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Your Right to Know

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"This dialogue is nothing but a farce. It's also a joke for the nation."
BNP SENIOR JOINT SECRETARY GENERAL
RUHUL 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,

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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 SEE PAGE 2 COL 1