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"If infection rate surges and the situation goes out of control, then we have a plan to enforce lockdown."

Health and Family Welfare Minister
Zahid Maleque



PADMA BRIDGE

Deadline: **June 2022**
Revised cost: **Tk 30,193 crore**
Progress till Dec 2021: **89.5%**



METRO RAIL

Partial launching: **Dec 2022**
Cost: **Tk 21,985 crore**
Progress till Dec 2021: **74%**



BANGABANDHU TUNNEL

Deadline: **Dec 2022**
Revised cost: **Tk 10,374.42 crore**
Progress till Dec 2021: **77.5%**

MILES FORWARD

Mega dreams coming true this year

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Bangladesh will see some great strides in its transportation system with a number of mega projects expected to come to fruition by the year-end, opening up new ways to boost economic growth.

From the longest railroad bridge to the first-ever metro lines and underwater tunnel, these infrastructural undertakings with

billion-dollar price tags will help the country in its bid to attain the status of a developed one by 2041.

But there were many hurdles along the way including fund crunch, complications over designs, and the unprecedented crisis stemming from the coronavirus pandemic, leading to deadline revisions and cost escalation.

Yet, these much-anticipated ventures, involving multiple public and

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Priority now on metro for the port city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

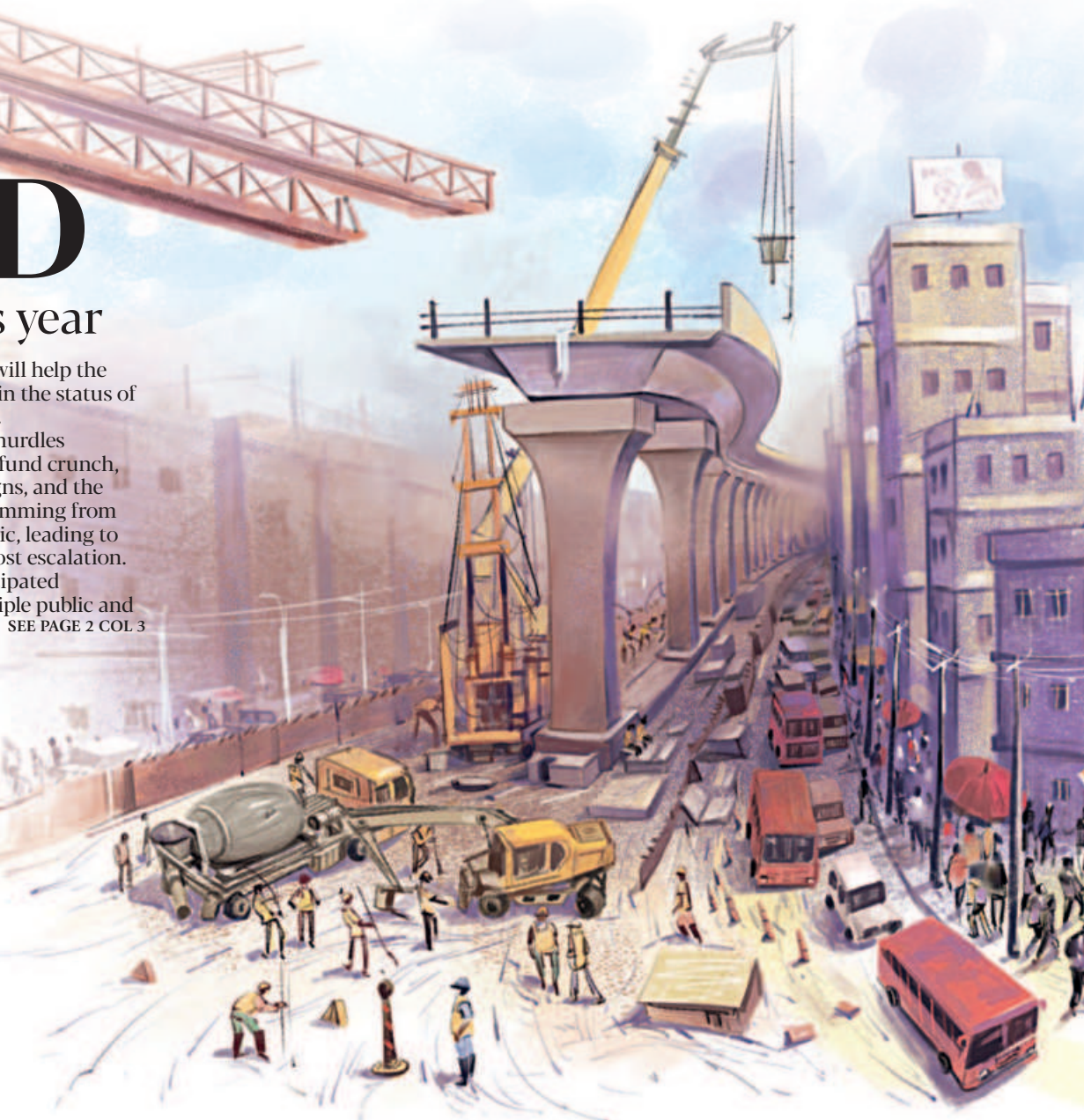
Chattogram residents can look forward to a metro rail service after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called for one as part of the government's efforts to improve connectivity.

"The prime minister said that metro

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

"These projects would work as precursors to big-scale development of the country in next phases."

Prof Shamsul Hoque,
noted transport expert



OMICRON THREAT

It's real and it's looming

Say experts; govt to slap curbs in 7 days

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

With new cases of Covid-19 rising steadily for four days, the country faces the bleak prospect of another wave of the coronavirus that might put the health care system under serious strain again, experts fear.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said a new set of restrictions will be implemented in seven days instead of the previously planned 15.

Amid rising numbers of new cases for over a week, several Indian states have already announced curbs that include curfew in Kolkata.

"We are witnessing a fresh wave and it is most likely

due to Omicron. The situation in India suggests we will see a major spike in the next couple of weeks," infectious disease specialist Prof Ridwanur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

In mid-2020, the Delta variant of coronavirus put significant strain on Bangladeshi health facilities. The picture was similar in Indian hospitals in the preceding months.

First detected on December 9 in Bangladesh, a total of 10 Omicron infected patients have been identified through genome sequence, which is a time-consuming and expensive procedure that can only be done in the capital.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7

"The situation in India suggests we will see a major spike in the next couple of weeks."

Prof Ridwanur Rahman,
infectious disease specialist



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Anita Chowdhury and Family



BCL general secy hurt in infighting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chhatra League General Secretary Lekhak Bhattacharya was injured in infighting between its two factions yesterday at a programme on the Dhaka University campus marking the student front's 74th birth anniversary.

The inauguration of the birth anniversary celebrations was held at the foot of Aparajeyo Bangla in front of the Kala Bhaban (arts faculty building).

BCL sources said several former and current leaders of the student front took the stage of the programme. A few minutes before the start of the event around 2:00pm, the two BCL factions clashed over taking front row seats in front of the stage.

Chhatra League leaders and activists from the DU's Kabi Jasimuddin Hall and Dhaka College units started throwing brick chips at each other, said a BCL leader on condition of anonymity.

He said a brick chip hit Lekhak while he was getting off the stage to pacify the two factions. Some BCL men later took Lekhak to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.



Defying health safety rules, students throng the Covid-19 vaccination centre at Morgan Girls School and College in Narayanganj city. The photo was taken around 11:00am yesterday before the start of vaccination for the day.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

707 unions go to polls today

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Tension is running high in many unions across the country over the possibility of violence during today's fifth phase elections to 707 union parishads.

According to media reports, at least 76 people have so far been killed and several hundred injured in violence over the ongoing staggered UP polls. Of them, nine were killed in violence over the fifth phase polls.

Tension prevailed in many unions where clashes occurred mostly between supporters of the ruling Awami League candidates and those of the party rebels.

AL sources said several hundred party rebels are contesting today's polls.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Election Commission Secretary Humayun Kabir Khandaker yesterday said, "Instructions have been given to law enforcers to control law and order. An adequate number of law enforcers have been deployed to avert any untoward incidents."

There are some 1.42 crore voters in the 707 unions. The contest would presumably be held between the AL, party rebels and the Jatiya Party candidates as the BNP is not taking part in the elections.

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

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

US sets global record with 1m cases in a day

Delhi imposes weekend curfew; China locks down another city

AFP, WASHINGTON

The United States reported more than one million new Covid-19 cases Monday after the long New Year's weekend, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, as the Omicron variant spread at a blistering pace.

There were 1,080,211 new cases in the country, a global record, although the number of cases reported on a Monday is usually higher than other days because of delays in weekend tallying, especially after such a three-day holiday weekend.

Still, the figure is double the number of daily cases compared to the previous Monday.

The rolling average over seven days -- which experts see as more reliable -- was 486,000 cases per day as of Monday evening, the university said.

The new figure comes a day after top US pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci said the country was experiencing "almost a vertical increase" in Covid-19 cases, adding

the peak may be only weeks away.

The heavily mutated Omicron strain -- the most transmissible to date -- accounted for around 59 percent of US cases in the week ending December 25, according to government modeling.

Fauci said the experience of South Africa -- where the strain was first detected in late November and peaked quickly, then subsided nearly as speedily -- offered some hope.

Rates of death and hospitalization in the United States have been lower in recent weeks than during previous Covid surges.

With 9,382 deaths over the past seven days, the nation's death toll has fallen by 10 percent, week on week. In the last seven days, the country has recorded 3.4 million cases according to Johns Hopkins data.

The US record during previous waves was 258,000 cases per day, for the week of January 5 to 11, 2021.

Covid-19 has killed at least 5,441,446 people globally since the outbreak emerged in December 2019,

according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources on Monday.

In India, capital New Delhi will lock down over the weekend as authorities grapple with a fresh surge in coronavirus cases, partly fuelled by the fast-spreading Omicron variant.

All residents besides essential workers will now be asked to stay home from Friday night to Monday morning.

The country was battered by a devastating Covid outbreak last year that overwhelmed hospitals and crematoriums, but daily case numbers had since then stayed reasonably low until last week.

In China, more than one million people in a city in central China were being confined to their homes yesterday after three asymptomatic coronavirus cases were recorded in the country's latest mass lockdown.

The central Chinese city of Yuzhou in Henan province is locked down as a part of the country's zero Covid strategy.

Priority now

FROM PAGE 1

rail should not be limited to Dhaka only and that it should be available in Chattogram, too," Planning Minister MA Mannan told reporters quoting Hasina after the meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council, where the directive was given.

She called for a metro rail from the Shah Amanat International Airport to the railway station.

"With the experience of Chattogram, we will expand it further to other major cities with airports and stations," Mannan said, adding that the planning ministry will push for the projects.

At the meeting yesterday, a total of 10 projects, including three fresh projects, under eight different ministries worth Tk 11,244 crore were passed.

Seven of the projects were for revision.

When the projects were conceived, they were supposed to cost Tk 3,099 crore. Their estimated expenditure has now billowed close to five times to Tk 14,961 crore.

The projects are seeking an extra year to a full decade.

Mannan said all the delays have valid reasons, including the pandemic. The other two major reasons are the price hike of construction materials and delays in land acquisition as the laws are too complicated.

"We have another important reason but many would not believe

it. When we take a loan from another country or international organisation, they give lots of conditions. This means we have to face two bureaucratic systems," he added.

One of the revised projects is the Ashrayan-2 project, a landmark endeavour of the Awami League-led government to alleviate poverty and homelessness, which was revised for the fourth time.

It was given with another year and an extra Tk 6,316 crore. The project's total allocation now stands at Tk 11,143 crore, which is many times more than the original cost.

When probed on the cost overrun, Mamun-Al-Rashid, a member of the Planning Commission, said the project was implemented all over the country.

"We will not deny that some mismanagement did happen in two or three places," he said, adding that Hasina said the quality of the lodgings cannot be compromised for the budget constraints.

About the increase in project figures, he said those who have no land or home will get Tk 2.5 lakh each under the project.

The small and middle-sized projects, including the three mega projects that will be completed this year, will expand the GDP by 1.5 to 2, said Shamsul Alam, the state minister for planning.

The Padma bridge will open in June, Karnaphuli in October and Metro Rail in December, he said.

Miles forward

FROM PAGE 1

private stakeholders, are expected to be open to the public this year.

Two other mega projects, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and first-ever elevated expressway, are making good progress and also likely to be put into service by this year.

"These projects would work as precursors to big scale development of the country in next phases," Prof Shamsul Hoque, a noted transport expert, told The Daily Star on December 20.

He, however, added, "Cost overrun and shifting of deadlines have overshadowed the elation. This also exposed that our planning was weak and our projection about deadlines was casual."

BIG BRIDGE, BIG DREAM Padma Bridge, a self-funded project of the government worth Tk 30,000 crore, is likely to open in June.

The 6.1km double-deck bridge across the mighty Padma had been in talks since mid '90s. The government approved the project worth Tk 10,161 crore in August 2007 to be built with donor assistance.

The dream project became uncertain in September 2011, when the lead donor, World Bank, suspended its promised \$1.2 billion loan on allegations of corruption conspiracy, which were later thrown out by a Canadian court. Other donors also cancelled their funding.

Then in 2012, Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina took a bold decision to implement the project with own funds.

The first span was installed in September 2017. The project was moving ahead smoothly but then came the onslaught of Covid-19, slowing down the progress.

The bridge, with road and rail tracks, is expected to contribute around 1.2 percent to the annual GDP growth and increase economic activities of the people of the impoverished southwest region.

ERA OF ELECTRIC TRAINS Bangladesh would enter the era of electric trains once the metro rail project comes into operation.

The government planned to develop a 1,280km network of metro lines in the capital and adjacent areas within 2030 to reduce the horrendous traffic congestion and pollution. There would be six metro lines -- with elevated and underground options.

Though the idea of constructing Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) lines first came in 2005, the first project for building metro rail network in the capital was approved in December 2012. Formally known as MRT Line 6, the first metro track is being laid from Uttara Third Phase to Motijheel at the cost of Tk 21,985 crore.

Eight sets of trains have already reached Dhaka and their performance tests are going on.

Officials of Dhaka Mass

Transit Company Ltd, the implementing agency, said they will complete all types of trials by September to launch metro rail operation in the first phase -- from Uttara to Agargaon -- from December.

Once completed, the metro rail -- with 16 stations -- will be able to carry 60,000 people an hour, bringing down the commute time between Uttara and Motijheel to around 40 minutes from the existing two hours.

Even people in the upper class may consider shifting modes of transport once the metro rail service comes into operation, which could reduce the number of small vehicles on the roads -- the major reason for traffic jams, said Prof Shamsul.

UNDERWATER WONDER To link two parts of Chattogram, the government took up the project to build a tunnel under the Karnaphuli river, the first-ever in South Asia.

The 9.1km tunnel with a cost of Tk 10,374.42 crore will help develop a modern transportation system between Dhaka, Chattogram and Cox's Bazar, and will also be linked to the Asian Highway.

Although the project was approved in November 2015, physical work began in December 2017.

The project authority recently sought a six-month extension of the current deadline of December 2022, but officials maintain that they would be able to open the tunnel within this year.

COMMUTERS' RELIEF

In 2012, the government took up a project to cut down Dhaka's perineal traffic congestion by building an elevated expressway under public-private partnership.

After extending the deadline several times, the authorities now aim to open a portion of the expressway -- from Airport to Tejgaon Rail Station -- to the public in December.

Once fully completed, the 19.73km expressway stretching from Shahjalal International Airport to Kutubkhali on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway is expected to help people cross Dhaka without having to face the traffic congestion inside the city.

Besides, the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service from the airport to Gazipur is also expected to be open in December.

The project was taken up in November 2012 for building the 20.5km bus corridor to allow people to reach Dhaka from Gazipur. It was supposed to be completed by December 2016 but got delayed due to various complexities.

The service would start with 100 new buses, which would be able to transport 20,000 passengers per hour. There would be 25 stations on the corridor.

However, officials say, meeting these deadlines definitely depends on many factors, particularly Covid pandemic. If the Covid situation deteriorates again, it will be difficult for some projects to complete their work in time.

DIALOGUE WITH PRESIDENT Samyabadi Dal asks for law on EC formation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal during its dialogue with President Abdul Hamid yesterday joined the chorus of political parties recommending that a law be enacted to form the Election Commission.

In its written proposal presented to Hamid, the party said people's hopes will be reflected if an EC is formed through a law in line with the constitution.

Past experience shows that an EC formed without a law becomes a subservient institution, the party said.

"We have urged the president to take steps for framing a law to form the Election Commission," party General Secretary Dilip Barua told The Daily Star after the dialogue held at the Bangabhaban.

"If a search committee needs to be formed due to constitutional obligations, the president can form such a committee comprising heads of constitutional bodies.

"We also proposed that it is realistic to form an election-time government under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina," he added.

According to a Bangabhaban press wing statement, during the dialogue the president said it is important to ensure political etiquette and a healthy environment in politics for a fair and credible election, and this is a task to for the political parties.

Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal in the written proposals also recommended for instant actions against misuse of religion, money and arms.

It also said most MPs in parliament are businessmen and that is a hurdle for democracy to flourish. Dominance of businessmen in parliament also limits the scope of people's franchise rights.

A seven-member delegation led by Dilip took part in the dialogue.

The president late last month started dialogues with registered political parties on the formation of the next EC as the tenure of the Election Commission led by KM Nurul Huda expires on February 14.

The president will have to form the new EC before the tenure of the incumbent EC expires, according to the constitution.

Thirteen parties have so far joined the dialogue.

However, three parties -- Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal and Islami Andolon Bangladesh -- have refused to participate. The BNP said it would not join the dialogue.

According to the Bangabhaban press wing, the president has invited nine more political parties for the dialogue.

The president said it is important to ensure political etiquette and a healthy environment in politics for a fair and credible election, and this is a task for the political parties.

It's real

FROM PAGE 1

"Due to inadequate testing and genome sequencing capacity against a large population, the reality will be worse than what the data may indicate," Prof Ridwanur said.

Covid-19 cases in India yesterday increased by 10.75 percent compared to the previous day.

"Due to the large population density in our country, low rate of vaccination and rampant violation of health protocols, Omicron may put hospitals at capacity just as the Delta did."

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, only 31 percent of the population has received two shots of a Covid vaccine. Besides, most people don't wear masks and social distancing is a far cry.

Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of the DGHS, on Monday said the Omicron variant may cause a major spike in Covid-19 cases in March and April.

Officials yesterday reported 775 new cases, which is one and a half times higher than the number a week ago.

The DGHS identified Dhaka and Natore as the high-risk areas where the positivity rate was over five percent.

Besides, the number of patients in hospitals across the country has increased by almost 13 percent in the week preceding yesterday.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Zahid

Maleque yesterday said the government may consider enforcing a lockdown and shops will be ordered to close at 8:00pm in a week.

Medical tests and screening of passengers, who are arriving from Omicron-infected countries, at gateways -- land, air, and waterways will be strengthened and all educational institutions (madrasa, pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher secondary and universities) and coaching centres must maintain health rules.

The minister said, "If infection rate surges and the situation goes out of control, then we have a plan to enforce a lockdown."

Maleque said the restrictions will include reducing the number of public events, cutting down the number of passengers in public transport, ordering restaurants not to sell foods to unvaccinated people and penalising people for not wearing masks outdoors.

Meanwhile, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research completed genome sequences of a total of 18 samples collected between December 1 and 13 and all of those of the Delta variant.

"We regularly collect samples for genome sequence. The latest data indicated the Delta variant was dominant as of early December. But the situation may soon change," Prof Tahmina Shirin, director of the IEDCR told The Daily Star yesterday.



Twelve-year-old Jonny is unlike most other children of his age. Son of a rickshaw-puller, he took up the mantle of contributing to his family's survival by selling pink clouds of cotton candy, carrying about 40-50 of them every day. He sells each for Tk 10, earning around Tk 100-150 per day. Jonny's caricatured tiger mask surely resembles the spirit he carries with him, as he sets off for work. This photo was taken yesterday from Matuail area.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Foreign trips for sake of rail development Says minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan has either visited or talked with officials of over a dozen companies producing rail-related materials during his two foreign trips late last year.

During his tours in four European countries and Russia in November and December last year, he sought investment and technical cooperation from those companies, who expressed interest to work with Bangladesh Railway.

The minister yesterday revealed the information at a press conference arranged to divulge outcomes of his foreign trips at Rail Bhaban in the capital.

An eight-member team led by Sujan visited the UK, Germany, Spain and France while another eight-member team visited Russia.

All of these countries belong to developed and modern rail networks and the railway has scope to develop theirs by taking technical knowledge from these countries, Sujan added.

"The purpose of our Europe and Russia tours was to use the experience to change our rail management and create a developed and modern railway system," the minister further said.

ILLEGAL, UNETHICAL

Probe committee on MV Abhijan fire recommends abolishment of 'rotation system'

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The "rotation system", the practice of operating fewer launches than what is permitted and overcrowding them with passengers, all to maximise profits, should be abolished, said the committee that investigated the MV Abhijan-10 fire incident.

The committee said to prevent overcrowding, passengers without tickets should not be allowed to board launches.

Firefighters must inspect vessels every three months. Fire drills must be conducted twice a year, and crew members have to receive safety training.

These are among the 25 recommendations the seven-member probe body has given in their report.

Led by Tofayel Islam, joint secretary of the shipping ministry, the committee



RECOMMENDATIONS

Measures for dousing fire in engine room

No flammable substance can be used as launch interior, or kept beside engine

Ansar, security personnel for launches

CCTV cameras at important points

Insurance for accidents, trust fund for passenger launches

submitted the report to the ministry on Monday night.

The committee held three officials of the shipping department and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), and four owners and four crew members of MV Abhijan-10 accountable for the fire that killed 49 people and injured many on December 24 last year.

ROTATION SYSTEM

BIWTA provides a particular number of launches for a route, but launch owners

operate fewer launches than what is permitted.

For example, six launches were permitted to ply on Dhaka-Bhola route, but only four are reportedly operated.

"Launch owners introduced this illegal and unethical system to maximise profits. And BIWTA is also allowing them to continue," said Ashis Kumar Dey, general secretary of National Committee to Protect Shipping, Roads and Railways.

A water-transport leader echoed him, adding that powerful launch owners even prevent introduction of new launches to keep their profits unaffected.

A probe committee member, wishing anonymity, said although there is no direct link between launch accidents and rotation system, launches get overcrowded due to this practice, which often increases casualties when such accidents occur.

The committee found that MV Abhijan-10 was overcrowded, he said.

Badiuzzaman Badal, senior vice-chairperson of Bangladesh Inland Waterways (Passenger Carriers) Association, claimed that there is no

rotation system in the sector.

"The number of launches corresponds to the number of passengers. When there are not many passengers, fewer launches are operated and vice versa," he told this correspondent.

Asked about the ticketing system, he said currently passengers have to buy tickets for cabins. But passengers who board decks enter vessels from different sides, and it is not possible for authorities to ensure that they have tickets, he said, adding that BIWTA can work on this issue.

The committee also said the workforce of BIWTA and the shipping department should be increased at Sadarghat for better inspection and monitoring, as the number of launches has increased.

Ashis Kumar said the shipping department only has seven surveyors against 22 posts, and it is not possible to inspect everything with these few workers.

Currently, there are some 14,000 registered passenger and cargo vessels in the country.

The BIWTA chairman could not be contacted for comments.

Three of a family die after fire breaks out at Uttara home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two siblings and their cousin died after a fire broke out at a tin-shed house in Dhaka's Uttara area early yesterday.

The deceased are Jahangir Hossain (19), his sister Ruma Akter (17) and their cousin Afrin (14).

They were asleep when the fire originated at their three-room house at Chandabuk Manik Bosti area around 4:15am.

Three firefighting units doused the blaze around 6:45am, said Khaleda Akter, duty officer of Fire Service and Civil Defence Control Room.

Fire officials suspect electric short circuit caused the blaze.

Alamgir Hossain, brother of Jahangir, said he and the victims went to bed around 10:00pm. His parents along with another sister went to their village residence in Sherpur three weeks ago to build a house there, he said.

"Afrin came to stay with Ruma yesterday afternoon... I woke up at night hearing screams of my brother and sisters. An electrocution occurred when I tried to open the tin door between two rooms," he said. "Suddenly, fire engulfed the house... I could not save them," said Alamgir, who was rescued by neighbour from another room.

Alamgir said the blaze not only took three lives but also ravaged their house on the government land and all belongings -- including Tk 2 lakh that they saved over the years to marry off Ruma.

MV ABHIJAN TRAGEDY Civic committee to investigate launch fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fifteen civic organisations have announced the formation of a civic committee to investigate the MV Abhijan-10 inferno that left 49 dead, around 100 injured and many more missing.

The 17-member committee was announced yesterday from a press conference held at Poba's office in the capital's Kalabagan.

Abu Naser Khan, chairperson of Poba, will act as its convener while Aminur Rasul Babul, member secretary of Nirapad Noupath Bastobayan Andolon, was made member secretary.

Apart from this, Ashis Kumar Dey, writer and river-route researcher was announced as chief coordinator, while Mir Tarek Ali, professor of Marine Architecture and Marine Engineering from Buet, will serve the committee as an expert member.

Abu Naser said the committee will prepare its investigation report within three weeks and submit it to relevant authorities and ministries.

"We have already started our work. We will talk to the victims and their families, visit the launch and exchange views with locals. The committee will collect data and information, find out causes behind the inferno and ascertain liabilities of those who were supposed to oversee the technical issues related to its safety," he said.

He also said the structural weakness of regulatory bodies and political connections enable launch owners to bypass punitive measures after incidents like this. He mentioned that around 25,000 to 30,000 passengers died in fire hazards in the river route in the last 50 years.

Aminur Rasul Babul, Ashis Kumar Dey and Abdus Sobhan, general secretary of Poba, also spoke at the press conference.

PRAYER TIMING JAN 5



	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
Azan	5:30	12:45	4:00	5:30	7:00
Jamaat	6:05	1:15	4:15	5:35	7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Three held with fake notes worth Tk 1.2cr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rab has busted a fake currency-making gang in Dhaka's Pallabi area and arrested three people along with fake notes of around Tk 1.2 crore.

The arrestees are the alleged ring leader Sagir Hossain (47), Selina Akter Pakhi (20) and Ruhul Amin (33).

They were targeting the ongoing Dhaka International Trade Fair and village fairs during winter to circulate the fake notes, Khandaker Al Moin, Rab's Legal and Media wing director, told a press conference yesterday.

Sagir has produced fake notes of around Tk 10 crore since 2017, Moin said, adding he used to collect equipment and material from old Dhaka. A gang of 5 to 20 members have long been circulating the fake notes mostly in Dhaka and Barishal, he added.

According to Rab, Sagir arrived in Dhaka from Barguna in 1987 and started working at a restaurant. He joined the fake note-making gang through one Idris in 2010. Sagir, arrested for the same offence earlier, told Rab that it costs Tk 4,000 to produce Tk 1 lakh of fake notes while he used to sell those at Tk 10,000-15,000.

Pakhi, an employee of a beauty parlour in Kamrangirchar, used to circulate the fake notes in the local market. Her husband is in jail for the same offence.



Illegally built tin-shed houses under flyovers, which are rented out to low-earning families, have turned into a lucrative business in some parts of the capital. According to recent media reports, some unscrupulous staffers of a city corporation are pulling the strings behind this. This photo was taken from Gulistan area yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON



The committee will collect data and information, find out causes behind the [launch] inferno and ascertain liabilities of those who were supposed to oversee the technical issues related to its safety.

Poba Chairperson
ABU NASER KHAN

Top grabber

FROM PAGE 5
Contacted, Munshiganj DC Kazi Nahid Rasul echoed the UNO and said, "I think the probe report is alright, because the investigation was conducted following proper rules."

Asked about the 2019 circular, she said, "I don't know how the investigation was conducted then."

Three Angle Marine Ltd director Lokman Hossain said their company has not occupied any river, canal or land.

He said it's their business rivals who are spreading propaganda against the company.

NRCC Chairman ASM Ali Kabir said he is yet to receive the probe report.

Missing man found dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A man was found dead in a pond in Sandwip upazila of Chattogram yesterday, three days after he had gone missing.

"The deceased -- Tonu Guha (55) -- had several injury marks on his body and we are investigating the incident," said OC Basir Uddin of Sandwip Police Station.

After he went missing, his family members filed a general diary with the police station on Sunday night, said the OC.



Winners of The Daily Star-Vision Android TV "Guess The Name" T-20 World Cup digital campaign pose with their prizes after a ceremony held at the Daily Star Centre yesterday. Among others, Md Atiqur Rahman, head of digital media, PRAN-RFL Group; Rakib Ahmed, head of marketing, Vision Electronics; Amit Pramanik, head of sales, The Daily Star; and Shuvashish Roy, head of business, The Daily Star, were present.

PHOTO: STAR

Samson H Chowdhury's death anniv

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Today is the 10th death anniversary of Samson H Chowdhury, the founder of Square Group.


On this day in 2012, the visionary entrepreneur and industrialist passed away at Raffles Hospital in Singapore at the age of 86.

Samson left behind an unmatched legacy of entrepreneurship and industrialisation. He built up from scratch Square Group, one of the largest conglomerates in Bangladesh, and set an example of ethical business.

Born on February 25, 1926 in Pabna, Samson was the eldest child of medical officer Eakub H Chowdhury and Latika Chowdhury. He also obtained a diploma in management from a Harvard University school.

Samson started a small pharmacy at Ataikula in Pabna in 1952, which was the beginning of one of the leading pharmaceutical companies.





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With You Always.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

NCC Bank wishes to receive proposals containing "Functional" "Technical" "Commercial" and "Eligibility Assessment" offers as guided in this "Request for Proposal (RFP)", hereby invited from reputed and experienced partners and renowned companies for "Supply, Installation, Implementation, Commissioning and Post Implementation Support of Internet Banking System, Mobile Banking & Wallet in NCC Bank Limited".

1. The intending bidders shall have to apply to the Head of CSD, NCC Bank along with documentary evidence to meet the following primary **ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA** for issuance of Tender document:

- a. The Bidder should be a legal entity and a registered company that have not been prohibited by Bangladeshi or International court(s) to enter into contracts. Should have at least **5 years** of experience in business.
- b. The Bidder should have own/representative office and strong presence in Dhaka, Bangladesh with well-equipped service/support/system up-gradation team resourced by adequate qualified Technical/Business personnel for maintenance and support of the proposed solution.
- c. The proposed solution must implanted to any Commercial Bank in Bangladesh as per global best practice and Bangladesh Bank guideline from functional, technical and security perspective. Multiple implementation experience and successful deployment in Bangladesh or outside of country will be added advantage during evaluation.
- d. The Bidder must confirm that the proposed solution has the capability of handling largest number of users by providing reference sites with demonstrated capability, and flexibility to expand.
- e. Authorization letter of Principal against this project should be submitted. The Bank's Authority may verify the submitted Authorization Letter.
- f. The Bidder should have valid Trade License, TIN/BIN, VAT registration certificate and other relevant documents associated with local regulation.

2. Bidders without having the primary eligibility as stated under point # 1 above, need **NOT** to apply for issuance of the Tender Documents. Apart from primary eligibility criteria, Bank will apply other eligibility criteria included in the "Eligibility Assessment" for all relevant entities (e.g. Local Partner, Implementation Partner, Principal etc.).

3. Bidders may form Joint Venture / Consortium/ Association to meet the required eligibility as mention in point # 1 above. However, this should not be changed during the project lifecycle and cannot be delegated to any other 3rd parties in the form of outsourcing (partly or fully functionality) unless Bank formally agreed in the written form.

4. One single partner entity cannot participate for multiple solutions offering; otherwise, this will be treated as disqualification. However, the same local partner may participate infrastructure or hardware bid for the proposed solution which may be or may not be separate tender depending on Bank's decision.

5. Tender Documents will be issued in working days from the office of the CSD, NCC Bank Head Office on payment of Tk.25,000.00 (Taka Twenty Five Thousand) only (non-refundable) in the form of Pay Order in favor of NCC Bank Ltd. on or before 25th January 2022 at 4:00 PM.

6. The Bidders shall have to submit an Earnest Money L.S. Tk.10,00,000.00 (Taka Ten Lac) only in favor of NCC Bank Ltd. in the form of Bank Guarantee (BG) from any schedule bank in Bangladesh. Proposals submitted without the Earnest Money shall be rejected outright.

7. A Performance Guarantee of 25% on contract price or work order value shall be furnished by the successful bidder.

8. For any clarification regarding preparation of submission of Tender, the Bidders may contact **cio@nccbank.com.bd**.

9. Tender documents will be received in the office of the CSD, Head Office, NCC Bank Ltd. up to 1:00 PM on 6th February 2022 or earlier and **ONLY** the "Eligibility Assessment" proposal will be opened at 4:00 PM on the same day in presence of Bidders, if any.

10. NCC Bank Ltd. reserves the right to accept or reject any or all Tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.

11. Any kind of persuasion will be treated as disqualification.

Dr. Executive Vice President
Common Services Division (CSD)

www.nccbank.com.bd



খুলনা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়
বিজ্ঞান, প্রকৌশল ও প্রযুক্তিবিদ্যা কুল
কম্পিউটার সাইন্স এ্যান্ড ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং ডিপার্টমেন্ট

অনুমতি নং: খ.বি.সি.এস.ই-৪৮/৯৮- তারিখ: ২৭/১২/২০২১খ্রিঃ

M. Sc. Engg (CSE)/M. Engg (CSE)
প্রোগ্রামে ভর্তি বিজ্ঞপ্তি

খুলনা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের কম্পিউটার সাইন্স এ্যান্ড ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং ডিপার্টমেন্টে M. Sc. Engg (CSE)/M. Engg (CSE) প্রোগ্রামে বাছ্যার্থী/২০২২ শিক্ষাবর্ষে ভর্তি/৩৬ শিক্ষার্থীসহ নিকট থেকে আবেদন আহ্বান করা হচ্ছে। ভর্তি সংক্রান্ত যাবতীয় তথ্যের এবং আবেদনপত্র ডিপার্টমেন্টে ওয়েবসাইটে (<http://www.cseku.ac.bd>) পাওয়া যাবে।

প্রস্তুতকৃত/তারিখসমূহ:

আবেদন গ্রহণের তারিখ:	০৪ জানুয়ারি, ২০২২খ্রিঃ
আবেদনের শেষ তারিখ:	০৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি, ২০২২খ্রিঃ
ভর্তি পরীক্ষার তারিখ:	১০ ফেব্রুয়ারি, ২০২২খ্রিঃ

যোগাযোগের ফোন নম্বর: ০২-৪৭৭৭০৪১০/১১০০, ০২-৪৭৭৭০৪২১৬
বিশেষ: ভর্তি সংক্রান্ত যেকোন বিষয়-কোন পর্বিতকন, সংশোধন বা সংশোধনের ক্ষমতা ভর্তি পরীক্ষা কমিটি সংক্রান্ত করবে।

অধ্যাপক অফিসের প্রধান, পিএইচডি
চেয়ারম্যান
পোস্ট গ্রাডুয়েট ভর্তি কমিটি জাদুঘর-২০২২ এবং
ডিন
বিজ্ঞান, প্রকৌশল ও প্রযুক্তিবিদ্যা কুল
খুলনা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়

১৩-১৩৪৪

Govt. Brajalal College
Khulna
Website: www.blcollege.edu.bd

Memo No. BLC/CEDP/25 Date: 05 January, 2022

e-Tender Notice 03/2021-2022

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

Sl. No.	Tender ID No.	Name of works	Last date and time of tender security submission	Tender closing date & time
1.	643783	Renovation of Classrooms, Laboratories, Central Library & Common-rooms for Females	27-Jan-2022 13:30	27-Jan-2022 14:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks' branches upto 26-Jan-2022 16:00. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Prof. Sharif Atiquzzaman
Principal
Govt. Brajalal College, Khulna
Phone: 051-2622
E-mail: atqzaman0512622@gmail.com

GD-25

Mahi Samabaya union president

STAFF CORRESPONDENT


Mohiuddin Ahmed Mahi, joint general secretary of Dhaka south city Awami League, has been elected president of Jatiya Samabaya Union. The executive committee election was held at Samabaya office in Motijheel yesterday.



Jamal Uddin Ahmed no more

CITY DESK

Jamal Uddin Ahmed, former captain of Biman and Qatar Airlines, passed away in New York, USA on Monday. He was 72. He left behind his wife, one son and three daughters. He was the son of late Zahir Ahmed and Jahanara Begum, residents of Nazir Park, West Sholashahar, Chattogram.



টেঙ্গটাইল ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং বিভাগ
মাওলানা ভাসানী বিজ্ঞান ও প্রযুক্তি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়
ফোনঃ ০৯২১-৬২৪০৫, টেলি ফ্যাক্সঃ ০৯২১-৫৫৪০০
সূত্রঃ মাত্রাবিধি/টিই চসই/১৩৩/২০২১ তারিখঃ ৩০ অগ্রহায়ণ ১৪২১
১৫ ডিসেম্বর ২০২১

২০১৮-২০১৯ইং শিক্ষাবর্ষে M.Sc. in Textile Engineering প্রোগ্রামে ভর্তি বিজ্ঞপ্তি

২০১৮-২০১৯ইং শিক্ষাবর্ষের জন্য মাওলানা ভাসানী বিজ্ঞান ও প্রযুক্তি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের টেঙ্গটাইল ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং (টিই) বিভাগে M.Sc. in Textile Engineering প্রোগ্রামে সংশ্লিষ্ট বিভাগ কর্তৃক নির্ধারিত আসনে ভর্তির জন্য গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার অনুমোদিত যে কোন বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের সংশ্লিষ্ট বিষয়ে বিএসসি (ইঞ্জিঃ) ডিগ্রীধারী ছাত্র-ছাত্রীদের নিকট থেকে আবেদনপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে। অগ্রহী প্রার্থীগণ টেঙ্গটাইল ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং বিভাগের অফিসে ১০০০/- (এক হাজার) টাকা জমা দিয়ে আবেদনপত্র সংগ্রহ করতে পারবে।

ভর্তির যোগ্যতাঃ

- ক) এস.এস.সি ও এইচ.এস.সি বা সমমান পরীক্ষায় পৃথকভাবে সিজিপিএ ৩.০০ থাকতে হবে।
- খ) বি.এস.সি (ইঞ্জিঃ) কোর্সে (চার বছর মেয়াদী) ন্যূনতম সিজিপিএ ৩.২৫/প্রথম শ্রেণী থাকতে হবে।
- গ) চাকুরীতে প্রার্থীদের অবশ্যই যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষের মাধ্যমে আবেদন করতে হবে।

আবেদনপত্রের সাথে নিম্নলিখিত কাগজপত্র সংযুক্ত করতে হবেঃ

- ক) শিক্ষাপত্র যোগ্যতার সমর্থনে সকল পরীক্ষার মার্কশীট/ট্রান্সক্রিপ্ট এবং সার্টিফিকেটের সত্যায়িত ফটোকপি।
- খ) নাগরিকত্বের সনদপত্র/জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্রের সত্যায়িত ফটোকপি।
- গ) সদ্য তোলা ০২ (দুই) কপি পাসপোর্ট সাইজের রঙিন ছবি।
- ঘ) সর্বশেষ শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠানের প্রশংসাপত্রের সত্যায়িত ফটোকপি।
- ঙ) সর্বশেষ শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠানের/বিভাগের মাইগ্রেশন সার্টিফিকেট।


ভর্তি সংক্রান্ত তারিখসমূহঃ

সংখ্যা	বিবরণ	তারিখ
১.	আবেদনপত্র বিতরণ ও জমা সকাল ১০.০০ থেকে বিকাল ৪.০০ পর্যন্ত (বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় ছুটি ও কেন্দ্রীয় ভর্তি পরীক্ষার দিন ব্যতিত)	০৮/০১/২০২২ইং থেকে ০৮/০২/২০২২ইং পর্যন্ত
২.	এডমিশন টেস্ট/সাক্ষাতকার (সকাল ১০.০০ থেকে দুপুর ১২.০০ পর্যন্ত)	২৮/০২/২০২২ইং
৩.	ফলাফল প্রকাশ	০৫/০৩/২০২২ইং
৪.	ভর্তির তারিখ (ছুটির দিন ব্যতিত)	১৩/০৩/২০২২ইং থেকে ২৭/০৩/২০২২ইং পর্যন্ত
৫.	ক্লাস শুরু	০৪/০৪/২০২২ইং।

*মুক্তিযোদ্ধা/উপজাতি/পোষা কোটা বিধি মোতাবেক সংরক্ষণ করা হবে।
ভর্তি সংক্রান্ত যাবতীয় তথ্য ও তারিখ বিভাগীয় অফিস এবং বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের ওয়েবসাইট www.mbstu.ac.bd থেকে জানা যাবে।

চেয়ারম্যান
টেঙ্গটাইল ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং বিভাগ
মাত্রাবিধি

জিডি-২৭



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Local Government Engineering Department
Office of The Executive Engineer
Pirojpur
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No. 46.02.7900.000.07.001.2021-17

e-Tender Notice No. 30/2021-2022

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

Sl No.	Tender ID No.	Package No. & name of work	Procurement method	Last selling date & time	Closing & opening date & time
1.	635939	SupRB/Peroj/Replace/21-22/W-87 Construction of 30.00m long PSC Girder Bridge on Mathbaria GC- Charduan GC (Up to Nali Khaya Ghat) via Sapleza GC Road at Chainage: 51m under Replacement category [579582001]	OTM	25.01.2022 17:00pm	26.01.2022 13:00pm
2.	635940	SupRB/Peroj/Replace/21-22/W-88 Construction of 25.00m long PSC Girder Bridge on Mathbaria GC- Charduan GC (Up to Nali Khaya Ghat) via Sapleza GC Road at Chainage: 14636m under Replacement category [579582001]	OTM	25.01.2022 17:00pm	26.01.2022 13:00pm
3.	644600	IRIDP-3/PRJ/DW-27 (a) Improvement of Baldia UP Office-Katakhali Hat via Chowddarashi Bazar Road (Ch. 3000m-6110m) [ID No. 579873005] (b) Construction of 09 No. 1.0mx1.0m culvert at ch. 3380m, 3835m, 4685m, 4754m, 4800m, 5140m, 5300m, 5340m & 5490m on the same road. (c) Construction of 05 No. 1.50m, 1.50m culvert at ch. 3150m, 4475m, 5010m, 5225m & 5374m on the same road (Salvage Materials Tk. 4750945.00).	OTM	25.01.2022 17:00pm	26.01.2022 13:00pm
4.	644601	CAFDRIRP/Perojpur/VR-BW-25/2021-22 Rehabilitation of Road from Hazigong Bazar to Khetachira Wapdia via Kabir Member House Road from Ch. 00-3200m under Mathbaria Upazila District- Pirojpur. (Road ID: 579585023). Salvage Materials cost: 981573.00	OTM	25.01.2022 17:00pm	26.01.2022 13:00pm
5.	644602	PDRIIDP/BAN/DW-102 (a) Improvement of BC road from Golbunia LGED Road Nunul Islam Mowla Bari Mistri Bari Debipur RHD road at Ch. 0.00-1500m including 05 Nos. 2.00mx2.00m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 200m, 322m, 657m, 842m & 1123m and 01 No. 2-Vent 4.00mx3.60m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 891m under Bhandaria Upazila, District-Pirojpur. Road ID No. 579144148. (b) Improvement of BC road from Boro Kanua UZR-2006 to Pona river road at Ch. 0.00-1500m including 06 Nos. 2.00mx2.00m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 250m, 360m, 655m, 842m, 1200m & 1400m and 01 No. 2-Vent 4.00mx3.60m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 900m under Bhandaria Upazila, District-Pirojpur. Road ID No: 579144222.	OTM	25.01.2022 17:00pm	26.01.2022 13:00pm
6.	644603	PDRIIDP/BAN/DW-103 (a) Improvement of BC road from Telikhali-Tushkhali UZR-2005 road Tulatala-Md. Shaser Ali house GPS road at Ch. 0.00-2000m including 06 Nos. 2.00mx2.00m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 150m, 320m, 750m, 950m, 1360m & 1900m and 01 No. 2-Vent 4.00mx3.60m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 600m under Bhandaria Upazila, District-Pirojpur. Road ID No: 579144201.	OTM	25.01.2022 17:00pm	26.01.2022 13:00pm
7.	644604	PDRIIDP/BAN/DW-104 (a) Improvement of BC road from Horingpala Gholchator Anayet to Zahangir road at Ch. 0.00-1500m including 05 Nos. 2.00mx2.00m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 150m, 320m, 750m, 950m & 1125m under Bhandaria Upazila, District-Pirojpur. Road ID No: 579144205. (b) Improvement of BC road from Gouripur UP to-Kalkhali Bazar via Bhoboneswar Bridge & Mohila College bridge road at Ch. 1000-2900m including 07 Nos. 2.00mx2.00m RCC Box Culvert at Ch. 1098m, 1233m, 1302m, 1587m, 1660m, 2400m & 2700m under Bhandaria Upazila, District-Pirojpur. Road ID No: 579144065.	OTM	25.01.2022 17:00pm	26.01.2022 13:00pm

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 downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited through online at any branches of registered banks branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Md. Abdus Sattar Howlader
Executive Engineer
LGED, Pirojpur
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GD-26

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www.thedailystar.net



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of Divisional Forest Officer
Management Plan Division
Banpahar, Nandan Kanon, Chattogram
Invitation for Tenders

No.	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
02	Agency	Bangladesh Forest Department.
03	Procuring entity name	Divisional Forest Officer, Management Plan Division, Chattogram.
04	Invitation for	Supply of manpower through outsourcing.
05	Invitation Ref. No.	22.01.0000.177.06.012.22.04
06	Date	03 January, 2022

KEY INFORMATION

07	Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (OTM): National Competitive Tender (NCT).
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FUNDING INFORMATION

08	Budget and source of funds	Revenue Budget, Government of Bangladesh.
09	Development partners	Not applicable.

PARTICULAR INFORMATION

10	Tender package No.	MPD/Revenue/2021-2022/S-2
11	Tender package name	Supply of manpower through outsourcing.
12	Tender publication date	05 January, 2022
13	Tender last selling date	18 January, 2022 (up to 5.00pm).
14	Tender closing date and time	19 January, 2022 12.30pm
15	Tender opening date and time	19 January, 2022 1.00pm
16	Name & address of the office(s) selling, receiving & opening tender document	Address: Office of the Divisional Forest Officer, Management Plan Division, Banpahar, Nandan Kanon, Chattogram.

INFORMATION FOR TENDERER

17	Eligibility of tenderer	i) Tenderers will be the firms having required experience of manpower supply through outsourcing. ii) Tenderers must be enrolled in the relevant professional or trade organizations registered in Bangladesh. iii) Other eligibility requirements have been mentioned in tender document.
18	Brief description of services	Supply of outsourcing manpower for the position of Mali (02 Nos.)
19	Price of tender document (Tk.)	Tk. 1000 (one thousand) only (non-refundable).
20	Lot Identification of lot	Location Tender security amount (Tk.) Completion time in weeks/months
21	1. Supply of manpower through outsourcing	Chattogram City Tk. 14400/- 12 months
22	Name of official inviting tender	Mohammed Hossain.
23	Designation, address and contact details of official inviting tender	Divisional Forest Officer, Office of the Divisional Forest Officer, Management Plan Division, Banpahar, Nandan Kanon, Chattogram. E-mail: managementplanctg@gmail.com
24	The procuring entity reserves the right to reject all tenders or annul the tender proceedings.	

Mohammed Hossain
Divisional Forest Officer
Management Plan Division
Chattogram

GD-28



As the Dhalai River is drying up at the onset of winter, the white stone tourism hub under Sylhet's Companiganj upazila is starting to find itself in trouble. Although boaters are trying their best to navigate through the shallow waters, travel time has still increased by a good threefold, which is adding to the costs of both tourists and boat owners. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

MUNSHIGANJ RIVERS

Top grabber let
OFF THE HOOK

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Two years after labelling a shipping company as the district's top river grabber, Munshiganj district administration has taken a U-turn on that revelation.

On May 6, 2019, the administration declared that Three Angle Marine Ltd was responsible for grabbing parts of Meghna and Fuldi rivers in Munshiganj's Gazaria upazila.

But now, the same administration is saying that the company has neither grabbed rivers nor filled up any canal, but is only responsible for grabbing a little bit of farmland.

Such backtracking of the government body has drawn widespread criticism from citizens and environmentalists, who labelled this a strategy to protect the company's interest.

In a circular published in 2019, the district administration said the company occupied 4.31 acres of low-lying lands and canals and almost one acre along Fuldi and Meghna in Nayanagar Mouza, drawing media attention.

Following news reports of various media outlets, National River Conservation Commission (NRCC) directed the administration to investigate the matter.

Later in September last year, the administration asked Gazaria UNO Ziaul Islam Chowdhury to start the investigation. Across September and



An aerial view of a shipbuilding yard built by grabbing parts of the Meghna and the Fuldi rivers in Munshiganj's Gajaria upazila.

FILE PHOTO

October, a probe body led by the UNO conducted the inquiry.

The report was submitted to the office of the district's deputy commissioner (DC). Subsequently on October 20, DC Kazi Nahid Rasul forwarded the report to NRCC.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the probe report, which said the information stated in the 2019 circular regarding river-grabbing by the shipping company was "untrue".

Though the company has illegally occupied around 34 acres of land to set up its factory, it was not involved in river

grabbing, the probe report said. The probe body talked to several villagers during the investigation.

However, talking to The Daily Star, locals said the company has occupied around 60 acres of land belonging to around 120 farmers, and grabbed a portion of Meghna and Fuldi rivers.

Besides, the company has also filled up two canals, Kumira and Borocharal, they said, adding that ever since its construction work began at the upazila's Nayanagar in 2010, it has been continuously gabbing riverbanks.

Meanwhile, villagers have claimed

that the probe report is riddled with irregularities.

Mir Md Ferdous, a resident of Nayanagar village, who filed a petition with the High Court in 2020, seeking government measures to end the river grabbing, was one of the locals who was interviewed by the probe committee.

In the report, the probe body said it asked Ferdous to place his written statement before it, but Ferdous did not do so.

However, when contacted, Ferdous denied the claim and said, "I had given a written statement before the High Court when I filed the petition. I requested the probe body to attach that statement. But it did not do it."

Another villager, Akhter Hossain, said although he talked with the UNO on September 14, when he tried to place his written statement several times later on, the UNO did not receive it.

Gazaria union parishad chair Md Abu Taleb Bhuiyan, who also faced the probe body, said, "The probe report is faulty. We want impartial investigation."

Gazaria upazila parishad chairman Amirul Islam has alleged that the company has influenced the administration with "underhanded dealings".

Contacted, Gazaria UNO Ziaul Islam Chowdhury said the investigation was done following the guidelines. "We have found that neither any river nor canal has been grabbed," he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

When waste piles up

Khulna city marred by uncollected garbage

DIPANKAR ROY

Almost 400 tonnes of waste remain uncollected in Khulna City Corporation (KCC) streets and drains every day, causing health risk and environmental hazards for city's 1.7 million dwellers.

Everyday these areas generate approximately 1,200 to 1,250 tonnes of solid waste including 4.5 tonnes of clinical waste, according to KCC.

Lack of carrying capacity, negligence of authorities concerned, illegal dumping of waste and reluctance of putting garbage inside designated dumpsters are the main causes, according to city dwellers.

This correspondent visited at least eight points, including Nirala Mor, PTI Mor, Gallamari bridge area, KDA avenue, Boyra Mor, Notun Bazar Mor and Notun Rasta area last week, and saw trash piled up in all of them.

In some places, wastes were scattered across portions of the road and nearby areas — emitting a horrible stench. Pedestrians and commuters were seen passing the spot after covering their noses. Many were forced to use alternative roads.

Abdur Rob, a resident of Bastuhara of ward- 9, said locals throw trash on Bastuhara Link Road as there is no waste bin for around half a kilometre.

"Around 50 shopkeepers of Bastuhara Kitchen Markets throw garbage and waste in nearby drains and roads," he added.

"KCC built the kitchen market on April, 2012.



PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

There are 74 shops including 40 vegetables, 14 groceries, 10 fish, five chicken and meat shops. We do not have any designated area for disposing our trash," said Imamul Azam Mashuk, a resident of Mujgunni area.

Like him, many complained about the stench and alleged that the city corporation's workers don't collect garbage regularly.

Md Abdul Ahad, principal of Khulna Medical College, said waterborne diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery, jaundice and skin diseases are spreading after the uncollected waste mixes with rainwater and surface water.

"Open dumpsters can lead to respiratory diseases," he said.

Contacted, Md Abdul Aziz, chief conservancy officer of KCC, said the city corporation now collects around 800 tonnes of solid waste and dumps it in an open field in Rajbandho area, eight kilometres away from the city.

The rest 400-450 tonnes don't even reach the dumping ground, due to lack of logistical support and manpower, he said.

"We collect 95 percent of waste from selected areas or secondary transfer stations twice a day, however, almost all uncollected wastes go to drains or wet land," he added.

"In addition, 710 employees and cleaners, including 198 permanent ones, are working to remove waste from 31 wards of Khulna city," said the chief conservancy officer.

Besides, they will initiate a waste management project next year to mitigate the crisis, he added. City dwellers must practice putting their garbage inside bins, he further added.

ROAD TRANSPORT NETWORK

Tk 2,490.97cr project approved for Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The government has taken a Tk 2,490.97 crore project to develop Chattogram's road transport network and solve the port city's traffic congestion.

Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) yesterday approved the project, the biggest for the Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) in recent times.

CCC will implement the project between March 2022 and December 2024.

Under the project, the government will construct 600 metres of overpasses on Airport Road, 38 foot-over-bridges of 1,520 metres, 14 bridges of 224 metres, 22 culverts of 87 metres, 10 roundabouts and develop different city roads with a total length of 769 kilometres, according to the project document.

The project also includes the purchase of a jeep and 15 pieces of construction equipment for the CCC.

The project document also said the port city's transportation network needs to be developed since goods-laden vehicles from the port use the city roads to reach different destinations of the country.

Feasibility study of the project was done by Centre for Innovation Studies.

At a press briefing following the Ecneec meeting, Shamsul Alam, state minister for planning, said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina directed the new CCC Mayor Rejaul Karim to ensure quality and timely completion of the project at the meeting.

The PM has also instructed the CCC to develop its own fund for maintenance and urged to increase earnings for funding such projects in future.



While installing a deep tube-well at Khulna's Batiaghata area, locals discovered a natural gas source. Not to let it get to waste, they got down to trying to harness it for everyday use. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

GRABBING GOVT LAND

ACC sues 'Golden Monir'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday filed another case against Monir Hossain alias "Golden Monir" and eight others, including Rajuk officials, for their alleged attempt to grab government land.

ACC Deputy Director Md Shafiullah filed the case with the commission's integrated district office of Dhaka.

The other accused are Rajuk's office assistant Parvej Chowdhury, retired assistant director Nasir Uddin Sharif, deputy director Didarul Alam, office assistant Anwar Hossain, accounts assistant SM Touhidul Islam and work supervisor Alauddin Sarkar; as well as two civilians, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Nasir Uddin Khan. According to the case statement, the accused, in collaboration, stole documents from Rajuk between December 2017 and October 2019.



A family wades through floodwaters outside a residence in the Gampong Meunasah area in North Aceh, Indonesia, yesterday. About 24,000 people have been evacuated and two children killed in floods on Indonesia's Sumatra island, officials said, with environmental campaigners blaming deforestation for worsening the disaster. PHOTO: AFP

CAPITOL RIOT ANNIVERSARY Biden, Trump to address divided US

AFP, Washington

A divided nation will experience an ominous split-screen moment Thursday when President Joe Biden uses the anniversary of the January 6 attack on Congress to warn of threats to US democracy and Donald Trump goes live with his conspiracy theories.

One year after a mob of Trump supporters marched on Congress to try and prevent lawmakers from certifying Biden's victory in the presidential election, political wounds remain far from healed.

Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris will reportedly speak from inside the Capitol, the setting during the unrest of almost unbelievable scenes as Trump supporters fought past police to invade the heart of US democracy.

As a veteran politician who came out of retirement to take on what he saw as Trump's authoritarian presidency, Biden has often warned during his first year in the White House of an "existential" threat to political freedoms that until now most Americans took for granted.

His speech -- part of a series of events on what Biden's key ally, Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, says will be a "difficult day" -- is set to take that warning to a new level.

But while Congress is holding a prayer vigil for what Biden has called "a dark moment," Trump will be giving a press conference from his luxury property in Mar-a-Lago, Florida.

His message is likewise easy to predict. Despite losing by more than seven million votes to Biden, and despite losing multiple court challenges around the country, Trump continues to tout wild claims that the 2020 election was stolen.

However ludicrous the election conspiracy theory may be -- one federal judge in Pennsylvania ruled Trump's case "strained" and "speculative" -- it is seen as truth by millions of Americans.

Polls consistently show that around 70 percent of Republicans think Biden was elected illegitimately.

A new Washington Post-University of Maryland poll puts this number at 58 percent. However, that same poll found that 40 percent of Republicans, compared to 23 percent of Democrats, believe violence against the government is justified sometimes.

Polls consistently show that around 70 percent of Republicans think Biden was elected illegitimately

NY subpoenas Trump, children in fraud probe

AFP, New York

New York's top justice official has subpoenaed ex-president Donald Trump, his son Don Jr. and daughter Ivanka in her investigation into the family's business dealings, a court filing showed Monday.

State Attorney General Letitia James, a Democrat, issued the subpoenas seeking their testimony in her years-long civil probe last month, according to the document.

The filing came to light after the Washington Post reported in December that James had asked Trump to testify in person at her office on January 7. Monday's legal filing was the first time investigators have said that they also want to quiz Trump's two eldest children under oath.

Following the Post's report, Trump sued James, arguing that she was violating his constitutional rights with a politically motivated investigation.

The Trumps urged a court to "quash" the subpoenas, a legal filing showed. "Her (James's) actions are a threat to our democracy and I plan to hold her accountable to the fullest extent," said



Trump lawyer Alina Habba. James launched her investigation in March 2019 and suspects that the Trump Organization fraudulently overstated the value of certain properties when seeking bank loans, and later reported much smaller values when declaring assets so it could pay less tax. The former president is facing pressure from several legal probes. In Washington he is trying to prevent a congressional probe into the January 6 attack by his supporters on the US Capitol from accessing White House records related to that day. The Trump Organization is under investigation by the Manhattan district attorney for possible financial crimes and insurance fraud.

Spoils of war

Taliban put victory over US on display



AFP, Ghazni

In the governor's compound of Afghanistan's Ghazni province, a new historical exhibit is unveiled before a rapt audience of Taliban fighters -- sections of blast walls from a former US military base.

One concrete slab is inscribed with the names and regiments of US troops who served in the province during America's longest war.

Like soldiers throughout history, US troops regularly daubed their names on the walls of bases and fixed positions they occupied. But now the towering block is on public display -- being used to bolster the Taliban's narrative of toppling US-led forces after 20 years of fighting.

"We have to show this so that Afghans, the world, and future generations know that we beat the Americans," Taliban provincial culture chief Mullah Habibullah Mujahid told AFP.

"Even if they called themselves the greatest power in the world."

Taliban forces took the city of Ghazni -- 150 kilometres (95 miles) south of Kabul -- three days before the capital fell on August 15.

The region has 3,500 years of rich recorded history, and the Taliban are now busy writing the latest chapter with proof of their military triumph. The propaganda push comes as Afghanistan's

new rulers struggle to evolve from an insurgency to a governing power in a country on the brink of economic collapse, with the UN estimating more than half the population is facing acute hunger.

On roads outside the city, another informal exhibition to the Taliban victory has been erected.

Rusting hulks of destroyed American armoured vehicles are on display, their weapons removed, their tyres flat and frayed.

Children clamber around and over the wreckage, which also features skeletons of abandoned Soviet tanks from the decade-long occupation of Afghanistan. That invasion ended in humiliation for the Soviets, and -- alongside the defeat of British troops in the 19th century -- Afghans are quick to remind visitors that the country has now triumphed over three foreign empires.

Reminders and relics of two decades of the US-led occupation of Afghanistan are scattered across the nation -- some of them usable. Much military hardware gifted to Afghan police and armed forces fell into the hands of the Taliban in the last chaotic days of the US-backed government.

The windfall of weapons, vehicles and uniforms has given the new rulers of Kabul tangible spoils of victory. But curating those trophies into a credible homage to the Taliban's return to power remains a challenge.



China landslide kills at least 14

AFP, Beijing

A landslide at a construction site in southwest China's Guizhou province has killed at least 14 people, state media reported yesterday.

Workers were reinforcing a hillside when the landslide happened on Monday evening, the official Xinhua news agency said.

Rescuers have found 14 bodies, as well as three injured people, with the cause of the accident "still under investigation", Xinhua reported.

Rescue work is "completed", with the three injured currently in stable condition, Xinhua added.

Photos published by state media showed rescue crews working overnight under floodlights, with masses of debris and crushed machinery visible.

Construction and industrial accidents are not uncommon in China, often due to lax safety standards.

In December, two workers were killed and twenty others rescued from a flooded coal mine in Shanxi province.

In July, 14 workers died in south China's Guangdong province after a tunnel they were building flooded.

Haiti PM survives assassination attempt

REUTERS, Port-Au-Prince

Gunmen unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry during an event on Saturday commemorating the Caribbean country's independence, his office said in a statement.

Henry's office said on Monday that "bandits and terrorists" had tried to shoot the prime minister at a church in the northern city of Gonaives where the ceremony marking the 218th anniversary of independence was taking place.

Video footage broadcast on social media



showed Henry and his entourage scrambling toward their vehicles as an armed group began shooting outside the cathedral in Gonaives.

Haitian media pointed to possible gang involvement in the shooting, which they said killed one person and injured two more.

Gangs' hold on parts of Haiti has strengthened since the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in July. Police, who called Saturday's attack the work of "armed groups," were unable to immediately confirm casualties. Prior to the incident, a local gang boss had made threats against Henry in local media. The prime minister's office said arrest warrants had been issued for the suspects who fired on Henry's convoy.



Tourists visit the Taj Mahal amidst heavy fog in Agra, India, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



A person crosses a street during a snowstorm in Washington, DC, US, on Monday. A winter storm hammered the capital and other parts of the mid-Atlantic, with official forecasts of five to 10 inches (12.7 to 25.4 centimeters) of snow in Washington.

PHOTO: AFP

‘No one can win nuke war’

World powers make rare pledge to prevent nuclear weapons spread

AGENCIES

China, Russia, Britain, the United States and France have agreed that a further spread of nuclear arms and a nuclear war should be avoided, according to a joint statement by the five nuclear powers published by the Kremlin on Monday.

It said that the five countries - which are the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council - consider it their primary responsibility to avoid war between the nuclear states and to reduce strategic risks, while aiming to work with all countries to create an atmosphere of security.

“We affirm that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought,” the English-language version of the statement read. “As nuclear use would have far-reaching consequences, we also affirm that nuclear weapons — for as long as they continue to exist — should serve defensive purposes, deter aggression, and prevent war.”

Chinese Vice FM Ma Zhaoxu said the joint statement could help increase mutual trust and “replace competition among major powers with coordination and cooperation,” adding that China has a “no first use” policy on nuclear weapons, state news agency Xinhua reported.

However, China’s foreign ministry yesterday said it would continue to “modernise” its nuclear arsenal and called on the United States and Russia to reduce their own stockpiles.

Beijing says the US and Russia still possess 90 percent of the nuclear warheads on Earth. The United States has said China is expanding its nuclear arsenal with as many as 700 warheads by 2027 and possibly 1,000 by 2030.

Geopolitical tensions between Moscow and Western countries have increased over concerns about Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine. Ties between Beijing and Washington have been strained over a series of issues.

Beijing says the US and Russia still possess 90 percent of the nuclear warheads on Earth, vows to continue to modernise nuclear arsenal.

FIGHTING NEAR YEMEN’S MARIB

Nearly 200 killed

AFP, Dubai

About 200 fighters have been killed in fresh clashes near the strategic Yemeni city of Marib, military and medical sources said yesterday, as the seven-year war witnesses a surge in violence.

More than 125 Huthi rebels were killed in air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition and clashes with pro-government forces in Shabwa and Al-Bayda provinces, bordering Marib, medical sources told AFP.

The pro-government Giants Brigade, backed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, also lost 70 fighters, Yemeni government sources said. The clashes took place over the past 24 hours.

The Saudi-led coalition has been fighting for nearly seven years in support of Yemen’s government against the Huthis, in a conflict that has displaced millions and created the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, according to the United Nations.

As hostilities escalate, the rebels on Monday said they had seized a military ship flying a United Arab Emirates flag. The coalition insisted it was carrying medical supplies.

In September, the rebels intensified their efforts to take Marib, a provincial capital which is the government’s last northern stronghold.

Recent weeks have seen another spike with Saudi air strikes on rebel territory multiplying, while the Huthis have ramped up missile and drone assaults on the kingdom.

Thirty-nine wounded arrived at Shabwa’s Ataq hospital in just one day on Sunday, according to a Medecins Sans Frontieres team that arrived in late December.

Analyst Stephane Lacroix of Paris’s Sciences Po university said the Huthis were in a “relatively strong position, unwilling to negotiate and trying to get the Saudi coalition to basically surrender”.

“The Saudis... have launched a major offensive to put as much pressure as possible on the Huthis to try to force them into a compromise. For the moment, that hasn’t been working,” he told AFP.

IRAN PRESIDENT ON SOLEIMANI KILLING

Try Trump or face revenge



AFP, Tehran

Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi vowed revenge against Donald Trump unless the former US president is tried over the killing of Qassem Soleimani, as Tehran marked two years since the revered commander’s death.

The Islamic republic and its allies across the Middle East held emotional commemorations for General Soleimani and his Iraqi lieutenant who were assassinated in a US drone strike at Baghdad airport on January 3, 2020.

Tehran’s arch enemies were targeted on the day of the anniversary in unclaimed drone and cyber attacks -- with two armed unmanned aerial vehicles intercepted by the US-led coalition in Iraq over Baghdad airport, and hackers attacking Israeli media sites.

Soleimani headed the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, with links to armed groups in Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Syria and Yemen.

Raisi, addressing Tehran’s largest prayer hall, said: “The aggressor and the main assassin, the then president of the United States, must face justice and retribution” alongside former

US secretary of state Mike Pompeo “and other criminals”.

“Otherwise, I will tell all US leaders that without a doubt the hand of revenge will emerge from the sleeve of the Muslim nation.”

Trump -- under whom tensions over Iran’s nuclear programme escalated, leading to a new and painful sanctions regime -- ordered the assassination which brought the enemies to the brink of a direct military confrontation.

Washington said at the time that Soleimani was planning imminent action against US personnel in Iraq.

The night-time strike destroyed a convoy carrying Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy leader of Iraq’s Hashed al-Shaabi coalition of pro-Iranian armed groups, and others.

Iran responded days later by firing missiles at bases hosting US troops in Iraq. No one was killed in the attacks.

Amid the heightened tensions Iran also accidentally downed a Ukrainian passenger jet on January 8, 2020, killing all 176 people aboard.

Commemorations were held this year across Iran as well as at Baghdad airport, in the holy Iraqi Shia city of Najaf, in Gaza City and elsewhere.



SEXUAL ASSAULT LAWSUIT

Prince Andrew to urge judge to dismiss case

AFP, New York

Prince Andrew’s lawyers were scheduled to use a court hearing yesterday to urge a New York judge to throw out a sexual assault lawsuit brought against the British royal in the United States.

His attorneys are expected to argue that a once-confidential settlement between accuser Virginia Giuffre and late disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein unveiled on Monday protects Andrew from litigation.

Giuffre alleges that Epstein lent her out for sex with his wealthy and powerful associates, including Andrew, an allegation the prince has repeatedly and strenuously denied.

A deal made public for the first time Monday by a New York court shows that Giuffre agreed to drop a civil case against Epstein for \$500,000 in Florida in 2009. The settlement contained a provision that purports to protect “other potential defendants” from being sued related to alleged sexual abuse committed by Epstein, who killed himself in jail two and a half years ago.

Giuffre sued the prince for unspecified damages last year, alleging he sexually assaulted her in 2001 when she was 17 and a minor under American law.

S Africa parliament fire contained

AFP, Johannesburg

A fire that devastated South Africa’s parliament was finally contained yesterday after a two-day battle, firefighters said, as a man appeared in court to face charges of starting the blaze.

Flames broke out in the Cape Town complex before dawn on Sunday, spreading to the National Assembly, whose roof collapsed, and threatening national treasures housed in an older section.

The blaze was initially declared under control on Monday but then flared up again, fanned by strong winds.

A 49-year-old man, Zandile Christmas Mafe,

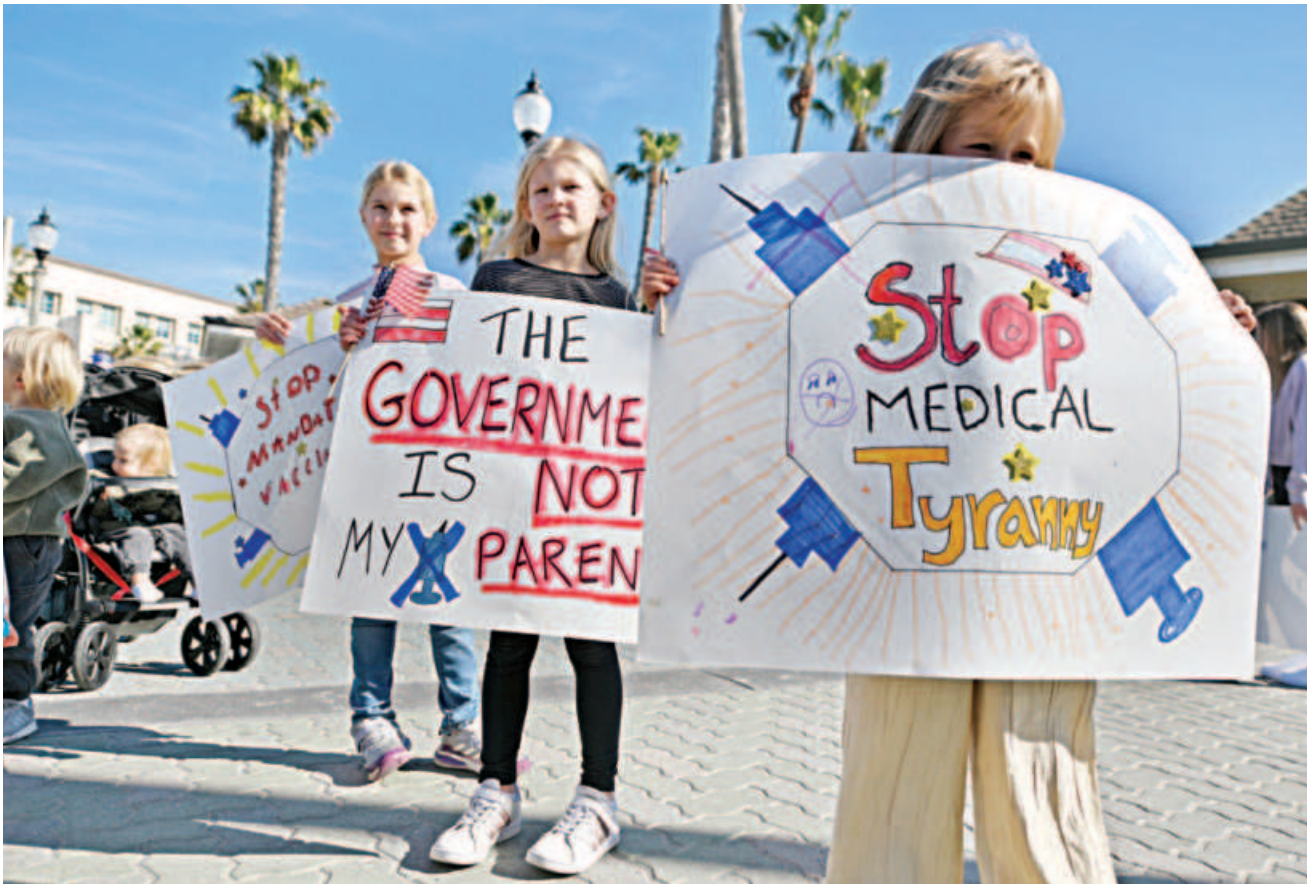


was arrested in the complex on Sunday.

He yesterday appeared briefly in court to answer charges of breaking into and “setting fire to parliamentary buildings” and intention to steal property, including “laptops, crockery and documents”.

Bearded and dressed in a grey shirt with knee-length shorts, he removed his mask on arriving in court and turned to present his face to the TV cameras and press photographers.

He was remanded in custody until January 11 pending further inquiries, which depend on when investigators can gain access to the building.



People demonstrate against Covid-19 vaccine mandates for students in Huntington Beach, California, US, on Monday. The United States recorded more than one million Covid-19 cases on Monday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, as the Omicron variant spread at a blistering pace.

PHOTO: AFP



If Trump and Pompeo are not tried in a fair court for the criminal act of assassinating General Soleimani, Muslims will take our martyr’s revenge. The aggressor, murderer and main culprit - the then president of the United States - must be tried and judged under the (Islamic) law of retribution, and God’s ruling must be carried out against him.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi

CXO SUMMIT 2021

In Pursuit of Resurgence

SESSION 1
THE CALIBRATION: BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

In this session, speakers focused on how businesses can properly address ongoing and future crises to achieve sustainability, and how organisational leaders could rise to the occasion with appropriate and effective strategy, vision, mission and business models that determine the sustainability of a business.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Mutual Trust Bank (MTB), stressed upon the necessity of ensuring good governance and the importance of decision-making. He also urged to increase the quality of education so that there is an abundance of skilled labour, as Bangladesh is far behind in this aspect in comparison to neighbouring countries.

“First of all, we have to strengthen our governance and address the issue of corruption, since both of these are interlinked. Corruption impedes sustainable growth. It is only through strict governance that we can bring corruption under check,” he added.

Sharif Zahir, Managing Director of Ananta Group, noted that Bangladesh now has a lot of infrastructure that was not there in the past.

“We have an opportunity to increase our private sector investment and foreign direct investment, but this will not happen until and unless we ensure that our policies for governance are more transparent. The United States and other developed countries tend to establish operations and factories in developing countries. Bangladesh needs to sufficiently capitalise on these opportunities, as otherwise it will be a missed opportunity,” said Zahir.

Syed Naimul Abedin, Chief Executive Officer of Peakward Bangladesh Limited, focused on the need for proper decision-making and execution to facilitate investment in this country. “We are blessed by our demographic dividend, but this alone will not ensure economic growth. We need to ensure we create proper policies for strict monitoring, which will allow us to capitalise on our demographic dividend,” he said.

Syful Islam, Managing Partner, Syful Shamsul Alam & Co. emphasised on the need for efficient business management and also highlighted the importance of a corruption-free system to facilitate business sustainability in Bangladesh.

“While technological development is causing disruptions in the market, we will be able to adapt to these changes. However, what is more necessary at the moment is a stable political system that is free of corruption, which will facilitate business-friendly policies and allow businesses in the country to thrive,” he added.

M Jahangir Alam, Group Chief Executive Officer of Bangla Trac Group opined on the importance of ensuring that employees are happy throughout the whole process of technological transformation. Employees are the backbone of any organisation, and without handling them with empathy, long term sustainability cannot be achieved.

Finally, speakers said that Bangladesh had made tremendous achievements due to well-planned policies and now this policy support must be ensured going forward. All organisations must have proper knowledge of the evolving technology and business environment, globally, and that is why it is essential to appoint the right people to lead their organisations.

The session was moderated by KAM Majedur Rahman, Vice Chairman & Trustee, Valor of Bangladesh and Chief Executive Officer, AK Khan and Company Limited.

SESSION 2
CONSCIOUS LEADER: ACHIEVING THROUGH PEOPLE

In this session, speakers shared their observations on the role of leadership and teamwork in organisational success. Panellists spoke about their experience as leaders and gave key insights on driving a team of individuals over the course of their storied careers.

Visionary leaders ensure strong leadership that stems from within the organisation and have the ability to influence the lives of individual co-workers towards a shared goal. This is how leaders achieve through people.

Yasir Azman, Chief Executive Officer, Grameenphone, started off the session by emphasising on the importance of leadership to drive an organisation towards achieving greater goals and also touched on some of the traits that make great leaders.

“Leaders help bring out the best of their team members. A leader is able to inspire people to dream big, to do more and to learn more. The two most defining traits of a leader are honesty and transparency,” said Azman. As leadership has evolved, leaders are closer and more accessible to their employees than ever before. This provides them with an opportunity to have an impact on their employees to an even greater extent, Azman added.

Sulaiman Ajaneer, Managing Director, Standard Finis Oil Company, stressed that leaders are those who put the team and organisation before themselves. He emphasised that a “we rather than me” mentality is what makes a true leader. Ajaneer mentioned that leaders should always stay true to their commitments and recommended volunteerism as a

great way for leaders to become more acclimatized with serving a community or team.

This sentiment was further echoed by Barrister Fatema Anwar, Academic Director and Head of Laws, Dhaka Centre of Law and Economics, with her adding that there are many ups and downs in a freelance profession, but the grit to keep going is what makes a leader. “You must be patient and never compromise your values if you want to become a successful leader,” she added.

Shwapna Bhowmick, Country Manager, Marks and Spencer Bangladesh, opined that daily excellence is essential and something that all leaders should try their best to ensure. She also reflected that leaders should not only acknowledge the success stories, but also talk about the shortcomings and how to improve on them.

A challenge within the context of Bangladesh is the culture where employees put their boss over everyone else. Syed Moinuddin Ahmed, Additional Managing Director and Company Secretary, Green Delta Insurance Company Limited, highlighted this with a story about when his company was restructuring their salary structure to comply with the requirements of NBR. “When we sat down and started to plan the restructuring of our salary structure to ensure compliance, I saw resistance from some of my team members. I realised that they were more concerned about the negative financial impact the process would have on their salaries. But if the change benefits the organisation and the majority of the employees, then why shouldn’t we adopt them? This is a part of the work culture in Bangladesh that needs to change,” said Moinuddin.

The session was moderated by Akhteruddin Mahmood, CHRO, BRAC Bank, who recommended that we focus on instilling the values we were brought up with as children into our businesses.

SESSION 3
CULTURE IS THE BACKBONE: COLLABORATION AND VALUE CHAIN

The session highlighted the importance of working together and creating a value chain to make businesses sustainable.

Whether going to the work-place or working from home, the COVID-19 pandemic has had tremendous effects on work culture. The speakers shared their experiences of working through the COVID-19 pandemic and discussed some key lessons learned about organisational culture during this period.

Malik Talha Ismail Bari, Director, United Group, shared that the key factor behind their successful journey through the COVID-19 pandemic was team effort. The whole organisation worked as a team and supported each other which also helped them to find innovative solutions to face the new challenges posed by the pandemic.

Mushfique Manzoor, COO of IGW Operators Forum, emphasised on three key words: adapt, adopt, and execute. In a circumstance like the COVID-19 pandemic, he suggested, every organisation needs to adapt to the changes, adopt innovative plans to address the new challenges, and execute those plans successfully.

“As most of our interactions are happening online, it is really difficult to understand an employee’s mental and physical condition. Therefore, we need to develop empathy towards our colleagues across the organisation,” he added.

Sayem Haq, Managing Director of Lighthouse Bangladesh opined that the new generation is eager to take up new technologies as well as new challenges but senior citizens are not that eager to transform themselves. CXOs must identify and understand the emerging challenges faced by their employees and work out solutions in collaboration, he added.

Asadul Haque Sufyani, Chief Operating Officer at Bengal Cement Limited, shared the need for teamwork, ranging from manufacturing to distribution level, which has helped businesses sustain themselves and that subsequently gave a satisfactory outcome. He also mentioned “courage” and “safety” as two other key factors that supported their journey.

“We reorganised our entire work-flow taking into consideration the external and internal factors of the value chain. We used real-time data to prepare our action plan and, with robust adoption of technology, successfully implemented the plan,” he added.

Ihtesham B. Shahjahan, Managing Director, Quality Feeds Limited said that the COVID-19 pandemic might be a boon for the companies in the end as it taught many valuable lessons. Every company, for example, should have some preparation such as reserve funds for facing sudden ruptures. The leaders of an enterprise should lead from the front and create confidence among the employees, he added.

The session was moderated by Shams Mahmud, Managing Director of Shasha Denims Limited. He identified that the pandemic helped organisations to re-evaluate their internal strength and encouraged them to invest in it. He also emphasised the need for creating ownership among the employees.

Citing the example of his textile mill, Shams Mahmud shared that since they started sharing profits with the employees the productivity of the company rose to 98 percent and turnover increased manifold.

The CXO Summit 2021 was held at the Radisson Blu Dhaka Water Garden Hotel on December 11, 2021. The day-long event was organised by Valor of Bangladesh (VoB). This year, the theme of the summit was ‘In Pursuit of Resurgence’. The summit hosted a series of thoughtful dialogues and discussions among the top CXOs in Bangladesh. Here we publish a summary of the discussions.

SESSION 4
THE CHANGE ARCHITECT: AGILITY AND TRANSFORMATION

In this session, speakers shared their observations on the importance of agility to transform businesses quickly in an increasingly evolving market.

Business leaders and managers have to navigate through fast-changing conditions that are more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous than ever before. A new form of leadership thought has emerged that will produce effective and efficient solutions taking charge of the rapid transforming landscape – agile leadership.

Shehzad Munim, Managing Director of British American Tobacco Bangladesh, gave the keynote speech before the formal start of the session. He advised leaders to prioritize understanding their consumers, scanning their environment and thoroughly understanding the core purpose of their company. Munim also discussed the importance of handling challenges with the right perspective and agility, and the necessity of developing new talent.

Shams Zaman, Head of Corporate and Investment Banking, Citibank, N.A. Bangladesh started the session talking about the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and how his organisation adapted to the changes.

The most important priority for Citigroup was to ensure the safety of and maintain their commitments to their clients. Agility became an important element for leaders to ensure that they could motivate employees and effectively communicate the organisation’s situation, he added.

“Being empathetic in our decision making was of the utmost priority. In everything that we do, we must embody empathy and compassion in our interaction with people. This requires a different breed of managers who are more agile and can adapt to the evolving environment,” said Zaman.

This sentiment for agile leaders was echoed by Rezwanaul Haque Jami, Head of eCommerce, a2i, ICT Division, who added that younger entrepreneurs should start participating in the market. The low barrier to entry allowed many people to enter the e-commerce industry, even though many of these companies are just retailing businesses. Younger entrepreneurs are working in niches of the sector such as food-tech and agri-tech, but they should consider entering the larger market as it need agile leaders, opined Haque. “We would like to see

instead. “Creating new and unique models is hard to do in-house, and so corporations should invest in innovative start-ups. Once these start-ups are established, they can be fully procured by larger companies who will then use their distribution channels to grow the business even further. In Bangladesh, the corporate sector should invest or collaborate with start-ups and acquire them down the line,” added Ahmed.

The session was moderated by Professor Mohammad Abdul Momen, Director, IBA, University of Dhaka, who reiterated that businesses will continue to face challenges as we are in a volatile and ambiguous environment. That is why it is necessary for a new generation of agile leaders to help Bangladesh get to the next stage of its transformation.

SESSION 5
FUTURE READINESS : INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

In this session, speakers shared their observations on what role technology and innovation has been playing to reshape the landscape of commerce in an ever-changing world. Panellists spoke about their insights, plans, and the rationale behind the plans to become future-ready business entities.

Shuvashish Roy, Head of Business, The Daily Star, began the session discussing the two elements we must observe and adapt in order to be future ready. “Technological disruption is perpetual, and adapting to the changes in technology is one part of becoming future ready. The other part is innovation, and this is more difficult, as it requires us to change our organisations with new ideas and concepts,” added Roy.

Imran Karim, Vice Chairman, Confidence Group spoke about how his sector – engineering and manufacturing – is in the privileged position of being protected from disruptive technology because of the high cost of entry. Sharing his observation, he said, “For technology to be disruptive, it must be easy, it must be cheap, and it must be easily adaptable.”

Ala Uddin Ahmad, Chief Executive Officer, MetLife Bangladesh, explained why innovation is vital to businesses with a mind for success. “Things are changing so fast that it calls for innovation. If businesses cannot cope with this change, it will impact their future performance,” he shared.

Mominul Islam, MD and Chief Executive Officer, IPDC Finance, discussed all the ways his organisation used technology for the betterment of society and their business, “IPDC has embraced

Chief Executive Officer, B-Trac Technologies Limited., shared his unique perspective as the sole technology supplier among the panellists. He spoke of how COVID-19 first exposed the lack of readiness, and then expedited the digitisation process for Bangladeshi businesses.

He added, “There is now demand for the latest technologies we have available now. This is a good indication for the maturity of the industries and leadership, and for them, understanding the necessity of technology in business.”

All the speakers agreed that the most important thing would be the mentality to adapt, to be open to change that will be the most vital for future readiness, as technology and infrastructure has a tendency to follow what the market demands.

SESSION 6
GOVERNANCE ENSURES ORGANISATIONAL EXCELLENCE

In this session, speakers highlighted the necessity for governance and strict monitoring to achieve long-term success as an organisation.

The aim of governance is to facilitate effective and pragmatic management, transparency and accountability that can deliver long-term success. Organisations with well-designed reporting systems, ethical approaches and monitoring of all dealings, interactions, and transactions effectively are crucial to ensuring this.

The session was kick-started by the moderator Anis A. Khan, Chairman, Valor of Bangladesh. Khan stressed that governance starts from our families and moves up to the corporate world. He also suggested that businesses select members for their boards based on skill-set and experience, rather than just appointing distinguished individuals who might not always be right for the role. “We can have an operational board and a supervisory board. The operational board will be in charge of making technical business decisions while the supervisory board will be in charge of overseeing them,” added Khan.

Ali Reza Iftekhar, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Eastern Bank Limited mentioned that one of the biggest challenges in the industry is that key financial decisions are made by the board of directors, who might not always have the right set of skills to make these decisions. “An important point is that our companies invest millions on technological advancements but sometimes we forget to invest in our employees. We should provide our employees with skills that are useful to their roles and will help them grow in the long term,” added Iftekhar.

The intricacies of governance were further elaborated on by Suraiya Zannath, Lead Financial Management Specialist, World Bank, who highlighted that governance is the backbone of every organisation. It is a structured framework where the processes, the laws, and the regulatory environment operate. The four fundamentals that are essential for any organisation, private or public, are transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and compliance, she added.

Zahida Fizza Kabir, Chief Executive Officer, Sajida Foundation stressed the importance of non-profit organisations becoming more self-sufficient, or they would struggle as Bangladesh becomes more developed and funds from international donors diminish.

“Funding via the corporate sector will be the key going forward. As the corporate sector and private donors prefer to work with financially sustainable organisations, governance will be a key component to ensuring a steady flow of investment,” she added.

The state of governance in universities is also a key issue as Bangladesh looks to ensure its universities meet global standards, opined Professor Imran Rahman, Vice Chancellor of University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh.

“We need to improve governance in our universities as thousands of taxpayer funds go to public universities to ensure quality education. Even University of Dhaka needs to rebrand and reposition itself as we are now in the 21st century. It is essential to select board members who have the right skill-set, values, and experience to elevate the state of our universities, whether public or private,” added Professor Rahman.

Masud Khan, Chairman, Unilever Consumer Care Limited urged the corporate sector to strengthen their state of corporate governance, as it is a reflection of the value of their investors. Good corporate governance is attractive to everyone, from investors and regulators to financial institutions who act as lenders. The board is at the heart of good corporate governance and they are the ones who set the tone of an organisation.



young and agile leadership in the e-commerce sector in the future. As this e-commerce sector spills into other sectors such as fintech and core technology, agility is the key to success here,” he added.

Ruhi Murshid Ahmed, Adviser, CSR & Public Relations, BSRM, mentioned that it is likely we will be in this COVID-19 situation for the next one or two years, and that is why it is important to adapt to the changes brought by the pandemic. “BSRM’s senior management knew exactly how to coordinate the team and technology together. Their foresight meant that we were prepared in terms of technology for such a crisis and were able to react quickly,” she added.

Rahat Ahmed, Founding Partner and Chief Executive Officer, Anchorless Bangladesh stressed upon the necessity for collaboration between large corporate bodies and start-ups. He also emphasised that replicable models will not help in securing international investment, and that entrepreneurs should strive to become market leaders

technology as a tool for financial inclusion and reshaped its business model. We have two applications: a block-chain-based digital supply chain finance platform, ORJON, which caters to the small suppliers who supply to corporates; the other is IPDC Dana, where we provide small credit facilities to retailers digitally.” Kamal Quadir, Chief Executive Officer, bKash, went back to the origins of his organisation to discuss how technological innovation was achieved with cost consideration. “Brick and mortar banking services struggle to serve clients whose average ticket size is around BDT 1100-1200. This is the challenge that the central bank and banking sector was facing when we started. bKash’s challenge was to provide this service by staying within the regulatory framework and providing the service in a cost-effective manner. To solve this problem, we had to employ hundreds of thousands of agents, and develop a platform that can be used with a very basic phone,” he said. Muhammad Abdul Mabud,



I took inspiration from the brave journalists I know: PORI MONI

ZAHID AKBAR

Popular actress Pori Moni’s “Mukhosh”, directed by Elfhakhar Suvo, is set to release on January 21. The upcoming film also stars Mosharraf Karim and Roshan, among others. At a recent press meet in Dhaka’s Banani, the title track of the film was unveiled. Pori Moni spoke to The Daily Star about the film, her hopes for 2022, and more.

What do you think of the title track of “Mukhosh”?

We all want gifts from our loved ones for the New Year; the title song of “Mukhosh” is my gift to my fans and admirers. I hope people enjoy it.

Tell us a bit about your role in “Mukhosh”.

I play the role of crime reporter Sohana in the film. I took inspiration from the brave journalists that I know in real life.

You have worked with Mosharraf Karim in this film. How was the experience?

All of us got along very well on the sets, from the first day. Mosharraf Karim is a great artiste without a doubt. I am not one when compared to his acting skills, but he never made me feel that way.

What are your aspirations for the New Year?

I want to exceed my own expectations this year. That being said, it is not as if I want to land on the moon; I just want to continue doing good work, and be surrounded by people’s love.

What would you consider the ‘love of your life’ at this moment?

I exist because there is love in this world. I cannot tell you who or what exactly this ‘love’ is, but the truth is, there is no life without love.

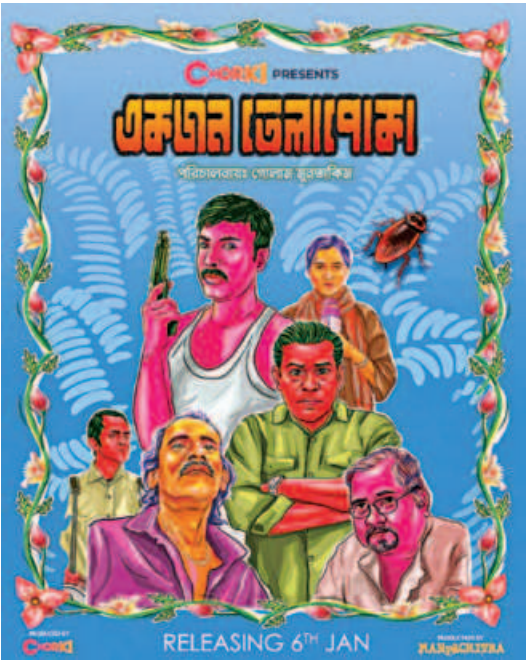


PHOTO: COLLECTED

Chorki’s ‘Ekjon Telapoka’ to release tomorrow

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Crime thriller “Ekjon Telapoka”, featuring noted actors Manoj Pramanik, Tasnuva Tisha, and Shatabdi Wadud, is set to release worldwide on Chorki on January 6.

The poster, featuring caricatures of Tasnuva Tisha as a journalist and Pramanik holding a gun, alongside other cast members and a cockroach, was unveiled on Chorki’s official Facebook Page recently.

The project, produced by Manpachitra, is written and directed by Golam Muntakim.

‘Surrogacy wasn’t going as planned’

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Sunny Leone recently got candid about feeling absolutely heartbroken amidst challenging surrogacy, which wasn’t going as planned. During a conversation with *Bollywood Bubble*, the mother of three said, “We were going through the process of surrogacy, which takes a long time. It took about a year-and-a-half from start to finish and during that time, before we decided hey, why don’t we just adopt?” surrogacy wasn’t going as planned.”

She also detailed her struggle while adding, “You feel like a failure, you feel so low and so upset about it.”

Leone, who welcomed twin boys with Daniel Weber in 2018 also shared that after continuous disappointment, the couple decided to register for adoption and adopted a girl.

“Because that other process was not working, this process is a ‘what if’ as well. It takes a little bit of time, a lot of paperwork, a lot of due diligence. Then we found out we were having twin boys and a little girl all in the same week. We call that God’s plan,” she explained.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

A stellar, shrewd, and star-studded satire

“Don’t Look Up” is a biting political satire that is discernibly directed at politicians and the society as a whole due to their collective ignorance about the imminent climate crisis. Director Adam McKay’s unique juxtaposition of humour and terror created caricatures of not only famous people but also the state of the modern world.

SHANIZ CHOWDHURY

Oscar-winning performers Jennifer Lawrence and Leonardo DiCaprio star as each other’s foil – DiCaprio is a timid and anxious professor while Lawrence is the egalitarian, aspiring PhD candidate. Working at Michigan State University, Lawrence’s character Kate discovers a rare comet, headed towards the Earth, which as we soon learn has almost a 100% probability of extermination.

In the film, two low-level astronomers must go on a giant media tour to warn mankind of an approaching comet that will destroy planet Earth.

Lawrence and DiCaprio cleverly balanced each other’s emotions – when DiCaprio was taciturn, Lawrence was seething with anger and when she gave up, DiCaprio’s inchoate rage bubbled up to indignation. McKay’s screenplay brimmed with several subplots which were masterfully crafted by a corral of actors. Each of the stars shone and had just the perfect screen-time to leave a profound impact on the protagonists. As usual, Meryl Streep was a delight to watch, with her hilarious impression of Donald Trump and the mother-son dynamic with figurehead Jonah Hill who is a stand-in for Jared Kushner. Another favorite was Cate Blanchett’s role as a co-host – a hit at Megyn Kelly

– embracing her apathetic and cynical attitude about everything but trivial stories.

Mark Rylance’s performance as Peter Isherwell, a hybrid Zuckerberg-Bezos-Gates pied piper, was blood-curdling. Instead of taking thorough actions to save the planet, he was only interested in wringing more profits through the exploitation of the working class. Ariana Grande and Kid Cudi also appear to mock the celebrity culture that society and therefore, the media are more obsessed with than real news.

Jennifer Lawrence plays Kate Dibiasky, an MSU doctoral candidate in astronomy.

McKay was determined to bluntly ridicule the people who pull the puppet strings on the broken system that has made modern America a cesspool in so many pathetic ways.

After estimating the apocalyptic incident that is just six months away, both scientists are immediately escorted to the White House. The lack of effectual decision-making throws them off. They became the voice of the viewers throughout the rest of the movie – yelling and pleading for ways to fix the problem that only got bigger each day. To no one’s surprise, once Isherwell and the government’s

FILM REVIEW



conjoined effort to entertain their greed fails magnificently, they run away without a pang of conscience. No Time to Die’s cinematographer Linus Sandgren added jump cuts and cutaways frequently to set the atmosphere of a thriller movie. The remarkable score by “Succession’s” Nicholas Britell elevated these scenes to an outstanding stature.

Meryl Streep plays Janie Orlean, President of the United States.

Perhaps, the most sinister part of “Don’t Look Up” is its plausibility. Like a Saturday Night Live skit, it feeds you stories of contemporary malaise that are prevalent in the world but the one percent of rich people, with the help of the government, tries to subterfuge. The movie serves as a wake-up call so

we acknowledge just how attuned to Ostrich syndrome we are.

With precedents like “Dr. Strangelove”, “Armageddon”, “Deep Impact” and “Black Mirror”, “Don’t Look Up” had big shoes to fill. Receiving 4 Golden Globe nominations, McKay’s hard-hitting masterpiece has surely earned him high praise.

A little bit of accountability can go a long way

The culture of time and cost overruns in public projects must stop

WE are baffled by the continued failure of public authorities leading to frequent cost and time overruns in various projects, despite the prime minister's clear directives in the past to check questionable project revisions—including the directive that a project cannot be revised more than three times. As the prime minister-led Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) convened its first meeting of the year, seven of the 10 projects placed at the meeting were set for revisions. According to a report by this newspaper on January 4, when the 10 projects tabled at the meeting were first conceived, they were supposed to cost Tk 3,099 crore. Now that has ballooned up to Tk 14,961 crore.

In terms of time, the authorities sought extensions ranging from a year to a full decade for some of the projects—and that, too, after several revisions. For instance, one of the seven projects—the Ashrayan-2 project to alleviate poverty and homelessness—was taken up in 2010 for completion in June 2014. It has gone through three revisions and is now seeking extra time and money again. The project was initially estimated to cost Tk 1,169.18 crore, but that has now increased to a massive Tk 11,142.8 crore. Another project called BEPZA Economic Zone Mirsarai-1st Phase, which is aimed at attracting domestic and foreign investment, is seeking additional expenditure of Tk 552 crore and two more years; the original project cost was Tk 750 crore and the completion date was June last year.

That the authorities have asked for such a massive increase in expenditures at the first meeting of the year is deplorable. Similarly, the delay we see in project completion year after year is truly shocking. Besides the cost increase that it leads to—which the taxpayers have to bear—and the benefit that it deprives the people of, the fact that the authorities have failed to make any improvements despite the PM's directives is unacceptable. And the reason for this, we believe, is the lack of accountability that we see when it comes to repeated project revisions. We have barely—if ever—seen any of the public officials or private consultants involved in these delayed projects being reprimanded in any way, shape or form. That must change if such huge time/cost overruns are to be avoided.

In line with that, we call on the government to get the message across to all project officials that they must change their business-as-usual attitude. And if they don't, they should be held accountable for failing to deliver to the public what they promise in their initial project proposals.

Urgent measures needed for workplace safety

Employers must be held accountable and subject to regular inspections

A recent survey by the Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment (OSHE) Foundation has revealed what we already know to be true—workplace safety in the country, especially in the informal sector, is a sham. In 2021, the number of deaths due to workplace accidents was 853, while the number of serious injuries stood at 236. Of the deceased, a staggering 792 were workers from the informal sector. The findings were based on reports from 15 national newspapers, seven local newspapers, and information gathered from the spot by the organisation. However, there is no doubt that many such incidents have gone unreported, and that the real number may be even more horrifying.

One need not look back too far into the past to realise just how callous working conditions in Bangladesh can be, which lead to such heavy casualties. On July 8, 2021, a deadly fire at the Hashem Foods factory in Rupganj, Narayanganj claimed the lives of 54 people, 17 of whom were children. Many have termed this a "murder," because workers could not escape the fire as the factory authorities had blocked the only exit of the building from outside. Such tactics can be seen across industries, with deaths or injuries routinely reported in ship breaking yards, garment factories, construction industry, brick fields, steel mills, etc. Though the tragic Rana Plaza collapse of 2013 had made the government amend the Labour Act, many workers continue to suffer due to their sectors not being counted as part of the formal economy. Not only do they lose out on due benefits—as happened during Covid-enforced closures—but many lose their lives as well due to the lack of proper rules and regulations to protect them.

Ensuring the safety of workers, especially in the informal sector, is a hefty task that the government needs to carry out on a priority basis. Risky sectors need to have health and safety committees, which will ensure that the working conditions at factories and such establishments are not dangerous, and will carry out regular inspections to keep non-conforming firms in check. Additionally, a proper legal framework needs to be in place to protect workers and ensure justice for them, while holding employers to account for any negligence. Workers' lives are hard enough, what with the unfavourable working conditions and meagre wages. Being fatally injured at work should not be something they need to worry about on top of everything else.

Making the most of our e-commerce sector



A CLOSER LOOK
Tasneem Tayeb
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Her Twitter handle is @tasneem_tayeb

TASNEEM TAYEB

THE e-commerce sector of Bangladesh witnessed significant growth since the outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020. This growth, however, was not to last long. From mid-2021, the sector was mired in controversy surrounding scams by multiple actors—including Evaly, Eorange, Alesha Mart, and Dhamaka. These e-commerce players offered unsustainable and unrealistic discounts and cashback offers on advance payment to lure customers, and then failed to deliver the products or return the customers' money, or even pay the merchants.

As a result, customer confidence in the overall e-commerce sector has taken a hit, leading to a substantial decline in transactions. A local daily, citing a Bangladesh Bank e-commerce transactions report, revealed that transactions in October 2021 witnessed a 41.53 percent fall—to Tk 743 crore—in comparison to the transaction in June 2021, when it was Tk 1,277.4 crore.

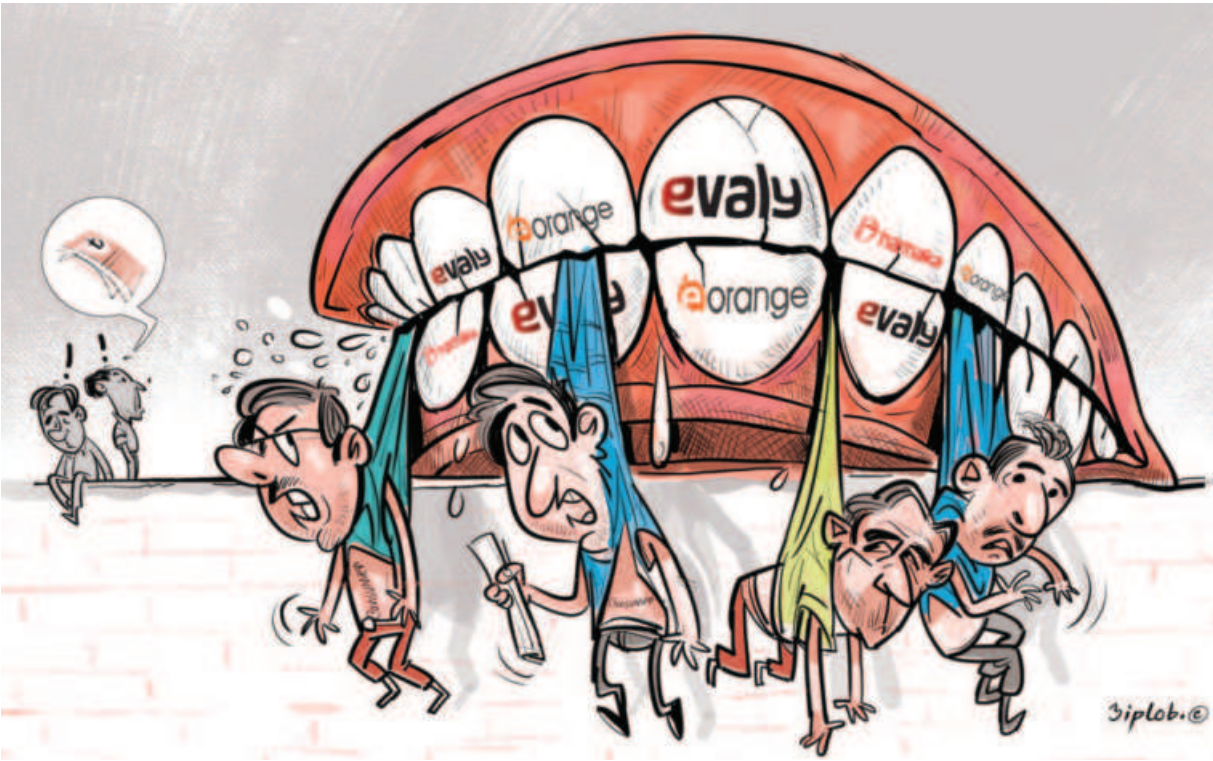
In addition, the authorities' failure to stop the misadventures of the unscrupulous players on time (despite these having been reported multiple times since the end of 2020), lack of a concrete policy framework to regulate the sector, and the authorities' inability to trace the customers' money and ensure refund have also added to the customers' fears, many of whom now feel uncomfortable making online purchase.

While these scams still remain a major concern for the authorities, they must now also focus on taking preventive and curative measures to bring the e-commerce sector back on the growth trajectory, which, according to a November 2020 forecast, was anticipated to be worth USD 3 billion by 2023.

One of the first steps in this regard should be to track the money trail to be able to refund the affected parties. The financial regulators, especially Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU), should take a closer look at the money laundering aspect.

It has recently been reported that the managing director of Dhamaka had transferred Tk 84 crore to his personal account from advance payments the platform had received from the customers.

SMD Jasim Uddin Chishti, Dhamaka's managing director, also lent Tk 25 crore to other companies he owns, in addition to misappropriating Tk 20 crore, in the name of software procurement. The company, now having only Tk 45.28 lakh in its account, had taken Tk 736 crore as advance payment from its customers, and paid only Tk 557 crore to the merchants. The company now owes Tk 480 crore



▲ ILLUSTRATION:
BIPLOB CHAKRABORTY

As we move forward in 2022, with the aim to create a bigger scope for the e-commerce sector, we need to take learnings from the setbacks of 2021, and reset the system to make the most of what this sector has to offer.

to its customers and the merchants. Evaly, Eorange, and others have similarly conned their customers and merchants and owe them crores of taka.

Now the question is: Where is the missing money? Is the money still within the country? Where in the system are the loopholes, because these multiple cases could not have been the result of chance

services and banks facilitating online, cashless payments, e-commerce has become a more convenient marketplace. We need to utilise these opportunities.

For now, the commerce ministry has issued the Digital Commerce Operation Guidelines, 2021, pursuant to the National Digital Commerce Policy, 2018 (as amended in 2020), in order to ensure

or coincidence? Why could the regulatory and law enforcement bodies not identify the problems earlier? Why did the authorities not take preventive measures before?

More importantly, who are the primary and secondary beneficiaries of these scams? By beneficiaries, I mean not only Dhamaka's SMD Jasim Uddin Chishti, or Evaly CEO Mohammad Rassel, and his wife and company chairman, Shamima Nasrin, but the masterminds who moved the pawns from behind the curtains—if there are any—and every single individual, body or syndicate who have benefitted from these scams—whoever they may be or however politically well-connected they are.

These are questions that need to be thoroughly scrutinised by unbiased relevant agencies, because in a corrupt system that enables such scams to go on for months, not a single page should remain unturned in order to identify the rotten elements that are eating at the core of the system, making it dysfunctional and ineffective. The answer to these questions would not only help in tracing the money trail, but would also help in formulating a comprehensive policy framework that would safeguard the interests of not only the customers or the e-commerce players, but the sector overall.

With the pandemic set to stay for the long haul, e-commerce has become one of the preferred options for customers worldwide. And with mobile financial

transparency and accountability in the sector, among other objectives. And while the guidelines are comprehensive in nature, its effectiveness will only depend on how well these are being enforced. If the regulators and law enforcers apply the guidelines selectively, it will be a self-defeating act and will only be detrimental to the growth of the e-commerce sector.

"While the Digital Commerce Operation Guidelines, 2021 is a welcome move in the face of the crisis we have been through, we must keep in mind that it is only a stop-gap measure. In order to truly create a conducive environment for long-term growth and much-needed sustainability of the e-commerce industry, the government, in alignment with its high profile aspiration of creating a Digital Bangladesh, must focus on formulating a comprehensive policy framework, which will also define the roles and responsibilities of each actor involved, especially to ensure proper implementation," suggested Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) while talking to this writer. He added that it is also important that relevant stakeholders are involved in developing such a policy.

As we move forward in 2022, with the aim to create a bigger scope for the e-commerce sector, we need to take learnings from the setbacks of 2021, and reset the system to make the most of what this sector has to offer.

How do we reach 2030 climate goals?



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

SALEEMUL HUQ

THE year 2030 is the target year for the world to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. In addition to the SDGs, 2030 is also the year by which all countries party to the Paris Agreement on climate change must keep the global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius, as well as achieve the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA).

At the same time, the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) held in 2021 has launched a series of initiatives to change the food systems nationally as well as globally, to make them more resilient by 2030.

Another initiative of note is the Race to Resilience (R2R) campaign launched by the high-level champions of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which is bringing together non-state actors from around the world to enhance the overall resilience of society in the face of adverse impacts from human-induced climate change that are going to get only worse by the day.

As we have entered the era of loss and damage caused by human-induced climate change, we need to tackle these issues as true emergencies, rather than simply tinkering with reform around the edges. The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated what a global crisis looks

It is important to focus on the role that local communities—including households and even individuals—can and must play to tackle the climate impacts.

like, as well as the need for all countries to work together to effectively combat it.

Every single one of us needs to consider ourselves the citizens of Planet Earth first, and our respective countries second. Almost all the major problems facing humanity now are global in nature, and cannot be solved within national boundaries anymore. Hence, we all need to think globally while acting locally.

Another important shift needed in our thinking is for every sector and organisation to make it their own responsibility to actively participate in tackling climate change—rather than simply leave it to the government. This is now known as a "whole-of-society" approach, taken to tackle major issues. This approach is the way to go if we are to have any chance of tackling the global challenges we currently face. This means that every organisation—from schools to companies, from NGOs to media houses—has to undertake its own analysis of what can be done regarding climate change, and then commit to actions themselves to contribute to the greater climate action.

The third important task regarding the climate emergency is to confront the forces who are causing the problems—which includes fossil fuel companies as well as certain governments and media outlets who protect them. These forces of the status quo now need to be challenged at every level. This will require criminalising their behaviour both at national and global levels. From now on, polluting companies must be forced to pay for the loss and damage they have caused and profited from. It is now very clear that these companies knowingly caused the damage; now, they must face the consequences.

Every country in the world needs to

make these three transitions as quickly as possible in order to enable their citizens to tackle the crisis adequately. In Bangladesh, we have a number of major opportunities for us to make these transitions quicker than others.

The first big transition we have coming up is our graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category in 2026. This means that we will no longer be eligible for grants and concessional loans, and will have to compete in the open global economy. This is a major achievement for the government as well as the people of Bangladesh. But it will certainly create a shock, which we must be prepared to overcome.

The Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCPPI), with its 10-year goal to achieve prosperity for the country in the face of adverse impacts of climate change, takes a whole-of-society approach to enable all sectors, organisations and even individuals to play their respective roles in achieving the desired prosperity by 2030. At the same time, it is important to focus on the role that local communities—including households and even individuals—can and must play to tackle the climate impacts. This is known as Locally Led Adaptation (LLA), in which Bangladesh has already been acknowledged as a global leader. We need to build on this—not just for ourselves, but for us to share our knowledge and experience with other countries as well.

Finally, we must invest in our young girls and boys who are by far our biggest asset. We have to help them become creative, innovative and successful adults. Each year that we fail to do so is another wasted year, and there are only nine years left until 2030. We need to act as swiftly as possible; there is no time to lose.

Why are rape victims put on trial?



Anupoma Joyeeta Joyee is a barrister at law.

ANUPOMA JOYEETA JOYEE

THE rape culture in Bangladesh is nurtured by many disappointing legal loopholes. Some of the provisions are so self-defeating and irrational in nature that not only do they fail to ensure justice to the victims, but they also put the victims on trial, rather than the perpetrators. Despite countless demonstrations, protests and articles which surely make us sound like broken records at this point, the political will of the government never follows through to scrap these provisions.

Two such notorious legal provisions are sections 155 (4) and 146 (3) of the colonial-era Evidence Act, 1872.

Section 155 (4) allows the defence to show that the victim is of “generally immoral character.” By virtue of this section, defence may produce a witness to give evidence along the lines of why the victim should not be believed. Similarly, Section 146 (3) allows a witness to be asked such questions that dent her credibility.

In November 2021, a writ petition was filed challenging the legality of these two archaic sections. These provisions are completely against a rape victim’s fundamental rights and are devoid of any logic whatsoever, because it should be the perpetrator on the stand being judged—not the victim.

The adverse effect of these provisions is extremely far-reaching—not just on each rape trial, but also on our societal fabric as a whole. When a piece of law passed and endorsed by the most supreme body in the entire state permits a victim’s character to be dragged through the mud during her own rape trial, it passively gives everyone the right to do the same even outside the courtroom. These sections allow the defence to discredit the victim’s character, while at the same time enabling the Everyman of our country to ask: Well, what was she wearing? Why was she out so late at night? And if the victim is found to have been wearing something or behaving in a way which is outside the conventionally accepted standards of modesty, people are allowed to draw the conclusion that she herself is to be blamed for her rape. No civilised legal system in this day and age would allow such line of questioning, because it is damaging to the trial, the victim’s psyche and the community of rape survivors.

The domino effect of these provisions seeps into every interaction a victim has, starting from those with the law enforcement to the general public. On December 23, a gang of young men raped a woman who was collecting funds from tourists with her husband in Cox’s Bazar, for the treatment of their child suffering from heart disease. The incident ensued when the perpetrators failed to extort money from the family. They abducted the woman and raped her while holding her husband and eight-month-old child hostage. The intrinsically violent and deliberately misogynistic nature of this crime is horrifying beyond comprehension, but the moral decay of men in our society is a conversation for another day. For now, let’s see how the police are running the investigation for this heinous crime that has permanently scarred a family.

While the matter is under investigation, police initially chose to label the perpetrators as being “formerly known” to the victim. The same trajectory was also adopted during the trial of the Raintree Hotel rape case (2017) and Kalabagan

student rape case (2021), both of which were (in)famously ripe with victim-blaming.

A rape victim’s past sexual history is in no way relevant to whether she had given consent to the particular sexual activity in question. Instances of previous acquaintance discredit a victim’s character and insinuate that she might have consented to the sexual activity in question, which is extremely harmful to the case and completely defeats the purpose of a rape trial. If such insinuations regarding a victim’s character are valid, then it must also mean that prostitutes and sex workers by default have given consent to literally everyone at large and therefore can never be raped, which is an irrational conclusion. Similarly, this line of investigation fails to consider that most victims are not raped by complete strangers, but rather their acquaintances.

Criminal law fascinatingly adopts a bird’s eye view while judging a situation. Very often, a statute would expressly guide the courts to “take all circumstances into consideration” before they reach a particular conclusion. An interesting deviation from this general rule of thumb appears in cases of sexual offences in many jurisdictions. For example, Section 41 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act, 1999 of England restricts all evidences and questioning about the complainant’s sexual history in sexual offence trials—hence making the lens for judgment very narrow and considering only what is relevant, such as whether the complainant had given consent during only the particular sexual activity in question.

On the contrary, Section 155 (4) of our Evidence Act uses arbitrary terminology such as “generally immoral character” without defining how such immorality is to be construed. This provision was enacted nearly 150 years ago. A woman

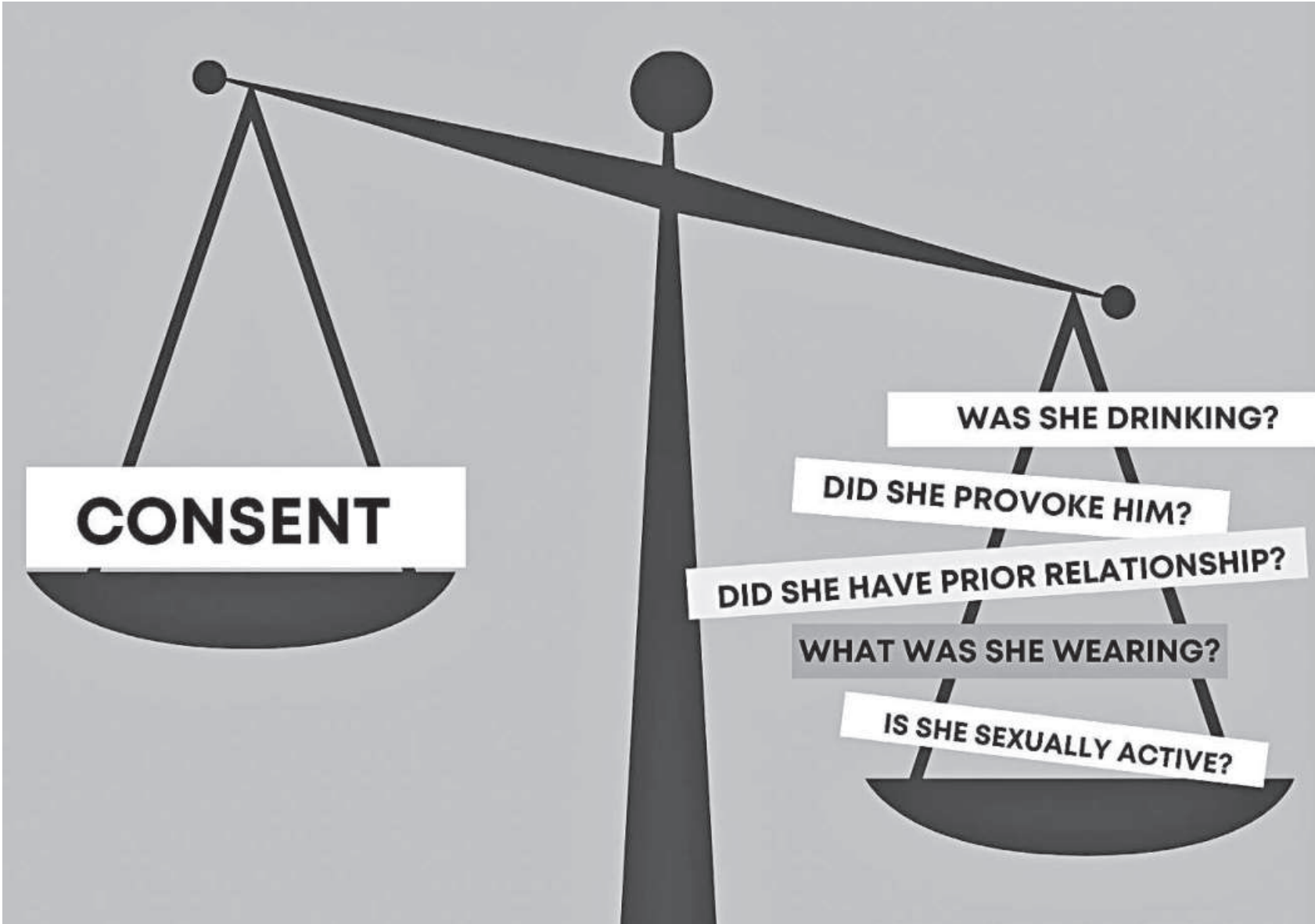


ILLUSTRATION: STAR

Section 155 (4) allows the defence to show that a rape victim is of “generally immoral character.” By virtue of this section, the defence may produce a witness to give evidence along the lines of why the victim should not be believed.

speaking out of turn could potentially have been interpreted as having an immoral character back then. How do we interpret this century-old provision now? Who dictates the parameters of morality for women? Would staying out past 10 o’clock at night be considered as a woman’s immoral characteristic in 2022? Would being raped while she was out wearing a sleeveless salwar kameez harm her chances of getting justice? What exactly is the purpose of this nonsensical provision, which in no way helps the court decide upon the accused’s guilt?

To demonstrate just how backwards and inherently harmful to fairness these two sections are, we can take the Sexual Offences Act, 2003 of England and Wales as an example. Section 74 of it states, “A person consents if he/she agrees by choice, and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice.” On top of this triple-layer safety net (requiring the victim to have the choice, freedom and capacity to agree to engage in sexual activity before they can be said to have consented), the act also requires that the defendant has had “reasonable belief” that the victim consented to the activity. To prove reasonable belief, the court asks both a subjective question and an objective question. First, did the defendant believe that the victim was consenting? Second, if he so believed, then was the belief reasonable?

This is how a modern piece of sexual offence law addresses the nuances of consent. England’s 2003 law denounces the patriarchal whims of their own colonial era statute, which we are still fostering 74 years after being decolonised. On top of our shockingly outdated provisions of the Evidence Act, 1872, consent has not been defined anywhere in our entire legal glossary. This lacuna leads to the judges interpreting consent in whichever way they deem fit, with no statutory guidance, regardless of whether

the victim in question is a romantic partner of the perpetrator or a stranger to a violent aggressor.

India, our colonised counterpart with similar societal structure and legal system, has made significant reforms—at least on paper, if not in practice—with regards to these archaic provisions. By introducing Section 53 (A) into the legislation, India has made character evidence inadmissible and has prescribed any question regarding a victim’s character and past sexual history “irrelevant.” They have also entirely repealed the controversial Section 155 (4). These amendments were being discussed at least since the late 1970s in India, four decades prior to when Bangladeshi women would still be protesting in front of the parliament building with placards, demanding justice. In that light, the irony of the regular Bangladeshis sitting on their high horse whenever India deals with widespread sexual offences should not be lost on anyone.

Patriarchy is all-consuming and intends to assume rights over women’s bodies. Why isn’t our parliament doing the bare minimum to side with women? The fact that we are still judging the women of this country through a 150-year-old lens is alarming—more so when they should not even be on trial.

Laws are “sentient” and a reflection of our collective consciousness. They are supposed to mirror the changing times and the shift in our moral codes. What is the point of the government preaching about equality for women, if the same is not reflected in the laws? A century and a half should be long enough for two unreasonable legal provisions to be cancelled, and the fact that the state has failed to do so—despite our many passionate appeals—shows just how little it cares about the horrifying lived experiences of women in this country, and how dysfunctional our legislature is.

QUOTABLE
Quote



NIKOLA
TESLA

(1856 - 1943)
Serbian-American inventor

Our virtues and our failings are inseparable, like force and matter. When they separate, man is no more.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Calendar items

6 Wine barrel

10 Deeply impressed

11 Rashness

12 Be of one mind

13 Welles of "Citizen Kane"

14 Telescope part

15 Gazelle's cousin

16 Yale rooter

17 Sticky stuff

18 Longing

19 Store worker's perk

22 Scorch

23 Oxen connector

26 Gymnast's finish

29 Road gunk

32 CD fore-

runners

33 Simple card game

34 "I wish!"

36 Crib occupant

37 Egypt neighbor

38 Fencing swords

39 Attempts

40 Duo quadrupled

41 Posted

42 Forays

DOWN

1 Used an old phone

2 Perfectly behaved

3 Lose luster

4 Some sheep

5 Take in

6 Complain

7 Test for purity

8 Fancy wrap

9 Thompson of "SNL"

11 Bare and bear, e.g.

15 Debtor's letters

17 Zoo favorites

20 Heel

21 Overly

24 Iraqi's neighbor

25 Made possible

27 Mole, e.g.

28 Secret meetings

29 Inclines

30 Burning

31 Blue egg tender

35 Russian refusal

36 — Raton

38 Gift tag word

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SATURDAY'S ANSWERS

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BEETLE BAILEY

BABY BLUES



CYCLE OF WASTE

THE dumping of plastic waste in landfills and water bodies has reached gargantuan proportions in the country, posing a threat to natural resources. The non-biodegradable material is entering the food chain. As they never dissolve, the plastic waste destroys the regenerative qualities of the soil. Over time, it breaks down into microplastic and is released into the environment. According to a World Bank report released in December 2021, the annual per capita consumption of plastic in Bangladesh is 9kg and the figure is 100 kg in Europe. But Bangladesh is one of the worst affected due to plastic pollution largely because of the mismanagement of waste. As pictured here, people of lower income groups collect plastic from an expanse of waste in landfills in Lalbagh, Kamrangirchar and Chawk Bazar in Old Dhaka. Then, private factories arrange for the plastic waste to be collected and processed into granules. This process is reliant on private organisations and daily wage earners, who again collect the processed material and spread them out to dry on the bank of the Buriganga.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

COUNTRYWIDE

Four outlaws get life term for murder in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Pabna

A Pabna court yesterday sentenced four operatives of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) for killing a man in Santhia upazila in 2006.

The convicts are Wasim Munshi, 39, of Mohadebpur village, and Mohammad Mostafa, 42, Mirazul Islam, 43, and Shahadat Hossain, 30, of Gobindapur village in the upazila.

Of them, Shahdat and Wasim were present before the court while the other

Criminals abducted Rafikul from the house and later killed him.

two accused were tried in absentia.

District Special Judge Mohammad Ahsan Tarek also fined the convicts Tk 25,000 each.

According to the case statement, Rafikul Islam of village Gobindapur village went to visit his in-laws' house at Sagarkandi village on October, 19, 2006.

The same day, criminals abducted Rafikul from the house and later killed him.

The following day, locals spotted Rafikul's body in a field and informed the police, who sent it to the hospital for autopsy.

Later, a case was filed with Santhia Police Station accusing 25 people on October 26.

After investigation, police submitted the charge-sheet against 23 people.

Slain Rafikul was involved with the outlawed party, Public Prosecutor Advocate Dewan Moznul Haque said.

Fellow outlawed operatives killed Rafikul over previous enmity, he added.

After examining the witnesses and evidences, the delivered the verdict against the four.

The other accused were acquitted from the case as charges brought against them was not proved.



Farm labourers spending busy time harvesting early potatoes. The photo was taken from Kochabari village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila on Friday.

PHOTO: STAR

EARLY POTATO HARVESTS

Sun shines on farmers of North

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Farmers are making a windfall profit selling early variety of potatoes in different villages of Lalmonirhat and Kurigram.

They are also happy to get the desired yield of potatoes in the region this year thanks to favourable weather and quality seeds.

Farmers said the early variety of potatoes has already been available in the local markets and the price is also good with per kg of potatoes being sold at Tk 25 to Tk 30.

Although the early variety has been being harvested, the sowing of the seeds of late varieties will continue till the first week of February, they added.

Early potatoes were being sold at Tk 65 to Tk 70 per kg only four weeks ago when they hit the markets for the first time, however, the price dropped sharply following the availability of the kitchen

staple, the growers said.

Agriculture office sources said an increasing number of farmers have been cultivating early varieties of potatoes at different villages under five upazilas in Lalmonirhat and nine upazilas in Kurigram. A total of 33,500 hectares

Farmers said although the early variety is being harvested, sowing seeds of late varieties will continue till the first week of February.

of land has been brought under potato cultivation in 14 upazilas of the two districts. Of which, the early variety of potatoes was cultivated on 1,600 hectares of land.

Farmer Afzal Hossain of Nazimkhan village in Kurigram's Rajarhat upazila said he cultivated the early variety potato on

four bighas of land spending Tk 20,000.

"I have already sold 2,600 kgs of early potatoes at the rate of Tk 40 to Tk 30 per kg in the last three weeks and I hope that I will be able to sell 1,400 to 1,500 kgs more within the next week," he said.

Farmer Nagendranath Barmon of Kamlabari village in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila said he has made an excellent profit cultivating early variety potato on his three bighas of land this year.

"I have cultivated early variety of potato on the land after harvesting Aman paddy," Barmon said, adding that he has already earned Tk 65,000 selling early potatoes.

Deputy Director of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Lalmonirhat Shamim Ashraf said a good number of farmers have made windfall profit selling early potatoes.

The agriculture officials provided technical support to the growers, he added.

Smear campaign on by rival

FROM PAGE 16

not write to the city corporation before about the tax being high? It is nothing but an electoral stunt.

"I will say to the city dwellers that if applications are submitted to the corporation to reduce taxes, it can deduct 15 percent tax as per their authority. But I urge them not to be misled by [Taimur's] propaganda."

About the allegations that the corporation has become a syndicated contractors' office, the two-time mayor said, "It's a blatant lie. Without knowing anything, he [Taimur] is telling such lies."

Without mentioning names, Ivy further said, "I contested the election

against an influential candidate in 2011. The complaints made by that person then are the same ones Taimur is making this time."

She added that the government introduced e-tender and anyone can participate in the tender process from anywhere.

"The problem lies with the system – the way the criteria were stipulated in the tender process was that only big contractors get works. I have spoken on this issue on several occasions."

Asked whether she has the Osman family's support in her campaign, she said, "All the grassroots leaders are with me. The Osman family is a part of the Awami League. As Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave me the nomination,

they [the Osmans] are also with me.

"Shamim Osman is a lawmaker, he cannot participate in the election campaign but his followers are by my side."

Regarding her relationship with Taimur, she said, "He is my uncle. He was close to my father and watched me grow up. I want to keep our uncle-niece relationship intact in the coming days."

Expressing gratitude, she added, "When he was the BRTC chairman and I was the Narayanganj municipality chairman, I got his cooperation on various occasions. I am grateful to him and want to contest the polls keeping the good relations alive. I will accept whatever the result is."

Philippines widens Covid restrictions

AFF, MANILA

The Philippines will expand coronavirus restrictions in Manila from today to include more than 11 million people living near the capital as cases surge, the government said.

Daily infections have spiked to a two-month high in January and the health department warned of higher caseloads in the coming days following the detection of local cases of the highly contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

Will free office

FROM PAGE 16

secret and it is the people who are the victims."

When asked why people should vote for him, he said he has always been with and for the people throughout his 50-year-long political career. "People want a change and are raising their voices for civic amenities."

"Over the years, the amenities have not been increased but additional taxes were imposed on the city dwellers in different ways – holding tax, trade licence, water tariff... I am contesting the election, as people want a change."

Taimur said the BNP's decision to remove him from the party posts was a blessing as there will be no pressure on him from anyone to withdraw candidacy at the last moment, unlike in the 2011 polls, when he was made to withdraw five hours before election.

He was removed from his posts as he joined the election as an independent candidate in violation of the party's decision to boycott the polls.

Asked about the central

and local BNP leaders' engagement in the polls, he said, "In a local government election, central leaders' presence is not needed. All the local BNP leaders are with me and regularly campaigning for me."

Expressing concern that some ruling party leaders are making provocative comments on the election, Taimur said if the government does not resort to any "election engineering", it will be peaceful.

"I will not violate any electoral code of conduct. I hope the government and administration will enforce the [electoral] code without prejudice."

About his opponents, he said, "I will not make any comment on any contender. All the contenders are equal to me. Ivy is my niece. Chunka bhai [Ivy's father] was my leader. I respect him and have learned a lot from him."

"The fact that the office should not be in the grip of contractors is something I learned from Chunka bhai and I will follow it."

Biman slashes fares

FROM PAGE 16

Bangladesh and its neighbouring countries for Riyadh, he said the fare for the Colombo-Riyadh route is Tk 38,000, while airfare for the Mumbai-Riyadh route is around Tk 32,000.

On the other hand, a Bangladeshi passenger needs to spend around Tk 80,000 to Tk 85,000 to go

to Riyadh, said Fakhrul.

Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh and leaders of recruiting agencies recently demanded operating additional flights to Middle Eastern destinations by Biman and other concerned airlines so that airfare could be brought back to normal rates.

They'd better talk

FROM PAGE 16

Supreme Court lawyer Md Abdullah Al Harun Russell filed the writ petition as a public interest litigation to the HC on Sunday.

On December 22, three men raped a tourist while their cohorts took her husband and child hostage.

The woman, her husband, and their eight-month-old child went to Cox's Bazar on holiday from the capital, according to case documents. A total of six people have been arrested so far in connection with the case.

Meanwhile, tourist police in Cox's Bazar arrested Mehedi Hasan Babu, 27 – a named accused in the gang rape case – from Khuruskul

area of Cox's Bazar Sadar upazila yesterday.

All seven named accused in the case has now been arrested.

"With arrest of Babu, we have arrested all the accused in the case," Mohiuddin Ahmed, additional police super of Cox's Bazar zone told The Daily Star yesterday. Ruhul Amin, investigation officer of the case, told The Daily Star that they sought seven days' remand for Ashikul Islam Ashik, 28, the main accused of the case and chief judicial magistrate of Cox's Bazar granted three days.

Other accused were remanded and quizzed but none gave any confessional statement, police said.

Experts worry about new Covid

FROM PAGE 16

had been discovered, that did not necessarily mean IHU will prove as infectious as other strains.

In the analysis, the authors found "46 mutations" which had not been spotted in other countries, nor labelled a variant under investigation by the WHO.

The genomes were obtained by next-generation sequencing. The authors claimed that the person who was identified with the IHU variant, was fully-vaccinated. The person tested positive after returning from a three-day trip to Cameroon.

The authors of the research paper said "subsequent detection... of

three mutations in the spike gene to screen for variants... did not correspond to the pattern of the Delta variant involved in almost all SARS-CoV-2 infections at that time".

Arguing that the emln a long Twitter thread, epidemiologist and a fellow at Federation of American Scientists, Eric Feigl-Ding said the new variant was being monitored.

"There are scores of new variants discovered all the time, but it does not necessarily mean they will be more dangerous."

"What makes a variant more well-known and dangerous is its ability to multiply because of the number of mutations it has in relation to the original

Bolsonaro will not have surgery

AFF, SAO PAULO

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro will not need surgery, his doctors said yesterday, a day after the far-right leader was rushed to the hospital with a partially blocked intestine.

"President Jair Messias Bolsonaro's intestinal subocclusion has been eliminated, with no need for surgery," the Vila Nova Star hospital in Sao Paulo said in a statement.

"The patient is making satisfactory progress in both clinical evaluations and laboratory exams, and will begin a liquid diet today."

Residents in Faridpur town face erosion threat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

About a hundred families of Khabaspur Karalpara area in Faridpur town are passing days in panic as sudden erosion by the Kumar river has devoured homesteads and fresh areas within couple of days.

Locals said last week three concrete houses with several rooms, kitchen and toilets went to the river bed within a span of two days.

Suddenly erosion by the Kumar river, flowing along parts of the town, started in the early morning of December 26.

They said within a span of only two days about one kilometre area, stretching from one Nani Biswas's house to Samsul Ulum Madrasa, was devoured by the river.

Besides, three tin-shed concrete houses belonging to late Khabir Hawladar, Nurul Islam and Abdur Razzk were either completely or partially washed away due to the sudden erosion.

During a visit to the area this correspondent saw numerous cracks have been developed on vast areas along the bank of the river which poses serious erosion treat to nearby around one hundred houses and cropland on the north side.

Of them, house of at least 40 families are at high risk of being eroded anytime.

Housewife Sathi Akter said, "The sudden erosion started on December 26 and devoured our three living houses, kitchen and two bathrooms by December 28."





The lifeline of PORT CITY

Sunset over the Karnaphuli river never ceases to amaze the onlooker. Even as a blanket of smog covers the glorious winter sun's slow descent into slumber, the glistening of its light on the water still holds a sway over those who frequent the area. One can only imagine what the scene could look like if industrial pollution is ever to subside. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Jamal Khan

A ward like no other

Urmi Dutta, an eighth grader at Dr Khastagir Government Girls' High School, was seen reading captions written under the murals of 31 notable personalities on the retaining wall of Government Hazi Muhammad Mohsin High School on Thursday.

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Located in the port city's Jamal Khan Road, the artworks were inaugurated on December 16 by city Mayor Rezaul Karim Chowdhury to mark Victory Day.

"I had been curious about this ever since I saw artists working on the pieces on my way to school," Urmi told this correspondent.

Like Urmi, many more students were seen flocking to the spot as well.

"I heard the name of Kazem Ali Master as there's a school in the city named after him, but I knew little of him," said 10th-grader Ariful Islam. "After coming here, I have a much clear idea about him now."

Titled "Chattol Gourab", the murals by artist Pranab Sarkar boasts such names as Hazi Muhammad Mohsin, Muhammad Enamul Haque, Abul Kashem Khan, Syed Waliullah, Mojaffar Ahmad, anti-British revolutionary Kalpana Dutta, Chakma Rani Kalindi, Lokanath Baul, Benimadhab Barua, MA Aziz, Kabiyaal Ramesh Shil, Maolana Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, Purnendu Dastidar, Prof Abul Fajal, Jatindra Mohan Sengupta and more.

The project was initiated by CCC Ward-21 councillor Shaibal Das Suman. With assistance from Dainik Azadi and Four H Group, he took the initiative as part of beautifying the ward area, better known as Jamal Khan.

Suman has been taking up numerous such projects for the ward since 2016, thanks to



which Jamal Khan has been able to regain its stature as a clean and serene area. This has helped reinforce its reputation as a green and healthy ward as well.

Some of the initiatives include removing open dumpsters and setting up of roadside waste bins for dumping solid waste, beautification of road islands, tree plantation drives, and roadside seating arrangements.

The 0.78 square kilometre ward also boasts a fountain right at its centre, at Jamal Khan intersection. Quite the scene on its own, it only gets more dazzling when decorative lights are switched on every

evening.

There is also an eye-catching terracotta design depicting the country's history on the boundary wall of Dr Khastagir Girls' High School in the intersection area, which never fails to draw attention of the passers-by. There's another tile mural on the red brick boundary wall of Saint Mary's School, which is also situated near the intersection.

Contacted, councillor Suman said, "I was only trying to make the ward more beautiful and liveable. I'd like to thank all the organisations for patronage, without which we couldn't have completed our projects so fast."

Mayor Rezaul said he expects other wards of the city to follow the example set by Jamal Khan.

Ctg admin eyes reserve forest land

Experts warn against it, say area is extra-sensitive where tidal waves can reach

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

Chattogram district administration has grabbed 30 acres of reserve forest land illegally in Uttar Kattoli coastal area in order to construct a memorial and museum on the Liberation War, said forest officials.

Abdur Rahman, divisional forest officer of Chattogram coastal forest department, said, "The district administration has also hung a signboard there in this regard." It is illegal to construct any establishment grabbing reserve forest land, he said.

"In 2017, the Ministry of Environment and Forests declared the proposed land (at Uttar Kattoli) as a reserve forest under Section 20 of the Forest Act of 1927," said the DFO. "We have sent a letter and informed higher authorities in this regard," he added.

Md Tohidul Islam, an assistant chief conservator at the forest department, said, "No one can occupy



protected forest land and construct any structures there in the name of development."

Contacted, freedom fighter and researcher Dr Mahfuzur Rahman said, "We don't support the construction of anything related to the Liberation War on reserve forest areas. The government could have chosen to construct the establishments at Pahartoli Baddhyabhum area."

Chattogram Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Mominur Rahman denied the claims, saying, "The proposed 30 acres of land does not fall under reserve forest areas."

"We have already sent a proposal to the Prime Minister's Office in September last year," the DC added. "There were illegal brick kilns in the area, which I evicted while the forest department never took any action against them."

During a recent visit, this correspondent found Sagarlota growing in the proposed land area.

"Sagarlota, whose English name is Railroad vine, is a fast-growing plant that grow in saline environments, usually above coastal areas where tidal water rises to that height," said Dr Md Atiqur Rahman, associate professor of geography and environmental studies department at CU. It can hold sandy soil and control soil that is moved by sea waves and wind. It allows shelters and allows sand that flies in the wind to accumulate in the coastal area.

"It shouldn't be destroyed as it has a special role in preventing coastal erosion and maintaining ecological balance," he said. "It's risky to construct establishments in the coastal area where Sagarlota grows."

Dr Md Rabiul Alam, professor of civil engineering department at Cuat, said, "Special protective measures should be taken before constructing any structures in areas where tidal water can reach."

More than a cup of tea

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

"When I first sat here it was almost like a small jungle beside the stadium. It's been 27 years since. I'm still here, but it looks nothing like what it used to. I consider myself a witness to Chattogram's transformation."

These are the words of Sarwar Alam, who is considered to be something of an innovator when it comes to the port city's tea culture.

"I was the first vendor to have introduced powder milk tea in the city instead of condensed milk one. This is very much in vogue now," prided the 61-year-old.

The lanky veteran, popularly known as "Kaku" to the Chittagonians, sells his tea at Kazir Dewri's MA Aziz Studiam area. Every day, he serves nearly 400 customers from noon to 10 at the night.

Recalling the old times, the tea seller said people from all spheres came to Kazir Dewri children's park



with their families. "This is right across the street from my spot, so they'd come to have tea from me."

Sarwar first came to Chattogram from Fatikchhari upazila at the tender age of 10 in search of work.

"I started by selling plastic dolls. That was a tumultuous time. I was only four months into my business,

and the Liberation War started. I packed my bags and went back home," he said.

"A year after the war ended, I came back and got a job at the cargo plane office warehouse in Agrabad. I worked there for 10 years. After the airlines' shutdown, I went back to the village and farmed for two years."

"But I couldn't stay away from Chattogram for long. This time, I started selling 'Mitha Paan' (betel-nut) in front of Shishu Park area. This was when I introduced powder milk tea to my customers," Sarwar said.

"It was Chattogram's first Bijoy Mela in 1989 where I started my journey as a tea vendor," he said.

"Seeing my volume of sales, the then country manager of Dano milk powder, a foreign national, interviewed me. I have also received several awards from Isphani tea."

Md Nur Nabi, wing manager of Isphani Tea Limited, told this newspaper, "Sarwar is an old customer. He stands out with his unwavering passion for quality."

Md Saddam Hossain, a private cricket coach in Patiya upazila, said, "I'm one of Kaku's regular customers. He never compromises with quality, which is why people come to him for a cup of tea."

SPORT

HIGHLIGHTS

- 176.2 - The second-most overs Bangladesh have batted in a Test innings, behind the 196 overs they batted out against Sri Lanka in Galle, 2013.
- 130 - Bangladesh's first-innings lead in this match; the highest New Zealand have conceded in a home Test since 2017. It is also the second-highest first-innings lead for Bangladesh while batting second in a Test, behind the 295-run lead against Zimbabwe in 2020.
- 1 - Only once before have Bangladesh bagged a higher first-innings lead in an away Test than the 130 they did here.
- 8 - It is the first instance for Bangladesh in Test cricket where their top eight batters survived 50 or more balls in the same innings.



What to WATCH

T SPORTS

South Africa vs India

Live from 02:00 pm

SONY SIX

The Ashes

Australia vs India

4th Test, Day 2

Live from 05:30 am

(Thursday)

Ismail happy with long jump gold

SPORTS REPORTER

Sprinter Mohammad Ismail may have a regret of losing his 100m crown to England-based sprinter Imranur Rahman, but the four-time fastest sprinter found some solace by win gold medal in long jump event of the Shaheed Sheikh Kamal 45th National Athletics championships yesterday.

Ismail could not match his previous best of 7.51m he cleared in the Bangladesh Games last year but a clearance of 7.26m was good enough for him beat Ashraful Islam (7.22m) and Akram Hossain (6.90m) on way to winning an eighth gold medal overall in long jump event, during the second day at the Army Stadium in Banani.

"I never returned without a gold medal in individual events," said Ismail.

The 29-year-old sprinter also vowed to regain his 100m title in the next competition. "I welcome Imranur Rahman to the 100m sprint but I want to regain my title in the next competition and I am ready for hard work," said Ismail, who finished third in 100m sprint on Monday.

MAZHAR UDDIN



The way Ebadot Hossain welcomed the experienced Ross Taylor to the crease, with a well-directed bouncer that the right-hander somehow managed to survive, served as a perfect example of true fast bowling at Mount Maunganui yesterday.

Once again, Bangladesh's pacers gathered steam and gained confidence on a typically seam-friendly surface in New Zealand, showing the signs of a unit complementing each other.

This time it was Ebadot who brought Bangladesh back into the game in the last hour of the fourth day, picking up three wickets in the span of nine deliveries to gun down the hosts from a comfortable 136 for two to 136 for five in their second innings.

Operating with a cool head and consistency in going through the process correctly, Ebadot was finally rewarded by the all-important breakthrough in the 54th over. Ebadot's short of a length delivery shaped into Will Young, who misread the length and went for a pull, allowing the ball to strike timber.

Ebadot should also surely get full marks

for game awareness just a ball later, when he fired in a full and straight delivery to new batsman Henry Nicholls. He struggled to adjust and the ball went on to demolish his stumps.

In his following over, the 27-year-old again kept things simple and used the conditions to great effect to trap Tom Blundell leg before with another delivery.

It was a refreshing sight to see someone like Ebadot step up, but it will be important for the team management to make sure such performances do not remain rare one-off shows. Instead, the think-tank needs to take the next step towards consistency.

This also raises questions about the need to give seamers a platform in the domestic circuit in the form of swing and bounce in the surface that can encourage fast bowlers.

"They like bowling in conditions like these because they don't get conditions back at home that encourage them to enjoy bowling," team director Khaled Mahmud said.

The likes of Taskin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam, Ebadot and Abu Jayed have shown potential, but because fast-bowling is a demanding task, both mentally and physically, it is also important to groom a

bigger lot by giving exposure to seamers at home.

"It is important to have ideal conditions and pitches where seamers can enjoy the art of fast bowling in domestic cricket. A fast bowler must set the placement of fielders himself and if you don't know where to bowl on different surfaces, it becomes very difficult to improve as a bowler," prominent coach Sarwar Imran told The Daily Star who has groomed Ebadot during his early days of a career in the high-performance unit.

"We still lag behind when it comes to providing suitable conditions to pacers and if seamers are not encouraged, you cannot expect them to deliver every time they travel abroad even in favorable conditions."

India can be a perfect example, given how they developed a bunch of fast bowlers by encouraging them in the domestic circuit and how having a good fast bowling group is equally as necessary as having a good batting unit for a Test team, especially away from home.

For Bangladesh, the ongoing Test match can set a trend when it comes to promoting fast bowlers, not only for this series but also to improve as a team in world cricket in the coming days.

A pronounced Test mentality

ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI

For four days, Bangladesh have managed to stay on top of a New Zealand side known for their Test capabilities and a rare excitement coursed the side, unseen especially away from home in Test cricket.

There appeared to be a belief in the Bangladesh camp that their plans were effective. In fact, during difficult scenarios, Bangladesh showed application which usually escapes them. In essence, the beauty of Test cricket was to understand its pulse, and Bangladesh, perhaps for the first time, caught the right tempo throughout the first four days. Mistakes were made and opportunities lost as it all happened on day four but uncharacteristic of Bangladesh's Test mentality, especially overseas, their shoulders had not dropped.

In fact, the other reality was prevalent. The fielders appeared to be on their toes, ears up, ready to pounce and that feeling and belief that something could happen at any moment prevailed within the whole side throughout the first Test when Bangladesh had the ball in hand.

"Listen guys, I have something to say. The bowler is working really hard. Can we support him and make some noise," wicketkeeper Liton Das was heard shouting on the stump mic, calling on the rest of the side to rally around Ebadot Hossain before he scalped three vital wickets in the final session of the fourth day yesterday.

Liton remained vocal, giving little anecdotes, suggestions and instructions to all concerned.



An excitement had taken hold of the Bangladesh camp and they did not want to give it up.

Will Young, looking solid, found a delivery from Mehedi Miraz sneaking in and nicked it through to Liton Das, who failed to hold on. Mehedi's plan to induce Ross Taylor into a mistimed sweep had worked only for Shadman Islam to drop one at mid-wicket before Taylor survived a run-out scare.

Mehedi had been working on Taylor for quite a while and when the catch was not taken in the 42nd over with the batter looking for a release shot, it could have confounded hopes like it has on so many occasions. Intensity could have waned and frustration found its way into confidence. But not this Bangladesh side at Mount Maunganui. The intensity and eagerness from fielders was unwavering, even when Kiwis found further foothold in the third session.

The true beauty of Test cricket is how the momentum shifts from one side to the other and Bangladesh's grapple to hold on produced perhaps their most stunning display in Tests so far.

There were little moments, little gestures that spoke volumes of how Bangladesh were able to stay in the game mentally.

New Zealand, with all their experience in home conditions, appeared perplexed by Bangladesh's fight. Neil Wagner resorted to Mominul Haque an earful after the latter frustrated Wagner by ducking under a few bouncers on the third day. Reviews had gone bad too before Ebadot's fiery spell late in the day reminded the Tigers that their spirit had been true. For a Bangladesh side going through a rebuilding phase, results should be secondary. But on the fifth and final day, they must now look for a result, finally having found the right rhythm in their Test mentality.

Mithun's double ton flips the script

SPORTS REPORTER

Not too long ago, Mohammad Mithun lost his place in the national side due to inconsistency with the bat. However, following a dull phase in the National Cricket League (NCL), Mithun rediscovered his flair in the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) and the Central Zone opener turned the final against South Zone on its head by scoring a maiden double century on the third day at the Sher-e-Bangla Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Mithun and Shuvagata Hom added 115 runs to their overnight partnership, which contributed 283 runs overall after they had been reduced to 16 for four on the second day. Shuvagata hit 116, laced with 12 boundaries before departing but Mithun strung together a 75-run partnership with wicketkeeper Jaker Ali while stretching his individual tally to 206 runs off 306 balls.

The right-hander's resilient innings was punctuated with 27 boundaries and three maximums and saw Central Zone amass 438, enough for a 51-run lead. Farhad Reza and Kamrul Islam Rabbi bagged four wickets each for South Zone.

In their second essay, South Zone opener Abu Haider Rony returned for a duck but his side reached 43 at stumps with no further losses.

Pinak Ghosh was unbeaten on 22 alongside Amite Hasan, on 20.

Mithun could have achieved the milestone in his first BCL game of the current campaign, also against South Zone, but his innings ended on 176. In the current campaign, Towhid Hridoy is the only other double-century, with his 217-effort against North Zone.



Central Zone opener Mohammad Mithun celebrates after scoring his maiden first-class double hundred against South Zone on the third day of the Bangladesh Cricket League final at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

Thakur's seven restricts SA

REUTERS, JOHANNESBURG

India seamer Shardul Thakur took seven wickets but South Africa managed a slender lead of 27 runs before being bowled out for 229 in their first innings on the second day of the second Test at the Wanderers on Tuesday.

Keegan Petersen (62) and Temba Bavuma (51) scored half centuries in the home team's reply to India's 202.

Thakur, 30, posted career best figures of 7-61 -- the best return by an Indian bowler in a Test against South Africa -- and single-handedly removed the home top order. Thakur also took the last two wickets after the South Africa tail wagged, delivering potentially precious runs as the Wanderers wicket is expected to increasingly favour the seamers as the test progresses.



Can Tigers make history?

SPORTS REPORTER

After dismal showings in the longest format of the game over the years, Bangladesh started to show glimpses of heading in the right direction as they maintained an upper hand over New Zealand for the fourth consecutive day in the first Test at Mount Maunganui.

Pacer Ebadot Hossain's late punch put the hosts under pressure and saw them end the fourth day on 147 for five, holding onto a slender 17-run lead going into the final day today.

Earlier, Bangladesh rode on the bowling of Shoriful Islam and Mehedi Hasan Miraz – who scalped three wickets each – to bundle the hosts out for 328 runs in their first essay despite Devon Conway's hundred.

Bangladesh replied brilliantly and posted 458 – riding on fifties from Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Najmul Hossain Shanto, skipper Mominul Haque and Liton Das – to take a first-innings lead of 158, the first instance that Bangladesh have taken the

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Bangladesh pacer Ebadot Hossain, who wrecked New Zealand's top order in the final session of the fourth day of the first Test, pulls out his trademark celebration after casting Will Young at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

NBL allowed 11 to spend Tk 91cr via credit cards

9 of them members of Zainul Haque Sikder's family

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Bank allowed 11 persons, including its board directors and their family members, to spend a staggering \$10.65 million (about Tk 91.4 crore) through credit cards, in a serious breach of banking rules.

The amount was spent from 2017 to 2021 by nine family members of Zainul Haque Sikder, the bank's former chairman, and two top executives of Sikder Group, according to a probe carried out by the Bangladesh Bank.

They spent the amount violating the central bank policy that allows a Bangladeshi national to spend a maximum of \$12,000 per year outside of the country through credit card or cash.

The bank allowed the 11 credit cardholders to spend beyond their foreign currency quota on the instruction of Sikder, who passed away on February 10 last year. A fortnight later, his widow Monowara Sikder was elected the bank's chairman.

The central bank probe also found the bank had opened a foreign currency account for ZH



Rick Sikder



Ron Sikder

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NARAYANGANJ CITY POLLS

Smear campaign on by rival candidates

Says AL nominee Ivy

Awami League candidate Selina Hayat Ivy said she wants to woo voters with new promises and ward off smear campaigns launched allegedly by her rival candidates.

She also said that, if elected, she will make Narayanganj a "blue city" centring the rivers surrounding the city.

"I term Narayanganj a 'blue city'. Seven rivers encircle us and I am planning to utilise them. I have already started working to turn the city green. And so, Narayanganj will be green and blue."

Former mayor Ivy said when she was in office, she took up a number of mega projects – some already completed and some ongoing. "I would like to complete all those projects."

Regarding the water tariff, she said "it is a propaganda" by the opponents and the issue has been wrongly interpreted. "Wasa's services were not available in

the city before. When they resume their service anywhere, three percent tax is imposed on the city dwellers. So, I

Independent candidate Taimur Alam Khandakar said he wants to make Narayanganj a pro-people city by

contractors control the city corporation. I first took the initiative to turn it into a city corporation but we did not want one that burdens the city dwellers with taxes."

He added the people of the city have also had to suffer for 18 long years due to the bitter rivalry between the mayor and local lawmakers.

"Some problems do not require huge

amounts of money to be solved; they

need good intentions," he said, giving the example of the construction of a bridge over the Shitalakhya to connect Bandar with Narayanganj city.

"The Ecne approved the fund for the construction, but it is yet to begin because of the conflict between the mayor and lawmakers. There may be a difference of opinion, but why should they not come together for the good of the people? The conflict is an open

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INTERVIEWS TAKEN BY MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA



Selina Hayat Ivy



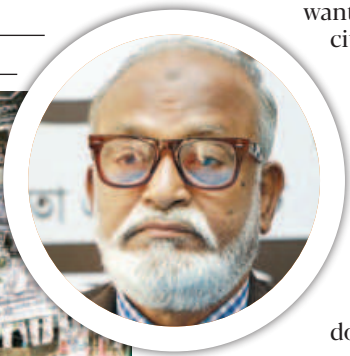
have nothing to do except levying it."

She added, "Taimur Alam Khandakar is a very conscious person. Why did he

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reducing the tax burden on residents and freeing the city corporation office from the "grip of contractors".

"The people of Narayanganj say



Taimur Alam Khandakar

Biman slashes fares for 4 ME destinations

RASHIDUL HASAN

Biman Bangladesh Airlines yesterday announced to reduce its ticket prices for different destinations in Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia.

The reduced prices would be effective from January 16. The airfares for different routes were reduced from Tk 7,000 to Tk 13,000.

The association of recruiting agencies, however, said that the reduced amount is nominal and the airfare for Biman still remained very high compared to other airlines in the neighbouring countries.

Besides, passengers, especially the expatriate workers, will not be able to avail of the benefit as Biman has no ticket available until March, they added.

According to Biman authorities, the reduced fare would be applicable for tickets for Jeddah, Riyadh, Dammam, Dubai and Abu Dhabi routes, depending on the availability of the tickets.

The reduced airfare will continue as always, they added.

The national airliner said the one-way maximum fare for each economy class ticket on the Dhaka-Jeddah route has been reduced from Tk 72,455 to Tk 64,820 inclusive of tax.

The maximum one-way economy class fare on the Dhaka-Riyadh or Dammam routes have been reduced from Tk 70,758 to Tk 63,123.

For the Dhaka-Dubai route, the maximum one-way economy class fare has been reduced from Tk 75,508 to Tk 62,784 while the maximum one-way economy class fare on the Dhaka-Abu Dhabi route has been reduced from Tk 67,025 to Tk 58,542.

Fakhrul Islam, president of Recruiting Agency Welfare Organization of Bangladesh, yesterday told The Daily Star that in November, airfares for different Middle Eastern countries were between Tk 40,000 and Tk 45,000. Now, the prices are between Tk 70,000 and Tk 90,000, which is totally illogical.

Giving a comparison between

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Illegal stores on the footpath in front of the Emergency Department of Dhaka Medical College Hospital obstruct patients and their attendants. The shops contribute to traffic congestions that delay ambulances reaching the department. The photo was taken around 1:00pm yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Experts worry about new Covid variant in France

12 detected so far

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

While the world is grappling with the highly infectious Omicron, strain of Covid, scientists in France have identified a potentially worrying new variant, which has 46 mutations.

Named IHU, the new B.1.640.2 variant has so far infected 12 people living in southeastern France. The first case was linked to a person with a travel history to Cameroon, western Africa, said researchers in a paper published on medRxiv.

However, experts were quick to announce that just because a new variant

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