



The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

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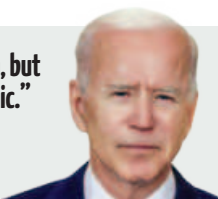
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"Politics has been wrested from the hands of politicians. Politicians also have no place in parliament."
WORKERS PARTY PRESIDENT RASHED KHAN MENON DURING DIALOGUE WITH PRESIDENT ABDUL HAMID



"Omicron is a source of concern, but it should not be a source of panic."
US PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN ASSURES AMERICANS



"For sure there can be a good agreement... We know the parameters. Is that expected to happen now in the current dynamics? No."
ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER NAFTALI BENNETT ON IRAN NUCLEAR TALKS



4TH PHASE UP POLLS

AL sinks in its strongholds

Ruling party candidates' performance declining with every passing phase

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and ASIFUR RAHMAN



Awami League candidates in Faridpur have never faced defeats as comprehensive as the ones they suffered in the fourth phase of union parishad polls held on Sunday.

Contenders of the ruling party had won all national elections from 1991 to 2018, except two by-polls, in Faridpur -- a district considered a bastion of AL.

But the picture was starkly different in Sunday's fourth phase of union parishad elections to 836 UPs.

Take the case of Boalmari upazila.

Out of 10 union parishads in the upazila, AL nominated candidates lost in nine.

In the third phase on November 28, the picture was also very dismal as AL aspirants lost in 14 out of 15 unions in Bhanga and Charbhadrans upazilas.

Faridpur's is not an isolated example. Ruling-party candidates fared miserably in Sunday's polls in many places like

Mymensingh, Sherpur, Kishoreganj and Sunamganj, regarded as strongholds of AL.

The Election Commission released unofficial results of 796 UPs out of 836 on Monday. Forty-eight AL candidates got walkovers.

Out of the 796 unions, AL aspirants could not even compete with their rivals in 230. Shockingly, AL candidates in 28 UPs lost their security deposits as a result of getting less than one-sixth of the total ballots cast.

Take some examples of the ruling party's humiliating defeats.

In Chiringa union under Chakaria upazila of Cox's Bazar, ruling party candidate Shahnewaj Rumel bagged only 67 votes. The total number of voters of the union is 10,436.

Awami League candidate Hasina Begum of Khatamadhupur union under Nilphamari's Syedpur upazila got 93 out of 17,496 votes.

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Farmers pluck boro saplings from a seedbed in Sylhet's Gowainghat upazila. Growers in the haor region are busy planting boro as they plan to harvest the crop before their land is inundated by flooding or onrush of water from upstream. This is the only crop grown in haor areas. The photo was taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

CORRECTION

In the headline of our lead story yesterday, we inadvertently wrote "\$500m economy by next fiscal"; it should have been "\$500b economy by next fiscal". We sincerely apologise to our readers for this mistake.

SSC results tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The results of this year's Secondary School Certificate and equivalent exams will be published on Thursday.

Prof Nehal Ahmed, chairman of the Dhaka Education Board, said the results will be handed over to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a programme at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre around 10:00am.

The PM will join the programme virtually and

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TEKNAF LAND PORT

Porous, powerless



MOHAMMAD SUMAN, back from Teknaf

On the face of it, Teknaf Land Port is as clean as a whistle.

The lone gateway to trade with Myanmar has little or no record of confiscation of Yaba or reported cases of tax evasion through the false declaration of goods.

But the ground reality suggests something else.

The land port with the poor scanning system, lack of security and absence of proper import-export documents has long been exposed to smuggling of illegal and contraband items like Yaba and tax evasion by dishonest traders.

- A racket forging documents to evade tax for years
- No automatic scanner machine or dog squad to check inflow of contraband goods
- Customs officials only check at best 2% of the goods manually by random sampling
- Some dishonest traders import high-tax items falsely declaring them as low taxable goods

The clandestine activities at the land port came to the fore following the arrest of Nurul Islam, a computer operator-turned-billionaire, on September 14.

Islam used to lead a racket that helped in the smuggling of Yaba and other goods and forged documents to evade tax in the land port for years, according to the Rapid Action Battalion.

He made a fortune of about Tk 460 crore, a far cry from his start as a computer operator at the port's customs house for a daily wage of Tk 130, Rab said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

DIALOGUE WITH PRESIDENT ON EC

BNP decides not to join

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The BNP, if invited, will not join the dialogue with President Abdul Hamid over forming the new Election Commission.

Party leaders say they made the decision as they believe the talks will not yield any fruit.

Upon the invitation of the president, the party may send a letter to him detailing why it will not join the talks and the overall political situation in the country. The BNP will also ask Hamid to take initiatives to form a polls-time interim government to oversee the next general election, said party sources.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said, "We will not join the talks. Joining will mean nothing. We held talks twice earlier but we found those to be pointless."

The BNP standing committee, the highest policymaking body of the party, in a meeting on Monday unanimously decided that the party would not join the dialogue as it sees the initiative as "an attempt to snatch the people's voting rights".

BNP leaders said the president can hold talks but he cannot do anything without consultation with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and that's why participating in talks is nothing but "giving legitimacy to the process of forming the next EC".

"The entire electoral system has been destroyed. In our political culture, a free and fair election is not possible under a partisan government. So, dialogues should be held on formation of a polls-time government," Fakhru said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

KHALEDA'S TREATMENT

No way to send her abroad

Law ministry opines

UNB, Dhaka

As per the law ministry's opinion there is no scope in law to allow BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to go abroad for medical treatment, said Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday.

"The law ministry in its opinion said there is no scope in law to let Khaleda Zia go abroad for treatment. The law ministry gave its opinion with the explanation of the relevant law, and we're reviewing it," he said while talking to reporters at the Secretariat.

The opinion of the ministry will be sent to the prime minister after its review, the home minister said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

SECURITY COOPERATIONS

Dhaka wants discussion before US decision

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh wants prior discussions with the US before the latter takes any decision regarding security cooperation.

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen commented to journalists after an inter-ministerial meeting on the US' Leahy Law at the secretariat.

"We will communicate with the US. If they have any allegations against any organisations of Bangladesh, they should let us know before making any decision," he said.

If the US says they have credible information on any organisation, Bangladesh would seek to learn about the sources of the information, he said.

"We will seek adequate time to explain the measures taken by Bangladesh and its position," he added.

The meeting discussed various aspects of Leahy

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



Nurse Shahnaz Begum having a chat with Sayma Chowdhury, 96, a resident of the capital's Dhanmondi, before giving her a booster shot of Covid-19 vaccine at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The government yesterday officially started administering booster doses to senior citizen aged above 60 and frontliners. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Another rail project taking forever

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

In June 2018, the Bangladesh Railways took up a Tk 3,602 crore project that would substantively enhance its operational capacity in three years.

Come June 2021, let alone complete the project -- which entails procuring 40 locomotives, 125 luggage vans and 1,000 wagons -- it has failed to complete the signing of agreements with all vendors, in a development that has become characteristic of the BR.

Of the 37 projects it is implementing, 26 -- including this one -- has been extended at least once.

At present, this project's deadline is June 2022. Given that only yesterday the BR has signed the fourth of the five contracts needed for the project, another lengthy extension is most definitely in the offing.

Another three years after the expiry of the revised deadline of June 2022 is needed, Project Director Mizanur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

Prodded on the delay, Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan largely blamed the pandemic.

"But I would not say that there was no laxity on our part," he added.

Apart from the two reasons, Rahman said the lengthy tendering process retarded the pace of the project, which is largely being funded with a loan from the Asian Development Bank.

"We have to take concurrence from ADB at every step -- time extension is normal in almost all the projects," he added.

The BR is implementing nine projects with loans from the Manila-based multilateral lender and the deadline for all but two had to be extended, document shows.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

397
New cases in 24hrs



15,84,023
Total cases



28,062
Deaths



15,48,062
Recoveries



5,425,840
Deaths



282,045,899
Total cases



282,045,899
Total cases

PM urges judges to ensure justice for all

Bss, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon the judges to ensure justice for all, reassuring them of every required support from her government to this end.

"We know the pain of getting no justice as 23 are the victims of it," she said at the unveiling of the covers of a research-based Mujib memorial book titled "Bangabandhu and the Judiciary" and a Mujib Borsho souvenir "Nyay Kontho" (Voice of Justice) published by the Bangladesh Supreme Court.

Cases filed against the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and their verdicts alongside the laws enacted by the Bangabandhu government were incorporated in the book "Bangabandhu and the Judiciary".

A brief biography of Bangabandhu and his measures taken for the development of the judiciary were



also included in the book, which has been published both in English and Bangla.

Getting justice is people's rights, she said.

"None would have to shed tears like me losing a father-mother. So, we want to make sure that people will get justice,"

she said.

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Anisul Huq spoke on the occasion while the Appellate Division Justice and editor of the book and the souvenir Md. Nuruzzaman gave the welcome address.

An audio-video documentary on the book and the souvenir was screened on the occasion.

At the outset of the programme, a one-minute silence was observed to pay respect to the memory of August 15, 1975, and Liberation War martyrs.



A partly collapsed structure of the state-owned Khulna Newsprint Mills on the Bhairab river in the southwest of Khulna city. The mill has been shut for two decades as it incurred heavy losses after the demand for its newsprint decreased. However, the authorities are still paying different bills of over Tk 14 lakh a month. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

No way to send her

FROM PAGE 1

On Monday, the law ministry forwarded its opinion to the home ministry on an application seeking permission to allow Khaleda Zia to go abroad for treatment.

Khaleda, a 76-year-old former prime minister, has been receiving treatment at Evercare Hospital for various health complications since November 13.

The BNP chief's medical board members on November 28 said she immediately needs to go abroad for better treatment as she was diagnosed with liver cirrhosis.

On behalf of her family, Khaleda's younger brother, Shamim Iskander, submitted an application to the home ministry on November 11 seeking permission to take her abroad for treatment.

Though the government earlier twice turned down such applications, it is taking time to dispose of the fresh plea.

On November 28, the Law Minister Anisul Huq told parliament that Khaleda is now free as she is not in government custody.

He also said as Khaleda was temporarily released under Section 401 of the Criminal Code of Procedure based on some conditions, including not leaving the country, there is no provision in the law to allow her to go abroad now until she submits a fresh petition after returning to jail.

BNP leaders and pro-BNP lawyers, however, have long been arguing that the government has the unlimited authority to take any decision in this regard under Section 401.

The party has also been observing various programmes since November 25 demanding that the BNP chief be allowed to go abroad as there is no advanced centre in Bangladesh to treat her liver cirrhosis problem.

BNP decides not to join

FROM PAGE 1

The president on December 20 opened the talks with the registered political parties. The Jatiya Party, the main opposition in parliament, was the first party to join the dialogue.

Hamid has so far invited 14 parties to the dialogue.

A total of 39 political parties are registered with the EC and only nine of them have representation in the current parliament.

The tenure of the incumbent EC will expire on February 14 next year. According to the constitution, the new EC must be formed before the current one expires.

Asked why the party decided against joining the talks, BNP standing committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said, "You will get the answer if you ask anyone on the street. The whole exercise of holding talks is a project of the government to snatch people's voting rights. Any democratic party fully aware of the government's intention cannot join the talks."

In 2017, President Hamid held talks

with 31 political parties before forming a search committee, headed by Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, on January 25 that year.

The committee had asked the 31 political parties to recommend five names each for the posts of CEC and commissioners. The panel then shortlisted 20 names from 128 suggested by 26 political parties. Hamid then appointed KM Nurul Huda as chief election commissioner and four other commissioners.

In 2012, then president Zillur Rahman held talks with 23 political parties. Five of them had proposed forming a search committee, while four suggested enacting a law that could be followed for such appointments.

Zillur later appointed a judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court as the head of a four-member search committee to recommend names for the posts of CEC and commissioners.

That committee shortlisted 10 individuals. Later, Zillur picked five and formed the EC, led by Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad, on February 9, 2012.

Another rail project taking

FROM PAGE 1

It is hopeful that the project will progress briskly now that it is close to signing all five contracts.

The fifth contract -- which is for procuring 420 broad-gauge (BG) wagons from the Kolkata-based Hindusthan Engineering and Industries -- will be signed early next month, according to Rahman.

Yesterday, it signed a two-and-a-half-year contract with Chinese CRRC Shandong Company to procure 580 metre-gauge (MG) wagons for Tk 318.6 crore.

CRRC Shandong, which is also supplying 71 freight trains to London Underground, will deliver the wagons within 27 months from the effective date of the contract and complete all procedures within 30 months.

The contract is expected to be activated within 15 days, Rahman said.

The fourth and fifth contracts were scheduled to be signed last year.

But the concurrence did not come in time, so the tendering process had to be started afresh, Suján said.

Asked why MG wagons are being procured when the BR will convert all tracks to BG as per its 30-year master plan to 2045, he said: "We have to use MG for the next 10 to 15 years, so we need wagons and locomotive to provide service on those. A major portion of the railway network is still

MG tracks."

In January 2019, the BR struck a deal with US-based Progress Rail for purchasing 40 BG locomotives.

In August 2020, it signed another contract with a Chinese joint-venture firm to procure 125 luggage vans (75 MG and 50 BG vans under two packages) to boost the transportation of agro-based products.

As of October, the project has witnessed 8 percent physical progress and 12.5 percent financial progress.

SSC results

FROM PAGE 1

education minister Dipu Moni will give details about the results, he added.

This year, the exams took place between November 14 and 23 -- nine months after the scheduled time due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Examinees sat for tests in only three optional subjects, apart from compulsory subjects like Bangla, English and Mathematics, with shortened syllabuses. The total marks for the exams were also lessened.

The results of the three optional subjects and the grade point average of the students' previous public examinations, including Junior School Certificate, will be taken into consideration while preparing the final results.

Around 22,27,113 students sat for this year's SSC and equivalent exams.

AL sinks in its strongholds

FROM PAGE 1

SM Anisuzzaman, AL candidate for Lahuria union under Lohagara of Narail, got 118 votes out of a total 20,689 votes.

AL leaders, while talking to The Daily Star, said the results of the fourth phase UP polls is totally unexpected at a time when many political parties are not participating with their electoral symbols.

Providing nominations to candidates chosen by influential MPs and leaders, anti-AL sentiments, ignoring candidates' lists proposed by party grassroots and conflict between local AL leaders and MPs were the major reasons for such a debacle, according to party sources.

Most importantly, they pointed out, fighting in grassroots units and picking up many incumbent chairmen as candidates backfired once more.

"Many incumbent chairmen became unpopular in their respective unions because of their misdeeds during their five-year tenure," said an AL central leader, preferring not to be named.

Besides, AL failed to contain its rebel candidates despite taking measures such as issuing show-cause notices, warnings of punitive actions and expulsions from the organisation. Party leaders think victory of rebel candidates are encouraging the party's grassroots leaders to contest against party nominees.

The results released on Monday showed that ruling party candidates performed poorly in the fourth phase compared to the previous three phases.

In Sunday's polls, independents fared well, winning 49 percent of the

chairman posts while AL candidates won 49.74 percent.

In the first phase held in June and September, AL candidates won 76 percent chairman posts, in the second phase they won 56 percent and 53 percent in the third phase, before dipping below 50 on Sunday in the fourth phase.

Talking to The Daily Star, AL presidium member Abdur Rahman termed the fourth phase election result "unexpected". He, however, said the party will move forward and act accordingly after learning lessons from the fourth phase.

Elections held in 10 unions of Faridpur's Boalmari upazila, where nine AL candidates were defeated and of them five candidates lost their security money.

Locals said conflict between local MP Manjur Hossain and former MP Abdur Rahman was responsible for this humiliating result.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Boalmari upazila AL General Secretary Pikul Mirdah said, "We sent a list of probable candidates to the AL central committee mentioning their contribution to the party and their role in previous elections."

"But candidates that were our top choices did not get party nominations. Instead, candidates who were our third or fourth choices got party nominations and thus our candidates were defeated," he said.

In the third phase UP polls, AL's poor results in Bhanga and Charbhadrans upazilas were also due to the conflict between incumbent MP Mojibur Rahman Chowdhury Nixon and former MP Kazi Zafarullah Chowdhury, locals said.

Porous, powerless

FROM PAGE 1

The fortune was made by forging documents between 2001 and 2009, according to Rab. During the period, the government earned Tk 320 crore from the land port.

The corrupt practices have been going on for a long time in connivance with a section of corrupt customs officials and dishonest traders, The Daily Star learnt after speaking with people in Teknaf.

In the absence of any automatic scanner machine, customs officials only check at best 2 percent of the goods by random sampling and that too manually, which is not sufficient to detect illegal goods inside any import consignment, they said.

Several traders said some dishonest traders import falsely declaring high tax items as low taxable goods.

The rackets including that of Islam's used to help release those, bribing a section of corrupt customs officials.

For instance, it is not possible to identify coffee in the pickle bag without a scanning machine, said a trader wishing anonymity. The tax on pickles is only Tk 5 per kg while the tax on the same amount of coffee is Tk 500, he said.

As far as security measures are concerned, the correspondent found cargo boats from Myanmar were entering the port without any checking by the port authority. The staffers of the boats were seen roaming freely in the markets surrounding the port.

Local traders, clearing and forwarding agents and port workers were also walking into the boats from Myanmar unrestricted.

Most of the workers of the port are Rohingyas, who have been sheltering in various camps in Bangladesh for a long time, said Nazrul Islam, the proprietor of Teknaf Trading, which provides all the labour at the port.

The locals did not want to work as labourers in the port, where onions, wood, fish, shoes, betel nuts, rice and cosmetic items come through.

"It is very surprising that no Yaba consignment has so far been seized at Teknaf land port, which is believed to be the major route for its smuggling

in Bangladesh," Ehteshamul Haque, technical officer (customs) of the World Health Organisation, told The Daily Star recently.

It is not possible to separate Yaba from other goods by checking manually, said Haque, who previously worked at the National Board of Revenue, the Bangladesh Customs and the World Customs Organisation.

Scanner machines or dog squads are needed to check such smuggling through the Teknaf port, he said, adding that both are becoming a mainstay at borders and ports across the world to prevent smuggling.

Abdun Noor, revenue officer of Teknaf Land Port Custom, said that they weigh all imported and exported goods.

If there is any irregularity, it will be caught by weighing scale, he said.

Jasim Uddin, general manager of the port, denied any irregularities.

"We are ensuring maximum security here. No one can enter or exit without our concern. As far as I know, no Rohingyas work here," he said.

Usually, a trader needs multiple documents -- a letter of credit, packing list, bill of lading, general manifest (IGM) copy by the shipowner and others -- for importing or exporting goods.

But Teknaf Land Port -- where about 4.15 lakh tonnes of goods worth about Tk 3,400 crore were imported between 2017 and 2020 -- is an exception, said customs officials.

Unlike any other port, traders can import goods through Teknaf showing only a single document: the bank draft.

Sonali Bank and Myanmar Economic Bank are nominated to issue bank drafts on border trade by their respective governments under an agreement signed on May 18, 1994.

The bank draft only mentions the name of the importing company and the dollar amount.

In the absence of standard documents, customs duty is levied based on the information given by the traders after import.

There is no opportunity for the customs authority to verify the

Election to 22 UPs were held in Hossainpur, Katiadi and Bhairab upazilas under Kishoreganj, which is also considered a stronghold of AL, on Sunday and of them AL sponsored candidates were defeated in 13 UPs.

In Katiadi, AL candidates won in only two out of nine UPs.

Voting was held in 21 unions under Sunamganj district where nine AL sponsored candidates lost their security deposit. Ruling party candidates won in seven UPs while party rebels achieved victories in six.

Sherpur is also known as an AL bastion. Elections to nine UPs were held in Sreebardi upazila of the district and AL candidates were defeated in seven of them.

Independent candidate Abdul Karim, also a local BNP leader, won as chairman in Bhelua union where ruling party sponsored candidate Rezaul Karim, union unit AL president, finished fourth.

In Gauripur upazila of Mymensingh, also a stronghold of AL, elections to 10 UPs were held where AL candidates achieved victory only in two while independent candidates won in four and AL rebels in three. The result of one UP has been postponed.

At least six AL candidates lost their security deposit in 21 UPs under Dinajpur while AL nominees won in a single UP out of 10 in Rangamati.

Although BNP is not participating in the ongoing UP polls, party leaders independently won in 75 UPs, local sources said.

Meanwhile, main opposition Jatiya Party candidates won in six UPs. Besides, Islami Andolon bagged two chairman posts and Zaker Party and Jatiya Party (Manju) won one each.

authenticity of the document with the institution or bank of the exporting country, according to Noor.

Manpower shortage is also handicapping the land port, customs officials said.

There are only seven government staff at the port against a sanctioned headcount of 19, said a customs official seeking anonymity.

The National Board of Revenue has already been asked to install the scanner machine, said Shahin Akter, revenue officer of the port, adding that an initiative is underway to make the identity card compulsory for entry to the port.

"The situation in the port has improved a lot in the last few months," he added.

The government has a plan to set up scanner machines in all land ports of the country including Teknaf, Zakia Sultana, member of the NBR's customs audit, modernisation and international trade, told The Daily Star at the end of October.

She, however, could not say how long it would take to implement the plan.

In the first 11 months of this year, about 53,000 tonnes of goods worth about Tk 812 crore were imported through the Teknaf Land Port.

US President Biden signs \$770 billion defense bill

REUTERS

US President Joe Biden signed into law the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, for fiscal year 2022, which authorizes \$770 billion in defense spending, the White House said on Monday.

Earlier this month, the Senate and the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly for the defense bill with strong support from both Democrats and Republicans for the annual legislation setting policy for the Department of Defense.

STUDENT'S DEATH

PBI given time again to finish probe

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday asked police to submit the probe report by January 16 in a case filed against Bashundhara Group Managing Director Sayem Sobhan Anvir.

Anvir and seven others were accused in the case filed over the rape and murder of a college student in the capital's Gulshan.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Begum Yasmin Ara gave the order to Golam Moktar Ashrafuddin, inspector of Police Bureau of Investigation, who is investigating the case.

Yesterday was the fifth time the PBI failed to submit the probe report, court officials said.

On December 8, the same court asked PBI to submit the report by yesterday.

Anvir is the prime accused in the case and Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan alias Shah Alam and six others are accused of assisting Anvir.

The other accused are Shah Alam's wife Afroza Begum, Anvir's wife Sabrina Sayem, model Faria Mahbub Piyasha, Saifa Rahman Mim, Ibrahim Ahmed Ripon and his wife Sharmin.

The High Court on September 29 refused to grant anticipatory bail to Anvir in the case.

On April 26, police recovered the body of a 21-year-old college student in a Gulshan flat. Her elder sister then filed a case with Gulshan Police Station, accusing Anvir of abetting suicide.

On July 19, Abul Hasan, officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station, submitted the final report in the case to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka.

On August 18, a Dhaka court accepted the final report and relieved Anvir from the case.

However, the victim's elder sister on September 6 filed the another case with the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-8 of Dhaka, making allegations of rape and murder.

Dhaka wants

FROM PAGE 1

Law that governs the nation's funding to foreign security forces.

Officials from the home and law ministries and law enforcement agencies were present at the meeting. The law will be effective from January 2022.

In a letter to Dhaka on December 1, Washington said Dhaka needs to inform in writing the consent to the Leahy Law for assistance on security cooperation.

The US will need the consent of the countries where the US cooperates on security issues. Bangladesh will need to inform the US government of the security forces that receive the US security assistance and how it will be used.

Bangladesh was asked to respond to the letter by December 15 but Dhaka has now sought until December 31 to give feedback.

"Earlier, we discussed. We did it again today and will do some more work before informing our consent on the law by December 31," Masud Bin Momen said.

"We are reviewing the benefits of Bangladesh if we endorse the US law. Also, we are checking if any policy of our law enforcers contradicts the US law," the foreign secretary said.

Bangladesh maintains a "zero tolerance" policy in terms of human rights violation, militancy and other serious crimes, and there is a commonality between that of the US and other development partners, he said.

"We will hold one more meeting on it before communicating our consent to the law to the US," he said, adding that Bangladesh values the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and the US.

Asked if any of the Leahy Law provisions contradict Bangladesh laws and context, he said Bangladesh's law and situation would surely get priority.

He said the security assistance that Bangladesh got from the US in the past was not coming under the purview of the law.

"We are working on the language aspect of the law so that our interests are protected," the foreign secretary said.

"The US wants general consent to the law, but we want to respond by making sure that our interests are protected at the same time," he said.

Responding to a question, he said there was no link between the security cooperation and the US sanctions imposed on Rab and seven of its former and current officials.

Constable remanded over rape of 13-year-old

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday placed Shimul Ahmed (27) a constable of Armed Police Battalion (APBN), on a one-day remand in a case filed against him on charge of raping a 13-year-old girl in Dhaka's Motijheel area.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Jashim passed the order after Sujon Kumer Roy, sub-inspector of Motijheel Police Station and also the case's investigation officer, produced him before it with a three-day remand prayer.

In the remand prayer, the IO said the accused entered the house of the girl at around 9:30am of December 26 as her parents were out and raped her.

He needs to be remanded to gather more information about the incident, the IO added.

Claiming himself innocent, Shimul told the court he was framed in the case.

Upon hearing, the magistrate placed him on the remand.

Shimul was arrested on Monday after the victim's father filed a case against him with Motijheel Police Station.

The victim was admitted to One-Stop Crisis Centre of Dhaka Medical College and Hospital.



It's that time of the year. As winter slowly settles in, it marks the time when Chattogram's Laskar Dighi becomes a temporary abode for numerous migrant birds. For locals, this is indeed the season to be merry, as they wake up and enter the night surrounded by the pleasant tweets of these visiting birds. The amicable avians spend a good couple of months at the dighi, which is populated by local species for the rest of the year. This photo was taken from Raozan upazila's Kadalpur village.

3 killed, 4 hurt in Dinajpur road accidents

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Three people were killed and four were injured in separate road accidents in Ghoraghat and Parbatipur upazilas of Dinajpur yesterday.

The deceased are Akhter Hossain (38), Shahjahan Ali (70) and Ashraf Ali (35).

Witnesses said a pick-up van coming from Naogaon rammied into a bicycle on Parbatipur-Fulbari road in Sherpur area of Parbatipur upazila around 12:30pm, leaving bicyclist Shahjahan dead on the spot. Besides, a pick-up van passenger, Ashraf, died on the spot and two others were injured as the vehicle turned over on the road after hitting the bicycle.

Abul Bashar, sub-inspector of Bhabanipur Police Investigation Centre, said they recovered the bodies of two people from the spot and handed over those to family for burial.

Sources at Ghoraghat Fire Service Station said a Rajshahi-bound truck hit another truck, parked beside Dinajpur-Gobindaganj Regional Highway, in Birahampur area of Ghoraghat, leaving truck driver Akhter dead and two people, including the truck helper, injured.

On information, a police team and fire service members recovered the body.

'Place bill on EC formation in next JS session'

Workers Party calls upon president at dialogue

RASHIDUL HASAN

Rejecting the government's argument that there is not enough time to enact a law on forming the next Election Commission, Workers Party of Bangladesh (WPB) yesterday said the caretaker government bill was passed in parliament within one night in 1996.

While holding dialogue with President Abdul Hamid at Bangabhaban on the matter, the party called upon the president to instruct the government to place a bill on EC's formation in the next session of parliament in January.

"You [Abdul Hamid] will address the parliament in January, which will be the first session of next year. In the speech, you assure the nation that the law will be enacted in that session," Rashed Khan Menon, president of WPB, which is a part of the ruling-Awami League alliance, told reporters after the dialogue.

Pointing to Law Minister Anisul Huq's argument that the law cannot be enacted before expiration of the present EC on February 14 next year, Menon said it is very much possible, if the government wants it.



SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Who will be the next chief justice?



Imman Ali



Foez Siddique



Nuruzzaman



Obaidul Hassan

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Syed Mahmud Hossain, the current chief justice, will retire tomorrow, as he will turn 68 the day after that.

Article 96 (1) of the constitution states, "Subject to other provisions of this article, a judge shall hold office until he attains the age of sixty-seven years."

However, it is still not clear who will be appointed as the next (23rd) chief justice of Bangladesh, and when will the president announce the appointment.

And so, there is a buzz at the Supreme Court premises over this issue.

"The honourable president will appoint the new chief justice. I don't know whom and when he [President Abdul Hamid] will appoint. He has the sole authority to do so, as per

the constitution," Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star on Monday.

Meanwhile, some SC lawyers told this correspondent that the next chief justice will be appointed from the four judges of the Appellate Division, considering political issues and the next parliamentary election.

There is a precedent of appointing chief justices by superseding other judges of the apex court who were their seniors. Some of the superseded judges had resigned from office due to this, they said.

Of the sitting Appellate Division judges, Justice Muhammad Imman Ali will retire on December 31, 2022, Justice Hasan Foez Siddique on September 25, 2023, Justice Md Nuruzzaman on June 30, 2023, and Justice Obaidul Hassan on January 10, 2026, SC sources said.

The pro-BNP lawyers have demanded no supersession in appointing the new chief justice.

Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain was appointed as the 22nd chief justice on February 2, 2018, superseding Justice Md Abdul Wahhab Miah, who had been discharging duties of the chief justice for four months.

The post of chief justice had remained vacant for about three months, after Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha stepped down on November 10, 2017.

Later in the day on February 2, 2018, Justice Wahhab resigned as an apex court judge.

Earlier, six other apex court judges -- Justice KM Hasan, Justice Syed JR Mudassir Husain, Justice MM Ruhul Amin, Justice Md Tafazzul Islam, Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Md Muzammel Hossain -- were appointed chief justice, ignoring seniority of their colleagues.

He was never afraid to speak up to the powerful

Speakers tell discussion on Reazuddin Ahmed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Veteran journalist Reazuddin Ahmed upheld a time when the interests of journalism lay before political interests, reminisced speakers at a memorial discussion yesterday.

The memorial was held at Jatiya Press Club.

The session was organised by the Editors' Council and Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (NOAB). Ahmed passed away on December 25 while receiving treatment for Covid-related complications.

The Ekushey Padak-awardee was not only remembered for his material achievements, but also for his ability to lead the journalist community in unity. "We have lost a guardian of the community," said senior journalist Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul.

He said during today's trying times, there are more leaders who feed off of strife than people willing to come to an understanding.

Bulbul explained how Ahmed was a staunch supporter of inclusive democracy and had the courage to speak up to the most powerful in state and society.

Reazuddin Ahmed's son Mashrur Reaz spoke about how his father had retired from his role of leading the management of a media organisation only to launch a newspaper two years later.

"He had retired saying he was ageing, which was making his job difficult. But

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Attendees at the memorial observed a minute's silence in honour of their beloved colleague Reazuddin Ahmed.

PHOTO: STAR

AIRFARE FOR EXPATS Govt, Biman, Baira served legal notice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Supreme Court lawyer yesterday served a legal notice on the authorities concerned for taking proper steps to bring air-ticket fares for Bangladeshi expatriates to a reasonable price.

Mohammad Shishir Manir sent the legal notice on behalf of eight Bangladeshi expatriate labourers to the officials concerned of government, Balaka Biman Bangladesh Airlines Limited and Bangladesh Association of Recruiting Agency (BAIRA).

In the legal notice, the lawyer asked the officials to explain in seven days why appropriate action should not be taken against the persons and organisations involved in the irregularities, corruption and unusual air-ticket fares.

If the respondents do not respond to the legal notice in seven days, a case will be moved before the High Court for necessary directives, Shishir Manir said in the legal notice.



As the year nears its end, all educational institutions around the country are gearing up for distributing free textbooks among students, traditionally given out every year on January 1. In Dhaka, freshly printed books are being circulated to different schools from Mohammadpur Govt Primary School's main campus under the supervision of teachers. This photo was taken on Monday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

2 Rab members hurt in clash with 'drug peddlers' in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

At least two Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members and several locals were injured in a clash with suspected drug peddlers during an anti-narcotics drive in Baromasia Tea Garden, under Chattogram's Fatikhhari upazila, on Monday night.

Two Rab vehicles were also vandalised during the clash, which occurred around 9:00pm.

The force had to open fire to bring the situation under control, said Rab officials.

The injured are Rab-7 media officer Flight Lt Niaz Uddin Chapal and deputy assistant director Samad, among others.

Of the injured, Chapal was shifted to Dhaka CMH, Rab-7 Commanding Officer Lt Col MA Yousuf told The Daily Star.

Rab claimed that a group of drug peddlers used to produce alcohol in the guise of tea garden workers. The racket produced huge amounts of liquor to sell on December 31, ahead of thirty-first night celebrations.

"Based on a tip-off, Rab went to Baromasia Tea Garden area to destroy the liquor factory. As they were returning after destroying the liquor items, a gang of drug dealers swooped in on the law enforcers with lethal weapons, injuring two Rab men," he said. "Rab detained five persons in this connection so far. The drive is still ongoing."

Local sources and police, however, said the team of Rab went to the tea garden in plain clothes, in a microbus and private car.

Seeking anonymity, an elected public representative of Suabil union who visited the spot, said the Rab men were in plain clothes, which created confusion among tea workers. After the incident, the workers went into hiding.

Superintendent of Police of Chattogram SM Rashidul Haque said, "Till now, we haven't received any complaint from Rab."

Saidul Haque Chunnu passes away

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Md Saidul Haque Chunnu, a senior leader of Pabna district unit Awami League and former administrator of Pabna Zila Parishad, passed away early yesterday.

He was 72. He left behind his wife, a daughter and son. Chunnu was undergoing treatment at Dhaka's United Hospital.

A former vice president of Pabna district unit AL, he was a leading cultural organiser of the district who played a vital role in reservation of Suchitra Sen's ancestral home.

Chunnu was buried at Arifpur graveyard after a namaz-e-janaza at Shibrapur Eidgah after Zohr prayers.

United Hospital launches Gastro Liver Centre

CITY DESK

United Hospital has launched a Gastro Liver Centre that offers comprehensive Gastro Liver services in treating complications of gastrointestinal, liver and pancreatic disorders.

Dedicated doctor, nurses and patient counselor will work at this centre where both out-patients and in-patients can take services, said a press release.

Mohammad Faizur Rahman, managing director and CEO of United Hospital, inaugurated the centre.

Among others, Dr Mahbub Uddin Ahmed, director, medical services of the hospital; Pioneer Therapeutic & Interventional Gastroenterologist Prof Dr AQM Mohsen; Dr Mohammed Mahbub Alam, director, Gastro Liver Centre, and other physicians, nurses and higher officials were present at the event.

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Primary teachers under the banner of "Jatiya Karankrita Prathamik Shikshak Mahajot" gathered in front of the capital's Central Shaheed Minar yesterday, protesting the government decision to withdraw the "timescale facilities" that include salary increment for 48,720 teachers.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Place bill on EC

FROM PAGE 3

Menon said the president agreed with them, saying that enacting the law is a must.

"The president agreed that controversy arises every time during formation of the Election Commission, in absence of the law. This creates a lack of confidence in the EC," he said.

Criticising the present Election Commission for failing to hold free and fair elections, Menon said the present EC is "inactive".

"They even termed the UP polls festive," he added. "We want an EC that will be able to use its power vested on it. We want a powerful and independent EC that will control the administration to hold free and fair polls," Menon said.

He also alleged that politics has moved away from the hands of politicians.

In its six-point proposal to the president, WPB also suggested that the president exchange views with civil society representatives, media personalities and intellectuals on EC's formation.

A seven-member delegation of WPB, led by Menon, joined the dialogue around 4:00pm.

According to a release issued by Bangabhaban, the president welcomed the delegation and said, "Politics is meant for people's welfare. If quality is not ensured in politics, it will be difficult for politicians to do politics in the future."

Starting the current round of dialogues with Jatiya Party, the main opposition party in parliament, on December 20, President Hamid has so far met leaders of six political parties.

Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal and Communist Party of Bangladesh have declined to participate in the dialogue. BNP yesterday said they will also not participate, even if it is invited.

The country has 39 registered political parties, according to the EC website, and only nine of them have representation in parliament.

RMG workers protest 'assault' on colleague

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

Workers of an RMG factory in Ashulia yesterday demonstrated inside the premises over an alleged incident of sexual assault of one of their female co-worker.

Hundreds of workers of Yagi Bangladesh Garments Ltd in Jamgora area started demonstrating inside the factory around 8:00am after hearing news that the female worker, aged around 20, was sexually assaulted a couple of days ago, said SI Samiul Islam of Ashulia Police Station.

"Police are investigating the incident," he said.

The agitated workers said on December 23 during lunch break, an unidentified person approached the female worker and introduced himself as a medical worker.

The female worker is new to the factory, joining just five days ago on December 18, which is why she doesn't know that many people at the workplace, her colleagues said.

After she told the unidentified person she wasn't feeling very well, he told her she needed to be administered an injection and took her aside for it. She soon lost consciousness, at which point she was allegedly sexually assaulted, they claimed.

She would remain at home ever since the incident, only returning to work yesterday. After coming in, she told her co-workers of the events, which triggered the demonstration.

The workers have demanded immediate identification of the culprit. Contacted, Md Elias Patwary, managing director of the factory, said, "There is no chance for such a heinous incident to take place inside our premises. However, I have asked factory officials and police to investigate."

He further said they are suspecting that a group might have spread rumours regarding the incident to create unrest among workers and damage the factory's goodwill.

10 brick kilns demolished in Dhamrai

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

Department of Environment (DoE) demolished 10 brick kilns and fined the owners Tk 42 lakh for causing severe environmental pollution in Dhamrai's Kalampur and Mohudanga area yesterday.

Modina, MSB-2, MS/Faruk, Nur Bricks, Tuhin Bricks and Marks Bricks were fined Tk 6 lakh each as they did not have necessary documents, while Mokka-Modina and Khan bricks were fined Tk 5 lakh each over the same allegation.

Rahat Bricks and Kalampur Bricks were fined Tk 2 lakh each as they could not provide some documents but lacked full clearance, said Tamzid Ahmed, executive magistrate of DoE.

Law says that no brick kiln is allowed within 1.5km of residential areas, educational institutions and hospitals, which made the demolished kilns illegal in the first place.

Drive against illegal brick kilns will continue, Tamzid added.

According to experts, over 200 illegal brick kilns are currently operating in Dhamrai and Savar, contributing to the deteriorating air quality in the country.

He was never afraid

FROM PAGE 3

soon after, he told me that as a journalist, it was imperative for him to remain connected to newspapers, which is why he re-entered the industry to start the Financial Herald," said Reaz.

Journalism and the media industry meant just as much to him as his family -- if not more, Reaz said.

Of note, Financial Herald is yet to launch commercially. Mozammel Hossain Monju, acting editor of daily Samakal, pointed out that one of the defining features of Ahmed's leadership was his quiet charisma. "He was not the type to brandish loud slogans. Instead, he focused on how to present practical solutions."

Monju also talked about Reazuddin's plight for freedom of press since even before the liberation.

During his speech, Jatiya Press Club vice president Saiful Alam said at a time when the journalist community is fraught across political lines, he was an undivided leader. The current chairperson of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists Omar Faruk also reiterated the same.

Reazuddin was elected to lead an undivided journalists' union four times, pointed out AK Azad, president of NOAB. Farida Yasmin, president of the Press Club, reminded everyone that Reazuddin had led the club for several years. Speakers also lamented how divisions among journalists hinder achieving goals that can benefit the community.

Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, whose career started at the same time as Reazuddin's, spoke about how the deceased veteran journalist spearheaded the sphere of economic reporting.

"Reporting on economic affairs is mandatory for all media organisations today, but it was Reazuddin who started it," said Chowdhury, who was a former information adviser to the prime minister.

ASM Shahidullah Khan Badal, chairperson of New Age's editorial board and vice president of NOAB, also spoke at the event, while Dewan Mahmud, editor of Bonik Barta, moderated the event.

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.

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NT No. IRCON/9843/BD.KHU-MON/TENDER/STEEEL-RF/128/2021-19 Dt. 28.12.2021
Open Tender in Single packet bid system are invited for "Supply of HYSD (Grade Fe-500) Steel reinforcement bars of various dia conforming to IS 1786-1985 for Khalina-Mongla Port Rail Line Project" (Quantity - 850 MT).
Estimated Cost of work : USD 7,41,824.60
Earnest Money Deposit : Not Applicable
Completion Period : 02 (Two) Months
Cost of Tender Document : Tk. 5,000/-
Last Date & Time for Bid Submission : Dt.10.01.2022 upto 15:00 Hrs. Opening at 15:30 Hrs.
For further details and updates, Bidders may visit IRCON office, House No. 411, Road No. 4, Sonadanga R/A, Phase-2, Khalina-9100. Project Manager/KMRLP Ircon International Ltd.
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e-Tenders details can be downloaded e-GP System Portal <http://www.eprocure.gov.bd> for pursue.

Tender ID & Ref No.	Name of works	Tender publication date & time	Last selling/ downloading date and time	Tender closing/ opening date & time
632990 & 189	Supply & Installation of 5KWp Solar Electric System at Sonali Bank Limited, Manpura Branch, Bhola.	30/12/2021 at 15.00	18/01/2022 at 12.00	18/01/2022 at 15.00

GD-2410 **Chief Engineer**

বাংলাদেশ প্রকৌশল বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, ঢাকা
গোষ্ঠীবীমা দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

আগামী ০১ এপ্রিল ২০২২ হইতে পরবর্তী ৩ (তিন) বৎসরের জন্য অর্থাৎ, ০১-০৪-২০২২ইং হইতে ৩১-০৩-২০২৫ইং পর্যন্ত বাংলাদেশ প্রকৌশল বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের শিক্ষক, কর্মকর্তা, তৃতীয় ও চতুর্থ শ্রেণী কর্মচারীদের গোষ্ঠীবীমা চুক্তি সম্পাদনের বিষয়ে অগ্রহী বিভিন্ন বীমা প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহের নিকট হইতে প্রয়োজনীয় শর্তাবলী পূরণ সাপেক্ষে দরপত্র আহবান করা যাইতেছে। নিম্নে উল্লিখিত তথ্য যথাযথ প্রমাণপত্রসহ সংযোজন করিতে হইবে।

আগামী ১৭ জানুয়ারি, ২০২২ইং রোজ সোমবার বিকাল ৪.০০ (চার) ঘটিকার মধ্যে দরপত্র অত্র অফিসের রক্ষিত বাস্তব জমা প্রদান করিতে হইবে। দরপত্রের অন্যান্য তথ্য/শর্তসূত্র সিডিউল নপদ টাকা ১৫০০/- (এক হাজার পাঁচশত) মাত্র এর বিনিময়ে (অফেরতযোগ্য) আগামী ১৬ জানুয়ারি, ২০২২ইং রোজ রবিবার পর্যন্ত অফিস চলাকালীন কম্পিউটার অফিস, ফান্ড শাখা হইতে সংগ্রহ করা যাইবে।

বিশেষ নির্দেশিকাঃ কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকেই যে কোন বা সকল দরপত্র গ্রহণ/বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা কর্তৃপক্ষ সংরক্ষণ করে।

তথ্যাদিঃ

- বিগত ৩০শে নভেম্বর/২০২১ইং পর্যন্ত অনূর্ধ্ব ১০ বৎসরের গ্রুপ জীবন বীমা ব্যবসার বৎসর ওয়ারী প্রিমিয়াম আয়ের তালিকা।
- বিগত ৩০শে নভেম্বর/২০২১ইং পর্যন্ত কয়টি রিটায়ার্ড প্রতিষ্ঠানের নামে গ্রুপ জীবন বীমা চুক্তি বলবৎ আছে তাহার তালিকা।
- বর্তমানে কোন বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের সাথে গ্রুপ জীবন বীমা চুক্তি বলবৎ থাকিলে তাহার তালিকা।
- বিগত তিন বৎসরের গ্রুপ বীমা দাবী পরিশোধের বিবরণ।

মোহাম্মদ মনিরুজ্জামান
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e-GP Tender Notice (Goods)

PKSF invites e-Tender in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following goods:

Tender ID No	Description	Tender Publication Date & Time	Tender Closing Date & Time
639039	Procurement of Desktop, UPS, Laptop, Printer, Photocopier, and Telephone set under BD Rural WASH for HCD Project of PKSF	28-12-2021 3:00 PM	19-01-2022 12:00 PM

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AQM Golam Mawla
Deputy Managing Director

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD
Road Division, Lalmonirhat
+Tel: 0591-61770, Fax: 0591-61770
E-mail: eerhdial@yahoo.com, eelal@rhd.gov.bd

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DBS Wearing Course including repair work at ch 5th(p) km of Patgram-Dhagram-Angorpot Road (Z-5903) under Road Division, Lalmonirhat during the year 2021-2022.

Sl No.	Tender ID No.	Tender Ref. No.	Tender/last selling	Tender/closing date	Tender/opening date	Tendering method
1.	642933	eGP-23/EE/LRD/LTM/2021-2022	12-Jan-2022 17:00	13-Jan-2022 13:00	13-Jan-2022 13:00	LTM

Reference No. 1356
Date: 28-12-2021

Mohammad Mahbub Alam
ID No. 602242
Executive Engineer (A.C.), RHD
Road Division, Lalmonirhat

GD-2409



Fruit grower Ayub Ali of Santoshpur village in Mymensingh's in Phulbaria upazila is seen tending his Jaaldugi variety pineapple field.

PHOTO: STAR

Jaaldugi brings high profit to growers

Cultivation of the early variety pineapple helping many farmers make a fortune

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Cultivation of Jaaldugi, an early variety of pineapple, has changed the fortune of many farmers in Phulbaria upazila over the last couple of years.

A larger number of farmers in different villages of the upazila are cultivating the early variety pineapple for a higher profit for the last few years.

Ayub Ali, one of the top fruit growers of Santoshpur village, is expecting to earn a good profit from the early variety pineapple, cultivated on his eight acres of land, this season.

The 51-year-old, who lives near the Santoshpur Reserved Forest, said he cultivated Jaaldugi, a small sized early variety pineapple, on eight acres land and expecting to harvest those in between February and early March.

As the fruit is harvested in early of the year, which is usually off-season for pineapple, so it

has a good demand, he said, adding that growers can sell their pineapple at a high and earn a good profit from it.

Ayub, who started from cultivating Jaaldugi variety on one acre land five years ago, has gradually expanded the cultivation area and now there are about one lakh and fifty thousand plants in his field.

If everything goes well he is expecting to earn a profit of Tk 25 lakh this season, Ayub said.

Ayub said he has been involved in pineapple farming for over 30 years.

In 2019, he earned a profit of Tk 2.5 lakh from Jaaldugi cultivation, Ayub said, adding that the profit was about Tk 10 lakh in 2020.

Like Ayub many pineapple growers of Santoshpur and other adjacent villages in the upazila have been getting a good profit from their produce for the last couple of years as they are enjoying a high fair price of the early variety

pineapple.

Farmers said some of the growers are earning double profit from their mixed orchard round the year.

Another farmer of the village Fazlul Haque said he has been growing Jaaldugi variety pineapple on one acre land for the last three years. He earned a profit of Tk 4 lakh this year and eyeing a double profit in the coming season.

With the development of communication and information technologies, now farmers can directly contact their clients to know the actual market price of their produce, another grower Abdul Hye said.

Maznu Mia of the locality said many growers of Santoshpur and adjacent Krishnapur, Balughat, Harirambari and Kastagara villages have changed their lot through pineapple cultivation in recent years.

Locals said alongside pineapple

cultivation of different fruits has created seasonal job opportunity for nearly 50,000 people in the upazila.

Naugaon Union Parishad (UP) Chairman Mozammel Hossain said pineapple is cultivated at a large scale in different villages under Naugaon and Rangamatia unions of the upazila and it is a cash crop for several thousand farmers.

Contacted, Phulbaria Upazila Agriculture Officer Jesmin Nahar said there are over 15,000 pineapple growers in the upazila.

Of them, about 1000 farmers are involved in mixed fruits cultivation and getting a good profit every year, she added.

The pineapples, especially Jaaldugi and Honey Queen variety, produced in the upazila are famous for its taste as both the soil and weather of the area are suitable for pineapple cultivation, she further said.

Dotara artiste Shuklal struggling for survival

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Once Dotara artiste Shuklal Roy used to pass busy days attending one programme to another enthraling his audience with his musical rendition. But since the onset of Covid-19 pandemic, there is hardly any musical programmes in the village leaving Shuklal who is fondly called Dotara Shuklal in a perennial crisis for survival.

This Dotara artiste hails from Kalisthan village of Kamalabari union of Aditmari upazila in Lalmonirhat.

"As there is no programme because of the pandemic, nobody calls me," he said.

Though the veteran artiste as well as his family is struggling for survival, he still wears a big smile on his face.

"Somedays I can manage some food and somedays we go unfed. I try to run my family working as a day labourer but people often refuse to give me work as I am a person belonging the community of musicians," he also said.

Despite suffering from hunger pangs, Shuklal is trying to preserve the tradition of music in rural Bengal. Alongside playing the Dotara, Shuklal is also a prolific singer having prowess on different genre of Bengali songs especially Bhawaiya.

He is adept in folk songs and kirtan songs. He can play flute, harmonium, drum, ektara, sarinda and all other traditional musical instruments.

His family comprises of his wife Sudha Rani and two sons Ripon Chandra Roy and Jiban Chandra Roy. The elder son Ripon is studying at a college and the younger one is in a school.

His wife Sudha Rani has to work as a day labourer in the village now. Shuklal does not have any land property except for the homestead.

Shuklal said that he had three Dotaras. Due to financial crisis, he has sold two of them for Tk 3,000. He cannot repair some other musical instruments due to lack of money.

"I'm a man of music. I don't like other works. Besides, I can't do any other works properly," he said.

"There is a severe crisis of money in the family and now I have only one Dotara left. I don't know how long I will be able to retain this one," he further said.

Shuklal's wife Sudha Rani (38) said "My husband regularly plays the Dotara suffering from hunger pangs. All my frustration and agonies are dispelled with the mellifluous rendition of his Dotara."



Alongside playing the Dotara, Shuklal is also a prolific singer having prowess on different genre of Bengali songs especially Bhawaiya.

PHOTO: STAR

Another key accused

FROM PAGE 12

He added that the process of bringing key accused Ashik, who was arrested by Rab, from Madaripur to Cox's Bazar was underway.

Meanwhile in Noakhali's Chatkhil upazila, a rickshaw puller raped a woman who was waiting by the roadside for a vehicle to reach a polling station to vote in the fourth phase of the union parishad election.

According to the FIR, the woman got out to vote at a polling station near her home yesterday.

A rickshaw puller named Sarwar Hossen, 28, took her on his rickshaw and went to a farmhouse instead and raped her there.

A farmer came to rescue her after hearing her screams. The rapist had fled the scene by then.

Abul Khair, officer-in-charge of Chatkhil Police Station, told The Daily Star that a case was filed in

this regard.

"We sent the woman to Noakhali General Hospital for medical tests. The accused is on the run. We are trying to arrest him as soon as possible."

In Chuadanga, police yesterday arrested two people on charges of raping a woman after a case was filed with Chuadanga Sadar Police Station.

The arrestees are Rubel Hossen, 32, and Nazim Uddin, 30.

The FIR said that on December 25, the woman was picked up by three people around 8:00pm when she was on her way back home from grocery shopping. They forced her into a mango orchard and raped her.

Mohammad Mohsin, OC of the Chuadanga Police Station, told The Daily Star that the victim kept the incident a secret out of fear of social stigma. However, on Monday she filed the case against the three.

Indonesia rejects

FROM PAGE 12

children, we must pay attention to their health," executive director of Amnesty International Indonesia Usman Hamid said in a statement.

The UNHCR also called on Jakarta to let the boat's passengers disembark, pointing to the unseaworthiness of the boat.

Badruddin Yunus, a leader of the local fishing community, told AFP that fishermen who had visited the boat reported there were 120 people on board, including 51

children and 60 women.

He said the engine was broken and the refugees could not communicate with the local fishermen due to the language barrier.

Last year, hundreds of Rohingya who fled persecution in Buddhist-majority Myanmar arrived in Indonesia.

Many have since escaped to Malaysia, drawn by its substantial population of more than 100,000 Rohingya.

130-year-old time capsule

FROM PAGE 12

time capsule hidden in the base of the statue of General Robert E. Lee, who commanded the Army of Northern Virginia during the Civil War, contained relics such as buttons and bullets, Confederate currency, maps, a rare picture of assassinated president Abraham Lincoln in his coffin and other items.

The box will be opened on Tuesday at 1:00 pm (1800 GMT), Northam said in a later tweet, adding that it had been X-rayed.

"Experts believe there may be coins, books, buttons, and even ammunition from the Civil War," he said.

A different shoebox-sized container found in the base of the statue was opened by conservators last week but was clearly not the time capsule mentioned in the

1887 newspaper piece.

It contained three water-logged books, a photograph in a soggy cloth envelope and a coin.

The items appeared to have been mementos left behind for posterity by some of the workers who erected the statue.

The time capsule found on Monday is about twice the size.

Lee's statue in Richmond, the Virginia city that was the capital of the South during the bloody 1861-65 conflict, was taken down in September, one of a number of monuments to the pro-slavery Confederacy removed in recent months.

The statue became the focus of protests for racial justice last year following the death of George Floyd, a Black man who was murdered by a white police officer in Minnesota.

BIWTA officials, vessel authorities

FROM PAGE 12

See such role of the association," Justice Enayetur Rahim, who was a secretary of the association, told Aneek R Haque, a lawyer for a writ petitioner.

With the observation, the bench directed the government to give financial assistance to victims of the MV Abhijan-10 launch fire incident. It also sought all probe reports on the incidents, a list of people who died and got injured and fitness reports of launches and ships across the country.

The HC bench ordered the authorities to submit the list of dead and injured in 30 days and the reports on the fitness of launches and ships in 90 days.

Besides, the court issued a rule asking the officials concerned of the government to explain why their inaction in taking measures to prevent the incident of fire on the launch should not be declared illegal.

The bench came up with the directives and issued the rule following two separate writ petitions filed by Supreme Court lawyers Saumitra Sarder and Md Eunus Ali Akond.

Meanwhile, Monir Hossain 38, a construction material businessman from Dhaka's Demra, filed a case with Jhalakathi Sadar Police Station in connection with the fire incident.

Eight named, including one of the owners of the launch, and 15 to 20

unnamed people were made accused in the case, said Saiful Islam Sohad, inspector (investigation) of the police station.

Complainant Monir said his sister Taslima Akter, brother-in-law Sumon Sardar, nieces Sumaiya Akter Mim and Sumona Akter Tasnia and nephew Zonayed Islam Baizid were on MV Abhijan-10 on December 23.

Around 3:10am on December 24, Taslima called Monir and said the fire broke out in the launch. After that, her phone was found switched off.

Monir went to Jhalakathi the next morning and tried to identify their bodies but could not as the bodies were burnt beyond recognition.

Omicron may overwhelm healthcare

FROM PAGE 12

The hundreds of thousands of affected residents there joined the 13 million people in the city of Xi'an, who entered a sixth day of home confinement as China battled its highest daily case numbers in 21 months.

"I'm about to be starved to death," wrote one Xi'an resident on the Twitter-like Weibo platform.

"There's no food, my housing compound won't let me out, and I'm about to run out of instant noodles... please help!"

Many Xi'an residents have similarly complained on social media about the restrictions, which include a ban on driving and only one member of a household permitted to go outside for groceries every three days.

This lockdown is the most sweeping in China since the similarly-sized city Wuhan was cut off from the world in the early days of the pandemic.

The surges in many countries have been propelled by the highly transmissible Omicron variant.

The WHO warned against complacency even though preliminary findings suggest that Omicron could lead to milder disease.

"A rapid growth of Omicron... even if combined with a slightly milder disease, will still result in

large numbers of hospitalisations, particularly amongst unvaccinated groups, and cause widespread disruption to health systems and other critical services," warned WHO Europe's Covid Incident Manager Catherine Smallwood.

To hold back the tide, European nations brought back curbs with painful economic and social consequences.

Facing record-high infections, France stopped short of issuing a stay-at-home order but called on employers to make staff work from home three days a week where possible.

Sweden and Finland required negative tests for incoming non-resident travellers from yesterday, a day after Denmark -- which currently has the world's highest rate of infection per capita -- applied the same measure.

In Germany, private gatherings are now limited to 10 vaccinated people -- or two households where any unvaccinated people are present -- and nightclubs have been closed. All sports competitions will now be held behind closed doors.

Beyond social strife, the pandemic has been punishing economically, in particular for sectors like travel.

Some 11,500 flights have been scrapped worldwide since Friday, and tens of thousands more delayed, during one of the year's busiest travel periods.

Multiple airlines have blamed staffing shortages caused by spikes of Omicron cases.

The surge in the US has been fuelled by the Omicron variant, as well as large pockets of unvaccinated residents and a lack of access to quick and easy testing.

President Joe Biden said Monday some US hospitals could be "overrun" but that the country was generally well prepared.

He stressed that Omicron would not have the same impact as the initial Covid outbreak or the Delta variant surge this year.

"Omicron is a source of concern, but it should not be a source of panic," Biden said.

In an effort to prevent mass labour shortages during the surge, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Monday cut the isolation period for asymptomatic cases from 10 to five days.

The US is the nation hit hardest by the pandemic, and is closing in on its daily high of 250,000 cases recorded last January.

Limited-scale booster

FROM PAGE 12

of Burn and Plastic Surgery, 250-bed TB Hospital in Shyamoli, Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Hospital and Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital.

The total number of booster dose recipients could yet be known as no official concerned of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) could be reached for the information.

Speaking to reporters earlier in the morning, Dr Shamsul Haque, member secretary of the National Covid-19 Vaccine Deployment Programme, said, "Those who have received two doses of any Covid-19 jab will get an SMS to receive the booster dose. We have sent orders to all hospitals to start administering booster shots."

Only those who have received two shots of any of the five Covid-19 vaccines among frontline workers or people aged 60 years and above will get a Pfizer, Moderna or AstraZeneca shot as booster dose, said a DGHS circular signed by Shamsul, released on December 26, 2021.

The five vaccines which have so far been used in the countrywide campaign are produced by Oxford-AstraZeneca, Moderna, Pfizer, Sinopharm, and Sinovac. Shamsul said, "A few hospitals have started administering booster doses today [yesterday] while other hospitals across the country will begin in a day or two."

On December 19, the government introduced the booster dose on trial basis by administering Pfizer vaccine to 17 frontline workers and senior citizens.

On Monday, Lokman Hossain Miah, senior secretary of the health and family welfare ministry, said they would introduce booster doses in Dhaka from Tuesday to test the Surokkha registration app.

Country logs 4 new

FROM PAGE 12

from the others. The samples of the 33-year-old woman was collected on December 8 while the rest on December 23.

Earlier on Monday night, GISAID published the country's third Omicron Covid case on its website, which was also detected in Dhaka through active surveillance.

On December 9, two cricketers of the Bangladesh women's cricket team became the first in the country to test positive for Omicron after returning home from their tour of Zimbabwe.

Amid the reports of Omicron infections, the government stepped up health screening at all ports in the country from December 3.

The first case of Omicron variant was reported in South Africa on November 18. Since then, cases have been reported in at least 119 countries or territories, according to media reports.

The variant has caused a spike in new cases of Covid-19 across Europe and America.

Post-polls violence claims 3 lives

FROM PAGE 12

member of Harirampur UP in Gabindaganj, was beaten to death by supporters of Firoz Kabir, who defeated him, Shaharul's family members alleged.

However, Ezar Uddin, officer-in-charge of Gobindaganj Police Station, said he was not aware of anyone being beaten to death.

Shaharul's nephew Anwar Hossain

said the family will file a murder case. In Habiganj, at least 25 people were injured in a clash between supporters of Ayub Ali, who won as a UP member in Bullah Union Parishad, and Faizur Rahman, who lost the election.

Additional law enforcers have been deployed in the area to prevent further violence, said Saiful Islam, OC of Lakhai Police Station.

In Joypurhat, a man was injured, and several houses and businesses were vandalised in Bhadsha UP on Monday during a clash between supporters of AL chairman nominee Swadhin Sarwar, who won the election, and Haidar Ali, an independent who lost, locals said.

On Sunday, at least three people were killed as polls were held in 838 union parishads.

VIENNA TALKS

Israel open to 'good' Iran nuke deal

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett yesterday said that Israel would not automatically oppose a nuclear deal with Iran but world powers must take a firmer position.

"We are not the bear who said 'no'," Bennett said in an interview with Israel's Army Radio, referring to a popular naysaying character from children's literature.

Israel prefers a more result-oriented approach, he said.

"For sure there can be a good agreement. For sure. We know the parameters. Is that expected to happen now in the current dynamics? No. Because there needs to be a much firmer position," he said.

"Iran is negotiating with a very weak hand. But unfortunately the world is acting like Iran is at a strong point."

Bennett declined to comment on Israel's military strike capabilities against Iran, saying he preferred the approach of "speak little and do a lot".

On Monday, Iran and the US resumed indirect talks in Vienna on salvaging the 2015 Iran nuclear deal with Iran focused on one side of the original bargain, lifting sanctions against it, despite what critics see as scant progress on reining in its atomic activities.



Handout picture released by the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) shows firefighters battling the blaze at Syria's Latakia port after an Israeli air strike early yesterday. An Israeli air strike hit Syria's Latakia port, the second such attack on the key facility this month, according to Syrian state media. Since the outbreak of Syria's civil war in 2011, Israel has routinely carried out air strikes on its strife-torn neighbour. Britain-based war monitor, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said the cargo was "arms and munitions," which had detonated in "powerful explosions that were felt across the city of Latakia and its suburbs".

PHOTO: AFP



DECEMBER 29

1835 - Treaty of New Echota is signed between the US government and representatives of a minority Cherokee political faction to cede all lands of the Cherokee east of the Mississippi River to the United States.

1911 - Sun Yat Sen became the first president of the Chinese Republic.

1940 - German aircraft dropped thousands of incendiary bombs on London's city centre.

1978 - Spain's new democratic constitution, providing for a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary government, takes effect.

SOURCE: REUTERS

India boosts arsenal

Okays Merck pill, two more vaccines against Covid

REUTERS, Bengaluru

India has approved Merck's Covid-19 pill and two more vaccines for emergency use as the world's second most populous country braces for a possible spike in coronavirus cases due to the rapidly spreading Omicron variant.

Asia's third-largest economy has already said it will allow Covid-19 booster shots for some of its population as some Indian states logged an uptick in Omicron cases.

The emergency approvals come at a time measures are being taken to ramp up oxygen supplies and strengthen the country's health infrastructure.

Molnupiravir will be manufactured in India by 13 companies for restricted use under emergency situation for treatment of adult patients with COVID-19, the country's Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said yesterday.

Merck's anti-viral pill molnupiravir was authorised by the United States last week for certain high-risk adult patients and has been shown to reduce hospitalisations and deaths by around 30 percent in a clinical trial.

Earlier this year, Aurobindo Pharma, Cipla, Sun Pharmaceuticals and some others signed non-exclusive voluntary licensing agreements with Merck to manufacture and supply molnupiravir in India.

Two other Covid-19 vaccines, Serum Institute of India's version of Novavax Inc's shot, Covovax, and homegrown drugmaker Biological E's Corbevax were also granted emergency use approval, Mandaviya said on Twitter.

Medical experts have said India needs to double down on its vaccine campaign

and some states have imposed night curfews and other restrictions in the run up to New Year festivities to prevent a spike in infections and a repeat of summer 2021 when a devastating second wave of infections left tens of thousands dead.

The country's inoculation drive so far has been dominated by a domestically produced version of the AstraZeneca Covid-19 shot by Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech's inactivated vaccine Covaxin.



India has so far administered 1.43 billion Covid-19 vaccine doses and 62 percent of its eligible population have received both doses. The country plans to start vaccinating those aged 15-18 from Jan. 3.

The coronavirus has killed at least 5,404,577 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally Tuesday from official sources compiled by AFP.

Overall, the United States has recorded the most Covid deaths with 818,371, followed by Brazil with 618,534, India with 480,290 and Russia with 306,090.

Afghan women protest against Taliban killings of former soldiers

AFP, Kabul

A crowd of women marched through the Afghan capital yesterday, accusing Taliban authorities of covertly killing soldiers who served the former US-backed regime.

Around 30 women gathered near a mosque in the centre of Kabul and marched a few hundred metres chanting "justice, justice" before they were stopped by Taliban forces, an AFP correspondent saw.

The Taliban also tried to prevent journalists from covering the march, organised against the "mysterious murders of young people, particularly the country's former soldiers", according to social media invitations.

Taliban fighters briefly detained a group of reporters and confiscated equipment from some photographers, deleting images from their cameras before returning them.

Since the hardliners returned to power in August they have effectively banned unsanctioned protests and frequently intervene to block demonstrations against their austere brand of Islam.

The protest comes weeks after separate reports by the United Nations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said there were credible allegations of more than 100 extrajudicial killings by the Taliban since their takeover.

"I want to tell the world, tell the Taliban to stop killing. We want freedom, we want justice, we want human rights," said protester Nayera Koahistani.

In a statement read aloud by protester Laila Basam, the demonstrators called on the Taliban "to stop its criminal machine".

The statement said former soldiers and government employees of the old regime are "under direct threat", violating a general amnesty announced by the Taliban in August.

The protesters also aired objections to the ratcheting restrictions women are facing under Taliban rule.

The government issued new guidelines at the weekend banning women from travelling long distances unless escorted by a close male relative.

"Women's rights are human rights. We must defend our rights," said Koahistani.

Video footage posted online on Tuesday showed another women's protest held elsewhere in the capital that also called for women to be allowed education and work opportunities.

MORE NEWS

India restricts foreign funding for Mother Teresa charity

India has moved to cut off foreign funding to a charity founded by Mother Teresa, a decision critics described as further evidence of harassment of Christians under the Hindu nationalist government. The Missionaries of Charity was founded in 1950 by the late Mother Teresa, a Catholic nun who devoted most of her life to helping the poor in the eastern city of Kolkata. Her organisation runs shelter homes across India. According to the Hindu daily, it received around \$750 million from abroad in the 2020-21 financial year. The statement issued on Monday said the reason was "not meeting the eligibility conditions" under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act after "adverse inputs were noticed", without giving further details.

Japan aims to put a person on the moon by late 2020s

Japan revised the schedule of its space exploration plans yesterday, aiming to put a Japanese person on the moon by the latter half of the 2020s. According to the draft schedule of the plan, Japan aims to put the first non-American on the moon as part of the Artemis programme, a US-led initiative that aims to return astronauts to the moon. The plan also spells out Japan's aspirations to launch a probe to explore Mars in 2024, as well as to find ways to generate solar electricity in space.



Death toll from Brazil flooding rises to 20

The death toll from heavy rain and flooding that has plagued the northeastern Brazilian state of Bahia since November rose to 20 on Monday, amid incessant torrents that have displaced almost 63,000 people, authorities said. Two new fatalities were recorded in the town of Itabuna: a 21-year-old man who was swept away by currents and a 33-year-old woman was killed in a landslide, according to a local government report. Houses were under water and streets turned into rivers in several municipalities in the south of the state, pounded since Thursday by heavy rainfall that caused dams to burst and rivers to overflow at the weekend.

France closes mosque after 'unacceptable' preaching

France has ordered the closure of a mosque in the north of the country because of the radical nature of its imam's preaching, regional authorities told AFP yesterday. The mosque in Beauvais, a town of 50,000 people some 100 kilometres north of Paris, will remain shut for six months, according to the prefecture of the Oise region where Beauvais is located. It said the sermons there incite hatred, violence and "defend jihad". The move comes two weeks after Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said he had triggered the procedure to close the site because the imam there "is targeting Christians, homosexuals and Jews" in his sermons. This, the minister said, was "unacceptable". The French government announced earlier this year that it would step up checks of places of worship and associations suspected of spreading radical Islamic propaganda.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

EUROPE'S SECURITY, UKRAINE

US, Russia to meet early Jan in Geneva

AFP, Moscow

The United States and Russia will hold much-anticipated talks in January on European security and the Ukraine conflict after Moscow listed demands including to end Nato's expansion.

A spokesperson for the US National Security Council told AFP on condition of anonymity late Monday that the talks with Russia will take place on January 10.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov yesterday confirmed the date and said that they will take place in Geneva, where US President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin met for their first summit in June.

The Kremlin has grown increasingly insistent that the West and Nato are encroaching dangerously close to Russia's borders.

Moscow earlier this month presented the West with sweeping security demands, saying Nato must not admit new members and seeking to bar the United States from establishing new bases in former Soviet republics.

Moscow and Nato representatives are then expected to meet January 12, while Russia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which includes the United States, will meet January 13, the spokesperson added.



A Palestinian woman is blocked by Israeli security forces as she tries to stop the demolition of her home, located within the "Area C" of the occupied West Bank, where Israel retains full control over planning and construction, in the occupied West Bank town of Hebron, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

I want to satisfy my inner artiste: TANVIN SWEETY

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Tanvin Sweety started her career in the industry as a model, and is a renowned face in television dramas for 2 decades.

She has also appeared on theatre, where her presence is still active. She talked to The Daily Star about her latest works, and future plans.

You are starring in the ongoing mega-series 'Gulshan Avenue' season 2. Share your thoughts on this project.

It is a family drama where I portray the eldest daughter-in-law of an influential family. Being the eldest daughter-in-law, my character wants to handle everything in the house by exercising her power. It is written and directed by Nima Rahman, and is being aired on Bangla Vision.

You have been involved with theatre troupe 'Theatre' for many years. 'Mukti' made its 101st appearance on stage recently. You also worked on this drama. Share your experience about it?

We recently staged the 100th premiere of "Mukti" in a grand manner, earning positive response from the audience. It has an amazing storyline, which mesmerized the audience and makes them feel a lot of emotions.

Are you working on any new plays?

The work for a new drama, titled "Jamini Na Jete", is going on. It is expected to appear on stage in February or March next year. The audience will see a new side of me through this drama.

Why did you decrease your appearances in films?

I will surely work on films that have good characters and storylines. In this year's "August 1975", I played the role of a historical character in this movie. I recently got a new offer for another film, which I will work on.

After working in the industry for so many years, what are your expectations from acting?

I want to work on something which the audience will remember for a long time. I want to create a strong position in the industry, through my acting. I have done many projects, but now, I want to do satisfy my inner artiste.

Translated by Rafsana Amin



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



2021: LOOKING BACK 5 outstanding web productions throughout the year

SHARABA IQBAL

This year saw the release of a slew of outstanding Bangladeshi web series and films that had us glued to our screens. As 2021 comes to an end, we bring you a list of some of the best productions, released on OTT platforms.

Networker Baire

Renowned director Mizanur Rahman Aryan's "Networker Baire" was released on Chorki. A story about love and friendship showcasing the aspirations of young Dhaka dwellers, the original film brings together the life of Ratul (Yash Rohan), Munna (Khairul Basar), Abir (Sariful Islam Razz), and Sifat (Jonayed Bukdadi).

The multi-starrer production also features Nazia Haque Orsha as Tania opposite Khairul Bashar, Tasnia Farin as Kotha opposite Jonayed Bukdadi, Nazifa Tushi as Samia opposite Sariful Islam Razz and Tasnuva Tisha.

"Networker Baire" was lauded by the audience for its unique storytelling.

Mohanagar

Hoichoi's "Mohanagar", written and directed by Ashfaque Nipun, boasts a gripping story that shines a spotlight on the deep-rooted corruption in the police machinery.

The series was widely acclaimed upon its release. Mosharrif Karim brilliantly conveys the deviousness and chutzpah of the morally bankrupt officer Harun.

Ladies & Gentlemen

Internationally acclaimed filmmaker Mostofa Sarwar Farooki is known for showcasing a myriad of social and emotional struggles in his stories.

His eight-episode debut web series "Ladies & Gentlemen", on ZEE5, was lauded for portraying the journey of the protagonist, played by Tasnia Farin, as she fights for her rights in her own workplace and in the process, paves the way for every working woman in Bangladesh.

The cast also includes Maria Nur, Afzal Hossain, Mukit Zakaria, Hasan Masood, Partha Barua, Iresh Zaker, Pavel Areen, and Tanvir Hossain among others.

Unoloukik

The five episodes of Chorki's anthology series "Unoloukik" — strange, dark,



unpredictable, funny — both overlap in style and wildly differ from one another. There is a consistency in tone. This is achieved because they are all

based on stories by the same author, Shibabrata Barman, and made by one director, Robiul Alam Robi, but shot by five different cinematographers.

The cast of the show includes Asaduzzaman Noor, Chanchal Chowdhury, Nusrat Imrose Tisha, Gazi Rakayet, Intekhab Dinar, Iresh Zaker, Rafiath Rashid Mithila, Mostafa Monwar, Shohel Mondol, Farhana Hamid, Sahana Rahman Sumi and Naziba Basher, among others. Intekhab Dinar, in the role of Mostak Ahmed, delivers a stellar performance in his episode, "Dwikhandito".

Adhkhana Bhalo Chele Adha Mostaan

This musical film on popular singer-songwriter Shayan Chowdhury Arnob was released on Chorki to much anticipation. It showcases newly remastered versions of 12 popular Arnob tracks, along with some special stories narrated by the artiste himself and some of the people close to him.

"Adhkhana Bhalo Chele Adha Mostaan" is a film that explores the duality of an artiste, told through chats between director Abrar Athar and Arnob about life, battling one's demons, and overcoming them.

Honourable mentions

There were many other web projects that sparked interest among viewers this year, one of which was Ashfaque Nipun's "Koshoneer", on Hoichoi.

Featuring brilliant performances by Tariq Anam Khan, Saberi Alam, Runa Khan, Sayed Babu, Shyamol Mawla, Sabila Nur and Yash Rohan, the film tells the tale of a family torn apart by rifts.

Raihan Rafi's "Dark Side of Dhaka", featuring five connected stories, was lauded for its outstanding screenplay. The film, released on Cinematic, featured Nazifa Tushi, Manoj Kumar Pramanik, and Khairul Basar in pivotal roles.

Adnan Al Rajeev's debut Chorki original film, "YouTumor", features Pritom Hasan and Ziaul Hoque Polish in the lead roles. A story about two friends who turn out to be YouTubers, it was appreciated for addressing social issues, with a tint of comedy.

The Hoichoi series "Boli", directed by Shankha Dasgupta and starring Chanchal Chowdhury and Shohel Mondol among others, thrilled audiences with the story of the mysterious Chheradia Dwip, where the locals are doomed amidst the struggle for power and control.

SERIES REVIEW

Season 2 of 'The Witcher' takes folklore fantasy to new heights

SHANIZ CHOWDHURY

Based on Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski's stories that spawned an incredibly popular gaming franchise, Netflix's "The Witcher" recently released its much-anticipated second season.

You don't have to be a die-hard fan of "Game of Thrones" or even fantasy shows to watch "The Witcher". With sweeping multitudes: rich mythology, political tectonics, monster fables, peripatetic adventures, and unique characters, the new season has something refreshing to offer every step of the way.

The star of the show, Geralt of Rivia, a genetically enhanced monster slayer, now has a "Child Surprise" - Cirilla, a princess in exile - which means he is a surrogate father. From the very first episode, the audience learns about Ciri's conspicuous animosity towards the Nilfgaard Empire, which lay siege to her home, the Kingdom of Cintra. She is determined to take her revenge, for which she believes it's crucial that she transmutes into a Witcher.

Not long after meeting more of the Witcher clan in Kaer Morhen, Ciri learns to be one as well, under the tutelage of Geralt. Meanwhile, the world is hardly barren of calamities. In between well-choreographed and gnarly fight scenes, the story progresses further as conflict rises between empires, terrifying monsters attack and a host of new and captivating characters add to the breadth of lore. On one hand, we are introduced to Geralt's mentor Vesemir and on the other, Yennefer's mentor Tissaia makes a return. Other familiar faces such as the mage Triss



Ciri in 'The Witcher'

Merigold and Nilfgaardian commander Cahir also reappear.

When stories are blended together, it makes for a fun watch and also allows the writer to string in diverse plot elements. Each episode unfolds across three non-linear timelines, which is a testament to how the world-building in this season is more expansive.

The earliest timeline portrays the origin of the sorceress Yennefer of Vengerberg, played by the brilliantly versatile Anya Chalotra. Although Yennefer's love interest Geralt is under the impression that she is dead, the opposite is true. After being stripped off of her magical powers, she embarks on quite the winding journey with fellow mage, Fringilla.

We follow Geralt as he is thrown in the

deep end of many desultory adventures. We meet Ciri in the present timeline as she battles between playing safe and playing hard. Despite sparse timelines, these three main characters' fates are intrinsically bonded.

Freya Allen carefully channels the dichotomy of vulnerability and control into her role of Ciri. As for Geralt, Henry Cavill personifies the character exactly the way fans envisaged it. From Geralt's gruff mannerisms and his stoic profile to his sly sense of humour and affectionate nature, Cavill interweaved several quirks to create this character.

While "The Wheel of Time" and "The Last Kingdom" are wrestling to fill the void left by "Game of Thrones", "The Witcher" is at the forefront of this new era.

I forgot how to act after lockdown: Meryl Streep

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Noted actress Meryl Streep opened up about how she temporarily forgot how to act while portraying the U.S. president at a political rally for writer-director Adam McKay's comedy "Don't Look Up".

"I found it really hard," Streep revealed in the course of EW's *Around the Table* chat with the actress, McKay, Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Lawrence, Jonah Hill, and Tyler Perry.

"I didn't feel funny in the lockdown. When I would come in to shoot my stuff, [I'd] get out of the car and hadn't spoken to anybody in three weeks. [I'd] walk into the stadium in Worcester, put on the wig and the nails and the suit, and make a speech to all these people. I just lost it. I forgot how to act, I forgot what I was about. It sort of dismantles your humanity, to be isolated like that."

However, Streep swiftly recovered her acting mojo, at least according to Hill, who plays the actress' son in "Don't Look Up", and is full of praise for his co-star's comedic chops.

"Don't Look Up" is now streaming on Netflix.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Why are we stifling critical expressions on social media?

DSA is incompatible with our fundamental rights

WE have said it before and we are saying it again: the Digital Security Act (DSA) is a repressive law, which curbs the constitutionally guaranteed right of citizens to freedom of expression. We expect the votaries of the draconian law to retort that no freedom is without the attendant obligation to exercise it without abridging the rights of others. To that, we say: there are existing laws to address any transgression in this regard, without applying a reprehensible instrument such as the DSA.

If one analyses the cases lodged in the last two years, the fear that it would be used as a shield to protect the government and the administration from criticism—particularly from the mainstream media—and stifle the opposition is borne out by the number of cases targeting journalists for mere criticism of the agencies or the elected or nominated public office holders, and the opposition politicians. So much has the law become the Sword of Damocles that the print and electronic media (even those not attached to the government apron string) choose to err on the side of caution.

No political party that claims to have the mandate of the people can afford to be so conceited as to consider itself and the functionaries under it above all criticism, unwilling to countenance critical comments and dissenting voice from the public and political opponents. What should one make of the fact that, reportedly, more than 1,500 people—mostly politicians and journalists—were sued under the DSA between the years 2018 and 2020, and a similar number of cases were filed between January 1, 2020 and September 15, 2021?

Having neutered the media thus, the other platforms of communication, i.e. the social media platforms, are now being targeted—another prediction that has, sadly, come true. According to data by ARTICLE 19, a UK-based human rights body that focuses on freedom of expression, 83 percent of the 225 DSA cases lodged between January and November this year were filed over social media posts and individuals' online expressions. Individuals affiliated with the ruling party filed 40 percent of these cases. Similarly, 40 percent of the cases were filed against people for allegedly criticising the prime minister, ministers, members of parliament, and affiliates of the ruling party.

These statistics are a sad commentary on the country's state of democracy, rights and freedom. The DSA has infused a sense of fear among the public and the media which is supposed to reflect public opinion. We have no issue with the intention of the government to secure the variegated communication media, but we regret to say that the draconian provisions have been motivated by the administration's unwillingness to face criticism, fed by a dangerous notion that public servants are above reproach. It is time to bin the unconstitutional provisions of the DSA.

Bangladesh on course to reach another milestone

As the economy recovers, we must remain alert

IT is encouraging to see our economy recovering well from the pandemic, to the point where the government's finance division is projecting that it will become a half-a-trillion-dollar economy next fiscal year. According to the forecast, the size of Bangladesh's economy would be USD 510 billion in the 2022-23 fiscal year after growing at 10.7 percent. A large part of this growth, it has been estimated, is being driven by a successful vaccination campaign and steady growth in agriculture and industry.

The pandemic considerably slowed down the country's economic growth. Hence, it is of no surprise that once its effects start to fade away, our GDP growth will increase quite substantially. As the daily infection rate dropped below five percent from October, we have seen domestic demand rebound, which gave a massive boost to growth. Bangladesh's exports and remittance inflow figures have also been notable of late. Even during most of the pandemic period, our agriculture sector has continued to impress. This is a most remarkable achievement on part of our farmers, whose hard work has been a major driver of our success as a nation.

On the other hand, certain sectors such as the leather industry, textile industry and other non-metallic minerals industry have been performing extremely well. Thus, it is incumbent upon the government to provide them with all the necessary support to help continue their growth.

Having said all that, we agree with the experts that we are not yet completely out of the woods. The Omicron variant of the coronavirus, which has been tearing through certain parts of the world, continues to be a real and present danger to us. It has already caused massive setbacks for some of the developed countries and their economic recoveries, and Bangladesh must take all precautionary measures to ensure that it doesn't suffer a similar fate. Therefore, while the recovery we have seen so far does give us a cause for celebration, we must remain vigilant to ensure that this recovery does not fall by the wayside. Additionally, the increased wealth gap and poverty that the pandemic has caused must be addressed by the government, so that our growth can be truly inclusive and meaningful.



NAZNIN TITHI

IN the early hours of December 24, the deadliest launch fire in Bangladesh's history wreaked havoc on the launch MV Abhijan 10, burning so many people alive; as of December 28 afternoon, the death toll from the tragedy stood at 42, with more than 50 people still missing. According to reports in this daily, more than 50 passengers out of the 100 who sustained burn injuries are undergoing treatment at hospitals in Dhaka and Barishal. Among them, 15 critically injured patients were admitted to the Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in Dhaka. Three of them are now on life support.



All these deaths could have been avoided if the crew of MV Abhijan 10 or the water transport authorities had done their jobs.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

The gruesome details of negligence, indifference and inefficiency of the crew members of MV Abhijan 10—as well as others in positions of authority—have been the highlights of news reports published over the past few days. From these reports, what we understand is that there are three parties that should be held accountable for this tragedy: 1) The master and staffers of the launch, whose inefficiency and negligence caused the fatal fire; 2) The owners of the launch who didn't bother to comply with any of the rules regarding the operation of water vessels; and 3) the Department of Shipping and the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), who did not play their parts by monitoring

and inspecting the vessel and suspending its operation.

Although investigations are in progress to find out the exact reasons for the fire, primary inquiries done by the probe committees have identified faulty engines to be the main reason. Reportedly, the two engines of the launch were replaced with ones bigger in size last month, without getting approval from the Department of Shipping. Among them, only one was running on the night of the fire. What the probe committees have found is that the engine overheated due to a lack of lubrication, which might have caused the fire. Other factors that might have helped the fire spread so quickly include an illegally modified engine room and a kitchen next to it, and the barrels of fuel and gas cylinders stored in there. Apparently, all the changes to the vessel were made without taking approval from the authorities concerned.

Many other irregularities and violations

Barguna on the evening of December 23. Although the crew noticed that the engine was acting strange, they kept the vessel moving without fixing the problem. And when people on the bottom floor felt the deck getting hotter—after it left the Barishal launch terminal at around 1:30am—the master still kept the launch sailing towards its destination. According to a member of the probe committee, it should have been an easy task for the crew members to identify and resolve the engine issue. But apparently, they didn't bother to check the engine.

And what did they do when the entire launch was engulfed with fire, with hundreds of passengers crying for help? They steered the launch to the bank of Sugandha River in the Charkathi area of Jhalakathi district, and fled without mooring it. Had they moored it to a tree in the area, there could have been much fewer casualties. What is even more shocking is the fact that the launch crew

The common excuse that we hear from the BIWTA and the Department of Shipping is that they don't have enough manpower to inspect all the water vessels in operation. Reportedly, the BIWTA has only 25 traffic inspectors across the country, seven of whom are deployed at Sadarghat in Dhaka, while the Department of Shipping has a total of 18 inspectors—only one of them stationed at Sadarghat. Besides, there are only six surveyors in the shipping department to survey around 14,000 registered vessels across the country. The question that arises here is: What is stopping them from recruiting more inspectors and surveyors to cover the inspection and monitoring of all the active water vessels?

In the absence of proper monitoring and inspection, the number of unregistered and unfit vessels are increasing in our waterways, with unskilled and novice sailors running them, leading to many tragedies like the MB Abhijan one. The MV Mayur accident on June 29, 2020 is still fresh in our memory, where 34 people died as the launch hit a small water vessel in the Buriganga River.

Furthermore, the issue of fire safety is always overlooked by the authorities as well as those working in the sector. Reportedly, while many water vessels in the country have lifts, well-furnished rooms, Wi-Fi, radio communication and modern gadgets, they hardly have any fire safety equipment. According to the Fire Service and Civil Defence in Barishal, no fire drill for the crews of water vessels has taken place in the last four years.

The responsibility to ensure that all the water transports are compliant with fire safety regulations also falls on the Department of Shipping and the BIWTA. When will they start playing their parts?

It is good news that a case has been filed with the marine court by an inspector of the Department of Shipping against the four owners of MV Abhijan 10 and eight others, and the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) has already arrested Hamjalal Sheikh, one of the launch owners. We hope that the rest of the owners and the crew members will be arrested soon. All of those who are guilty of this crime must be arrested and punished, as well as those in authority who failed to do the job they have been recruited for. However, given the inefficiency of the marine court and its dismal case disposal record—only one case has been disposed of by the court in the last four years—can we really expect them to ensure justice for the victims of this massive tragedy?

Naznin Tithi is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

The crime of negligence

The guilty, including those in the authorities, must face justice

The extent of apathy and negligence that the launch masters and staffers showed towards the passengers' lives is incredible—and nothing short of a criminal offence.

kept the main gate closed during the fire, limiting the passengers' chances to escape.

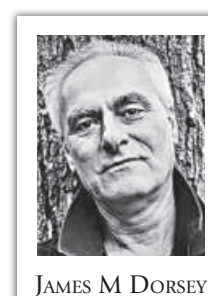
The extent of apathy and negligence that the launch masters and staffers showed towards the passengers' lives is incredible—and nothing short of a criminal offence. Legal action must be taken against them without any delay.

But while we demand punishment of the launch owners and crew members for this man-made tragedy, we must also hold the Department of Shipping and the BIWTA authorities accountable. If the owners of the launch are at fault for replacing the engines, changing the masters and crew members, and modifying their vessel without the authorities' approval, the shipping authorities and the BIWTA are also at fault for not inspecting the vessel that was operating on this river route regularly.

of rules were found as well. The launch owners reportedly appointed masters and other crew members without the approval of the authorities; on the night of the fire, the launch was being driven by two second class masters instead of a first class one. Also, they didn't have the necessary fire safety equipment, nor were its crew members trained on fire safety. Moreover, there were around a thousand passengers on board while the launch should have had 420 passengers at night, as per the rules.

Then comes the issue of inefficiency and negligence of the crew members. According to a report published in this daily on December 26, nothing was done right by the launch crew from the moment MV Abhijan 10 left Dhaka for

Christmas finally arrives in Saudi Arabia



JAMES M DORSEY

LONG banned, Christmas has finally—at least tacitly—arrived in Saudi Arabia; just don't use the name in marketing or be ostentatious about your tree. Coffee shops serving beverages in red cups with snowflakes on them are okay. So is the sale of soap bars named Tis the Season and Vanilla Bean Noel.

Christmas trees that sell at up to USD 3,000 apiece are slightly more complicated. The religious police no longer harass shopkeepers for selling items that reference a non-Muslim holiday. But shopkeepers remain uncertain about trees and sometimes still keep them in a backroom. Religious references and carols remain beyond the pale.

The loosening of the rules of the game in a country that still bans non-Muslims from worshipping in public and the building of non-Muslim houses of worship is part of an effort to ensure that the kingdom does not lag in the competition with the UAE and Qatar to project itself as an enlightened, modern country that can attract foreign investment and vie for foreign talent and tourists.

The loosening is also part of an effort to position the kingdom as a beacon of Muslim moderation in competition with the UAE, Qatar, and Indonesia.

While Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country and democracy, is struggling with creeping conservatism, and Qatar is seeking to ensure football fans that it will welcome diversity of any kind during next year's World Cup, the UAE has sprinted ahead by leaps and bounds.

In the last year, the UAE, where public references to Christmas and carols are not an issue and non-Muslim houses of worship exist alongside mosques, far-reaching legal reforms have been enacted that legalised alcohol and non-married cohabitation and ended censorship of cinematic releases. The caveat, like elsewhere in most of the Muslim world, is that the reforms are anchored in secular—not in Islamic—law and jurisprudence.

Nahdlatul Ulama, the world's largest Muslim civil society organisation, which is at the forefront of the projection of Indonesian moderation, has started a process of reform of Muslim jurisprudence, but has so far shied away from hot button

issues that top the agenda of its Middle Eastern rivals.

Saudi loosening of norms also serves to distinguish the kingdom from other competitors for religious soft power and leadership of the Muslim world, like Turkey and Iran that are governed by Islamists, who either are inspired by or more strictly apply conservative interpretations of Islamic law. The loosening further aims to bolster economic reforms and efforts to diversify the economy and create jobs.

To be sure, Saudi Arabia has been signalling for several years that it is travelling down a road of greater religious tolerance and social liberalisation. Meetings between Saudi leaders and

for the first time in shop windows.

However, increasingly, same-sex relationships are emerging as a red line in Gulf social liberalisation.

The kingdom's top cleric, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al-Sheikh, came out swinging this week in a *fatwa* or religious opinion that denounced same-sex relationships. He appeared to be responding to a United Nations General Assembly resolution adopted earlier this month that called for recognition of "women in all their diversities," including "gender identity" and "sexual orientation."

In what amounted to rare public—albeit implicit—clerical criticism of the crown prince's liberalisations, al-Sheikh also appeared to be reacting to a major



Is Saudi Arabia relaxing its anti-Christmas rules in an effort to position itself as a beacon of Muslim moderation?

PHOTO: ARAB NEWS

Evangelical and Jewish leaders and support for interfaith dialogue served the purpose.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has turned the Muslim World League, once a major vehicle for the global propagation of Wahhabism, the ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam that dominated Saudi Arabia for its first 85 years, into the propagator of his vaguely defined concept of moderate Islam.

Bin Salman has also lifted the ban on women's driving, liberalised gender segregation, created greater job and leisure opportunities for women, and generated a Western-style entertainment industry. But, like the UAE and Qatar, he has stopped short of fully abolishing male guardianship.

Saudi shops started catering several years ago to Valentine's Day, long a no-go in the kingdom, by selling red roses, and in October Halloween costumes appeared

electronic dance festival, the MDLBeast Soundstorm, held near Riyadh in recent days and reportedly attended by 732,000 people.

Some reports suggested that some attendees had been publicly intoxicated and had displayed behaviour that raised suspicions that they were queers.

The kingdom punishes homosexuality by death.

Al-Sheikh, a descendant of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism, described homosexuality as among the "most heinous and ugliest crimes."

He asserted that "human rights ... find first and foremost position in God's law" and warned that "the whole world is afflicted with outrageous boldness, false claims, and despicable perversion, which is intended to strip man of his humanity!"

Al-Sheikh appeared to be drawing a red

Saudi Arabia may have enacted significant social liberalisations, but beyond red lines they rest on a fragile fundament as long as they are not anchored in changes of religious doctrine and jurisprudence.

line for social reform on an issue that was likely to enjoy public support.

A recent public opinion poll concluded that 67 percent of the people applauded the kingdom's rejection of the UN resolution, while 33 percent said they did not have an opinion.

Scholar Matthew Hedges, who was arrested in the Emirates and sentenced to life in prison on charges of espionage while researching a just published book, noted that countering "immoral" sexual conduct is one way Emirati authorities appeal to the public's cultural sensitivities to justify the construction of a surveillance state.

Al-Sheikh's *fatwa* contrasts starkly with efforts by Qatari officials to downplay criticism of the Gulf state's anti-same sex laws and reassure LGBTQ fans that they would be welcome during next year's World Cup and would even be allowed to fly the rainbow flag at games. LGBTQ Qataris insist that the same tolerance is not extended to them.

For Saudis, Al-Sheikh's *fatwa* contains a cautionary note. Saudi Arabia may have enacted significant social liberalisations, but beyond red lines they rest on a fragile fundament as long as they are not anchored in changes of religious doctrine and jurisprudence.

"While the changes (in Saudi Arabia) are potentially far-reaching, their ultimate direction is uncertain. Most ... remain quite reversible. And while state structures and officials have accepted and even applauded the moves, some social resentment and resistance is still possible—and unintended consequences might still materialise," warned scholars Yasmine Farouk and Nathan J Brown.

Dr James M Dorsey is an award-winning journalist and scholar, and a senior fellow at the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute.



Historically and traditionally, women have had limited access to community support and social capital.

ILLUSTRATION: COLLECTED

Brunt of Covid-19 on female-headed households



"M life is full of struggles and misery; I don't think I'll ever be happy.", Aliya Begum, head of her household, narrates sadly.

Aliya (not her real name), a 50-year-old widow living with her daughter in a congested slum in Chattogram, is one of the many women household heads who are bearing the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic. Before Covid, Aliya worked as a domestic help while her 15-year-old daughter worked at a garments factory. During the onset of Covid-19 and the associated lockdown, they both were laid off from their jobs without prior notice. With no income or external support, Aliya found herself in a deep pit of desolation. Although the lockdown was finally lifted when we were having this conversation in September 2021, Aliya had hardly outrun her misery.

According to the World Bank, in 2018, approximately 15.8 percent of the total households in Bangladesh had female heads. It doesn't take much effort to understand the unfavourable situation of female-headed households in a patriarchal society like ours. Up until the late 90s, female-headed households were considered as the "poorest of the poor" in development discourse. Although this notion has been contested and claimed to be misleading when poverty is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon, female-headed households are still visibly and readily an identifiable group in income poverty.

Aliya is not alone in her plight. Female-headed households have evidently been one of the hardest hit groups during the ongoing pandemic. Recent statistics from a field survey conducted by Centre for Peace and Justice, Brac University—and funded by the Covid Collective Platform of IDS, University of Sussex—illustrate an appalling profile of households with female heads. The survey, which included 14 percent of the total sample from female-headed households, highlighted a number

of critical issues. Nearly half of the female heads had attained only primary level education and more than a quarter had no literacy at all. A quarter of the female heads reported loss of work due to the pandemic. Decrease in income was also reportedly high (61 percent) in September 2021, and was even higher in June 2021 (77 percent). More than half of these households are facing increasing food deficit and 23 percent of them face food crisis. Not having adequate education, coupled with lack of skills, made it nearly impossible for the participants to opt for another job after being laid off.

As Aliya illustrates her situation, "When strict lockdown was imposed, the garments factory my daughter worked at was closed down and my employer also told me not to go to my job. At one point, we had no money to buy food. There were days when we only ate once." Like many other female heads from our survey, Aliya also relied on borrowing money to survive the pandemic. Access to formal financial institutions such as banks is very limited for under-served groups of women, in general, in Bangladesh. These women mostly relied on neighbours or relatives for borrowing cash, and sometimes even from moneylenders, at high interest rates. She is still repaying those loans, but by borrowing more money, which makes her susceptible to a vicious never-ending cycle of debt.

One other problem for female heads of households is that, traditionally women are considered the primary caregivers of the family. Strict social distancing limited their ability to get external help to take care of dependent household members such as children, elderly persons and persons with disabilities. This often reduced women's working hours and hence also reduced income. Such households reported being forced to opt for debilitating mechanisms—such as 53 percent of them reducing food consumption—to cope with increased expenses and income loss.

Historically and traditionally, women as a group have had limited access to community support and social capital. There is also mistrust towards community, stemming from previously experienced discriminatory behaviour. All of these combined makes female heads of

households more vulnerable to crises and shocks. The evidences from the survey reiterate that more than half of the female-headed households received no support from their community during the pandemic. Sometimes, they have even eschewed seeking support as they cannot reciprocate the same due to constant resource constraints. Their access to social support programmes is also very limited. 61 percent female-headed households reported that they are not enlisted under any social safety net programmes.

Bangladesh has shown visible improvements in women's empowerment. This gives rise to the assumption that being head of the household would give women more power to exercise agency and transition to a better-off position. However, the reality as reflected in our survey starkly contrasts with this hypothesis. Having said that, it is also erroneous to assume or imply that having male earners in the household will automatically mitigate the same risks during crises like the pandemic. Instead, the inferences indicate that it is mostly structural challenges that are creating new fault lines for female-headed households. Lacking access to financial and community support and lack of transparency prevent these women from benefiting from social welfare programmes which were designed to support vulnerable people like them.

The statistics and numbers on empowerment ranking mean little to Aliya, as she is all too familiar to the quandary and fears that keep her awake at night. We are now almost two years into the pandemic and, with a decrease in infection rates, the focus is now on economic rebuilding. However, the reductionist focus of public policies that seldom takes account of female household heads' realities will only exacerbate their existing conundrums. It is, therefore, critical to amplify their needs and concerns in the policy-making space and devise policies that take into account their realities. We cannot risk leaving these female-headed demographics worse-off as we ambitiously plan to build back better as a country.

Nahida Akter is a development researcher at the Centre for Peace and Justice, Brac University. All opinions are the author's own, based on her analysis of empirical findings, and do not represent the position of any affiliated organisations.

2021 was a critical year for climate actions



from burning fossil fuels for over a century had already raised the global mean temperature by over one degree Celsius, and that this was now causing losses and damages to human lives, livelihoods and infrastructure.

This was definitively proven by the 6th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), published by the panel's Working Group 1 in August 2021, where scientists said that, for the first time, they now had unequivocal evidence of climate change impacts that can be clearly attributed to human actions. This report was duly acknowledged at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference, also known as the Conference of Parties (COP26), held in Glasgow, Scotland in November, and it is now clear that we have entered a new era of climate

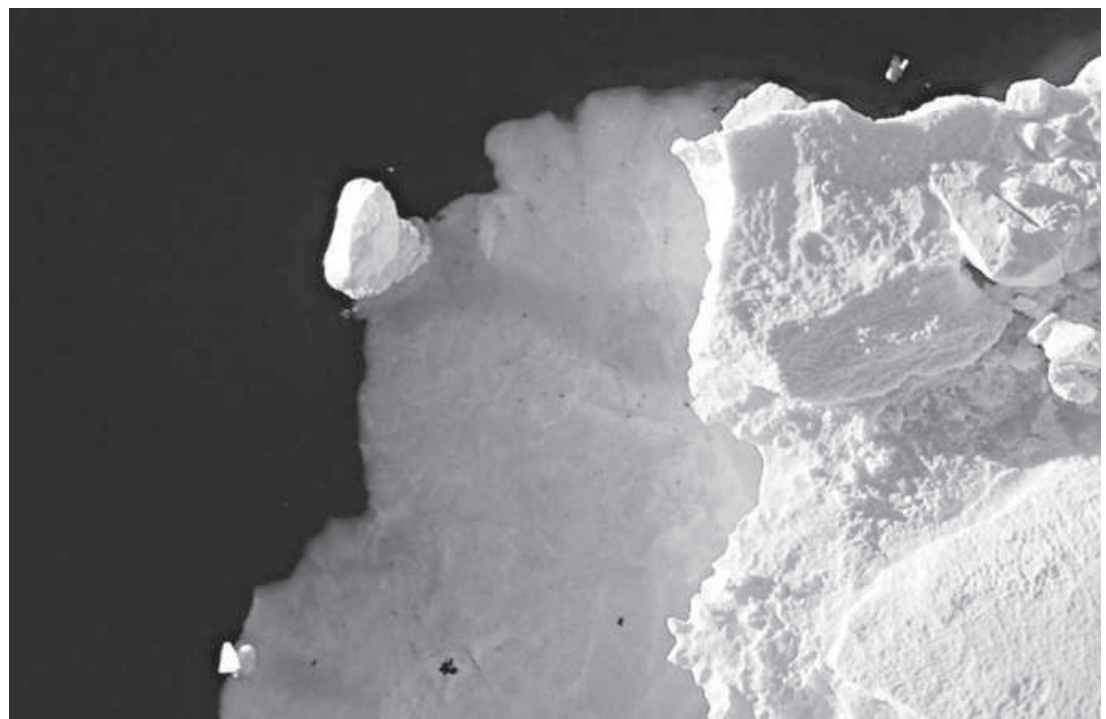
THE year 2021 has been significant in climate change discussions, in a decade that is already quite important in terms of tackling the climate crisis. This was the year when the world finally acknowledged that human-induced climate change due to the emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs)

members, played a critical role at COP26 on behalf of the vulnerable nations. Bangladesh needs to keep up its political leadership role in this regard over the coming years. Even though Bangladesh is set to hand over the leadership of the CVF to Ghana in 2022, it will remain a part of the *troika* that governs the CVF for two more terms, and hence will be able to play a leadership role at the political level for another four years.

Political work on tackling climate change will be a daily phenomenon from now on, and not only confined to the annual COPs. So, the entire diplomatic corps of Bangladesh as well as other vulnerable developing countries need to build capacity in climate diplomacy. This also means that tackling climate change has now become a matter for all conscious and educated citizens of every country to become engaged in, and not just leave it to their leaders to deal with. This means that a whole-of-society approach is required to tackling climate change.

A particularly important group to look up to is the youth from all over the world, many of whom are already engaged in the Fridays for Future movement led by Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg.

This is something that Bangladesh has an opportunity to lead the world in as the new Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCP) is launched to go



The year 2021 is the year that the world finally acknowledged the loss and damage caused by human-induced climate change.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

change discussions.

In early 2022, we expect to see the publication of the IPCC Working Group 2 report on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation, which is expected to reinforce the evidence on loss and damage attributable to human-induced climate change. This will take us forward in terms of trying to deal with the reality of climate change around the world.

In terms of political actions to tackle climate change, considering the successful completion of COP26, the world is moving—albeit not fast enough—in the right direction. It is expected that more progress will be made at COP27, which is scheduled for November 2022 in Egypt and is expected to have greater emphasis on adaptation, resilience, and loss and damage.

As Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, as the current chair of Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), which has 55 developing countries as

beyond merely adapting or even building resilience to tackle climate change, and to become prosperous despite the setbacks that climate change will inevitably cause going forward. It is heartening that many of the CVF countries have vowed to follow Bangladesh's example and develop their own climate prosperity plans as well. Bangladesh will be able to share its experience with other vulnerable developing countries over the coming decade.

As we move forward towards 2030, which is the deadline by which both the Paris Agreement as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are targeted to achieve their objectives, Bangladesh has an opportunity to become a global leader in combining successful development with tackling climate change. We only have nine more years to do it, so there is no time to lose.

Dr Saleemul Huq is the director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) at the Independent University Bangladesh (IUB).

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Hindu hero
 - 5 Niger neighbor
 - 9 Poultry buy
 - 10 Whoop it up
 - 12 Tony, for one
 - 13 Make blank
 - 14 Regions
 - 16 Michele of "Glee"
 - 17 Fire proof
 - 18 Parish leaders
 - 20 Takes the wheel
 - 22 Player's fee
 - 23 Channing of "Magic Mike"
 - 25 Seoul setting
 - 28 New York tribe
- DOWN**
- 1 Most chilly
 - 2 Cochise's people
 - 3 Humorist Sahl
 - 4 Neighbor of Spain
 - 5 Musical opposite of dimin.
 - 6 That woman
 - 7 Arthurian island
 - 8 Dry expanse
 - 9 Hacienda houses
 - 11 Tenant's form
 - 15 Make good as new
 - 19 Unexciting
 - 21 Coup d'—
 - 24 Tum loose, say
 - 25 In the future
 - 26 Assured
 - 27 Pleistocene period
 - 29 Pressed
 - 30 Sad songs
 - 31 Church parts
 - 33 Pizzeria sights
 - 37 Race goal
 - 39 Hamm of soccer



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD
 Road Division, Kushtia.
 email : eekus@rhd.gov.bd

Date: 28-12-2021

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the following works :


Sl. No.	Tender ID No.	Package Reference No.	Name of work	Last Date & Time of Selling	Date & Time of Closing and Opening
01.	640805	e-GP/R/W-12/KURD/2021-2022	Repair of Damaged embankment with RCC Paving and earth work at different Km (Ch. 0+120 to 0+160m, Ch. 0+180 to 0+210m, Ch. 0+220 to 0+270m, Ch. 0+480 to 0+505m, Ch. 3+101 to 3+138m, Ch. 3+900 to 3+980m, Ch. 4+120 to 5+210m, Ch. 5+590 to 6+015m, Ch. 7+300 to 7+350m, Ch. 7+400 to 7+440m, Ch. 11+450 to 11+485m, Ch. 12+650 to 12+695m, Ch. 13+350 to 13+385m & Ch. 14+370 to 14+393m.) of Sadarpur Bazar-Halsha Rail Bazar (Z-7465) Road under Road Division, Kushtia during the year 2021-2022.	12-01-2021 At 16:00 hours.	13-01-2021 At 12:30 hours.
02.	640807	e-GP/R/W-13/KURD/2021-2022	Seal coat work at Ch. 2+120 to 3+230 = 1110.00m. of Bheramra Rail Station-Bheramra Ferry Ghat Raod (Z-7409) under Road Division, Kushtia during the year 2021-2022.	12-01-2021 At 16:00 hours.	13-01-2021 At 12:35 hours.
03.	640809	e-GP/R/W-14/KURD/2021-2022	Seal coat work at Ch. 0+950 to 2+120 = 1170.00m. of Bheramra Rail Station Bheramra Ferry Ghat Raod (Z-7409) under Road Division, Kushtia during the year 2021-2022.	12-01-2021 At 16:00 hours.	13-01-2021 At 12:40 hours.


This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.


To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for submission the e-Tender Document from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any Member of Schedule Banks for e-GP.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System portal and form e-GP help desk (helpdesk@procure.gov.bd).

 (Md. Falema Khatur)
 Sub-Assistant Engineer, RHD
 Road Division, Kushtia.

 (Md. Abdul Halim)
 Assistant Engineer (C.C.), RHD
 Road Division, Kushtia.

 (Md. Shakirul Islam)
 Executive Engineer (C.C.), RHD
 Road Division, Kushtia.

GD-2406



Succored by a packed slip cordon, Shoriful Islam drops the cherry against New Zealand XI as Bangladesh hone their pace-bowling craft in tailor-made conditions at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Sunzamul spins North Zone to victory

SPORTS REPORTER



Left-arm spinner Sunzamul Islam's eleven-wicket haul helped BCB North Zone register their first win in the Bangladesh Cricket League by securing a

six-wicket victory over Islami Bank East Zone on the third day of their third round game at Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi yesterday.

Sunzamul was the chief destroyer for North Zone, picking up eight wickets while conceding 98 as he helped bundle out East Zone for 254 runs in their second innings. North Zone went on to chase the small target of 111 runs for the loss of just four wickets to seal their only win in three games with a day in hand.

It was an eventful third day's play in Rajshahi where a total of 14 wickets fell after East Zone resumed the day on 17 without loss.

The 31-year-old Sunzamul, who had picked up three wickets in the first innings, went on to register his 24th fiver and his seventh ten-wicket haul in first-class cricket following his eight-wicket haul in the second innings yesterday. This was also the first ten-wicket haul in this edition of BCL.

Meanwhile, it was a disappointing batting display from the East Zone as none of the batters were able to convert their starts. Nayeem Hasan's 45 was the top score for the side.

North Zone, however, had swayed the momentum of the game towards them when they took a 144-run first-innings lead.

Meanwhile, at Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, centuries from Amite Hasan and Towhid Hridoy propelled South Zone to 381 for five before stumps against Walton Central Zone.

Despite the two centuries, South Zone still trail by 100 runs in reply to Central Zone's 481 in the first innings.

Resuming the day on 92 for one, overnight batter Pinak Ghosh was dismissed on 71. But Amite and Hridoy added valuable 201 runs for the third wicket stand.

Amite went on to register his fourth first-class ton and his second in the ongoing tournament before being dismissed on 117 off 275 balls. And after smashing a double ton in the previous match, Hridoy followed it up with another well-paced 122.

If the game ends in a draw, both Central Zone and South Zone will advance to the top two of the points table and will face each other in the final.



TIGERS' pace battery charged up a notch

SPORTS REPORTER



Keeping oneself fresh mentally and physically is a challenge during the new normal of quarantine protocols and for a pacer, the task of finding rhythm is perhaps more difficult.

Yesterday's practice game against New Zealand XI provided just the right opportunity for the Bangladesh team's pace battery – a key component in Kiwi conditions – to find some rhythm and much needed confidence following a tough few days for the visitors in New Zealand after spin-bowling coach Rangana Herath had tested positive for Covid-19, which subsequently lengthened the quarantine period and hampered Bangladesh's preparations for the two-Test series, slated to begin from January 1.

U-19s progress as group champs

SPORTS REPORTER

The group-deciding fixture between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka was abandoned after one of the umpires returned positive Covid result midway through the game at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka had already confirmed their semifinals spot and were vying for the top spot in Group B.

The positive Covid result, however, did not impact the young Tigers' progress as they ended the group phase being champions, thanks to a superior run-rate, and are set to face runners-up of Group A, India, in their semifinal on December 30. Sri Lanka, meanwhile, will square off against Pakistan in the other semifinal.

January 1.

Having won the toss, captain Mominul Haque handed the ball to his quicks at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui after rain had seen the start delayed till 11:44 pm local time. Abu Jayed Rahi was able to make the new ball talk, picking up the wickets of Luke Georgeson and Devon Conway, the sixth of the innings, in the same over.

Taskin Ahmed, not to be left behind, then picked up Jacob Cumming, out caught behind in the very next over as New Zealand XI slumped to three for eight runs.

Rain had hampered proceedings before early lunch was called. Following a steady partnership, Taskin made inroads after lunch, removing Jack Boyle (20 off 47) out caught-behind to break the hosts' resistance further. Jayed went on to remove Mitch Renwick (18 off 60) before rain halted proceedings with 27.3 overs played and New Zealand XI standing at 71 for five.

Jayed finished with three for 27 in 9 overs while Taskin returned figures of 2 for 26 in 8.3 overs. Shoriful Islam and Shohidul Islam also got a run in, bowling five overs each.

Jayed was satisfied with the day's work and especially using the new ball.

"We played after a long time and it was good for our team. Rain kept coming and going and the bowlers did well and we were able to comeback. We were able to bowl well with the new ball after quite some time and overall bowled in good areas according to the conditions," Jayed remarked in a video message to the media.

On pace-friendly New Zealand conditions, Jayed and Co will now be hoping to carry on the good day's work before the Tigers take on the Kiwis in the red-ball format which is also part of the new World Test Championship cycle, hoping to avoid a hiding after a few dismal results over the last few months.



FEDERATION CUP

Ctg Abahani through to quarters

SPORTS REPORTER

Chattogram Abahani qualified for the quarterfinals of the Bashundhara Group Federation Cup following a 2-0 victory over Bangladesh Police in their Group C fixture at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday.

Midfielder Arifur Rahman gave the port city side a 24-minute lead, rounding off the Police goalkeeper before placing the shot into open net following a through-ball from Sohel Rana. South African recruit Nkululeko Twala doubled the team's advantage on the hour-mark with a glancing header on a cross from Kamrul Islam.

The win in their first match was enough to see Chattogram Abahani through as they have three points while Police, with a defeat and a draw which they earned in their opening match against Saif SC, are in third position with a single point.

Saif will need to avoid defeat or at least lose by a single-goal margin to secure their last-eight berth when they meet Chattogram Abahani in the last group phase match on Thursday.

Sri Lanka smash hosts in final

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh had to be content with the runners-up trophy in the Bangabandhu Asian Central Zone Men's Volleyball Challenge Cup following a 3-0 sets defeat against Sri Lanka in the final at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The home side gave a run for the money to the 50th-ranked side in the world despite lacking skill in all three departments – defending, attacking and service, as most of the players except for Horosit Bishwas, Syaed Al Jaber



and Mohammad Sujar are inexperienced, coming into the tournament on the back of only a month's training. With the spectators cheering the home team relentlessly, Bangladesh fought equally in the first set and were close to victory before two silly mistakes forced them surrender the lead as the Lankans took the first set 28-26.

In the second set, Bangladesh could not match with pace, power, block and smashing of Sri Lanka and were beaten 25-20. The men in red and green took a 16-14 lead in the third set before poor blocking from them and some intelligent play from the Sri Lankans meant the islanders won the set 25-20.

Sri Lanka had beaten Bangladesh in 3-1 sets in the group stages.

"We lost to Sri Lanka due to inexperience. Most of our players have no experience of playing such a match, which is why we could not match them despite offering equal fight. I think this experience will help us in future," captain Horosit said.

Meanwhile, Nepal lifted the title of Bangamata Asian Central Zone Women's Volleyball Championship after handing a 3-2 sets defeat to Uzbekistan in the final at the same venue.

India seamers make SA toil

REUTERS, PRETORIA

India's seamers made inroads into South Africa's brittle batting line-up as the home side limped to 193 for eight on the third day of the first Test on Tuesday in reply to the tourists' total of 327.

Twelve wickets fell in the first two sessions on a wicket that has sprung to life and is providing plenty of assistance to the seamers in movement, pace and steep bounce at Centurion Park. Mohammed Shami (four wickets) was excellent with his line and length.

Seamer Lungi Ngidi had earlier taken 6-71 as South Africa made light work of bowling India out on the third morning. Ngidi helped South Africa claim the last seven Indian wickets for the addition of only 55 runs.

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
South Africa vs India
1st Test, Day 4
Live from 02:00 pm
STAR SPORTS HD 1

EPL
Chelsea vs Brighton
Live from 01:30 am
(Thursday)
STAR SPORTS HD 2

EPL
Brentford vs
Manchester City
Live from 02:15 am
(Thursday)

DAY'S EVENT

BCL
South Zone vs Central Zone, Chattogram
North Zone vs East Zone, Rajshahi

Even more to come, Cummins warns

AFP, MELBOURNE



Skipper Pat Cummins said the way his team ripped England apart to retain the Ashes on Tuesday showed the strength of Australian cricket -- and warned they were only just getting started.

"A great sign of the strength of Australian cricket. We were really confident Scotty would do a great job. Maybe not six for seven!" said Cummins.

"Outside of the actual results, there have been so many other positives -- a couple of debutants, a strong squad.

"These three victories really feel like we're setting ourselves up for the next few years and on."

Along with Boland, wicketkeeper Alex Carey also made

England's defeat at the MCG was their ninth Test loss in 2021 -- a joint record for a calendar year along with Bangladesh in 2003. With the fourth Ashes Test starting on January 5, England will be glad to see the back of 2021.

his debut this series, in for Tim Paine, who stood down as captain and player in the weeks before the Ashes over a lewd text-message scandal.

Seamer Michael Neser also played his first match, in Adelaide, performing admirably when Cummins was ruled out at the last minute as a close contact of a Covid case.

Cummins said Australia's recent victory at the Twenty20 World Cup had given them the belief "that we are right up there with the best teams in the world".

"We went into the series really confident. Losing Paine obviously wasn't ideal, but as soon as we knew that was going to be the case, we knew we had our jobs to do and a lot of really confident players around that," said Cummins.

"I just feel like it's building, we have a great squad of 15 or 20 guys we're working from and I think we have got options for anywhere in the world."



Australia's Scott Boland celebrates the dismissal of England captain Joe Root on day three of the third Test in Melbourne yesterday. Boland had a dream debut on home turf as the pacer took five wickets in just 19 balls, the joint-fastest five-wicket haul in Test history, and finished with incredible figures of 6-7 off four overs to etch his name in the record books.

PHOTO: AFP

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Djokovic mystery deepens as stars begin to arrive



AFP, MELBOURNE

AO Novak Djokovic has not withdrawn from the ATP Cup despite claims he was almost sure to do so, Tennis Australia said

Tuesday, as other top players led by Naomi Osaka began arriving ahead of the Australian Open.

There has been serious doubt as to whether men's world number one Djokovic would travel to Australia, having refused to confirm if he has been vaccinated against the coronavirus.

An unnamed member of his team told Serbian newspaper Blic that they were "99 percent" sure that he would not play in the ATP Cup, which comes ahead of the Australian Open, adding to the intrigue over whether Djokovic would be at the first Grand Slam of the year. But Tennis Australia told AFP the Serbian had yet to pull out of the teams event, which is due to start on Saturday in Sydney with Djokovic drawn to play Norway's Casper Ruud on the opening day.

"We haven't heard of any withdrawals from Team Serbia for the ATP Cup," a spokesperson said.

Tennis Australia has organised charter flights to bring international stars into Melbourne and Sydney, with the first arriving Tuesday.

Defending women's Australian Open champion Osaka was among those to touch down, but Djokovic was not on board, TA said. Players can

also opt to fly commercial.

Nine-time Australian Open champion Djokovic could win a record 21st Grand Slam title if he plays at Melbourne Park, but to enter Australia he and members of his entourage have to be vaccinated.

The 34-year-old has previously expressed his opposition to the vaccine and his father Srđjan said in late November that Djokovic would probably not play the Australian Open, accusing the organisers of "blackmail".

The ATP Cup has already been hit by several players testing positive for Covid, including Russian world number five Andrey Rublev and Canada's Wimbledon semi-finalist Denis Shapovalov.

Spanish superstar Rafael Nadal, who was due to play a warm-up event in Melbourne next week, also contracted the virus. They all played in an Abu Dhabi exhibition tournament this month.

Three female players at the same event also tested positive -- Olympic gold medallist Belinda Bencic, US Open champion Emma Raducanu and Wimbledon quarter-finalist Ons Jabeur.

Tennis Australia has organised the charter flights to help minimise the risk of getting the virus on the trip over, with all passengers having to provide proof of a negative test in the 72 hours before flying.

The Australian Open is due to start on January 17.

ENGLAND'S HUMILIATION

Calls for 'red-ball reset'

REUTERS

England's humiliating surrender of the Ashes to Australia exposed not only a gulf in class between the two old rivals but also laid bare, in brutally emphatic fashion, the deep-seated problems in English Test cricket.

The faint hope of a turnaround in their fortunes in this series ended with them being scuttled out for 68 in their second innings and 14-run loss in Melbourne.

It has been an abysmal 12 months in red-ball cricket for England, who lost four series in a year for the first time -- the crushing in Australia following home losses to New Zealand and India, and a defeat at the start of the year in India. Never before have England lost nine Test matches in a calendar year.

For all the micro-debates that will rage about coach Chris Silverwood, selection decisions, tactical approaches, Joe Root's captaincy and the limitations of specific players, the big picture is the one that will surely be on the agenda for the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB).

Former England captain Michael Vaughan has no doubt that test match cricket has slipped down the priorities in English cricket.

"They've not been focused enough on the test



match team. The focus has been on the white-ball team and it delivered a World Cup. But we're not a good enough cricketing nation to take our eye off the ball of test match cricket. We can't just arrive and play," he told Australia's Fox Cricket.

Another former captain, Michael Atherton,

believes that the structure of English cricket is to blame for the shocking results.

"Beyond questions of individual responsibility which cannot be avoided, it may be that this latest hammering brings pressure to bear upon systemic change," Atherton wrote in The Times.

"The hollowing out of English first-class cricket, pushed to the margins of the season and sacrificed at the altar of one-day cricket, has resulted in a domestic standard that is routinely revealed to be sub-standard when players come to this part of the world. Over five tests, an Ashes series is partly a referendum on respective systems, and the result of this year's is clear," he added.

Former England captain Ian Botham said he was "embarrassed" by the performances of Joe Root's side.

"I'm a little embarrassed, to be honest," Botham said on Australia's Channel 7. To lose the Ashes in 12 days ... I just think that England have lost their way. The performance today summed it up.

"It's been a walk in the park for the Australians. It burns me to say that but they have completely outplayed England."



Edinson Cavani celebrates his second-half strike that helped Manchester United salvage a 1-1 draw against Newcastle United in the Premier League on Monday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

'A bunch of whingebags!'

REUTERS

Former Manchester United defender Gary Neville described the current side as "a bunch of whingebags" and singled out Cristiano Ronaldo and Bruno Fernandes for their attitude during Monday's 1-1 Premier League draw at Newcastle United.

Substitute Edinson Cavani's opportunistic 71st-minute goal cancelled out Allan Saint-Maximin's early strike as interim United boss Ralf Rangnick's unbeaten start stretched to four games in all competitions.

"They've not done one single thing right as a team, and not one single player can go in and say they've done their jobs, or even done themselves justice," Neville told Sky Sports. "They're whinging at each other... a bunch of whingebags!"

"They're the two senior players. It's devastating for younger players when the two best players are looking at every other player like they're not good enough," he said. United, who host Burnley on Thursday, are seventh on 28 points.

EVERYONE CAN MAKE ROADS, BUT **THERE'S ONLY 1 EXPERT** SO CHOOSE BSRM TO BUILD SAFER HOMES

COUNTRY'S NO. 1 STEEL EXPERT

BSRM building a safer nation

HIGHEST SELLING 15 CEMENT for more than years

SHAH CEMENT

Omicron may overwhelm healthcare

Warns WHO; China, Europe impose new Covid curbs

AFP, Berlin

The WHO yesterday warned that the Omicron coronavirus variant could lead to overwhelmed healthcare systems even though early studies suggest it leads to milder disease, as China and Germany brought back tough restrictions to stamp out new infection surges.

China put hundreds of thousands more people under lockdown, while infections hit new highs in multiple US states and European countries.

Covid-19 surges have wreaked havoc around the world, with many nations trying to strike a balance between economically punishing restrictions and controlling the spread of the virus.

The United States has halved the isolation period for asymptomatic cases to try and blunt the disruption, while France has ordered firms to have employees work from home at least three days a week.

Contact restrictions were in place in Germany for the second year in a row heading into the New Year, as Europe's biggest economy shuttered nightclubs and forced sports competitions behind closed doors.

Despite facing a much smaller outbreak compared with global virus hotspots, China has not relaxed its "zero Covid" strategy, imposing stay-at-home orders in many parts of the city of Yan'an.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3



A bus of Ena Paribahan breaks through the median, made to keep crashing vehicles on respective sides, and hits an oncoming microbus on the capital's Airport Road yesterday. There were no casualties reported.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

BUSINESS

BB not to extend relaxed loan policy

The Bangladesh Bank yesterday decided not to extend the tenure of the current relaxed policy on loan classification despite pleas from the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI). The deadline expires on December 31. The central bank came up with the decision at a bankers' meeting at the BB headquarters. Recently, the FBCCI requested the central bank to extend the tenure of the policy to June next year.

STORY ON B1

LAUNCH FIRE TRAGEDY

BIWTA officials, vessel authorities negligent

Observes HC bench while hearing writs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority officials had negligence in examining the fitness of MV Abhijan-10, observed the High Court yesterday.

BIWTA cleared the vessel for operations that caught fire in Jhalakathi on December 23, leaving at least 44 people killed and around 100 others injured, the HC mentioned.

During the hearing of two separate writ petitions, the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman told Deputy Attorney General Bepul Bagmar that officials of BIWTA and the launch management had negligence.

"You are saying that the government had no negligence. But, the BIWTA officials have given the clearance to operate the launch. Didn't the officials have any responsibility?" it asked.

"We have seen earlier that the Supreme Court Bar Association giving financial assistance from its fund to the victims of tragic incidents. Nowadays, we do not

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3

Post-polls violence claims 3 lives

STAR REPORT

At least three men got killed and many others were injured in post-polls violence in several districts over the last two days.

In Pabna, Shamim Hossain, 35, publicity affairs secretary of Hemayetpur Union Awami League, was shot dead last night over rivalry between AL chairman nominee Monjurul Islam Modhu and Tarikul Islam Nilu who ran as an independent after failing to get the ruling party's nomination.

None of them won in the election. Yesterday evening, Modhu was talking to his supporter Shamim in Nazirpur Bazar area when several gunmen opened fire on them.

"Shamim came forward to protect me and got shot. The attackers fled the scene quickly. Shamim died on the way to a hospital," said Modhu.

The AL candidate alleged that the attackers were Nilu's supporters. Nilu could not be reached over the phone for comment.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Rokonzaman said the matter was being investigated.

In Cumilla, Farhad Hossain, 20, who was a supporter of the Awami League chairman nominee, was stabbed dead by supporters of an independent in Chaudagram on Monday evening.

The AL nominee was Syed Ahmed Khokon. He lost to Mostafa Kamal who ran as an independent after the AL didn't pick him.

Khokon's supporter Farhad was attacked by Kamal's supporters in Doshbaha area, locals said.

He was taken to Feni General Hospital where doctors pronounced him dead around 9:00pm.

Contacted, Mostafa said none of his supporters were involved in the incident.

Suvoranjana Chakma, officer-in-charge of Chaudagram Police Station, said police were investigating the incident.

In Gaibandha, Shaharul Islam, 40, who lost the bid to be a general

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3

OMICRON VARIANT

Country logs 4 new cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four new Omicron Covid cases were reported in the country yesterday.

With this, the total number of confirmed Omicron variant cases in Bangladesh went up to seven, according to the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) -- a Germany based web database.

The new patients infected with Omicron include a 33-year-old woman from the capital's Basabo area. The three others, including two women aged 30 and 47, and a man aged 84, are from Banani.

The GISAID said International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) collected the nasopharyngeal swab from the 33-year-old while the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research collected samples

SEE PAGE 5 COL 6

130-year-old time capsule found in US



AFP, Washington

Workers dismantling the pedestal of a statue of a Confederate general discovered a copper box on Monday believed to have been buried 130 years ago, the second apparent time capsule unearthed at the site.

"They found it!" tweeted Virginia Governor Ralph Northam along with pictures of the box. "This is likely the time capsule everyone was looking for."

According to an 1887 newspaper article, a

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Limited-scale booster dose drive begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health directorate yesterday launched the campaign for administering Covid-19 vaccine booster doses "on a limited scale" in Dhaka.

Around 120 people were jabbed on the first day in Kurmitola General Hospital from 10:00am to 3:00pm.

Other hospitals where booster shots were given are Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, Dhaka Medical College and Hospital, Shaikh Hasina National Institute

SEE PAGE 5 COL 6



PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 29

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

TOURIST RAPE

Another key accused arrested

Two women raped in 2 districts

STAR REPORT

One of the main accused in the Cox's Bazar tourist rape case was arrested yesterday, while two women, including a voter, were raped in two separate incidents in Noakhali and Chudanga.

The arrestee, Israfil Huda Joy, was arrested from Chakaria Bus Stand in Chakaria upazila of Cox's Bazar. Six of the seven accused have so far been arrested, including three named in the First Information Report, in the Cox's Bazar gangrape incident.

Mohammad Muslim, additional deputy inspector general of Chattogram Tourist Police, which is investigating the case, in a press conference yesterday said they were conducting the probe with utmost importance and will seek remand for Israfil Huda Joy in court today.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



Two men are repairing a billboard at Chairmanbari in the capital's Banani area yesterday. They neither have any safety gears nor any safety harness. A little slip and a tumble from that height could be fatal.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Indonesia rejects Rohingyas

Sends stricken boat with 120 on board to Malaysia

AFP, Bireun

Dozens of Rohingya refugees intercepted after their boat ran into trouble off the coast of Indonesia's Aceh province were being sent into Malaysian waters, authorities said yesterday.

At least 100 mostly women and children aboard a wooden vessel said to be taking on water were denied refuge in Indonesia and instead pushed into the neighbouring Southeast Asian country.

Despite calls from non-governmental organisations and the United Nations agency for refugees, Indonesian authorities are attempting to send the group back after providing supplies, clothes and fuel, as well as a technician to fix their damaged boat.

"We hope (the supplies) can help the Rohingyas to continue their journey to Malaysia as they planned and intended," Winardy, an Aceh police spokesman who, like many Indonesians, goes by only one name, told AFP.

"We will monitor them until they reach their destination," he said.

The wooden boat was first sighted two days ago, stranded about 70 nautical miles off the Indonesian coast, according to a local navy commander.

Indonesian authorities have not pushed back Rohingya refugees as strongly as Malaysia or Thailand, instead reluctantly accepting them upon arrival by sea.

But Amnesty International and the UNHCR have called on the government to let the stranded group of Rohingya refugees land.

"This is about life and death. There are women and

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1