

JS may pass EC law this session

Set to be placed Sunday, draft seeks legal cover for past ECs formed thru search committees

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The ongoing parliament session is set to pass a law aiming to give legal cover to the chief election commissioners and other commissioners appointed through search committees in the past.

Once passed, the law will also provide a legal shield to all activities of those search committees.

Appointments of all the CECs and other commissioners recommended by the search committees will be considered legal, and no question can be raised in any court over this matter, reads the draft law, titled "Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioner Appointment Act, 2022".

Ahead of the general elections in 2014 and 2018, president picked CECs and other commissioners in 2012 and 2017 following recommendations by search committees.

The current Election Commission led by CEC KM Nurul Huda was formed on February 15, 2017. Its tenure expires on February 14.

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said the president would appoint the upcoming CEC and other commissioners upon recommendation by a search committee to be constituted as per the proposed law.

"A bill on forming the Election Commission will be placed in parliament on Sunday. I hope it will be passed in the current Jatiya Sangsad session following all legal procedures, including scrutiny by the parliamentary standing committee concerned," he told The Daily Star.

As his attention was drawn to the matter, election expert Badiul Alam Majumdar expressed his surprise.

He said the move was nothing but a government effort to "legalise all the misdeeds of the past Election Commissions".

"Once the new law is in place in this form, there will be a lack of transparency in appointments of CEC and other commissioners," said Majumdar, also Shujan secretary.

The draft law does not mention whether the names to be recommended by the search committee and the criteria of the selection would be made public.

Not disclosing the names might raise suspicion and questions in public mind over transparency in the appointments.

Last month, Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) handed a draft law titled "Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners' Appointment Act 2021" to Law Minister Anisul Haq to help the government frame the law.

The draft proposed that the search committee will recommend

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A sluice gate being installed at the mouth of the Rajarkhali canal on the bank of the Karnaphuli in Chattogram. To lessen the impacts of waterlogging, various local organisations are installing around 40 such sluice gates at points where canals in the port city fall into the river. The photo was taken yesterday morning.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

COVID-19 12 dists at high risk

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of coronavirus cases has continued to increase rapidly with the health directorate reporting 9,500 fresh cases yesterday, 1,093 up from the previous day.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), this is the highest single-day count after 10,126 cases on August 12.

Against a total of 37,830 tests, the positivity rate was 25.11 percent yesterday, the highest since August 8. Besides, 12 Covid-19 patients died in the same period.

Fueled by the Omicron variant, the country has been witnessing the third wave of Covid-19 since the beginning of January.

The ongoing spike in Covid-19 cases has put 12 districts, including Dhaka, at high risk, according to the weekly analysis of the DGHS till Sunday.

Regions above 10 percent positivity rate are considered as high-risk, between 5 and 10 percent as medium-risk, and below 5 percent as low-risk zones, as per the DGHS.

Other high-risk districts were Chattogram, Rajshahi, Jashore, Kustia, Bogura, Gazipur, Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat, Panchagarh, Rangamati, and Khagrachhari.

Meanwhile, 32 districts were at medium risk, including Sylhet, Feni,

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Prioritise rapid test

Experts for making antigen kits available everywhere for free to curb Omicron spread; govt has no plan to distribute them outside health centres

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

When countries are shifting to at-home rapid antigen tests for detecting the coronavirus to keep pace with the Omicron's blistering speed of transmission, the government has stuck to its policy of keeping the self-administered kit available at only healthcare points.

At present, the rapid antigen test kits can be found in 545 public and 100 private healthcare points across the country, according to the Directorate General of Health

Services (DGHS).

Also called lateral flow tests, the tests require rubbing a shallow swab inside one's nostrils and throat and then exposing the swab to a few drops of a liquid reagent, which looks for protein antigens that live on the coronavirus's surface.

In about 15 minutes, one can find out whether they have been infected with the coronavirus or not. The tests are excellent at flagging people who have high viral loads

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The Daily Star

IPDC
FINANCE

OMS of rice, flour starts in upazilas today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will start open market sale of rice and flour at upazila level from today.

Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque said this while talking to the media about the high price of rice after attending a session at the deputy commissioners' conference in the capital's Osmani Memorial Auditorium yesterday.

He said the food ministry currently has a food stock of 20 lakh tonnes, which is the highest ever. Meanwhile, newly produced rice will hit the market in April. As a result, rice prices will soon be stable and normal, the minister added.

Over the last one month, retail prices of rice edged up as much as 6 percent

"Food prices have also sharply increased in the international market. Wheat prices, which were \$230-280 per tonnes, have risen to \$450."

in the capital. Yesterday, retail prices of medium-quality grain were Tk 52-58 a kg, up from Tk 48-Tk 56 a month ago, data from the state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh showed.

Explaining the reasons behind the price rise, Razzaque said, "Food prices have also sharply increased in the international market. Wheat prices, which were \$230-280 per tonnes, have risen to \$450."

"In the fiscal year 2020-21, 48 lakh tonnes of wheat were imported but only 16 lakh tonnes were imported until January in this fiscal year. Wheat imports are declining due to rising prices. As a result, the price of flour is higher than that of rice, but the flour price had always been lower than that of rice," he said.

At the same event, Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumdar said rice would be sold at Tk 30 a kg and flour at Tk 18 a kg through 1,776 dealers.



Dust and dirt are kicked up by the wheels of two human hauliers on AHM Kamruzzaman Sharani in front of the Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in the capital. The road has been in a dilapidated state for some time. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Admin cadre too want UN mission berth

Proposal placed in DC conference; change to promotion policy also sought

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Like the members of armed forces and law enforcement agencies, admin cadre officials now want to participate in the UN missions as well.

A proposal was made in this regard on the second day of the annual deputy commissioners' (DC) conference yesterday.

Speaking to journalists after the meeting, KM Ali Azam, senior secretary of the public administration ministry, said, "Sending officials to UN Missions depends on the host country's demand."

"We have decided to send letters in this regard to the foreign ministry and Permanent Resident of the UN to avail the facilities."

The DCs also proposed updating promotion policies, setting up hospitals for government staffers in every divisional city and creating an additional deputy commissioner post in the districts where massive development works are going on.

Replying to a question, Azam said, "We've received proposals from three divisions for setting up hospitals. The Prime Minister has already given consent

in principle to set up hospitals at the divisional level."

The DCs were also given directives to remain alert to the surging Covid cases across the country.

The three-day long conference began on Tuesday at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated it virtually.

Yesterday, the DCs held six sessions with

"We've sought their cooperation to stop forest grabbing and shut down illegal brick kilns."
— Environment Minister

the ministers and officials of 12 ministries.

In one session, Environment Minister Shahab Uddin said the ministry gave directives to the DCs to take steps to stop hill cutting and deforestation.

"We've sought their cooperation to stop forest grabbing and shut down illegal brick kilns."

He added that they have already

written to the DCs to recover forests from grabbers.

Meanwhile, Textile and Jute Minister Golam Dastagir Gazi asked the DCs to conduct mobile court drives at least once a month to prevent use of illegal polythene.

He requested the DCs to check whether jute bags are used for the packaging of 19 products, including paddy, rice, wheat, maize, fertilizer, sugar, chili, ginger, garlic and onion.

Discussions were also held on setting up multipurpose cyclone centres and with rain harvesting systems in coastal areas.

Meanwhile, the disaster management and relief ministry rejected a proposal to release money at one go for rural infrastructure development.

"We told them that it is only possible to ensure the [desired] pace of work and monitoring if the money is released in two or three instalments in a year," said Enamur Rahman, state minister for disaster management and relief.

There was also a discussion on setting up grid substations in hilly areas and submarine cables to supply power in coastal areas.

Prioritise rapid test

FROM PAGE 1

— and who are thus most likely to be actively transmitting the virus to others.

Coupled with their rapid results, the self-swab kits have become a vital tool in fast diagnosing infection with the Omicron variant — which causes mild symptoms among vaccinated people that is not too dissimilar from the common flu — and compelling people to isolate immediately.

Easy availability of such kits in Bangladesh, which is going through a third wave of Covid-19 cases, can help slow the spread of the virus, according to experts.

While the polymerase chain reaction remains the gold standard for detecting the virus, due to the inconvenience and costs involved in getting the test, many tend to avoid getting one and pose the risk of spreading the virus.

In public hospitals, the RT-PCR test costs Tk 100, while it costs Tk 3,000 in private healthcare providers. For at-home sample collection by private operators, it costs Tk 3,700, while it costs Tk 300 by public institutes.

The antigen test costs Tk 700 in private hospitals and Tk 100 in public healthcare points.

Only three types of people can be tested as per the guideline provided by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR): people showing Covid-19 symptoms in the previous 1-7 days, those who came close to a metre of a Covid-19 patient and stayed

for at least 15 minutes, and healthcare staffers treating Covid-19 patients.

Data from the DGHS indicates that the antigen test has not been expanded so much: on average, 2,721 tests were conducted in a day in the past seven days.

"If the government really wants to curb the Omicron, the antigen testing kits must be made available everywhere at free of cost," Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist, told The Daily Star yesterday.

While the official tally of Omicron cases in Bangladesh stands at 55, the ongoing surge in Covid-19 cases, particularly in Dhaka, is said to be driven by the heavily mutated variant.

In the 24 hours to 8 am yesterday, 9,500 cases were recorded — the highest since August 12 last year — and up from 8,407 cases the previous day.

Many countries in Europe and America and neighbouring India are offering lateral flow test kits, Rahman said.

Britain has used the tests to fight outbreaks since 2020, even before Omicron, and makes them freely available, while the US recently said that it planned to make 500 million tests available for free and that Americans could request that tests be sent to their homes.

"When the infection rate rises, choosing rapid antigen testing method is ideal — maybe 80 percent of the tests will come out to be positive and they can be isolated immediately," Tahmina Shirin, director of the IEDCR, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked why people's access to rapid kits at home is barred by the guideline, she said: "The guideline was adopted based on the situation at that time. But, it is the ministry higher-ups who can decide on updating it now."

After months of bureaucratic exercises, the health services division of the health ministry on September 17, 2020 had approved the antigen rapid testing at public healthcare centres.

Later on Jul 18 last year, the government initially approved 78 private healthcare organisations across the country to use rapid antigen test kits.

As of yesterday, the Directorate General of Drug Administration has given emergency use authorisation to 23 foreign brands inside the country as their kits met the criteria of 90 percent sensitivity and 95 percent specificity.

The retail price range per kit has been approved from Tk 220 to 550, according to the officials.

The local suppliers are allowed to supply kits to only the government's Central Medicine Store Depot and the approved private laboratories.

However, this newspaper has learnt that the rapid antigen kit of a brand is available for mass people in the market, which is illegal.

Contacted, ABM Khurshid Alam, the director-general of the DGHS, told The Daily Star: "If there are many other countries where the home-based rapid test is available, we will also consider it. But we have no plan right now."

JS may pass EC law this session

FROM PAGE 1

20 people, including five women, for the posts of the CEC and other commissioners. It also said the names of the candidates and information on their assets should be published in a circular with their consent.

The draft also suggested holding a public hearing on those selected for the appointments, Majumdar said, adding the clauses should be incorporated in the proposed law to be placed in parliament.

Mentioning article 48 of the constitution, he said, "As the president can't make any decision without consultation with the prime minister, it is obvious that the president will have to discuss with the head of the government before finalising the names of CEC and other commissioners."

"If this is the case, then question will arise," he also said.

"Going by the draft, there is no way to know if the president is giving appointments from the candidates pitched by the search committee."

The cabinet approved the draft of "Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioner Appointment Act, 2022" for the EC formation on Monday, hours before the ruling Awami League joined the dialogue with the president on EC formation.

The government move came nearly 50 years after the constitution prescribed enacting a specific law for forming the EC.

The move comes also at a time when almost all political parties, during the recent dialogue with President Abdul Hamid, demanded the JS frame a law in this regard.

Civil society members too demand enactment of a law for EC formation.

The ATM Shamsul Huda led EC had prepared a draft law in 2012 and submitted it to the then Awami League-led government. But the law was never enacted.

The president initiated the dialogue with registered political parties seeking suggestions on forming an independent, neutral and credible EC on December 20.

A total 25 political parties participated in the talks, which ended on Monday with participation of the ruling AL. Seven political parties, including the BNP, however, refrained from taking part in it, saying a credible election is not possible under the current government.

WHAT THE DRAFT SAYS
According to the proposed law, a six-member search committee, to be headed by a judge of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division, will recommend names to the president for appointing the CEC and other commissioners.

The judge will be nominated by the chief justice.

The five other members will include a High Court judge, to be nominated by the CJ, the comptroller and auditor general, the chairman of Bangladesh Public Service Commission

and two distinguished citizens nominated by the president.

The search committee will make the recommendations in 10 working days following its formation, reads the draft law.

The president will then make the appointments upon the recommendations. Search committee will also be formed under the law in future.

According to the proposed law, the search committee cannot recommend anyone for the post of CEC who has been convicted and sentenced to at least two years' imprisonment for committing any criminal offence or moral turpitude or has been convicted under the International Crimes (Tribunal) Act, 1973 or holds any profitable posts of the republic.

The cabinet division will provide secretarial assistance to the search committee, according to the proposed bill.

The search committee will determine the agenda of its meeting whose quorum will be fulfilled in the presence of at least three members and the committee will take decision on votes.

If the number of votes is equal in any case, the presiding member of the search committee can cast a second vote to reach a result.

According to section 4 of the proposed law, the search committee will perform its responsibilities

Bangladesh open to observers in polls

FM tells outgoing US envoy

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday told outgoing US Ambassador Earl R Miller that Bangladesh would remain open to foreign election observers in the next parliamentary polls due next year.

During the envoy's farewell meeting with the minister at the state guesthouse Padma, they discussed ways of cooperation on human rights, said a foreign ministry statement.

Ambassador Miller said the US remains willing to stay closely engaged with Bangladesh on human rights related issues, including through holding regular dialogues.

Both sides expressed optimism that a series of dialogues and visits would take place in coming months and the bilateral relations would be enhanced further.

The US envoy is leaving Dhaka shortly after completing his tenure of more than three years here.

Earlier, Miller called on Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen and discussed issues of mutual interest.

Biggest 'ice' cache seized on the Naf

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The BGB seized 50,000 yaba pills and 4.17kg of crystal meth worth Tk 22.37 crore from a boat on the Naf river early yesterday.

This is the biggest consignment of crystal meth, or "ice", seized in the country, Col Sheikh Khalid Mohammad Iftakhar, commander of BGB Battalion-2, told a press briefing.

He said they took position in Joillardwip area after getting information about the consignment. When BGB spotted the smugglers and opened fire, they jumped into the river and swam to Myanmar, abandoning the boat.

The team recovered the drugs from the boat after a search around 4:00am. No one was arrested till the filing of this report last night.

Dhaka's air again worst in the world

UNB, Dhaka

Dhaka's air quality index (AQI) was recorded at 269 at 10:11am yesterday, once again making the capital's air the world's most polluted.

China's Wuhhan and India's New Delhi occupied the next two positions, with AQI scores of 252 and 214 respectively.

An AQI between 201 and 300 is said to be "poor", while a reading of 301 to 400 is considered "hazardous" for residents.

A report by the Department of Environment and the World Bank in March 2019 pointed out that the three main sources of air pollution in Dhaka were brick kilns, fumes from vehicles and dust from construction sites.

with transparency and neutrality.

The search committee will recommend the names to the president for the appointments of CEC and other commissioners considering their qualifications, experiences, and honesty.

It can hunt for qualified persons and at the same time can ask names from the political parties and professional organisations.

The committee can propose two names to the president for the post of CEC. It can also recommend two persons against each of the commissioner's post.

Badiul Alam Majumdar said it was totally unbelievable that the draft law is being passed to give legitimacy to the ECs formed through search committees.

"Since Bangladesh is a democratic country, everyone has to be accountable for their actions. This draft law will hamper accountability," he said.

Majumdar accused the previous Election Commission of destroying the country's election system and depriving people of exercising their voting rights. He also raised questions against the incumbent EC.

"A total 42 distinguished citizens have urged the president to constitute the

Supreme Judicial Council SJC to investigate the allegations of financial irregularities, corruption and gross election-related misconduct against

the present Election Commission. But once the draft law is passed, none can raise any question against it," he said.

12 dists

FROM PAGE 1

Narayanganj, Cox's Bazar, Mymensingh, Khulna, Barishal, Rangpur, and Thakurgaon.

The DGHS has described the situation as "concerning".

The number of Covid-19 patients has increased by 228 percent this week till Tuesday, compared to the previous week, DGHS spokesperson Dr Nazmul Islam said in an online briefing yesterday.

During the same period, the number of deaths has also increased by 185 percent.

Nazmul said, "Latest statistics showed that the Delta variant has been spreading more [than the Omicron]. So we have no chance to be insincere."

He said that the number of patients has not increased in the hospitals, despite the rise in cases. "But there is no room for complacency."

According to the DGHS data, the overall bed occupancy in the Covid-19 hospitals countrywide has increased to 16 percent while it was 6 percent on January 1.

Meanwhile, the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 has recommended distributing masks free of cost to contain the coronavirus.



Transportation in the city can be expensive. But does that justify riding on a rickshaw with so many people -- including four children -- on the capital's busy roads? Sat precariously, each person pictured here carry immense risk of facing an accident due to the slightest of nudge or a sharp turn. This photo was taken yesterday from Shahbagh.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

VACCINATION DRIVE 200 transport workers get jobs on first day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 200 transport workers got Covid-19 jabs yesterday, the first day of a special drive to bring the workers under the vaccination programme.

They received the vaccine at a makeshift centre at the capital's Mohakhali Bus Terminal.

The drive will continue today but not at the terminal, rather at nearby vaccination centres, as the terminal is not suitable for the programme, officials said.

The Cabinet Division in a circular on January 10 directed that only vaccinated transport workers would be allowed to operate vehicles.

As many of the workers remain unvaccinated, the government started the drive in the capital, said Sitangshu Shekhar Biswas, director (engineering) of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), after the programme's inauguration. He said they would conduct the drive until all workers are vaccinated.

Manir Hossain, a driver of long-haul buses, was among the workers gathered near the centre. "I didn't get a text message even after registering a long time ago. So, I came here because our leaders told us that we wouldn't be able to drive if we're not vaccinated," he said.

Zhumana Ashrafi Sweetey, medical officer at Dhaka Civil Surgeon Office, said they are planning to vaccinate 900 workers, but BRTA, through transport associations, provided a list of only 100 workers. The other 100 who came to the centre received the vaccine on the spot.

A BRTA official said transport workers of Mohakhali Bus Terminal would be vaccinated at the nearby DNCC Covid-19 Dedicated Hospital today.



'Form credible probe commission'

Speakers demand at event on disappearance cases

DEMANDS

Platform to present proof supporting claims against law enforcers

All political parties must unite on this issue

Stop coercing family members



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rights activists, politicians and social workers yesterday in a protest meeting demanded a credible investigative commission for incidents of disappearance.

"We have hundreds of proofs in favour of the claims by families of the disappeared, that law enforcers have been behind these incidents, but

In another incident, law enforcers talked to the father of the disappeared. They said they needed to talk to his son. They then took the son away and he never returned.

nobody listened," said Nur Khan Liton, secretary-general of rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra.

Political party Nagorik Oikko organised the protest meeting.

"We have limitations, and we can't tell all the truth. But political parties can. All parties must unite on this issue," said Nur Khan.

"I hope all parties, including the ruling Awami League, will join this demand for justice," he said.

Nur Khan also discussed some incidents where proofs stand against law enforcers. During the pre-election period in 2013, eight youths disappeared in one night, he mentioned.

"On that night, the mechanics working

in Nakhhalpara area mentioned which type of cars went there, where they were parked and the people who took the ones who disappeared."

"In another incident, law enforcers talked to the father of the disappeared. They said they needed to talk to his son. They then took the son away and he never returned," said Nur.

"In another incident, Rab came to a victim's house and took his mobile phone, while his father was at the police station filing a GD regarding his son going missing. How did they know about the victim before the GD was filed?"

He also said there should be a platform where people can present the proof supporting the claims against law enforcers in such incidents.

Afroza Akter of Mayer Daak -- an organisation of the victims' families -- said the families were made to file general diaries (GDs) or mention in case statements that the victims went "missing" or "never returned" or "were picked up by unidentified people" instead of filing legitimate cases.

Speakers condemned the harassment and coercion the families faced. Law enforcers had allegedly made them sign pre-written statements that said the families deliberately misled police by concealing information.

Mahmudur Rahman Manna, convener of Nagorik Oikko, said victims of disappearances did not go missing by themselves. "The government used law enforcers in these incidences of forced disappearance." Subrata Chowdhury of Gonoforum, and SM Akram, advisor of Nagorik Oikko, also spoke at the event among others.

Doors to Italy to remain open

Job applications can be submitted from Jan 27, says circular

JAMIL MAHMUD

Bangladeshis will continue to have the opportunity of applying for employment in Italy through the legal process as seasonal and non-seasonal workers in various sectors.

The Italian government allowed hiring workers from Bangladesh both in "seasonal" and "non-seasonal" categories from 2020, after an eight-year embargo.

As per a circular issued by Bangladesh embassy in Rome on Tuesday, this year, Italy will issue 69,700 visas for 31 non-European Union countries including Bangladesh.

Of those, 42,000 are seasonal and 27,700 non-seasonal visas.

Those seeking work will be able to submit applications between January 27 and March 17.

Arfanul Haque, labour welfare counsellor at the embassy, yesterday said this year, Bangladeshis can obtain jobs in agriculture and hospitality sectors as both seasonal and non-seasonal workers.

Besides, there are opportunities for lorry drivers and construction workers under the non-seasonal category, he said over phone.

The Italian government had withdrawn this opportunity for Bangladesh, as Bangladeshi farm workers violated conditions of Italy's programme

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Crores embezzled by promising jobs abroad: CID

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

He used to trick unemployed youths promising them jobs at Australian ports and in Canada. For that, all they had to do is train at Chattogram's Marine Academy.

Mirza Mukul (45), an Oman returned expatriate, lured around 260 youths in this way and embezzled around Tk 5 crore over the last two to three years. On Tuesday, a team of CID raided his residence in Bashundhara Residential area and arrested him, CID Additional DIG Imam Hossain told a press briefing at CID Headquarters in Malibagh yesterday. Around 26 passports, three automatic seals, 35 Marine Academy training pass cards, fake training cards, 25 passport application forms, and a mobile phone were seized from him.

ACTOR SHIMU MURDER Police quizzing husband, friend

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police are interrogating murdered actor Raima Islam Shimu's husband and his friend to confirm whether the killing was pre-planned.

Police arrested the actor's husband Khandaker Shakhawat Alim Nobel and his friend Abdullah Farhad after Nobel admitted to strangling his wife to death in their Green Road flat on Saturday night during a feud.

"We are interrogating the duo to know whether Farhad came after the killing or he participated in it as well," SI Chunnu Mia of Keraniganj Model Police Station and the case's investigating officer, said yesterday.

3 days, 40 ATM cards, 84 withdrawal attempts

Credit card frauds busted in Dhaka, one a Turkish national

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Cloning credit card of citizens of around 40 countries, a transnational syndicate has been withdrawing money from ATM booths of different countries.

The syndicate -- with members in Turkey, Bulgaria, Mexico, India and Bangladesh -- has been involved in the crime for at least the last two years.

After collecting users' credit card info through the dark web, they collect the money from POS machines with the help of hackers. Sometimes, the syndicate even clone the cards.

Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit yesterday claimed to have obtained the information following the arrest of an international and local member of the syndicate on Tuesday night.

CTTC identified the arrestees as Turkish national Hakan Zanburkan and Bangladeshi Md Mofiuul Islam. Police

arrested the duo from Gulshan-1 area along with 15 cloned cards, five phones and a laptop, said Md Asaduzzaman, chief of CTTC unit.

Hakan came to Bangladesh on December 31 with a business visa. Mentioning the purpose of the visit as "garments business", he was staying at a hotel in the capital's Paltan.

Between just January 2 and January 4, he attempted to withdraw money with the cloned cards 84 times. The cards are from around 40 countries, including US, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Canada, Saudi Arabia, and Spain.

But when he tried to withdraw money at an Eastern Bank Limited (EBL) ATM, he was thwarted by the bank's anti-skimming protection, said Asaduzzaman.

A high official of CTTC unit involved with the investigation said he was planning to leave the country soon.

"Hakan first tried to go to Malaysia.

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Senior BNP leaders place a wreath at the grave of party founder Ziaur Rahman marking his 86th birth anniversary yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

'It's baseless' BNP shrugs off allegation of hiring lobbyists

UNB, Dhaka

BNP yesterday termed the government's allegation of recruiting lobbyists abroad to campaign against Bangladesh "baseless" and "fabricated".

It's the Awami League government that has been engaging lobbyists for the last 14 years to cover up its misdeeds, said BNP standing committee member Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain.

He was speaking to reporters at Chandrima Udyan after paying tribute to BNP founder Ziaur Rahman on his 86th birth anniversary.

On January 17, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam told the parliament that there was evidence of how much

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PRAYER
TIMING
JAN 20



	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
Azan	5:30	12:45	4:15	5:43	7:15
Jamaat	6:05	1:15	4:30	5:47	7:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Qazi Anwar Husain

FROM PAGE 12
scientist and writer. Seba publishes paperbacksthat are both well written and affordable. In the mid 60s, Anwar launched Masud Rana series. The swiftly paced spy thrillers kept readers spellbound with the suspense of the plots and breathtaking final twists. He immortalized the character of Masud Rana.

He also published Kuasha series, a monthly magazine called Rohoshsho Potrika, and teen magazine Kishore Potrika. In recent years, he drew flak after Bangladesh Copyright Office granted the copyrights of many "Masud Rana" books to its ghost writer Sheikh Abdul Hakim in June 2020. Anwar's body will be kept at his Quantum Foundation. After Zohr prayers today, he will be buried at the Banani Graveyard in his mother's grave.

Anwar through Seba also published translations of classics as well as cowboy stories widely known as "Westerns". Seba introduced Tin Goyenda series, written by Rakib Hasan, in the mid-80s. This series is credited with giving generations a reading habit.

Anwar is survived by two sons and a daughter. His wife renowned singer Farida Yasmin died in 2015.

Will work for BNP as activist

Says Taimur

UNB, Narayanganj

Defeated Narayanganj City Corporation (NCC) independent mayoral candidate Taimur Alam Khandakar, who was expelled from BNP, said he wants to work as an activist of the party. "Though the party has expelled me, I'll work as an activist and will not join any other party," he said while talking to reporters at his Masdair residence in the city yesterday. "They expelled me from the party's posts, but not as an activist. So, I'll work as an activist of the party," Taimur said. On Tuesday, BNP expelled Taimur and Narayanganj city unit general secretary ATM Kamal for violating party discipline. Kamal was the chief election agent of Taimur.



Two separate letters were sent to Taimur and Kamal from BNP's Nayapaltan central office on Tuesday night.

"As an activist, I want to wage a movement seeking the release of chairperson Khaleda Zia and against the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in the days ahead," he said, blaming the faulty EVM service for his defeat. Meanwhile, he denied receiving any phone call or letter regarding his expulsion.

Nominations

FROM PAGE 5
limited to those from privileged classes. Hence, IPDC has a special interest in inculcating women-friendly offerings in all its products and services. Because, we believe, true independence comes from financial freedom.

heroines of our country's prosperity. "We must recognise them and honour them to encourage more such silent nation builders to carry on their work," Mahfuz Anam added.

Nominations can be submitted at uwnba.com; email: unsungwomen@gmail.com; phone: 01786-111100. Deadline for submitting nomination is February 15, 2022.

It's baseless

FROM PAGE 3
money BNP-Jamaat had given to lobbying firms in the United States to campaign against Bangladesh in the past five years.

He also said the amount of this money was about \$3.75 million. Khandakar said their party will come up with a formal reaction at a press conference soon.

Advertisement for BNP election agent Taimur. Title: বাগদাদ-ঢাকা কাপেট ফ্যাক্টরী. Content: বাংলাদেশ পটিল কাপড়ের একটি প্রতিষ্ঠান... মোগল সেলস এজেন্সি প্রকল্প গ্রহণ করুন

Request for Quotation (RFQ) of 12 storied Commercial Building Project. BRAC Bank Limited is currently looking for a potential vendor(s) for a 12-storied Commercial Building Project with 3 basements in Dhanmondi, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Journalist

FROM PAGE 5
to DMCH, said Habib was lying in a pool of blood beside the road with head injuries. Hearing the news, his friends and colleagues, swarmed at the hospital.

Habib, a former organising secretary of Dhaka Reporters Unity, worked at several media outlets.

He was a journalism graduate from Dhaka University. He was also a central leader of BCL.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in condolence message, expressed profound shock at his death.

Habib from Cumilla was a father of a two-year-old son. His body was taken to his village home at Brahmanpara for burial after three nazam-e-janaza at Dhaka Reporters Unity, DU and Shomoyer Alo office.

Doors to Italy

FROM PAGE 3
by not returning home after terms of their seasonal work ended. According to the embassy circular, the validity of seasonal visas is nine months and non-seasonal visas two years. Non-seasonal visa holders will have the option for renewal.

3 days, 40

FROM PAGE 3
But failing to do so, he was about to fly to Pakistan," said the official.

This is not the first time Hakan visited Bangladesh. He had visited the country in 2016, 2018 and 2019 on business visa but never stayed over a week. "We are suspecting he had success withdrawing money from here," said Asaduzzaman.

"We are now looking for syndicate member Sakib alias Saber, a suspected Indian national, who is believed to be hiding inside Bangladesh," he added.

Addressing a briefing, Asaduzzaman said Hakan had been arrested in Assam in 2019, along with five others. He was in jail for about 20 months and fled while being treated at Govind Ballabh Pant Hospital under custody.

He later went back to Turkey through Nepal, with the help of an Indian syndicate. About Mofit, CTC said his brother Rafiq was among the five arrested in India with Hakan in 2019.

Investigators said they have got names of some syndicate members hiding in different countries. One of them has been identified as Romel, hiding in Delhi. Tohidul Islam, additional deputy commissioner of CTC unit, said, "Once the names are verified, we will seek help from Interpol."

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Office of the Quality Assurance Manager. Quality Control Lab. Department of Fisheries, Dhaka. Memo No: 33.02.0000.314.22.125.16-139. Date: 19.01.2022. Invitation for Tender (Works). e-Tendering Notice No: 01/2021-2022.

Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. Directorate of Planning and Development. Invitation for International Tender. Tender No. P&D/FP(S-3)-01/21/CE-01/Cap/International Tender/DR-17. Date: 19 Jan 2022.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার. বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ. ডিআইজি এর কার্যালয়. ট্রাফিক এন্ড ড্রাইভিং স্কুল, ঢাকা. স্মারক নং-টেডার-৪৪.০১.২৬০০.৯৭৪.০৯.০০২.২০২২-২১৪. তারিখ: ১৭/০১/২০২২খ্রিঃ. দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি.

Way Housing Pvt. Limited. Level-02, 15/2 Road no-03, Dhandmondi, Dhaka. Job Opportunity. Name of Post: Sr. Executive (Sales & Marketing). Vacancy: 03. Salary: 55,000/-.



The land of this road by the banks of Taltola canal was previously a part of the water-body. But after a botched excavation, it was slowly turned into this road, which further narrowed the canal that was already plagued by waste dumping and illegal occupation.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

ALMOST GONE

Once an important water-body, Taltola canal now struggling for survival

DIPANKAR ROY, *Khulna*

Taltola canal, once a two kilometre-long vital waterbody flowing through Khulna city, is approaching extinction due to indiscriminate garbage dumping.

Today, the canal's bed is almost filled with garbage, grass, weeds and aquatic plants.

On top of locals throwing household waste into it, there are many illegal occupiers of the waterbody as well, the most blatant of which are cattle farms built on a portion of the canal.

There's around 25 establishments like them there, with not an inch of water to be seen on the surface.

In fact, if one didn't know it beforehand, they won't even be able to tell that it used to be an important water-body.

As a result of this, the canal has been unable to play any role in discharging water from the city.

Moreover, it has also become a hotbed of mosquito breeding.

Locals and experts said the canal will soon disappear completely if large-scale excavations are not carried out.

It already looks like a barren piece of land, choked by water hyacinth, bushes



and shrubs. The canal starts from the opposite side Karim Nagar residential area on Sonadanga-Notunrasta road and merges with the Mayur river, which flows through the city.

Visiting the area last week, this correspondent found the once 60 feet wide waterbody reduced to a mere 25 to 30 feet.

One of the reasons behind this can be attributed to the construction of two roads by Khulna City Corporation on both sides.

canal was dug properly, there wouldn't be any waterlogging in Boyra, Chhoto Boyra and Karim Nagar areas."

People living in nearby villages once relied on it to transport goods to and from Khulna city, he added.

"The canal is so polluted that cattle or other animals get sick from drinking its water," said Roksana Begum of Karim Nagar.

"Those who illegally occupy it even put up signs and fences, pretending to own the land," a frustrated Roksana said.

According to KCC, an estimation process is underway to excavate the canal.

It was demarcated once in 2009, but it soon got occupied again.

Nuruzzaman Talukder, estate officer of Khulna City Corporation, said project worth Tk 823 crore is underway to reduce waterlogging and develop drainage system in the city.

He said the canal will be excavated with side walls on both sides under the project.

Once completed, there will be walkways on its both sides, the official added.

Regarding the construction of a road over the canal, he admitted to it and said, "It's common practice in Khulna city for people to build houses and other establishments on the banks of waterbodies in this manner. They don't even leave any space for roads."

"This canal is no different in that regard. If we did not build the road, then people would find it difficult to navigate the area. We had no choice but to do it this way," the official said.

Abdur Rahim (67), a resident of the area, said the canal's demarcation was marked ten to eleven years ago, while it was dug in 2015.

However, the excavation wasn't executed properly.

"While the works were going on, the soil was placed by the side of the canal.

Gradually, a road was created to move through the soil. Later, the city corporation built a road around 15 feet in width, which came to be known as Haji Abdur Rahman Road," he further said.

"Large boats used to sail through it. People even fished here," said local Abul Kalam.

"Today, the neighbouring areas get submerged because water can't pass through the canal. Even then, if the



Woes of 'Neel Kuthi'

Proposed archaeological site rots away in negligence



OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Nilphamari*

Nilphamari's history carries a deep wound from the colonial era. During that period, its farmers were compelled to cultivate indigo in the face of torture from British traders.

The very name of the district is said to have originated from the two words -- "Neel", meaning indigo in Bangla, and "farm", owing to the presence of several indigo farms in the region.

The "Neel Kuthi" at Notkhana village in Polashbari union bears testimony of the indigo traders' atrocities on local farmers.

But despite its significance, the establishment is on the verge of rotting away due to the lack of preservative steps.

A few years ago, the Department of Archaeology (DoA) declared it as a proposed archaeological site, but this is yet to materialise.

According to "Nilphamarir Itihas", published by Bangla Academy, the establishment was constructed in the early 19th century and was used as a torture centre.

"The history of the Kuthi is intertwined with that of the area. It reminds everyone of the pain and agony inflicted on their colonised forefathers," said Jahangir Alam Sarker, author of the book.

Locals alleged that the dilapidated Kuthi is a safe house for anti-social and criminal activities today.

Contacted, SM Hasanat Bin Islam, assistant custodian of Rangpur museum and a DoA official, said, "When the Kuthi is declared as a fully reserved archaeological site, we can proceed to take proper safety and development measures, as mentioned in our proposal."

Nominations open for 'Unsung Women Nation Builders' award

CITY DESK

The Daily Star and IPDC have called for nominations for the sixth edition of "Unsung Women Nation Builders" awards.

The joint initiative will honour women change-makers for their silent and unrelenting contributions in building a better Bangladesh, said a press release.

This year, the nomination categories are health, education, social welfare, entrepreneurship, and Covid hero. An independent jury panel comprising eminent personalities will be evaluating the submissions.

Mominul Islam, managing director and CEO of IPDC Finance Limited, said, "The narrative of nation-building is overwhelmingly dominated by men. Whatever little credit we spare for women is also

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Father, son among 3 killed in road crashes

12 people injured

STAR REPORT

Three people were killed and 12 others were injured in road accidents in two districts yesterday, according to reports from our correspondents.

In Khagrachhari, a man and his son were killed after a cement-laden truck carrying them hit a roadside tree at Budong Para in Guimara upazila.

The truck driver was injured in the accident, said police.

Jibon Majumdar (50) and his son Ratif Majumdar (12) died on the spot, said Guimara Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mizanur Rahman.

"They were going to Khagrachhari Sadar from Manikchhari," he said.

In Munshiganj, a worker was killed and 11 others were injured as a concrete mixture truck and a minibus collided on Dhaka-Chattogram highway at Baktarkandi in Baushia area yesterday.

Jinnahar Begum (35) from Sunamganj was a worker of a local factory in Gazaria upazila, said police.

She was travelling in the minibus.

The 11 injured -- who were also the minibus passengers -- were taken to Gazaria Upazila Health Complex.

When the vehicle of Anwar Cement Company hit the moving minibus around 2:00pm, both the vehicles fell into a roadside ditch one after another, said Bhaberchar Highway Police Station Officer-in-Charge C Shah Jalal Babul.

He said the vehicles were pulled with a wrecker.



Fire service officials conducting rescue operation after a truck and minibus collided and fell into a roadside ditch in Munshiganj yesterday. A worker was killed and 11 were injured in the accident.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



Journalist Habib dies in road crash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Habibur Rahman, a senior reporter of the daily Shomoyer Alo, died in an accident in Dhaka's Hatirjheel early yesterday.

His motorcycle hit a footpath near Begunbari around 2:30am on his way home, said Sub-Inspector Enamul Haque, duty officer of Hatirjheel Police Station.

Pedestrians took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead, he told The Daily Star.

On information, police rushed to the spot and recovered the motorcycle.

Majdar Hossain, a pedestrian who took him

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



(L) Filmmakers Mika Sasaki (Japan), Supriya Suri (India), Iwona Siekierzynska (Poland) and costume designer Izabela Stronias (Poland) at the DIFF. (R) Even though few people visited throughout the day, the crowds increased in the evening.



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

DIFF 2022: Surprisingly solid, disappointingly under-appreciated

Stepping inside the Public Library, a vivid blend of vibrant cultures was a treat to my eyes, as filmmakers, producers, and film academics from different parts of the world were enjoying each other's company while they talked about the passion that united them, films.

ASHLEY SHOFTORSHI SAMADDAR

English in many different accents: Indian, Polish, European, Egyptian, Iranian, Russian, and many more, started echoing like a drum roll in my ears when I entered the director's lounge at the 20th Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF).

Echoing the theme, 'Better Film, Better Audience, and Better Society', the festival this year has opened its doors in various categories, including the Asian Competition section, Retrospective, Tribute, Wide Angle, Bangladesh Panorama, Cinema of the World, Children's Film, Short and Independent Film, Women Filmmakers Section, and Spiritual Films section. Around 225 films from 70 different nations are being screened at DIFF this year.

The submitted films are being screened at multiple venues across Dhaka – Sufia Kamal Auditorium and Main Auditorium at National Museum in Shahbagh, Alliance Francaise de Dhaka in Dhanmondi, National Art Gallery Auditorium and Auditorium of National Music and Dance at Bangladesh



The entrance of DIFF's venue at the Public Library.

Shilpakala Academy (BSA), and at the Public Library Auditorium in Shahbagh.

Stepping inside the Public Library, a vivid blend of vibrant cultures was a treat to my eyes, as filmmakers, producers, and film academics from different parts of the world were enjoying each other's company while they talked about the passion that united them, films.

The festival, which opened on Jan 15 and will run till Jan 23, has also become

an educational hub of young Bangladeshi students, aspiring filmmakers, and prominent directors and producers, indulging in the wide array of themes displayed onto the screens of the Main Auditorium at the Library.

As the sun started to dim and the evening winds blew in, the DIFF screening theatres started to breathe new air as more stumping feet started entering the halls.

Ranging from smaller budget projects to well-financed productions, DIFF paid equal heed to all comers. While some are worth avoiding, many are also substantial enough to deserve walk-ins as they hit the screens.

Through DIFF, I was able to live 70 cultures, some similar and others completely different. I became witness to an amazing cultural harmony that inclines one to be accepting and even enjoying each other's differences.

DIFF 2022, in my opinion, is a wonderfully carnivalesque experience, which few people bought the tickets to. That is a shame, as it has a lot to offer for all visitors.

READ THE FULL STORY ONLINE

I revealed the untold stories of my life in this book: Kumar Bishwajit

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Kumar Bishwajit, a man born for music, has inspired many upcoming singers in his long career.

The legendary singer will depict stories of his life through his autobiography "Ebong Bishwajit" in the upcoming Ekushey Book Fair.

"I have revealed the untold stories of my life in the autobiography. New generation artists will be able to get an in-depth insight into my childhood and also learn about my musical journey through the chapters of this book," said the singer.

Kumar Bishwajit narrated the story while musician Joy Shahriar transcribed the book. Published under the banner of Aajob Prokashoni, the cover illustration has been drawn by Sohail Anam.



Britney Spears wishes she 'slapped' her mom and sister after Justin Timberlake split

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK



Pop sensation Britney Spears has been posting lengthy notes to counter her sister Jamie Lynn's recent quotes about their life as the latter promotes her new memoir.

In an Instagram post, the "Toxic" singer called out her sister and her mother as she recalled their behaviour from the time after she had

broken up with Justin Timberlake and wished she had slapped them.

"I'm sorry Jamie Lynn, I wasn't strong enough to do what should have been done. I should have slapped you and Mamma right across your faces," the post read.

Justin and Britney dated from 1999 to 2002. After the breakup, Spears had a hard time moving on.

COUNTRYWIDE



A waterlogged Boro field in Jashore's Monirampur upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

WATERLOGGING

Boro cultivation on 4,000 hectares uncertain

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Cultivation of Boro on about 4,000 hectares of land in the current season seems uncertain due to permanent waterlogging along the Bhabadaha region in Jashore's Monirampur upazila.

Alongside loss of seedbeds, increased prices of fertilizers, electricity and diesel are the other reasons behind the setback.

Local farmers are currently in utter frustration as Boro has been cultivated in only 55 hectares of land so far this season.

Locals said about 15 beels (waterbodies) around Monirampur upazila remain waterlogged for nearly half of the year. They said most of the houses, educational institutions and other infrastructures in the low land area are still submerged in water.

Farmer Abdur Rahim of Bhabdahapar said Boro cultivation on his five bighas land still uncertain as most of the seedlings and seedbed got damaged due to stagnant water.

Farmers' leader Paritosh Biswas said farmers in the region can grow only one crop a year, but it too looks uncertain due to waterlogging.

Monirampur Upazila Deputy Assistant Plant Protection Officer Pradeep Kumar Biswas said current Boro season has started from December last year and will continue till the first week of February this year.

But, persistent water logging may affect Boro cultivation on 4,000 hectares of land under the upazila this season, he said, adding that they have a target to bring 27,500 hectares under Boro cultivation this season.

Most of iron bridges in a shambles

Movement through the ramshackle bridges on Charkhali-Mathbaria road poses risk of accidents

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) in Pirojpur has hanged signboards on both two sides of each iron bridge on Charkhali-Mathbaria road in the district saying that it is risky.

But there has no system to monitor it. Though the longevity of an iron bridge is ten years, they have been in use for around 35 years.

Of the 20 iron bridges, four were replaced with RCC girder bridges last year. But the rest are now in a sorry state. As the 38-kilometre-long road is very busy, the repair work does not last long.

Mohammad Ibrahim, a bus driver, said they have to cross the old iron bridges through serious difficulty.

"When we get onto the bridge it begins to swing," Ibrahim said adding that they have to wait at one end of the bridge until another vehicle comes from the other side as two vehicles cannot simultaneously cross an iron bridge.

Another bus driver of the road Mohammad Kalu said that they have to cross the iron bridges amidst fear of collapse as four to five iron bridges on the road collapsed in the past failing to bear heavy loads.

"But while crossing a concrete bridge,

we do not have to face such a problem," he said.

On the other hand, drivers of small vehicles also have to face untold sufferings while crossing the iron bridges.

"As there are big holes on the iron plates of the bridge, sometimes wheels of our vehicles get stuck," said a motorcyclist, Imam Hossain Masud who most often goes to Mathbaria traversing the road.

Locals said that every day huge trucks loaded with wooden logs, stones, bricks and other materials move along the road. As there is nobody to check the load of the vehicles, they (truckers) cross

the iron bridges easily risking their lives and others.

Ali Akber, a sub-assistant engineer of RHD in Pirojpur, has admitted the fact that the iron bridges on Charkhali-Mathbaria road are in shambles.

"We have included 17 bridges and 29 culverts in the development project proposal (DPP) to be constructed from Bhandaria upazila's Charkhali to C & B Bazaar of Mathbaria upazila in the district," he said adding it will cost around TK 350 crore.

"We hope that the project will be passed by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) soon," he added.



The RHD in Pirojpur erects cautionary signboards at both ends of each iron bridge on Charkhali-Mathbaria road asking vehicles not to pass through it carrying more than five tonnes of load as the condition of the bridges is precarious. The photo was taken near Ikri bus stop in Pirojpur's Bhandaria upazila.

PHOTO: STAR



Members of the Israeli forces watch as people walk through the ruins of a Palestinian house in the sensitive east Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, yesterday. Israeli police demolished the home and arrested at least 18 people as they carried out a controversial eviction order. The looming eviction of other families from Sheikh Jarrah in May last year fuelled an 11-day war between Israel and armed Palestinian factions in Gaza.

PHOTO: AFP

'Tax us now' Millionaires make unusual plea

AFP, Paris

More than 100 millionaires made an unusual plea yesterday: "Tax us now".

Their appeal came as a study backed by wealthy individuals and nonprofits found that a wealth tax on the world's richest people could raise \$2.52 trillion per year — enough to pay for Covid vaccines for everyone and pull 2.3 billion people out of poverty.

In an open letter to the World Economic Forum's online Davos meeting, 102 millionaires, including Disney heiress Abigail Disney, said the current tax system is unfair and "deliberately designed to make the rich richer".

"The world — every country in it — must demand the rich pay their fair share," the letter says. "Tax us, the rich, and tax us now."

Their plea follows a report by global charity Oxfam this week which said that the world's 10 wealthiest men doubled their fortunes to \$1.5 trillion during the first two years of the pandemic while inequality and poverty soared.

The signatories include wealthy men and women from the United States, Canada, Germany, Britain, Denmark, Norway, Austria, the Netherlands and Iran. The Patriotic Millionaires took part in a the wealth tax study with a network of non-profits and social movements, including Fight for Inequality Alliance, Oxfam and the US-based Institute for Policy Studies think tank.

In addition to funding vaccines worldwide and alleviating poverty, the tax would be enough to provide universal health care and social protection to 3.6 billion people in low- and middle-income countries, the group said.

The tax would be set at two percent for those worth over \$5 million, three percent for over \$50 million and five percent for over \$1 billion.

Russia could attack Ukraine at short notice

Says Blinken in Kyiv, set to meet Lavrov in Geneva tomorrow in 'last stop before the train wreck'

REUTERS, Kyiv

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday said that Russia could launch a new attack on Ukraine at "very short notice" as he met the country's president on the first leg of a new diplomatic push to avert war.

Russia said tension around Ukraine was increasing and it was still waiting for a written US response to its sweeping demands for security guarantees from the West.

The pessimistic statements highlighted the gulf between Washington and Moscow as Blinken gears up for a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov tomorrow that a Russian foreign policy analyst called "probably the last stop before the train wreck".

Blinken told diplomats at the US embassy in Kyiv that a Russian build-up of tens of thousands of troops near the Ukrainian border was taking place with "no provocation, no reason."

"We know that there are plans in place to increase that force even more on very short notice, and that gives President Putin the capacity, also on very short notice, to take further aggressive

action against Ukraine," Blinken said.

Russia has also moved troops to Belarus for what it calls joint military exercises, giving it the option of attacking neighbouring Ukraine from the north, east and south.

But it continues to deny any such intention. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Western weapons deliveries to Ukraine, military manoeuvres and Nato aircraft flights were to blame for rising tension around Ukraine.

Vladimir Frolov, a former Russian diplomat who is now a foreign policy analyst, said Moscow would not be appeased by West's offer of arms control talks and was pursuing a much more sweeping rearrangement of the European security order.

"The Lavrov-Blinken meet is probably the last stop before the train wreck. But hopes are dim, the positions are incompatible," he said.

Describing Russia's military deployment in Belarus as a "huge escalation", Frolov gave a dire assessment of the crisis. "I think barring a US surrender and their delivering Ukraine to Russia, some kind of a military option is all but inevitable now."



Will not resign

Says UK PM as Conservative MP defects to Labour amid 'partygate' revolt

AGENCIES

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, fighting to save his premiership amid a storm over a series of lockdown parties in Downing Street, yesterday told parliament that he would not resign.

Seven Conservatives said they had filed letters demanding a Tory vote of no confidence in the embattled Johnson, and more than 20 others were reported to have coalesced in an organised revolt.

One of the seven Tories, Christian Wakeford, took the dramatic step of joining the opposition party, minutes before Johnson faced Labour leader Keir Starmer at their weekly joust in the House of Commons.

Johnson, who in 2019 won his party's biggest majority in more than 30 years on a pledge to "Get Brexit Done", has repeatedly apologised for the parties and said that he was unaware of many of them.

Starmer, who welcomed the defection of Wakeford, asked Johnson if a prime minister should resign if he misled parliament.

Asked directly if he would resign, Johnson said: "No".

To trigger a leadership challenge, 54 of the 360 Conservative MPs in parliament must write letters of no confidence to the chairman of the party's 1922 Committee. An analysis by The Times newspaper showed that 58 Conservative lawmakers had openly criticised the prime minister.

Toppling Johnson would leave the United Kingdom in limbo for months just as the West deals with the Ukraine crisis and the world's fifth largest economy grapples with the inflationary wave triggered by the Covid pandemic.

Recognise us

Taliban PM urges Muslim nations to ease pain of Afghans

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban's prime minister yesterday called on Muslim nations to be the first to officially recognise their government, as aid-dependent Afghanistan faces economic collapse.

No country has yet recognised the Taliban, with most watching to see how the hardline Islamists — notorious for human rights abuses during their first stint in power — restrict freedoms.

Although the group has promised a softer rule in line with their interpretation of Islamic Sharia law, women are largely excluded from government employment and secondary schools for girls are mostly shuttered.

"I call on Muslim countries to take the lead and recognise us officially. Then I hope we will be able to develop quickly," Mohammad Hassan Akhund told a conference in Kabul called to address the country's massive economic woes.

"We don't want it for the officials. We want it for our public," he said, adding that the Taliban had fulfilled all necessary conditions by restoring peace and security.

UN: 2021 among seven hottest years on record

AFP, Geneva

The past seven years have been the hottest on record, the United Nations confirmed yesterday, adding that 2021 temperatures remained high despite the cooling effect of the La Nina weather phenomenon. "The warmest seven years have all been since 2015," the UN's World Meteorological Organization said in a statement. The datasets showed that the average global temperature in 2021 was around 1.11 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial levels measured between 1850 and 1900.

Tonga clears runway for aid flights

AFP, Wellington

Tonga finished removing a thick coat of ash from an international runway yesterday after days of painstaking effort, clearing the way for desperately needed emergency aid to arrive in the isolated and disaster-stricken nation. UN crisis coordinator Jonathan Veitch told AFP the runway on the Pacific kingdom's main island was again operational. It is "cleared but not in use yet", he said, adding that Tonga could receive much-stalled flights from Australia and New Zealand from today. Three people were killed when the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano exploded on Saturday, triggering tsunami waves that ripped down homes and caused widespread flooding.

Russia-led troops complete withdrawal from Kazakhstan


AFP, Almaty

A Russia-led military contingent completed its withdrawal from Kazakhstan as the country lifted a state of emergency yesterday after unprecedented unrest in the Central Asian state. The Russian defence ministry said that four military planes carrying its last remaining troops had departed from the capital Nur-Sultan and Kazakhstan's largest city Almaty. Ex-Soviet Kazakhstan has been roiled by clashes that followed peaceful protests over a New Year fuel price increase and which left at least 225 people dead, including 19 fatalities among servicemen.

Three dead in blast on Indian warship

AFP, New Delhi

Three Indian naval personnel were killed in an explosion on one of the country's oldest destroyers at a naval dockyard in Mumbai, authorities said. The blast occurred Tuesday in an internal compartment on the Soviet-built INS Ranvir, commissioned in 1986, according to the Indian Navy. Broadcaster NDTV quoted sources saying the explosion did not involve weapons. Media reports said 11 people were also injured.



Jagannath University
Faculty of Life and Earth Sciences

Master of Pharmacy (Professional) Program
Department of Pharmacy

Admission Circular (Batch 01P)
Spring 2022 (February-July)

Key Features of the program

Degree/Award: Master of Pharmacy
Major: 1. Industrial Pharmacy, 2. Pharmaceutical Marketing

Course duration: One year (2 semesters) Total credits : 32

Class time: Friday and Saturday

Application fee: Tk. 1,000.00

Application open: Till February 17, 2022 (9 am – 3 pm, week-days only)

Admission test: February 18, 2022, Friday Result publication: February 19, 2022

Admission period: February 20-24, 2022 Class starts: February 25, 2022 (Friday)

Eligibility for submission of application

A. Minimum 16 years of schooling; having S.S.C. (or equivalent) 10 years, H.S.C. (or equivalent) 2 years and Graduation (or equivalent) 4 years. **B.** Graduated in pharmaceutical sciences or relevant areas (GPA 3.00 or more out of 4.00, or 2nd Class approved by the equivalence Committee of the Department of Pharmacy). **C.** No third class/division (or equivalent).

Application submission

A. Filled-up application form (available in www.jnu.ac.bd), **B.** Attested 3 copies of passport size photographs, **C.** Copies of the certificates and mark-sheets of all the previous examinations (attested by the Chairperson of the department of graduation) and **D.** Application fee

Contact (further information and application form)

Office of the Dean, Faculty of Life and Earth Sciences, Jagannath University. Phone: +88029587900 (Dean Office), +88029515035 (Dept. office), +8801781453704 (Program Director).

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Public trust vital for acceptability of any EC law

Govt should invite scrutiny from all stakeholders before passing it

IT was surprising to learn that the cabinet, on January 17, 2022, approved a draft law to form the Election Commission (EC), following a 50-year-old constitutional obligation. While we have yet to get access to the draft of the "Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioner Appointment Act, 2022," what is evident from media reports is that it provides a framework for forming the commission through a search committee, in essence extending legal coverage to the practice of constituting ECs through such committees. But apart from some general criteria for the selection of appointees to the said committee or the EC, our knowledge in this regard is limited to the briefing of the cabinet secretary. What added to the confusion is the way the approval has been rushed—without prior engagements with the political parties, civil society and the citizens.

According to media reports, the draft provides for a six-member search committee, headed by a judge of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division, which will propose names for the EC to the president, who will finalise the appointments. Among the members, there will be a High Court Division judge, the comptroller and auditor general, the chairman of Bangladesh Public Service Commission, and two other persons nominated by the president. From what we have learnt so far, this seems more of a law to form a search committee or the EC, while wider concerns about their function, credibility and accountability are not addressed, which a law of this nature should. Even if we keep our discussion limited to the search committee, experts have expressed concerns about whether there will be a female representative in the committee, its working procedure, the eligibility criteria for citizen representatives, etc. What about the representation of civil society and political parties, the most important stakeholders in any election? Will the committee disclose the names to be proposed? Will those names be sent to parliament for discussion?

These questions are important, because if we are going to see more of the same kind of search committees through which the past two highly controversial ECs were constituted, it will serve no purpose beyond being a cosmetic exercise. Article 118 (j) of the constitution categorically says, "The appointment of the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners shall, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf, be made by the President." We need a law that fulfils both the letter and the spirit of our constitution. If the purpose of this constitutional exercise is to hold elections through a fair process and with the consensus of all involved, this draft law and the manner in which it came about raises more questions than answers.

We, therefore, urge the government to immediately make the draft public and finalise it based on the reviews of all stakeholders. For example, as some experts have suggested, the law should incorporate an assurance provision to ensure the qualifications, skills, experience, neutrality and acceptability of the chief election commissioner and other commissioners, as well as their determination to uphold an objective stance. We are told that if the proposed law is not passed in the ongoing session of parliament, the president may promulgate an ordinance to turn it into an act for its quick enforcement. We, however, advise circumspection in how we go about it. We also need to remember that no law will be sufficient if the powers that be are not sincere about holding a fair and credible election.

Protect wildlife in Lawachhara

Authorities must replace exposed wires in the forest

IT is quite alarming that open electrical lines going right through the Lawachhara forest are turning into a death trap for different species of wildlife there. As a protected forest, it is supposed to be a safe place for animals, and having such uncovered lines is clearly a danger to them. This makes us wonder why this hasn't crossed the minds of the forest authorities, or if it has, why they haven't done anything about it.

According to a report by this daily on January 19, 2022, the power line that runs through the forest in Moulvibazar's Kamalganj upazila packs 33 kilovolts, posing a constant threat to the overall biodiversity of wildlife there. When animals roam at night in search of food, they risk getting electrocuted as the power line is not insulated with non-conductive materials. According to forest officials, almost every month, there is news of at least one or two endangered wild animals getting entangled in live wires, resulting in deaths or serious injuries. The actual number could be much higher.

Experts believe that if the animals keep dying at this rate, many of them might go extinct someday. They stressed the need to replace the existing power line with one covered with rubber or other non-conductive coating. But despite requests made to the forest department and the rural electricity office to install suitable covers, nothing of this sort has been done yet. According to the Forest Act, installation of electric poles, laying of lines and providing power connection in a forest without permission of the forest department are prohibited.

We must understand that the Lawachhara forest is a national treasure that needs to be protected. Seeing many inspiring examples of wildlife conservation in other countries, it is heart-breaking to see animals dying in our country because of neglect and mismanagement. We urge the relevant authorities to replace the uncovered wires in the forest for the sake of its wildlife.

Our youth are craving opportunities

Are we willing to make way and give it to them?



THE OVERTON WINDOW

Eresh Omar Jamal is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star. His Twitter handle is: @EreshOmarJamal

ERESH OMAR JAMAL

IN a first-of-its-kind study, the Economic Relations Division (ERD) under the finance ministry found that around 1.6 million young people lost their jobs and about 20 million youths faced income loss due to the pandemic. No doubt the pandemic has been extremely difficult for young people—as well as people of other age groups—around the world. But the study acknowledged that it has been particularly brutal for Bangladesh's youth labour force.

Part of that obviously has to do with the lockdowns that the government had imposed to contain Covid-19 transmission, and the resulting economic losses. Another part has to do with the unequal recovery that we have experienced. For example, cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which account for 98 percent of all firms and half of all jobs, have been able to access only around Tk 15,000 crore of the Tk 40,000-crore stimulus packages allocated by the government. Meanwhile, large firms have gained access to the majority of the funds that the government set aside for them.

This disparity in disbursement of funds under the stimulus programme is the main obstacle to a comprehensive economic recovery and sustainable job creation, according to former Bangladesh Bank governor Salehuddin Ahmed.

In order to overcome the prevailing crisis, government dole-outs or enhanced safety net programmes cannot continue forever; hence, it is the creation of more jobs that matters the most. However, the pandemic alone is not the only factor that is of concern in regards to the creation of more jobs, particularly for young people.

Even before the pandemic began, Bangladesh was struggling to create jobs and exciting new opportunities for its younger population. According to the Labour Force Survey, 2016-17, youth unemployment in the country (12.3 percent) far surpassed overall unemployment (4.2 percent)—even though the latter (as per the official data) was shockingly as low as in countries such as Switzerland and the US, which some economists deemed very unrealistic. Moreover, during that time, the rate of job creation had already slowed down at a worrying rate: between 2013 and 2016-17, while the average annual GDP growth was 6.6 percent, the

average annual growth of jobs was only 0.9 percent.

Lack of long-term and innovative planning are partly to blame for this. But so are bad governance and widespread corruption. The fact that Bangladesh has continually done poorly in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business ranking shows how the business environment has

along with the lack of space that we have traditionally reserved for them, is stifling their creativity from freely flowing and changing society for the better. Not only are our young people suffering as a consequence, but so is everyone else.

The most unfortunate part is that our young people actually want to get involved and help. According to a survey



▲ **Lack of long-term and innovative planning on the government's part is partly to blame for the crisis of unemployment that the youths of Bangladesh face today.**

SOURCE: LSE

been hampered by these and other factors.

Corruption and poor governance are always serious drawbacks for business. Corrupt groups and individuals who curry favours from the government not only get "special" benefits that allow them to dominate the business landscape without having to operate more efficiently, but they also create barriers to entry for more skilled competition, which leads to the creation of monopolies and less jobs. The social cost that arises as a result of such corruption far outweighs what is easily detectable on the surface.

Besides the increased unemployment and income loss, about two million college students and one million university students are also facing serious uncertainties about their future. And as more young people sit idle at home, they are also developing various health problems such as sleep disorders, obesity, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, which will have long-term health and economic implications for them and for society as a whole.

Whereas one would expect the youth to be more productive and the biggest source of innovation, the pandemic,

done by the ERD, the topmost priority of our adolescents is to help other people, while a significant area of their dreams and aspirations are related to the prosperity of society and the country.

And the same survey acknowledges that there is no other alternative but to create an environment in Bangladesh where the next generation can raise their voice, make themselves heard and exercise their agency.

In regards to the pandemic, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has warned that unless action is taken to tackle the way it has affected young people's employment opportunities, many of them could continue to struggle for decades. But the problem we have is much bigger—it is one of giving young people the opportunity to truly and freely get involved, and feel a sense of ownership of this country, which they are being denied by the power-obsessed who simply cannot tolerate seeing others gain any kind of opportunities or freedom.

And that, most definitely, will hold back the progress of Bangladesh for decades, which is why we need to see a change fast.

The 'crossfire' controversy



STRAIGHT LINE

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a former IGP of Bangladesh Police.

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE piece "No 'crossfire' deaths since US sanctions" published in this newspaper on January 11 will definitely engage all thinking minds, especially those entrusted with the maintenance of law and public order. It would appear from the report that human rights bodies are of the opinion that the so-called "crossfires" incidents happen due to establishment policy and strategy and that the same stop or decrease sharply after public outcry or condemnation of such mode of operation of the law enforcement agency. A serving official has said that a "crossfire" takes place when the situation so warrants and the increase or decrease of such engagement is dependent upon objective conditions, meaning that law enforcers resort to "crossfire" only in self-defence.

In view of the above diametrically opposite views on "crossfires", it is necessary in public interest to take a serious look into matters and understand the different ramifications.

Many consider "crossfires" to be extrajudicial murders that have been authoritatively encouraged. There is good reason to agree with such a view as so-called crossfires continued unabated during the democratic dispensation of 2001-2006. During the caretaker interval, there were comparatively fewer "crossfires". However, the return of democracy since early 2009 has not

been able to put an effective stop to the suspected extrajudicial killings.

Under the circumstances, should citizens believe that lawless enforcement officials are in great demand when lawlessness and disorder prevail? Alternatively, is belief in the rule of law unnecessary? Don't we need to put sustained efforts into achieving substantial results in the long run? Why are we obsessed with "spectacular results" that are in fact illusory?

Eulogising or praising "crossfire" actions has created a worrying environment wherein result-oriented investigating officers are increasingly getting inclined to resort to short-cut methods to please political heavyweights. The worst aspect of this is the possibility that an alleged criminal or ordinary suspect may easily get caught up in a "crossfire" while ulterior motives are served.

Since most "crossfire" deaths are not seriously investigated to find proof of one's suspected culpability, the culprits in the enforcement and investigative apparatus achieve a macabre win-win situation. Elements of accountability and fear recede into the background and investigation becomes a pathetically low priority.

Professionally speaking, this is an instance of heightened jeopardy because, in Bangladesh, the crime-fighting machinery already stands accused of not cultivating a scientific modus operandi and quite often relapsing into untenable third-degree methods.

The question is: Do we want sustained labourious action under the law to strengthen our democratic foundation or do we need rash, desperate action without the cover of law?

The ultimate punishment for alleged "crossfires", the credibility of which

many are not convinced of, appears as a summary response from desperate executives of law enforcement. The legality of actions leading to such an extreme apart, any responsible citizen might like to know if in our often overzealous anti-crime operations, we are just treating symptoms without venturing to study and assess the objective conditions promoting criminality.

We do not need sociologists and criminologists to tell us that present-day crime is a complex social phenomenon caused by a multiplicity of factors, and determining culpability is an extremely mind-exacting task.

Often, the fun-seeking delinquent of yesteryears turns into the uncontrollable don of the day due to the patronage of powerful quarters and the unexplained inaction of law enforcement. Therefore, when "crossfires" cause deaths, some myopic elements may be satisfied, but a civilised society—which wishes to live by the cannons of law—cannot but be concerned.

What we need is adequate provision for witness protection and victim support in the criminal justice administration, alongside hefty government funds. Any further delay in achieving this will only swell the ranks of summary justice seekers and admirers of vigilante action. The decapitating adversity of the victims of crime demands mainstream support from the system.

The rule of law and criminal jurisprudence may appear to be unequivocally in favour of offenders, criminals, and the law-breakers—but that does not automatically allow for resorting to illegal measures. A civilised government must strive to demonstrate that law enforcement effectiveness and civil liberties can co-exist in a society governed by the rule of law.

We do not need sociologists and criminologists to tell us that present-day crime is a complex social phenomenon caused by a multiplicity of factors, and determining culpability is an extremely mind-exacting task.

Forge ahead with confidence and fortitude to jointly create a better post-Covid world



XI JINPING

Xi Jinping is the president of the People's Republic of China. This article is his message on the occasion of the 2022 Davos Agenda of the World Economic Forum (WEF).

IN two weeks' time, China will celebrate the advent of spring in the lunar new year, the Year of the Tiger. In Chinese culture, the tiger symbolises bravery and strength, as the Chinese people often refer to spirited dragon and dynamic tiger, or soaring dragon and leaping tiger. To meet the severe challenges facing humanity, we must "add wings to the tiger" and act with the courage and strength of the tiger to overcome all obstacles on our way forward. We must do everything necessary to clear the shadow of the pandemic and boost economic and social recovery and development, so that the sunshine of hope may light up the future of humanity.

The world today is undergoing major changes unseen in a century. These changes, not limited to a particular moment, event, country or region, represent the profound and sweeping

a powerful weapon, ensure their equitable distribution, quicken vaccination, and close the global immunisation gap, so as to truly safeguard people's lives, health and livelihoods.

China is a country that delivers on its promises. China has already sent over two billion doses of vaccines to more than 120 countries and international organisations. Still, China will provide another one billion doses to African countries, including 600 million doses as donation, and will also donate 150 million doses to the Asean countries.

Second, we need to resolve various risks and promote steady recovery of the world economy. The world economy is emerging from the depths, yet it still faces many constraints. The global industrial and supply chains have been disrupted. Commodity prices continue to rise. Energy supply remains tight. These risks compound one another and heighten the uncertainty about economic recovery. The global low inflation environment has notably changed, and the risks of inflation driven by multiple factors are surfacing. If major economies slam on the brakes or take a U-turn in their monetary policies, there would be serious negative spillovers. They would present challenges

trajectories, development fault lines, and a technological divide. The Human Development Index has declined for the first time in 30 years. The world's poor population has increased by more than 100 million. Nearly 800 million people live in hunger. Difficulties are mounting in food security, education, employment, medicine, health and other areas important to people's livelihoods. Some developing countries have fallen back into poverty and instability due to the pandemic. Many in developed countries are also living through a hard time.

No matter what difficulties may come our way, we must adhere to a people-centred philosophy of development, place development and livelihoods front and centre in global macro-policies, realise the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and build greater synergy among existing mechanisms of development cooperation to promote balanced development worldwide. We need to uphold the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, promote international cooperation on climate change in the context of development, and implement the outcomes of COP26 to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Developed economies should take the lead in honouring their emission reduction responsibilities, deliver on their commitment of financial and technological support, and create the necessary conditions for developing countries to address climate change and achieve sustainable development.

Last year, I put forward a Global Development Initiative at the UN General Assembly to draw international attention to the pressing challenges faced by developing countries. The initiative is a public good open to the whole world, which aims to form synergy with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and boost common development across the world. China stands ready to work with all partners to jointly translate the initiative into concrete actions and make sure that no country is left behind in this process.

Fourth, we need to discard the Cold War mentality and seek peaceful coexistence and win-win outcomes. Our world today is far from being tranquil; rhetorics that stoke hatred and prejudice abound. Acts of containment, suppression or confrontation arising thereof do all harm, not the least good, to world peace and security. History has proven time and again that confrontation does not solve problems—it only invites catastrophic consequences. Protectionism and unilateralism can protect no one; they ultimately hurt the interests of others as well as one's own. Even worse are the practices of hegemony and bullying, which run counter to the tide of history. Naturally, countries have divergences and disagreements between them. Yet, a zero-sum approach that enlarges one's own gain at the expense of others will not help. Acts of single-mindedly building "exclusive yards with high walls" or "parallel systems," of enthusiastically putting together exclusive small circles or blocs that polarise the world, of overstressing the concept of national security to hold back economic and technological advances of other countries, and of fanning ideological antagonism and politicising or weaponising economic, scientific and technological issues, will gravely undercut international efforts to tackle common challenges.

The right way forward for humanity is peaceful development and win-win cooperation. Different countries and civilisations may prosper together on the basis of respect for each other, and seek common ground and win-win outcomes by setting aside differences.

We should follow the trend of history, work for a stable international order, advocate common values of humanity, and build a community with a shared future for mankind. We should choose dialogue over confrontation, inclusiveness over exclusion, and stand against all forms of unilateralism, protectionism, hegemony or power politics.

Last year, the Communist Party of China (CPC) celebrated the 100th anniversary of its founding. Through a century of tenacious struggle, the CPC has rallied and led the Chinese people in accomplishing remarkable achievements in the advancement of the nation and betterment of people's lives. We have realised a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and won the battle against poverty, both according to plan, and found a historic solution to ending absolute poverty. Now, China is marching on a new journey of building a modern socialist country in all respects.

China will stay committed to pursuing high-quality development. The Chinese economy enjoys a good momentum overall. Last year, our GDP grew by around eight percent, achieving the dual target of fairly high growth and relatively low inflation. Shifts in the domestic and international economic environment have brought tremendous pressure, but the fundamentals of the Chinese economy, characterised by strong resilience, enormous potential and long-term sustainability, remain unchanged. We have every confidence in the future of China's economy.

"The wealth of a country is measured

by the abundance of its people." Thanks to considerable economic growth, the Chinese people are living much better lives. Nonetheless, we are soberly aware that to meet people's aspiration for an even better life, we still have much hard work to do in the long run. China has made it clear that we strive for more visible and substantive progress in the well-rounded development of individuals, and the common prosperity of the entire population. We are working hard on all fronts to deliver this goal. The common prosperity we desire is not egalitarianism. To use an analogy, we will first make the pie bigger, and then divide it properly through reasonable institutional arrangements. As a rising tide lifts all boats, everyone will get a fair share from development, and development gains will benefit all our people in a more substantial and equitable way.

China will stay committed to reform and opening up. For China, reform and opening up is always a work in process. Whatever change in the international landscape, China will always hold high the banner of reform and opening up. China will continue to let the market play a decisive role in resource allocation, and see to it that the government plays its role better. We will be steadfast in consolidating and developing the public sector, just as we are steadfast in encouraging, supporting and guiding the development of the non-public sector. We will build a unified, open, competitive and orderly market system, where all businesses enjoy equal status before the law and have equal opportunities in the marketplace. All types of capital are welcome to operate in China in compliance with laws and regulations, and play a positive role for the development of the country. China will continue to expand high-standard opening up, steadily advance institutional opening up that covers rules, management and standards, deliver national treatment for foreign businesses, and promote high-quality Belt and Road cooperation. With the entry into force of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) on January 1 this year, China will faithfully fulfil its obligations and deepen economic and trade ties with other RCEP parties. China will also continue to work for the joining of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA), with a view to further integrating into the regional and global economy and achieving mutual benefit and win-win results.

China will stay committed to promoting ecological conservation. As I have said many times, we should never grow the economy at the cost of resource depletion and environmental degradation, which is like draining a pond to get fish; nor should we sacrifice growth to protect the environment, which is like climbing a tree to catch fish. Guided by our philosophy that clean waters and green mountains are just as valuable as gold and silver, China has carried out holistic conservation and systematic governance of its mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, and deserts. We do everything we can to conserve the ecological system, intensify pollution prevention and control, and improve the living and working environment for our people. China is now putting in place the world's largest national park system. Last year, we successfully hosted COP15 to the Convention on Biological Diversity, contributing China's share to a clean and beautiful world.

Achieving carbon peak and carbon neutrality are the intrinsic requirements of China's own high-quality development, and a solemn pledge to the international community. China will honour its word and keep working towards its goal. We have unveiled an Action Plan for Carbon Dioxide Peaking before 2030, to be followed by implementation plans for specific sectors such as energy, industry and construction. China now has the world's biggest carbon market and biggest clean power generation system: the installed capacity of renewable energy has exceeded one billion kilowatts, and the construction of wind and photovoltaic power stations with a total installed capacity of 100 million kilowatts is well under way. Carbon peak and carbon neutrality cannot be realised overnight. Through solid and steady steps, China will pursue an orderly phase-down of traditional energy in the course of finding reliable substitution in new energy. This approach, which combines phasing out the old and bringing in the new, will ensure steady economic and social development. China will also actively engage in international cooperation on climate and jointly work for a complete transition to a greener economy and society.

Davos is known as a heaven for winter sports. The Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games will open soon. We are confident that China will present a streamlined, safe and splendid Games to the world. The official motto for Beijing 2022 is "Together for a Shared Future." Indeed, let us join hands with full confidence, and work together for a shared future.



changes of our times. As changes of the times combine with the once-in-a-century pandemic, the world finds itself in a new period of turbulence and transformation. How to beat the pandemic and how to build the post-Covid world? These are major issues of common concern to people around the world. They are also major, urgent questions we must give answers to.

As a Chinese saying goes, "The momentum of the world either flourishes or declines; the state of the world either progresses or regresses." The world is always developing through the movement of contradictions; without contradiction, nothing would exist. The history of humanity is a history of achieving growth by meeting various tests and of developing by overcoming various crises. We need to move forward by following the logic of historical progress, and develop by riding the tide of development of our times.

Notwithstanding all vicissitudes, humanity will move on. We need to learn from comparing long history cycles, and see the change in things through the subtle and minute. We need to foster new opportunities amid crises, open up new horizons on a shifting landscape, and pool great strength to go through difficulties and challenges.

First, we need to embrace cooperation and jointly defeat the pandemic. Confronted by the once-in-a-century pandemic, which will affect the future of humanity, the international community has fought a tenacious battle. Facts have shown once again that amid the raging torrents of a global crisis, countries are not riding separately in some 190 small boats, but are rather all in a giant ship on which our shared destiny hinges. Small boats may not survive a storm, but a giant ship is strong enough to brave a storm. Thanks to the concerted efforts of the international community, major progress has been made in the global fight against the pandemic. That said, the pandemic is proving to be a protracted one, resurging with more variants and spreading faster than before. It poses a serious threat to people's safety and health, and exerts a profound impact on the global economy.

Strong confidence and cooperation represent the only right way to defeat the pandemic. Holding each other back or shifting blame would only cause needless delay in response and distract us from the overall objective. Countries need to strengthen international cooperation against Covid-19, carry out active cooperation on research and development of medicines, jointly build multiple lines of defence against the coronavirus, and speed up efforts to build a global community of health for all. Of particular importance is to fully leverage vaccines as

to global economic and financial stability, and developing countries would bear the brunt of it. In the context of the ongoing Covid-19 response, we need to explore new drivers of economic growth, new modes of social life, and new pathways for people-to-people exchange, in a bid to facilitate cross-border trade, keep industrial and supply chains secure and smooth, and promote steady and solid progress in global economic recovery.

Economic globalisation is the trend of the times. Though countercurrents are sure to exist in a river, no one can stop it from flowing to the sea. Driving forces bolster the river's momentum, and resistance may yet enhance its flow. Despite the countercurrents and dangerous shoals along the way, economic globalisation has never and will not veer off course. Countries around the world should uphold true multilateralism. We should remove barriers, not erect walls. We should open up, not close off. We should seek integration, not decoupling. This is the way to build an open world economy. We should guide reforms of the global governance system with the principle of fairness and justice, and uphold the multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its centre. We should make generally acceptable and effective rules for artificial intelligence and digital economy on the basis of full consultation, and create an open, just and non-discriminatory environment for scientific and technological innovation. This is the way to make economic globalisation more open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial for all, and to fully unleash the vitality of the world economy.

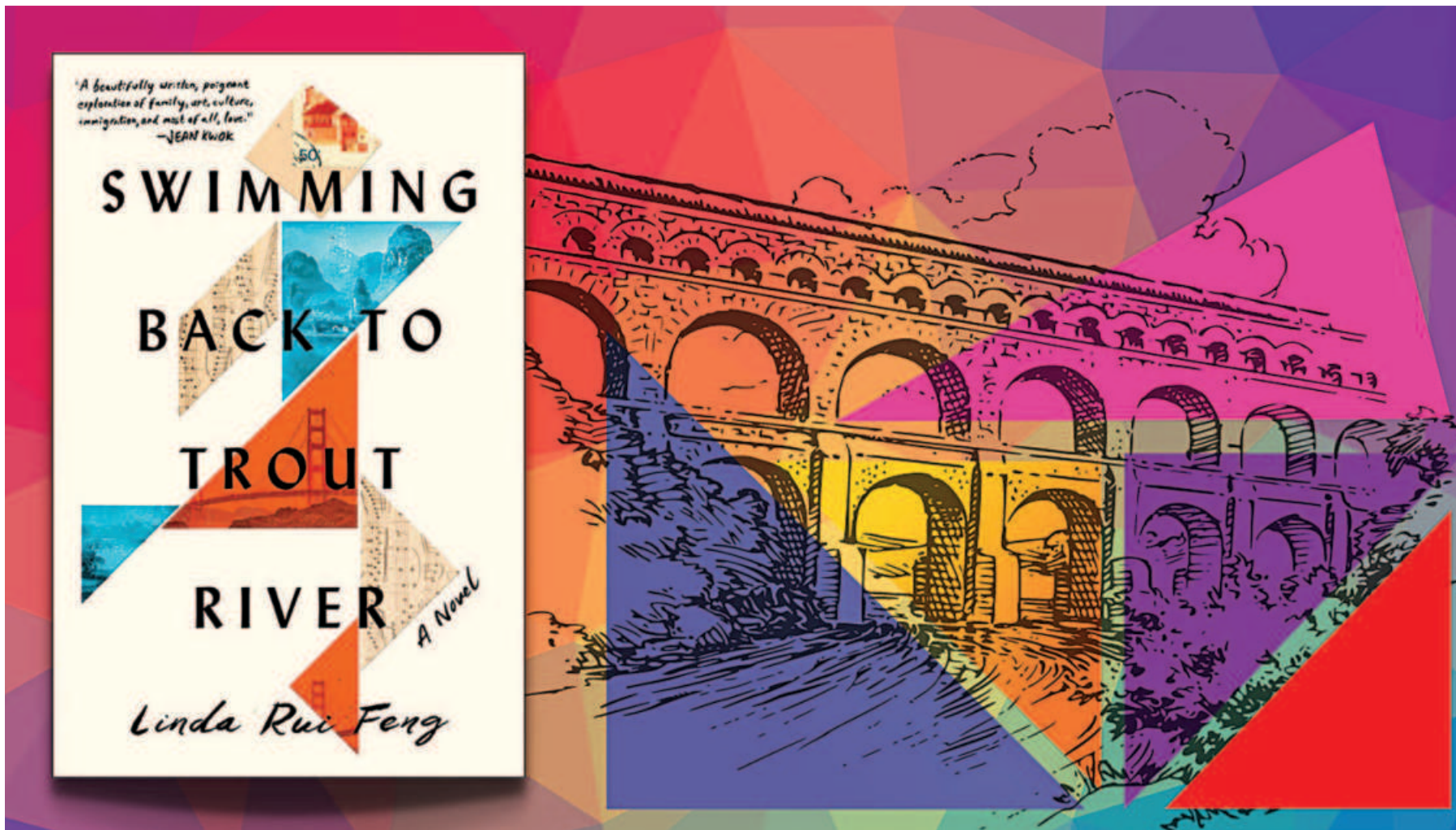
A common understanding among us is that to turn the world economy from crisis to recovery, it is imperative to strengthen macro-policy coordination. Major economies should see the world as one community, think in a more systematic way, increase policy transparency and information sharing, and coordinate the objectives, intensity and pace of fiscal and monetary policies, so as to prevent the world economy from plummeting again. Major developed countries should adopt responsible economic policies, manage policy spillovers, and avoid severe impacts on developing countries. International economic and financial institutions should play their constructive role to pool global consensus, enhance policy synergy, and prevent systemic risks.

Third, we need to bridge the development divide and revitalise global development. The process of global development is suffering from severe disruption, entailing more outstanding problems like a widening North-South gap, divergent recovery

In the process of recovering from Covid impacts, we need to bridge the development divide and revitalise global development.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

The right way forward for humanity is peaceful development and win-win cooperation. Different countries and civilisations may prosper together on the basis of respect for each other, and seek common ground and win-win outcomes by setting aside differences. We should follow the trend of history, work for a stable international order, advocate common values of humanity, and build a community with a shared future for mankind. We should choose dialogue over confrontation, inclusiveness over exclusion, and stand against all forms of unilateralism, protectionism, hegemony or power politics.



COLLAGE: MAISHA SYEDA

BOOK REVIEW: FICTION

Of music, migration, Mao Zedong's China, and more

On the cusp of the Cultural Revolution, Dawn, an aspiring violinist, meets and makes a mark in the life of Momo, an engineer, introducing him to the beauty of classical music and teaching him how to play the violin.

JAHIN KAISSAR

Spanning nearly three decades and moving back and forth between Communist China and the United States, Linda Rui Feng's debut novel, *Swimming Back to Trout River* (Simon & Schuster, 2021), follows a family fractured by physical and emotional distance.

The story begins in 1981 as 5-year-old Junie is sent to live with her paternal grandparents in their home in Trout River, a small village in China. Her father, Momo, recently relocated to the US to pursue his graduate degree, and her mother, Cassia, is due to follow. Years later, Junie receives a letter from her father, promising to bring her to the US by her 12th birthday. Born with congenital amputation of legs below her knees, Junie is determined to stay with her beloved grandparents in the peaceful countryside, vowing to swim back to Trout River if they send her away. Whisking the reader back in time, the narrative then shifts its focus to the intertwined lives of Momo, Cassia, and Momo's former friend, Dawn. It portrays the various hardships that these three characters face during and after China's Cultural Revolution—in China, life under Mao Zedong's rule is filled with violence and oppression. The characters are consequently forced to bear the compounding weight of historical alongside personal tragedies, such as deferred ambitions, deaths of loved ones, postpartum

depression after stillbirth, and more. At the heart of Feng's novel lies the Chinese concept of *yuanfen*, a condition that "acknowledges some unknowability in the workings of the universe, and it implies that there is an invisible mesh that loosely binds people and circumstances"; it draws the characters together, separates them, and reunites them in unexpected ways. Music is another thread that wordlessly guides, inspires, and connects the characters of the story. On the cusp of the Cultural Revolution, Dawn, an aspiring violinist, meets and makes a mark in the life of Momo, an engineer, introducing him to the beauty of classical music and teaching him how to play the violin. Even after they go their separate ways, music plays a prominent role in their lives, ultimately causing their stories to overlap once again. The novel, too, like a good arrangement of classical music, gradually gathers pace and rhythm as it introduces and elucidates themes of love, loss, grief, and resilience.

With lyrical clarity and keen insight, Feng movingly explores what it means to be a Chinese immigrant in the US during the 1980s. In China, Dawn had to give up playing the violin because classical music was considered counter-revolutionary. In her adopted country, however, her dreams and desires suddenly become tangible and achievable. This kind of freedom provides each character with a sense of purpose and hope. Momo finds himself making

new friends and focusing on his graduate studies as he eagerly waits for his family to reunite; Cassia learns to become independent as she wrestles with the ghosts from her past; and Dawn follows her dreams of becoming a successful composer as she grapples with her growing sense of otherness. Yet, Feng makes it evident in her book that no matter how hopeful the situation, freedom comes at a price. The characters have to give up what it hurts most to lose—family ties and their sense of rootedness.

The beauty of *Swimming Back to Trout River* rests in the depth of its unforgettable characters; they are flawed, complex, and multilayered. Their journeys, full of moments both beautiful and tragic, are bound to leave footprints across the reader's heart. The only flaw is perhaps the lack of focus on Junie's perspective. The novel begins and ends with Junie, but it is the stories of her parents and Dawn that lend the most emotional drama. Although this minor quibble does not detract from the book's powerful achievements, some extra flesh would have strengthened the overall narrative, because the reader longs for more of the little girl's story.

Jahin Kaiissar is a contributor. Reach her at jahinkaiissar@gmail.com.

BOOK NEWS

UPL launches Samuel Jaffe's book on US grassroots activism in the Bangladesh Liberation War

MAISHA SYEDA

In a live YouTube broadcast, The University Press Limited (UPL) launched their book, *An Internal Matter: The U.S., Grassroots Activism and the Creation of Bangladesh*, written by Samuel Jaffe, at 7 PM on Saturday, January 15, 2022.

An independent scholar based in New Zealand, Jaffe has a dual MA/MSc in International and World History from Columbia University and the London School of Economics, where his research interests focus on the international responses to Bangladesh's Liberation War. An Internal Matter draws upon his graduate research on archival records, interviews, and activities of pro-Bangladesh grassroots organisations who advocated for the country's independence in 1971. Contrary to the common focus on diplomatic figures, Jaffe's narrative of the war highlights the contribution of ordinary people—from Dhaka and Manpura to those based in the United States and in the congress—who challenged the Nixon administration's pro-Pakistan stance.

In her opening remarks, Mahrukh Mohiuddin stated that the publication of Jaffe's book aids UPL's attempt to bring back "a fresh start for many accounts of the Liberation War that had been lost or gone out of print for some time".

A number of notable panelists graced the book launch—Dr Shamsul Bari, former Director of the United Nations (UNHCR); Katherine Dunham, Adjunct Associate Professor of

Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP); Abul Hasan Chowdhury, former State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh; Dr A Qayyum Khan, freedom fighter and former Managing Director of Bureau Veritas Bangladesh; Julian Francis, Independent Development Consultant; and independent scholar and the author of the book himself, Samuel Jaffe; along with UPL Managing Director Mahrukh Mohiuddin. Jon Rohde, Senior Low N Scholar of Global Health and Population at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, also made an appearance.

Author Samuel Jaffe, while introducing his book, said, "First and foremost, it is a story about an injustice and ordinary people responding to

an injustice, which is the heartless and callous response of the United States to the plight of Bangladesh in 1971—the Nixon administration's response".

Dr Shamsul Bari remarked that the birth of Bangladesh is unique in world history in many ways. "One particular feature of that birth", he stated, "is that we were the first colonial country to be born after World War II by exercising our collective human rights".

"I had the opportunity to be a part of that activism. Samuel Jaffe has drawn an authentic picture of those activities", Dr Bari said.

An Internal Matter: The U.S., Grassroots Activism and the Creation of Bangladesh can be bought from the UPL showroom, located in Farmgate, at 850.00 BDT (\$25.00).

Maisha Syeda is a writer, painter, and a graduate of English Literature and Writing. She is an intern at Daily Star Books.

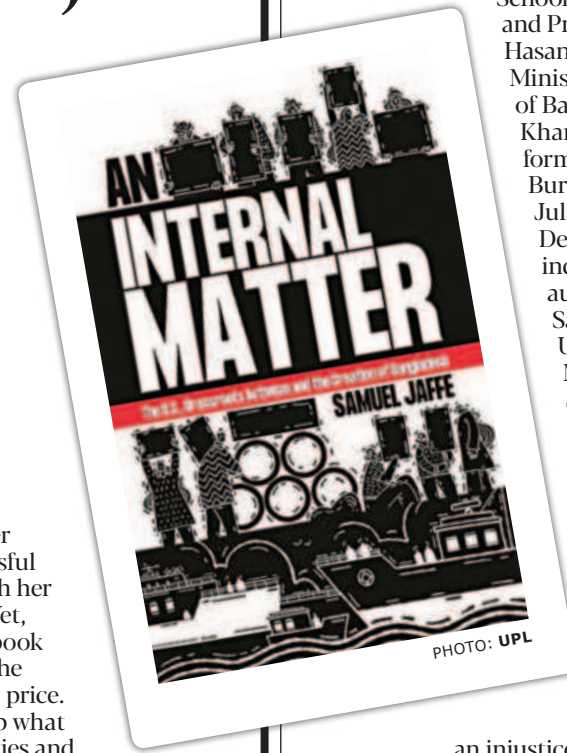


PHOTO: UPL

OPINION

Why you should give your books a break

Neil Gaiman first came up with the idea for *The Graveyard Book* in 1985. It would be another 23 years before the novel would be published. He once remarked that when he developed the initial concept, he didn't think he was yet the writer he needed to be to do the story justice.

AAQIB HASIB

A week or two ago, I came across an article by Hassan Munhamanna on Daily Star Books in which he talked about his struggles with reading books in their entirety. While I'm sure many readers experience this at some point in their lives, what concerns me is the long-term impression it may have on them—more often than not, this supposed failure makes readers assume that the book they are unable to finish is either not suited to their taste or not interesting enough to keep their attention.

I think there's more to this phenomenon than meets the eye. Similar to a writer's block, readers too experience a reading slump at some point in their lives. You get into the habit of reading 20 books a year and then all of a sudden, you're struggling to get past the first 50 pages of a novel. It could even be that you're crippled with guilt or apprehension to even look at a book, let alone pick it up and read a few pages. If you're experiencing this with some books but not others, then it might just be that you're not ready for the particular book in question.



COLLAGE: KAZI AKTB BIN ASAD

Our reading habits and tastes change as we get older. Some of us hated reading classic literature when we were kids, but then grew up to fall in love with it. Even throughout our adulthood, we tend to evolve as readers; reading a variety of books with different writing styles and genres can help broaden our horizons and allow

us to enjoy books we were previously not fans of.

On top of that, our moods and mental states, along with the experiences we are having at any particular time, also play a factor in determining what kind of books we enjoy.

One book that I struggled to finish

was *American Gods* (William Morrow, 2001) by Neil Gaiman, which may come as a surprise to those who know about my absolute love for the author. The love story started when I was about 16 years old and read *The Graveyard Book* (HarperCollins, 2008); I fell head over heels for his ability to set a scene, write compelling characters, and translate words into emotions that strike the reader's heart.

I would devour his oeuvre over the next two years—comics, novels, short stories, children's books, yet the one book that I could not seem to get past the first 100 pages of was *American Gods*.

The novel came across to me as rather boring. It jumped back and forth between different characters and scenes, and the large interlude sections felt pointless to me. The plot itself was rather slow.

Yet I kept coming back to it for eight years before I could finally finish it. During this time, I had grown an appreciation for history and mythology. More than that, I had learned to appreciate books that wouldn't give me instant gratification in the first 10 chapters.

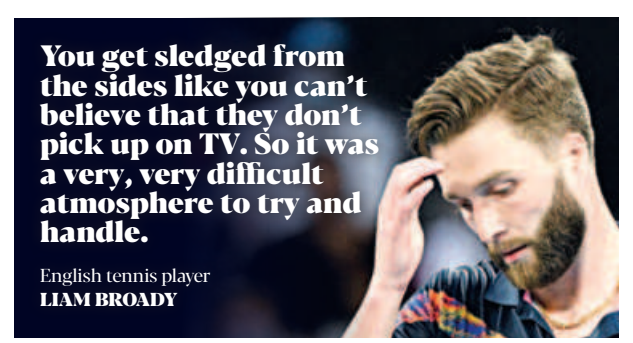
Similar to how writers often come

up with ideas that they cannot immediately write about with a certain level of maturity, readers, too, need to let some books sit. Gaiman himself first came up with the idea for *The Graveyard Book* in 1985. It would be another 23 years before the novel would be published. He once remarked that when he developed the initial concept, he didn't think he was yet the writer he needed to be to do the story justice.

If you or someone you know is experiencing this with respect to reading a book, I suggest putting it back on the shelf temporarily; go and read something else. Switch it up between genres and styles until you're enjoying the experience again. Or maybe even take a break from reading.

If there's one thing I'd ask for you to take away from this article, it is to stop being hard on yourself for not being able to finish a book. Just because you were reading 20 books a year at one point, it doesn't mean you need to be doing so now or even ever. After all, why should a hobby stress you out?

Aaqib Hasib will someday finish writing his book. But not today. Write to him at aaqib.hasib@thedailystar.net.



Nahida spins Tigresses to big win

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's team continued their dominance in the ongoing Commonwealth Games Women's Cricket competition qualifiers, beating Kenya by 80 runs in their second game in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

After being sent in to bat, Bangladesh were in a spot of bother early and were struggling at 50 for six. But a world record seventh-wicket stand of 75 unbeaten runs between Ritu Moni (39*) and Salma Khatun (33*) helped the Tigresses to post 125 for six in 20 overs.

In reply, Kenya were all out for just 45 runs, thanks to Nahida Akter's best bowling figure by a Bangladeshi in T20 format of 12 for five as Bangladesh managed to bundle out their opponents below the 50-run mark for the second time. The Tigresses, who will play against Scotland in their third game on January 23, earlier beat Malaysia by eight wickets after dismissing the hosts for 49 runs.



(L-R) Members of Chattogram Challengers and Sylhet Sunrisers franchises – Ryad Emrit, Ravi Bopara, Kesrick Williams, Mervin Dyllon, Chadwick Walton and Kennar Lewis – indulge in a friendly chat in the middle of their practice sessions at the BCB Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Cabrera aims for competitiveness

SPORTS REPORTER

Newly appointed head coach Javier Cabrera wants to make Bangladesh national football team a competitive side in the coming days.

Following a meeting with the National Teams Committee headed by the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) vice president Kazi Nabil Ahmed, the 37-year-old Spanish coach was introduced before a crowded media conference at the BFF House yesterday, four days after his arrival in Dhaka.

The Spaniard is expected to implement a possession-based brand of football. However, instead of making any promise to produce results in the FIFA friendlies or international tournaments, Cabrera told the media that his foremost target is to make Bangladesh national football team a competitive side over his 11-month tenure.

"I think it's beautiful and a big challenge for me. My intention is to create a competitive team from the beginning and to create a proper high-performance structure along with all other necessary areas involved," said Cabrera, who believes his eight-year tenure in India will give him some advantage in Bangladesh.

"I think we will try to put the technical, scouting, analysis, medical performance areas together to create that globally integrated structure, in order to get the best performance out of the national team."

Cabrera will begin his work by observing the training facilities at the club level, starting with Abahani, from Friday. Afterwards, he will proceed to watch the Bangladesh Premier League matches alongside BFF technical director Paul Smalley to scout players for the FIFA Window in March and Asian Cup Qualifiers in June.

"I need to go step by step and face each FIFA window and Asian Cup Qualifiers. When the



Qualifiers come, let's see what point we are at. We have to make sure that we are able to compete in any stage, be it Asian Qualifiers, SAFF or FIFA window," dictated Cabrera, who was quite impressed with national team's display during the SAFF Championship in Maldives and the four-nation tournament in Sri Lanka but he feels that the Bangladesh team lacked cohesion.

"We have to be competitive. The main objective is to win the match but if you can't create a competitive squad, that is not going to happen," stated the UEFA Pro-licensed coach.

"To be successful, I need to create a high-performance structure and a football identity that we want, and be able to communicate and transmit to the players what we want to achieve and what our common plan is. That is the main thing.

"The players need to be clear in what we want from them and how we can be successful together. My responsibility is to create confidence in players whenever they jump into the game. The players have to know what individual roles are functional on the ground and that is how I'm going to make the team competitive," Cabrera concluded.

Focus on safety as BPL launch draws near

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite the latest Covid-19 surge, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has set aside certain health protocols in order to manage the month-long Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), slated to begin from January 21. However, the BCB wanted all the players inside the bio-secure environment of their hotels yesterday but certain realities saw them push back their plans.

The Omicron variant of Covid-19 has proven to be more contagious than other variants and the BCB chief physician Debashish Chowdhury issued a word of caution to the franchises, reminding everyone concerned that success depends on awareness. Several franchises have had promotional events and jersey unveilings till now, with the BCB instructing them to keep things in check.

There have been a few cases in the BPL so far, although the exact number remains classified information. The BPL has a Covid-19 committee and the tournament will be played according to the guidelines set by the committee.

"We are testing each and every participant. And those who will return a negative test and also those who have double vaccine doses, will enter

the bubble," Debashish told the media yesterday after the second day of tests and informed that the bio-bubble setup is being replaced by Managed Event Environment (MEE).

He urged the franchises and their officials to maintain protocols during the events.

"All stakeholders, franchise officials and players have an important role to play and we can't succeed without them.

"Of course, we have to be more aware in places where it is crowded. Our stakeholders will have to be more careful if we want to finish the tournament successfully," Debashish added while mentioning that the number of cases so far do not put the tournament at risk.

With the beginning of the BPL edging closer, the teams are also finalising their setup. Star-studded Comilla Victorians, handed the captaincy to experienced Imrul Kayes. With Faf du Plessis starring for Comilla, Imrul dictated that the South African was sharing his experience with

the local players.

"He's a big star. He shared his experiences from IPL and also how he bats in other tournaments. I also talked to him about our wickets and what the team plan will be. Since he'll be batting with Liton [Das], I shared some info. His experience means we need his help on the field," informed Imrul.

Meanwhile, Khulna Tigers coach Lance Klusener hopes to get the best out of his local players.

"I don't believe that in Bangladesh, the BPL is won with overseas players. It's won with local players," Klusener opined.

One big local star who has found it hard is Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. The former Bangladesh ODI captain returned to practice yesterday for Dhaka, but once again found his injury aggravating enough and had to stop bowling after a few attempts. As the tournament gears towards its beginning, the franchises and the BCB will be hoping the tournament goes smoothly amidst the pandemic with the best local stars and overseas players available.



U-19s take on Canada today

SPORTS REPORTER

Following a crushing seven-wicket defeat in their opening game of the ICC Under-19 World Cup against England, defending champions Bangladesh will be looking to bounce back when they take on Canada in their second Group A fixture in Basseterre, West Indies today.

The Rakibul Hasan-led side were disappointing in their first game, bundling out for 97 runs in 35.2 overs, a target easily chased down by England.

Head coach Navid Newaz will be hoping to correct the mistakes in batting from the first game as the young Tigers looked shaky against the English pacers and surrendered meekly in the end. Canada also lost their opening game against England by 106 runs.

Osaka all smiles

AFP, MELBOURNE

Naomi Osaka said she drew on past experience in a composed beating of Madison Brengle on Wednesday to move closer to a blockbuster Australian Open clash with top seed Ashleigh Barty.

The Japanese 13th seed and defending champion raced through the first set but had to work hard in the second on Rod Laver Arena before eliminating the 54th-ranked American 6-0, 6-4 in 65 minutes to make the third round.

"I remember when I was younger, I would watch her play in the pro circuit, and she was kind of notorious for getting every ball back," she said of Brengle.

"So I just kind of took those memories from back then and tried to tell myself, you're probably going to make a lot of unforced errors this match, but it's something you have to do because you can't let her dictate you in this match in the way that she would try to, like, keep the ball in play.

"For me, I feel like it was really important that even though I made a lot of errors at the net today, I thought it was really important to keep stepping in."

Osaka will meet another unseeded American next after Amanda Anisimova upset Tokyo Olympic champion and 22nd seed Belinda Bencic 6-2, 7-5.

The four-time Grand Slam champion, who has won two of the past three Australian Opens, wasted little energy on Brengle in the first set.

She immediately broke to take control and raced through in just 20 minutes, with her opponent hitting zero winners and managing just 10 points.

Laughing and smiling on court, Osaka held serve to open the second set before Brengle won a huge round of applause by finally getting on the scoreboard for 1-1.

It lifted the American and Osaka faced a harder fight, with her unforced error count mounting.

But the Japanese star regrouped to secure the win.



Japan's Naomi Osaka hits a return against Madison Brengle of the US during their second round women's singles match of the Australian Open in Melbourne on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

What to WATCH

GTV

ICC U19 World Cup 2022
Bangladesh vs Canada
Live from 07:00 pm
STAR SPORTS HD 2
ICC U19 World Cup 2022
Pakistan vs Afghanistan
Live from 07:00 pm

T SPORTS

LA LIGA
Getafe vs Granada
Live from 12:00 am
(Friday)

TEN 2 & SONY SIX

Australian Open 2022
Round 1
Live from 06:00 am
onwards



Around 24 students of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology stage a hunger strike in front of Sust Vice-Chancellor Farid Uddin Ahmed's residence on the sixth day of demonstrations yesterday. Of the students, at least nine were female. The protesters' only demand now is the VC's resignation. PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Sust students go on hunger strike

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Twenty-four students of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (Sust) went on a "hunger strike until death" in front of the VC's residence yesterday demanding his resignation.

The students, including nine females, began the strike at 2:50pm as Vice Chancellor Farid Uddin Ahmed did not step down by noon despite students' ultimatum.

Speaking at a press briefing, a spokesperson of protesters said Farid Uddin lost his credibility as the VC as he ordered police action against students on Sunday.

The incident left 30-40 students injured.

"We issued an ultimatum to the VC asking him to resign by this noon, but he did not comply. He is lying about the protest and he has no sensitivity towards the students. Now we will continue the hunger strike until death. Either the VC will step down or we will die."

Meanwhile, a group of Sust teachers formed a human chain in front of the main entrance to the university around noon, protesting "indecent remarks" about teachers by "anti-VC students".

Prof Laila Ashrafun of social science department alleged that the protesting students were making "indecent comments" about teachers on social media.

However, Sust Teachers Association President Dr Tulsi Kumar Das said the association has no links with the protest.

On Thursday, students of Begum Sirajunnessa Chowdhury Hall launched a protest over allegations that Provost Zafirin Ahmed Liza misbehaved with a student who called her to report mismanagement at the dormitory.

The demand for the VC's resignation was raised after students were injured as police used truncheons on them, fired rubber bullets and sound grenades on Sunday evening to free the VC from confinement to his office.

None can look down on us now

Says prime minister

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said nobody can ignore Bangladesh anymore as the image of the country has brightened for its successes in ensuring socio-economic development and promoting global peace.

"Once there were so many negative words against Bangladesh abroad. Still, some people are there who like to undermine it. But the country's image has brightened for its socio-economic development, and for many other reasons," she said.

The PM was addressing the graduation ceremony of DSCSC-2021-2022 course virtually from the Gono Bhaban. The event was held at Sheikh Hasina Complex of Defence Services Command and Staff College (DSCSC) in Mirpur Cantonment.

Hasina said the country has successfully regained the dignity that was obtained through the victory in the 1971 Liberation War but was lost after August 15 of 1975.

"Now no one can neglect Bangladesh. It has gained the dignity as a role model for development. It will have to be upheld.

"We won't fight against anyone. But we won't remain silent if any blow comes to our independence and sovereignty. We'll resist or protest it. We've built our armed forces in that way."

Hasina also asked the newly graduated and trained officers to work to build a prosperous Bangladesh.



'A daily reality'

Many Dhaka dwellers complain of gas crisis on regular basis

ASIFUR RAHMAN

For many households and industries in Dhaka and its adjacent areas, gas supply has become as scarce as hen's teeth for two months now.

Take the case of Nilufar Mannan, a housewife from Mohammadpur's Tajmahal Road. Since winter started, she has to finish her cooking for the day before 10 am as the piped gas supply to her kitchen just dies.

"It is so stressful," she told The Daily Star yesterday.

It is a similar story over at Jatrabari, about 12 kilometres from Nilufar's neighbourhood.

"Since early morning, we don't get any gas supply," said Soheli Rana Shuvo, a resident of Jatrabari.

The situation has gotten so bad in recent days that buying breakfast from outside has become a daily reality.

The Daily Star contacted residents in Rajabazar, Jigatola, Mohakhali, Adabar, Badda, Banasree, Mirpur, Pallabi and Old Dhaka and all said the same: they were suffering from a shortage of gas supply.

For Shurovi Rosario, a homemaker from East Rajabazar, her husband has come up with a costly alternative to paper over the crisis in piped gas supply to her kitchen: get an electric burner and over.

"We are having to pay extra electricity bills, while also paying the bill for the gas that we are not being supplied -- this is unfair," she told The Daily Star

yesterday.

It is not just the households; the industries that have mushroomed surrounding Dhaka are also suffering from production losses for the gas crisis.

And there does not seem to be an end to the sufferings.

Since September 19, the government has started to keep the CNG filling stations closed every day for four hours with the view to providing an uninterrupted piped gas supply.

Evidently, it is not helping much.

The increase in the international price is another reason for the gas supply crisis, said an official of the energy division of the power, energy and mineral resources ministry.

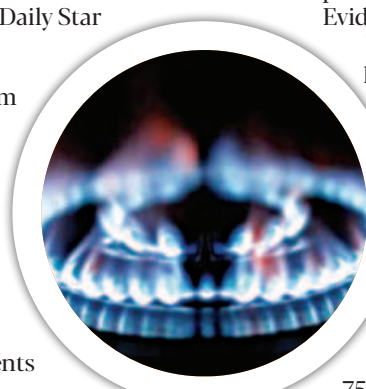
The current demand for gas in the country is more than 3,800 mmcf/d (million cubic feet per day).

The distributors supplied 2,600-2,700 mmcf/d.

Bangladesh produced more than 75 percent of the required gas and imported 20 percent, according to officials of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission. Only 5 percent of the required gas was bought from the international spot market.

Bangladesh imported LNG at \$36 per MMBtu from the spot market in October 2021 and got price quotes as high as \$51 from a supplier.

Experts said the government's increasing dependency on the open market without searching for new gas sources could cause suffering for all.



Covid pandemic 'nowhere near over'

Warns WHO chief as France, Germany post record cases; UK PM drops curbs

AGENCIES

The World Health Organization has warned that the Covid-19 pandemic is far from over, as France, Germany and Brazil posted new infection records in the past 24 hours.

The highly-transmissible Omicron strain has spread unabated around the world, pushing some governments to impose fresh measures while speeding up the rollout of vaccine booster shots.

WHO Chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Tuesday told reporters at its Geneva headquarters.

The UN health chief warned against dismissing Omicron as mild. "Omicron may be less severe, on average, but the narrative that it is a mild disease is misleading," he said.

In US, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Tuesday advised against travel to 22 nations and territories

because of a rising number of Covid-19 cases, including for Israel, Australia, Egypt, Albania, Argentina and Uruguay.

Top US infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci said on Monday that it's still too early to predict whether Omicron's rapid spread will help push coronavirus from the pandemic phase to a more manageable endemic phase -- but "I would hope that that's the case."

In England, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said yesterday that people will no longer be required to wear face masks anywhere or work from home from next week, adding that scientists believed a wave of the Omicron coronavirus variant had peaked nationally, reports Reuters.

India reported new infections at an eight-month high and a government scientist warned it will take weeks before data on hospitalisations and deaths will show how severe the latest wave driven by the Omicron variant will be.



Bus drivers and helpers of Mohakhali terminal stand in line to get vaccinated at the Dhaka District Bus Minibus Road Transport Workers Union office yesterday -- the first day of the government's special inoculation drive for road transport workers, which will gradually expand to Sayedabad, Gabtoli and Phulbari terminals later. Story on page 3. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



Qazi Anwar Husain passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Qazi Anwar Husain, the creator of the popular book series "Masud Rana" and the man behind the teen detective series "Tin Goyenda" that engrossed generations, passed away yesterday.

He was 86.

Anwar suffered a stroke and a heart attack simultaneously while on life support, his sister cultural personality Sanjida Khatun told The Daily Star.

"He had been on life support at Birdem Hospital and was moved to its ICU on Tuesday. He breathed his last at 4:40pm yesterday," she added.

He was diagnosed with prostate cancer on October 31 and had been hospitalised five times since then.

Anwar, born on July 19, 1936, in Dhaka, got his master's degree in Bangla literature and language from Dhaka University.

He started publishing house Seba Prokashoni with Tk 10,000 given by his father National Professor Qazi Motahar Hossain, also an eminent

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1