

"We must... rapidly inject liquidity into the economy and avoid a meltdown that would lead to poverty, hunger and destitution for millions."

UN chief Antonio Guterres on Afghan humanitarian crisis

# The Daily Star

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

SECOND EDITION

"We have, I think, a few weeks left to see if we can get back to mutual compliance... We're very, very short on time."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on saving Iran nuke deal



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**Celebration of colours at Shakrain**



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**Djokovic fights deportation again**



Illegal brick shops have been set up on the land of Bangladesh Water Development Board and BIWTA on the Turag river in Aminbazar on the outskirts of the capital. The authorities conduct eviction drives to clear the illegal occupants once in a while, but they show up again within a few days. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

NCC ELECTION

## Campaign ends with fear over violence, rigging



"I'll win the polls if there is no violence on the voting day."

Selina Hayat Ivy



"Local administration is trying to manipulate the election ..."

Taimur Alam Khandakar

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA AND SANAD SAHA

Selina Hayat Ivy and Taimur Alam Khandakar have accused each other of plotting to cause violence as the campaign for the Narayanganj city polls ended midnight yesterday.

Security has been stepped up across Narayanganj ahead of the voting tomorrow. No one from outside was being allowed to stay in the city.

Both mayor candidates expect to win the ballot battle, which is set to put one of them at the helm of Narayanganj City Corporation for the next five years. They urged the administration to ensure a free, fair and transparent election.

Voters, meanwhile, say they hope that polls will be peaceful like the previous two elections.

"I'll win the polls if there is no violence on voting day... My opponent wants violence," Ivy, who is contesting with AL's "boat" symbol, told journalists yesterday, wrapping up her 18-day campaign.

Asked why she fears violence, the two-time mayor said, "The election will be between Ivy and many things. The opposition camps may get united and cause violence."

She urged the Election Commission to ensure that female and new voters can cast votes without any fear, saying such voters could make a difference.

Ivy's rival Taimur, who is contesting with "elephant" symbol as an independent candidate, alleged that government machinery, including the local administration in Narayanganj, was trying to manipulate the election to ensure the ruling party candidate's victory.

He accused the administration of planning to rig the vote.

Asked about Ivy's fears of violence, he said it was she who was out to foil the election by causing violence.

Besides, he alleged that a vested quarter was trying to spread a rumour that he would withdraw from the election race. "Whatever the situation is, I will never quit. I would ask voters not to pay heed to such rumours."

Taimur had withdrawn his candidature just five hours before the NCC polls in 2011.

He urged the administration to create an atmosphere conducive to free and fair voting.

Superintendent of Police in Narayanganj Jayedul Alam said five lakh people are expected to cast votes tomorrow to pick their mayor for a city with around 35 lakh residents.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

AUTOMATED TRAFFIC SIGNAL

## Money thrown down the drain

HELEMUL ALAM AND WASIM BIN HABIB

Over the last 15 years, the government has spent Tk 119 crore to upgrade Dhaka's traffic signal system. The plan involved some ambitious experiments to modernise the capital's traffic control system, including digitising signal lights and installing timer countdown and digital display boards in some major intersections.

But nothing seems to have worked, as traffic in the city of more than 1.5 crore people remains as chaotic. In some cases, it has turned worse as traffic cops reverted to the old system of manual control, using their stretched hands to control vehicular movement.

Ropes, cones and bamboo fences are also used to control the disorderly city traffic, one of the worst in the world.

In the World Traffic Index 2020, Dhaka has ranked 10th in terms of poor traffic management among 228 cities, according to a report published by the largest user-contributed database Numbeo.

Last year, the country lost an estimated Tk 55,685 crore due to traffic congestion in Dhaka city alone, according to Buet's Accident Research

Institute (ARI). Urban transport experts blame unthoughtful traffic management, unrealistic projects and unplanned

permission for new vehicles that are way beyond the road capacity for the situation.

Poor road condition, rickety public transport, jaywalking and movement of non-motorised vehicles also contribute to worsening the gridlock.

In many cases, projects were taken up without considering the rising number of vehicles and road conditions, experts said.

"Basically, our traffic signal system has become a joke," noted transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque told The Daily Star.

A 2015 study by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) found Dhaka's traffic volume was over 1.5 times higher than its road capacity that year, Prof Shamsul said.

The situation has worsened now. As of December 2021, at least 17,80,597 motorised vehicles were registered under Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) in Dhaka.

Adil Mohammad Khan, general

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

- Despite costly experiments, Dhaka's traffic signal system is in a shambles
- TK 119 crore spent over last 15yrs, but little has improved
- The number of vehicles in Dhaka city is about twice its road capacity
- Unplanned vehicle registrations are largely responsible for Dhaka's poor traffic management



## Ex-DU teacher found dead in a Gazipur bush

STAR REPORT

Police yesterday recovered the body of retired Dhaka University Professor Sayeda Gaffar Khaleque from a bush in Gazipur's Kashimpur area, three days after she was killed.

Police recovered the body around 10:30am and arrested one Anwarul Islam, 25, an assistant mason working at the under-construction building on the deceased's five-kantha piece of land inside Dhaka University Teachers' Housing Project in Kashimpur.

The 71-year-old ex-teacher had been living in a rented house in Panishail area to look after the construction of the building.

Police arrested Anwarul, 25, from Gaibandha early yesterday. During interrogation, he admitted to strangling Sayeda to death with her scarf on Tuesday and dumping her body inside a bush at the housing project, said Sub-inspector Dipankar Roy after quizzing Anwarul.

The arrestee decided to kill the victim in order to steal Tk 10,000 that he spotted in her purse when she paid him for cutting down trees at the construction site on Tuesday evening, the SI said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 8



A crowd of joyful supporters of Selina Hayat Ivy, mayoral contender of the ruling Awami League, chanting slogans during a procession in Narayanganj city's Chasara area last evening. There was an air of festivity in the city yesterday, the last day of the city polls campaign.

PHOTO: SANAD SAHA

## Leave them alone

Statement slams 'pressure' on disappearance victims' families

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Human Rights Forum Bangladesh (HRFB) yesterday said the government should immediately instruct the police to stop harassing the families of the victims of enforced disappearance.

The forum, a coalition of the country's leading rights and development organisations, in a statement expressed deep concern over such police harassment and called upon the authorities concerned to ensure security of the victims' families and ascertain the whereabouts of their dear ones.

It demanded that actions be taken against those involved in such harassment and also against their superiors who gave the orders.

"Instead of performing their duties and finding

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## Don't respond to ICC warrants

### Myanmar junta orders its military personnel

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Myanmar junta has ordered all military personnel not to answer letters related to arrest warrants or summons from the International Criminal Court (ICC) or the Argentinian judiciary on the human rights violations of the Rohingya and other communities.

In an order issued on January 6, it said Myanmar still stands by its position that it is not a member of the ICC, so it does not need to abide by the ruling of the ICC.

"Possibilities are that judges of ICC could decide that the evidence of the plaintiff is sufficient to issue arrest warrant or summons," said the order signed by Captain Aung Ko Zaw, said Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) in a statement yesterday.

Therefore, responsible officials of all levels of battalions under the command of the regional operation commands shall supervise and implement strictly to ensure that no one shall accept any letters or arrest orders related to travel restrictions or arrest warrants or summons or letters sent by express carrier services from abroad and other means from ICC or Argentinian Courts or the plaintiff, it said.

On September 6 in 2018, the ICC filed that Rohingya Muslims from northern Rakhine State in Myanmar were forcibly relocated to Bangladesh.

BROUK on November 13, 2019, filed human rights violations and crimes against former heads of state, military senior officials and government leaders in the Federal Court of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In December 2021, the Argentinian judiciary accepted a petition by BROUK to open a case against senior military officials over genocide and crimes against humanity in Rakhine State since 2016.

BROUK, in a statement yesterday, said Myanmar has led a decade-long genocide against the Rohingya people.

In August 2017, the Myanmar military and its proxies launched a vicious operation in Rakhine State, killing thousands of Rohingya and driving hundreds of thousands to flee into Bangladesh.

BROUK said it is outrageous that the Myanmar military is now desperately trying to cover the tracks of its genocidal crimes against the Rohingya.

This leaked memo shows clearly how the Myanmar junta can never be trusted to cooperate with international justice mechanisms in good faith. However, it also is a sign that the efforts to hold the junta to account for its atrocities are working, said Tun Khin, president of BROUK.

"This must also be a wake-up call to the international community to act. The UN Security Council must support a full referral of the situation in Myanmar to the ICC, while other countries should look to open universal jurisdiction cases like the one in Argentina."



Family members of paddy traders drying parboiled Balam paddy in the sun in Uttarkul village of Barishal's Banaripara upazila. The paddy, bought from Patuakhali, Barguna and Bhola, would be sent to millers for husking. The special variety of Balam rice sells for Tk 1,500 to Tk 2,000 a maund. The photo was taken on Tuesday.

PHOTO: STAR

## GOPALPUR MASS KILLING '71

# PM's gift brings joy to martyrs' families

OUR CORRESPONDENT, TANGAIL

On September 30 during the 1971 Liberation War, Ramajan Ali Miah, along with others, was killed by the Pakistani forces in Mahmudpur area of Tangail's Gopalpur.

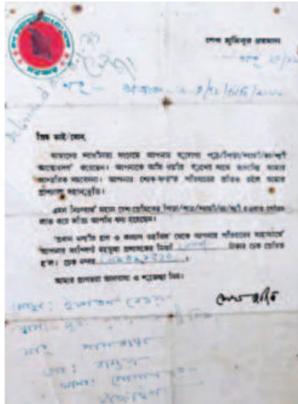
After the war ended, his widow, Ifatan Bewa, received a letter from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In the letter, Bangabandhu said Ramajan was a martyr. He also expressed deep sympathy to Ramajan's family.

A cheque of Tk 2,000 was also sent to Ifatan from the relief and welfare fund of the then prime minister.

Ifatan, however, did not get any further assistance and so she had to beg to feed herself.

Despite all the odds, she preserved the letter for the last 50 years.

Last week, a daily published news on the matter after which it grabbed the attention of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman wrote this letter to Ifatan Bewa after the war ended.

The PM then directed the deputy commissioner of Tangail to stand beside Ifatan and the families of 16 other victims of the mass killing on

September 30, 1971.

The families were overwhelmed with joy after receiving a special gift from the prime minister.

DC Atauil Gani along with others went to the house of Ifatan in Pankata village in Dhanbari upazila on January 9 and handed over Tk 20,000, clothes and fruits to her on behalf of the PM.

The families of 16 other martyrs were provided with the same gift.

The DC told reporters that Bir Nibas (houses) would be built for the martyrs' families as per the PM's wish.

Steps will also be taken so that they get state recognition and necessary supports as members of the martyrs' families, he added.

In her reaction, Ifatan said, "I have been fighting poverty for the last 50 years. I have had to starve as well. I feel blessed to have received the cash and gift items from the prime minister."

She wished the PM a long life.

## Leave them alone

FROM PAGE 1

the relatives, police are adding to the miseries of the suffering family members," the HRFB said in the statement.

Citing media reports, the forum said an allegation has been raised against policemen over putting pressure on victims' family members in different ways.

The family members were summoned to police stations and interrogated by cops at their own houses. In some cases, attempts were made to have signatures of the family members on blank papers or previously-written statements, it said.

Moreover, family members were put under pressure to change their stand or narrative and

mention their dear ones as "missing" persons, the statement added.

The HRFB statement was issued by 23 leading rights activists, including Hameeda Hossain, Sultana Kamal, Raja Devasish Roy, Golam Monowar Kamal, Shaheen Anam, Iftakharuzzaman, Sara Hossain, Fauzia Moslem, Shamsul Huda, and Khushi Kabir.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police in a statement yesterday protested reports run by different media outlets on the police harassment.

The reports contained "exaggerated" and "fabricated" information and it was an attempt to tarnish police's image, the DMP claimed.

## Campaign ends

FROM PAGE 1

"The Election Commission has not announced any holiday for Election Day. So, people will move to go to work. We have ensured all sorts of arrangements to avert any untoward situation over the polls."

He said at least five policemen would be deployed in each polling centre. More than two mobile courts would be active in each ward. Besides, there will be striking forces in case they are needed.

Since the announcement of the election schedule, Narayanganj polls have been at the centre of discussion in the country's political arena, although the BNP boycotted it saying free and fair election is not possible under the current EC and the government.

Taimur went against the party decision and

decided to run for mayor. He, however, had to pay the price as the BNP removed him from the post of its chairperson's adviser. It also removed him from the district committee.

Ivy, on the other hand, alleged that her rival — ruling AL lawmaker Shamim Osman — was secretly backing Taimur. Shamim has recently extended his support to Ivy holding a press conference, violating the polls code.

In the first NCC election in 2011, Ivy contested as an independent candidate and won defeating Shamim Osman. In the second polls five years later, Ivy became the mayor beating BNP nominated candidate Shakhawat Hossain Khan.

Apart from Ivy and Taimur, five other candidates are running for the mayor post.

## Money thrown down the drain

FROM PAGE 1

secretary of Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said a modern city requires a road network of 20 to 25 percent its size. Dhaka's road network is just 8 percent of its size.

**COSTLY EXPERIMENTS**

In 2001, Dhaka's traffic control system saw a major change with the introduction of automatic signals under Dhaka Urban Transport Project. With funding from the World Bank, nine traffic signals were set up in 2001-02 and 59 more in 2005, spending Tk 13 crore.

It soon became dysfunctional mainly due to poor maintenance, the WB said in a report to the government in 2006.

Officials say the 68 automatic signal lights were meant to synchronise the signal system, but they worked rather independently and did not work as intended.

Later in 2012-13, the two Dhaka city corporations restored the signal lights by adding solar panels and timer countdown systems at 70 crossings, under another World Bank-funded project.

In the first phase of the project, solar panels and timer countdowns were installed for Tk 15 crore in 2011-12. In the second phase, another Tk 11.5 crore were spent to set up new signal lights in 2013.

But the trial run failed, forcing the city corporations and traffic police to ditch the new signal system and return to manual traffic management.

"The system was initiated based on a flawed plan, as traffic volume and speed were not considered," said a city corporation official.

The city corporation later introduced remote controls to use the signal lights, but the experiment did not last even a month.

"Timer countdown and solar panels are additional features, which they introduced without having any experience. Perhaps, the inclusion was done to make the project size bigger. We see a lack of good governance here," said Prof Shamsul Hoque, former head of ARI at Buet.

"We are allowing vehicles without considering the road capacity. No signal system will work with this existing pressure of vehicles. We must think of striking a balance between road capacity and number of vehicles," he added.

Meanwhile, 17 large and 14 small digital boards displaying traffic rules and speed limits were set up at some key points, but they remain largely ignored. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police set up those displays at a cost of Tk 27 crore.

Many of them have since been removed for ongoing projects like Metro Rail and U-loops.

Two years ago, the High Court directed the authorities to submit a report on the "mismanagement" of the traffic signal monitoring system.

A committee headed by a joint secretary of the home ministry formed after the directive is still working

on the report, officials said.

Asked about their findings, Monibur Rahman, additional commissioner (traffic) of DMP, said he could comment only after the committee completed its work.

**'INTELLIGENT' SYSTEM IN LIMBO**

Six years ago, the government undertook an even more sophisticated project to bring Dhaka's four crossings — Paltan, Phulbari, Mohakhali and Gulshan I — under a single automatic traffic control system.

Each of these crossings is notorious for bad traffic, and the pilot project aimed to improve traffic management in these intersections.

Originally scheduled to complete in June 2017, the Intelligent Transportation System (ITS), as it is officially called, is yet to come into operation.

A joint initiative by Bangladesh and Japan governments, the project got four extensions so far, and its estimated cost shot up from Tk 36.37 crore to Tk 52 crore when the cost was last revised in 2019.

By November 2019, the ITS system — including ultrasonic vehicle detector, vehicle image detector, CCTV to keep track of traffic volume and control the traffic signals — got installed at the four crossings.

The following year, two special computers with ITS software were brought from Japan, but one of them was stolen from a warehouse of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC)

before installation.

After the theft, the authorities ordered suspension of the project for two years. It was eventually revived after Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority in December 2020 sent a proposal to Roads Transport and Highway Division to procure a server through internal budget adjustment, without increasing the total project cost.

The project deadline was then extended to June 2021 without any cost increase.

Project Director Mohammad Rabiul Alam said they are now seeking another extension, up to July this year.

**EXPERTS ARE SCEPTICAL**

Experts say they have doubts about its success.

Given the number of vehicles and their unpredictable movements, digital traffic signals will help little to ease the gridlock, they said.

"It is very difficult to make the digital traffic signal functional in Dhaka due to its unpredictable volume of traffic," said Kazi Md Shifun Newaz, an assistant professor of ARI.

He suggested reducing intersections and building circular roads to ease the congestion, created by heavy traffic crossing the intersections after coming from different lanes and by-lanes erratically.

Prof Shamsul said the huge volume of traffic during peak hours is the main reason why the digital signal system has failed.

If well managed, even

low-cost signal systems can be effective, he said, citing the example of India where traffic cops operate the signal lights manually depending on the traffic rush.

"But the authorities in our country set up a signal system thinking it will solve everything. The reality is the system will only minimise the workload of police, not the problem," Prof Shamsul said.

## Gen Rawat's chopper crashed due to pilot error

India's court of inquiry finds

NDTV ONLINE

Pilot error caused the chopper crash that led to India's Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat's death last month, according to preliminary findings of the inquiry team investigating the matter.

"The accident was a result of entry into clouds due to an unexpected change in weather conditions in the valley. This led to spatial disorientation of the pilot resulting in a Controlled Flight Into Terrain (CFIT)," the team found after analysing the Flight Data Recorder and Cockpit Voice Recorder besides questioning all available witnesses to determine the most probable cause of the accident.

Sikder Monoare Murshed, a professor of the department of linguistics of DU and also president of the housing project, said police suspected Anwarul and traced him.

Police also recovered a necklace of the victim from the arrestee, Murshed, who visited Gazipur after receiving the news, told The Daily Star over phone.

Contacted, Inspector (investigation) of Kashimpur Police Station Sheikh Mizanur Rahman said it will be learnt after further interrogation whether anyone else was involved in the killing.

Police handed over the body to her family after an autopsy.

## HRW report unacceptable

Says information minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The recently published Human Rights Watch report is "one-sided, unacceptable and politically-motivated", said Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday.

"After reading the report, it appears that someone from Bangladesh had drafted it and later they [HRW] published it following revision," he said while talking to journalists at his residence in the capital.

In its World Report 2022, HRW said the security forces in Bangladesh continued to commit crimes such as enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings with impunity.

All these incidents happened while the ruling Awami League government made it clear in 2021 that it had no intention of addressing a pattern of grave abuses like these ones, added the report published on Thursday.

"Authorities cracked down on critics, journalists, and even children who criticised the government or dared to question its response to the Covid-19 pandemic," reads the report.

It also said the government denied the findings of a report after HRW released it in August 2021 documenting enforced disappearances by "Bangladesh security forces" under the AL-led government between 2009 and 2020.

## Will engage in lobbying if needed

Foreign minister says about govt response to US sanctions on Rab

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister Abdul Momen yesterday said the government would engage in lobbying if required to further the country's interests.

Speaking to reporters after inaugurating the international conference on "Law & Legal Education during and post-pandemic" at the Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA) Auditorium in the capital, Momen was asked if Bangladesh would hire new lobbyists in the wake of US sanctions on Rab.

"Every country does this. It's an American practice. Where lobbying is needed, we will lobby. Lobbying is also needed at home many times while working. We will see how we can work out the legal process," he said at the event jointly organised by BILIA and the Asian Association of Law Professors.

The US on December 10 sanctioned Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and seven of its current and former top officials in relation to human rights violations, including alleged extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

The parliamentary standing committee on foreign ministry on January 5 recommended appointing lobbyists in the USA, especially to engage the US Congress.

Later, a Bangla daily revealed that the Bangladesh government actually appointed Washington-based lobbying firm BGR Government Affairs in 2014 and paid it several million US dollars.

## Ex-DU teacher

FROM PAGE 1

Anwarul attacked the victim at a secluded place when she was on her way back to her residence, around one kilometre off the construction site.

After dumping her body, the arrestee took her key and stole gold ornaments, mobile phone, laptop, tablet and money from her residence, said police and the victim's family.

The construction work was at the final stage and Sayeda was supposed to move to her new home in a week, her son Sayed Iftakher Bin Zahir said.

He said his sister Sadia Afrin filed a general diary with Kashimpur Police Station on Thursday after Anwar informed them the previous evening that the door of Sayeda's home was ajar and there was no trace of her.

Sikder Monoare Murshed, a professor of the department of linguistics of DU and also president of the housing project, said police suspected Anwarul and traced him.

Police also recovered a necklace of the victim from the arrestee, Murshed, who visited Gazipur after receiving the news, told The Daily Star over phone.

Contacted, Inspector (investigation) of Kashimpur Police Station Sheikh Mizanur Rahman said it will be learnt after further interrogation whether anyone else was involved in the killing.

Police handed over the body to her family after an autopsy.



A sky full of colours and lights -- such was the view at the age-old Shakrain festival of Old Dhaka yesterday. Traditionally observed as a kite-flying festival on the occasion of Makar Sankranti, new elements like fireworks, light shows and concerts have made their way to the festival of colours over the years. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## To the sky and beyond

Kites, colours and music fill up celebrations at Shakrain

DIPAN NANDY

If you looked at Old Dhaka's sky yesterday, your eyes would surely get blinded by the sheer amount of colours, with thousands of kites flying in motion. Kites were flown from every rooftop of the area. The sky might be the limit for these kites, but the joy was beyond any such limits.

Yesterday was the first day of the Bangla month of Magh, marking the day of the age-old Shakrain festival on the occasion of Makar Sankranti. Shakrain, the kite-flying festival, dates back to the

Nawabi period. Fast-forward to twenty-first century's Dhaka, the festival has only become bigger.

This correspondent visited Old Dhaka's Shankharibazar, Laxmibazar, Nayabazar, Sutrapur, Dayaganj, Gandaria, Narinda, Banglabazar, Sadarghat areas yesterday. The traditional Shakrain festival started with a riot of colours in the sky, accompanied by fireworks, music and delicious food.

The main attraction of the festival are the kite fights. Kites are flown with the help of a "manja" yarn. A kite can be cut any time with the help of the yarn.

'Vokatta' cheers everyone as soon as someone cuts another's kite.

The kites also come in different names and shapes. Chokhadar, Pandar, Kathadar, Maladar, Pankhiraj, Chalandar, Petidar, Pandar, Prajapati, Dapas, Batur, Chil, names as majestic as the sight they create.

The doors to Old Dhaka are open to thousands of people from outside the old town, who come to join and witness the celebrations themselves.

Dipok Dev, a service holder and resident of Modhubagh area, talked to this correspondent about his experience

with the festival this year. "I've never seen so many kites together in my entire life," he said.

"I'll attend the festival next year as well. And I'll share my experience with my friends."

The festival, in recent years, is attended by many foreign nationals as well.

"I had no idea about Shakrain before coming here. It was great to come here and see the kites and fireworks," said Raija, who came all the way from Finland.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

### 'Pay annual increments as per law'

Demand trade union leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Garment Shramik Sanghati (BGSS) yesterday demanded that workers at different industrial areas, including export processing zones, be paid with equal annual increments on due time.

During a protest rally in front of the Jatiya Press

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



PRAYER TIMING JANUARY 15

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5:30	12:45	4:00	5:36	7:00
JAMAAT 6:05	1:15	4:15	5:40	7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

## Passengers yet to be sold on Nagar Paribahan

Blame slow speed, long queues at counters

UNB, Dhaka

Although commuters travelling by the red and green buses of Dhaka Nagar Paribahan (DNP), currently in its pilot phase since launching late last year, have expressed their satisfaction with its services so far, the DNP is yet to attract a sizeable crowd.

Those who did ride on the bus said they like it for its disciplined service and reasonable fare, along with the ease in buying tickets and designated bus stops.

But despite this quality service delivery, the buses were still found running at less than capacity. Their common complaints include the buses being too slow, which means the queues get longer at the designated stops.

This drives many of these passengers to take the otherwise rough driving, higher fare charging bus services, simply because they can make them reach their

destinations faster.

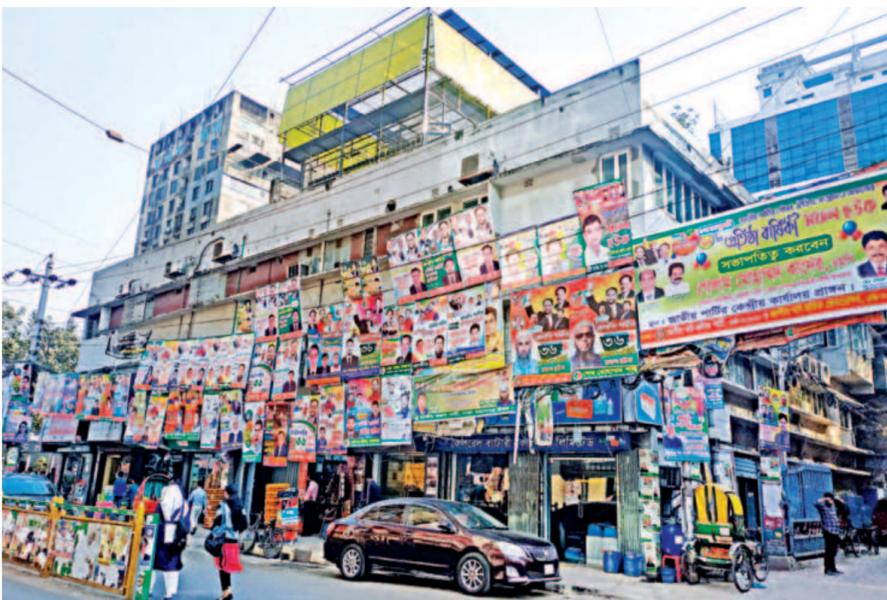
Drivers, conductors and helpers of the service have expressed their woes over the matter. "It is disappointing for us as we are providing the promised better services," said Karim, a conductor.

One passenger, private service-holder Jafar Alam, said the low number of vehicles from the service is failing to meet the demand, which is why the queues are long at bus stops. "The wait is almost unbearable during office time, but I still take it because of the quality of its service."

He also said he only pays around half the amount compared to other bus services. "I pay Tk 21 for the same trip that private companies charge Tk 40 for."

Another regular passenger, retail shop-owner Rafsan Khan said he too likes the service but is wary of its lag. "I think it can get more passengers if it uses the Mayor

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



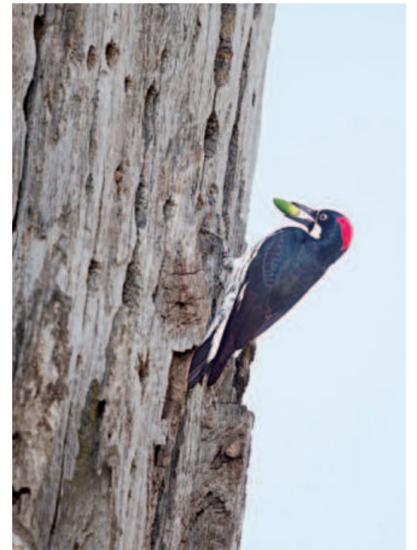
These banners and posters were put up in front of Jatiya Party's central office on Pioneer Road in Kakrail, to mark the party's 36th founding anniversary. However, some two weeks after that day, the banners were still found to be there, ruining the area's beauty and dangling dangerously among electric, telephone and internet wires. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

### Acorn Woodpeckers



Acorn woodpecker and cavities to deposit acorns, California. PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

During a visit to California last year, a friend and I went birding. Early one morning we headed to Rancho San Antonio, a wilderness area in Silicon Valley. In a previous life I had lived in this area and had hiked often in this sprawling nature park. However, that was before I became interested in birds. This hike was a new experience as the focus of the walk was very different: I tried to find hints and clues to where the birds might be.

Along the way my friend pointed out various places where he had seen birds of interest: a California Quail on that meadow, a Red-tailed Hawk up on this tree, and so on. However, as we walked we saw little of interest. On this crisp sunny California fall day all the birds had decided to be elsewhere.

After hiking about a mile, we came across a small homestead "farm" with some animals, a barn and a cottage. In front was a small water tap

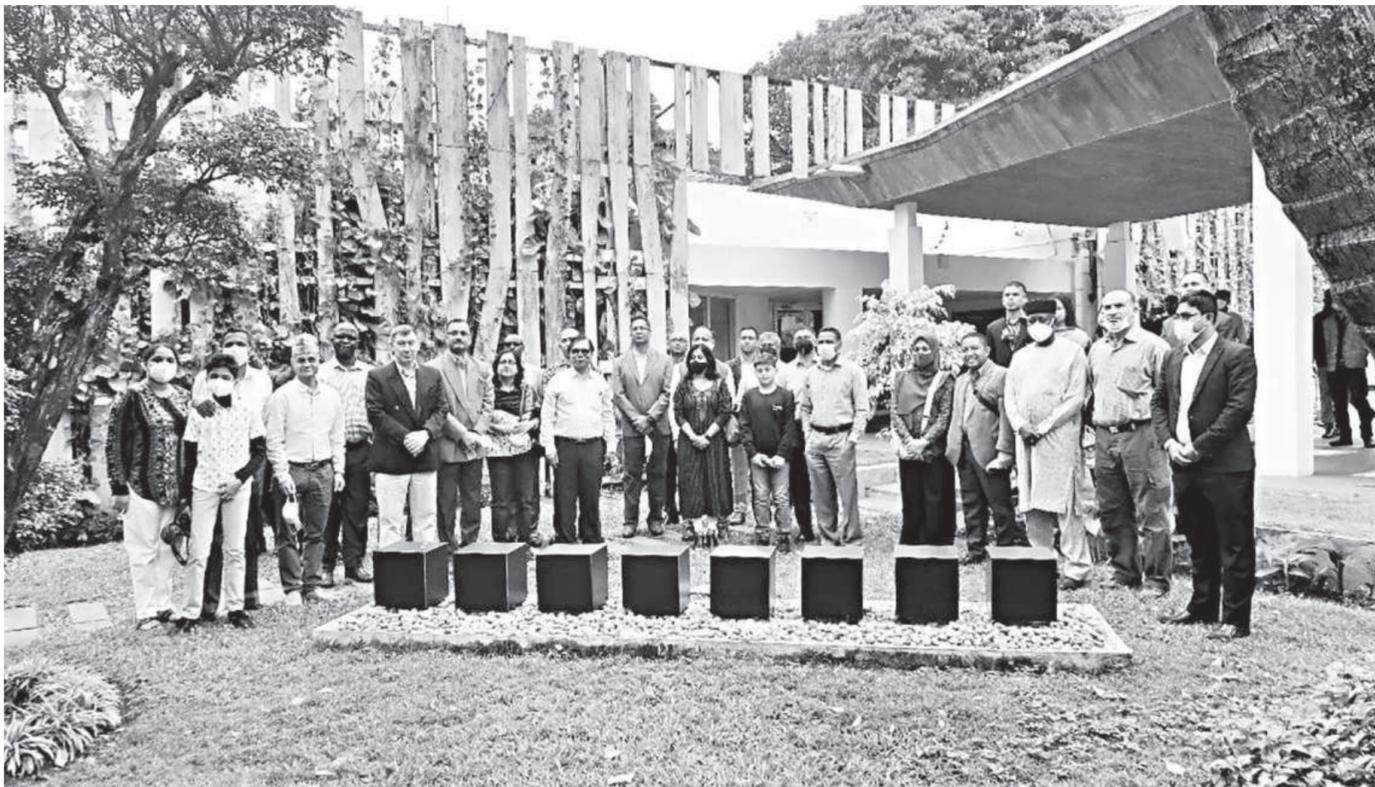
SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

THREE  
GULSHAN 2

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The visiting team took stops at Shikha Chirantan, British Council, Salimullah Muslim Hall, Central Shaheed Minar, Jagannath Hall, Suhrawardy Udyan, Ducusu Museum and more spots as part of the tour.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Dignitaries stroll through DU's 'Walking Museum'

DU CORRESPONDENT

A group of international dignitaries, including diplomats and military officials, have visited the Dhaka University "Walking Museum", which consists of historical installations and memorials of the 1971 genocide.

Guided by Rear Admiral Mohammad Moyeenul Haque, senior directing staff of Bangladesh Navy, the dignitaries visited the site on foot yesterday.

The Center for Genocide Studies (CGS) of DU established the museum in 2016.

CGS sources said they began the initiative with the aim to introduce the university's historical sites to the new generation.

Among others, British High Commissioner Robert Chatterton Dickson, US Ambassador Earl R Miller, UN Resident Coordinator Mia Seppo, Turkish Ambassador Mustafa Osman Turan and Resident Representative (Asia and Pacific Department) of International Monetary Fund (IMF) Jayendu De visited the museum.

Talking to The Daily Star, GM Ariefuzzaman, a research associate at CGS, said the centre is working to raise awareness over the extent of the atrocities committed by Pakistani aggressors during the Liberation War through the walking tour.

Freedom fighter and Ekushey Medal winning journalist Ajay Dasgupta also briefed the foreign officials about the various events and places of historical significance of DU, which are associated with the memory of the war.

The tour consisted of stops at Shikha Chirantan, British Council, Salimullah Muslim Hall, Central Shaheed Minar, Jagannath Hall, Suhrawardy Udyan, Ducusu Museum and more.

## Abandoned staff

FROM PAGE 5  
months ago, this has not been enough to keep out the shadowy figures.

Contacted, Omar Faruk, deputy post master general in Tangail division, told The Daily Star that no one has lodged any complaint to him in this regard after he joined the office a couple of years ago.

However, he said he's aware that police and Rab teams have visited the place, while also

confirming the fencing of the boundary walls.

"We have plans to demolish the worn out buildings and construct new ones in their place. But we are yet to take up any project in this regard," he added. Meanwhile, several staffers of the office told The Daily Star that they have rent out houses in the neighbourhood for higher costs than they would have to if they could live at the staff quarter buildings.

## Pay annual

FROM PAGE 3  
Club, trade union leaders alleged that at present, the annual increment is not paid to the workers as per the country's labour law.

Besides, there is clear discrimination between the cited increment mentioned in the law and the scheme followed by the

EPZ authorities.

They also demanded wage adjustment and dearness allowance for the workers.

BGSS chief Taslima Akhter, general secretary Zulhasnain Babu and finance secretary Prabir Saha, among others, spoke at the rally.

## A decade of

FROM PAGE 5  
Contacted, councillor of Ward 9, under whose domain the market falls, Mahafuzur Rahman Liton said they have visited the market recently and have decided to launch it as soon as possible.

He told this correspondent that the market could not be launched in the past due to political troubles. He said a lot of those who applied for shop space are in fact non-traders, who managed to file their applications using their political influence.

He also cited the market's location, which is at the edge of the city, as a problem, saying not many locals want to go there for groceries.

"But we're still trying to get the market up and running, because if we can

do that, at least the city corporation will get some revenue," Liton said.

Md Mazed Mollah, market superintendent of KCC, confirmed the market is in the process of being fully operational.

"We have taken various initiatives to open the market, such as setting up mobile courts to evict illegal occupiers and calling for applications for shop space all over again."

However, he cited some difficulties with this. "Not many traders are willing to come here," he said. "It seems like they're more comfortable setting up shop around the market area but not inside it."

"We collect Tk 250 to Tk 300 per day from some of the shops that come and run their trade inside the market. This is quite low compared to the standard market rate for shop space," he said.

He also said a project worth around Tk 49 crore is underway to construct new markets, including this one, soon.

## To the sky

FROM PAGE 3  
Literary editor Mohammad Nasiruddin's house is one of the most famous establishments of Narinda. His great granddaughter, Priota Iltekhar, arranged festivities on the rooftop, in association with organisations The Flag Girl and Dutch Club.

"We arrange this festival every year to brand Bangladesh's traditional cultural events. When we were children, we celebrated these festivals with our families. Now the expats living in Dhaka will get to enjoy them too," Priota told The Daily Star.

European Union Ambassador Charles Whiteley, Dutch

Ambassador Anne van Leeuwen and Turkish Ambassador Mustafa Osman Turan were also present at the festival as guests. The bonus of the festival is undoubtedly the traditional old-town food served at every household on the day of the festival. With the passage of time, concerts and DJ parties also made their way into the celebrations.

As the day comes to an end with the setting of the sun, not an ounce of darkness can be spotted in the heart of the old town. Shakra, a hundred-year-old festival, keeps illuminating the area with fireworks, lanterns and above all, joy and hope.

## Few following

FROM PAGE 5  
Contacted, Mominur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Chattogram, said they are trying to involve community leaders in this campaign.

"The executive magistrates from District Administration will be on the road to conduct mobile courts from tomorrow (today), in a bid to enforce the government's instructions," he said.

## Crisis in the planet

FROM PAGE 5  
protect Patharia and Rajkandi forests by declaring them gibbon sanctuaries.

Recently, five artificial canopy bridges were constructed to offer safe passage for primates and arboreal mammals at

## Acorn Woodpeckers

FROM PAGE 3  
Two woodpeckers perched on a horizontal branch. Unlike the colourful woodpeckers one sees in Bangladesh, these were black and white with a red circle on the crown of their head. They busily jumped from branch to branch. Then they flew off, one after another, towards another tree about a hundred feet away. It was a dead tree with a dried trunk. We both walked rapidly towards it.

As we watched the Acorn Woodpecker did its "thing." It had flown here from the oak tree carrying an acorn in its mouth. The trunk of the dead tree was pockmarked with dozens of cavities it had dug. It deposited the acorn into one of them, supplementing its rainy day stock. The day once again proved a valuable lesson for birding: there is no telling when and where luck may strike. You need to pay attention and hope for the best. If you give up you have lost.

Our trail was bordered by a low wooden fence on each side. As the trail curved gently to the right, a meadow opened up on our left. On the far side of the meadow was a grizzled old oak tree. I thought I saw movement on a branch. Stopping for a better look with my binoculars I realized it was a woodpecker. We found a spot on the fence where we could cross over. Crossing the meadow, we approached the tree.

Lawachhara.

About the alarming decline of the gibbon population, Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, divisional forest officer in Sylhet, said, "We will continue our efforts in this regard and discuss the issue with higher authorities."

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For the author's daily bird photos, please follow "ihishamkabr" on Instagram.

## Passengers yet

FROM PAGE 3  
Hanif Flyover to pass from Kajla to Gulistan, as that route is faster," he suggested.

"The route plan should be re-rationalised if the authorities want to attract more passengers," he said.

To take advantage of this situation, private buses were seen parked near DNP bus stops, to pick up frustrated passengers when the buses take too long to arrive.

DNP's Kanchpur counter in-charge Mohammad Ali said the low number of passengers can also be attributed to not placing counters at the right spots.

Meanwhile, Shahbag counter manager, wishing anonymity, said DNP is losing commuters to these private service buses who pick up and drop off passengers everywhere.

"Our service will be in crisis if such practices are not stopped," he said.

Contacted, Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA) Executive Director Neelima Akhter said, "We are aware of the situation. This is a new system, still in its pilot phase, so it will take some time."

"We will raise the issue at our next meeting," the official assured.

Earlier on December 26, the government launched the 'Dhaka Nagar Paribahan' under the bus route rationalisation programme of the two Dhaka city corporations on trial basis.

The service aims to streamline the public transport sector, bringing discipline to the sector, and reduce the traffic congestion plaguing the capital city's roads.

At the initial stage, 50 buses are being operated on the route, which will be increased to 100 in phases, while the entire city will get the service by 2023.

## Children with ADHD

FROM PAGE 12  
Symptoms sometimes decrease with age. Some people never completely outgrow their ADHD symptoms, but can learn strategies to be successful.

ADHD symptoms start before age 12, and in some children they're noticeable as early as three years of age. It occurs more often in male children.

The exact cause of ADHD is not clear but genetics, the environment or problems with the central nervous system might be the key factors.

Risk factors for ADHD may include blood relatives such as a parent or sibling with ADHD or another mental health disorder, exposure to environmental toxins such as lead, alcohol use or smoking during pregnancy and premature birth. Sugar is a popular suspect in causing hyperactivity but there's no reliable proof of this.

To help reduce risk of

ADHD, avoid anything that could harm foetal development, protect child from exposure to pollutants and toxins, including cigarette smoke and lead paint and limit screen time.

Deciding if a child has ADHD is a process with several steps, which include a checklist for rating ADHD symptoms and taking a history of the child from parents, teachers, and sometimes, the child.

While treatment won't cure ADHD, it can help a great deal with symptoms. Early diagnosis and treatment can make a big difference in outcome.

In most cases, ADHD is best treated with a combination of behaviour therapy and medication. For preschool-aged children (4-5 years of age), behaviour therapy, particularly training for parents, is recommended as the first line of treatment before medication is tried.

## Invitation for Tenders

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH

1	Ministry/Division/Department	Ministry of Cultural Affairs
2	Agency	Department of Public Libraries
3	Procuring Entity Name	'Extension of Online Service of Govt. Public Libraries' Project
4	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka
5	Invitation for	Supply of goods & related services for Library Automation-Development of Library Solution and e-Library
6	Invitation Ref No.	১৮
7	Date	12/01/2022
8	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method (OTM)
9	Budget and Source of Funds	GoB
10	Development Partners	Not Applicable
11	Project/Program code	224330900
12	Project/Program name	Library Automation - Development of Library Solution and e-Library
13	Tender Package No.	EPL-GD#01
14	Tender Package	Supply of goods & related services for Library Automation-Development of Library Solution and e-Library
15	Tender Publication Date	15/01/2022
16	Tender Last Selling Date	13/02/2022; Time-5.00 pm
17	Tender Closing Date and Time	Date 14/02/2022 Time 2:00 pm
18	Tender Opening Date and Time	14/02/2022 3:30 pm
19	Name & Address of the office (s)	Selling Tender Document 'Extension of Online Service of Govt. Public Libraries' Project Department of Public Libraries, 10 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Shahbagh, Dhaka. Receiving Tender Document Department of Public Libraries, 10 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Shahbagh, Dhaka-1000 and Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Bhaban-6 Room no. 1008, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka-1000. Opening Tender Document Conference Room, Department of Public Libraries, 10 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Shahbagh, Dhaka-1000
20	Eligibility of Tenderers	1. Bidders have a least 10(ten) years experience of supplying ICT related goods & services; 2. Bidders have experience of completed at least three contracts in Government/Autonomous/organizations involving network server, equipment and storage solutions of within those a single contract of Tk 30(thirty) crore within last five years; 3. Must have service support facilities in 64 districts of Bangladesh, and 4. The terms and conditions mentioned in TDS & PCC.
21	Brief description of Goods	RFID, Desktop, Laptop, Printer, UPS, MDC, Surveillance Systems, Router, Switch, Firewall, Access point, Server, Storage, San Switch, OS, DB, VM, Security Fabrics and so on.
22	Brief description of Related Services	Onsite installation, testing of network and equipment at 60 ± 4 locations nationwide, is making the system workable with Internet and data connectivity.
23	Price of Tender Document (Tk)	Tk 5,000.
25	Name of Official Inviting Tender	Md. Shameem Khan
26	Designation of Official Inviting Tender	Joint Secretary and Project Director
27	Address of Official Inviting Tender	'Extension of Online Service of Govt. Public Libraries' Project Department of Public Libraries, 10 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Shahbagh, Dhaka-1000.
28	Contact Details	Tel: 02-9540190 Fax: 02-9576535 E-mail: shikhan0628@gmail.com
29	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders	

Md. Shameem Khan  
(Joint Secretary), Project Director

GD-89

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## CORRIGENDUM

In the advertisement Request for Proposal (RFP) published in this newspaper on January 12, 2022 on page 04, the RFP Ref. No.: 9172730 has been wrongly printed as 9172719. The correct RFP Ref. No. will be LRPS-BAN-2022-9172730 and should be read as such. This inadvertent error is deeply regretted.

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# Crisis in the planet of the apes

Gibbon population drops by 90pc in two decades; deforestation behind the decline, finds study

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Gibbons are endangered worldwide, and it just so happens that Bangladesh is no exception to the norm.

According to Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Division in Sylhet, gibbon habitats are present in different regions of Sylhet and Chattogram.

However, the number of gibbons, classified as small apes, has decreased by almost 90 percent just within the last two decades. Although Lawachhara National Park has been considered a safe haven for gibbons, presently, 40 gibbons are struggling for survival there.

This information came up in a study led by Habibun Nahar, associate professor of zoology at Jagannath University.

It's difficult to get an exact estimate

of gibbons. Nahar mentioned that according to a 1970 study, there were 3,000 gibbons in the country. However, current estimates say there are about 468 gibbons in 135 groups across Bangladesh, and of them, 268 are in Sylhet.

According to an International Union for Conservation of Nature survey from 2018, gibbons are about 60 to 90 centimetres in length, and weigh six to nine kilos. Although male and female gibbons are almost identical in size, there are significant differences in their skin texture and colour. The average lifespan of gibbons is 25 years.

Researchers have found that at present, the highest number of gibbon habitats are in Sylhet, and in the region, Rajkandi Reserve Forest of Moulvibazar hosts the highest number of the species.

The data came up in a study

conducted by a team of wildlife researchers, Hasan Al Razi Choyan, Tanvir Ahmed and Sabit Hasan from Bangladesh and Ariz Zaradat from United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), who were led by Habibun Nahar, and Sabir bin Muzaffar of UAEU.

The study, conducted with the support of the forest department and funded by US Fish and Wildlife Service, was published in the Journal of Diversity. It was conducted in 22 forests in Sylhet and Chattogram from March 2019 to February 2020.

Sabit Hasan, one of the team members, said, "Deforestation is the main reason behind the decline in gibbon habitats. This issue leads to their food crisis and makes them vulnerable to poaching."

Hassan al-Razi, the project's manager and researcher, said, "Although the number of gibbons in

some forests may seem relatively good, it's not all good news. All forests where gibbons are found are fragmented islands, isolated from one another."

Because of this, gibbons of one forest lose contact with the others, leading to genetic distancing. This is threatening their kind, since low genetic diversity can lead to the animals' extinction during adversities like outbreak of a disease or climate change, he said.

Team member Tanvir Ahmed said it's crucial to take firm initiatives to

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



## KEY REASONS

- Deforestation
- Habitat loss
- Food crisis
- Low genetic diversity

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase research
- Focus on building closer tie amid existent population
- Initiative to protect forests
- Setting up ape sanctuaries

## NUMBER OF GIBBONS

- 122
- 91
- 40
- 2
- 5
- 9

## FORESTS (in Sylhet)

- Rajkandi Reserve Forest
- Patharia Reserve Forest
- Lawachhara National Park
- Sagarnal Forest
- Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary
- Satchhari National Park

## HEALTH GUIDELINES AT CTG

# Few following, none monitoring

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chattogram

On the second day of the new 11-point health guidelines, people were seen roaming port city roads and riding public vehicles without adhering to the new regulations.

While visiting different roads on Thursday and yesterday, this correspondent saw many people roaming around without facemasks. Meanwhile, no one from the authorities were also found monitoring the areas to enforce the instructions.

This correspondent came across a youth, around 22 years of age, who got on a human haulier without wearing a facemask in Bahaddarhat area yesterday. Asked, he said although he had a mask on the first day of the new guidelines, he took it off after seeing almost no one else wearing it.

Mentioning that he's vaccinated, the youth also said he's less afraid to not wear one as there's no one from the authorities to hold him against it.

But not everyone is comfortable with the situation.

**“ We're seeing more people on main thoroughfares wearing facemasks, but it should be ensured for everyone in every lane. ”**

DR MAHFUZUR RAHMAN  
convener of Public Health Rights Protection Committee,  
Chattogram

Jamal Hossain, a schoolteacher from Raja Pukur Lane, said, "This is not safe for us. The government must find ways to enforce the guidelines."

Meanwhile, the infection rate in Chattogram keeps rising everyday, with yesterday's positive cases hitting 14.52 percent yesterday. A total of 296 cases were detected against 2038 samples tested yesterday, said Dr Elias Chowdhury, civil surgeon of Chattogram. The rate was 10 percent on Thursday, 12.4 percent on Wednesday and 9 percent on Tuesday, he said.

Contacted, Dr Mahfuzur Rahman, convener of Public Health Rights Protection Committee, Chattogram, said, "We're seeing more people on main thoroughfares wearing facemasks, but it should be ensured for everyone in every lane," he said. "We urge the government to involve community leaders in this regard."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

# A decade of nothing

Built in 2012, Khulna's Bastuhara-Boyra Housing Market yet to open



DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

The Bastuhara-Boyra Housing Market was constructed 10 long years ago. But even after all this time, the Khulna City Corporation (KCC) owned market is yet to launch.

This means while a lot of space is being eaten up by the establishment, it actually brings no benefit to the residents of the city's Bastuhara-Mujgunni area, who have to travel three to four kilometres to visit the nearest kitchen market.

Meanwhile, at least four illegal floating markets have sprung up in the vicinity of the market.

KCC authorities said it cannot open the market as it has become a centre of political "power play", alongside lack of interested shopkeepers and the unauthorised roadside markets in the area.

According to city corporation sources, the market construction was completed in April 2012. It has enough space to accommodate 74 shops, including 40 for vegetables, 14 for groceries, 10 for fish, and five for chicken and other meat. The market has three different sheds for these shops.

One year later in April 2013, around 400 interested traders applied for shop space.

But according to locals and traders, authorities did not really do anything after receiving the applications, which gradually stymied the market's

momentum as traders' interest waned.

The market is surrounded by Mujgunni, Bastuhara, Goalkhali, Boyra Housing and Naval Colony areas. But rather than residents of the locations being benefitted from the market, they are forced to go to Chittrali, Daulatpur and Boikali markets, which are some three to four kilometres away.

Aslam Pervez, a resident of Mujgunni residential area, said, "It would've been nice for us if the market remained open permanently. But now we have to go to these distant markets, braving a lot of difficulties."

"KCC should re-call application from traders, remove the illegal shops and floating markets of the area and set up the actual planned market with proper facilities as soon as possible," he added.

Abdur Rauf, a shopkeeper interested in renting a shop space there, said, "We bought the form for shop allotment, but despite informing the local councillor several times, we have gotten nothing."

"As a result," Rauf said, "we are setting up shop outside the market. If the market was opened with proper facilities, our sales would definitely increase. The area's people would be benefitted as well."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## PATUAKHALI MEDICAL COLLEGE

# Covid testing lab still not operational

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The RT-PCR lab at Patuakhali Medical College Hospital has not started operation even after two years, due to lack of necessary equipment and workforce.

Currently, only a banner hung in front of hospital gates informs people that there should be a lab at the premises. For RT-PCR testing, the samples must be sent to Barishal or Dhaka, and the whole testing process takes seven to 10 days.

The government had taken the initiative to set up the lab in Patuakhali to identify those infected with Covid-19 in a short time. But presently, only antigen tests are being carried out in the district.

If the lab is set up, around 16 lakh Patuakhali residents and 12 lakh dwellers of neighbouring Barguna will be benefitted. Although Covid-19 testing and fatalities have been stable in Patuakhali, the detection rate is increasing yet again. Meanwhile, residents are worried about the Omicron variant.

Mushfiqur Rahman Tuhin, a Patuakhali resident, said, "We have been demanding an RT-PCR lab in Patuakhali since the pandemic's beginning, but the facility is still on paper."

Mostafizur Rahman, acting principal of Patuakhali Medical College, said the lab room is ready, but to start operation eight medical technologists, four data-entry operators, four office assistants and four cleaners are required.

Equipment is also needed for testing. Authorities informed the ministry concerned about this matter two years back, but got no response, he said.

# Abandoned staff quarter turns into crime spot

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

The abandoned staff quarters of the Deputy Post Master General's Office in Tangail has turned into a den for criminals and drug abusers, ruining the environment of the area.

The dilapidated condition of the buildings is also preventing staffers of the office from using the facilities at a cheaper rate.

Locals said as soon as night falls, a bunch of suspicious figures flock to the staff quarter's abandoned buildings and emit a lot of disturbing noises.

The quarters and the government office are situated together inside the same complex.

Although they have informed the office authorities about the matter on several occasions, the issue still remains to be solved, locals alleged.

According to the officials, the Deputy Post Master General's Office was constructed beside the former Dhaka Road at Biswas Betka area in the town on 1984. Three additional buildings were later constructed at the back as the staff quarters.

However, over the years, the buildings became worn-down and inhabitable, at which point the residents started leaving one by one.

It has been two decades since the buildings have remained in this abandoned condition, said local Pappu Ahmed, taking advantage of which miscreants have turned them into a crime den.

Several locals told this correspondent that although the office authorities have fenced the boundary walls of the quarters a couple of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## BANGABANDHU BRIDGE

# Crash causes long tailback

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A long tailback was created on the east and west link roads of Bangabandhu bridge in Tangail and Sirajganj yesterday morning, following a road accident on the bridge.

A passenger bus hit an ambulance near pillar 26 around 6:45am, injuring the ambulance driver and suspending vehicular movement on the Dhaka-bound lane, said police.

After the accident, toll collection was suspended from 7:05am to 8:00am for carrying out rescue operation and removing the wreckage, Shafiqul Islam, OC of Bangabandhu Bridge East Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Traffic became normal after a few hours.



Well aware of the risks involved in jumping from the anchoring ropes of a cargo vessel, this daredevil duo couldn't stop themselves from fancying a dip into the Bhairab, that too in the middle of winter. This photo was taken recently from Khulna Ghat-5 area.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN



Hindu devotees arrive to take a holy dip in the waters of Sangam, the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers during Magh Mela festival, amidst the spread of the coronavirus disease in Prayagraj, India yesterday. Officials expect around three million people to attend the festival's final day. They have also warned that the mela could prove to be a "superspreader" event. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Unfreeze Afghan funds UN chief urges US, World Bank

AFP, Kabul

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has urged the United States and the World Bank to unfreeze Afghan funds, locked since the Taliban's return to power, to prevent "the nightmare unfolding in Afghanistan" from getting worse.

The Taliban yesterday urged Washington to heed the UN chief's call.

"The United States must respond positively to the international voice and release Afghan capital," the Taliban government's spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said on Twitter.

Washington has taken control of nearly \$9.5 billion in assets belonging to the Afghan central bank. The IMF and World Bank have suspended activities in Afghanistan, withholding aid as well as \$340 million in new reserves issued by the IMF in August.

"We must... Rapidly inject liquidity into the economy and avoid a meltdown that would lead to poverty, hunger and destitution for millions," Guterres told reporters in New York on Thursday.

After the Taliban hardline Islamist movement seized power in mid-August as the United States ended its 20-year war in Afghanistan, the country has found itself on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe.

Aid agencies and the UN have estimated that more than half of the nation's 38 million population is expected to face hunger this winter. An estimated 4.7 million people will suffer from acute malnutrition in 2022, including 1.1 million children with severe acute malnutrition, according to aid agencies.

Speaking to reporters two days after the UN said it needs \$5 billion in aid for Afghanistan in 2022, Guterres called on Washington to take the lead in helping the country avoid a meltdown "because the major part of the world financial system works in dollars."

"I hope the remaining resources - more that \$1.2 billion" from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) "will become available to help Afghanistan's people survive the winter," Guterres told journalists.

Many Western nations have also largely suspended their assistance to Afghanistan, one of the world's poorest countries.



## 'The drumbeat of war sounding loud'

Russia moves more troops to Ukraine border;  
EU, US warn Moscow after massive cyberattack



AGENCIES

Ukraine was hit by a massive cyberattack warning its citizens to "be afraid and expect the worst", and Russia, which has massed more than 100,000 troops on its neighbour's frontier, released TV pictures yesterday of more forces deploying in a drill.

The developments unfolded hours after talks wrapped up with no breakthrough between Russia and Western states.

"The drumbeat of war is sounding loud," Michael Carpenter, US Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), said at the close of talks on Thursday.

Russia denies plans to attack Ukraine but says it could take unspecified military action unless demands are met, including a promise by the Nato alliance never to admit Kyiv.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday said Russia hoped security talks with the United States would resume, but this would depend on Washington's response to Moscow's proposals.

"We categorically will not accept the appearance of Nato right on our borders,

especially so given the current course of the Ukrainian leadership," he said.

Asked what Moscow meant by threatening this week to take "military-technical action" if talks fail, Lavrov said: "Measures to deploy military hardware, that is obvious. When we take decisions with military hardware we understand what we mean and what we are preparing for."

Ukrainian officials were investigating the huge cyberattack, which they said hit around 70 internet sites of government bodies including the ministry of foreign affairs, cabinet of ministers, and security and defence council. Though they avoided directly accusing Moscow, they made clear Russia was suspected.

EU foreign ministers yesterday warned Russia of a "robust" response, fearing that a cyberattack against Ukraine could prepare the ground for military action by Moscow against its neighbour.

The standoff with Russia "is serious, more serious than anything we've seen in recent years", Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg told reporters at a meeting of the bloc's top diplomats in the French city of Brest.

"Some say the cyberattack could be the prelude for other activities, military activities," he said.

## N Korea fires two ballistic missiles

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea fired at least two ballistic missiles yesterday, its third test in less than two weeks, just hours after criticising a US push for new sanctions over the previous launches as a "provocation" and warning of a strong reaction. South Korea's National Security Council held an emergency meeting and expressed "strong regret" over the test and called on Pyongyang to return to talks. Japan's coast guard also said the North fired what could be a ballistic missile. The missiles appeared to have landed in the sea outside Japan's exclusive economic zone, broadcaster NHK said, citing an unnamed Japanese defence ministry official. The two missiles travelled about 430 km to a maximum altitude of 36 km.

## Prince Andrew stripped of royal, military links

REUTERS, London

The Royal Family removed Prince Andrew's military links and royal patronages on Thursday and said he will no longer be known as "His Royal Highness", as the son of Queen Elizabeth fights a US lawsuit in which he is accused of sex abuse. Andrew, 61, the Duke of York, was forced to step down from public duties in 2019 because of his connections to convicted US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Thursday's move by the royal family means he will now lose all his royal connections. On Wednesday, Andrew's lawyers failed to persuade a US judge to dismiss a civil lawsuit in which Virginia Giuffre accuses him of sexually abusing her when she was a teenager.

## Bomb found at Delhi market

AFP, New Delhi

Indian bomb disposal experts cordoned off a busy flower market in the capital New Delhi yesterday after finding an improvised explosive device left in an abandoned bag, police said. Police commissioner Rakesh Asthana told the NDTV news channel the bag was left behind by a customer who visited a shop to buy flowers at the Ghazipur wholesale flower market. Media reports said police carried out a controlled explosion. The market in eastern Delhi gets thousands of small farmers, horticulturists and shopkeepers early in the morning. India is in a heightened state of security ahead of Republic Day celebrations on January 26, when a military parade is due to take place in the heart of the capital.

## US Capitol riot: Social media giants subpoenaed

AFP, Washington

The congressional committee investigating the January 6, 2021 storming of the US Capitol on Thursday subpoenaed records from YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Reddit that would detail the use of social media in the attack. The records could help explain "how the spread of misinformation and violent extremism contributed to the violent attack on our democracy," said Bennie Thompson, chairman of the House Select January 6 Committee. Thompson said the companies had not responded adequately to requests for information to help in its investigation of the violent attack a year ago on the Capitol by supporters of then-president Donald Trump.

## NEW PARTYGATE SCANDAL

### PM Johnson's office apologises to Queen

REUTERS, London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's office apologised to Queen Elizabeth yesterday after it emerged that staff had partied late into the night in Downing Street on the eve of Prince Philip's funeral, at a time when mixing indoors was banned.

Johnson is facing the gravest crisis of his premiership after almost daily revelations about a series of social gatherings during Covid-19 lockdowns, some held when ordinary people could not bid farewell in person to dying relatives.

In an extraordinary twist to a saga, the Daily Telegraph said drinks parties were held inside Downing Street on April 16, 2021, the day before Prince Philip's funeral.

"It is deeply regrettable this took place at a time of national mourning and No. 10 (Downing Street) has apologised to the Palace," Johnson's spokesman told reporters. Johnson was at his Chequers country residence that day and was not invited to any gathering, his spokesman said.

Opponents have called for Johnson, 57, to resign, casting him as a charlatan who demanded the British people follow some of the most onerous rules in peacetime history while his own staff partied at the heart of the British state.



In the coming days, Nato and Ukraine will sign an agreement on enhanced cyber cooperation, including Ukrainian access to Nato's malware information sharing platform.

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg after a massive cyberattack hit Ukraine amid Russia tensions



A Palestinian protester flashes the victory sign amid clashes with Israeli security forces, following a demonstration against the expropriation of land by Israel in the village of Kfar Qaddum near the Jewish settlement of Kedumim in the occupied West Bank, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## \$3.36 million for a comic book page!

AFP, Los Angeles

A single page of original artwork from an acclaimed 1984 comic featuring Spider-Man sold for a record \$3.36 million in the United States on Thursday, making the webslinger the world's mightiest auction superhero.

The page features the first appearance of Spidey's black symbiote suit that would later lead to the creation of anti-hero Venom in artwork by Mike Zeck from Marvel Super Heroes Secret Wars no. 8.

The previous record for a single page of artwork from the interior of an American comic book was a frame showing the first image of Wolverine in a 1974 issue of "The Incredible Hulk". The page sold for \$657,250.



BUDGET, COPYRIGHT, AND VIEWERSHIP

## Why are TV channels saying 'no' to YouTube productions?

**There was a time when directors were struggling with budget for television productions, and YouTube producers helped restore hope as they started offering more resources.**

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Opting for a new policy, some local TV channels have decided to stop buying the television rights of YouTube-based productions, from different labels. We dig deeper into the story, as we talk to channels, labels, and filmmakers, highlighting the causes and effects of this seemingly extreme decision.

The dilemma lies between the streaming rights – whether the production will only air on television, or if they could stream the same content on the producers' or label's respective YouTube channels.

"YouTube label companies only sell us the television rights, not the YouTube rights, when they give us a production," says Pavel Islam, Assistant manager, program and communication, NTV. "Thus, they keep earning from YouTube, while our YouTube channels cannot feature their content. However, we want all our content to be available to our audience on our designated channels, be it online or on television."

"As far as the budget is concerned, now we are offering budget categorically, depending mainly on the story first, then the casting and the other productions stages," he adds. "This is a

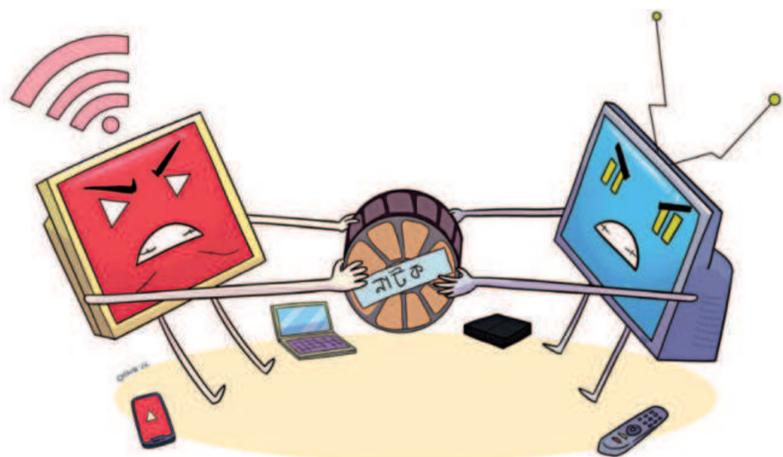


ILLUSTRATION: OISHIK JAWAD

business policy crafted by the TV channels to maximise their profit," says Dhruba Guha, the owner of YouTube label Dhruba TV. "It is tough to make quality content within the budget that they provide, and thus, they have been losing viewership. They have come up with this policy to overcome this hurdle, and I think the policy will work in their favour."

Abu Nasim, Head of Digital at Deepto

TV, weighed in on the matter. "YouTube, TV channels, OTT platforms, and other such visual mediums are part of a distribution ecosystem, and there is a specific kind of audience for every platform," he says.

"As revenue is an issue, I believe each medium should have its footprints on all the distribution mediums. Only then can TV channels reach bigger masses with their content. It is a positive

sign as the channels are now aware of this circle and are trying to build their own policies in this regard."

There was a time when directors were struggling with budget for television productions, and YouTube producers helped restore hope as they started offering more resources. The emergence of online-based productions salvaged producers, and artistes, shares "Bachelor Point" famed director Kajal Arefin Ome.

"The audience demands good content and thus, they also started turning towards YouTube for entertainment," says Ome. "However, the course has changed now, and this policy adopted by the TV channels, if followed bearing their improvement in mind, will prove to be beneficial for all," he adds.

"RTV aims at producing quality content while maintaining our social norms, cultural practices, and family values. YouTube productions mostly lack these elements, and thus, we feel they are not worth the screen time," asserts Dewan Shamsur Rakib, Programme Head, RTV.

"We believe, through this decision, we will be able to control the quality of our productions while providing healthy and entertaining production to our audience," he further adds.

"YouTube is an unpredictable platform, where anyone can upload content. I believe the TV channels should start looking out for OTT platforms, especially the foreign ones, instead of competing with the small fishes in the river," concludes director Mabrur Rashid Bannah.



## I am dedicating all my time to the mother of my child

Sariful Razz

## "My kids are absolute monsters, especially TAIMUR"

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Bollywood superstar Kareena Kapoor posted a small clip on Instagram yesterday, in which she said, "My kids are absolute monsters, specially Taimur. But today I am gonna show them who the real monster is."

The actress then applied a monster filter and says, "Check out this new filter by Hotel Transylvania: Transformania". My family absolutely loves this franchise, so don't forget to watch it on Amazon Prime."

It turned out that the video was a publicity stunt for the animated movie, which came out on Amazon Prime recently.

**Debating on the silver screen with the Redoan Rony directorial film "Ice Cream", Sariful Razz stepped up to the limelight with critically acclaimed productions like "No Dorai" and "Mainkar Chipay".**

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

The actor took the nation by surprise recently, when he announced his marriage to popular actress Pori Moni, and that they were expecting their first child.

In a candid conversation with The Daily Star, Sariful Razz talks about his conjugal life, his anticipations of becoming a father, and his upcoming releases.

**How are you spending your time these days?**

I am dedicating all my time and attention to the mother of my child. I have taken a break from shooting and looking Pori Moni, as I want her to be healthy and happy during her pregnancy.

I am planning to take a long break and will come back after the baby is born. This is a beautiful phase in our lives, and we want to enjoy it to the fullest.

**You fell in love with Pori Moni on the sets of Giasuddin Selim's "Gumin". What do you love most about her?**  
I love Pori Moni's courage to rebel. She



has had her share of struggles, and is very strong. I appreciate and respect her courage, as not all have the nerve to speak against injustice.

**How do you find Pori Moni as an actress?**

I won't comment on her acting, as the entire nation knows about her performances. However, I am proud of the place she has created for herself in the industry. We have a lot in common, and have lived a similar journey.

**There are many criticisms surrounding your partner. How do you deal with them?**

Criticisms are an inevitable part of our industry. She was first a co-artist but now she is family. I will stand by her all life long, nurturing our relationship with love.

**What are your upcoming plans?**

I am eagerly waiting for my projects "Poran", "Damal", "Hawaa" and "Rokto Joba" to release. I love the silver screen, and want to keep coming back on it with unique characters and new stories.



## The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

# Confusion does not beget confidence

### Authorities must make farsighted interventions to curb Omicron spread

WITH the Omicron variant of the coronavirus threatening to spread uncontrollably in the coming weeks, we are concerned at the lacklustre implementation of the new Covid-19 curbs that took effect on January 13, 2022 across Bangladesh. There already appears to be confusion regarding the directive given to the transport sector to run buses at half capacity. Reportedly, the Dhaka Road Transport Owners' Association instructed its members to operate their vehicles at full capacity, violating the government directive on the very first day of the curbs. When asked, the association representatives claimed that the ministry concerned had given them "verbal" permission to do so—a statement that has not been confirmed by the ministry yet.

We cannot help but wonder: Why the confusion and contradiction in the government's instructions? On what basis did they make the decision in the first place? We had warned the government against taking measures that were impractical to begin with. With offices, factories and shopping malls all remaining open, it is unclear how operating public transport at half capacity would have helped the public.

This is not the first time that the government has given an instruction only to change it a day later. Often, they have retracted their decision in response to different pressure groups, the foremost among whom have been transport owners. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have observed the authorities floundering when they should have made timely, practical and farsighted interventions. It is of urgent importance that the government takes judicious decisions in the coming days, if we are to expect the public to take these directives seriously. Confusion does not beget confidence or compliance.

Meanwhile, according to our reports, other restrictions are also not being followed. A majority of restaurants are not complying with the directive to deny service to customers without vaccination cards, while many customers seemed clueless about how to acquire such a card. The mandatory mask use is being violated. It is apparent at this point that arbitrary drives alone will not help. We need mass awareness programmes, along with strict enforcement of the restrictions, if we are to curb the spread of the virus. Both the authorities and the public need to understand the importance of abiding by the restrictions, if we are to avoid loss of lives as well as another lockdown that will inevitably harm the economy and people's livelihoods.

# Balloons turn into a nightmare

### Strict quality control and regular monitoring of gas cylinders a must-do

THE report of a gas cylinder explosion in Cumilla resulting in the injury of 35 children is distressing, to say the least. We are further troubled to learn that at least six children among them remain critically injured. It was in the district's Nangalkot upazila that the cylinder filled with helium gas was being used to inflate balloons, with about 40 children standing in close proximity. But the joy of watching balloons floating in the air soon turned into horror as the gas cylinder exploded with a loud noise.

We are relieved that some of the injured children were rushed to the Cumilla Medical College Hospital, while others to Nangalkot Upazila Health Complex for receiving emergency medical treatment. According to hospital sources, all the children are aged between 8 and 18 years. It is good to know that the Mokara Union Parishad chairman visited the hospital and promised to bear the cost of treatment of the children.

Primary reports state that the balloons were meant to be sold at a fair being organised at a nearby village. But the local administration confirmed that no permission had been granted by them to organise a fair amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, considering health hazards. We believe proper investigation would reveal who the organisers were and how they could violate government order.

Explosion of gas cylinders has become a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. In most cases in the past, such explosions have taken lives of either the men handling the cylinders or some persons including children standing nearby. Fire originating from exploding cylinders damaged many homes as well.

Investigations revealed that faulty, overused or poorly manufactured cylinders usually cannot sustain the pressure of the gas inside and burst at the seams. Gas cylinders ought to be manufactured with high quality materials, and under the supervision of qualified engineers. These must go through strict quality control checks before going to the market. Proper maintenance instruction labels should also be fixed on them.

However, this needs to be said that we see low quality gas cylinders being bought and sold in the country by people who know very little about the safety standards. We hope that the government office entrusted with the responsibility of inspection will now carry out regular testing of the cylinders in the market to avoid such accidents in the future.

# RTI can contribute to government accountability

Shamsul Bari and Ruhi Naz are chairman and RTI coordinator, respectively, of the Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB).

SHAMSUL BARI and RUHI NAZ

EFFORTS to limit the ruler's authority over the ruled is as old as human history. It is a subject that has occupied the minds of social thinkers and philosophers of all major civilisations since ancient times. Modern parliaments are the outcome of the search for a balanced system of governance, whereby people pledge obedience to the ruling authority in exchange for a social compact that ensures their protection and well-being. The concept of government's accountability to the people was born in the process. In parliamentary democracy, it forms the basis for peoples' trust in the government and the latter's answerability to the people. People choose their representatives to represent their interests in parliament and raise their concerns with the government on matters of governance. The purpose is to ensure that government activities are corruption-free, guided by law, and serve public good.

Over time, as the concept of peoples' sovereignty over the state became more concretised, the need for other measures of government accountability grew in tandem. It increased further with the rise of authoritarianism globally and attendant efforts to muzzle parliaments, often turning them into "rubber-stamp" bodies. The call for supplementary and alternative methods of accountability increased accordingly.

An important development in this regard was the resurrection of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, which was first introduced by Sweden in 1766, but remained largely limited to a few Western nations. It was only in the later part of the last century—more particularly, during the sudden spurt of democracy in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution—that a large number of countries adopted the FOI law, in various other names, including the Right to Information (RTI) Act. The law provided a platform for citizens to intervene directly with government bodies to promote transparency and accountability in their work.

While citizens are empowered directly by a judicious use of the RTI Act, members of parliament can use the law to advance the interests of their constituents, too. In fact, in many countries, parliamentarians or their staff often use the law to obtain information, normally undisclosed by the government, or to probe government

activities. It is resorted to more often when parliaments are in doldrums because of political difficulties. During such times, the RTI law provides an opportunity for all conscious citizens of the land, including lawmakers, to turn to the law to fill the gaps. It may be underscored that the RTI Act is available to all citizens of the land, irrespective of

*inter alia*, that the information requested was public information and did not relate to any individual's private information, and therefore it could not be considered exempt. In the meantime, several other citizens submitted the same RTI request to the bank.

On receipt of the appeal and being faced with additional requests of the same



ILLUSTRATION: COLLECTED

**While citizens are empowered directly by a judicious use of the RTI Act, members of parliament can use the law to advance the interests of their constituents, too.**

their vocation.

Let us end with a real-world example to illustrate the type of issues susceptible to such interventions.

A resident of an upazila in Dinajpur district submitted an RTI request to the local branch of a large bank late last year, asking for the list of recipients who benefitted from a government stimulus package for farmers to help them overcome financial difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Upon receiving the request, the bank authorities reportedly resorted to various scare tactics to force the applicant to withdraw his application, including by threatening him with criminal prosecution. The applicant apparently came to know that the stimulus fund had mostly been disbursed among businesspeople, and hence the bank authorities were not inclined to provide the list.

The applicant refused to give in to pressures and insisted on his rights, as provided in the RTI Act. As a result, the bank finally sent him a written response, claiming that the requested information could not be disclosed as it fell within the purview of the exemption clause under the RTI Act. The applicant then applied to the appeal authority of the bank, stating,

nature, the bank authorities organised a meeting with the applicant at the house of a prominent local businessman. There, they pleaded for a mutually acceptable solution. Unable to withstand their relentless pressures, the applicant felt compelled to give in, in exchange for a promise to stop all future lapses of this nature. Subsequently, the applicant received a response to his appeal, "On basis of your complaint and following discussion between the two sides, specific mistakes have been identified and the concerned sections of the bank have been directed not to repeat such mistakes in the future."

A basic objective of Bangladesh's RTI Act is to ensure that "corruption shall decrease." Assuaging the effects of the pandemic is an issue which has occupied the minds of many, including our parliament, since the beginning of the crisis. While this story shows the difficulties that citizens face in making use of the law, it also highlights the tremendous potential of the law to fight corruption in public work. Hopefully more citizens, including our sociopolitical elites, will join those who are daring to make use of the law to address important public issues.

# Poll amid pandemic: Voting right vs human life

Pallab Bhattacharya is a special correspondent for The Daily Star. He writes from New Delhi, India.

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

ON January 8, 2022, the Election Commission of India (ECI) announced the schedule of fresh assembly elections in five Indian states—Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Goa, Manipur, and Uttarakhand—for the first major bout of polls in the New Year, amid the galloping cases of Covid-19 pandemic. The exponential rise in the daily cases of infections is a matter of serious concern to all, and one mathematical modelling done by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Kanpur suggests that the ongoing pandemic may peak in late January or first week of February, when daily cases could hit as high as 800,000—that is around the time when the entire polling exercise begins in Uttar Pradesh. In this situation, holding free and fair elections with maximum voter turnouts is a challenge for the Election Commission.

Concerns persist in some quarters about the wisdom behind holding assembly polls in the five states at a time when Covid cases are rising so rapidly across India. The share of these five states to India's overall pandemic caseload has risen of late. The Allahabad High Court in Uttar Pradesh recently requested the ECI to consider postponing the poll dates given the worsening Covid situation in the state. But, as former CEC SY Qureshi points out in a newspaper article, it is not within the commission's power to postpone the polls as the Indian Constitution does not empower the poll body to do so.

"Postponing elections is not in their hands at all and would be a violation of the constitutional mandate that gives

every Vidhan Sabha a fixed term. As soon as the term is over, the House stands dissolved automatically. The term of the House cannot be extended except in an emergency declared by parliament, which the constitution restricts to only two situations—war and breakdown of law and order," he writes. Qureshi also recalls that in the seven decades of India's electoral history, this has happened only thrice—

coming polls on January 8, defended the decision to go ahead with the polls, asserting that holding the elections is the "essence of maintaining democratic governance."

The challenges for Chandra remain the same as those of his predecessor Sunil Arora: to ensure people's safety and that the pandemic situation is not exacerbated by the polls.

The ECI has outlined a slew of measures keeping in mind the pandemic and the involvement of more than 180 million voters in the forthcoming polls. It has broken some new ground. For the first time, it has barred physical rallies and roadshows till January 15, saying the rule would be reviewed after that since the "ground situation is dynamic," indicative of an incremental posture. Quraishi, however, questioned the rationale behind the move and the line drawn between rallies and public meetings.

The real test of the ECI's ability to hold the polls will be how it enforces its elaborate Covid-related guidelines by marshalling the administrations in the five states, and how much the latter cooperates. The biggest challenge for the efficiency and independence of the ECI is, of course, how it deals with the Covid guidelines violations—if any—by the political parties. There is a possibility that such issues could be politicised, but the ECI should not come under any pressure from any quarter in cracking down on health protocols, because they relate to an unprecedented public health emergency.

While the ECI actions to enforce Covid guidelines will be under close scrutiny, stricter monitoring will be called for political parties abiding by them, because it is the parties which were unanimous in conveying to the ECI that the polls be held on time despite the pandemic. The parties must help the ECI's bid to ensure that the electoral exercise does not turn into a Covid-19 super-spreader event—especially in rural areas, where the health infrastructure is creaky.



**The Election Commission of India came under fire for giving leeway to political parties in initial campaigning for assembly elections in 2021 amid the second wave of Covid-19.**

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

in Assam, Punjab, and Jammu and Kashmir—amid insurgency situations.

The ECI would be under the scanner for how it conducts the elections in the five states amid the pandemic. One cannot forget the savage criticism the ECI had faced last year, when it had conducted the assembly polls in the midst of the devastating second wave of Covid. In May last year, the Madras High Court told the ECI that "You should be put on murder charges probably," that "You are the most irresponsible over the last few months in not stopping political parties from wanton abuse of the Covid-19 protocol," and that "You are the only institution responsible for the situation that we are in today."

Incumbent CEC Sushil Chandra, while coming out with the timetable for the

# A case for our mental privacy



**BLOWN IN THE WIND**

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Dr Shamsad Mortuza is the pro-vice-chancellor of the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

THE thoughtfulness of my son-in-law in printing a personalised letter on a blanket as a paper-themed anniversary gift to my daughter enthralled me. This new generation is full of surprises, even when some of these surprises are influenced by the media. Otherwise, who among you has heard of paper as the theme for a first-anniversary gift? I am sure some lifestyle magazines have promoted this year-by-year gift idea to carve out a niche business. I was sharing my bemusement with a colleague, and lo, my Facebook wall offered me a video on how to send a paper blanket to a daughter. I did not browse any keyword to prompt the suggestion, and the online platform pitted my love for my daughter against that of my son-in-law. Nice try, Mark Zuckerberg! During the same *adda*, I was telling my colleague that it was a jailable offence to forget one's spouse's birthday in Samoa—something that I learnt on Facebook. That evening, my colleague received a video suggestion on some strange laws including the one I mentioned. I gave my phone a suspicious look. Has it been spying on me?

The mind-reading algorithm is very much here. About two years back, in a blog post, Facebook announced that it was creating brain-machine interfaces that could collect thoughts from human neurons and translate them into corresponding images and words. The research initially aimed at helping patients with paralysis, giving the disabled individuals a much-desired medium to express their thoughts without moving any muscle. Many companies, including the US military and Elon Musk's Neuralink, have been engaged in developing such brain-computer interfaces for some time now. For me, it was an eye-opener to realise that such neurotechnology already existed, and I had been its unknowing subject. I felt like I was wearing the proverbial Emperor's New Cloth that failed glaringly to hide the bare self of the wearer.

Gone are the days when privacy used to be a concept. The science behind it is no longer fiction. It is embedded in the devices that we are carrying in our hands as an extension of our bodies. The social media app on my phone can now figure out what I do, see or hear. It is the modern-day angelic scribes that sit on our shoulders recording everything for the judgement day. Through functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), our devices can now measure blood flow to the brain as a proxy for neural activity, paint a corresponding image, and translate them into words.

As a student of culture, this worries me, because I have been owned by an agency that has the intention of using my mind as its own frontier. It has every intention of colonising my mind. It is a type of "imperialism" that Edward Said defined as "thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others." Similarly, Facebook has taken over my virtual space to control the space it does not own or possess. At the same time, as a student of humanities, I am appalled by the consent I have given to Facebook to subjugate me. While glossing over some fine print, little did I know that I had made myself vulnerable to Big Data. The exciting video threads, news bites have lured me into joining a platform, manufacturing my consent and making me a helpless cog in the browsing machine. I am responsible for my own virtual enslavement. In the prison house of cyberspace, my brain, which has been the ultimate reservoir of our privacy frontier, has stopped being private.

Traditionally, we have heard of Big Brother state machinery carrying out clandestine surveillance operations on its subjects. It seems intelligence agencies are not the only ones prying into our private lives. Our data is up for grabs for anyone who is interested. Facebook has already been accused of peddling information to

through which artificial intelligence (AI) could hack human brains. For the safe operation of these new technologies, Harari suggested observance of three principles so that no agencies obtain "a frightening accumulation of power." These include: 1) Making sure that the data is used to help, rather than

insurrection in the US. We were once again reminded of the dubious role of Facebook when it failed to prevent far-right groups from planning the US Capitol siege. It tracked the "stop the steal" hate messages, but did not alert the authorities concerned. The social media platform has been equally guilty of being complacent

ILLUSTRATION: VECTORPOUCH/FREEPIK



different agencies, including advertising firms. The digital marketing network has thus targeted me as a potential client. How do I know? While researching on this topic, I was dogged by a "Study Digital Marketing in Europe" campaign. The app analysed my profile to think that my admin role involves educational marketing. I have thus become a product of neuro-capitalism without my foreknowledge. The question is: How do we protect our privacy, our brain data from these all-aggressive giant technological innovations? The danger is bigger than we can imagine.

Certain authoritarian companies are already using this brain-mapping technology to measure the emotional and cognitive health of their employees. They are given EEG headgears so that the employers would know the emotional level of their staff members. They have been used for brainwashing. Such technologies can very well be used for criminal investigation and interrogation. The group that has access to this power will rule over the rest, turning them into mere zombies that Satyajit Ray caricatured in "Hirak Rajar Deshe."

Yuval Noah Harari, the author of "Sapiens," in a recent interview with CBS 60 Minutes, warned us of the process

**While most countries are giving in to the manufactured consent of AI, the Latin American country Chile has been an exception. Addressing the mental privacy issue against the backdrop of the rapid encroachment of brain-computer interfaces, the country adopted a neuro-protection bill last July.**

manipulate; 2) Monitoring any agency that has the power to monitor us, so that it employs its power responsibly; and 3) Ensuring that the data is not concentrated in just one place to avoid dictatorship.

This is easier said than done, especially in societies where mind-reading can be exploited for personal gains. While most countries are giving in to the manufactured consent of AI, the Latin American country Chile has been an exception. Addressing the mental privacy issue against the backdrop of the rapid encroachment of brain-computer interfaces, the country adopted a neuro-protection bill last July. Chile's parliament agreed that neural data is a special kind of information related to our essential self as it defines our identities. The bill considers neural data as an organic tissue. "By treating neuro-data as an organ, the law prohibits Chileans from being compelled to give up brain data and, crucially, its collection will require explicit 'opt-in' authorisation," wrote Abel Wajnerman Paz, a Chilean university teacher, on Restofworld.org.

Do we need similar legal protection? The issue resurfaced during last week's review of the January 6, 2021 Capitol

during the genocide in Myanmar and ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia. It is said that 90 percent of Facebook users reside outside of the US, where the company employs 10 percent of its surveillance efforts. Whereas for 10 percent of its users in the US, it uses 90 percent surveillance apparatuses. To safeguard ourselves from the malpractices and misuses of social media, we, therefore, will need our own safety valves.

In theory, access to brain information is good for research, education, health, and entertainment. In reality, it will allow certain groups to acquire more power for their own sake. A state agency may temporarily benefit from its access to the brain data of its own citizens, but the problem arises when other agencies make inroads in cultivating choices and manufacturing consents. It is no coincidence that Facebook is not only monitoring the purchasing behaviour of my family, but also creating a familial contest to encourage me into starting a new behaviour.

The paper blanket for my daughter is a cute gesture from her husband. To make me compete for the cuteness is perverse. And the machine, without an ethical code written by humans, will never understand that.

**QUOTABLE Quote**



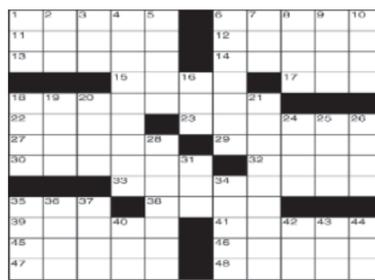
ISAAC ASIMOV

American writer (1920-1992)

**Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent.**

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

- ACROSS**  
1 Puts away  
6 Hold tightly  
11 Vietnam's capital  
12 Ham's device  
13 Correct, as text  
14 Even a little  
15 College head  
17 "The Simpsons" bartender  
18 "Password" or "Jeopardy!"  
22 Manual reader  
23 Nome's home  
27 Solemn  
29 Prank  
30 Treated, as leather  
32 Secluded
- valley  
33 Articles of clothing  
35 Tennis court divider  
38 Fabric worker  
39 Banish  
41 Thin coins  
45 Make broader  
46 Deeply impressed  
47 Spirited horse  
48 Concur
- DOWN**  
1 That woman  
2 Woolen cap  
3 Count start  
4 Curious  
5 Factions  
6 Healthy snack  
7 Mouse's cousin  
8 Genesis name  
9 Farm sight
- 10 Warsaw native  
16 "That's it!"  
18 Blast of wind  
19 Nick and Nora's dog  
20 Cruel  
21 Peripatetic  
24 Sax great Getz  
25 Highland attire  
26 High cards  
28 Cul-de-sac  
31 Parched  
34 TV, radio, papers, etc.  
35 Latest word  
36 Way to go  
37 Shore eroder  
40 Director  
42 Ruin  
43 Lamb's mother  
44 Take in



**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**



**BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER**



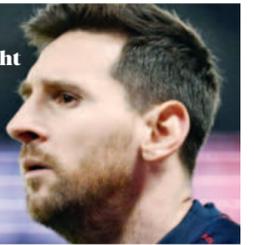
**BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT**



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.

It has taken me longer than I thought to be OK but I'm almost recovered and I'm looking forward to getting back on the field.

LIONEL MESSI



South Africa's Rassie van der Dussen and Temba Bavuma embrace each other after the winning runs were scored on the fourth day of the third and final Test against India in Cape Town on Friday. The Proteas won the Test by seven wickets to take the series 2-1.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Tigers return, await tough challenges

SPORTS REPORT

Mominul Haque and Co will reach Dhaka today following a successful tour of New Zealand, where Bangladesh registered a historic win in the first Test at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui and eventually shared a Test series with the Kiwis for the first time.

Team director Khaled Mahmud and experienced campaigner Mushfiqur Rahim, however, arrived in the country two days early.

The eight-wicket victory in the first Test will certainly boost the morale of the side ahead of a challenging year.

The cricketers will get busy as the upcoming (BPL) is set to begin on January 21.

The Tigers then host Afghanistan for three ODIs and two T20Is in February-March before embarking on a trip to South Africa after almost five years for three ODIs and two Tests.

## 'It was a proper team win'

REUTERS, CAPE TOWN

South Africa captain Dean Elgar admits he had to show some tough love to his players, which he believes was behind their turnaround in fortunes as they completed a seven-wicket victory over India at Newlands on Friday to claim the series 2-1.

The home side were well beaten by 113 runs in the first Test in Pretoria, but bounced back, against expectations with their young side, to win in both Johannesburg and Cape Town against the number one ranked team in the world.

"We have a young, talented group," Elgar told reporters. "The experience isn't there, but we are gaining it and getting better every day."

"It was unreal to see how a group that doesn't have the 'names' could get together and play as one. This is a proper unit. It was a proper team win."

Elgar admits he did not pull any punches after the loss in Pretoria and says there were some tough conversations within the group.

"Ultimately if you want to operate at a high-performance level you need to have tough, hard chats. If guys don't like it, that

is up for them to deal with," he said.

"I am a bit of an old school mentality with a new school twist, but I laid down some proper challenges to some senior players to stand up and respond. It was brilliant to see the guys take the message on board."

"If you want to be world number one in the future, you have to compete and beat the best."

**"Having collapses every now and then is not a good thing and we need to analyse and correct that moving forward."**

Meanwhile, India captain Virat Kohli said the team's batting line-up "must be looked into" for Tests away from home as he pinned the blame on their inability to cope in the unfamiliar conditions.

"One of the challenges we have faced touring abroad is to make sure we capitalise on the momentum when it is on our side. When we do that we have won

tests, but when we haven't it has cost us the match," Kohli told reporters.

"It (the reason for the series defeat) is batting, we can't pinpoint any other aspect of our game as a team. The batting has to be looked into, there is no running away from that."

"Having collapses every now and then is not a good thing and we need to analyse and correct that moving forward."

Kohli said the fact that his side were expected to win speaks volumes for their recent improvement on the road, but that will make this loss all the more disappointing as they still seek a first series victory in South Africa.

"We know how far we have come as a team. The fact that we came to South Africa and people expect us to win is testimony to what we have done in the past," he said.

"But that does not guarantee you results, you still have to come out and play hard cricket, which we failed to do this time round."

"I am not going to stand here and say, 'oh, but we won in Australia and we won in England', we have to turn up to every series and try and win that one and we still haven't done that in South Africa."

## Djokovic to fight visa cancellation

REUTERS, MELBOURNE

Australia cancelled Novak Djokovic's visa on the grounds his presence in the country might excite anti-vaccination sentiment, and not because he posed a health threat being unvaccinated against COVID-19, his lawyers told a court on Friday night.

Immigration Minister Alex Hawke's decision was "patently irrational", Djokovic's lawyer Nicholas Wood told the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, explaining that would be the main reason for asking the court to quash the second cancellation of his visa.

His lawyers are pressing for the case to be heard on Sunday, so that if he is successful and is allowed to stay, he will be able to compete in the Australian Open, which starts on Monday, in a bid to win a record 21st major title.

In the meantime the court said he would be put in detention from 8 am on Saturday, with allowance to attend his lawyers' offices under guard to prepare for the case and watch the court hearing, possibly on Sunday.

Djokovic was detained for several days after arriving in Australia more than a week ago, and was released last Monday when the same court quashed his visa cancellation on the grounds that the Australian Border Force had treated him unfairly. When he first arrived, immigration officials cancelled his visa on the grounds that he did not have enough evidence to back up a medical exemption from Australia's COVID-19 vaccination requirement for incoming travellers.



However the immigration minister's decision on Friday to cancel his visa again was based on a completely different reason, Djokovic's lawyers said.

"The underlying new rationale is not a direct risk to others. It's that Mr Djokovic being in Australia, in Melbourne in particular, by being here will excite anti-vax sentiment - radically different approach," his lawyer Wood told the court.

In contrast to the Australian Border Force last week, Wood said, the minister had found that Djokovic complied with the law, he posed only a negligible risk to others, with natural immunity from recent infection, he had a medical reason for not being vaccinated and was a man of good standing. Wood said the jurisdictional error which should lead to the cancellation being revoked "might be explained as irrationality".

The government has agreed not to deport Djokovic at least until the case has concluded, Judge Anthony Kelly said.

## 'Competitive' BCL set for final showdown

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) Independence Cup final between Central Zone and South Zone will get underway at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium today in what would be a repeat of the BCL four-day format final.

The final would not have the established stars of the Bangladesh setup with Shakib Al Hasan opting not to play the final while the likes of North Zone's Mahmudullah Riyad and East Zone's Tamim Iqbal failing to make the final. Mustafizur Rahman of Central Zone may also miss the final due to a back injury but he was still a cause for hope in South Zone's attempt to turn the tables from the longer format final.

Despite that, there was no lack of competitive air as South Zone manager Jamal Babu reiterated to reporters that his team were out for revenge after losing the final of the four-day format between the two sides.

"We lost the four day match. We have come prepared and were able to beat them in the last match. We have a bowler like Mustafizur and hopefully we can become champions," he said.

While Central Zone lost their last match against South Zone, skipper Mosaddek Hossain was optimistic.

"We're not under any pressure. We took many lessons from our last game and hopefully we can use that to our advantage.

When the wickets are good it's better for bowlers and batters to improve on their skill. How the wicket was in the last game would help Bangladesh cricket as a whole," Mosaddek said ahead of the final.

While Mosaddek said that it was a folly to have a different plan for Mustafizur because of his exceptional skills, South Zone skipper Zakir Hasan was waiting for good news on the pacer's recovery. "We will wait for Mustafizur till the last minute," Zakir said of Mustafizur.

The players looked focused during an optional practice session yesterday with Soumya Sarkar, Mosaddek and Mohammad Mithun going through the motions ahead of the final. For selector Habibur Bashar, the tournament has been competitive.

"There are only four teams. Usually finalists are decided quickly but this time we had to wait till the last moment. It was very competitive and the strengths of the teams were equal. The players were very serious and they enjoyed their wins. They owned the team. It was good," he said.

The participation from the senior players in the national side also helped raise spirits.

"Definitely it's an added bonus [to have top national stars in these types of tournaments]. The top players play in three formats and their schedules are very busy. If they play even one or two games, the players outside national team get inspired. It's a huge boost for them to play with those stars," Bashar said.



Australia's Travis Head (R) celebrates scoring a century against England with teammate Cameron Green on the first day of the fifth Test in Hobart on Friday. Head scored 101 while Green added 74 as Australia recovered from a terrible start to post 241 for six at stumps.

PHOTO: AFP

**We haven't worked with the new coach, so we don't know him yet. But we are taking his arrival positively for something better in the near future.**

National striker Suman Reza



## Focus on grassroots: the only way out?

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national men's football team, who continue to reside at the bottom of FIFA rankings, had once showcased consistent performances and achieved international success despite serious limitations. To add insult to injury, in terms of current rankings, the 24 teams below Bangladesh are not considered as serious footballing nations.

When the country's struggle in the recent past alongside the dearth of quality players is factored in, does the appointment of another foreign coach allows room for optimism?

"Where Bangladesh football stands now, no coach in the world can get you results. That's because there is a huge crisis of players. Many don't understand this but want results," opined former national striker Alfaz Ahmed, who won silverware with the national team in the 1999 South Asian Games and the 2003 SAFF Championship.

"Currently the [established] players have no alternative, which was not the case during our time. There were at least three to four players in each position. Besides, we didn't get enough facilities," the 50-year-old added.

"I think there is no way but to focus on the district leagues to produce more players. Instead of spending crores behind the foreign coaches of the national team, the federation could offer [BDT] 50 lakh to 1 crore [prize] money for each competition, so that the clubs can be encouraged to maintain age-group teams by hunting talent from the district level," Alfaz concluded.



## A NEW BEGINNING or another year wasted?



ATIQUE ANAM

As Bangladesh national football team braces for a new beginning under new coach Javier Cabrera with optimism that things will finally take a positive turn after a year of turmoil, experimentation and failure, time is probably right to remind everyone that things can only change as much as they want it to change.

Following Jamie Day's release from national duties towards the end of last year, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) experimented with two successful club coaches -- Oscar Bruzon of Bashundhara Kings and Mario Lemos of Abahani -- in two regional tournaments.

It's safe to say that those two appointments came out of desperation and as stop-gap measures rather than any conviction or part of any long-term plan. Expectedly those experiments failed to bring any positive result, prompting the game's local governing body to look for something new.

What it has come up with is basically a coach with similar attributes to that of Day when the Englishman was first roped in, but perhaps with very different philosophy of football.

Whatever his philosophy,

the Spaniard will have plenty of opportunities to make a mark during his one-year tenure. While the planned friendlies against Indonesia have been cancelled, BFF is likely to use the March FIFA window and other windows available later in the year. The biggest challenge awaits in the form of AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers in June and the likelihood of the SAFF Championship towards the end of the year.

**Spanish coach Javier Cabrera became the 24th foreign coach in Bangladesh's history, and the 13th foreign coach appointed in 13 years under the leadership of Kazi Salahuddin, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president.**

It is good that BFF is giving the new gaffer a number of assignments to prove his worth. Another good thing about this contract is that Cabrera will have to stay in Bangladesh for the most part of the year, allowing him time to watch the players in the domestic leagues closely and develop an understanding and bonding with the national team players, something

that is very important if positive results are to be expected.

However, only ensuring time and togetherness will not yield the desired results unless the coach is allowed a free hand in implementing his ideas. There ought to be non-interference from the BFF executive members in selection of players once the coach is familiar with the pool of players available.

Another aspect that needs ensuring is the fairness of the leagues -- both premier league and championship league -- so that teams and the players can show their true quality on the pitch. In that regard, refereeing will need to be of the highest standard, so much so that the match officials will not shy away from using their authority, not mindful of which one is a big team and which one is a small.

The new coach will have the advantage of starting without much expectation of him, but come June onwards, there will be a lot of expectations and pressure. How the Spaniard will handle that pressure on and off the field will eventually decide whether 2022 is another year of wasted experiments or a turning point for Bangladesh football.

## 'No FA has a role in developing its nation's football'

Legendary footballer Kazi Salahuddin has been at the helm of the Bangladesh Football Federation for 13 years but the national team has not made satisfactory progress in that time. The BFF boss spoke to *The Daily Star's* Anisur Rahman, sharing his thoughts about the new coach and the team's plans for the next year. The excerpts are below:

**The Daily Star (DS):** What changes are you expecting in this year under the new coach?

**Kazi Salahuddin (KS):** It was inevitable that we would have to appoint a new coach following the last coach's [Jamie Day's] performance, decisions and remarks, which forced me into a decision. We looked at some high-profile coaches with high price tags, but ultimately we got Javier Cabrera at the right price for one year. What I want is for him to improve the performances of the national football team by 10 per cent compared to recent performances. If there is 10 per cent development,

### BANGLADESH'S FIFA RANKINGS

Best	110	1996
Present	186	2021
Lowest	192	2018

### BANGLADESH'S MAJOR SUCCESS

- Champions, Four-nation tournament in Myanmar, 1995
- Champions, South Asian Games in Nepal, 1999
- Champions, SAFF Championship in Bangladesh, 2003
- Champions, South Asian Games in Bangladesh, 2010

we become a power in South Asia. If Cabrera can perform well, it will be very good. Otherwise, we will have to decide further.

**DS:** Similar to previous coaches, Cabrera also does not have experience managing a national team. How optimistic are you?

**KS:** If I wanted to sign a coach who has experience working with national teams, it would cost US \$40-50 thousand per month. What we are doing is signing a coach within our capabilities.

**DS:** What international engagements lie ahead for the national team?

**KS:** Bangladesh are supposed to take part in the AFC Asian Cup Qualifying round in June. For the national team, we want to avail all FIFA windows in January, March and September. We have already decided to play two friendly matches against Indonesia, subject to meeting the criteria set by hosts Indonesia. We will also play friendly matches in two more windows to improve our FIFA ranking. Apart from that, the Bangladesh Olympic team is supposed to take part in the football event at the Asian Games in China in September.

**DS:** What are the developmental steps you have taken to groom quality players in future?

**KS:** This question was answered many times before. 210 countries play football and clubs bear the responsibility of developing a nation's football. If you count the top 20 clubs of the world, everyone spends \$230-260 million behind the players per year. No national federation has a role in developing its nation's football but I find that our clubs are more interested in ready-made players instead of nursing age-group players.



## 'It looks like they play football for the sake of it'

**Grassroots football plays a major role in the scouting of talented players who can go on to have an impact at the highest levels for both club and country. In Bangladesh, however, the focus on grassroots development is still very low.**

Khaled Ahmed, an AFC-C licensed coach who coached the Sylhet Under-17 divisional team to the title of the Bangabandhu U-17 Gold Cup 2021, spoke about the current condition of the grassroots culture and its future with *The Daily Star's* Ashfaq Ul Mushfiq. The excerpts are below:

**The Daily Star (DS):** What is the current condition of grassroots football in Bangladesh?

**Khaled Ahmed (KA):** Not that good to be honest. The idea of grassroots is very new in this country and the amount of work done for the grassroots is very small.

**DS:** You are the head coach of the Sylhet Under-17 divisional team and also coach in local academies. What is the daily routine at these academies?

**KA:** There isn't any proper structure in these academies compared to the likes of BKSP. The players come to practice



in the field in the afternoon and go back home after training.

**DS:** What experience and qualifications do the coaches who train these young players have? Why can't they produce players of a similar ilk to those we had during our golden years?

**KA:** Most coaches don't have any academic coaching licenses. Even if some of these coaches get their licenses done, they still train players with a very casual approach. They barely do any activation work before training, let alone teach the players the basics of the game. I can give many

examples like this and I think that is why many players around the country lack basic skills in terms of first touch and passing. It looks like they play football for the sake of it.

**DS:** What are the obstacles grassroots players face in their development? Why do many fade away?

**KA:** The main problem is poverty. Most of these players come from very poor families who are unable to provide financial support. This is why many of these players can't continue. A player of the Sylhet U-17 team, I won't name him, came to me saying he won't be able to play football anymore. He went to Dhaka to make a living and support his family. That, coupled with the absence of good coaches, means they are missing the essential components that will make them skilled footballers.

**DS:** How are you helping such players overcome obstacles? How are these

academies funded?

**KA:** The funding comes out of my pocket. A few cousins of mine who live in the United Kingdom support me from time to time. We need to buy balls, boots, training kits and accessories. I had to fund most of the things we have now. I've gone to many people for funding but returned empty-handed. Mind you, I don't get paid as a district-division coach. And I have to run my family as well.

**DS:** What's the process of these players making it to higher levels?

**KA:** Our Anik Deb Borma became the best player of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup. Seeing his play, he got called for a trial at Chittagong Abahani by Maruful Islam. Four of my players will play the U-18 B league for Bashundhara Kings and three for Mohammedan. Three more went for a trial at the Bangladesh Air Force senior team. I am confident they will do great.

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The street in front of Holy Cross College in the capital is packed with people, a majority of whom are not wearing masks. Most of them are guardians of students who sat for an admission test of the institution yesterday. Although health guidelines were followed inside the centre, they were disregarded outside, increasing the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Prof Tajmeri sent to jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Prof Tajmeri SA Islam, adviser to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, has been sent to jail in a case filed over obstructing police from performing duties during an anti-government demonstration of the party in the capital's Uttara in 2018.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Arafatul Rakib rejected her bail plea after she was produced before the court on Thursday, her lawyer Masud Ahmed Talukdar told The Daily Star.

On September 23, 2018, the case was filed with Uttara (West) Police Station, accusing 134 people.

The High Court granted bail to Prof Tajmeri, a former teacher at Dhaka University, on October 18 the same year in the case till submission of probe report.

On March 4, 2020, police submitted a charge sheet against 75 people, including Prof Tajmeri. Accepting the charge sheet, a

Dhaka court issued an arrest warrant against her on May 7 that year, Prof Tajmeri's lawyer added.

Later, Uttara police arrested her on Thursday. She was sent to Kashimpur Central Jail yesterday, according to Uttara (West) Police Station.

Prof Tajmeri was involved with White Panel, pro-BNP teachers' association of Dhaka University.

She was also the former dean of science faculty, chairperson of Chemistry department and provost of Ruqayyah Hall.



## BNP rescheduling 32 rallies due to Covid surge

UNB, Dhaka

The BNP has decided to reschedule its 32 rallies in different districts due to a sharp rise in Covid infection rate.

"We earlier said the restriction [on public rallies in open spaces] imposed by the government is illogical and ineffective," said BNP standing committee member Nazrul Islam Khan.

"Even then, we've decided to reschedule our rallies, taking into account the public interest," he added.

The BNP leader was speaking at a press conference at the party chief's Gulshan office yesterday.

The rallies were scheduled to be held in six days on January 8, 12, 15, 17, 22 and 24 to mount pressure on the government to allow ailing BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to go abroad for better treatment.

Replying to a question, Nazrul said they did not postpone their rallies as they have only rescheduled those.

The fresh dates for the rallies in 32 districts will be announced later.

Amid the spike in Covid cases due to the transmission of the Omicron variant, the government imposed fresh restrictions on public gatherings, social programmes, political and religious events, which came into effect on Thursday.

BNP leader Nazrul, however, said, "The main purpose of the restrictions is to obstruct our programmes of the ongoing movement as the government has failed to thwart those by imposing section 144."

## Bangladesh reports 6 more Covid deaths

Positivity rate rises to 14.66pc

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh logged six more Covid-19 linked deaths and 4,378 new cases in 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday as the deadly infections keep rising in the country.

With the fresh cases reported after testing 30,366 samples, the daily positivity rate surged to 14.66 percent, up from Thursday's 12.03 percent, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

On August 26 last year, the country reported 4,698 Covid cases along with 102 deaths. The positivity rate was 13.77 percent that day.

The latest numbers took the country's total fatalities to 28,129 while the caseload went up to 1,609,042.

Among the six deceased, two were men and four women. The mortality rate remained static at 1.75 percent during the 24-hour period.

## WHO approves two new Covid treatments

China suspends more int'l flights over Omicron surge; HK bans transit passengers from most of world

AGENCIES

The World Health Organization approved two new Covid-19 treatments yesterday, growing the arsenal of tools along with vaccines to stave off severe illness and death from the virus.

The news comes as Omicron cases fill hospitals around the world with the WHO predicting half of Europe will be infected by March.

In their recommendation in British medical Journal the BMJ, WHO experts said arthritis drug baricitinib used with corticosteroids to treat severe or critical Covid patients led to better survival rates and reduced need for ventilators.

Experts also recommended synthetic antibody treatment Sotrovimab for people with non-serious Covid at highest risk of hospitalisation, such as the elderly, people with immunodeficiencies or chronic diseases such as diabetes.

Sotrovimab's benefits for people not at risk of hospitalisation were deemed insignificant and the WHO said its effectiveness against new variants like Omicron was "still uncertain".

Only three other treatments for Covid-19 have received WHO approval, starting with corticosteroids for severely ill patients in September 2020.

Corticosteroids are inexpensive and widely available and fight inflammation that commonly

accompanies severe cases.

The coronavirus has killed at least 5,540,918 people worldwide since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources yesterday.

China suspended dozens of international flights yesterday amid a global surge in Omicron cases, while the city of Shanghai curbed tourist activity as it rushed to head off local Covid-19 infections as imported cases rose.

Hong Kong authorities said the city's airport will suspend operations of transit flights from around 150 countries and territories considered high risk because of the coronavirus for a month, deepening the global financial hub's isolation, reports Reuters.

Schools in the Philippine capital Manila were ordered yesterday to suspend online classes for a week, as an Omicron-driven record surge in infections ravages the metropolis of 13 million.

US President Joe Biden on Thursday said he would send more military health workers to hospitals in six states.

He also promised to provide free masks and more free tests to help Americans tackle the fast-spreading Omicron variant. British researchers, meanwhile, said young children and babies are proportionally more likely to be hospitalised with Omicron compared to older children than with previous variants but the cases are still mild, adding the overall picture was reassuring.

## HELIUM CYLINDER BLAST

### Five injured brought to Dhaka

STAR REPORT

Five people, severely injured in a helium cylinder explosion in Nangalkot upazila of Cumilla, were brought to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery yesterday for better treatment.

The victims are Saiful Islam, 12, Sabbir, 13, Emran Hossain Emon, 15, Abdur Rouf, 32, and Anwar Hossain, 35.

Dr Samanta Lal Sen, coordinator of the institute, said two patients - Saiful and Rouf - had around 35 percent burns on their bodies and that they were in critical condition.

Dr Sefayet Ullah, assistant prof of the Department of Surgery at Cumilla Medical College Hospital, said two children underwent surgeries there on Thursday night.

Some 10 to 11 patients, mostly children, were undergoing treatment at the hospital, he said.

Meanwhile, Nangalkot upazila administration yesterday formed a three-member probe committee to investigate the incident.

Ashrafal Haque, assistant commissioner (land) of the upazila, was made the chief of the probe body.



A view of an abandoned building inside the staff quarters of the deputy postmaster general's office in Tangail. Locals said for the last two decades, it has been a den for unsavoury activities such as drug abuse and other crimes. The photo was taken yesterday. Story on page 5.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

## 5 arrested over gang rape of teenage girl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Five people were arrested in Natore on Thursday night over the gang rape of a teenage girl.

Acting on a tip-off, police conducted drives in Chhatni area of Natore Sadar upazila and arrested the five, said Monsur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Natore Sadar Police Station.

Police also rescued the 16-year-old victim from the same area early yesterday, he added.

In the afternoon, a Natore court sent the arrestees to jail after police produced them before it in a case filed by the victim's father.

**Star HEALTHLINE**

Children with ADHD can thrive with parent-teacher SUPPORT

STAR HEALTH DESK

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is the most common neurodevelopmental disorder in childhood, which often continues into adulthood.

ADHD includes a combination of persistent issues such as difficulty sustaining attention, hyperactivity and impulsive behaviour.

Children with ADHD may struggle with low self-esteem, troubled relationships and poor performance in school.

They might daydream, lose things, squirm or fidget, talk too much, make careless mistakes, have a hard time resisting temptation and have difficulty getting along with others.

But that does not mean children with ADHD cannot succeed in school. There are many things both parents and teachers can do to help children with ADHD thrive in the classroom.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

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# The mystery of Chawkbazar's lost ARTEFACTS

**Dispute between DoA, excavation team leaves history of relics mired in the unknown**

**In 2016, a government technical committee appointed Prof Sufi Mostafizur Rahman, from Jahangirnagar University, as supervisor of the excavation site. However, despite repeated requests from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the DoA, he is yet to submit his report.**

TARUN SARKAR

Years after some 30-40 ancient artefacts were discovered from inside the old central jail compound in Old Dhaka's Chawkbazar area, information regarding the total number of artefacts at the site or their age is yet to be ascertained due to an internal issue between the Department of Archaeology (DoA) and the excavation team.

The artefacts include ancient coins, cowry, pieces of clay pots, terracotta balls and more, said sources at the DoA.

In 2016, a government technical committee appointed Prof Sufi Mostafizur Rahman, of Jahangirnagar University's archaeology department, as supervisor of the excavation site. However, despite repeated requests from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the DoA, he is yet to submit his report.

Earlier on April 11 this year, The Daily Star ran a report titled 'Chawkbazar Jail: Ruins offer trip deep into Old Dhaka history'. Following the report, authorities concerned started pressurising Prof Mostafizur to submit his report.

Contacted, the professor said the report

the jail authorities appointed him.

On June 11, 2017, the DoA gave approval to Home Ministry to conduct excavation at the site, imposing three conditions, which included that the excavation work must be conducted in the presence of a representative of the department.

The department proceeded to assign Razia Sultana, former assistant custodian of Lalbagh Fort Museum, as its representative.

Interestingly, the excavation team led by Prof Sufi completed the excavation works by July 24, 2017, the same day that Razi Sultana joined the team.

After this, Razi in a letter to her superiors claimed that she was not fully aware about the numbers of artefacts that were found in the site as the excavation work was completed before she joined.

Following the letter, officials of the Department of Archaeology tried to visit the site to scrutinise the artefacts, but they were denied access by the jail authorities.

Later, in December 2019, the department's director general (DG) sent a letter to the secretary of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs explaining the overall situation.

took some photographs of the artefacts.

Now, they are in the process of studying the artefacts.

Asked about the numbers of artefacts at the site, he asked The Daily Star to speak to Halima Afroz.

Contacted, Halima declined to comment on the issue and suggested this correspondent talk to Rakhi Roy, Dhaka Divisional regional director of the DoA.

However, despite multiple attempts, this correspondent could not reach Rakhi—she did not respond to the calls or the text



messages left for her.

Contacted, technical committee member and eminent historian Professor Muntasir Mamun said, "Earlier, we had decided to showcase the artefacts found in the old jail compound. We requested the jail authorities several times to publish the excavation report, but they said they were still trying to collect it." He opined the report should be published immediately for the sake of public interest.

Another member of the technical committee eminent architect Prof Abu Sayeed M Ahmed said, "We cannot devise the next plan of action on this issue in absence of the report."

The project's director, Home Ministry Joint Secretary Md Ali Reza Siddiquee, could not be contacted over phone.

Contacted, Brigadier General ASM Anisul Haque, Inspector General of Prisons, said he had only recently joined his post and as such was unable to make a comment on the issue. Earlier in April this year, Prof Sufi told The Daily Star that he conducted the excavation for around three months at four spots in the prison between 2017 and 2018.

"I have got some significant ancient archaeological evidence there. But the technical committee asked me not to publish my findings. They are even barring me from working there," he had said.

That time, this correspondent contacted Prof Muntasir Mamun, who denied the allegations and said Prof Sufi had personally published a brochure containing information on the excavation.

Prof Sufi wanted to hold a press conference to disclose the findings without taking the consent of the technical committee, he added.

"We repeatedly asked him [Sufi] to submit a report with the findings before the technical committee. But it is a matter of great regret that he did not do it," said Prof Muntasir Mamun in April this year.

## Brimming with History

Built on the banks of the rivers Buriganga, Turag, Balu and Tongi, Dhaka was urbanised centuries ago. For the last five hundred years, the city has gone through numerous iterations, but Chawkbazar has remained an important marker of the city's past and present. It was the political, administrative and commercial hub during the Sultanate, Mughal, and Nawab periods, and as such, has long been designated as a historically and archeologically significant area of the capital.

In terms of both number and variety, the highest number of artefacts has been found in Chawkbazar in Dhaka. An ancient stone statue of Basudev was found during an excavation on the Churhatta Mosque premises in 1906. In 2011, the Dhaka Architectural Writing Committee found a Nateshwar statue – a prominent symbol in art from the Chandra dynasty, dating back to the 10th and 11th century – at Sarangodhor monastery in the area.

The oldest artefact from the Sultanate period in Chawkbazar is an inscription about the renovation of Urdu Road Mosque, excavated in the 19th century. According to the inscription – now preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum – the construction of the arch of the mosque in Chawkbazar was completed in 1459.

It is still unclear exactly when the Chawkbazar Fort was constructed, but it can be confirmed that it existed during the rule of the Bengal Sultanate between the 14th and 16th centuries. At the time, it was surrounded by palaces, treasury, courts and administrative offices. The fort was possibly renovated before Islam Khan reached Dhaka after being appointed as a subedar during the Mughal period.

The area's political and commercial importance started to decline with the beginning of East India Company rule. The office of the then naye-e-nazim, who was the administrative chief of Dhaka, was relocated to Nimtoli Palace from Chawkbazar Fort. The fort eventually became a mental asylum and prison. The latter remained in operation during British and Pakistani rule and in independent Bangladesh, till it was finally closed down in 2016.

This jailhouse has a significant place in recent history too, bearing witness to the anti-British movement, Language Movement, and the Liberation War. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and many key important figures in the country's politics served time here as political prisoners. The assassination of four national leaders took place here in 1975.

The government formed a technical committee – Committee for Documentation in Architectural Sites in Dhaka – comprising representatives from the home ministry, prison authorities and Department of Archaeology of Bangladesh, architects, planners, and historians in 2016 to oversee the process of turning the old prison into a heritage site and urban oasis.

Historians say that if exploration continues in Chawkbazar, more artefacts can be discovered in the future.



Historians and archaeologists think more archaeological evidence from the Mughal, Sultanate and Sen eras or before these can be found at the old central jail.

PHOTOS: RASHED SHUMON

will be submitted, but could not say when.

The Chawkbazar fort was constructed during the Sultanate rule between the 14th and 16th centuries. Eventually, the fort was turned into a mental asylum 1819 and a prison in 1836. The asylum was shut down after some years, but the prison came to be the Dhaka Central Jail and remained in operation till 45 years after the country's independence.

After July 2016, inmates were shifted to the newly built jail in Keraniganj, as the government took initiatives to preserve this historic site.

The same year, the government formed the technical committee with representatives from the home ministry, prison authorities and DoA, along with architects, planners, and historians. It is now overseeing the work of converting the old prison into an urban oasis.

It was this committee that proposed the name of Prof Sufi Mostafizur Rahman as the supervisor of the excavation, following which

On the basis of the letter, the cultural affairs secretary in January 2020 wrote to the secretary of the Home Ministry, citing that the excavation team did not comply with the conditions of excavation.

Later, the ministry asked the jail authorities to take necessary measures to publish the excavation report regarding the ancient artefacts found at the site.

In response, jail authorities sent a letter to the DoA, seeking representatives to prepare the list of artefacts.

The department appointed two representatives. Of them, one was Md Tanjilur Rahman, assistant custodian of Lalbagh Fort Museum, who was made a full-time representative, while Halima Afroz, custodian of Lalbagh Fort Museum, was made a part-time representative.

Contacted, Tanjilur said he along with the excavation team visited the excavation site two or three times in July and August. They





RIGHTS ADVOCACY

# A call for overhauling the probation system

**Probation is a sentence handed down to offenders in lieu of jail time. This is to facilitate social reintegration. It allows a probationer to live a normal life in the community and to readjust to socially acceptable attitudes without being confined to jail.**

SHISHIR MANIR

Under the supervision of a probation officer, the probationers are often discharged on the conditions to perform social, and community works like planting trees, reading books, taking care of elderly parents and children, etc.

Three legislations govern our probation system, namely the Probation of Offenders Ordinance 1960 for offenders in general; the Children Act, 2013 for children; and the Special Privileges for Convicted Women Act, 2006 for women.

Under the 1960 Ordinance, when a court is of the opinion that, having regard to the circumstances including the nature of the offence and the character of the offender, it is expedient to do so, the court may instead of sentencing the person at once, make a probation order.

The High Court Division in *Moti Matbar v State* (2020) observed that the purpose of probation under section 5(2) of the 1960 Ordinance is to prevent repetition of the same offence or a commission of other offences by an offender and for rehabilitating her/him as an honest, industrious, and law-abiding citizen.

A probation requires a court order specifying the conditions for probation for which the court generally considers age, character, socio-economic background or physical or mental condition of the offender; and the nature of the offence or any justifying circumstances attending the commission of the offence. The court, in order to decide whether to grant probation, often relies upon a social inquiry report by a probation officer.

Probation officers supervise probationers

during the whole probation period and report to the court as to the behaviour of the offender at the end of the probation. At present, there are only 44 posts of probation officers at district level. Social Welfare Officers at the district or upazila level perform the functions of a probation officer. Generally, probation officers of our country are involved with administrative works rather than administering probations.

Since probation requires continuous supervision from a probation officer, a proper administrative structure is need of

**The implementation of probation will not only relieve the pressure from our prisons but also let the offenders rehabilitate and reintegrate into the society.**

the hour. The practice of imposing probation to adult offenders is in the rudimentary stage. Current practices of probation have been accurately described by Mr. Justice M Imman Ali of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh that, “[t]he use of [probation] by our trial Courts is very rare, possibly due to the punitive attitude of the learned Judges[, and this] appears to be prevalent across the country”.

Probation is not seen as a popular or at least regularly researched topic in the academia. One of the very few is the 2013 research by BLAST which shows that probation for adult offenders was rarely available in practice. In 2009-10, only 261

persons including adults and children were granted probation across the country, while the figure fell to 43 in 2010-2011. On the other hand, in 2019 an EU analysis paper shows the probation population rate is higher than the prison population rate in European Union countries. The data manifests that probation is gaining rapid popularity among the EU countries.

The High Court Division, in *Abdul Khaleque v Hazera Begum* and another 58 DLR (HCD) 322 observed that, “the penal system of Bangladesh is essentially reformatory in character as opposed to retributive. The 1960 Ordinance is a prime example of such a policy. If a sentence of probation is imposed for a period of time, it is likely to be more of a deterrent and will have a rehabilitating effect which will fulfil the intention of the legislature”. The Court also indicated the need of the practice of probation services in *Fahima Nasrin v Government of Bangladesh* 61 DLR (HCD) 232.

The implementation of probation will not only relieve the pressure from our prisons but also let the offenders rehabilitate and reintegrate into the society. Hence, probations should be made compulsory. The 1960 Ordinance should be amended to make probation available on courts’ own motion. A separate and dedicated Probation Office must be established with adequate manpower having proper qualifications and backgrounds.

The writer is an Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

LAW REVIEW

## Legal framework for safety on waterways

S.M. SHAKIB

Despite that the indoor water transportation sector carries over one-fourth of the country’s total passenger traffic, it faces plenty of accidents every year. The safety of this sector is overlooked, unlike the roadways. Though the Inland Water Transport Authority Ordinance, 1958 does not talk much about the safety of waterways, the Inland Shipping Ordinance, 1976 has some provisions on this.

Section 55 of the 1976 Ordinance prohibits transporting passengers on any voyage when a danger signal for a storm is announced or where there is reasonable apprehension of a storm. In the event of a violation of this section, the master of the ship faces imprisonment for a maximum of three years, or a fine of BDT 30000, or both (section 61A). However, comparatively smaller launches usually try to violate this rule, which is why we often hear the news of launches sinking due to storms or cyclones.

Section 37B confers a duty on the Director-General to conduct periodic training programs on crowd management, firefighting, personal survival, and tanker safety for inland engineers, masters, engine-drivers, greaser, and other people mainly responsible for passenger safety.

As per section 56, it is prohibited to proceed on any voyage without being equipped with life-saving apparatus, firefighting equipment, and without taking proper measures against explosions, fires, collisions, and other accidents. In the event of a violation of this provision, the owner and master of the ship will separately face imprisonment for a maximum of two years, or a fine of BDT 30000, or both (section 61). The range of punishment seems to be inadequate given the higher severity of casualties and the lives lost on the waterways. For example, around 49 people died in the recent Abhijan-10 launch incident due to the lack of sufficient firefighting equipment and proper protective measures against explosions.

Section 58A provides that no inland ship transporting passengers will embark on any voyage unless her passengers and crew are insured with an insurance company. The non-compliance of this provision will result in imprisoning the offender for a maximum of two years, or fining him/her with BDT 30000, or both (section 68B). However, there are many launch owners who are conducting business without having any insurance and are not being punished under the law.

As per section 67, if on any voyage the ship carries more passengers than the number specified in the certificate of survey, the owner or his representative or master of the ship will be punishable with a fine of BDT 300 for each passenger so in excess, up to a maximum of TK one lakh. But the launch operators defy the rule and carry excess passengers during the festival period. That is why the sinking of launches due to the overloading happens frequently in Bangladesh.

Section 47 gives jurisdiction to marine courts consisting of a magistrate of the first class to try the offences punishable under the Ordinance. There is only one Marine Court located in Dhaka. In March 2020, the Court issued a statement to the Dhaka Chief Judicial Magistrate’s Court, noting that 1,517 cases were pending before it. It is quite impossible for a single Court to deal with so many cases. The 1976 Ordinance contains no provision for the Court to remand offenders on bail. Thus, offenders frequently approach other courts for bail, which closes the door for the Marine Court to proceed with the case. Another matter of concern is that the Court is being operated under the Department of Shipping, which is contradictory to the concept of separation of powers.

The year 2021 ended with the nation in deep mourning over the Abhijan-10 launch fire incident. The concerned authorities should take proper steps as early as possible, otherwise we will end up witnessing more maritime disasters every year.

The writer is a student of Law, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP).



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

## The two-page document that recognises the 1971’s genocide

TAWHEED REZA NOOR

At the time of its birth, Bangladesh experienced one of the worst genocides of the century, one that is yet to be duly recognised all over the globe. On the last day of Bangladesh’s 50th anniversary, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention (LIGP), a USA based organisation dealing with genocide prevention related research, cracked the recognition deadlock by issuing a statement. Genocide scholars like Irene Victoria Massimino and Elisa von Joeden-Forgey, the co-founders and co-presidents of the Institute, and their team at the LIGP worked hard to come up with the wordings of the document titled as “Statement on the Bangladesh Genocide of 1971”. This two-page document clearly recognises the atrocities committed in 1971 as

genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. “Given the lack of a broad international recognition of the crimes”, the LIGP through its statement categorically “calls upon the international community, including the UN, to urgently recognise the Bengali genocide as a way to pay tribute to the victims and to hold perpetrators accountable.”

The LIGP works with people around the world to promote genocide prevention, human security, restorative dialogue, mental health literacy, and peace-building education and training as well as to offer tools for grassroots responses to conflict. In the process, it seeks to inform the world about global grassroots efforts to end the cycle of genocide.

For celebrating the golden jubilee of Bangladesh liberation war as well as

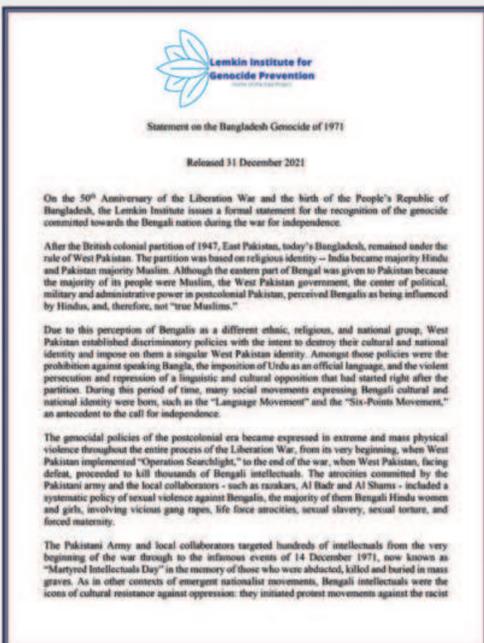
the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh genocide, it collaborated with the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka to run a project called as “1971 Genocide in Bangladesh: A Micro-course”. The project contains five segments that cover five vital aspects of liberation war and genocide in Bangladesh. These are the emergence of Bangladesh and its historical struggle towards independence; refugee crisis; victims of sexual violence; killing of intellectuals; and international crimes tribunal.

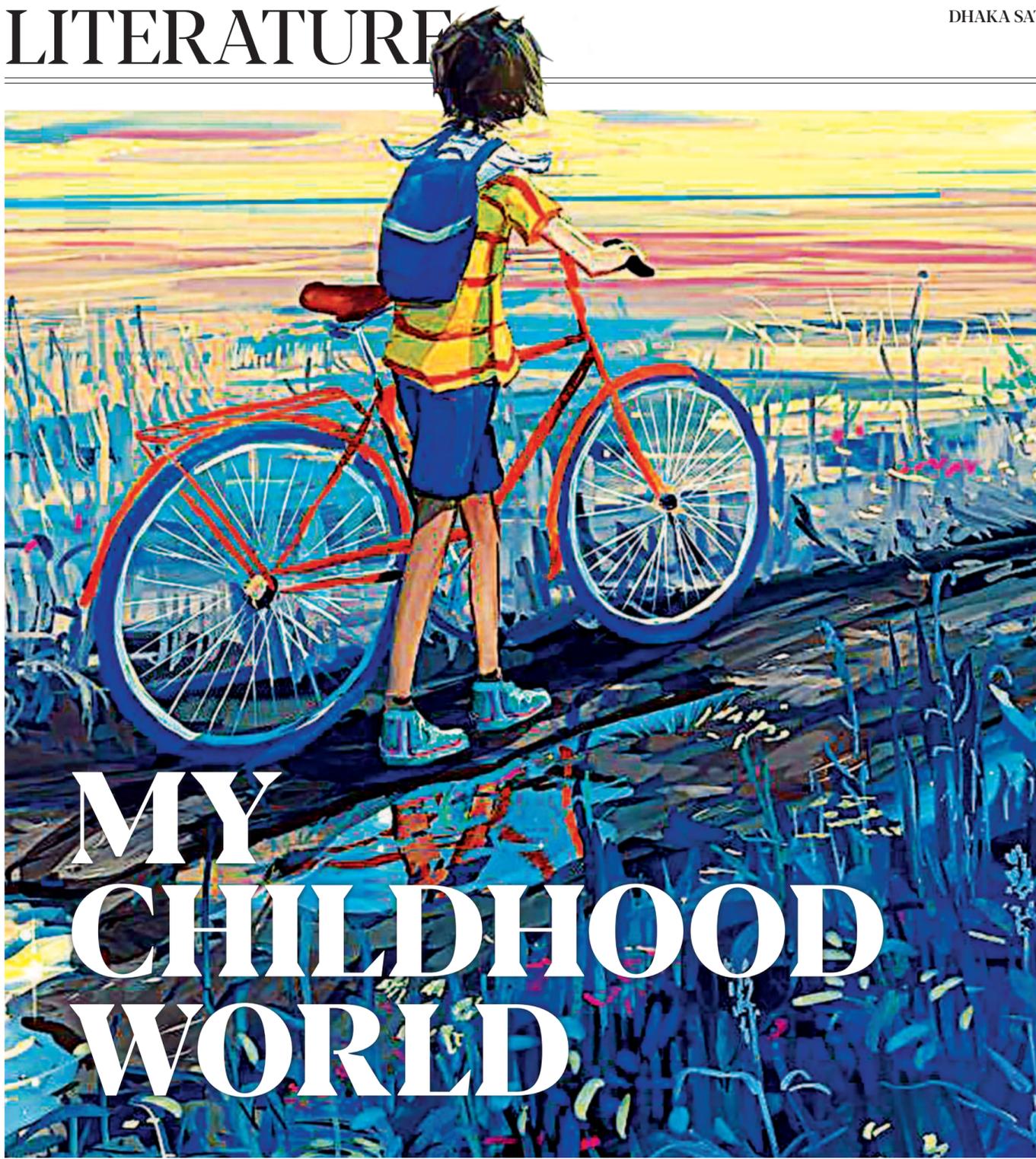
Alongside, the LIGP has been working on the issue of the Bangladesh genocide for a while both in historical and legal terms. They are convinced that what happened to Bengalis in 1971 was genocide, and that the West Pakistan’s policies prior to 1971 were genocidal in intent and nature.

Due to their capacity and clarity on

this very case, they did serve this vital statement with confidence, and probably this is the first document of this nature from any international organisation. Undoubtedly this is a historic move, which is not only a great tribute to the innocent millions who were the victims of Bangladesh genocide, it would also pave the way to all other organisations and countries to come forward to endorse the atrocities occurred in 1971 as a case of genocide. Finally, the LIGP statement is an instrumental addition for the long journey of achieving due international recognition of the Bangladesh genocide.

The writer is one of the sons of martyred journalist Serajuddin Hossain and a visiting scholar at Binghamton University, State University of New York, USA.





# MY CHILDHOOD WORLD

**I was thrilled with my success. I had finally proved my deeply held belief – I do possess free will – correct. But then I regretted my action. I am stupid, I thought. I had lost my hard-earned guava for nothing.**

TOHON

## PROLOGUE

The best part of my childhood was during the late fifties, attending Dacca Cantonment Primary School at Ayub Line. My father was in the army, and we lived at the Kurmitola military compound. There was a parade ground sandwiched between the army barracks and the family quarters. Besides military parades, the ground had other useful purposes: sports and variety shows for the military personnel and their families.

We lived next to the parade ground. Not only could we run and play there, but the open field offered an unrestricted view of the army barracks. We also enjoyed watching the military parades and the marching band.

Even more exciting was the no-man's land – we called it a jungle – bordering the Dacca-Chittagong railway line that ran past the cantonment. The jungle was full of bushes and trees. Our main attraction was the fruit trees, mostly guava, mango, and jackfruit. We also loved chasing the rabbits and aiming at birds with slingshots. So, beyond home and school, our happy, exciting days revolved around the parade ground and our adventures in the no-man's-land.

## MY WORLD

Monsoon rains always brought me joy. I

must be separate enclosed areas so that Allah can decide to send rain to some places while keeping it sunny in other areas. It made a lot of sense to me, and I was happy with my intellectual feat in solving the problem.

But then I also had a deeper curiosity: do I have free will? I was sure that I did, so I must find proof to establish it once and for all. Occasionally, I would run thought experiments – I do not remember the details – but was disappointed that none of the experiments proved for certain that I possessed free will.

Then one day, a few friends and I while venturing in the jungle came across a guava tree. We did not waste time. Like monkeys, we climbed up the branches and spread out looking for ripe, ready-to-eat fruits. I caught sight of an unusually large, perfectly ripe guava towards the end of the branch. Getting to it would be risky – a fear of falling to the ground assailed me, but the promise of the reward was stronger. I managed to reach the fruit, grabbed it, and then quickly came down to the ground to enjoy it.

A thought flashed through my mind as I was about to bite the guava and savour it in my saliva-filled mouth. I gathered my strength and threw the guava away into the bush as far as I could.

I was thrilled with my success. I had finally proved my deeply held belief – I do possess free will – correct. But then I regretted my action. *I am stupid*, I thought. I had lost my hard-earned guava for nothing. How could I be sure that I was not fated to believe in free will and run experiments to prove myself right? How could I know that Allah was not driving my life, just as He decided when and where it would rain?

While my deeper curiosity remained unresolved, I was successful in shaping my world in a different way.

There was a lanky, stray dog in our neighbourhood. Occasionally I would offer him leftover food. In return he started guarding our door and wagging his tail as an expression of his gratitude.

While the monsoon season brought me joy, the dog's suffering troubled me. Soaked in rainwater, shivering with cold, he would take shelter underneath the leafy banyan tree behind our house. Some evenings I would sneak the dog in and allow him to rest in the dark corner of our veranda, but not without my intrinsic feelings of guilt for the deceit.

It has always been an age-old belief that, unlike cats, dogs are unclean animals and therefore not allowed inside a household. It bothered me as to why an innocent, obedient, and faithful animal was considered unclean.

My mother's family came from Bikrampur (presently Munshiganj). It was (and still is) a historic region in Bengal with more than 2,500 years of Hindu antiquity and early Buddhist scholarship during the Emperor Ashoka's period (269 BC to 232 BC). One can still see the remnants of ancient Hindu and

Buddhist temples in the area.

During holiday seasons we used to visit our maternal uncle, Hashem *mama*, and his family residing in the *nana's* old house. I remember one particular occasion during our visits when Hashem *mama* took us to the *Durga puja mela*. There was a variety of shops. One particular shop was selling handmade pottery: coloured decorative pieces and vases; pots and pitchers; statues of Maa Kali, Ganesh, and the Buddha; and toys of all kinds, including dolls and miniature animal figures (tigers, elephants, crocodiles, and even cobras). I stood there motionless, looking at the clay art and sculptures. And then in a lightning flash, I saw the heavenly light shining on earth.

Allah in heaven must have first created men and animals in different shapes and forms according to His own will and then, like filling empty pots and pitchers with water, He poured life into them all before placing them on earth. So, the dog and I must share the same life. Why would only one of us be "unclean" or even "inferior"?

When we got back home, in no time the dog and I became friends. I would call him *Bondhu* (the Bengali word for friend). At my request, my mother allowed him to use our veranda as his refuge during the hot summer days, the rainy season, and cold evenings. Unfortunately, before his time, he fell gravely ill. For the first time, we carried him inside the house so that we could closely monitor his health. He died shortly thereafter.

The dog went from being "unclean" to becoming a member of our family. We took some comfort in being able to care for him during his last days and grieved his passing. I realised that the lanky, stray dog came to me not only as a friend, but also as a messenger from heaven.

## EPILOGUE

More than sixty years have passed since that momentous revelation. My life's pleasures have now been reduced to leisurely walks in the neighbourhood park, holding my grandson Himaloy's soft little warm hand. His curious mind beholds the wondrous world around him. He asks me about the flying birds, falling rain, and endless other things. I reminisce about my childhood world and share it with him.

*Tohon is a short-story writer. He contributes regularly to the Star Literature page. He is the author of Emil Joseph Burcik (2021), Life's Invisible Battles (2020), The Jihadi (2016) and The Landscape of a Mind (2015).*

## From One Minute Past Midnight

A COLLECTION OF POEMS BY ARSHI MORTUZA

## One Minute Past Midnight

I'm feeling a certain disenchantment.  
The kind that takes place at 12:01 am.  
I'm feeling more pumpkin than a princess.

I once traded my voice for a pair of legs  
During a bet with a sea witch  
Who was just as much of a  
victim of the system.  
Why else would she seek my voice?

I once took a bite of a poisoned apple  
From a stranger who offered it so kindly  
I forgave her – cause it was the  
masculine mirror,  
telling her women don't age well.

So, I'm grateful that I pricked my finger  
On the needle of a spinning wheel  
On my sixteenth birthday  
So I could stay forever young  
Cryogenically frozen.



## Nothing Like Kipling's "If"

If Cinderella's feet were not petite.

If Rapunzel's hair was short and trimmed.  
If Ariel's fishtail did not split or spread.

If Snow White's skin was not like the purer looking snow (a little muddied or yellow?)

If Aurora drooled or snored in her hundred-year sleep.  
If beneath Belle's beauty, there was a beast.

Or if,  
He was not her first beast.



## Unhooding Red

Swallow me whole  
Big Bad Wolf  
So the hunter can come  
To my rescue

You had to devour me  
Big Bad Wolf  
How else would we eternally glorify the hunter?

It's cozy in here  
Big Bad Wolf  
I can make it homey  
Right here in your tummy

It's what I am trained to do  
It's what my mother,  
And my mother's mother  
Have been trained to do

Don't believe me?  
Ask her yourself  
You've swallowed her too.



*Arshi Mortuza has two MAs in English Literature; one from Queen's University, Kingston, and the other from University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB). She currently resides in Toronto, Ontario.*



would lie on my bed idle and enjoy listening to the pounding *rim-jhim* on our tin-roofed house. I would also create music by covering and uncovering my ears with my palms in a fast, rhythmic cycle. I would watch through the window as the soft breeze created endless ripples in the vast expanse of shallow water on the inundated parade ground.

When the rain stopped – or sometimes even during the rain – we brothers would go out and run in the submerged grassland, but not without risking Mother's reprimands.

I was curious those days: where does the rainwater fall from? After my initial struggle, I managed to crack the puzzle: the sky must be full of punched holes. Allah in heaven orders the angels to turn on the water taps to allow water to drip down on the earth. There



## Lockdown will ruin company culture, Mamun from HR warns govt

**“It’s finally time for me to align with my goals, think out of the box, circle back to the plan, make an impact and shift the paradigm,” he said while giving himself a pep talk.**

SHOAB AHMED SAYAM

“There’s no way I’m going to let these people go back home again,” Mamun from HR murmured. “What will happen to the company’s synergy, dynamism and disruption, if there is no one to synergise, dynamise and disrupt at the office?”

“It’s finally time for me to align with my goals, think out of the box, circle back to the plan, make an impact and shift the paradigm,” he said while giving himself a pep talk.

Ever since the Omicron variant of Covid-22 arrived in Dhaka city, HR executives like Mamun have been shaking in their boots – no, not in fear of getting infected, but of empty offices and turned-off computers, of work from home (WFH).

Exactly a year ago, when the Delta variant was wreaking havoc, when the lockdown was imposed, Mamun saw the horror. Ideation was at an all-time low, and so was he.

Unfortunately for HR, history is set to repeat itself. If another lockdown is imposed, scalability will surely sink, Mamun warned the government.

Employees were seen trying to console Mamun, but for some reason, they didn’t have that look of pain on their faces.

“Oh no, another lockdown, whatever shall I do?” said Hirok Paul, one of the employees. “I guess it’s time for me to pack my stuff and get ready for WFH.”

“Man, I’m going to miss waking up at 7:00am, wearing a three-piece suit with a tie that chokes me all day, making small-talk with other random employees, and nodding in hour-long meetings. I was living the life,” he said.

“Now I’ll be home, wearing pyjamas all day, spending time with my family and ordering food. It’s so depressing,” he added.

Unlike Hirok, a group of employees were quite cheery about the oncoming lockdown.

“We are introverts, a special breed of

individuals who introspect and ponder about the important aspects of life,” said the self-aggrandising bunch. “Since we utilise so much of our energy to contemplate the world, this lockdown will bring us great bounty.”

“You see, unlike the common extroverts, who have infinitely smaller brains than ours, we need time to recharge our minds, after dwelling on economics, psychology, philosophy and the like. Talking with commoners drains us,” said the group, who are known for not talking much, but not today it seems.

After hearing the annoying introverts, Mamun started to plead with them.

“O introverts, please don’t abandon me! I know these are trying times, now more than ever. Let’s start a brainstorming session and find an alternative to WFH, what do you say? We are all in this together, like a family. We must pivot from the new normal, I beg you!”

## New Covid variant named after Novak Djokovic

UNSPORTING CORRESPONDENT

The International Institute of Naming Covid-22 Strains (IINCS) yesterday succumbed to pressure from the pro-Covid lobby and named the newest variant after tennis legend Novak Djokovic.

The highly polarising pro-Covid lobby has been in existence since the Delta variant started doing the rounds last spring. They think Covid is a divine intervention to separate the weak from the strong, because just when the world thinks it has the virus beat, it comes back resurrected, as it has with the variant now known as Nole (Djokovic’s nickname).

This correspondent could not find out whether Serbia’s Djokovic is a member of the lobby, because Djokovic would not answer his phone. Djokovic’s father said his son was detained in an Australian hotel and had no access to his cell phone. Subsequently, this correspondent lost interest.

Djokovic has said that he is against vaccination and also, at the height of the first wave in 2020 when the world was at a standstill, he held a tennis event and partied in nightclubs, which contributed to the spread of the virus.

The new variant, Nole, is uncannily able to invade the tightest of defence systems. Scientists say masks and even face shields cannot protect people from Nole.

“We thought of Nole as the name for the new variant because Djokovic is a champion who breaches the defences of the best tennis players in the world,” a Covid lobby member, Phil Phlegm Cofferson, told this correspondent. “Also, he breached the most anal immigration system in the world – which doesn’t even let people out or into the country for medical reasons – by getting into Australia unvaccinated. That is the kind of guy we want as the face of the new variant.”

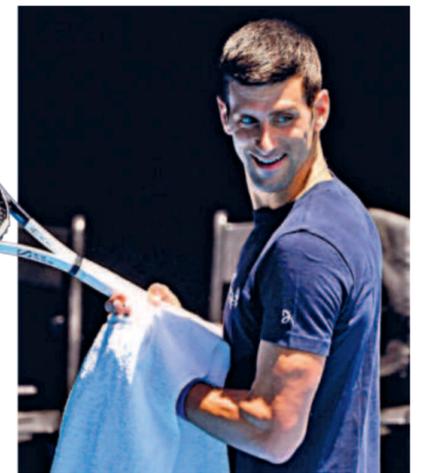


PHOTO: AFP

## Food bloggers outnumber diners at city restaurants: Study

MAHBUB ALAM MUNNA

A revolutionary new study has revealed that there are more food bloggers and vloggers than actual customers in a majority of the capital’s restaurants.

The recent study on Dhaka city has some eye-catching findings. The rate of growth of food bloggers is much higher than the growth of population. One out of every one and a half person(s) is a food blogger. The private researcher, whose identity we cannot disclose because he or she is suffering from food poisoning, said, “If you randomly throw a stone in Dhaka, it will surely fall on the head of a food blogger. And they will blog about it there and then, and blame a restaurant for casting the stone.”

Despite being crowded, restaurant owners always seem unhappy. So, our private researcher started asking owners what the deal was.

“Since morning, I have found five customers and 20 food bloggers. Two customers had to leave without eating as the whole place was crowded with food bloggers and their film crews,” one owner said.

When asked about whether the number of customers increased as every blog went live, he laughed and said, “Yeah right. The only thing that increased was the number of food bloggers. Yesterday, 10 food bloggers came and reviewed my food and today I got 20! Every blog doubled the number of food bloggers, not customers.”

Food blogging has brought about a revolutionary change in the minds of our young generation. Previously, they used to take selfies and make TikTok videos wherever they would go, but now they are recording food reviews even when they are going nowhere, for instance, while having tea beside the road. This smooth transition has stunned 90 percent of people in Dhaka, of which 88 percent are food bloggers, the study found. One of the councillors of a city ward said, “There are 500,000 voters in my area, 495,000 of whom are food bloggers.”

Our correspondent, whose aim in life is obviously to be a food blogger who does not know the names of foods, tried to contact food bloggers and ask whether they have anything to say regarding restaurant owners’ complaint and the study’s findings. One of the bloggers, Farsan the Mejho Bhai, said, “Guys, trust me, this is the best question I have ever eaten in life. You should definitely try this one.”

