

"My guess is he [Putin] will move in. He has to do something."

Biden predicts Russia will invade Ukraine

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

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Those who built Rab now loathe it

Says home boss; 12 int'l organisations urge UN not to involve Rab in peacekeeping missions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said those who built Rab are now speaking against it.

"They are running a smear campaign against Rab. They are not highlighting the positive impacts Rab has had on society. They are not talking about Rab's war on drugs or terrorism," he said while replying to reporters' queries after the DC conference in the capital.

"They speak of human rights violations, but we can throw down a challenge to them – there is no country where encounters don't take place," Asaduzzaman said, referring to alleged shootouts involving the force.

His comments came in the wake of 12 international organisations urging UN to ban Rab from its peacekeeping missions.

On December 10, the US announced sanctions on Rab and seven of its current and former members in the face of widespread allegations of human rights abuses against the force formed in 2004.

Earlier, on November 8, 2021, the 12 organisations wrote to Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix. They include Human Rights Watch (HRW), Asian Human Rights Commission and Robert F Kennedy for Human Rights, who have for the past year been campaigning to have Rab banned from the UN peacekeeping missions.

The nine other organisations are Amnesty International, International Federation for Human Rights, Civicus, World Organisation Against Torture, Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Asian Network for Free Elections, Capital Punishment Justice Project, and The Advocates for Human Rights.

The letter urged the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations to ban Rab from its missions, HRW in a statement said yesterday, adding that the department was yet to provide a formal response.

The organisations requested the department to implement a systematic requirement to disclose all previous affiliations so that a background check can be done to make sure that the peacekeeping candidate was not affiliated with Rab.

They demanded that "all uniformed personnel deployed by the UN, regardless of level or rank, are subject to systematic scrutiny of their

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Looking at this overcrowded bus, who would say the country is going through a third wave of Covid-19? Many of the passengers were not even wearing masks. Such disregard for health safety in public transport is all too common, increasing chances of the virus spreading further. The photo was taken in the capital's Khamarbari area.

Mad race claims young life

14-year-old crushed between two speeding buses; man beaten to death by transport worker

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rakibul Islam should have been in school and not on the streets selling masks to pedestrians and bus passengers.

But that was what the 14-year-old was doing at the capital's Moghbazar intersection to help his family cope with the pandemic when he became yet another victim of competition between buses.

He was critically injured when two buses of the same company converged and crushed the hapless boy in the middle around 5:00pm yesterday.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in critical condition and was pronounced dead around 5:30pm.

Harun-or-Rashid, a pedestrian who brought Rakibul to DMCH, said three buses of Gazipur-bound Ajmeri Glory Paribahan were competing with each other at Moghbazar intersection.

Bachchu Mia, DMCH police outpost in-charge, said the body

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3



As a student falls sick, others tend to her during the second day of their hunger strike demanding Sust VC Farid Uddin Ahmed's resignation yesterday. Fourteen of the protesters were put on saline drips. Five of them were later hospitalised. More on page 5.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Stop abuse of DSA

Law minister asks DCs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The deputy commissioners have been instructed to stop the misuse and abuse of the Digital Security Act, Law Minister Anisul Huq said yesterday.

"We've [also] asked the home ministry not to accept digital security act cases immediately after filing. There is a provision in the law to send cases to [the corresponding] cell. And in the case of journalists, [instructions were given] not to make arrests right away," he told reporters after meeting the DCs on the third and final day of the annual DC conference held at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

"The act is mainly formulated to combat cybercrime. It is not enacted to curb press freedom... Our constitution has clearly pointed out that freedom of expression and freedom of press are fundamental rights.

"There has been some cases of misuse. We'll talk with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to find out best practice... If necessary, we'll bring some amendment to the act. We informed them three days ago that we're ready for a discussion."

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen urged the DCs to be "more sensitive" in ensuring hassle-free services to expatriate Bangladeshis as over one crore people of the country live abroad.

He said the expatriates come with complaints of not getting passports, police clearances, marriage

and birth certificates in time. In some cases, they complain about losing control over their land.

Seeking a stronger role of the DCs in stopping sand lifting from rivers, Zahid Faruque, state minister for water resources, said an initiative to formulate a river dredging policy was underway to save the country's rivers.

Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, state minister for shipping, said they directed the DCs to strengthen measures to protect rivers from pollution, encroachment and restoring navigability.

Meanwhile, Land Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury urged the DCs to rescue Khas land (government property).

He also said that they are considering cancelling the Power of Attorney system in the Land Acquisition act, adding that people are regularly being deceived and harassed due to it.

The last session was held with Mohammad Moinuddin Abdullah, chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission.

"The DCs know well where graft takes place in their offices. We asked them to take preventive measures in those sectors," he said.

The DCs requested the ACC to dispose cases quickly.

"Sometimes, there are delays and perhaps DCs face problems because of it... We are trying to address the matter," the ACC boss said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

News cannot be broadcast on IPTVs and YouTube

Says info minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

News items cannot be aired via IPTV and YouTube channels, said Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday citing the broadcast policy.

He also said newspapers cannot broadcast news or talk shows online or via YouTube.

"But news is still being broadcast through IPTVs [internet protocol televisions]. Regular bulletins are being presented and aired through YouTube channels. But this can't be allowed as per our broadcast policy," he said.

The minister came up with the comment while talking to reporters after a session on the third day of the DCs' Conference at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

Hasan urged the DCs to remain alert and take effective action in this regard.

After holding a discussion with representatives of the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) yesterday, the minister said they approved newspapers' online portals and that there was a stipulation that only content published in print could be made available online.

"There's no way to go beyond that. Adding a YouTube channel, and broadcasting news or talk shows are not to be done," the minister said, adding, "Since they are not approved, we will take action against them on the basis of ATCO's recommendation."

"One should not invade the field of the other. Television channels should not publish magazines,

IMMORTAL MEMORY WITH DEEPEST LOVE

Mahabub Alam Mridul (1997-2021)



Director, Walton Group

Today, 21 January is the first death anniversary of Mr. Mahabub Alam Mridul, the Honorable Director of Walton Group. With his sudden demise, we have lost a promising young entrepreneur. It was his dream to work on new innovations in the development of the Electrical & Electronics (E&E) industry and devote himself to the welfare of the country and the people.

We pray from the bottom of our hearts that his departed soul be granted Jannah where it finds eternal peace. Ameen-

Walton Family



DHAKA

Military, admin
should work
together

Army chief tells DC conference

UNB, Dhaka

Chief of Army Staff General SM Shafiqul Islam Ahmed has urged the military and civilian administrations to work together in the national goal of building "Sonar Bangla."

The army chief said the assistance of the civilian administration is an important factor in facilitating the Bangladesh Army to carry out its responsibilities.

He was speaking to reporters after addressing the first session on the third day of the Deputy Commissioners' Conference yesterday morning.

"We have discussed the areas. We all agree that there is no alternative to working together. At present we have a very good relationship. We want to go further by capitalising on it," he added.

Asked about proposals from the DCs in this regard, General Shafiqul Islam said there was no such proposal specifically.

"But we have discussed the areas in which we have the potential to enhance our civil-military relations," the army chief added.

Regarding the issues emphasised in the conference, he said, "Environment is very important for me to do any work together."



SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



These girders are supposed to be used for a mega project. But for the last year and a half, they've been left lying there on Airport Road. Their presence chokes the critical road, which is a gateway for inter-district vehicles, and leads to chronic traffic jams in the area. This photo was taken near the airport yesterday. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

It's them, not us!

BNP alleges AL hired lobbyists
abroad with public money

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP yesterday demanded a proper investigation, alleging that Awami League, not them, spent public money to hire lobbyists abroad.

"Ministers' claimed that they did not hire any lobbyist. The state minister for foreign affairs said a PR firm was given some tasks, but the evidence says something otherwise," said Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, party's standing committee member.

He gave the party's formal reaction to the government's allegation of BNP recruiting lobbyists abroad to campaign against Bangladesh at a press conference at BNP chairperson's Gulshan office.

Mosharrar said State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam claimed that they never appointed any lobbyist but engaged a company purely on the media front in 2015. "But the evidence doesn't support it."

Why should the government or a government party hire a lobbyist there? Despite having an embassy, it is unethical to hire a lobbyist spending public money.

On behalf of US chapter AL, he claimed that a lobbyist firm, Alcalde and Fay was hired in the US on November 29, 2004. The BNP leader further alleged that the firm was paid \$12.5 lakh in total (\$30,000 each month) between 2005 and 2007.

Mosharrar said it is necessary to present a report before people on how much public money has been spent to engage lobbyists.

The BNP leader also presented some documents on the agreement with two US firms, Alcalde and Fay, and Friedlander. He said Awami League has been working with another lobbyist firm, BGR, on a regular basis for many years.

"Friedlander, another lobbyist firm, was hired in September last year for a fee of \$40,000 for a month to arrange a high-level meeting and exchange visits between the two countries [US and Bangladesh]. If you go

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

PRAYER
TIMING
JAN 21

| | Fazr | Juma | Asr | Maghrib | Esha |
|--------|------|-------|------|---------|------|
| Azan | 5-30 | 12-30 | 4-15 | 5-43 | 7-15 |
| Jamaat | 6-05 | 1-15 | 4-30 | 5-47 | 7-45 |

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

RECRUITMENT
GRAFTACC sues
Jiban Bima
officials

UNB, Dhaka

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday filed a graft case against managing director of Jiban Bima Corporation Zahurul Haque and its assistant general manager Mahbubul Alam.

ACC assistant director Mohammad Nure Alam Siddiqui filed the case. ACC secretary Mohammad Mahbub Hossain said the commission found evidence of corruption regarding question papers of a recruitment test of Jiban Bima.

The investigation team will further look into the matter.

ACC on September 15 launched the probe against Zahurul.



The Bangabandhu Chatter in the capital's Khamarbari area had turned into a mishmash of shrubs, bushes and garbage due to the lack of maintenance. But since last month, the spot has been given a new face, after Dhaka North City Corporation started working to beautify it. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Farewell, Qazida

Qazi Anwar Husain laid to rest



People gather outside Qazi Anwar Husain's residence and Seba Prakashani's office at the capital's Segunbagicha to bid farewell to the beloved writer. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In contrast to his extroverted, charismatic literary creation "Masud Rana", Qazi Anwar Husain was a man of solitude. Yesterday, his farewell towards the eternity happened similarly — in a quiet and unpretentious manner.

In the afternoon, Anwar, who breathed his last on Wednesday, was laid to eternal rest at Banani graveyard in the capital.

As per his wish, he was buried at the very grave where his mother Sazeda Khatun was buried.

Earlier, his namaz-e-janaza was held at the Segunbagicha Jame Mosque after Zuhr prayers.

With his departure, a glorious chapter of the country's thriller literature comes to an end.

Anwar played a unique role in "creating readers" in the country, said Niaz Morshed, whose book was published by Anwar's publishing house Seba Prakashani, after paying homage to the author-publisher at Segunbagicha.

Niaz said while Humayun Ahmed gets special

mention whenever the topic of creating readers comes up, but Anwar successfully played the same role before Humayun, albeit much more silently and without acknowledgment.

On Wednesday, Anwar died at the capital's Birdem General Hospital after suffering a stroke and a heart attack simultaneously while on life support. He was 86.

His body was then kept in a freezer van of Quantum Foundation in Kakrail.

From there, the body was taken to his Segunbagicha residence around 10:00am yesterday. His famed Seba Prakashani is also located at the residence. The publishing house started its journey in Bangladesh from the 1960s.

Almost symbolically, the final episode of his journey also started from there yesterday.

After his body was taken to Seba Prakashani premises, family members, relatives, well-wishers, locals and readers gathered to pay their homage to the writer one last time.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Dhaka-Sharjah
Biman flight
from Jan 25

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For the first time, Biman Bangladesh Airlines will operate direct flights on the Dhaka-Sharjah-Dhaka route from January 25.



Initially, Biman will operate four flights per week, the national carrier said in a press release yesterday.

Passengers have to be present at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at least eight hours before scheduled departure time to complete all activities in line with travel advisory.

PROPOSED EC ACT

It will fail to fulfil
constitutional
commitment: TIB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh yesterday said the proposed Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioner Appointment Act, 2022 will fail to fulfil constitutional commitment and people's expectation.

As reasons, TIB said some "average criteria" were set in the draft law to determine eligibility and ineligibility for the appointments of the CEC and ECs.

Apart from this, there's an "unacceptable" absence of any provision to determine their skills, experience, impartiality, transparency and acceptability, said TIB in a statement. While the government's sudden move to formulate the law is positive, there's a due process to enact such an important and sensitive law, said TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman.

Referring to media reports, Iftekharuzzaman said that most recommendations made by civil society and stakeholders were not considered in the draft law.

Citing the draft law, he said three provisions have been incorporated in the proposed law to determine the eligibility of the CEC and ECs.

However, there is no specific directive in those provisions regarding the CEC and ECs' honesty, righteousness, impartiality, objectivity, courage and acceptability, he added. Also, there is no provision for inclusion of female members in the commission.

Mohammadpur-
based gang busted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rab has detained nine members of a Mohammadpur-based gang "Lou Thela" on Wednesday, over their alleged involvement in mugging, extortion, drug peddling and more.

They were arrested from Nabainagar Housing area after their involvement in a vandalism incident in the area on Sunday, said Lt Col Abu Nayeem Md Talat, commanding officer of Rab 2.

The arrestees are — gang leader Babu alias Dasher Babu (26), Forkan (22), Palash (23), Suman (22), Sagar (23), Rajan (23), Nazim (24), Shakil (20), and Milon (21). Various local weapons were recovered from them.

Rab said Babu came to Dhaka from Narail in 2000 with his mother, initially working menial jobs. In 2014, he got involved with teen gang "Vaibba Lo King". He later separated from the group and formed his own group "Lou Thela" in 2017. There are six cases filed against Babu.



Bappy Chowdhury and Zahara Mitu in 'Kushtigir'

Wherever I go, I am respected and recognised

Bappy Chowdhury



works.

What are your expectations with the upcoming election of Artistes' Association?

I consider the film fraternity as one big family. Whoever wins the contest, and whoever loses, they are still a part of the family, and we must be united. My best wishes are with all of them.

Professor Muntassir Mamoon's novel of the same name. How hopeful are you with the project?

I believe this project is going to be a landmark in my acting career. The plot highlights the tumultuous years from 1969 to 1971. Zahra Mitu is my co-artist in this production as well.

What is the greatest accomplishment in your career?

I have achieved a lot in my career of nine years. The audience has acknowledged me with enormous support and love. Wherever I go, I am respected and recognised, and I consider this my greatest accomplishment.

What plans do you have for the future?

This might sound generic, but I want to take up more challenging roles, and experimental stories. I want to live forever through my

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

One of Dhaliwood's established actors, Bappy Chowdhury recently celebrated 9 years of his arrival in the industry.

He has been shooting for Shahin Sumon's upcoming project "Kushtigir", alongside with his upcoming project, Kazi Hayat's "Joy Bangla".

In a candid conversation with The Daily Star, Bappy opened up about his recent works, future plans and more.

What projects are you currently busy with?

I am currently shooting at Netrokona, with the team of "Kushtigir".

The film is directed by Shahin Sumon, and Zahra Mitu is my co-artist. I will be seen in a new avatar in this film.

Interestingly, the location where we are shooting is extremely beautiful. We are enjoying every moment of this project.

After this, I will start shooting for Kazi Hayat's upcoming film, "Joy Bangla".

"Joy Bangla" is based on eminent author

I believe this project is going to be a landmark in my acting career. The plot highlights the tumultuous years from 1969 to 1971. Zahra Mitu is my co-artist in this production as well.

OMANUSH to release on February 4, confirms director

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR



Anonno Mamun's much anticipated film, "Omanush" is set to release on February 4. Marking Rafiath Rashid Mithila's silver screen debut, the film also casts Nirab Hossain, Quazi Nawshaba Ahmed, Misha Sowdagar, Shahiduzzaman Selim, Rashed Mamun Apu, Don and Ananda Khalid, among others.

"If the halls remain open, we will release the film on February 4," confirms Anonno Mamun. "We plan to start hall bookings next week, and hope that we can

keep up the promise of finally bringing this film to our audience."

The director is also currently planning for two other projects, and wishes to release the "Omanush" before he steps into anything new.

Jaya Ahsan to star in 'Putulnacher Iti Kotha', based on Manik Bandopadhyay's novel

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK



Renowned Indian director Suman Mukhopadhyay has cast Jaya Ahsan to play Kusum in a film based on eminent Indian litterateur Manik Bandopadhyay's novel, 'Putulnacher Iti Kotha'.

The news was confirmed to The Daily Star by Jaya herself.

"Manik Bandopadhyay is one of my favourite writers," says the National Award winning actress. "I am very excited for this project." Jaya Ahsan also confirmed that the shooting will begin from next month.

In the film, she will star opposite two big stars from India: Parambrata Chatterjee and Abir Chatterjee.

COUNTRYWIDE



Locals cross the Charalkatha river in Nilphamari Sadar upazila by boat as the nearby under construction bridge lying incomplete for years.

PHOTO: STAR

Left incomplete for 5 years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

About five lakh people in two upazilas are suffering as a bridge, connecting Nilphamari Sadar and Kishoreganj upazila, over the Charalkatha river at Par Ghat area has remained incomplete for nearly five years.

According to Nilphamari Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Jashore based construction firm Islam Traders got the work order to construct the 181-metre-long and 9.80-metre-wide bridge on Nilphamari-Kishoreganj road with an estimated cost of Tk 15.12 crore in 2017.

The construction firm was asked to complete the work by June 2018, but after completing only 40 percent of the work, contractor left the work.

Later, following several warning letters from the LGED, the contractor started the work again, seeking six month time extension. But, the firm missed that fresh deadline too.

In the meantime, authorities concerned extended the length of the bridge up to 252 metre, revised the budget and gave the work to another construction firm Nil Sagor Group to support the previous firm.

Although, LGED extended the work deadline for three times, with the latest in June this year, most of the work still lies incomplete.

While visiting the site on Monday, this correspondent saw pedestrians, bikers and bicyclists were crossing the river by boats, while traders and farmers are compel to travel an additional 20 kilometre to go to nearby markets.

Sumon Biswas, site engineer of Islam Traders, said the work was delayed due to interference of some local influential and then the lockdown.

Nilphamari LGED Executive Engineer Sujon Kumar Kor said they were conducting strict monitoring so that the bridge construction work can be done with the stipulated time.

The rat catcher

A Joypurhat man has been trapping and killing rats for over four decades

SDILIP ROY

Anwar Hossain has been trapping and killing rats since he was 16.

The 57-year-old man can be seen on the streets and haat-bazars in different Northern districts, including Lalmonirhat and Kurigram. He also sells poisons to kill rats.

Anwar is now popularly called 'Rat Man'.

He deposits the tails of 10-12 thousand dead rats to the agriculture office every year. In return, he receives cash incentives and gift items.

Anwar's family comprises his wife, a

son and a daughter.

He was found selling rat killing poisons in Dalpatti area of Lalmonirhat town recently. When approached, he said he sells poisons to kill rats. He earns Tk 500 to Tk 600 daily by selling the poisons.

"Farmers call me to kill rats. I kill rats infesting crop fields and houses and collect the tails of dead rats. Being pleased, farmers give me a bounty of up to Tk 200 to Tk 500," said Anwar.

"I don't know any magic to catch rats. I just use strategy. I have become accustomed to catching rats. Rats can't run away from me," he said, adding that

"I deposit the tails of 10-12 thousand rats to Akkelpur Agriculture Office every year."

He has received several national awards and certificates from the Department of Agriculture for participating in the National Rat Extermination Campaign, Anwar added.

"I want to stay involved in the rat-killing campaign till I die," he said.

"Rats cause a lot of damage to crops and furniture. My small efforts relieve farmers' families of rat infestation. I am happy with my job," said Anwar.

Mantu Mia, a farmer from

Khochabari village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, said his family was upset with the rat infestation. Later, Anwar was called and he successfully got rid of all the rats. Anwar also caught and killed the rats from his crop field.

Shamim Ashraf, deputy director of Department Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Lalmonirhat, said rats are very harmful to crops. Rat killing drives are conducted every year.

Anwar Hossain ranks number one in killing rats in the northern region and of course, he is benefiting the farmers by killing rats, said the DAE official.

Mad race claims young life

FROM PAGE 1

Monirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Ramna Model

Police Station, said they killed the two buses, but the drivers and conductors managed to flee.

"We came to know that the boy was trapped between the buses as the vehicles sped up after police gave the signal to cross [the intersection]," he told The Daily Star.

Police will look into CCTV camera footage to know what happened, he said.

On November 8, 2021, a school teacher was killed after being crushed between two buses in the capital's Demra Staff Quarter area.

On March 7 of the same year, a woman was crushed to death between two buses as the vehicles competed to make a U-turn in Dhaka's Gulistan roundabout.

On April 3, 2018, Government Titumir College student Rajib Hossain lost his right hand after it got stuck between two speeding buses while they were trying to overtake each other in Bangla Motor



A relative consoles Rakibul Islam's father Nur Islam at the DMC morgue yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

area. Rajib succumbed to his injuries at DMCH later on April 17.

Data shows a rising trend in road crashes in the last few years despite government agencies promising a change and initiating various steps after a major road safety movement in July-August 2018.

The movement took place after a bus, competing with another, ploughed into pedestrians and killed two students of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College - Abdul Karim Rajib, 18, and Dia Khanam Mim, 17 - on the capital's Airport Road.

A total of 3,776 people were killed in 3,204 road crashes last year, while 3,558 people were killed in 3,064 incidents in 2020,

according to Accident Research Institute (ARI) of Buet.

Meanwhile, in the capital's Wari, a man died following an altercation with a bus conductor over fare.

The deceased was identified as Irfan, 48, employee of an electrical appliance shop in Nawabpur.

Witnesses and the deceased's family members alleged that the conductor pushed him off the moving bus, which led to his fatal injuries.

However, Kabir Hossain Hawlader, officer-in-charge of Wari Police Station, told The Daily Star last night that they had learnt from primary investigation that the bus conductor had gotten off the bus with Irfan when it stopped at Joy Kali Temple area, and continued the altercation which left Irfan bruised and unconscious.

He said filing of a case was underway in this regard, and they would know more after apprehending Mozammel,

the conductor of the bus.

Earlier in the day, Wari Police Station Sub-inspector Arafat Hossain said locals had detained Mozammel following the incident, but he managed to flee.

Abdul Quader, Irfan's co-worker, said the incident took place around 11:00am when Irfan was heading to work on a Green Bangla Paribahan bus.

He fell on the road after the conductor pushed him off the bus near Joy Kali Temple following an altercation, Abdul said quoting witnesses.

With critical injuries, Irfan was rushed to a local hospital and was later shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead at 12:45pm, he said.

Raihan Ahmed, Irfan's elder brother, said he lived with his wife Ismot Ara and daughter in Demra.

Police said Irfan had injury marks at the back of his head and the body was sent to DMC morgue for autopsy.



A woman shouts and begs for alms next to children sleeping on a market area on a cold day in Kabul, Afghanistan, yesterday. Afghanistan is already in the grip of a humanitarian disaster, worsened by the Taliban takeover of the country in August when Western countries froze international aid and access to assets held abroad. The United Nations has warned that half the 38 million population faces acute food shortages.

PHOTO: AFP

'Covid should be treated like flu'

Spain leads calls to reclassify the coronavirus pandemic

AGENCIES

Spain is spearheading calls for governments to start tackling Covid-19 as any other endemic respiratory virus like seasonal flu, despite WHO opposition and warnings that the approach is premature.

With governments and populations worldwide desperate for an end to the pandemic, discussion about when the virus might be reclassified has intensified.

"Spain wants to lead this debate because it is timely and necessary to do so," Health Minister Carolina Darias has said, adding that Spain asked the European Centre for Disease Prevention (ECDC) to "study new strategies" to deal with Covid.

Spain is in a good position to open the debate, having one of the world's highest vaccination rates with 90.5 per cent of its population over the age of 12 fully immunised.

But the question has sparked disagreement between governments seeking some sort of normality and some parts of the medical community which advocate keeping its guard up.

The United States on Wednesday also reported that the latest wave of cases driven by the Omicron variant appears to be receding. The fast to rise, fast to fall graph could follow the same pattern seen in other countries hit by the highly-mutated strain.

On Tuesday, however, World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus insisted that the pandemic was "nowhere near over", warning that new variants were still "likely to emerge".

The WHO also warned against the temptation to play down the seriousness of an endemic disease.

Fernando Garcia, an epidemiologist and the spokesman of a public health association, warned that talk of treating Covid-19 as an endemic illness at this stage was "creating false hope".

Meanwhile, a study conducted and published by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Wednesday showed that people who were unvaccinated but survived Covid were better protected than those who were vaccinated and not previously infected.

The study, which was done before the emergence of the Omicron variant, showed that protection was highest among those who had both vaccination and prior Covid.



'He'll move in'

Biden on Putin's intentions over invading Ukraine; Russia announces massive drills ahead of Blinken-Lavrov meet



AFP, Washington

Russia yesterday condemned US President Joe Biden's vow of a "severe" response to any invasion of Ukraine as "destabilising", as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken opened talks with key European allies for a common strategy against Moscow.

The Kremlin's reaction came after Biden in Washington assessed that Vladimir Putin will "move in" on Ukraine and warned that would be a "disaster for Russia".

Biden said he did not believe that Putin wants a war, but said the Russian leader has created a situation that is proving extremely difficult to defuse -- and that could easily "get out of hand" in the region.

"My guess is he will move in. He has to do something," Biden said during a press conference marking his first year in office.

However, Biden raised eyebrows when he appeared to suggest that a small-scale attack by the Russians would prompt much less pushback from the West.

The White House quickly issued a statement clarifying that what he meant was that any military invasion would prompt a "severe" response, while non-military aggression, like paramilitary attacks, would be met with a "reciprocal" response.

Powerful Republican Senator Lindsey Graham described Biden's comment as "unnerving."

Biden was speaking ahead of a meeting today in Geneva between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Geneva.

With more than 100,000 troops and war-making machinery poised on Ukraine's borders, Moscow has sent alarms through the West over its threat to Kyiv.

Biden appeared to suggest ways of deconfliction, playing down Putin's biggest worries, that Ukraine would join Nato and that the West would position strategic weapons in Ukraine.

Speaking on the eve of the anniversary of his inauguration on January 20, 2021, Biden rejected criticism over his handling of the pandemic and soaring inflation.

On one of the most traumatic episodes of his presidency -- the chaotic and rushed final withdrawal from the 20-year long Afghanistan war -- Biden said flatly: "I make no apologies."

Biden also confirmed he would keep Kamala Harris as his vice presidential running mate if he seeks re-election in 2024.

Meanwhile, Russia yesterday announced it will hold huge naval drills in the Atlantic, Arctic, Pacific and Mediterranean this month and February. The war games will involve "more than 140 warships and support vessels, more than 60 aircraft, 1,000 pieces of military equipment, and about 10,000 servicemen," the defence ministry said in a statement carried by Russian news agencies.

Antibiotic-resistant superbugs killed 1.2m in 2019: study

AFP, Paris

Superbug infections killed 1.2 million people in 2019, according to a study published yesterday, which authors described as the most comprehensive assessment of the impact of antimicrobial resistance to date. The death toll means infections by bacteria resistant to antibiotics are directly responsible for more deaths than HIV/AIDS or malaria. The report, published in the Lancet, also found antimicrobial resistance played a role in up to 3.68 million other deaths. "These new data reveal the true scale of antimicrobial resistance worldwide, and are a clear signal that we must act now to combat the threat," said study co-author Chris Murray of the University of Washington. While previous estimates said superbugs could kill 10 million people per year by 2050, this study shows that milestone could be reached much sooner, he added. Antimicrobial resistance occurs as bacteria evolve to be immune to antibiotics. The World Health Organization has declared it a global health crisis, setting up a task force to study alternative treatments.



RELEASE OF CAPITOL RIOT DOCS US SC snubs Trump

AFP, Washington

The US Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected a bid by former president Donald Trump to block the release to a congressional committee of documents related to the January 6 attack on the Capitol. Trump, who has been accused of fomenting the Capitol assault, had asked the nation's highest court to stay a ruling by a federal appeals court, which rejected his efforts to keep the documents secret. But the Supreme Court, in an 8-1 vote, refused to issue a stay and upheld the lower court's ruling, in a significant setback for the former president.

Lahore blast kills 2

AFP, Lahore

At least two people were killed and 22 wounded yesterday by a bomb blast in a busy shopping district of the Pakistani megacity of Lahore, police and officials said. "Initial investigations show that it was a time-controlled device on a motorbike which was the cause of the blast," Rana Arif, spokesman for Lahore police, told AFP. There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but there have been a series of blasts and attacks against police since December, when a truce between the government and Pakistan's Taliban lapsed.

Liberia stampede kills at least 29

AFP, Monrovia

A stampede killed at least 29 people at a religious event in the suburbs of the Liberian capital Monrovia, police said yesterday. The disaster occurred overnight, either late Wednesday or in the early hours of yesterday, local media reported. Police spokesman Moses Carter said the death toll was provisional and "may increase". Details about the event remain unclear. Local media said it was a Christian prayer gathering held in a football field.

'PATYGATE' SCANDAL IN UK

MP's defection offers lifeline to PM Johnson

AFP, London

Allies of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson closed ranks yesterday after a day of high drama prompted second thoughts among some Conservatives about dethroning their embattled leader.

One anti-Johnson plot by younger Tory MPs, livid at breaches of lockdowns by partying Downing Street staff, appeared to be fizzling out despite one senior backbencher telling him to his face to quit, "in the name of God".

Wednesday's defection of Conservative Christian Wakeford to Labour served as a reminder of the high stakes at play, with the opposition party surging in opinion polls.

"The prime minister is probably thanking Christian for what he did because it's made a lot of people think again, think twice," Tory MP Andrew Percy

told BBC radio.

"It's kind of made people a bit more relaxed, it's calmed nerves," he said.

"I think people have recognised that actually this constant navel gazing and internal debating is only to the advantage of our political opponents."

Before Wakeford's defection, the plotters appeared confident that they were close to the 54 letters needed to force a no-confidence vote in Johnson by Conservative MPs.

But the secretive process remained on hold, with some rebels even withdrawing their letters in response to Wakeford joining Labour, according to reports.

Critics accuse Johnson of lying to parliament about what he knew and when, with regard to boozy parties held in Downing Street in apparent breach of his own government's Covid rules over the past two years.



Japan Air Self-Defense Forces's members stand in front of their C-130 Hercules carrying relief supplies to be deployed to Tonga, to help out the country devastated by a nearby eruption and tsunami, before it's take off at Komaki air base in Komaki, Japan, yesterday. The first humanitarian flights arrived in Tonga yesterday, five days after the dual disaster cut the Pacific kingdom off from the rest of the world.

PHOTO: REUTERS



We have been working overtime to try to understand what happened, who might be responsible and at the same time to do everything we can to care for our colleagues.... We will leave no stone unturned to get to the bottom of it.

US top diplomat Antony Blinken after CIA says mystery illness of US diplomats not a 'foreign plot'

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Make antigen test kits widely available

Test kit availability vital for curbing Covid surge

IT is disappointing to see the government's laissez-faire approach to curbing the recent surge in Covid-19. Given the speed at which the Omicron variant of the coronavirus is said to be spreading, we are baffled that the authorities are ignoring the use of rapid antigen test kits to make diagnosis faster. According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), 23 brands of rapid antigen test kits, authorised by the government for emergency use, can currently be found in 545 public and 100 private healthcare points across Bangladesh. Unsupervised use by individuals is currently prohibited. Even so, according to one of our reports, test kits of one of the approved brands are available in the market for people to buy directly. Would it not be more beneficial if, given the Covid surge, the government allowed for all the approved brands to be available directly to consumers, so that pricing could be fair and regulated? This would also help ensure faster access and better quality.

The exclusivity of antigen kits might have made sense earlier when the infection rate was relatively slower. However, the rate of increase in Covid-19 cases is hinting at the arrival of a third wave, and experts agree that speedy identification of an infected person, and isolating and treating them straight away, is ideal in this situation. That is exactly how making rapid antigen test kits widely available can help us during this time. Of course, nothing can beat the accuracy of PCR tests, but given how expensive they can be, many carriers avoid getting tested and end up exposing other people to the virus. Though the cost of antigen test kits available at healthcare points can still be out of reach for some, their retail price will surely be lower once they are in the market.

However, the DGHS director general's comment to this daily that making at-home rapid testing available will be "considered" if many other countries do it as well—and that there are no plans for going in that direction as of now—is not reassuring. Given that countries such as the UK made these test kits widely available long before the emergence of Omicron—and the experts' opinion on how such rapid identification of the virus can help curb the number of cases in Bangladesh—we believe it is high time the government considered releasing rapid antigen tests in the market. Not only will this make testing cheaper, faster, and easier, but it will also encourage people to take their symptoms seriously and get treatment soon.

As the UN health chief has warned, Omicron's symptoms may seem mild, but it can be dangerous to underestimate its severity.

Tale of the vanishing canals

We must restore them through excavation and mass awareness

WHY people show no qualms when a canal or a similar water body gets filled up with garbage right before their eyes remains a big puzzle. Traditionally, canal water is used in the rural areas to irrigate agricultural land, but the dying canals seem to have lost their usefulness for reasons both known and unknown. Throughout Bangladesh, we hear stories of dying canals and rivers, and we also hear about the mischievous role of some powerful quarters as well as a section of the administration behind such an environmental tragedy.

The Taltala canal, which used to flush out excess water from Khulna city, is one such water body that is on its way to oblivion because of indiscriminate garbage-dumping by the residents. It already looks like a barren piece of land, choked by water hyacinths, bushes and shrubs. As usual, a number of encroachers have constructed houses, shops and cattle farms on both sides of the canal, right before the eyes of the administration. Environment experts fear that the canal will disappear if large-scale excavations are not carried out soon.

A recent visit to the area by our correspondent revealed that the once 60-foot-wide water body has narrowed down to a mere 25 to 30 feet, with the canal bed completely filled up at places. Locals believe that the two roads constructed by the Khulna City Corporation on both sides of the canal contributed to the narrowing down of its width. As a result, the entire area gets waterlogged after a rain. We are told that the canal's demarcation work was done 10 to 11 years ago, and excavation was done in 2015, but the residents say the excavation work was not done properly.

According to the Khulna City Corporation authorities, a project worth Tk 823 crore is underway to reduce waterlogging and develop a drainage system through excavation work. The canal will be excavated with the construction of sidewalls and walkways. The residents, however, are waiting eagerly for the completion of the project in time.

This needs to be said that creating awareness regarding conservation of our water bodies, especially those facing danger, is of utmost importance. The elderly people living nearby must have seen the flowing canals during their youth, so they should come forward to create awareness among the present generation regarding the importance of preserving water bodies. And saying no to dumping of garbage must be the first step.

The consistent chaos that is Dhaka airport



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

Aasha Mehreen Amin is senior deputy editor and the head of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

AIRPORTS are the most fascinating places in the world. This forced congregation of total strangers from all corners of the world, rushing off to destinations as exotic as Zanzibar or Casablanca—isn't it just wonderful? Isn't it amazing that when we are at the airport, we are all in sync, looking at the same monitors together, all worrying about whether we will make it to the gate on time, everyone trying to find the best spot to sit at the waiting area, everyone watching everyone else rushing, laughing, talking, trying to sleep in the uncomfortable chairs, attempting to soothe the screaming, sleep-deprived children, eating the same sandwiches and having the same longing for a nice, cosy bed?

Oh, wait! That was in the old days and in other international airports. So, what's it like at our own dear Dhaka Airport (Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport), especially during the Covid-19 era and at a time when flights are only allowed between 8am and 12am, as it's closed from 12am to 8am due to renovation purposes?

Well, to put it simply, it's the centre of total chaos and mayhem. There are lines—unruly ones, of course—just about everywhere: starting from the entry point with cars and microbuses creating three lanes trying to get into that one little gate all at once, to the line outside the airport departure area, lines to get Covid tests verified, lines at the check in counters, lines at the restrooms, lines to get into the immigration area, and the regular lines outside the boarding gates. Now that all the flights (over a 100) have been crammed into 16 hours instead of 24, at any given time there will be thousands of people at Dhaka airport with these eternal queues being constantly broken by "considerate" travellers who think nothing of just shoving their heavy trolleys right into the middle of the queue, impervious to the dirty looks or even curses inflicted on them.

Trolley battles are common, with men running to the trolley lines treading on toes, elbowing out women, children, airport cats—anyone who may come in their way—and then getting into brawls with other contestants until the most aggressive one wins the trophy of a trolley and zooms away in triumph. The reason for this savage behaviour is simple: there are just not enough trolleys for everyone, regardless of all the assurances—was it 2,500 extra trolleys that were promised?—given by the authorities. There is also no airport staff controlling the crowd and

making sure that people know where to go or just behave like decent human beings.

Many of the flights are to the Middle East, so there are swarms of worried migrant workers who have absolutely no idea about which counters they should go to or what forms they must fill up or even how to ask for help at the fancy help desk. Unsurprisingly, our greatest remittance

kiosks feel it's okay to keep their masks under the nose, so that they can breathe (perhaps even sneeze a little) into the chicken patties and coffee before serving them.

That non-existent phenomenon called aesthetics in this airport perfectly complements this shabby show. The pathetic excuse for a snack area is a dusty corner with uncomfortable chairs

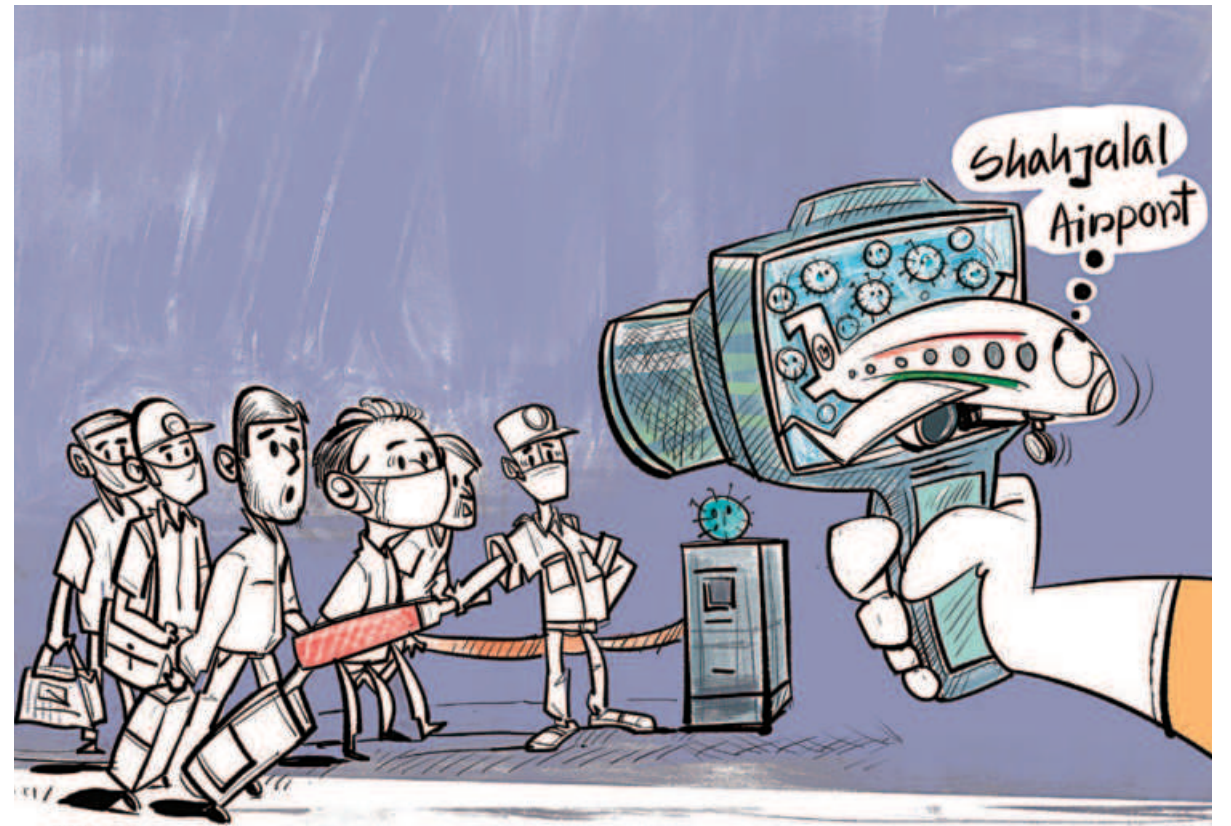


ILLUSTRATION: BIPOLOB CHAKROBARTY

Strangely, while we are being told that we cannot hold public events and must show our Covid vaccination certificates at restaurants, at Dhaka airport, Covid health protocols are optional.

earnings, and the backbone of our steady economic growth, are treated with utter disdain and apathy. Why there are no designated airport staff to guide and help them go through the formalities is anyone's guess. After all, authorities have only had about a few decades to figure this out.

Strangely, while we are being told that we cannot hold public events and must show our Covid vaccination certificates at restaurants, in addition to the "No Mask, No Entry" policy at all venues and establishments, at Dhaka airport, Covid health protocols are optional.

While people are running around trying to get their Covid test results verified—why this can't be done during check-ins like everywhere else in the world is a mystery—most people at the airport, including the staff, either wear their masks with their noses exposed or have no masks on whatsoever! There are also those who believe that the mask itself must be saved from germs, so whenever they feel the urge to sneeze or cough, they lower their masks, eject all their germs out to the world, and put their masks back on! Even the salespeople at the snack

and tables next to a dirty tile mural with a few small cupboards put up against them, apparently to stow away backpacks belonging to, who knows, the snack bar employees? The tables are so close together that you can practically hear everything your neighbours are saying—which wouldn't be such a bad thing if it weren't for the fact that they are also following the "no mask" etiquette, and again, no one is there to enforce any health protocol.

Outside the airport building is the maze of lanes surrounding bizarre, unseemly steel sculptures, and a car park that resembles a garbage dump with empty plastic bottles and packets of chips strewn here and there on the grimy floors and the uppermost floor being treated as a public toilet.

Everyone knows that travel these days has become a stressful, unenjoyable ordeal. But for those who must go through Dhaka airport—whether during arrival or departure—the trauma is on a whole new level. Unless, of course, you belong to the VIP or VVIP category.

We need affordable transport, not affordable fuel



DEBRA EFROYMSON

Debra Efroymsen is executive director of the Institute of Wellbeing, Bangladesh, and author of "Beyond Apologies: Defining and Achieving an Economics of Wellbeing."

WITH the price of basic necessities going up yet again, it is no surprise that people are campaigning for a reduction in fuel price. Fuel is, after all, related to the price of transport, food, and other necessities—which is, in fact, precisely the problem.

The climate emergency looms large, and not merely on our horizon—it is with us now and growing increasingly worse. Droughts, fires, floods and intense storms are only one aspect of our new abnormal. There will likely be increased pandemics (of which Covid is giving us an unpleasant preview), ever more refugees, and inevitably more violence and war. To slow down the catastrophe, we need to stop burning fossil fuels. Those fuels need to stay under the ground as we transition, rapidly, to a renewable fuel economy. But to do so, we must dramatically reduce the amount of fuel we need, as it is impossible to power our current lifestyles with renewables.

The only way we can successfully keep basic necessities affordable while addressing the climate emergency is to break our decades-long attachment to fossil fuels and to find less fuel-intensive ways to do things. It might help to remember that the

ways in which we currently move around and grow our food, to mention two main uses of fuel, are relatively recent when you look at the history of people on the planet. In Bangladesh, we strive to become a "modern" industrialised country where everything will be motorised as well as digital. But how sensible is that dream? The traditional ways of growing food worked for thousands of years—since the dawn of agriculture. Newer mechanised and chemical-intensive methods—both tractors and fertilisers require fossil fuels—have caused all kinds of problems in the last several decades. The biggest spike in carbon emissions started only in 1950—and has continued to surge ever since. That is to say, the price we are paying for cheap goods and convenience is the destruction of our planet and the daily loss of lives due to pollution.

Many people dream of a modern transport system, and yet we also pay the price daily for that dream—in the form of carnage on our roads, as well as pollution. Bicycles, rickshaws, and trains are slower, sure, but also vastly safer—and much better for our environment.

The more I think about it, the more it amazes me that people have advanced to this level of complex society and lost track of the basics. We don't focus on how to provide food, housing, education and healthcare to the masses; we are far more concerned about developing industries, finding new means of communicating and entertaining ourselves, and satisfying the whims of the wealthiest. We have completely forgotten that environmental destruction has a boomerang effect; we will pay—we already are paying—for the

harm that we do to nature. How crazy is it that we forget we need clean air to breathe and water to drink, and instead focus on all kinds of trivia that we could live better without?

So, do we demand fuel subsidies in order to reduce the price of basic goods, knowing that, in doing so, we contribute to pollution, road crashes, and the climate catastrophe? Or do we look to our recent ancestors for ways of meeting our basic needs without burning fuel: returning to manual methods that suited us just fine for thousands of years, and that for thousands of years were compatible with our environment?

If we're going to make the case that people are rational beings, then we need to start making rational demands. Sure, we want cheap bus fares and big roads and elevated expressways. Meanwhile, we need affordable food and housing, too. Deep down, I think we can all agree that where our future survival is in question, perhaps we should focus more on genuine sustainability, returning to methods that are compatible with a liveable future.

So, rather than affordable fuel, let's demand affordable transport: better conditions for walking, cycling, public transit and trains. Rather than subsidising fuel, how about directly subsidising some basic foods, while returning to farming methods that will require less fuel, thus making food affordable to our budgets and in harmony with our living planet? We could redefine prosperity by including a healthy environment, a sustainable future, and a decent existence for all, rather than get caught up in the destructive trappings of an elusive and ultimately deadly modernity.

Deep down, I think we can all agree that where our future survival is in question, perhaps we should focus more on genuine sustainability, returning to methods that are compatible with a liveable future.

We needed a law for EC formation, we're getting one for Search Committee



THE THIRD VIEW

MAHFUZ ANAM

Mahfuz Anam is the editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

WHAT waited for nearly 50 years is now being implemented with super speed. Why? Until recently, the government said that there was no chance of an Election Commission law being passed in this session of parliament.

The Awami League government drafted it, had it approved by the cabinet, and informed the president about it during its dialogue with him—who welcomed it. Now, the Awami League government will place it in parliament, and the Awami League-dominated parliament will, in all likelihood, pass it in this session.

Hello, is there anyone else in the country?

According to the law minister, a bill will be placed in parliament on January 23, 2022. No public discussion, no discussion with other political parties who are the main participants in the process, no sharing through public announcement, no invitation to stakeholders, no exchange of views with constitutional or election law experts, no discussion in the media, in fact no discussion with anyone except perhaps the government's inner core—and yet, it is set to be placed in parliament as a bill.

Yes, most of the political parties wanted an EC law, but definitely not a "Search Committee law" masquerading as an EC law. Our constitution mandates a law for the formation of the Election Commission. We never got it. Blame the military or military-led governments for not enacting such a law, but what about the democratic governments who have been ruling us since 1991?

In the meantime, we instituted a caretaker system to ensure free and fair elections, continued it for 15 years (1996-2011), and then abolished it. And yet, we found no time to go for the easier option of enacting an EC law with sufficient independence and guaranteed legal and moral structure and stature—as it exists in other countries holding elections for decades.

If one is of the view that something is



ILLUSTRATION: ANWAR SOHEL

better than nothing, then of course the Search Committee law is something to cheer about. But if that something is quite different, and if it is likely to confuse the issue further, rather than resolve it, then maybe instead of cheering, we should be concerned.

In a nutshell, here is what's happening. We needed a law for the formation of the Election Commission, as mandated in the constitution. Now we are being offered a law for the formation of a Search Committee, which is not asked for in the constitution.

Given our history of election manipulation, questions naturally arise as to what lies behind this move.

The government's response is that we are not seeing the real point. Instead of praising them for initiating something that did not happen for nearly 50 years, we are nit-picking and blaming them for taking the first step in that direction.

The idea is that a Search Committee will recommend suitable candidates to the president, who will then appoint the new Election Commission. Isn't it much better than what we have?

Without the slightest prejudice to the venerable people suggested, and with the highest respect for their professionalism and competence, it can be said that all of them are from a realm outside of politics and of dealing with people on a mass scale. Holding elections is a massive public affair—perhaps the biggest—which is not a bureaucrat's or official's cup of tea.

Our constitution mandates a law for the formation of the Election Commission. We never got it. Blame the military or military-led governments for not enacting such a law, but what about the democratic governments who have been ruling us since 1991?

public confidence. Judges establish the rule of law, and both the BPSC chair and the CAG run offices under meticulously laid out procedures. None of them have to deal with political acceptability, public perception, and the ability to bring divergent groups together to bring about convergence, if not consensus.

This group will be a square peg in a round hole.

Then, there are the issues of their process of functioning. How independent will they be? How openly and transparently will they be able to function? Even if they are totally open to the public eye, how will their final recommendations play out?

When the recommendations reach the presidential palace, a whole new range of issues will arise. The president is bound by

the constitution to act only on the advice of the prime minister on everything, save the well-known two issues. "In the exercise of all his functions, save only that of appointing the prime minister pursuant to Clause 3 of Article 56 and the chief justice pursuant to Clause 1 of Article 95, the president shall act in accordance with the advice of the prime minister," according to Clause 3 of Article 48 of Bangladesh Constitution.

Post-script: Indemnifying the past through laws with retrospective effect is a bad legal practice, usually used by military dictators or autocrats who give legal cover for their past misdeeds. Have the past ECs done things that need to be indemnified? Were illegalities committed that need legal cover? Please, don't go in that direction. It sets very bad precedents.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH. ACROSS: 1 New Orleans cuisine, 6 Useful skill, 11 Blue hue, 12 Play part, 13 Pat's TV colleague, 14 Annual visitor, 15 Yale rooter, 16 Dorm sharers, 18 Old roadster, 19 Georgia, once: Abbr., 20 Lode material, 21 DEA agent, 23 Constellation, 25 Plopped down, 27 Attack command, 28 Wild, 30 Coin, essentially, 33 Boxer Norton, 34 Disfigure, 36 Kicker's aid, 37 Soybean snack, 39 S&L offering, 40 Add up, 41 Naps, 43 Witch, 44 Singer Cara, 45 Fast runners, 46 Copenhagen natives, 21 Bat abode, 2 Flowery shrub, 3 New member, of Congress, perhaps, 4 Ornate vase, 5 Draws close to, 6 Classifies, 7 Racket, 8 Golden ager, 9 Comes in, 10 Make fun of, 17 CIA forerunner, 22 Lot sight, 24 Help out, 26 Sonora snacks, 28 Felt topper, 29 Hurried flight, 31 Placid, 32 Stops, 33 Yawl's kin, 35 Made over, 38 Horse feature, 42—pro nobis. WRITE FOR US, SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.

TUESDAY'S ANSWERS. SWAP, TRACE, PAPA, GOUGED, OVER, LAPELS, TESTCASE, NESTEGGS, SHEENS, RAW, HEART, KOALA, ART, WARDEN, WESTWIND, ASLEEP, SPENDS, LIAR, PADDY, SAT.

বাংলাদেশ তাঁত বোর্ড. ব্রজ ও পাট মন্ত্রণালয়. বিটিএমসি ভবন (৫ম তলা). ৭-৯, কাওরান বাজার, ঢাকা-১২১৫. www.bhb.gov.bd. নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি. ব্রজ ও পাট মন্ত্রণালয়ের ৩০.১১.২০২১খ্রিঃ তারিখের ২৪.০০.০০০০.১১৬.২৮.০০১.১৪-২২৫ নং স্মারকের প্রদত্ত ছাড়পত্র অনুসারে বাংলাদেশ তাঁত বোর্ড (বাতাবো) এর রাজস্ব বাতবৃত্তক নিদ্রবর্ণিত স্থায়ী শূন্য পদ সরাসরি নিয়োগের মাধ্যমে পূরণের লক্ষ্যে প্রকৃত বাংলাদেশী নাগরিকদের নিকট হতে নির্ধারিত ছকে দরখাস্ত আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে। নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তিতে বর্ণিত পদের ক্ষেত্রে প্রার্থীদের কি বাবদ (অফেরতযোগ্য) ১০০/- (একশত) টাকা চেয়ারম্যান, বাংলাদেশ তাঁত বোর্ড এর অনুকূল জমা স্বপক্ষে ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/পে-অর্ডার আবেদনপত্রের সাথে সংযোজন করতে হবে।

There is another T20 World Cup this year and another opportunity for us. Opportunities will be there for the ones who will perform well in BPL.

Mahmudullah Riyad
Bangladesh T20I captain



Premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was all smiles during Fortune Barishal's training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. The Barishal skipper will only be happier if his hope for good sporting wickets is fulfilled in the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League, starting today with his side's clash against Chattogram Challengers in Mirpur.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

BPL HIGHLIGHTS

1. Six teams – Chattogram Challengers, Comilla Victorians, Minister Group Dhaka, Fortune Barishal, Khulna Tigers and Sylhet Sunrisers – will be taking part in the eighth edition of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League.
2. The teams will play a total of 34 matches, including four games in the playoffs stage. The final will be held at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur on February 18.
3. The tournament will be played in a double round robin format with each team facing the same opponent twice in the league stage. All the matches will be played in three venues in Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet.
4. The tournament, set to be held from January 21 to February 18, will be played behind closed doors.
5. Rajshahi Royals, who were crowned champions last year, are now defunct, with the Rangpur region also not having any franchise to its name. Barishal, which did not have a franchise for half a decade, will mark their return to BPL for the first time since 2016.
6. A number of big names will take part in the upcoming season, including Fay du Plessis, Sunil Narine, Moeen Ali, Chris Gayle and Andre Russell.
7. There will be no DRS used in the tournament this time.

'A positive sign for Bangladesh cricket'

SPORTS REPORTER

That Bangladesh had the most number of players in the ICC Men's ODI Team of the Year 2021, announced by the International Cricket Council (ICC) yesterday, is a sign of Bangladesh's prosperity in the format over the years.

"This is a very positive sign for Bangladesh cricket," said premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan. Alongside Shakib, wicketkeeper-batter Mushfiqur Rahim and Bangladesh's ace left-arm paceman Mustafizur Rahman also found their places in the prestigious eleven.

"It feels great to be recognised in this manner by the ICC. I think we have been a very good side in the one-dayers over the years, both at home and abroad. This recognition shows that Bangladesh have been displaying good quality cricket," Shakib added.

Locals excited by BPL's allure

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) is special cause for celebration for local players, especially in the midst of the pandemic, as the arrival of international stars not only provides greater challenge and inspiration, but also an opportunity to gather knowledge of T20s, a format Bangladesh are desperate to improve upon.

The Omicron variant of Covid-19 is still at large, making things difficult for the organisers but the players have so far relished the opportunity to train, mingle with each other and learn from foreign coaches.

The tournament will bring fresh challenges for national team stars as well, with a few coming head to head in the opening day's fixtures today. Shakib Al Hasan's Fortune Barishal will face Mehedi Hasan Miraz's Chattogram Challengers at 1:30pm before Mushfiqur Rahim's Khulna Tigers take on Mahmudullah Riyad's Minister Group Dhaka in the evening affair.

Mushfiqur was dropped from the Bangladesh T20 lineup following the World Cup debacle in UAE.

"This is a big opportunity, especially for the locals. We have a World Cup coming up. Although the Covid situation is not good, we are getting the opportunity to play in a good environment. I'm not worried about



a comeback or thinking of the national side. Right now, I am focused on the BPL. I'm still the highest run-getter in the BPL. Holding on to that place will be a different challenge," Mushfiqur told reporters yesterday after a practice session in Mirpur.

Three-time champions Dhaka, who had issues with ownership before BCB took it upon itself to lead the franchise, will have Tamim Iqbal and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza to bank on. Although Mashrafe's injury issues may see him sit out today's fixture, the team will be in able hands with Mahmudullah leading a side that have Andre Russell as a genuine T20 weapon and Rubel Hossain and Oshane Thomas toting the pace battery.

Wickets will be the biggest issue heading

into the tournament, with Mirpur's slow tracks often failing to rope in fans by allowing displays of power-hitting. However, Mahmudullah was not thinking about the wickets at this stage.

"We have to think that the wickets are good before we play a match. If we enter with a negative mindset, it will have a negative impact," Mahmudullah dictated.

Despite the obvious setbacks, Shakib was keen on the inspiration gained from such a tournament. The all-rounder continued his power-hitting drills yesterday, scattering a few of the journalists watching on with ranged aerial shots. The onus was on improving certain facets of his game and the BPL was a good platform although it remains to be seen whether the pitches are conducive to good T20 cricket.

Leading a strong Barishal outfit, there are expectations. "Every side has expectations and there are expectations that one has from their own self. This is inspiring for us and we want to take it positively," Shakib said.

Taskin Ahmed was seen in conversation with former Australia speedster and Chattogram's pace bowling coach Shaun Tait. The conversation evoked memories of the good that come from such tournaments, especially for locals, even in such trying times.

'You have to think differently'

SPORTS REPORTER

Known as somewhat of a progenitor of the concept of power-hitting coaches in world cricket, Julian Wood arrived in Bangladesh as the batting coach of Sylhet Sunrisers in this year's BPL. But while power hitting, a speciality in the T20 format, cannot be taught within the space of a single tournament, his insights can certainly add new themes to Bangladesh cricket.

While talking to The Daily Star, he divulged certain aspects of his processes, beginning with how he started thinking of his concepts 12 years ago in the USA.

"I was watching the techniques used by baseball players. It's totally focused on hitting the ball hard. Cricket was basically still dependent on the hands but having talked to other professionals, I understood the game was changing. Power is not only dependent on hands, so I was thinking of using the whole body's strength. If you are not muscular, the power has to be created differently," he said.

He talked about being smarter, given the physique of the Bangladesh players. "You have to be a lot more dependent on rhythm and timing. For me, the base is very important. If your base starts from the ground, it's easier to generate power. I use very heavy bats in training because when you use a heavy bat you have to be able to control it and that enables players to understand the stress on their body. You have to be aware of your body mechanisms.

"There is also the bat speed factor. If you are not muscular, you have to think differently," he added.

US Open champion Raducanu crashes out

AGENCIES, MELBOURNE

Reigning US Open champion Emma Raducanu crashed out of the Australian Open in the second round Thursday as she struggled with blisters on her serving hand.

The 19-year-old, making her debut at Melbourne Park, looked on track when she raced to a 3-0 lead in the opening set against Montenegro's Danka Kovinic.

But the 17th seed then lost five games in a row and needed a medical timeout for treatment on her right hand. Despite battling back she couldn't stop Kovinic winning 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 on Margaret Court Arena.

The result put Kovinic, the world number 98, into the third round of a major for the first time.

She will now play either two-time Grand Slam winner Simona Halep, seeded 14, or Brazilian Beatriz Haddad Maia for a place in the fourth round.

Meanwhile, "Frustrated" three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray was stunned by Japanese qualifier Taro Daniel in straight sets in the second round of the Australian Open on Thursday. The 120th-ranked Daniel ambushed the former world number one 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 in 2hr 48min in John Cain Arena to reach the third round of a major for the first time.

World number two Daniil Medvedev put an end to the Nick Kyrgios show at this year's Australian Open on Thursday, dumping out the mercurial local hope with a clinical 7-6(1), 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 victory to reach the third round. "I came to win this match and I am happy to do it," said Medvedev.



Manchester United interim manager Ralf Rangnick had to deal with a Cristiano Ronaldo tantrum after substituting the Portuguese forward in the second half during their 3-1 victory away to Brentford in the Premier League on Wednesday. Ronaldo, who missed the last two games because of a niggling injury, took an age to walk off the pitch, scowling at United's coaching staff and throwing his jacket down in anger, and continued to show resentment from dugout.

PHOTO: AFP

What to WATCH

T SPORTS

BPL
Chattogram Challengers vs Fortune Barishal
Live from 01:30 pm
Khulna Tigers vs Minister Group Dhaka
Live from 06:30 pm
La Liga
Espanyol vs Real Betis
Live from 02:00 am (Saturday)

TEN 2 & SONY SIX

Australian Open 2022
Round 3
Live from 06:00 am onwards

GTV & STAR SPORTS HD 2

ICC U19 World Cup 2022
South Africa vs Ireland
Live from 07:00 pm
STAR SPORTS HD 1

EPL

Watford vs Norwich City
Live from 02:00 am (Saturday)

“Our goal this time was to have the best possible cricket. I think we can complete this BPL without any major problems. I hope we can maintain this system in the next BPL.”

BCB president Nazmul Hassan said in 2015 after the BPL was rebooted following two murky editions.



Often mired in controversy, BPL still suffering an IDENTITY CRISIS

After three editions and four years of planning and scrapping, it was time for the BPL to actually prove its standing behind the IPL, a statement that has often been uttered by the tournament's governing body.

NABID YEASIN

Dhaka Gladiators, Dhaka Dynamites or Minister Group Dhaka? Which team should fans pledge allegiance to?

The ever-changing shuffle of franchises, and with it their names, is enough to drive home the point that the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), the nation's premier franchise-based T20 tournament, has failed to establish its own identity nearly 10 years after its inception.

When the BPL launched in 2012, it certainly lured in viewers and gained massive public acceptance for a promise to follow in the footsteps of the Indian Premier League (IPL) and a pledge to perfect the 'brand of cricket' the country wants to display in the format.

The fact that it was at a time when T20 cricket was at the peak of its popularity also helped the cause.

But despite all the razzmatazz, the BPL has been mired in controversy since the beginning. From players and staff payment issues, a lack of planning, a failure to form a specific set of rules for smooth operation to even the unfortunate event of spot-fixing, the BPL seemed well behind forging the

promised brand of cricket in its first two editions.

However, after skipping a year to combat these issues, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) was able to revive the league in 2015 with renewed promise and vision. The promise was kept, but only for that season.

In fact, the timing of that edition and performances yielded in that season helped national cricketers prepare better and flourish in the Asia Cup and provide glimpses in the T20 World Cup the following year. "I hope we can hold on to this system in the next BPL," were the words from BCB president Nazmul Hassan back then but while it raised hopes, results never materialised.

After three editions and four years of planning and scrapping, it was time for the BPL to actually prove its standing behind the IPL, a statement that has often been uttered by the tournament's governing body.

For that, the BPL needed to tick the other boxes besides just timely payments and creating a platform for local players to share a dressing room with stars. It needed to ensure more profitability for franchisees and, most significantly, groom up and-coming national stars capable of going on to rule the

T20 format at the international level – something the IPL has certainly done for India over the years.

When franchises get ownership of a team, they obviously look for more than just exposure. Financial gain remains a major expectation.

However, over the years, franchises have often failed to recover investment due to the BPL governing body's frail financial structure.

When it comes to producing players, the BPL did give Bangladesh players like Afif Hossain, Yasir Ali and Hasan Mahmud, all of whom have since been in and around the national set-up. But their impact on the national side has not even been close to that of IPL finds Ravichandran Ashwin, Rishabh Pant and Ishan Kishan to the Indian side.

Even this year, the BPL started with glitches and the upsurge in Covid-19-related issues pose further challenges. Come January 21, the next 29 days will surely be a testing period for the BPL governing body. Will this edition be riddled with controversy or will the BPL finally take a step in the right direction in terms of establishing its identity?

THE BPL'S DUBIOUS DISTINCTIONS

- In the inaugural edition, it was announced that Chittagong Kings would play in the semifinals before BPL governing body, following late-night meetings, stated that Barisal Burners, not Chittagong, were through.
- Mashrafe Bin Mortaza reported a potential spot-fixing approach from a fellow cricketer to his franchise, Dhaka Gladiators, in the first edition of BPL.
- The first two editions of the BPL saw repeated complaints from players and coaching staff regarding delays of payment.
- Mohammad Ashraful was handed an eight-year ban – later reduced to five years – and franchise Dhaka Gladiators were handed a lifetime ban for match-fixing in the 2013 edition of the tournament.
- Despite setbacks, the BPL attracted star foreigners over the years, with the likes of Steve Smith and David Warner playing in the 2019 edition.
- In 2015, a match between Sylhet Superstars and Chittagong Vikings was delayed after Sylhet named a different eleven at the toss to the one they eventually fielded as Ravi Bopara and Josh Cobb's NOCs arrived after the toss.



- In 2017, the BPL governing body forgot to impose a pre-tournament regulation that a match would be decided by a Super Over in the playoffs in case the allotted overs were not played due to rain.
- Ahead of the 2020 edition, the Bangladesh Cricket Board announced that each BPL team would be required to have a pacer bowling over 140kmph and a leg-spinner present in the eleven.

● The BCB rejected franchise revenue sharing, scrapping all franchises and arranging special editions of BPL, from 2020.



‘We consider BPL a developmental tournament’

The grounds department is trying its best but to maintain a good pitch we can't have more than 40 days of cricket on the same ground each year. But we have over 200 days of cricket because we have to play a majority of matches in Mirpur, Chattogram or Sylhet.

Since its introduction in 2012, the cash-rich Bangladesh Premier League has made headlines due to glitz, glamour and myriad controversies. Influential Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director Ismail Haider Mallick, also a member secretary of the BPL governing council, spoke to **The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin** about the reasons behind the stunted growth of the franchise-based T20 tournament, the obstacles in the way and how to improve in the future. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): Tell us about the journey of BPL since its introduction in 2012.
Ismail Haider Mallick (IM): We came to the board after the first edition of the BPL and what we faced most were non-payment issues. Franchisees were not paying the players and the board was supposed to get Tk 30 crore from those who organised the event. Then the board formed a commission and found out that they were still owed Tk 52 crore. The model back then was different. The board used to take money from the franchisees and then they were supposed to pay the franchisees. But no party got the money. Then we went for a settlement of Tk 25 crore but we were unable to recover that as well.

Then we decided to dissolve the financial structure and opt for a different structure for the second edition. We formed new franchisees but none of the old franchisees were able to



continue beyond the third edition. That financial model did not match the context of Bangladesh's economical structure and was never viable. We call the BPL a headache because every edition you will hear about non-payment issues. But at one point between 2015 to 2017, we truly created hype. But since the pandemic, there has been a break but we still arranged a special edition.

DS: The franchisees asked for a revenue-sharing

model just before the special edition in 2019...

IM: If we want to share revenue, we have to return to the model from the inaugural edition. We have to increase franchise fees. The board's initial aim was to make this BPL a revenue-generating tournament, but we are not on that trajectory. Yes, the BPL generates money for us each year. But because this is the only T20 tournament in our calendar, we want to make it the platform for new players to get

international exposure as well as a way to give other local resources such as coaches, umpires, groundsmen and even the security team that exposure. If we talk about Mustafizur [Rahman] or Soumya [Sarkar], they came after getting exposure in the BPL like many others. We consider BPL a developmental tournament.

DS: Why are there always complaints about poor pitches in the BPL?

IM: We are suffering in terms of pitches. If you ask me as a member of the BPL governing council, we are not happy with the type of T20 pitches in Bangladesh. The grounds department is trying its best but to maintain a good pitch we can't have more than 40 days of cricket on the same ground each year. But we have over 200 days of cricket because we have to play a majority of matches in Mirpur, Chattogram or Sylhet.

DS: Do you think BPL has hit the heights it was destined to?

IM: No, we couldn't. Frankly, the hype we had during the third, fourth and fifth editions is not the same as now. As I said, we had a gap in the middle and non-payment issues have surely tarnished its image. But I think we can eventually get there if we develop infrastructure and go for a long-term agreement with franchisees once we get a proper timeslot. This is only the BCB's part, the franchisees should also prepare long-term plans.

CAP 10 OF THE STEEL INDUSTRY

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BPL begins amid raging Covid surge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The eighth edition of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League is set to begin today amid a Covid-19 surge in the country.

The Shakib Al Hasan-led Fortune Barishal is set to square off against Chattogram Challengers in the opener at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur from 1:30pm.

In the day's second match, set to start at 6:30pm at the same venue, Mushfiqur Rahim-led Khulna Tigers will battle it out against Mahmudullah Riyad's Minister Group Dhaka.



Locals with their cattle crossing the Brahmaputra on foot as water level of the once mighty river has dropped drastically. Massive siltation is hampering the free flow of water. As boats cannot ply, people of the chars face difficulties going to the mainland. The photo was taken at Ramna Nau-Ghat of Kurigram's Chilmari on Wednesday.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Star HEALTHLINE

Know your 'superfoods' **MORINGA**

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Moringa oleifera is a tree native to the subcontinent.

The pods of the tree, locally called "Shojne data", is a staple in Bangalee cuisine.

The pods are used in curries to be eaten with rice, and almost all parts of the tree can be used as various home remedies due to their medicinal properties.

Moringa oleifera is very nutritious. It contains compounds such as vitamin A, B1 (thiamine), B2 (riboflavin), B3 (niacin), B-6 folate, ascorbic acid (vitamin C), calcium, potassium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus and zinc.

Moringa seed oil can be beneficial for hair and skin due to the proteins, hydrating and detoxifying elements it contains. It is often used to heal sores.

The anti-inflammatory properties of moringa may be effective in preventing edema from developing.

Moringa can mildly protect the liver against damage caused by anti-tubercular drugs.

Its extracts might help treat some stomach

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Road crash fatalities leap by 30 percent

Govt report shows

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

After two road safety organisations, a government report now shows that the road crashes and fatalities saw a big leap last year, indicating that the road safety situation deteriorated further.

A total of 5,088 people were killed in 5,472 road crashes in 2021, 30 percent higher than the previous year, according to a police report.

According to experts, operations of a higher number of small vehicles, including motorcycles and illegal three-wheelers, mainly caused the rise in the number of accidents and fatalities.

They said the government's failure

to develop public transport system and non-implementations of different steps including providing training to drivers to be blamed for the situation.

Concerns over road accidents and fatalities led to three students' movements for road safety since July 2018, with the latest one in November last year.

Although the authorities promised and undertake several steps to cut down road crashes, the recent data shows those initiatives remain futile as roads became riskier.

Road Safety Foundation, in a report published on January 8 this year, said 6,284 people were killed in 5,371 road crashes last year, which is 15.71 percent and

14.70 percent higher than the previous year respectively.

On the same day, Nirapad Sarak Chai, a pioneer of road safety movements in Bangladesh, published its annual accident report.

The organisation said 4,289 people were killed in 3,793 crashes last year, which is 12.87 percent and 17.36 percent higher than 2020 respectively.

Both organisations, which prepared the statistics following media reports, held lack of monitoring and enforcement of traffic laws, reckless driving, unfit vehicles, unhealthy competition among drivers, and the increasing number of motorcycles and

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7

NATURE QUEST

A verditer flycatcher spotted in Rangpur recently. It is named after its shade of blue and is among flycatchers that forage above canopy level, on electric wires or exposed tree top branches.

PHOTO: SUMATYA SULTANA

Let's continue 'honest conversations'

Outgoing US envoy tells The Daily Star on Dhaka-Washington ties

PORIMOL PALMA

Outgoing US Ambassador Earl R Miller wants Dhaka and Washington DC to have honest and direct conversations on democracy, human rights, and rule of law as partnership of the two nations is indispensable not only for future prosperity and security but also for addressing global challenges.

He said President Biden has called for 2022 to be a year of action for



all democracies to improve governance. The US will continue engaging with Democracy Summit participants and other governments, including Bangladesh, to address democratic backsliding, promote respect for human rights, and defend against corruption both at home and abroad, the envoy added.

"My suggestion would be that our governments continue to have

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3
READ FULL INTERVIEW ONLINE

MALAYSIA RECRUITMENT All legal agents can now send workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All authorised recruiting agencies will get opportunities to send workers to Malaysia, said Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad.

The minister has issued a letter in response to one from Malaysia's human resources minister.

On January 14, the Malaysian minister issued the letter that stressed on the involvement of 25 "main" Bangladeshi recruiting agencies, each with 10 "associate" agencies under it.

As the issue of involvement of "selected" agencies is already in the media of both countries, various recruiting agencies in Bangladesh have termed it "syndication" and demanded an end to this, citing that a similar system had led to the labour market closure in Malaysia.

In his letter on Tuesday, Imran said Bangladesh is always in favour of transparent, fair and safe migration, as per relevant charters of International Labour Organisation and the country's Competition Act 2012, by keeping the opportunities open to all the valid licensed recruiting agencies as mentioned in the MoU signed on December 19 last year.

According to the MoU, Malaysia shall select Bangladeshi recruiting agencies through the online system from the list provided by the Bangladesh government, he said.

N Korea 'hints' at a face-off with the US

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday hinted it could resume nuclear and long-range weapons tests as it prepares for "confrontation" with Washington -- its latest threat after a string of sanctions busting missile launches.

Pyongyang has not tested inter-continental ballistic missiles or nukes since 2017, putting launches on hold as leader Kim Jong Un embarked on a blitz of high-level diplomacy.

Since then, the nuclear-armed North has rebuffed US offers of talks while restarting some testing, including of hypersonic missiles, as Kim pursues his avowed goal of further strengthening his military.

When Washington imposed fresh sanctions last week, Pyongyang said it was a "provocation" and ramped up conventional weapons tests, vowing a "stronger and certain" response to efforts to rein it in.

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