as conflicts between the two parties continue, according to data from Assistance Association for Political Prisoners—a Thailand and Myanmar based human rights organisation—as cited by UK-based news outlet The Independent.

Township, whose brother, brother-in-law and nephew had been brutally murdered by the notorious Myanmar military—also known as the Tatmadaw—told the BBC during an investigation.

In July this year, the Tatmadaw had gone on a revenge-killing spree in the Keni Township—a stronghold of sorts for the forces opposed to the ruling military junta. The People's Defence Force, a militia of civilian groups fighting for democracy, had earlier intensified their anti-military activities in the area, including clashes with the soldiers. The outcome was the Tatmadaw's ruthless and brutal mass killing of the locals of the township. In multiple attacks in July 2021, the Myanmar soldiers had gone from door to door in four villages—Yin, Zee Bin Dwin, Taungbauk and Shikoet forest—rounding up the men, torturing them with rifle butts, beating them up with stones, and then burying their mutilated bodies, at times in half-alive state, in shallow graves.

At least 40 corpses have been recovered from mass graves in the four villages, including a small body, most likely that of a child. Among the murdered was a 60-year-old man, who had been tied to a plum tree and tortured for hours—the numerous marks on his lifeless body a testament to the unspeakable horrors he had to endure in his final hours. Some of the soldiers involved in the bloody killings were as young as 17-18. The Myanmar military junta did not deny the allegations, saying, "It can happen. . . When they treat us as enemies, we have the right to defend ourselves." The comment of General Zaw Min Tun, Myanmar's

## Circularity in SMEs: The what, why, and how



MD SHAH JALAL

**T**HE world is being plagued by a global pandemic, climate change, biodiversity loss, rising demand for food and scarcity of natural resources, to name a few. Our irresponsible consumption and production are the root causes of humanity's multifarious problems.

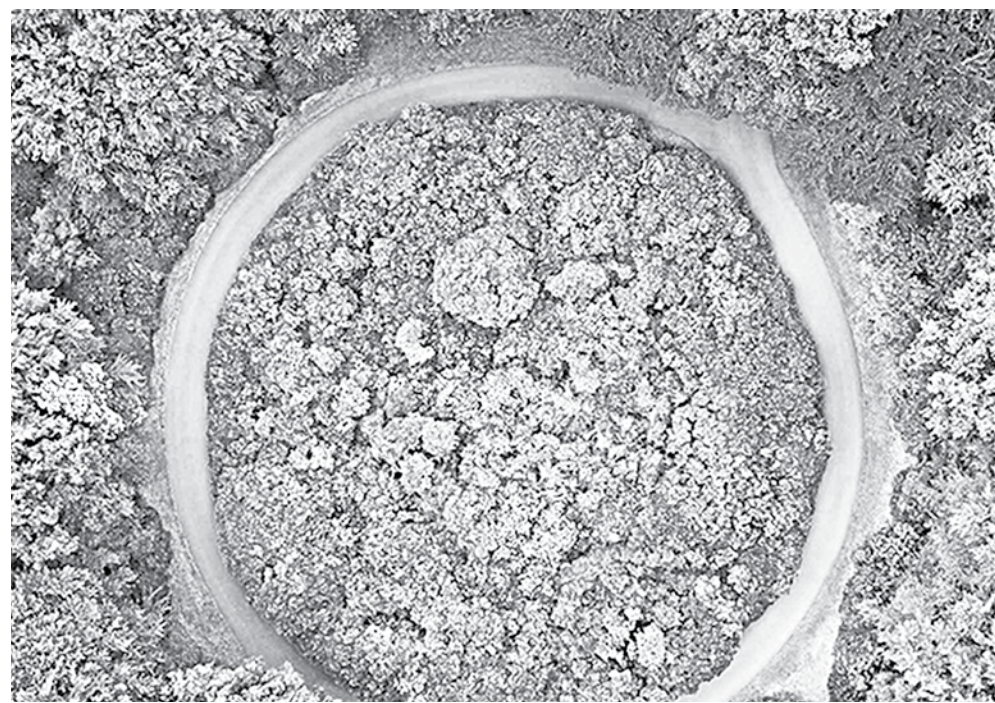
in our consumption and production process. Surely, it will help us achieve not just SDG-12 but also the other SDGs.

Numerous economic entities are involved in our consumption and production process. All economic actors need to embrace circular thinking to unleash the power of a circular economy in terms of socio-economic and environmental benefits. The World Bank (WB) estimates that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for more than 90 percent of businesses worldwide. According to the BBS Economic Enterprise Census 2013, SMEs (including cottage and micro-businesses) account for more than 99 percent of all enterprises in Bangladesh. Hence, SMEs have a crucial role in implementing a carbon-neutral circular economy as an integral part of our economy.

SMEs have enormous economic and environmental impacts as a group, though individually, their impacts are small in most cases. Moreover, SMEs have vertical and horizontal linkages with large enterprises. Such connections make SMEs strategically important to a true circular transition.

Generally, being more malleable than their larger counterparts, SMEs are more likely to adopt circular business practices. Nevertheless, SMEs face many capacity constraints because of their size, whereas the capacities of large enterprises facilitate the acceptance of and realisation of returns from a circular economy-based business model. Some critical limitations include limited access to finance, lack of knowledge and understanding of the circular economy, the dearth of technical and managerial capacity, and the absence of an SME-friendly regulatory framework.

Of course, there is no single way to support SMEs to surmount these obstacles. Through collective transition efforts, SMEs can integrate circularity into their operations; all they need to know is what, why, and how to do so. This is where business leaders, financiers, policymakers, international



The circular economy is a model of consumption and production that focuses on reducing, refurbishing, recycling, and reusing resources—benefiting both the economy and the environment.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

development agencies, and other stakeholders come in.

In most instances, large corporations can finance the circular transition internally through their retained earnings or other internal sources of finance, whereas SMEs are often dependent on external financing to design, manufacture, and use products in a circular way. Unfortunately, many a financier aren't acclimated to the correct assessment of the risks and opportunities associated with circular project financing. By formulating a circular economy financing strategy to improve understanding and knowledge of circular economy concepts among banks and other financial institutions, we can bridge the

financing gap in SME circular projects.

Thanks to technological advances in both recycling and upcycling, we have an opportunity to leapfrog to a circular economy now. However, because of the upfront costs of installing circular technologies, most SMEs may not find it financially feasible to overhaul their current linear business models. That is why we need to make technologies more accessible and affordable for SMEs to redesign their manufacturing processes to increase reuse of industrial waste potential and recyclability.

We all know that SMEs, particularly start-up SMEs, are receptive to new ideas and innovations. Initiating reforms in the ease

of doing business will help attract foreign direct investment (FDI) as well as circular management skills and expertise from multinational enterprises to our local SME landscape.

A regulatory framework for the circular economy is imperative. Policymakers should come up with a streamlined and SME-friendly regulatory framework to promote circularity practices among our SMEs. For instance, we may reward eco-inclusive SMEs through tax breaks, subsidies, and other financial incentives for a systemic transformation.

Finally, to foster the uptake of circularity systems among SMEs, awareness of the circular economy is a must. Appropriate policy initiatives to raise awareness about responsible consumption and production will invigorate the acceptance of circular business models among SMEs. Finland, a global frontrunner in the circular economy, has already taken such an initiative—called the "Program for the Promotion of Low-Carbon, Circular Economy and Digital Transformation", to encourage SMEs to accept circular economic approaches.

Bangladesh is one of the world's fastest booming economies, and it is anticipated to double its USD 409 billion economy by 2030, aiming to become a higher middle-income country. Concomitantly, our stellar economic growth is intertwined with sustainability challenges. As a country that has a pivotal role to play in the climate change debate, Bangladesh must make solid strides in transforming into a circular economy. Otherwise, we will be one of Asia's largest carbon emitters while being a higher middle-income country by 2030, which is inconsistent with our zero-carbon growth stance. So, let's walk the path of circularity by supporting our SMEs to ensure inclusive and sustainable development and prosperity.

Md Shah Jalal is a senior SME credit analyst and credit approver at IDLC Finance Limited. Email: shahjalal248@gmail.com

### QUOTABLE Quote



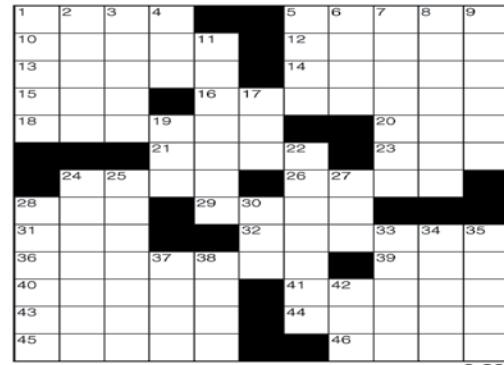
JOAN DIDION  
American writer (1934 - 2021)

*The willingness to accept responsibility for one's own life is the source from which self-respect springs.*

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- |                          |                       |                            |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b>            | 31 ___ loss           | 7 Intolerant group         |
| 1 Flank                  | 32 Burrowing rodent   | 8 Broad streets            |
| 5 Scarecrow fill         | 36 Pet rodent         | 9 In a tight spot, perhaps |
| 10 School events         | 39 Pub pint           | 11 Healing aids            |
| 12 Head out              | 40 Similar            | 17 Moose's kin             |
| 13 Incurred, as debt     | 41 Aisle walker       | 19 Outlaw                  |
| 14 Had a curving path    | 43 1998 De Niro movie | 22 Soaks up                |
| 15 Skater Midori         | 44 Quite full         | 24 Buyer's guide           |
| 16 Migrating rodent      | 45 Deal maker         | 25 Look over               |
| 18 Desert rodent         | 46 Lean and sinewy    | 27 Pharaoh's symbol        |
| 20 Be litigious          |                       | 28 African expanse         |
| 21 "My Way" writer       | <b>DOWN</b>           | 30 Candle count            |
| 23 Talking bear of films | 1 Parsley unit        | 33 Port-au-Prince's nation |
| 24 Mint product          | 2 Seething            | 34 Church leader           |
| 26 Game fish             | 3 Generous person     | 35 Frail                   |
| 28 Jazz instrument       | 4 Aussie bird         | 37 Tattoo site             |
| 29 Lip                   | 5 Close with a bang   | 38 Circus setting          |
|                          | 6 Semester            | 42 Unrefined               |

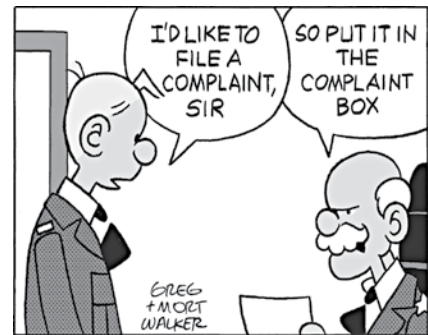
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### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

C L O S E D A J A R  
D E L E T E T A C O  
S E D U C E O C T O  
S H R A N K  
T A B S N O B L E  
I L L R E D F L A G  
A L A O L E A N Y  
R E C A L L S C A P  
A N K L E S K I T  
J E S U I T  
S C A R P R O B E S  
P A C T T O R E R O  
A R K S O N E D A Y

### BETLE BAILEY



### BY MORT WALKER



### BABY BLUES



### BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT





Runners participate in the 'Karachi Green Marathon' organized by the municipal corporation to promote environmental awareness in Karachi, Pakistan, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

MISSILE ATTACK BY HOUTHİ REBELS INSİDE SAUDI ARABİA

# Coalition launches 'large-scale' Yemen operation

AFP, Riyadh

The Saudi-led coalition yesterday launched a "large-scale" assault on Yemen after missiles fired by Iran-backed Houthi rebels killed two people in the kingdom, the first such deaths in three years.

The Huthis warned Yemen's oil-rich northern neighbour of a "painful" response if the coalition does not stop its "aggression" against the conflict-riven country.

Yemen has been wracked by civil war since 2014 pitting the internationally recognised government supported by the Saudi-led military coalition against the Huthis who control much of the north.

Tens of thousands of people have since been killed, in what the UN has described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The latest violence came overnight when two people -- one Saudi and the other Yemeni -- were killed in the projectile attack on Jazan, said Saudi's civil defence.

"A military projectile fell on a commercial store on the main street, resulting in two deaths," it said, adding six Saudis and a Bangladeshi national were wounded.

Images from the official Saudi Press Agency purportedly of the aftermath of the attack showed a large crater in the ground and destroyed vehicles.

The Saudi-led coalition said shortly afterwards that it was "preparing for a large-scale military operation". It later launched



an air strike in which "three civilians including a child and a woman were killed, and six others were wounded", Yemeni medics told AFP.

The coalition will hold a news conference today to address the latest developments, the Saudi authorities said.

Earlier Houthi spokesman Yahya Saree said the rebels had launched three ballistic missiles on Jazan, a southern region of the kingdom bordering Yemen.

The insurgents often launch missiles and drones into Saudi Arabia, targeting its airports and oil infrastructure. The latest was the first in more than three years that has resulted in fatalities in the kingdom, which recorded its first death from a Houthi missile attack when a missile struck Riyadh in 2018.

It also comes as fighting between the two sides intensifies, with the coalition ramping air strikes on Sanaa.

PROTEST MARCH AGAINST MILITARY RULE IN SUDAN

# Tear gas fired, internet cut

REUTERS, Khartoum

Sudanese security forces fired tear gas to disperse protesters in the capital Khartoum yesterday as the opponents of military rule marched towards the presidential palace, a Reuters witness said, while internet services in the city were also cut.

It is the 10th day of major demonstrations since an Oct. 25 coup, with protests continuing even after Abdallah Hamdok was reinstated as prime minister on Nov. 21. The demonstrators have demanded that the military have no role in government during a transition to free elections.

In neighbouring Omdurman yesterday, security forces also fired tear gas at protesters around 2 km away from a bridge connecting the city to central Khartoum, another Reuters witness said.

Internet services were disrupted in the capital, Khartoum, and soldiers blocked roads early in the day, the witnesses said.



Locals were also unable to make or receive calls domestically.

Despite the internet being cut off, people were still able to post on social media, with images showing protests taking place in several other cities including Madani and Atbara.

At the same time, soldiers and Rapid Support Forces were out in force blocking roads leading to bridges

linking Khartoum with Omdurman, its sister city across the Nile river, they said.

The SUNA state news agency reported that the province of Khartoum closed bridges on Friday evening in anticipation of the protests.

UN Special Representative to Sudan Volker Perthes urged Sudanese authorities not to stand in the way of yesterday's planned demonstrations.

"Freedom of expression is a human right. This includes full access to the Internet. According to international conventions, no one should be arrested for intent to protest peacefully," Perthes said.

The military could not immediately be reached for comment.

A march planned for Saturday is due to converge on the presidential palace and the demonstration will end at 5:00 pm (1500 GMT), organisers say.

Forty-eight people have been killed in crackdowns on protests since the coup, the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors said.

# Won't enrich uranium beyond 60pc if talks fail

Says Tehran ahead of resumption of nuke talks

AFP, Tehran

Iran has no plans to enrich uranium beyond 60 percent if nuclear talks in Vienna fail, the head of the country's atomic agency said yesterday.

Atomic Energy Organization of Iran director Mohammad Eslami said the enrichment levels were related to the needs of the country, in remarks published by the Russian news agency RIA Novosti.

"Our targets related to enriching uranium are meeting our industrial and production needs... and those of our people," he was quoted as saying.

Asked whether Iran plans to enrich beyond 60 percent purity if the talks fail, he said "No".

Eslami was speaking ahead of the resumption on Monday of talks in Vienna aimed at reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Iran's arch-rival Israel, which staunchly opposes the nuclear deal, had reportedly warned in November that the Islamic republic had taken the technical steps to prepare to enrich uranium to military-

grade levels of around 90 percent.

Tehran insists its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes.

The 2015 deal offered Iran relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear programme, but was derailed in 2018 when the US unilaterally withdrew under then president Donald Trump.

Other parties to the deal have taken part in the talks, but the United States has only engaged indirectly.

While the US and its Western allies have repeatedly called on Iran to offer assurances on its nuclear programme, Tehran has insisted sanctions must be lifted first.

US negotiator Rob Malley on Tuesday warned of a "period of escalating crisis" if diplomacy failed to restore the agreement.

In his interview with RIA Novosti, Eslami said Iran's nuclear activities comply with the regulations of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency.

The IAEA recently expressed concerns over Iran's stockpile of highly-enriched uranium, however.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



DECEMBER 26

**1492** - 1st Spanish settlement La Navidad in the New World is founded by Christopher Columbus (modern Môle-Saint-Nicolas in Haiti).

**2004** - An earthquake measuring 9.15 struck off the west coast of northern Sumatra, unleashing a tsunami that crashed into Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India and left nearly 230,000 people dead with over 43,000 missing.

SOURCE: REUTERS

# 'Let's Go Brandon'

Caller taunts Biden during White House Christmas event

AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden was trolled by a caller Friday who said "Let's Go Brandon" -- a coded insult that has become a rallying cry for supporters of Donald Trump -- during a White House Christmas Eve event.

The incident, which quickly went viral online, took place after Biden and First Lady Jill Biden spoke by video conference with North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) officials, who track Santa's travel across the globe.

After being assured of St Nick's progress, the president fielded calls from several American families.

One man identified himself as "Jared," a father of four. Biden spoke briefly with the caller's children, asking what presents they wanted for Christmas and telling them they needed to be in bed before midnight. He also remarked on how he and Jared both had sons named Hunter.

Wrapping up the call, Biden wished Jared a "wonderful Christmas."

"I hope you guys have a wonderful Christmas as well, Merry Christmas, and let's go Brandon!" Jared replied.

"Let's go Brandon, I agree," returned Biden, without reacting to the dig. It was not immediately clear if the president

had understood the reference, though Jill Biden chuckled uncomfortably and rolled her eyes.

Biden asked Jared where he was calling from, but by then the call had been disconnected. A clip of the moment spread widely on social media, with some praising the president for his calm response.

"Let's Go Brandon" is a euphemism for a vulgar insult that originated when a reporter at a NASCAR event misheard a chant of "F- Joe Biden" while interviewing driver Brandon Brown in September.

Since then it has been taken up as a political slogan by supporters of Trump, Biden's predecessor.

Trump had his own headline-grabbing Christmas Eve moment when, in 2018, he raised doubts about Santa's existence in a call with a seven-year-old boy.

"Are you still a believer in Santa Claus? 'Cuz at seven it's marginal, right?" he said.

The Santa tracker presented by NORAD dates to 1955, when a Colorado newspaper advertisement misprinted a phone number to connect children with Santa and mistakenly directed them to the military nerve center hotline.

# Libya urged to reschedule presidential polls 'swiftly'

AFP, London

The US and four European powers on Friday urged war-torn Libya to quickly set a new date for delayed presidential elections.

In a joint statement, they urged the North African country's leaders to "swiftly" name a new date and issue the final list of presidential candidates, which had been a key point of contention in the run-up to the polls that were set for Friday.

"We call on the relevant Libyan authorities to respect the aspirations of the Libyan people for prompt elections," said Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the United States.

The authorities overseeing the country's first-ever presidential election said earlier this week that holding it on Friday as scheduled would be "impossible".

The vote was intended to mark a fresh start for the oil-rich country, a year after a landmark ceasefire and more than a decade after its 2011 revolt that toppled and killed dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

But speculation of a delay had been mounting for weeks. There were bitter disputes over the vote's legal basis, the powers of the winner and the candidacies of several deeply divisive figures.

The country's electoral commission has suggested rescheduling the vote to January 24, but it remains to be seen whether agreement can be reached among divided institutions.

Libya's parliament is to meet on Monday to debate a new timeline.

Another key issue will be the mandate of the current interim government, which was meant to end Friday with the elections.



A family asks for alms along a highway in Surigao City, Surigao del Norte province yesterday, more than a week after Super Typhoon Rai devastated the province.

PHOTO: AFP

# 'We still have hope'

Philippine typhoon survivors wish for roofs and food at Christmas

AFP, Alegria

Father Ricardo Virtudazo stands in a pool of water in his typhoon-hit church in the southern Philippines

delivering Christmas Day mass to dozens of devotees whose wishes this year were for new roofs, food and fine weather.

More than a week after Typhoon Rai cut a swathe through the archipelago, killing nearly 400 people and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless, survivors clung to family and faith after their homes -- and planned festivities -- were wiped out.

"What's important is all of us are safe," said Joy Parera, 31, attending Christmas mass with her husband at San Isidro Labrador Parish church in the town of Alegria, on the northern tip of Mindanao island.

A light rain soaked the pews and white tiled floor of the damaged

church, which has been left with a gaping hole in the roof after Rai ravaged the area.

Devotees wore masks as they gathered inside the church festooned with Christmas decorations and prayed for a better year.

"We still have hope," Virtudazo told AFP. "In spite of the calamities they experience, they still have faith in God."

Christmas is one of the most important events in the Christian calendar and in the Catholic-majority Philippines, families typically gather to share a meal.

But the widespread destruction caused by Rai in the southern and central regions of the country has dampened celebrations as many survivors plead for drinking water and food.

Mindanao, Siargao, Dinagat and Bohol islands are among the most

devastated by the storm, which knocked out electricity, tore off roofs, shredded wooden buildings, felled concrete power poles and uprooted trees.

The scale of the damage, lack of mobile phone signal or internet in many areas, and depleted government coffers after the Covid-19 response were hampering efforts to distribute aid.

Nardel Vicente said his Christmas wish was for someone to help him buy a new roof for his house in Alegria after it was wrecked by Rai, which hit the country on December 16 as a super typhoon.

Jobless and with little money to spare, Vicente said his family would not be able to prepare a festive meal this year.

But he added: "That's ok -- we're alive. It's better than welcoming Christmas with a dead loved one."



# MERRY CHRISTMAS

(From Left, clockwise) A child runs towards a man dressed as Santa Claus in a slum of Iraq's southern city of Basra, Iraq; people wearing Santa Claus costumes surf at Cocoa Beach, Florida, US; and people wearing Santa hats take part in a laughter yoga session during Christmas celebrations on a beach in Mumbai, India, yesterday. Commercial airlines around the world canceled more than 4,500 flights over the Christmas weekend, as billions around the world again marked Christmas under the shadow of the coronavirus.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS



## MILITARY OPERATION IN MYANMAR'S KAYAH STATE

# 30 killed, 'bodies burnt'

Say reports; rights groups condemn brutal killings

REUTERS

More than 30 people, including women and children, were killed and their bodies burnt in Myanmar's conflict-torn Kayah state on Friday, according to a local resident, media reports and a local human rights group.

Karenni Human Rights Group said they found the burnt bodies of internally displaced people, including elders, women and children killed by the military that rules Myanmar, near Mo So village of Hpruso town yesterday.

"We strongly denounce the inhumane and brutal killing which violates human rights," the group said in a Facebook post.

The Myanmar military said it had shot and killed an unspecified number of "terrorists with weapons" from the opposition armed forces in the village, state media said. The people were in seven vehicles and did not stop for the military, it said.

The Myanmar military could not immediately be reached for comment.

Photos shared by the human rights group and local media showed the charred remains of bodies on burnt-out truckbeds.

The Karenni National Defence Force, one of the largest of several civilian militias

opposing the junta that led a Feb. 1 coup, said the dead were not their members but civilians seeking refuge from the conflict.

"We were so shocked at seeing that all the dead bodies were different sizes, including children, women and old people," a commander from group told Reuters, asking not to be named.

A villager who asked not to be named for security reasons said he was aware of the fire on Friday night but could not go to the scene as there was shooting.

"I went to see this morning. I saw dead bodies that had been burnt, and also the clothes of children and women spread around," he told Reuters by phone.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military overthrew the elected government of Nobel Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi almost 11 months ago, claiming fraud in a November election that her party had won.

Civilians enraged by the coup and subsequent crackdown on protesters have been taking up arms. Many local resistance forces have sprung up across the country.

The military has outlawed many opponents, labelling them traitors or terrorists, including a self-proclaimed National Unity Government that seeks to lobby the international community and prevent the junta from consolidating power.



## MALAYSIA FLOODS

# Death toll rises to 46

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The death toll from Malaysia's worst floods in years rose to 46 yesterday, with five people still missing, officials said, as work crews continued a massive clean-up on Christmas day.

Days of torrential rain caused rivers to overflow last weekend, swamping cities, cutting off major roads, and forcing tens of thousands of people to flee their homes.

Selangor -- Malaysia's most densely populated and wealthiest state, encircling the capital Kuala Lumpur -- has been one of the worst-hit areas.

The Southeast Asian nation is hit by floods annually during the monsoon season, from November to February, but those at the weekend were the worst since 2014.

Global warming has been linked to worsening floods. Because a warmer atmosphere holds more water, climate change increases the risk and intensity of flooding from extreme rainfall.

## Russia blocks rights monitor website

Accuses it of promoting 'terrorism' and 'extremism'

AFP, Moscow

Russia has blocked the website of a rights monitor tracking political persecution, saying it promoted terrorism and extremism, amid an unprecedented official crackdown on dissent.

The move comes in a year that has seen the opposition dismantled and scores of independent media and rights groups branded as "foreign agents" or banned outright.

OVD-Info, which tracks opposition protests and also provides legal support to victims of political persecution, said the Roskomnadzor media regulator had blocked its website earlier this week.

"At the moment, we have not received a notice and do not know the reason for being blocked," the group tweeted.

A Roskomnadzor registry of blocked websites showed that a Moscow region court had issued a ruling dated December 20 to "limit" access to the site.

The website was not accessible by AFP journalists in Russia yesterday.

Later, Russian news agencies cited Roskomnadzor as confirming that it had blocked OVD-Info's website because the Moscow region court had ruled that the group's activities were aimed at promoting "terrorism and extremism" in Russia. Roskomnadzor added that it had sent "demands" to social media networks to "delete the organisation's accounts".

The pressure on social media companies to remove OVD-Info from their platforms comes after a Moscow court on Friday slapped Google with an unprecedented fine of nearly \$100 million, while Meta (formerly Facebook) received a fine of \$27 million for failing to remove banned content.

## 'Value the little things in life'

Pope calls for dialogue, humility in Christmas message



AFP, Vatican City

Pope Francis yesterday urged dialogue on both personal and political levels as he celebrated a second Christmas under the shadow of a coronavirus pandemic that was pushing people into isolation.

In his traditional Urbi and Orbi Christmas Day message to the faithful gathered in St Peter's Square at the Vatican, the pontiff also deplored that the "immense tragedies" in Syria, Yemen and Iraq were "being passed over in silence" and cautioned against fresh violence in the simmering conflict in Ukraine.

Around the world, "we continue to witness a great number of conflicts, crises and disagreements. These never seem to end; by now we hardly even notice them. We have become so used to them that immense tragedies are now being passed over in silence," he said.

On Friday, the Pope called on the faithful to value the "little things in life" and show solidarity with the poor in his Christmas Eve mass in St. Peter's Basilica.

The 85-year-old Argentinian pontiff recalled the shepherds in the tale of the nativity, who lived modestly and were witness to the birth of Jesus.

"That is where Jesus is born: close to them, close to the forgotten ones of the peripheries. He comes where human dignity is put to the test."

He called for people to seek out "littleness" -- in "our daily lives, the things we do each day at home, in our families, at school and in the workplace".

"Jesus asks us to rediscover and value the little things in life," he said.

Francis, formerly the Archbishop of Buenos Aires Jorge Mario Bergoglio, called for more solidarity with those living in poverty.

## 'Putin wants to destroy Ukraine'

AFP, Kiev

Russian President Vladimir Putin is bent on destroying Ukraine but there is no major risk of an imminent invasion, a senior Ukrainian security official said on Friday.

Speaking to AFP in an interview, Oleksiy Danilov, secretary of the National Security and Defence Council, said that talk of Moscow's invasion could destabilise Ukraine and play into Putin's hands.

"Putin wants to destroy our country. Will he succeed? No, he will not," said Danilov.

"Our citizens will protect our country," he said, adding that both the army and civilians will form a broad national "resistance" movement if Russia attacks.

"We are going to protect our country. Full stop."

Tensions have been building since mid-November when Washington sounded the alarm over a massive Russian troop build-up on Ukraine's border and accused Putin of plotting an invasion.

But Danilov, 59, downplayed the risk of a major military escalation, saying Ukrainian officials have not seen any "critical build-up."

According to Kiev's estimates, the number of Russian troops along Ukraine's borders has increased from around 93,000 troops in October to 104,000 now.

"We don't think this is a big surge," Danilov said.

## Iran: Drills in Gulf warning to Israel

REUTERS

War games conducted this week by Iran in the Gulf were intended to send a warning to Israel, the country's top military commanders said on Friday, amid concerns over possible Israeli plans to target Iranian nuclear sites.

The Revolutionary Guards' war games included firing ballistic and cruise missiles. State television showed missiles flattening a target which resembled Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor at the conclusion of the exercises on Friday.

"Through a simulation of the Dimona atomic facilities, the Revolutionary Guards successfully practiced attacking this critical centre of the Zionist regime in its missile exercise," the semi-official news agency Tasnim said.

"These exercises had a very clear message: a serious, real ... warning to threats by the Zionist regime's authorities to beware of their mistakes," Guards chief General Hossein Salami said on state TV.

"We will cut off their hands if they make a wrong move. ... The distance between actual operations and military exercises is only a change in the angles of launching the missiles," Salami added.

Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri said 16 ballistic missiles of different classes had been fired simultaneously and had destroyed predetermined targets.

Britain condemned the launch of ballistic missiles during the war games.

"These actions are a threat to regional and international security, and we call on Iran to immediately cease its activities," the Foreign Office said in a statement.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Saeed Khatibzadeh, rejected the British statement as "meddling in Iran's defensive capacity," state media said.

Iran says its ballistic missiles have a range of 2,000 km and are capable of reaching arch-foe Israel and U.S. bases in the region.

Iran has one of the biggest missile programmes in the Middle East, regarding such weapons as an important deterrent and retaliatory force against US and other adversaries in the event of war.

Israel, which opposes efforts by world powers to revive Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal, has long threatened military action if diplomacy fails. Iran says its nuclear ambitions are peaceful.

Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz has called on world powers not to allow Iran to play for time at the nuclear negotiations, in recess at Iran's request and scheduled to resume next Monday.

Israel is widely believed to be the only Middle Eastern country with a nuclear arsenal.



Missiles are launched during a joint exercise called the 'Great Prophet 17', in the southwest of Iran. Picture was taken on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

## SPORT

## Fed Cup fiasco brings to fore myriad conflicts of interest

ATIQUÉ ANAM



The Federation Cup descended into farce on Friday after the defending champions Bashundhara Kings declined to participate, explaining their position to the game's local governing body 24 hours before the start of the tournament.

They found Muktiyoddha Sangsad as a spiritual ally and ahead of the scheduled kick-off, Uttar Baridhara and a number of other clubs joined the bandwagon of withdrawal as both the scheduled matches on Saturday -- Bashundhara Kings v Swadhinata KS and Uttar Baridhara v Abahani -- did not see the ball roll.

This was an embarrassment in waiting for the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) even though it probably did not anticipate the rebellion would come from one of its own -- the Bashundhara Kings, a club owned by the Bashundhara Group, title sponsors of the tournament, and helmed by Imrul Hasan, one of its vice-presidents.

The premise for withdrawal of the most glamorous club in current football scene was a valid one as their appeal to shift the venue from the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium, a venue which witnessed a number of serious injuries during the Independence Cup earlier this month, fell on deaf ears. What was more disturbing to Kings was the last-minute tweaking of the tournament fixtures, allegedly aimed at giving advantage to another club.

"We thought that the changes in fixture format was done to give advantage to a specific team. These sorts of events occurred many times before including in the Independence Cup. We had pent up grievance over time and our withdrawal was a reaction to that," Imrul told media, citing other issues where he felt the BFF was biased and hoping this 'jolt' would help make BFF and its competitions committee more professional and honest in future.

BFF's senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy appeared at an impromptu press conference at the venue in the evening, making a brave face and appearing adamant not to bow

to the demands of the clubs.

"The Federation Cup will continue. If the scheduled matches don't take place tomorrow [Sunday], then we will see. Those who haven't come have made mistakes. Everything will go as per the bylaws of the tournament," Murshedy, also the chairman of the professional league committee, told reporters.

Whether Imrul and the revolting clubs had more weight in their arguments than the BFF is a matter of argument, but there is no denying that the points raised by the Kings exposed an age-old issue of our domestic football: conflict of interest. And that there are not just one or two cases of conflicts, in fact the structure of our domestic football is riddled with multiple such cases.

For a starter, there is a weird case of such conflict regarding this very tournament, namely the Bashundhara Group Federation Cup. Isn't this quite unheard of that a major group of companies of the country sponsors a tournament where one of its clubs are title contenders? Can we rule out any undue

partiality from some other clubs including Sheikh Jamal DC in the past and Police FC more recently -- are to be true. When the president of a top-tier club also acts as a vice-president of the federation, aren't such questions and suspicions obvious?

While Imrul did not take any names, it is not hard to imagine that he was pointing his finger at Abahani, the club purportedly the subject of the tweak in fixture and one that is helmed by one of his colleagues at the BFF.

These are some of the issues that have been swept under the carpet for far too long, stunting the growth of domestic football. In the past, we've seen cases of match-fixing proved, albeit after initially being denied by the federation and some small-time culprits bearing the brunt. However, almost never have the bigger beneficiaries been brought to book. To remind of the old adage, it takes two to tango.

Sadly, this chain of conflict of interest and power-mongering isn't just limited to club football, but also extends to the national team.

Despite repeated promises from the higher-



influence in course of the tournament, not just in results but also in case of decision-making?

It's like Banco Santander running Real Madrid in La Liga or TIM sponsoring Juventus in Serie A, for that matter, which obviously don't happen since those leagues are run in a truly professional manner.

While both Imrul and Murshedy rejected the idea that a conflict of interest could arise from such a situation, the power-mongering from Bashundhara Kings in this instance -- unilaterally walking out of the tournament and reportedly influencing a few other clubs to follow them -- only points in that direction.

The Kings president spoke of the injustice against his team and a bias towards another specific club. Interestingly, his club has been the beneficiary of such bias -- if allegations of

ups of the game's local governing body, we are yet to see a non-club-executive in the national team manager's post. When the manager or the coach of the national team comes from yielding his power in recruiting and managing/coaching players of a certain club, yielding substantial influence over the players and developing personal choices round the year, isn't there likely to be an impact when making decisions over picking and commanding the national team?

Now that the BFF has taken a strong stance and the clubs appearing adamant not to budge, it will be interesting to see what the revolt will lead to eventually. Even if the BFF accommodates some space and take steps to correct what is intrinsically a faulty system, then we could expect to see at least some of the mess in our domestic football cleaned up.



## An error 'never seen' before

AGENCIES

On the penultimate ball of the Hobart Hurricanes' innings in the Big Bash League on Friday night in Hobart, Tim David knew he needed to get back on strike to face the final delivery.

He was the one with runs on the board compared to his partner Nathan Ellis, who was still stuck on nought.

David smacked a ball down to Stars skipper Glenn Maxwell who was fielding at deep mid-wicket, with the Victorian sprinting to pick up the ball and hurl it into the wicketkeeper.

Maxwell's throw didn't make it before David had returned to the crease but, much to Maxwell's confusion, the umpires then stopped to deliberate.

Upon review, David had been a little too

eager in his efforts to return to the striker's end and placed his bat well short of the crease at the other end of the wicket.

Maxwell continued to remain unaware as to what was happening until the commentary team of Adam Gilchrist and Michael Vaughan informed him of David's error.

The Victorian responded: "I thought I should have run him out!"

Gilchrist and Vaughan were perplexed at David's oversight, which ultimately cost the Hurricanes five runs and gifted the Stars that same value of

runs to begin their innings without facing a ball. Upon consulting the rule book, Gilchrist and Vaughan were in agreement of the umpire's decision. Gilchrist didn't think David's incident was a great look for the sport.



Organisers and sponsors speak at a press conference at the BFF House regarding the National Women's Football Championship, which began at six venues of the country yesterday with 47 district teams and Bangladesh Ansar taking part.

PHOTO: BFF



## Can Siddons mould another batch?

SPORTS REPORTER



Over ten years after his departure as Bangladesh's head coach, Jamie Siddons' impact on improving Bangladesh's batting unit is still remembered by the likes of Tamim Iqbal, Shakib Al Hasan and others who benefited during the infancy of their international careers.

It was current ODI skipper Tamim who insisted the board rope in Siddons once again and the 52-year-old's inclusion as batting consultant is expected to help out a struggling batting order which remains the biggest areas of concern across the formats.

From working on Shakib's backlift to help him better tackle express fast bowlers to bringing consistency to a young stroke-maker like Tamim, Siddons had a significant impact in the batting unit during his tenure as head coach from 2007 to 2011.

But it will be a different role this time around for the Australian, with the board likely to utilise Siddons more in the developmental stages in order to improve the batting skills of upcoming national-side players.

"He came as head coach back in 2007 and it has been a long time since then but I am sure he has gained a lot of experience during this period. Although he was not successful as a head coach for Bangladesh during that time, players like Shakib, Tamim, Mushfiqur [Rahim] and others benefited hugely from him when it comes to batting," Mohammad Ashraful, who

captained Bangladesh during Siddons' tenure as head coach, said.

However, Bangladesh have been guilty of being unable to get the best from the coaching panel despite roping in big names in the past. According to Ashraful, it will be important for Siddons to work on mental aspects and more as a mentor to youngsters.

"Obviously he will work on the technique of the batters, but I feel that he should also work on the mental aspects a lot more. It is important to work on game situations and the various thought processes of a batsman in different scenarios," Ashraful added.

"How you read the situation as a batsman is very important and it will be important for him to work one-on-one with players. I think he needs to work as an individual mentor because it's not necessary to instill the same technique to everyone."

Known as a tough cricketer during his playing days and a strict character when it comes to professionalism, Siddons has a lot to offer in his second stint with the Tigers.

He may have been criticised for his outspoken nature, be it in the selection process or handling of superiors during the final stages of his tenure as head coach, but according to Ashraful, it is Siddons' immense interest in Bangladesh cricket that will help the Tigers most.

"Obviously Siddons has been following Bangladesh cricket for a long time now and his interest in working here prompted him to take up the job again. I think he will do well and his inclusion will surely benefit Bangladesh cricket," added Ashraful.

## Mahfijul ton helps U-19s to massive win

SPORTS REPORTER



Another century, this time from opener Mahfijul Islam, helped Bangladesh Under-19 get a step closer to the semifinals of the ongoing ACC Under-19 Asia Cup with a thumping 222-run win against Kuwait at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

After Prantik Nawrose Nabil's unbeaten ton on Friday helped the young Tigers thrash Nepal in their opening game, Mahfijul's 119-ball 112 set Bangladesh on course for a massive total yesterday.

Mahfijul's ton and Meherob Hasan's quick-fire knock helped Bangladesh post 291 all out in 49.2 overs before they returned to bundle Kuwait out for a meagre 69 in just 25.3 overs.

With two consecutive wins, Bangladesh sit on top of the four-team table. A win for Sri Lanka in their game against Nepal today will confirm a semifinal spot for the young Tigers.

Yesterday, however, Bangladesh ran into some early trouble after being asked to bat. Opener Iftakher Hossain was removed by Mirza Ahmed for a cheap score early on before Mahfijul and Aich Mollah steadied the ship with an 84-run second-wicket stand.

Mahfijul brought up his fifty off as many deliveries before Aich was dismissed following a steady 20 in the 19th over. Mahfijul stayed firm at one end and stitched together stands of 53 and 44 runs Ariful Islam (23 off 24) and Tahjibul Islam (25 off 19) respectively.

However, Mahfijul could not stay on for long after bringing up his century in the 32nd over. The right-hander, who smashed four maximums and 12 fours, fell to Muhammad Umar in the 36th over.

Following his dismissal, Meherob never let the scoring rate dip, smashing five boundaries and a solitary maximum on way to a 24-ball 42. That knock, coupled with a run-a-ball 21 from skipper Rakibul Hasan, ensured the young Tigers would end with a formidable total.

The dominating batting performance was justly complemented by the bowlers. Led by pacer Ripon Mondol, who scalped three wickets for just 10 runs in an eight-over spell that featured three maidens, Bangladesh never gave Kuwait a chance.

Despite a 77-ball 43 from opener Meet Bhavsar, Kuwait were still bundled out for a low total.



# What to WATCH

**STAR SPORTS HD 1**  
EPL  
Manchester City vs Leicester City  
Live from 09:00 pm  
Aston Villa vs Chelsea  
Live from 11:30 pm

Brighton vs Brentford  
Live from 02:00 am (Monday)  
**STAR SPORTS HD 2**  
EPL  
Tottenham Hotspur vs Crystal Palace

Live from 09:00 pm  
**SONY SIX**  
The Ashes  
Australia vs England  
3rd Test, Day 2  
Live from 5:30 am (Monday)

**DAY'S EVENT**

**BCL**  
South Zone vs Central Zone, Chattogram  
North Zone vs East Zone, Rajshahi

## Tigers drawing inspiration from Wellington Test

SPORTS REPORTER



32 matches across formats and not a single win for Bangladesh away in New Zealand. With such a forgettable history, it always is a hard task for the Tigers to find inspiration ahead any series against the Kiwis in their backyard.

"We played 10 Tests [actually nine Tests] here in New Zealand previously and we do not have a record worth boasting about," team director Khaled Mahmud said from New Zealand in a video message yesterday.

Mahmud is correct. Although there are plenty of notable instances of individual brilliance from the Tigers, one needs to really comb through history to dig up a collective effort worth drawing inspiration from.

However, Mahmud did mention that rare Test upon which the Tigers are looking to improve on in the crucial two-Test series, part of the World Test Championship, starting from January 1.

"The Wellington Test in 2016 (in January 2017) was different. We only lost that game after tea on the final day. We are taking inspiration from that Test. If we were able to declare the innings after scoring 595 for the loss of eight wickets in that game, then we want to do something better this time around," Mahmud added.

In that game, Shakib Al Hasan's 217 and skipper Mushfiqur Rahim's 159 coupled with fifties from Tamim Iqbal, Mominul Haque and Sabbir Rahman helped Bangladesh pile up a mammoth first-innings total that eventually helped them take a 56-run lead in the second innings. That first innings was probably one of the very few occasions when Bangladesh's batters were able to display a collective approach in New Zealand. However, despite taking the game into the last session, a torrid final day and a disappointing batting display in the second innings saw the Tigers lose by seven wickets.

The Tigers, who arrived in Tauranga from Christchurch on Friday, enjoyed a break yesterday. The Mominul Haque-led side will have three more practise sessions and a two-day warm-up game against New Zealand XI on December 28 and 29 before the first Test.



## STARS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

The football world's stars embraced the festivities on the occasion of Christmas, taking to social media to show off decked-out trees surrounded by their loving families. Lionel Messi shared a snap alongside his wife Antonela Rocuzzo while Cristiano Ronaldo went in the other direction, including his ever-expanding family in matching outfits alongside other close relatives. Neymar and Robert Lewandowski also kept their families in focus, with the former posing alongside his son and the latter capturing his wife and two kids in a Kodak moment.

PHOTO : TWITTER

## Conte has no qualms over Kane's attitude

AFP, LONDON

Antonio Conte has said Harry Kane is "totally involved in the Tottenham project" despite a modest start to the season.

Kane was linked with a pre-season move to Manchester City but the deal fell through.

Many pundits felt his failure to join the Premier League champions has contributed to Kane's poor form in the early stages of the campaign -- although England's agonising penalty shoot-out loss to Italy in the Euro 2020 final at Wembley may have played a part as well.

England captain Kane found goals hard to come by when Nuno Espirito Santo, sacked in November and replaced by Conte, was in charge of Tottenham and even now the striker has



scored just nine goals in all competitions this season.

However, he scored a second Premier League goal of the campaign against Liverpool last weekend and the 28-year-old will aim to build on that performance when Spurs are at home to London rivals Crystal Palace on Sunday.

Even so, Kane's returns have been a long way off last season's 23 goals and 14 assists in the Premier League.

"Harry has showed me great availability and showed me (he is) totally involved in the Tottenham project," Conte said Friday.

## Kohli's India seek to conquer FINAL FRONTIER



AGENCIES



Virat Kohli bruised from being fired from India's one-day captain bids to rebound by leading his country to an historic triumph in South Africa in a three-match Test series which starts at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Sunday.

South Africa is the only regular Test-playing nation where India have yet to win a series.

India coach Rahul Dravid has urged his players to seize the chance to claim a first ever Test series win in South Africa, a moment that could be career defining for many in the team.

India have enjoyed recent success in Australia and England, but South Africa remains a mighty challenge for the top ranked Test side, though they will arguably never have had a better chance against a home team going through a transition period and with far less experience than in the past.

"It is a great challenge and a great opportunity for everyone," Dravid told reporters on Saturday. "It is something you look forward to as a batsman, the chance to play away from home and test yourself against

some really good opposition in their home conditions.

"A lot of your career is defined by those sorts of performances, so it is a great opportunity for everyone in the group to put in the performances that are something that they can remember, and people will remember them for."

South African captain Dean Elgar said he thought the teams were evenly matched.

"India are number one in the world for a reason but the fact that we are playing in our own back yard gives us an advantage."

Despite losing to New Zealand in last year's world Test championship final, India are the top-ranked Test team, five places ahead of South Africa, who have lost several key players to retirement in recent years. Kohli leads an experienced side. Crucially, it has the fast-bowling fire power to match South Africa's in conditions which usually favour pace.

No fewer than ten of India's 18-man squad have toured South Africa before.

India vice-captain KL Rahul indicated India were likely to maintain their recent strategy of picking five bowlers, which he

acknowledged would lead to a "very difficult discussion" about settling on five specialist batsmen.

India have the luxury of choosing between capable players in both batting and bowling, while South Africa's options seem limited, especially since fast bowler Anrich Nortje withdrew from the series because of a hip injury.

South Africa will, of necessity, field a batting line-up short of proven quality, with two players in their top six yet to score a Test century, while India may be unable to find a place for Shreyas Iyer, who scored 105 and 65 on debut against New Zealand last month.

South Africa's fast bowling remains their strength but the loss of Nortje is a major blow. Much will depend on former world number one Kagiso Rabada, whose form in the past two years has been moderate.

The hosts will also hope the injury-plagued Lungi Ngidi can recapture the form which enabled him to take 6-39 on debut against India at the same venue in 2017/18.

In South Africa's favour, Centurion has been a fortress for the home side, with 21 wins and only two defeats in 26 Tests at the venue.

## 'Barrel', Boland and the MCG

AGENCIES



Australia have illustrated the depth of their fast bowling stocks by handing Scott Boland a surprise debut in the third Ashes Test against England.

Boland's transformation from a 118kg battling allrounder at Frankston-Peninsula to Australia's second Indigenous male Test cricketer in 144 years completed when Australia dropped a Christmas Day bombshell after confirming Boland will make a dream home Test debut and be given the chance to bowl Australia to Ashes glory at the MCG.

The MCG specialist, who hails from the Gulidjan tribe near Colac in western Victoria, joins Faith Thomas, Jason Gillespie and Ashleigh Gardner as players of Indigenous descent to feature at Test level.

Boland, who played the last of his 17 international limited-overs matches in 2016, has an enviable record at the MCG which, until recent seasons, had a reputation for being a bowlers' graveyard.

The 32-year-old's record of 91 wickets at 25.71 in 26 first-class games at the 'G is impressive given most of his matches there have been on docile, unresponsive surfaces.

Australia skipper Pat Cummins said Boland record at the Melbourne Cricket Ground factored into their thinking.

Boland's 272 first-class wickets have included 42 in his past six games at the 'G at an average of 14.4.

The Victorian set to become first Indigenous man to pull on Baggy Green since Jason Gillespie. "It's huge - 'Dizzy' (Gillespie) was the first. Australia's got a rich history of 50,000-60,000 years and it's great that that's starting to get reflected in our team," Cummins said.

Boland, who wasn't even in the Australian squad last Monday, suddenly has the chance to help achieve this summer's main mission.

It seemed unlikely when the boy nicknamed "Barrel" because of his shape felt embarrassed to remove his shirt in a Victorian dressing room as a 21-year-old.

But Boland shed more than 20kg in the next five years and will proudly pull on the No.19 shirt worn by close mate James Pattinson when he makes history in the horses-for-courses selection shock.

"The only advice I had for him was I think he's wearing my No.19, so I said if you play to the No.19's average on Boxing Day you should get player-of-the-match," Pattinson told News Corp on Christmas Day.

"I think it was 69 with the bat and about 16 with the ball ... he should have a pretty good game."

Pattinson played in Boland's debut for Victoria against Western Australia at the MCG back in 2011.

"When he first came he was a bit bigger, but I've seen how hard he dedicates himself to his fitness," Pattinson said.

"He loves the gym, he gets around with his short shorts and reckons he's got the best legs in the team."

"He always had a really good knack of bowling to the left-handers, but the one thing he wanted to improve on was bowling to the right-handers."

"Over the years he's really done that. He's a smart bowler, he charges in, he doesn't give the batsmen an inch and he's picked up a few yards as well."

Player-of-the-match in the only Marsh Sheffield Shield game held at the MCG so far

this season, Boland would be awarded the Jonny Mullagh Medal (named for the star Aboriginal allrounder from Australia's historic 1868 tour of England) if he was to earn that honour again in his maiden Test.



## 'Players deserve credit for Villa's rise'

LONDON

Steven Gerrard said Friday his players deserved the credit for Aston Villa's climb up the Premier League table since he took charge of the Birmingham club.

Villa had lost five straight league matches and were just two points above the relegation zone when Gerrard left Scottish champions Rangers to replace Dean Smith, sacked as manager in November.

Since Gerrard's arrival at Villa Park, the club have climbed from 16th to 10th and will be bidding for a fifth win in seven league games when they are at home to Chelsea on Sunday.

"I had confidence and belief that we could come in and have the impact that we've had," said Gerrard, who brought several of his coaching staff with him from Glasgow giants Rangers.

"The players deserve the credit for going and carrying those performances out."

The former Liverpool and England captain added: "Once I started talking to Villa, the very first thing I did was look at the fixtures in the short-term."

"There were a lot of fixtures to be excited about, and I think the players have done extremely well in terms of the points return."

Under Gerrard, Villa have beaten Brighton, Crystal Palace, Leicester and Norwich while losing narrowly to title contenders Manchester City and Liverpool.

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# Example of miscarriage of law, order

SIMON ALI

Monoranjan Hajong, the father of traffic police sergeant Mohua Hajong, lost one of his legs after getting hit by a car on December 3 at the capital's Chairman Bari area.

The car was driven by Saif Hasan, the son of a Supreme Court justice.

What transpired after the incident was the perfect example of miscarriage of law and order and the reach of the influential few of the society.

The accused was taken to the police station along with the car from the place where the incident took place, and yet, he was released without facing any kind of action, Jyotirmoy Barua, an advocate of the Supreme Court, told The Daily Star.

"This is highly regrettable." After 14 days, the case was accepted against three "unknown persons".

Two days before, the accused person himself filed a general diary against the victim's family. In the GD, the detailed information of the accused was included.

Despite having this information, the case was filed after 14 days with the mention of unknown perpetrators.

"I can't match the facts. Not taking the case under the name of the accused is a crystal clear example of a criminal offence and it is a violation of professional responsibilities."

He went on to call for departmental action against the officer-in-charge of Banani police station as well as a trial under the criminal law.

"We always say the judicial wing is independent and the

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



A child receiving gifts from Santa Claus on the occasion of Christmas in the capital's Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## BUSINESS

### Govt's borrowing from banks surges

The government's borrowing from the banking sector surged this fiscal year mainly due to the lower investment of general people and firms in national savings tools. The government took loans of Tk 22,344 crore from banks between July 1 and December 14, data from the Bangladesh Bank showed. It borrowed Tk 26,078 crore last fiscal year.

Although the accelerated borrowing is yet to put any adverse impact on the private sector, this may bring about a credit crunch in the banking sector in the coming months if the current trend of public borrowing continues.

STORY ON B1

## RMG THEFT Rab busts another gang red handed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in a drive arrested five alleged burglars of a gang who steal apparel items from a cargo van during the shipment from Dhaka to Chattogram via highway.

They were held from Feni's Chhagalnaiya area on Friday during stealing a covered van that was coming from Dhaka's BIRDS and Z to Chattogram port for foreign shipment.

The arrestee are Md Alamin, 28, Md Nizam, 22, Md Shahzahan, 51, Md Maimul Hasan Asik, 20 and Md Nuran Nabi, said Rab sources.

After Rab was informed of the robbery, a drive was conducted at Chhagalnaiya area's Dhumghat BISIC Industrial area, said Niaz Morshed Chapal, the media officer of Rab-7. The five were held red-handed.

The gang members used to take off the seals of the padlocks on the cargo door, open the cartons and remove some garments items from the bottom of the boxes and resal the cartons back to their original state, he said.

Rab was trying to arrest the other members of the syndicate, he added.

## MIGRANT BOAT ACCIDENTS

### At least 30 killed in Greece

AFP, Athens

Greek coast guards scoured for survivors in the Aegean Sea yesterday after the latest in a series of migrant boat accidents that have killed at least 30 people in just days.

Late Friday, the coastguard found 16 bodies, including those of three women and a baby, and rescued 63 people from a boat that overturned and sank near the island of Paros.

According to those rescued, around 80 people had been on the vessel that was bound for Italy.

Smugglers operating from Cesme and Bodrum on the Turkish coast are packing migrants in yachts to send them to Italy using new, more dangerous routes, according to the ERT television channel.

Three coast guard patrol boats, private vessels, a coast guard plane as well as divers searched for more survivors, officials said.

The latest tragedy -- the third since Wednesday -- came amid high smuggler activity not seen in Greek waters in months.

Hours earlier, 11 bodies were recovered from another boat that ran aground on an islet north of the Greek island of Antikythera on Thursday evening.

Coast guard said on Saturday that two of the rescued migrants -- both men suspected of being the smugglers -- were arrested.

Ninety people stranded on the islet were rescued.

And on Wednesday, a dinghy carrying migrants capsized off the island of Folegandros, killing at least three people.

Thirteen people were rescued, while dozens remain missing, Greek authorities said.

Survivors gave conflicting accounts: Some said there had been 32 people on board, while others put the number around 50, a coast guard official told AFP.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

## Bodies of siblings found in Sangu

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Firefighters yesterday found the bodies of the brother and sister who were swept away by the strong current of the Sangu in Rowangchhari, Bandarban, on Friday afternoon.

Ahnad Akib, 22, a student of Brac University, and his sister Mariam Binte Adni, 16, a school student, drowned after they went down to the water near Badhura waterfall, said Mirza Zahir Uddin, inspector of Rowangchhari Police Station.

Their cousin Maria Islam, a college student, also drowned in the river. Locals rescued her and took her to a hospital soon after she was swept away, but doctors pronounced her dead, the officer added.

The three and seven others of the family from Narayanganj's Fatulla went there to see the waterfall, said the inspector.

## Most powerful telescope launched



AFP, Kourou

The world's most powerful space telescope yesterday blasted off into orbit, headed to an outpost 1.5 million kilometres (930,000 miles) from Earth, after several delays caused by technical hitches.

The James Webb Space Telescope, some three decades and billions of dollars in the making, left Earth enclosed in its Ariane 5 rocket from Kourou Space Centre in French Guiana.

It is expected to take a month to reach its remote destination.

It is expected to beam back new clues that will help scientists understand more about the origins of the Universe and Earth-like planets beyond our solar system.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

## Daily Covid infections drop below 300

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One person died from Covid-19 in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, said a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The total number of Covid-19 deaths in the country now stands at 28,056 and the death rate stands at 1.77 percent.

At least 275 new infections were recorded during the period, taking

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6



### PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 26

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha  
AZAN 5:30 12:45 4:00 5:27 7:00  
JAMAAT 6:05 1:15 4:15 5:30 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



## SERVING WITHOUT SAFETY

With very little safety gear on, staffers of DPDC working on an electric line in the capital's Karwan Bazar area. They are not even wearing protective helmets. Such carelessness could cause serious injuries. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## PREP FOR OMICRON Israel orders 100,000 Pfizer's new Covid pill

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel has ordered 100,000 units of Pfizer Inc's anti-viral COVID 19 pill Paxlovid for people aged 12 and older at risk of severe illness, an Israeli official said on Saturday, confirming a television report.

Channel 12 TV said Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett agreed the deal in a phone conversation with Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla. There was no immediate confirmation from the company.

The first oral and at home treatment for COVID-19, Paxlovid was nearly 90% effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths in patients at high risk of severe illness, according to data from Pfizer's clinical trial. Recent lab data suggests the drug retains effectiveness against the Omicron variant, it said.

এনআরবিসি ব্যাংক NRBC BANK

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দেশজুড়ে আরও ১০টি শাখা

গাম বাংলার উন্নয়ন এনআরবিসির অঙ্গীকার