

"If it depends on Russia, there will be no war. We do not want wars."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Ukraine crisis

The Daily Star

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

SECOND EDITION

"To be properly informed, to be helped to understand situations based on scientific data and not fake news, is a human right."

Pope Francis slams Covid disinformation



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Election Antics

Exciting and curious events on polls day at BFDC



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Tamim hits ton in BPL

Left-handed opener slams unbeaten 64-ball 111



Bruised but not beaten

For Sabekunnesa, life is a raw struggle for survival. Even in her eighties, she has to work hard every day to scratch out a living. A widow deserted by her two sons, she now collects iron scraps from a dumping ground, using a magnet, and sells them for Tk 30 a kg. The photos were taken in Beribadh area of the capital's Hajeribagh recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



BR's poor show yet again

Five railway projects face uncertainty

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

In August 2011, the government took up a Tk 1,946 crore project to procure 70 Metre Gauge (MG) locomotives to mitigate the growing crisis of rail engines and expanding the services of Bangladesh Railway.

The locomotives were supposed to be added to the BR fleet within June 2017, but the project authorities could not even complete the bidding process by that time.

The deadline was extended twice before the project went through a major revision in 2018, when the costs jumped to Tk 2,659.33 crore. The deadline was extended, again, this time to June 2024.

Later in October 2018, BR signed a deal with South Korean Hyundai Rotem Company for the procurement. As per the agreement, Hyundai Rotem was supposed to arrange the required funds.

Now, the HRC, however, wants to pull out from the project after the government asked it to manage soft loans instead of non-concessional loans as agreed by both sides earlier, causing the project's fate to hang in the

balance.

Four other Bangladesh Railway projects find themselves in a similar situation, mainly due to complexities over funding, further exposing the BR's poor skills in project implementation.

Of the 37 ongoing projects of BR, 26 have

been spent after the project to procure the 70 MG locomotives.

Failing to get contractor through two tenders, the project authorities floated the third one in December, 2014, and took four years to pick Hyundai Rotem.



PROJECT	COST	IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD
Procurement of 70 MG locomotives	Tk 2,659cr	Jul 2011-Jun 2024
Renovation of 21 locomotives	Tk 242cr	Jul 2019-Dec 2022
Technical assistance for rolling stock operation improvement	Tk 45cr	Jul 2019-Jun 2021
Joydebpur-Iswardi double line	Tk 14,251cr	Jan 2019-Dec 2024
Converting Akhaura-Sylhet single line into dual gauge	Tk 16,104cr	Apr 2019-Jun 2025

been extended at least once.

The four projects were taken up to renovate 21 MG locomotives, provide technical assistance for developing rolling stock operations, and expand the Joypurhat-Iswardi and Akhaura-Sylhet rail lines.

70 LOCOMOTIVES

Over the last 10 years, Tk 5.15 crore has already

As per the 2018 agreement, the company was supposed to supply all the locomotives to BR within five years of the contract taking effect.

In February, 2020, the Standing Committee on Non-Concessional Loan approved the Tk 1,946-crore fund. The railway ministry

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

ROHINGYA CAMPS

Arsa riddle needs to be solved: experts

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Despite the government's assertions to the contrary, the recent arrest of an Arsa chief's brother from a Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar strongly hints at the insurgent group's presence inside the refugee camps, residents and experts said.

Experts also said the government should seriously investigate the arrest of Mohammad Shah Ali, also an alleged operative of Myanmar's banned organisation Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (Arsa), not only to ascertain the presence of Arsa members in the camps, but also for the sake of ensuring security.

They warned that a volatile situation in the camp would create more uncertainty around the repatriation of the Rohingyas.

A team of the Armed Police Battalion (APBn) arrested Shah Ali, brother of Arsa commander Ataullah Abu Amar Jununi, on January 16 from Noukarmath Rohingya camp in Ukhiya of Cox's Bazar.

Following the arrest, APBn filed a case against him. According to

the case document, it has been known locally that the arrestee is "an identified Arsa member".

"He [Shah Ali] is also an armed criminal and kingpin of a gang that is involved with abduction, and also runs drug trading. In interrogation, the accused admitted that he used to keep firearms for security while trading drugs," it said.

The issue of Arsa's presence in the country has been widely discussed as Rohingyas and experts believe there are members of the Myanmar insurgent group in the camps. It came to the fore prominently after the murder of popular Rohingya leader Mohib Ullah last year.

However, the government and law enforcers alike maintain this group does not exist in Bangladesh and that some criminals might have falsely identified themselves as Arsa operatives to intimidate the refugees.

But experts said the government should take the matter seriously as it can affect the security of Rohingyas as well as the country.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Country logs highest ever positivity rate

20 more die from Covid, 15,440 new infections reported in a day

UNB, Dhaka

The country reported 20 more Covid-linked deaths with 15,440 fresh cases in 24 hours till yesterday morning.

The daily positivity rate rose to highest-ever 33.37 percent after testing 46,292 samples, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

On Thursday, the positivity rate was 31.98 percent.

The country's previous highest daily positivity rate (32.55 percent) was logged on July 24 last year.

On Thursday, the country reported 15 Covid-related deaths and 15,807 fresh cases.

The fresh numbers took the country's total Covid fatalities to 28,308 while the caseload went up to 1,762,771.

Among the 20 deceased, 12 were women and eight men.

Five deaths were reported in Dhaka division while nine in Chattogram, two each in Rajshahi and Sylhet and one each in Barishal and Mymensingh divisions.

Meanwhile, the mortality rate further declined to 1.61 percent.

The recovery rate also dropped to 88.63 percent with the recovery of 1,326 more patients during the 24-hour period.

Bangladesh's total tally of Covid Omicron cases reached 69 with the detection of five more cases till Sunday, according to GISAIM, a global initiative on sharing all influenza data.

On December 9 last year, Bangladesh logged zero Covid-related death after nearly three weeks as the pandemic was apparently showing signs of easing.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



A firefighter tries to douse the blaze at the factory of Jahin Garments in Narayanganj's Madanpur yesterday after a fire broke out there. No casualties were reported.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Cold wave to continue few more days

STAR REPORT

Many parts of the country have been experiencing a mild to moderate cold wave since Thursday night which may continue for the next few days.

A bone-chilling cold is affecting the daily life in the country's northern part and several other districts.

According to a report of Bangladesh Meteorological Department, a mild to moderate cold wave is sweeping over Rangpur and Rajshahi divisions and Gopalganj, Tangail, Mymensingh, Moulvibazar, Jashore and Kushtia districts and it may continue and spread.

Children and elder people in these areas are being affected by various cold-related diseases.

The temperature dropped by three to five degrees Celsius in several parts of the country yesterday. It may further go down by one to two

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

West ignored Russia's security concerns: Putin

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday told his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron that the West had ignored Moscow's security concerns over Nato expansion and Ukraine, the Kremlin said.

The United States and Nato earlier this week delivered a response to sweeping security demands put to them by Russia, that called on the West to promise never to admit Ukraine to the US-led security alliance.

A Russian troop build-up close to the border with eastern Ukraine has raised Western fears the Kremlin is planning to invade its pro-EU neighbour. Russia denies any plans to invade.

"The US and Nato responses did not take into account Russia's fundamental concerns including preventing Nato's expansion and refusing to deploy strike weapons systems near Russia's borders," Putin told Macron, the Kremlin said in a statement.

The Kremlin said the two leaders had spoken at length, with Putin telling Macron he will "carefully" study the US and Nato's responses "after which he will decide on his further actions".

RELATED STORY ON PAGE 6



Fishermen dry sea fish in Barishal city's Port Road area. The fish was preserved for about three months to be dried by fishermen when they would have a poor catch. They would consume dried fish while fishing at sea. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Asia hunkers down as Omicron pushes West to reopen

AGENCIES

As Omicron pushes Western countries towards reopening, Asia is hunkering down, sharpening an East-West divide on the balance between public health, the economy and basic rights and freedoms.

While the highly transmissible coronavirus variant is accelerating the move toward living with Covid-19 in Europe and North America, life in much of the Asia Pacific is little less restricted – and in some cases even more restricted – than at the start of the pandemic.

The widening divide comes even as many Asia Pacific countries boast vaccination rates higher than those of their Western counterparts.

The region's ultra-cautious stance two years into the pandemic raises questions about its endgame as border controls and strict social distancing rules, although credited with achieving some of the world's lowest death tolls, inflict growing social and economic costs.

"There is a certain level of Covid-related mortality that the society is willing to accept," Cho Sung-il, a professor of epidemiology at Seoul National University in South Korea, told Al Jazeera.

"Individually, there is a certain level of Covid-related risk one is willing to accept, to balance against what one has to pay for it, in terms of social distancing plus vaccination. Asians may be valuing life over freedom, if culture matters at all. Maybe because we don't have the strong memory of civil revolutions risking life for freedom."

In mainland China, authorities have doubled down on a zero-tolerance approach that has resulted in the near-total shutdown of international travel and the imposition of harsher and more frequent lockdowns.

Hong Kong, which is grappling with its biggest outbreak

of the pandemic, has closed schools, bars and gyms and banned dining in at restaurants after 6:00pm.

The Chinese-controlled territory, long branded "Asia's World City," ranks among the most isolated metropolises due to some of the toughest quarantine and border rules on earth.

In Japan, which is reporting close to 80,000 daily cases, borders remain closed to all non-residents, while "quasi-emergency" measures restricting opening hours for bars and restaurants are in place in 34 out of 47 prefectures.

South Korea, which like Japan has avoided full-scale lockdowns throughout the pandemic, requires arrivals to undergo 10 days of quarantine, limits private gatherings to six people, and banned restaurants, bars and gyms from operating after 9:00pm. Authorities, which yesterday reported more than 16,000 cases, are set to review the measures on February 6.

Unlike in most of Asia, Europe and North America are largely open to quarantine-free travel for those who are vaccinated.

Meanwhile, Merck & Co Inc and partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutics said yesterday six lab studies showed their experimental oral Covid-19 drug molnupiravir was active against the fast-spreading Omicron variant, reports Reuters.

The data evaluated the antiviral activity of molnupiravir and other Covid-19 antiviral agents against Covid-19 variants of concern. Molnupiravir is yet to be studied against Omicron in human studies, the companies said.

The coronavirus has killed at least 5,635,702 people globally since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources yesterday.

Japan pledges \$2m for Rohingyas in Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

Japan will contribute \$2 million in emergency grant aid for supporting the Rohingyas living on Bhasan Char.

This contribution includes \$1 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and \$1 million to World Food Programme, according to the Embassy of Japan in Dhaka.

This support will allow implementing humanitarian assistance activities for the displaced Rohingyas, who are in need of urgent assistance in Bhasan Char in areas such as food and health, said the embassy press release yesterday.

"Resolving Rohingya issues is of utmost importance for the peace and stability of the region. I appreciate the Bangladesh government's efforts to protect the Rohingya people and the dedicated work of the international organisations," said Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Ito Naoki.

Japan supports the steady and smooth operations of the international organisations under the MoU signed between the Bangladesh government and the United Nations in October 2021, "which is a basic framework of assistance for Bhasan Char", the release said.

Tiger found dead in Sundarbans canal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

The forest department recovered a tiger carcass from a Sundarbans canal yesterday afternoon.

The tiger, aged between 15 and 16, bore no signs of injury. It may have died of old age, said Belayet Hossain, divisional forest officer at the Sundarbans east forest department.

He said a tiger usually live up to 15-18 years.

Forest rangers found the carcass floating in Rupal canal adjacent to Dublar Char in the Sharankhola range and recovered it, Belayet said.

The carcass was taken to Sharankhola range office this morning. An autopsy will be conducted on the tiger's

body to know the cause of its death, he added. In February 2020, another tiger carcass was recovered from the Sundarbans, the habitat of the famous Bengal Tiger.

The carcass was found on Kabarkhali canal bank in Sharankhola range.



Sust students thank PM

Hope for rapid implementation of govt promises

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The protesting students of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology thanked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday for bearing all medical expenses of those who were injured in police attack and became sick in hunger strike.

At a press briefing, a spokesperson of the protesting students, said the prime minister also arranged critically injured student Shourav's treatment in Dhaka.

"As per the government's instructions, the Education Minister Dr Dipu Moni assured us to fulfill our key demands and other problems of the university," he said.

"We are eagerly waiting for the prompt fulfillment. We are inviting the education minister to visit Sust and sit in a discussion," he added.

On Thursday, the protesting students organised an open discussion on "what type of SUST we want".

In the programme, the students discussed issues that they have been suffering for years. That evening, they also painted graffiti on roads of the campus.

Cold wave

FROM PAGE 1

degrees Celsius today, said meteorologist Bazlur Rashid.

He said the temperature would start to increase after two to three days and another cold wave may hit the country later.

Lowest temperature in the country was recorded at 6.1 degrees Celsius in Kurigram yesterday, which has been the lowest temperature this season. The lowest temperature in Dhaka was recorded at 13 degrees Celsius yesterday.

A chilling cold wave has been blowing over the capital since early yesterday, affecting the poor, especially those who sleep under open sky.

Ashivering cold paralysed everyday life in Dinajpur and other districts in the northern part as the mercury dropped in a big notch yesterday.

The temperature went down by seven degrees Celsius in a day in Kurigram, said the Met office.

Tofazzal Hossain, in-charge of Dinajpur Meteorological Department, said the adverse weather was to continue for a couple of days in the region.

Around 200 people, mostly children, have been hospitalised in Dinajpur with cold-related diseases. Of them, 100 children were being treated at Arabindu Shishu Hospital in Dinajpur town, said Dilip Saha, its executive member.

Country logs

FROM PAGE 1

The country registered the highest daily Covid caseload of 16,230 on July 28 last year, while the highest number of daily fatalities of 264 was logged on August 10 last year.

BR's poor show yet again

FROM PAGE 1

was supposed to get \$280 million in non-concessional loans from two foreign banks in this regard.

The project, however, got stalled since the loan agreement could not be signed.

After the project authorities sought opinions from the Economic Relations Division on the draft loan agreement, the ERD in August last year forwarded the Finance Division's opinion on the matter.

The Finance Division opined that soft loans from South Korea or other sources should be managed, instead of taking the non-concessional loans which come with higher

interest rates.

When the project authorities asked Hyundai to manage the soft loans, it declined it. It also said it would cancel the contract.

On January 4 this year, the project implementation committee decided to take opinions from the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division and the Central Procurement Technical Unit in this regard, said a BR official.

THE FOUR OTHER PROJECTS

In July 2019, the government approved the technical assistance project – worth Tk 45 crore – for carrying out feasibility studies and detailed designs for four establishments, including a workshop for

diesel-electric multiple unit (DEMU) trains.

The Asian Development Bank was supposed to give Tk 31.36 crore in loan for the work. The deadline for the project was set for June 2021.

A consultant was also selected, but the project steering committee, led by the rail secretary, decided in November 2020 not to build the workshop for DEMU trains and drop this portion from the work scope of the consultant.

Besides, the deadline was extended till June 2022.

But the ADB asked to cancel the bidding process and later informed authorities that it would no longer finance the project.

In such a situation, the railways ministry asked

the BR to implement the project with government funds.

Project Director Taslim Ahmed Khan said the project has to be revised due to the changes and that they have already submitted a revised proposal in this regard.

Now, the project cost would be Tk 37.98 crores and the deadline June 2024.

Asked whether the project was facing uncertainty, he said, "It's impossible for me to say this right now. Several meetings will be held before the revision proposal is passed. The project's fate will be known then."

In July 2019, the government approved the project for renovating

21 MG locomotives at a cost of Tk 242.14 crore to solve BR's engine crisis. June 2022 was set as the deadline.

PD Tabassum Binte Islam said they floated tender thrice over the last three years. Except for the first, no one submitted any proposal. The submitted proposal, however, did not meet the requirements, she said.

"PIC [Project Implementation Committee] members in a meeting [in November last year] opined that the project should be ended," she said.

PIC's opinion would be placed before the project steering committee, which will take the final decision, she also said.

Arsa riddle needs to be solved: experts

FROM PAGE 1

"This particular arrest will be critical for investigating the death of Rohingya leader Mohib Ullah and finding evidence regarding Arsa's external linkages across the border," said Prof Shahab Enam Khan of Jahangirnagar University's Department of International Relations.

Former foreign secretary Touthid Hossain said it was generally believed that there was Arsa presence in the Rohingya camps and they were responsible for many of the crimes there.

"There are followers of Arsa in the camps, particularly among the criminal elements who oppose the repatriation.

I believe that intelligence activities should increase in the camps to identify and check them with appropriate action."

Contacted, Naimul Haque, commander of 14th Armed Police Battalion (APBn), which is in charge of security of a portion of Rohingya camps, said, "We did not say Shah Ali is an Arsa member, we said he is a so-called Arsa member."

He said Shah Ali told law enforcers that he went to Saudi Arabia but his visa was cancelled because he is the brother of Ataullah.

"Then he got married here and stayed here," said Naimul.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal

said, "We heard there is Arsa in the Rohingya camps but we did not find any identified Arsa member in the camps."

He, however, said it was not an issue as to who is an Arsa or Arakan Army member. "Whoever engages in criminal activities will be brought to book," the minister told The Daily Star.

On its verified twitter handle, Arsa claimed, "Shah Ali, a former low-key member of Arsa, was diagnosed with heart disease and suspected of suffering from cancer as well. He was thus relieved of all scopes of duties indefinitely since two and a half years ago on the

ground of incapability."

Touthid Hossain said, "Why the government is still denying it is not clear to me. I believe that Arsa is an agent of the Myanmar military, and it provided the pretext to Tatmadaw for committing ethnic cleansing both in 2016 and 2017."

On August 25, 2017, Arsa claimed responsibility for attacks on police posts across northern Rakhine. The Myanmar military used the attacks as a pretext to carry out a massive clampdown on the Rohingyas, resulting in the region's most severe refugee crisis in decades.

All 34 Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar are hubs of

organised and cross-border crimes and Rohingyas and law enforcers believe that Arsa is behind it all, sources said.

Out to make the refugee camps its stronghold, the armed group is cashing in on lax law enforcement and the misery of the refugees, said locals and intelligence sources.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of Rohingyas and their community leaders said a huge number of Arsa members are agents of Myanmar and receive regular patronage from the Myanmar military.

A community leader in the Whaikong camp said they were not aware of Shah Ali living in the camp.

"As Shah Ali was arrested, there are surely other leaders of Arsa living in the camps. They should also be arrested soon."

Mohammad Nur, a resident of Kutupalong unregistered Rohingya camp, said since Mohib Ullah's killing, the law enforcers regularly launch drives in the camps but still Arsa continued to carry out criminal activities in the camp at night.

Nazim Uddin, general secretary of Amra Cox's Bazarbashi, an organisation of citizens advocating for the repatriation of Rohingyas in Bangladesh back to Myanmar, said, "It should be investigated seriously

to know how he [Shah Ali] got the NID card? Who is sheltering him? Who are the people behind him?"

Naimul Haque said after Mohib Ullah's killing, they have arrested around 300 "so-called" Arsa members at different times.

The commander of 14th APBn, however, said many of the so-called Arsa members got bail from the court, engaged in criminal activities and got arrested again.

"The law and order situation in the camp is very good right now. The circular road centring the camps is almost completed and we have ensured patrolling through watch towers," he added.



The colder days of winter have once again set in around the country, and the capital is no exception. This means those who had to step out in the morning, whether to go to their workplaces or attend other needs, were seen wrapped in additional layers of clothing to take refuge from the shivering cold. This photo was taken recently from the Second Buriganga Bridge near Babubazar.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

History turning into rubble

Scores of buildings being built in heritage areas under Rajuk's nose

DIPAN NANDY

Old Dhaka's Paridas Road is starting to turn grey, not in the sense that it's getting older by the day, but due to concrete slabs being erected all around.

While walking through it, one will be surrounded by rows of buildings with modern architecture. Although there are still some old structures, they are increasingly getting overshadowed by the brand-new homes and offices.

On Rupchan Lane, the scene is the same, where preparations to demolish the old structures to replace them with new ones is well underway.

There's only one small problem. Both the roads should be preserved as historical sites, according to Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk).

On February 2, 2009, Rajuk published a gazette declaring four such areas to be Dhaka's heritage. Considering the historical, aesthetic, scientific, social and religious importance of sites in the capital's masterplan, the organisation also declared 93 structures of Dhaka as pieces of heritage.

According to Rule 71 of Dhaka Metropolitan Building (Construction, Development, Preservation and Removal) Rules 2006, changing the condition of buildings, installations, open spaces, roads and alleys

located within historically important structures and areas without permission is completely prohibited.

But with every passing day, these remnants of the past are being wiped out, as the laws, including Rajuk's gazettes, only remain on paper.

According to the Rajuk gazette, there are four protected areas in

According to Rule 71 of Dhaka Metropolitan Building (Construction, Development, Preservation and Removal) Rules 2006, changing the condition of buildings, installations, open spaces, roads and alleys located within historically important structures and areas without permission is completely prohibited.

Dhaka.

In Farashganj, four roads are protected: Rishikesh Das Road, Rebati Mohan Das Road, BK Das Road and Farashganj Road.

The protected roads in Shankharibazar area include Shankharibazar Road, Tantibazar Road and Panitola Road.

In Sutrapur area, Hemendra Das Road and Paridas Road are to be protected, and in Ramna area, Baily Road, Minto Road, Hare Road and Park Avenue were mentioned in the gazette.

The structures, buildings, roads, alleys and even open spaces in these areas will be considered as historically important. But a visit to these places will reveal that this history is slowly fading.

Of the holding numbers 50 to 56 on Paridas Road, only 51 and 52 still have their old structures.

Although the houses numbered one to three on Hemendra Das Road are old, everything else is new. It was learned that many have not taken permission from Rajuk or Urban Development Committee to construct these newer buildings.

Architect Taimur Islam, chief executive of Urban Study Group, told The Daily Star that Rajuk has never protected these areas in a proper way.

Although construction work for some buildings was stopped, Rajuk later let it resume. This happened in the case of 7, Rishikesh Das Lane. It allowed the construction of buildings there, showing various arguments, he said.

Contacted, Ashrafur Islam, town planner (in-charge) of Rajuk, said, "If any building violates the rules, we identify them as illegal. If a building is built in a heritage area without any kind of approval, we will take action in accordance with the building construction rules."

There are no government statistics. But we collected data from several media reports, which showed that in the five years since 2017, 304 accidents took place, while at least 560 people died.



Ashis Kumar Dey

Faulty design, negligence and much more

Says Ashis Kumar Dey of civil committee formed to probe MV Abhijan incident

ASIFUR RAHMAN

On December 24, the MV Abhijan fire hazard took the lives of 49 people and injured many more. A month since the tragedy, one question still lingers in everyone's minds: who was responsible?

On January 23, a civil committee formed to probe the fire incident disclosed their findings and put forward 25 recommendations. During the probe, they found negligence of four government officials, four launch owners and four operators.

The Daily Star sat with its chief coordinator Ashis Kumar Dey – also general secretary of National Committee to Protect Shipping, Roads and Railways – to get more insights about the whole incident.

The Daily Star: The government has conducted its own probe. Why was the civil committee formed and what issues did it find?

Ashis Kumar Dey: The committee, which consists of waterway experts, lawyers and environmentalists, emphasised on the reasons behind the incident and problems in management.

Initially, we tried to obtain the report of the government-led probe body to analyse it, but failed to acquire it, as the body did not publish its findings. We only found some details of the report through the media.

With our own probe, we found that while MV Abhijan-10 was registered by declaring that each engine was 1,100 British horsepower, it was actually 3,036 horsepower.

There was a lack of firefighting measures as well. For example, there should have been at least 12 fire hydrants on the launch, but we found only six, and those too were out of order.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH VIDEO



SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

PRAYER TIMING JAN 29



	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
Azan	5-35	12-45	4-15	5-46	7-15
Jamaat	6-10	1-15	4-30	5-50	7-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



This old structure, surrounded by under-construction buildings, on Paridas Road is one of the few symbols remaining of a bygone era. As new concrete towers fill up the area, which is apparently a protected historic site, the heritage will eventually fade away, unless something is done to stop this practice.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

LUXURY COLLECTION

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Despite immense hardship, this farmer is all smiles while showing off his successful harvest of cucumber, reaped right off the field. Farmers in Tangail are slowly shifting towards vegetable cultivation due to its profitability, as opposed to other crops. This photo was taken recently from Tangail Sadar's Taratia area. PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

Body of missing boy found in banana orchard

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Police have recovered the body of a teenage boy with a noose tied around his neck from a banana orchard at Sarabari area in Tangail's Ghatail upazila yesterday. The deceased is Maruf Hossain (14), son of Faruque Hossain of Gorbari village, adjacent to Sakhipur upazila.

Police and family members said Maruf, student of a local madrasa, was going to his uncle's house at Deopara on Thursday noon, with his elder brother Babar Ali on his battery-run three-wheeler.

Keeping Maruf inside the vehicle, Babar went into the uncle's house. After returning, he saw that Maruf and the three-wheeler were nowhere to be found.

Yesterday morning, locals sighted Maruf's body in the orchard and informed police, who later recovered the body and sent it to Tangail General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Contacted, Ghatail Police Station OC Azharul Islam said they suspect Maruf might have been strangled by one or multiple people who were looking to steal the vehicle.

SAIDPUR GOVT COLLEGE

No dorm for 5,000 students

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Established in 1953, Saidpur Government College, situated in the flourishing railway town of Nilphamari district, has been running without a hostel for the last 70 years, creating immense suffering for learners who come from distant areas for higher education.

In the absence of a permanent dormitory, students are now compelled to reside in messes scattered across different parts of the town, bearing additional cost for rent and transportation.

Relevant sources informed that after the college was nationalised in 2018, it started attracting a large number of students from far and wide for its quality education. Currently, it has around 5,000 students enrolled.

Meanwhile, Hafizur Rahman Hafiz, former principal of the college, said the then sub-divisional officer of Nilphamari had allocated an age-old two-storey building for makeshift accommodation of students until a hostel was built. The building was chosen from the government's enlisted abandoned properties, located near the college.

But a few years ago, the Public Works Department (PWD) declared the building risky and unfit for living. It has been lying deserted since then, Hafizur said, adding that as a result, students are once again left without proper accommodation.

Abdur Rashid, a second year honours student of the college's department of political science, said, "I've come from Birganj upazila in Dinajpur. I'm studying here by residing in a mess two km away from the college. To bear



The college was allocated an age-old two-storey building to use for makeshift accommodation of the students. But it was later declared risky and unfit for living by the Public Works Department, once again leaving the students without a place to go. PHOTO: STAR

the additional cost, I work as a house tutor."

Meanwhile, degree student Abul Kashem said, "Along with the additional cost, there is also a lack of safety in the messes."

Asadul Islam, a first-year student of botany, said, "The authorities should build a hostel immediately, otherwise students from distant areas won't choose the college for admission in future."

Contacted, Abdul Mannan, principal of the college, said, "We're aware of the students' suffering. We've recently sent a proposal to the education engineering department of the ministry to build two hostels, as we've got sufficient land."

10 held over attempt to steal Tk 18cr from bank accounts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have arrested 10 people for allegedly attempting to steal Tk 18 crore from two bank accounts of Walton Group and United Group of a private bank, by using forged signature and information.

The arrestees are Zakir Hossain, Yeasin Ali, Mahbub Ishtiaq Bhuiyan, Anisur Rahman, Dulal Hossain, Aslam, Abdur Razzak, Zakir Hossen, Anwar Hossain Bhuiyan, and Nazrul Islam.

Among them, Zakir is an SME sales team manager at Dutch-Bangla Bank's Karwan Bazar branch.

He used to collect information of affluent customers from the bank's servers and provide it to his accomplices, police said.

On Thursday, Gulshan police conducted drives in different areas of the capital to arrest them, Md Asaduzzaman, deputy commissioner (DC) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Gulshan Division, told a press briefing yesterday.

DC Asaduzzaman said, "On Tuesday, the gang was attempting to transfer money from a Dutch-Bangla Bank account of Walton Group by forging signatures and information through real-time gross settlement system... When it raised suspicion, the bank manager contacted Walton Group, and the fraud came to light."

Among the arrestees, five were held from a restaurant in Bhatara area while they were planning to embezzle Tk 12 crore from a savings account of United Hospital Limited with Dutch-Bangla Bank's Basundhara branch.

The DC said the racket works in two layers. One group forges signatures of certain individuals or groups, while the other tries to convince the branch manager in their favour.

Safayet Tarique, first assistant director of Walton Group, filed a case with Bhatara Police Station on Thursday over the incident.

Labour leader killed over land dispute

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A railway labour leader was killed in Rajshahi yesterday, following a dispute over land yesterday.

Victim Zahurul Islam (50) was a porter at Amnura Railway Station of Chapainawabganj, police and local AL leaders said.

He was vice-president of Railway Sramik League's Open Line Unit and former general secretary of a ward unit of Awami League.

The murder occurred in the city's Shiroil Colony area under Chandrima Police Station at 1:00pm, Golam Ruhul Kuddus, additional deputy commissioner and spokesperson of RMP said.

Police arrested a railway employee named Matiar Rahman in connection with the murder. He and Zahurul were partners in cultivating crops on a piece of railway land.

A Rare Duck

FROM PAGE 3

sand, repeating with its other foot, like an unsure dancer. Then it floated into the water. Finally it flew. Its takeoff was abrupt like other ducks, but unlike smaller ducks, its flight was slow. All this while, I had thought our Comb Duck was unattractive. But when it opened its wings in flight, an unexpected beauty emerged. Within the black of its feathers were shimmering islands of orange, blue and green. As always, nature revealed her secrets slowly.

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

You got to

FROM PAGE 5

in our family, the residents of the neighbourhood and even the rest of the city will be hard pressed to find a better puri."

At this point, Yousuf asked this correspondent and his entourage, "Don't you want some?"

As they signalled in the positive, a plate full of steaming hot puri was served right away.

You might be wondering what the puri actually tastes like, but we'll leave that out for now. If you're that interested, go visit Buddha's Puri, open for business from 7:00am in the morning to noon, and again from 4:00pm to 9:00pm.

Vaccine patents accord possible in 'weeks': WTO

AFP, Paris

An accord between rich nations and developing countries on intellectual property waivers for Covid-19 vaccines could be just weeks away, the head of the World Trade Organization said yesterday.

Developing countries that are lagging behind in vaccinating their populations have been pushing for waivers on the patents, or intellectual property rights, on Covid-19 vaccines as they say this would help spur local production.

That has pitted them against a group of mostly developed countries, including prominently EU nations, which believe that would discourage innovation and that other steps can be taken to boost access to vaccines.

"We hope that within the next few weeks we can have a breakthrough" on what has been a bone of contention for months, WTO leader Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala told a press conference.

"We believe there could be a sensible landing zone, a sensible compromise solution that would allow developing countries more access to technology transfer and IP whilst protecting innovation and research, not discouraging it," she added.

While a deal could be reached soon, it may not happen before the EU-African Union summit on February 17-18 in Brussels, said Okonjo-Iweala.

Addressing the same conference in Paris, French minister for foreign trade Franck Riester, said "what is important is access to vaccines."

This can be improved by lifting as far as possible restrictions to their distribution, he said.

With France having this month taken over the rotating EU presidency Riester said if greater facilitation of distribution was required then the EU was "ready to do that in the most constructive possible manner."

Know your

FROM PAGE 12

Immunity: As gooseberries contain a lot of vitamin C, it can enhance immunity.

Memory and brain health: High concentration of vitamin C and antioxidants can benefit memory.

Heart health: Gooseberry can prevent heart disease to some extent by reducing inflammation.

Liver health: Some promising animal studies suggest that gooseberry juice could help improve liver function.

Hair growth: Application of gooseberry is thought to stimulate hair growth and protect against hair loss.

However, eating too much gooseberry can cause stomach problems due to its sour nature. This fruit can also not replace medical treatment for any of the issues listed above.

Ten Pak troops slain in ambush

AFP, Islamabad

Ten Pakistani troops were killed in a checkpoint firefight earlier this week, an army statement said

Thursday, in an attack claimed by separatists in the country's restive southern province of Balochistan.

The Pakistani army said ten soldiers were slain "during intense exchange of fire" while defending against a raid on a post in the Kech district of Balochistan overnight from Tuesday into Wednesday.

One assailant was killed and several others were injured by army troops, the statement said, adding a "clearance operation" underway to "hunt down perpetrators" had captured three gunmen.

In a statement to AFP, separatist group the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for the assault and said the military death toll stood at 17.

"The enemy's weapons and other military

equipment were seized and the post was set on fire," the statement said, confirming one of their own militants was killed in the clash.

A spokesman for Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said he felt "deep sorrow" over the incident.

"Every drop of blood of the soldiers guarantees the security of the country," his office said in a statement.

Last week another separatist group from the region, the Baloch Nationalist Army (BNA), carried out a bombing in the eastern city of Lahore, killing three people.

Separatists have been waging an insurgency for years in Balochistan, the largest but least populous province of Pakistan, which borders Iran.

It is the poorest region of the country but is rich in minerals, and resentment among residents has been stoked by billions of dollars of Chinese money flowing in through Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative.

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Faulty design

FROM PAGE 3

DS: Who was responsible for the incident?

Dey: Of course, the launch owners and staffers like drivers and masters were responsible. However, we found that four government officials also didn't do their job properly, which led to the fire hazard.

During the annual fitness test, commonly known as a survey, all the issues should have surfaced. But the officials involved in the survey didn't fulfil their duties.

The launch could carry a maximum of 420 persons. But passengers said 800-1,000 were present on the launch at the time of the

accident.

When a launch leaves a terminal, it has to take permission from BIWTA's marine safety and traffic management department. A master of the launch told officials that the vessel was carrying only 310 passengers, and the officials signed it off without checking, which violated the laws.

Three officials, including a traffic inspector and an official from the shipping ministry, were appointed to inspect launches there. The ministry official, however, said he was not present at Sadarghat terminal that day.

DS: What has been the situation of launch accidents in the last five years?

Dey: There are no government statistics. But we collected data from several media reports, which showed that in the five years since 2017, 304 accidents took place, while at least 560 people died.

Some factors are behind these incidents: the absence of efficient drivers and masters, not following the designs, carrying extra passengers and bad weather.

There are 14,000 registered vessels, but over two lakh are running now. This is another reason behind the accidents.



While discarded cycle tyres might be trash to some, for these three kids from Sylhet's Shimulkandi, they are an exuberant plaything. Especially in winter, rural children delve into spirited tyre races, with sticks to steer the tyres in the right direction. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

You got to taste it to believe it

Buddu's Puri shop, a household name in Sutrapur

DIPAN NANDY

Even though the way to Buddu's Puri was shown by a flower seller sitting in front of Sutrapur's Govinda Mandir, it was difficult to locate the vaunted puri shop inside the labyrinthine Hemanta Das Lane.

After a few minutes' search, a narrow alley finally led up to the shop. It doesn't have a signboard, nor a formal name, but locals know that it is indeed the "Buddu's Puri" shop.

Md Babul has been a regular there for an astonishing 35 years.

"This is the best puri in the entire city. It's so good that I just can't like any other puri anymore," he told this correspondent.

Dilip, who was standing by Babul, cut him off to start singing his own praise for the puri. "They sell this egg-puri here. Let me tell you, when the yolk breaks and the warmth seeps into your mouth... well, it's just heavenly." They said the shop has been doing



At Buddu's Puri shop, the puri is never served cold, as the chefs don't fry the dough until customers place their orders. Its egg-puri is a major attraction for customers who love the idea of a runny yolk blossoming from within the delicious flat-bread.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

business there since the Pakistani era. It was established by Aftabuddin, a former biri trader, who was known to everyone as Buddu. Popular for his humour, Aftabuddin and his puri quickly won everyone over.

After he died in the 90's, his son Md Yousuf stepped up to take his place.

The shop sells three kinds of puri. There's the daal puri -- which sells for Tk 5. Then there's the egg puri and Taki fish-puri, both of which go for Tk 20.

But after a rise of fish prices this year, this item is on halt for the moment.

Md Sujon has been working there as an artisan for a full decade. "We only use masur daal, and sprinkle a bit of mint leaves on top. I think this is what sets us apart," he said.

Sujon doesn't really know exactly how many puri they sell in a day. "We need around 30-40 kg of flour every day, and even more on weekends."

But why is this puri so popular? According to owner Md Yousuf, it's the ingredients. "From our first day, we've been using local masur daal. We've never used anything else, never compromised with the quality. This is why people love it, and this love propels us to try even harder."

"We have this rule here: we never keep our puri fried. We only do it after customers place their orders. We don't sell cold puri here," Md Yousuf said while working.

As this correspondent was talking to Md Yousuf, a crowd gathered at the store. One customer, Sutrapur-resident Dip, ordered 25 for his family. "This is our afternoon treat. It's a family tradition."

Md Jumman is a second-generation customer at the shop. He said, "My father used to come here too. Everyone

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Two killed in truck collision

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Tangail

Two people were killed after two trucks collided on Tangail-Jamalpur highway in Tangail's Dhanbari upazila yesterday morning.

The deceased are truck driver Sohel Miah (32) of the district's Sadar upazila, and vegetable-trader Sumon Miah (26) of Jamalpur's Sarishabari upazila.

"The accident occurred when a brick-laden truck collided with another truck carrying chillis at Hazrabari Koyapara area around 7:15am, leaving the driver and passenger of the chilli-carrying truck seriously injured," said Tarikul Islam, in-charge of Fire Service and Civil Defence in Dhanbari.

"They later succumbed to their injuries at the local upazila health complex," he said.

"Police seized both vehicles and handed over the bodies to the families," said Chan Miah, officer-in-charge of Dhanbari Police Station.

A recent police report reveals that 5,088 people in total were killed in 5,472 road crashes in 2021, which was 30 percent higher than 2020.

Road Safety Foundation, in another report, put the casualties at 6,284 in 5,371 crashes.



On a cold winter morning, when those who have the luxury crave for more time under the blanket, this eight-year-old girl was out and about with her calf, both clad in sufficiently warm clothes to face the chill. The photo was taken recently from Dhamrai.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'Bomb-maker' arrested in Barishal

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Barishal

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) claimed to have arrested a man with arms, bombs and bomb-making equipment in Barishal.

Rab-8 deputy director Zahangir Alam disclosed the information during a press conference held yesterday at Rab-8 headquarters.

He said Babul was detained from Barishal's launch ghat area early yesterday during a drive.

Babul, a resident of Bhola Sadar's South Dighaldi, has several cases filed against him -- in connection to murder, robbery and torturing women -- with Bhola Sadar and Daulatkhan police stations.

Rab seized a foreign pistol, two magazines, four rounds of ammunition, three bombs, 800 grammes of gunpowder and other bomb-making equipment from him.

Babul confessed to being a professional bomb-maker and dealer. Another arms-related case was filed against him with Barishal-1 Kotwali Police Station, after seizing the weapons, said the Rab official.

Azizul Karim, Kotwali Police Station OC, said Babul was shown arrested in the case.

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

A Rare Duck



Comb Duck, Rajshahi, Bangladesh.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

"fogwich" was what I called that morning on the Padma river - a foggy mid-morning that was sandwiched by sunshine before and after. My friends and I had met our guide Nuru at the Bot-tola ghat on the river. Scrambling down the ghat's slope we had boarded his engine boat for our day-long cruise looking for birds.

Heading south on the river for an hour, the sunshine was replaced by fog rolling in from nowhere. After an hour it thinned and the sun eventually broke through. The dry season water was shallow and chars had emerged on all sides.

As we left the city behind us, birds began appearing. First, there were mundane ones: Black Kites and Cormorants. Then a Great Crested Grebe showed in the water, a white and brown creature with a long elegant neck topped by a puff of black feathers. Seeing us it decided to take flight. It took long running strides on the water for twenty feet, creating circular splashy waves with each step, flapping its wings mightily and eventually taking off.

Straight ahead, the river bifurcated around an elongated char, perhaps a mile across. From the distance, we could see a row of dots lining its edge. They were ducks. Binoculars revealed copper-coloured Ruddy Shelducks.

Then I saw two black-and-white dots in the middle of the row. They were facing away from us making identification difficult, but they looked different from other ducks here. Not only their colour, but also their large size, almost that of a goose, stood them apart.

Coming a little closer, we saw they were dark on top and white at bottom. When they turned their head we saw their most interesting feature: their white head and neck were speckled in a salt and pepper pattern. By then our boat's progress was impeded by shallow waters. The ducks were still far but we had seen enough.

They were African Comb Ducks, *Sarkidionis melanotos*. Also known as Knob-billed Ducks, they are found in Africa, Madagascar and some parts of Asia including the subcontinent. In Bangladesh they are very rare winter visitors. Some of the largest duck species in the world, they weigh up to three kilograms and possess a five-foot wingspan. Male ducks have a knob on their bill. But knob or not, they are unmistakable due to their spotted neck.

Late that afternoon, on our way back from other chars, we again encountered one of them on a sandbar, standing at water's edge. It tipped one foot into the water and pulled back into the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

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A woman walks past a monument to the soldiers killed in action during wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya in the village of Shebikino outside Belgorod, a few kilometres from Ukrainian border, on Thursday. The people of Shebikino is just a stone's throw away the scene of a major geopolitical crisis, but the Russians there see no war on the horizon.

PHOTO: AFP

CIVILIAN DEATHS FROM US STRIKES Pentagon chief orders reforms

AFP, Washington

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered Pentagon officials Thursday to undertake reforms to reduce the number of civilian deaths from military strikes after multiple unjustified fatal incidents.

"The protection of civilians is fundamentally consistent with the effective, efficient and decisive use of force in pursuit of US national interests," Austin said in a directive issued to Department of Defense leadership.

"It is a strategic and moral imperative," he said.

Austin gave Pentagon officials 90 days to produce a plan for how civilian casualties can be reduced and avoided in combat operations, saying the experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq provide an opportunity to learn lessons and mitigate civilian harm in an institutional way.

The move came after several incidents placed a dark cloud over the Pentagon, most recently the erroneous killing of 10 people, including seven children, in a Kabul drone strike in August 2021 during the last days of the US presence in Afghanistan.

Likewise, the US military has been embarrassed by reporting by The New York Times that showed a poorly managed March 2019 bombing that killed some 70 civilians in the final days of the war against the Islamic State group.

The military avoided investigation and accountability in that incident, the Times said.

Austin's order came after a study of civilian death causes and reporting by RAND Corp, commissioned by the Pentagon, painted an unflattering picture of the US military's processes for dealing with such incidents.

It said that in planning strikes, the military focuses so much on the enemy that it neglects the broader civilian picture -- a problem that can lead to avoidable casualties.

And it says the military does not adequately and consistently investigate and record civilian death incidents, and does not have a central database that would permit study that could lead to solutions.

Rand recommended the Pentagon establish a "center of excellence" with personnel dedicated full time to civilian harm issues and strengthen data collection and analysis.

Rand also called for a review of how the military offers condolence of "ex gratia" payments to the families of those non-combatants killed as a result of US attacks.



'We don't want wars'

Russia softens tone on Ukraine, weighs US answers



REUTERS, Moscow

Russia yesterday sent its strongest signal so far that it is willing to engage with US security proposals and reiterated that it does not want war over Ukraine.

"If it depends on Russia, then there will be no war. We don't want wars. But we also won't allow our interests to be rudely trampled, to be ignored," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told Russian radio stations in an interview.

Russia has massed tens of thousands of troops near the Ukrainian border as it presses demands for a redrawing of post-Cold War security arrangements in Europe.

The United States and its allies have warned President Vladimir Putin that Russia will face swift and tough economic sanctions if he attacks Ukraine.

Lavrov said the West was ignoring Russia's interests but there was at least "something" in written responses submitted by the United States and Nato on Wednesday to Russia's proposals.

Lavrov said he expected to meet US Secretary of State Antony Blinken again in the next couple of weeks. Their last meeting, in Geneva on Jan 21, produced no breakthrough but both sides agreed to keep talking.

Lavrov said, without giving details, that the US counter-proposals were better than Nato's. Russia was studying them and Putin would decide how to

respond.

While the US and Nato responses have not been made public, both have stated they are willing to engage with Moscow on a series of topics, including arms control.

The US ambassador to Moscow, John Sullivan, told reporters that Washington had raised the possibility of "reciprocal transparency measures... including on offensive weapons systems in Ukraine, as well as measures to increase confidence regarding military exercises and manoeuvres in Europe."

He said the size of Russia's build-up near Ukraine would allow an invasion with little warning, and urged it to pull back its forces.

"It's the equivalent of if you and I were having a discussion or a negotiation. If I put a gun on the table and say that I come in peace, that's threatening," Sullivan said.

Russia has dismissed calls to withdraw, saying it can deploy troops as it sees fit on its own territory.

The head of Germany's BND foreign intelligence agency told Reuters that Russia was prepared to attack Ukraine but added: "I believe that the decision to attack has not yet been made".

The Kremlin said Putin would spend a "lot of time" discussing European security issues with Chinese President Xi Jinping when he visits Beijing next week for the opening of the Winter Olympics.

'PARTYGATE' SCANDAL Cops 'not delaying' probe into UK PM

AFP, London

London police yesterday denied delaying a long-awaited government report into lockdown-breaking parties in Downing Street that have put Prime Minister Boris Johnson's future in jeopardy.

Weeks of so-called "partygate" revelations forced Johnson to order a senior civil servant to look into the claims, and her report was due to be published this week.

But the fact-finding investigation has yet to appear, prompting speculation the involvement of police this week could prevent full details emerging.



The Metropolitan Police confirmed in a statement it did not want details emerging that detectives were investigating for potential breaches of coronavirus legislation.

The "partygate" revelations have seen calls for Johnson to quit, due to widespread public and political anger about the breaking of rules the government itself had set.

Johnson's opponents accuse him of misleading parliament -- which under the code for ministers is seen as a resigning matter -- by insisting the events were work-related.

He has vowed to "get on with the job" and hopes the report will draw a line under the matter.

First Black woman to US top court!

REUTERS, Washington

President Joe Biden on Thursday said he plans by the end of February to nominate a Black woman to replace retiring US Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, a historic first that he called "long overdue." Biden appeared with Breyer, whom he has known since the 1970s, at the White House after the 83-year-old justice formally announced his retirement in a letter to the president. Biden, who won the Democratic Party's 2020 presidential nomination in large part because of strong support from Black voters, noted that he committed during that campaign to name a Black woman to a lifetime post on the high court and would keep his promise.

40pc in Tigray lack adequate food: WFP

REUTERS, Nairobi

Nearly 40 percent of people in Ethiopia's Tigray region do not have adequate food after 15 months of conflict, according to an assessment released yesterday by the UN World Food Programme (WFP).

The agency surveyed 980 households across the region and found that three-quarters of people are using extreme coping strategies like cutting the number of meals they eat daily. The war broke out in November 2020 and pits the Ethiopian government and its allies against Tigrayan forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the political party that

controls Tigray region. The conflict has killed thousands and displaced millions across three regions in Ethiopia and into neighbouring Sudan.



S-400 MISSILE DEAL WITH INDIA US slams Russia's 'destablising role'

NDTV ONLINE

Russia selling S-400 missile defense system to India "shines a spotlight on the destabilising role" that Moscow is playing in the region and potentially beyond as well, the United States has said.

The US continues to have its concerns over India purchasing the multi-billion missile defense system from Russia. India has asserted that its decisions are based on its national interest.

"Well in many ways, this doesn't change the concerns that we have with the S-400 system. I think it shines a spotlight on the destabilising role that Russia is playing not only in the region but potentially beyond as well," State Department Spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Thursday at his daily news conference. Price was responding to a question on implications of the Russian S-400 system to India on its bilateral ties with New Delhi.

Despite strong objections sanctions threat from the US, India has refused to make any changes in its decision and is going ahead with the purchase of the missile defense system.

"Whether it is India, whether it is any other country, we continue to urge all countries to avoid major new transactions for Russian weapon systems," Price said.



This undated picture released from North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) yesterday shows a slim looking North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (C) inspecting the planned construction site of a large-scale vegetable greenhouse farm in Ryonpho area of Hamju County, South Hamgyong Province, North Korea. Pyongyang has conducted six weapons tests in January, including firing hypersonic missiles, doubling down on Kim's call to build "military muscle" with one of the most intense single-month barrages on record.

PHOTO: AFP

UN rights chief may visit Xinjiang: paper

REUTERS, Beijing

China has agreed that the UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet can visit Xinjiang after the Beijing Olympics, the South China Morning Post said, citing unidentified sources.

Rights groups have accused China of widespread abuses against Uyghurs and other minority groups in its far western region of Xinjiang, including mass detention, torture and forced labour. The United States has accused China of genocide.

Beijing denies all allegations.

The newspaper said approval for the visit by Bachelet after the Games conclude on Feb 20 was granted on condition that it should be "friendly" and not framed as an investigation.



It's the equivalent of if you and I were having a discussion or a negotiation. If I put a gun on the table and say that I come in peace, that's threatening.

John Sullivan, US ambassador to Russia, on Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's 'no war' comment



Misha Sawdagor and Ilias Kanchan pose for a photo.



Nipun accused Zayed Khan of bribing candidates.

PHOTOS: STAR & COLLECTED

Election antics at BFDC

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Two completely different scenarios played out yesterday at BFDC and Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, where Bangladesh Film Artistes Association

At 1 pm during yesterday, nominee Nipun was seen creating a ruckus in front of the media in FDC, claiming that General Secretary nominee Zayed Khan was 'bribing' voters outside the voting centre.

the allegations brought against him. **Competitors, not enemies** Misha Sawdagor and Ilias Kanchan's panels were wrapped in a harsh war of words before the election. However, they were seen exchanging

Moushumi, Dipjol and Aruna Biswas break into a chorus "Haarjit Chirodin Thakbei" is a legendary song voiced by Abida Sultana, and written by Gazi Mazharul Anwar. Moushumi, Aruna Biswas and

made his way into BFDC yesterday at 12:30 pm to cast his vote.

As soon as his car entered through the gate, Ferdous, identified his car and greeted him. Zahid Hasan pulled down the glass of his window, and greeted him back with a big smile on his face.

"Zahid bhai is someone I deeply love. I believe, he feels the same way about me. I ask for his love and blessings, instead of his vote," said Ferdous.

Hero Alam injured after being jumped by excited 'fans' Hero Alam was injured at the ongoing election of the Film Artistes' Association at BFDC today. However, he has been immediately rescued by the law enforcement.

He claimed that he went there to observe and exchange pleasantries with the participants, before being bombarded by an excited crowd, who were eager to take selfies with him.

Finding no way out, he asked for help, after which law enforcement members helped him out of a potential stampede. He was carried towards his car with the help of the police.



(From left) Members of the Misha-Zayed panel burst out in a musical chorus; Ferdous elated after meeting Zahid Hasan; Hero Alam was injured after being jumped by overeager fans.



and Actors Equity' held their elections respectively. While the latter was quite festive and mellow, the other had no shortage of antics and excitement.

Zayed Khan 'handing out money under shawl', objects Nipun

"I got to know that Zayed Khan was handing out money in guise of a handshake, from under his shawl," said Nipun to the media present at the premises.

Zayed Khan, however, denied any of

pleasantries and posing for pictures together during the election.

"Ilias Kanchan is like my big brother, and I respect him a lot," said Misha. "The fact that my name is associated with him in this event makes me proud," he said.

Dipjol suddenly broke into a chorus, adding to the 'festive' environment of the election.

Ferdous would rather have 'love and blessings' than votes Renowned actor Zahid Hasan had

'Writing a song about my abuse was the hardest thing I've ever done'

TASHFEE



Sarah Alam in "Alo".

What message do you want to send through "Alo"?

Cliche but to put it simply - there is hope out there. Just shine through.

Who came up with the concept for the music video?

The video is based on the duality of light vs dark, fire vs water. Darkness is silence, keeping women from expressing themselves. We break through with the light of our truth. Water drowns us, but we break through with the power of the fire that burns within us all. The concept was created by Ilajar Islam, who directed the

A person who goes through abuse, knows how tenebrous it is. You feel like you have no hope, no dreams, you are a shadow just existing.

video, and my dear friend Arafat Kazi.

What are your upcoming projects this year?

I am calling 2022 my creative year. I have a bunch of original songs tuned and written, ready to go. I also have some collaborations lined up with incredible artists such as Shaker Raza, Sunidhi Nayak, and more. I am also part of a brand new musical film called "Hohat".

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

Few artistes have gone through as many ups and downs as Tashfee, who is often cited as a rising star in Bangladesh's music. Even though she constantly works with industry greats like Fuad Almuqtadir, Tahsan and Arnob, the artiste is on her way to discarding her 'rising' tag with her first 'hit' of the year, 'Alo', in which she voices out about domestic abuse.

You have publicly stated that 'Alo' was about the abuse that you faced. When did you decide that you were comfortable enough to write it?

It has been many years since I overcame an abusive relationship, and quite frankly speaking, releasing a song about it was the hardest thing I ever had to do. But you push through for the win, you push through to find the light, the "Alo".

Why did you decide to name it "Alo"?

A person who goes through abuse, knows how tenebrous it is. You feel like you have no hope, no dreams, you are a shadow just existing. It feels like this will be your forever reality and you will never be happy again. I named it "Alo". Because coming out of an abusive relationship is like finding light, literally and figuratively. This song is about finding your "Alo", which is within you.



PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL

Ryan Reynolds to have street named after him

Hollywood hunk Ryan Reynolds, who hails from Vancouver, is to be nationally recognised with the opening of 'Ryan Reynolds Way', located in the east end of Ottawa.



"It's clear that Ottawa has a special place in Ryan's heart - and in his honour, I'll be bringing forward a motion later today to have a street named after him. Ryan Reynolds Way will be located in a new subdivision in the east end. Look forward to seeing it open soon," tweeted Jim Watson, the

mayor of Ottawa.

The 'Deadpool' star called it an "incredible honour" and joked that in return, he would rename one of his children Ottawa.

Alia Bhatt's 'Gangubai Kathiawadi' set for release

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Celebrated Indian filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali's much anticipated forthcoming feature film 'Gangubai Kathiawadi' is set to hit theatres on February 25.

The film, starring Alia Bhatt, is inspired by the life of Gangubai Kothewali, known as the 'madam' of a red-light area in Mumbai's Kamathipura. Alia will be portraying the role of Gangubai, considered as one of the most powerful, loved and respected madams during the 1960s.

The plot of the film is based on the book 'Mafia Queens of Mumbai', authored by Hussain Zaidi.

Reportedly, earlier the film was scheduled to release on February 18.



A breath of poisonous air

Declare state of emergency till Dhaka's air is breathable again

FOR those of us who live in Dhaka and breathe its air, it's hardly shocking news anymore that the city is one of the most polluted in the world. Over the past several weeks, Dhaka topped the list of the worst offenders on multiple occasions, with its Air Quality Index (AQI) score beating that of China's Wuhan or India's New Delhi. Even then, we are shocked by a recently published report that highlights that in the last six years, Dhaka has had clean air for only 38 days! The study, conducted by Stamford University's Center for Atmospheric Pollution Studies from 2016 to 2021, states that the average AQI score in Dhaka was 219, which falls in the category of "extremely unhealthy," when the permissible AQI score is 0-50.

According to the study, unplanned and uncontrolled road-cutting and construction cause the most air pollution (30 percent), followed by brick kilns and factories (29 percent) and black smoke from vehicles (15 percent). It is inconceivable how we have allowed ourselves to reach this horrifying state, and worse still, that we seem to have accepted this as the status quo. Despite the deteriorating AQI readings year after year, we have done alarmingly little to address the pressing and persistent causes of air pollution. At a conference on Thursday, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh admitted that Dhaka was the most polluted city in the world, and that they were "working to get rid of the problem." As part of the public who are breathing in this poisonous air every day, we demand to know the details of such plans, along with a timeline of how long it would take before we can take a breath of fresh air again.

The High Court on November 24, 2021 issued nine instructions to the Department of Environment (DoE), two city corporations and the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) to make sure that waste-carrying vehicles, construction materials and construction sites are covered with tarpaulin, and that water is sprinkled on the streets of Dhaka to control air pollution. It is evident that these instructions are not being followed, and that the authorities are, yet again, failing to monitor the implementation of these directives. Who will monitor the authorities? It's high time they were held accountable for their consistent failure to make Dhaka liveable and breathable for more than 20 million people.

According to the Environment Conservation Act, 1995, when air quality deteriorates to such a level as it has in Dhaka, the DoE must issue a public warning about the associated health hazards. No such warning has been issued by the authorities, which, as highlighted by Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa), "indicates their sheer negligence." With over 10,000 people dying in Dhaka alone every year due to air pollution, and another 153,000 across the country (as per World Bank data), the authorities must recognise and treat it as a state of emergency requiring urgent attention.

Stop the silent killer

Greater awareness about NCDs needed to save lives

HEALTH experts tell us that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) strike silently and kill a large number of people all over the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), NCDs kill 41 million people each year, equivalent to 71 percent of all deaths globally. Each year, more than 15 million people die from an NCD between the ages of 30 and 69 years, and 85 percent of these "premature" deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. Cardiovascular diseases account for most NCD deaths, or 17.9 million people annually, followed by cancers (9.3 million), respiratory diseases (4.1 million), and diabetes (1.5 million). These four groups of diseases account for over 80 percent of all premature NCD deaths.

NCDs have also been identified as a major concern in Bangladesh, needing due attention and intervention. Latest statistics show that about 67 percent of all deaths in the country are caused by NCDs. On top of that, around 20 percent of the population suffer from hypertension, 10 percent from diabetes, and as much as two million people suffer from cancer every year in the country.

In this regard, Bangladesh's health minister said that NCDs were increasing because of changes in lifestyle and diet, obesity, tobacco consumption, environmental pollution, and misuse of medicines. He suggested creating wider awareness among the people so that the diseases could be detected early and treatment could be started immediately. He said this while addressing the first National NCD Conference 2022 virtually, in which WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was also in attendance. The WHO chief mentioned the increasing use of tobacco and unhealthy lifestyle as two major reasons for the growing cases of NCDs. He emphasised taking steps to ensure equitable healthcare services at primary level for those who are suffering from such diseases.

We note that the need for raising awareness at community level has been reiterated by health practitioners and researchers at the conference. Behavioural change through effective communication is essential as a large segment of the population has little knowledge about most NCDs and how to prevent them through improving lifestyle. Delay in consulting a qualified doctor in a proper health facility is one major factor that takes a patient from bad to worse.

We believe there is a health communication department under the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), which prepares health communication materials and organises dissemination programmes across the country. The communication experts should be given full support to create greater awareness at the community level to minimise the incidences of NCDs and ensure good health of the citizens.

This week in black and white



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

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

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

THE mystery of nine dead zebras over a period of three weeks at the Bangabandhu Safari Park in Gazipur has been solved. Experts identified bacterial infections and infighting during the mating season as the causes of death of those striped animals. The media sensation over the sad end of these gorgeous creatures, native to Africa, has alerted the authorities, and they have promised better care for the herd in the park, where captivity is given an air of freedom.

The black gloom that shrouded the incident is beginning to be replaced by a bright white possibility. Life is like a zebra—there is usually a white stripe after a black one. The pattern, in its repetitive form, is quite symbolic of our walk of life. When the visual symmetry was replicated to construct the first ever pedestrian crossing in Slough, England on October 31, 1951, a local MP compared the initiative with the striped animal. The name stuck. Zebra crossings have become a part of our everyday lingo. Chances are that you use a zebra crossing every day without realising their colour scheme and significance. Worryingly though, one news outlet recently asked random drivers and passers by whether they knew what a zebra crossing was; most had no clue. Maybe jaywalking has become the new normal in a city where traffic rules do not work. Maybe life cannot be seen in black and white anymore.

Nevertheless, the alternate patterns of hope and sorrow dictate life. Humans live on, knowing life goes on despite sorrows; the black stripes of life will be momentarily or eventually be replaced by white ones—either here or hereafter. It is hope that springs life.

The protesters at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) donned white shrouds and brought out a funeral procession, vowing to brace death to bring new life to their campus. They wanted an end to the miseries caused by the indifference of the authorities. The protest spread fast across other campuses. The dubious actions of police and pro-government student body, and the mysterious inactions of the university administration, added fuel to the fire. Social media started presenting the events in all their colours. The technicolour focus of the agitation was, however, given a monochrome treatment. The supply line of the movement was strategically



In the face of scare tactics and brute force, the students of SUST remain determined to stand for their cause.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

cut off. Suspicions were raised about their funding sources and ulterior motives. A group of vice-chancellors expressed their solidarity with their marooned colleague to act as a counter-pressure group.

The original protest of changing the quality of dormitory life veered from its course once subjected to police brutality and invisible interventions. The next phase

students of SUST—or any public university, for that matter? The 28 students who observed the hunger strike had a brush with death. They showed remarkable determination to press home their demands. They reminded us that a university is not just a development project with bricks and mortars or a computerised platform with hardware

of the protest focused on the resignation of the supreme guardian of the university, who not only failed to protect his students, but allegedly instigated the police attack. Students corralled their vice-chancellor, while security forces cordoned off the protesters. The freedom to protest in captivity soon proved illusory. One sci-fi writer flew in with a ray of hope. He appeared as a saviour to save grace for both parties. The protesters reluctantly broke their fast with the hope that their demands would be delivered. An opportunity has now been created for the vice-chancellor in question to have an honourable exit. One black stripe is crossed for now, to move on to the subsequent white stripe.

Let's review the two striped realities. The authorities have promised that they would resolve the plights of the zebras in Gazipur Safari Park as well as the students of SUST. It is important that we understand what ailed them in the first place. For the animals from the savannas, the reduced perimeter to roam around caused an unhygienic and unliveable condition where bacteria thrived. The infection could have also spread through their diets. Then there was infighting. The death of nine animals has probably saved the whole herd, which will now be taken under special custody.

Can we expect the same for the

and software, but also a living organism. The hunger, pain, and discomfort are real. The development mantra of new buildings and infrastructures hardly looks at the existing body of students and their daily requirements. The calorie intake of a university student is a fraction of the minimum requirement suggested by World Health Organization (WHO). The food quality within the allotted budget is impossible to be improved, unless a subsidy is given. Time to be creative then.

Can the food budget be prepared based on the number of students who opt to eat at the dining of a dormitory? If one can afford or prefer to eat at a dining mess or cafeteria, one should not be considered for the meal budget. The alumni network can be used to initiate an "adopt-a-junior" programme. There should be a combination of government and personal initiatives to improve campus life. In the universities overseas, alumni members play a significant role in doling out funds and support services. Such networks strengthen the fraternity and inspire the present students to remain committed to their institutions.

It's time we saw life beyond black and white and became creative. As one philosopher puts it, "Freedom would be not to choose between black and white, but to abjure such prescribed choices."

Of Buddhadeb, Azad and Award



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

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

REJECTING or returning official awards is not uncommon in India. What is not often seen is how such recognition sparks divisions in a party, and this came out quite clearly when senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, former chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir (when it was a state), was chosen for the Indian government's third highest civilian honour, Padma Bhushan, on the eve of India's Republic Day on January 26.

Azad, the most prominent Muslim face of the Congress party for decades, welcomed his selection for the award, saying it was good to be appreciated for one's public service by a government of the other side of the political divide—a reference to the BJP dispensation headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But Azad's senior party colleague Jairam Ramesh did not agree with him. In fact, within hours of the award announcement, Ramesh took to Twitter to have a dig at Azad. Ramesh contrasted former Chief Minister and Marxist veteran Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's rejection of the same award and had a dig at Azad by playing with words. Terming Bhattacharjee's refusal of the award as "the right thing to do," Ramesh said he "wants to be Azad, not Ghulam."

Officially, the Congress remained silent on the issue, but at least four more senior leaders of the party—Kapil Sibal, Shashi Tharoor, Anand Sharma, and

Two aspects of the political ripples caused in the Congress by the award for Azad stand out: 1) It came at a time when the relations between the BJP and the Congress have touched a new low; and 2) It showed the wide chasm in the grand old party.

Manish Tewari—welcomed the honour for Azad. It should be noted that Azad, Sharma and Sibal are among a group of 23 Congress leaders who had shot off a letter to Congress' interim President Sonia Gandhi last year demanding organisational overhaul, in a move seen as a veiled attack on the Gandhi family. It is not just the group of 23 Congress leaders who have flayed Ramesh for his dig at Azad. Senior leader Ashwani Kumar described Ramesh's jibe as "a shameful innuendo... intended to rob both the award and its recipient of the deserved dignity."

Two aspects of the political ripples caused in the Congress by the award for Azad stand out: 1) It came at a time when the relations between the BJP and the Congress have touched a new low; and 2) It showed the wide chasm in the grand old party. It needs to be said that Azad shares a warm relationship with Modi. The strongest evidence of this came to the fore in February last year, when Azad retired as a member of Rajya Sabha. Speaking on that occasion, the Indian prime minister had broken down a number of times during his nearly 15-minute speech while recalling his close association with Azad. Looking back, it is difficult to believe that Modi was just being nice to a retiring member, and that his remarks were not a throw-forward to the future.

Unlike the Congress, the CPI (M) was prompt to convey to both Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and the media that it had always been against accepting official awards. But the whole exercise came after hectic consultations over phone among the party's top brass and the Bhattacharjee family. The party leaders recalled how its leader EMS Namboodiripad had turned down an offer by the then Congress government headed by PV Narasimha Rao to be

named for Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian honour in India, in the 1990s. It may be recalled that the CPI (M) had in 1996 shot down a move to allow its veteran leader Jyoti Basu as India's prime minister, a decision years later termed by Basu himself as a "Himalayan blunder."

Opposition leaders have in the past made it to the government's awards list. The Narasimha Rao government had chosen former Prime Minister Morarji Desai for India's highest civilian honour, Bharat Ratna, and another former Prime Minister and BJP's tallest leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee for Padma Vibhushan. India's former President Pranab Mukherjee, who spent his entire political innings in the Congress, was honoured by the Modi government with Bharat Ratna without rumbblings in his party in 2019, and Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar with Padma Vibhushan in 2017.

The awards for Azad and Buddhadeb are being seen differently among a section of political observers. According to one view, it could be seen as an attempt by the Modi government to reach out to the opposition parties. The other view is that the political implications can be gauged by the split in Congress, which is already in the grip of factional feud, in reacting to the honour for Azad and a not-so-subtle message to West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress, which had waged a four-year struggle against the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee government before replacing it in 2011. The BJP cannot be oblivious to the fact that it had received help from the CPI (M) in shedding its politically untouchable tag in the 1980s, when the top leaders of the two parties, along with some other opposition leaders, shared the dais against the then Congress government of Rajiv Gandhi.

The new EC law leaves a lot to be desired



PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Partha Pratim Bhattacharjee is the chief reporter of The Daily Star.

ONE could say that the Awami League government deserves plaudits for passing a law on the formation of Election Commission—even if it is 50 years too late to fulfil a constitutional obligation. But has it fulfilled the desire and aspiration of the people to have a truly independent Election Commission? Drafted and passed at a speed that beats even a 100-metre sprint, the law has left us with more questions than answers.

Let us see what the new law contains and what it leaves out.

According to the law, the Search Committee must be transparent and impartial when imparting its responsibilities, and that the committee must judiciously vet the eligibility, ineligibility, experience, skill set and reputation of a candidate before recommending names for the posts of chief election commissioner (CEC) and election commissioners. The Search Committee would recommend two candidates each for the posts of the CEC and other commissioners. These names must be finalised and suggested to the president within 15 working days of the formation of the committee.

The law states that the committee can seek names from different political parties and professional bodies. It also states that the Search Committee will comprise six members and will be chaired by a justice of the Appellate Division, nominated by the chief justice himself.

The other members of the committee will include another judge from the High Court bench—also to be nominated by the chief justice, the comptroller and auditor general (CAG), the chairman of Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC), and two eminent citizens, including a woman, chosen by the president.

Three members of a committee will make a quorum, says the law. The Cabinet Division would be assisting the committee to carry out its secretarial duties.

On January 25, 2017, President Abdul Hamid promulgated a gazette decreeing that a Search Committee would form the Election Commission ahead of the 11th parliamentary elections.

The criteria for the eligibility of the candidates mentioned in the 2017 gazette are verbatim to that stipulated in the new law. In fact, the language of the gazette to form the Search Committee in 2012 was not much different from the one in 2017 either.

On December 30, 2021, Law Minister Anisul Huq said at a programme in the National Press Club that there was no way a new law could be passed for the formation of the Election Commission. The incumbent commission's tenure will end on February 14, 2022, and a law which is of crucial public importance cannot be passed "overnight," he had said.

The law minister had further added that the Search Committee was akin to a law, so there was no need to enact a new law.

The minister provided the audience with a description of the lengthy nitty-gritty of getting a law passed. "Before a bill is placed in the parliament, it must be drafted, sent to the cabinet meeting



for approval, and then circulated online to gather public feedback. Judging by the importance of the law, all these steps must be maintained judiciously," he had said.

Less than three weeks later, the Cabinet Division approved the draft of this law, and within a further six days, the bill was placed in parliament.

A day after all this, the law minister said they were not being hasty or secretive about passing the law.

Why would a law that had not been passed in 50 years be approved by the cabinet within a week and placed in parliament? What is the purpose of this law? These questions do arise.

In addition, nowhere in the process of formulating and passing this law was gathering public opinion on the draft included.

On January 2, the law minister himself had said, "The law must be such that it is acceptable to all quarters. If the law is only acceptable to one political party, it is not a universal law." All opposition lawmakers, while taking part in the discussion at parliament during the passage of the law on Thursday, opposed it.

Inferring from the law minister's own words, seeing that so many groups and parties are opposing the law right now, could one say that the new Election Commission law is for the masses?

Taking a look at the law, one would notice a provision that would provide legal cover to previous Election Commissions that were formed following the recommendations of Search Committees. Clause 9 of the law states, "The Search Committees formed by the president in the past for the purpose of choosing the CECs and election commissioners, the activities they carried out, and the CECs appointed based on the recommendations of said Search Committees, will be considered legal, and cannot be questioned in any court."

ILLUSTRATION: STAR

For the sake of argument, let's presume that they would nominate wholly impartial candidates—even then, what is the guarantee that the final appointment will be made from their short list, since the law does not mandate that the recommended names be made public?

Should we then presume that this law was passed so hastily simply to give legal cover for the current and past Election Commissions, the Search Committees, and their activities?

There are several loopholes in the new law.

In the political system of Bangladesh, the president is elected politically, and the chief justice has historically always been a favourite of the ruling party. In the last two terms, the chief justice chosen superseded the queue.

Hence, whoever the chief justice selects from the Appellate Division and the High Court bench will never go beyond the ideology of the ruling party. Those with ambitions of becoming chief justice in the future will not risk falling out of favour with the government.

On the other hand, the posts of CAG and the BPSC chairman have always been held by people who are government favourites. Similarly, the two other citizen members chosen by the president will likely be personal picks.

When the entire system is set up for six pro-ruling party members to be appointed to form the Search Committee, how will this committee nominate an impartial CEC and other election commissioners?

For the sake of argument, let's presume that they would nominate wholly impartial candidates—even then, what is the guarantee that the final appointment will be made from their short list, since the law does not mandate that the recommended names be made public?

According to Article 48 of the constitution, the president has to abide by the advice of the prime minister for all recommendations, other than the appointment of the prime minister and the chief justice. When such a pre-condition is given, how would the president appoint an impartial individual when it is the end goal of all political

parties to come to or remain in power?

Our neighbour India has not been able to pass a law for the formation of EC in 74 years. But questions of bias and partiality cannot be raised there, because the president can make independent appointments, and do not have to abide by the recommendations of the prime minister.

Our constitution also states that whatever recommendation is made by the prime minister to the president cannot be questioned in court—it cannot even be questioned whether any recommendation was made or not.

According to the Right to Information Act, 2009, all citizens are armed with the right to obtain any information. Is this very right not being violated by denying them information crucial for the good of the general public?

In no part of the law is there any transparency about the appointment of the CEC or the other election commissioners. The law does not make a dent in the existing process of making these appointments.

The government hurriedly completed the process to enact the law. It took only 10 days to pass the law since January 17, 2022, when the draft was approved by the cabinet. Such a hurry by the government to frame the law will most likely compel the Search Committee to work rapidly to recommend the names for the CEC and other commissioners, as according to the law, the Search committee will get 15 working days to complete their work.

If the president forms a Search Committee on Sunday, the committee will get only 11 working days till February 14, when the tenure of the current commission expires.

One could wonder whether this law was only formed as a consolation prize to the political parties, who engaged in dialogues with the president and demanded the law. Is it a move to get a political mileage?

QUOTABLE Quote



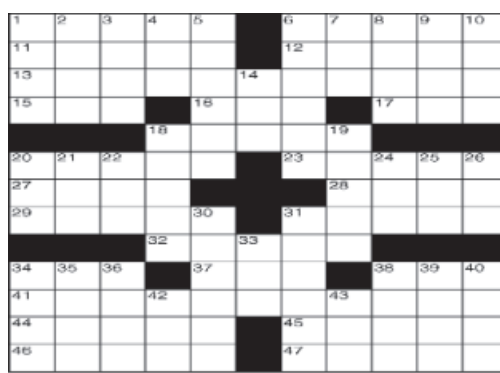
RAINER MARIA RILKE

(1875 - 1926) Austrian poet

Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Syrup source
 - 6 Texan tree
 - 11 Sci-fi visitor
 - 12 Without aid
 - 13 Some use rings
 - 15 Braying beast
 - 16 Future embryos
 - 17 Cereal bit
 - 18 Diploma holders
 - 20 Frighten
 - 23 Make law
 - 27 Franc's replacement
 - 28 Gets older
 - 29 Don Draper, for one
 - 31 Frighten
 - 32 Stately
 - 34 Wedding words
 - 37 Letter before upsilon
 - 38 Letter before omega
- DOWN**
- 1 Baby's call
 - 2 Woeful cry
 - 3 Trough eaters
 - 4 Honolulu souvenir
 - 5 Concert bonus
 - 6 Halloween event
 - 7 Quarterback
 - 8 Pixar film set on the Day of the Dead
 - 9 Singer Paul
 - 10 High home
 - 14 Dam-building org.
 - 18 Haunted
 - 19 Professor at Hogwarts
 - 20 Mermaid's home
 - 21 Cow's chew
 - 22 Sleeve filler
 - 24 In the past
 - 25 Co. bigwig
 - 26 Chiding sound
 - 30 Procrastinator's words
 - 31 Drinks noisily
 - 33 Halloween flier
 - 34 Notion
 - 35 Active one
 - 36 Fairy tale monster
 - 38 Baby's call
 - 39 Antlered animal
 - 40 Land in the sea
 - 42 Martini base
 - 43 Had a bite



THURSDAY'S ANSWERS



BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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

The Daily Star



Disability Inclusive National Budget 2022-23

Access Bangladesh Foundation and The Daily Star jointly organised a webinar titled 'Disability Inclusive National Budget 2022-23' on January 3, 2022. The initiative was supported by Manusher Jonno Foundation and UKaid. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



Albert Mollah,
Co Founder & Executive Director, Access Bangladesh Foundation & Moderator of the Session

Access Bangladesh Foundation has been campaigning since 2014 and advocating to make the national budget disability-inclusive. In continuation of this effort, we are holding today's roundtable with the support of Manusher Jonno Foundation and UKaid. This year we are organising the discussion earlier so that the policymakers have enough time to take our recommendations into consideration. We don't have any reliable data on the number of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. Determining their exact number is crucial to ensure their inclusion in all the development plans.

Currently, the government allocates only 0.37 percent of the national budget for the persons with disabilities. They get only 2.07 percent of the safety net budget. The safety net programmes are also not disability-inclusive since only 8 programmes out of 120 safety net initiatives are focused on the welfare of persons with disabilities.

We have several national and international instruments on the rights of persons with disabilities. However, we are seriously lagging

disabilities. This would cover the various assistive devices they may need. Additionally, the government should exempt persons with disabilities from having to pay taxes when importing such assistive devices.

Currently, one lakh students with disabilities receive a stipend, but we should ensure that 100 percent of persons with disabilities are provided a stipend, especially students. They should also be allowed to pursue vocational education if they want.

There should be specific quotas for persons with disabilities in educational institutions and workplaces. We must also ensure that workplaces are accepting and inclusive of women with disabilities.

There should be at least 10 seats for women with disabilities in the working women hostels. To ensure this the government should allocate a budget.

At present, there are no vehicles that are user-friendly for persons with disabilities. We need to address this issue immediately and provide incentives to companies so that they make vehicles that are user-friendly for persons with disabilities.

Currently, issues related to persons with disabilities are handled by the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW). However, I believe that participation of other relevant ministries is required here. A combined effort from multiple ministries, maybe through some sort of pilot project, could help address many of the issues faced by persons

The government is trying to improve the condition of persons with disabilities. However, there are some issues that require urgent attention. Besides increasing the allocation for persons with disabilities in the budget for social safety net programmes, the government should provide these people with effective skills so that they can earn their livelihoods and contribute to the economy.

The government has provided some housing facilities to persons with disabilities. But they still face access issues. The government should pay immediate attention to such inconveniences faced by persons with disabilities.



Khandaker Jahurul Alam,
Executive Director, Centre for Services and Information on Disability (CSID)

Our honourable Minister of Planning noted in the 8th Five Year Plan that the inclusion of persons with disabilities in our economy would increase GDP by 3.4 percent. That is why I earnestly request all stakeholders, including different ministries, civil society and DPOs, to come forward and help make our country more disability-inclusive.

Most of the work for the inclusion of persons with disabilities is being handled by the MoSW. The MoSW has allocated 750 taka per month for a person with disability, which amounts to 25 taka per day. Now, such little allowance cannot ensure a person's wellbeing. The government should seriously consider this issue.



Julian Francis,
Development and disability consultant

32 years ago, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) estimated the percentage of persons with disabilities to be around 0.52 percent. The World Health Organisation had, at the same time, published a figure of 10 percent. There is a discrepancy on the data regarding persons with disabilities in Bangladesh, and this needs to be solved. I am happy to hear that BBS is working with organisations like Access Foundation Bangladesh to identify persons with disabilities in the upcoming census. It should be an immediate priority for us to estimate the figure for persons with disabilities. If the planning ministry does not have the correct figure, then how can they make plans to address the needs of this group? How will the finance ministry allocate the appropriate funds to address their needs?



Vashkar Bhattacharjee,
National Consultant, a2i

While we have made great strides on our path to becoming a digital Bangladesh, we are yet to make it fully accessible, inclusive and barrier-free for everyone. This is why it's important for the government to ensure that all the benefits of digital Bangladesh are accessible to persons with disabilities. We have made 60 to 70 percent of services accessible for persons with disabilities, but there is a lack of initiative in making all services accessible.

The multimedia talking book, which provides an audio version of textbooks, should be made accessible for persons with disabilities as soon as possible. This will make it easier for them to read school textbooks. My recommendation would be for

the Ministry of Education to provide the multimedia talking book to all students with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities often rely on assistive technology or devices. However, these can be quite expensive. That is why the government should try and provide assistive technology, such as smartphones, computers, and power wheelchairs, free of cost for persons with disabilities.

Simultaneously, our prime objective should be to increase the allowance for persons with disabilities. This allowance should be provided to only those who are facing financial difficulties.



Salma Mahbub,
General Secretary, Protibondhi Nagorik Shangathaner Parishad (PNSP)

Recently, we allocated quotas and provided various incentives to empower women with disabilities. These quotas and incentives can ensure that persons with disabilities do not fall behind. This is why we need to allocate a portion of our budget to continue these affirmative actions.

I believe that organisations that are working with persons with disabilities can play an important role here. They should collaborate and support the government in making our country more disability-inclusive.



Jawaherul Islam Mamun,
Mentor, SWID Bangladesh

Schools and universities across the country are yet to be fully accessible and inclusive for persons with disabilities. Our goal should be to bring everyone under the umbrella of education. To do this, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education should formulate a plan, which is backed by the necessary budget and resources.

The government has many departments that provide skills training for employment. The Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training has Technical Training Centres (TTCs) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports has Youth Development Training Centres. These facilities should be made more accessible for persons with disabilities. This will help them become skilled and enter the job market.



Murteza Rafi Khan,
CEO, Bangladesh Business and Disability Network

We are observing a change in the attitude of employers towards persons with disabilities. Employers are now interested in employing persons with disabilities in their organisations.

The government provides a five percent tax rebate for organisations that recruit 10 percent of their total workforce from the disabled community. This number can be hard for some employers to reach. Perhaps if we used a slab system, then it would be easier for employers to achieve this number and it would encourage more companies to employ persons with disabilities.

Initially, employers used to perceive disability inclusion as a means of welfare or CSR. However, once we explained to them that persons with disabilities want these jobs using their skills and hard work, employers shifted to a diversity, inclusion and rights-based approach. This shift in mentality is important for the future of disability inclusion.



Md Abdullah,
General Member, Society of the Deaf and Sign Language Users (SDSL)

As a student, I think that education is important for everyone, particularly for persons with disabilities. However, schoolteachers are not experts at using sign language, at least at the primary level. This makes it difficult for those who suffer from hearing or speech impairment, and results in many persons with disabilities dropping out of school. The government should ensure that primary and secondary schoolteachers, who have persons with disabilities in their classrooms, are provided with training about sign language. This will help make schools more inclusive of persons with disabilities.



Dr. Salina Akhter,
Secretary General, National Forum of Organizations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD)

The SDGs are one of Bangladesh's top priorities at the moment. However, if we do not include persons with disabilities in our economy, then we cannot successfully achieve the SDGs. I would recommend planning our future budgets and national plans with persons with disabilities in mind.

Our education system should also be made inclusive of persons with disabilities. Alongside formal education, persons with disabilities should also be provided with special education and training for their particular disability. All teachers who work with persons with disabilities should be able to use sign language. This type of special education and training would require an additional budget, and this should be incorporated into our upcoming National Budget.

Additionally, we need to pay attention to female persons with disabilities as they are currently lagging behind. The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs has many projects and training programmes for women. These programmes should be made accessible to female persons with disabilities.



M.A. Mannan MP,
Honorable Minister, Ministry of Planning

The existing budget for persons with disabilities is inadequate. It amounts to only 0.375 percent of our total budget. Therefore, we need to ensure that the allocation for persons with disabilities is increased in the next budget. Support should be provided to those who are caregivers for persons with disabilities. If we can keep all these points in mind, we can establish a successful and sustainable budget, and I believe we will achieve it very soon.

While we are yet to include one percent of persons with disabilities in workplaces, we can see that many companies are eager to employ them. Many persons with disabilities are actively participating in the economy and they are doing so using their own capabilities.

When we originally established the allowance for persons with disabilities, there was not a lot of money in the budget. But we saw the sufferings of this community and tried our best to address their needs through this allowance. Now, the country is more well off economically. And so, we should increase the allowance for persons with disabilities, so that they not only survive, but also thrive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The social model of disability needs to be adopted in preparing budget and development plans.
- Design a disability-inclusive national budget and allocate more resources for persons with disabilities.
- Increase the amount of disability allowance. Instead of providing the same amount to all persons with disabilities, the government should establish a system so that the allowance is proportionate to the needs of the person with disability.
- Provide a separate allowance to caregivers of persons with severe disabilities.
- Design a special insurance scheme for persons with disabilities, that has a provision for financing assistive devices such as hearing aid, wheelchairs, smartphones, etc.
- Provide stipends to all students with disabilities.
- Ensure a comprehensive quota for persons with disabilities in educational institutions and workplaces.
- Collect accurate data on the population of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.
- Provide sign language training to schoolteachers.
- Make resources such as the multimedia talking book accessible for everyone.
- Assistive devices and equipment for persons with disabilities should be tax-free.

behind in terms of effective implementation of these legal instruments.

Although persons with disabilities constitute a significant portion of the population and contribute to the development of the country, they hardly get an opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes. I would like to request the government to hold discussions every year with persons with disabilities before preparing the national budget.

Lack of awareness, inadequate infrastructure and discrimination are three major barriers to the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities in the development projects.

The government should adopt the social model to make the budget disability-inclusive. According to this model, people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or differences.

The government should follow the twin-track approach to ensure equality of rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities. On the one hand, the government has to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to basic needs in every sphere of life on an equal basis with other members of the community. On the other hand, the specific needs of persons with disabilities should be addressed to empower them.

The current allowance for persons with disabilities is the same for all forms of disabilities. The allowance should not be the same for all. This should be investigated and fixed because the severity and challenges of different types of disabilities differ. The caregivers of the persons who suffer from severe types of disabilities should also be provided with an allowance.

A special insurance scheme should be designed for persons with

with disabilities. The government should also fund the various Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs) to create awareness about violence against women with disabilities. In short, I would say that there should be a holistic plan to integrate these people into our society.



Shamsuddoza Sajen,
Commercial Supplements Editor, The Daily Star

Media has two important roles to play to improve the condition of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh promoting an accurate image of persons with disabilities and enhancing their voice.

Persons with disabilities are often portrayed in media as objects of pity and charity. The focus is more on the impairment than on the individual. The media should present disability issues in a way that dispels negative stereotypes and promotes the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities are under-represented both in terms of employment in the media and portrayal in the media. Their under-representation within the media workforce has implications on how they are portrayed within the media.



Nazrana Yesmin Hira,
Program Coordinator, Manusher Jonno Foundation

ZACS to get new training facility

SPORTS REPORTER
from Chattogram

The Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium (ZACS) in Chattogram will see a new indoor practice facility to replace the old one that was taken down by the Chattogram Development Authority (CDA) in order to build a flyover.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officials confirmed that two turfs from New Zealand have already arrived while two more from Australia are on the way. "One turf will be spin oriented while the other turf will encourage pace. The other two turfs will act like flat and sporting wickets," a ZACS official told The Daily Star.

The work on the building had been stopped during peak pandemic periods but is nearing completion with officials estimating two months till its initiation.

An official requesting anonymity said that national team stars from Chattogram will have priority while U-19 sides can also schedule sessions here. The academy, which will have separate space for backroom staff and also management, is expected to house over 40 players. The academy building will be an advantage for national team and premier division players.

ICC bans Taylor

AFP, Dubai

Former Zimbabwe captain Brendan Taylor has been banned from all cricket for three-and-a-half years over breaches of the International Cricket Council's anti-corruption code. "Over such a long career, he (Taylor) participated in numerous anti-corruption and anti-doping education sessions and knew exactly what his obligations were under the ICC anti-corruption and anti-doping codes," said Alex Marshall, general manager of the ICC's Integrity Unit.

"It is disappointing that a player of his experience chose not to fulfil those obligations. However, he has accepted all charges, which has been reflected in the sanction."

Taylor revealed on Monday in a tweet that he took cocaine and accepted a \$15,000 bribe from an Indian businessman.



Tamim Iqbal slog-sweeps one on way to a scintillating century for Minister Group Dhaka during their BPL fixture against Sylhet Sunrisers at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday. (Bottom) Tamim's knock helped Dhaka win the contest comfortably despite a 65-ball 116 earlier from Sylhet's Lendl Simmons.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Domineering Tamim upstages Lendl ton

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

A day earlier, Tamim Iqbal had announced that he was skipping T20Is for the next six months. "I hope in the six months, those who play, do so well that the team wouldn't require me for this format." How things changed in just 24 hours. Lendl Simmons, Sylhet Sunrisers' 37-year-old Caribbean had hit this season's BPL's first ton just two hours ago in the first innings against Tamim's Minister Group of Dhaka, single-handedly taking the score to 175 for five in a tremendous 65-ball 116. Tamim upstaged that magnanimous effort with one of his own.

The crucial impetus might just have come in just the very first over of the chase as Mohammad Mithun dropped Tamim at slip off Taskin Ahmed with the score on zero. The classic shots started coming off since then. Dancing down the track to Taskin, he hit Taskin over extra cover for six to show his domineering mood during an unbeaten 111 off 64 deliveries. Sylhet were guilty of letting him off the hook twice on 71 as first Anamul Haque and then Alauddin Babu dropped the left-hander in the same over. Tamim did not have to look back again. 17 fours and four sixes, 92 runs of Tamim's incredible innings had come in boundaries as together with Mohammad Shahzad (53 off 39), he put on the highest opening stand during a BPL chase of 173 in a thrashing nine-wicket win.

There was relief and pride as he completed the ton, in what was a much-needed win for Dhaka. This was Tamim's fourth T20 ton and his second in the BPL. He had hit one international ton against Oman in 2016 World Cup while he also scored a domestic T20 ton Victory Day T20



Cup against Mohammedan Sporting Club in 2013.

"Look, a guy got 116 but they also ended up on 175 and I was happy about that. The last over went for just 4 or 5. Even if they got 220, I knew the wicket was good, I knew we had every chance if we started well." Tamim said in post-match presentations.

MUSHY GETS BACK INTO RUNS
Khulna Tigers captain Mushfiqur Rahim had not been amongst the runs in his side's first two games in the Dhaka phase of the tournament. Having been dropped from the squad from the Pakistan T20Is following Bangladesh's World Cup debacle in UAE, Mushfiqur was keen on getting back into flow while also showing his leadership qualities.

Chattogram Challengers had beaten Khulna in their previous match but at Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday, Mushfiqur carried his side through the chase of 144 runs with a

commanding 30-ball 44.

"I enjoyed my batting today. In the last few innings, I didn't get much time in the middle," Mushfiqur said after the win yesterday.

BPL TRIES TO RECOVER FROM POOR ON-FIELD CALLS

The BPL governing council's technical committee has brought in a completely different system for reviewing umpiring decisions during the ongoing BPL.

There were a few decisions during the Dhaka leg of the tournament but absence of a Decision Review System (DRS) was felt by the players who could not review the umpire's call.

The new system came into effect with the match between Chattogram and Khulna in the first game of the Chattogram leg of the BPL. The committee is calling the new system ADRS, which stands for Alternate Decision Review system.

Young Tigers face familiar foes

SPORTS REPORTER

So, it is India again! The intense rivalry between Bangladesh and India at the youth level had already created a buzz in recent years and the two teams are pumped up to lock horns in the quarter-final of the ICC Under-19 World Cup in Antigua today.

It was not the best of starts for the defending champions to set their World Cup campaign in motion as the young Tigers faced a crushing seven-wicket defeat against England.

Since then however, the boys in red and green bounced back with comprehensive victories over Canada and the UAE and secured second spot from group A to qualify for the last eight.

Backed by the experience of lifting the maiden World Cup title by beating India in the final of the previous edition, skipper Rakibul Hasan backs his troops to have the edge in the upcoming encounter.

"We got a break of five-six days ahead of the quarter-final game and tried to utilise this opportunity. We took part in a game-scenario session and we are in very good shape, both mentally and physically," informed Rakibul ahead of the quarter-final yesterday.

India, on the other hand, reached the last eight as the champions from group B. However, they were rattled earlier following a Covid-19 outbreak in their camp but all six affected players, including the Indian skipper Yash Dhull, had already returned negative and are expected to feature against Bangladesh.

Jahanara returns for World Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Pacer Jahanara Alam returned to the team as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday announced a 16-member women's team for the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup in New Zealand this year.

Jahanara, who was dropped from the squad from the Commonwealth Games Qualifier squad over disciplinary issues earlier this month, is the only addition as selectors kept all the 15 members from that squad which had lost to Sri Lanka in the final.

"We are very excited to take in our maiden fifty-over World Cup and I personally feel that all the players are hopeful to give their best. The squad is a mixture of experienced and young talented players who have been performing consistently for the team," captain Nigar Sultana Joty said in a video message yesterday.

Bangladesh will begin the World Cup campaign on March 5 against South Africa in Dunedin. The Tigresses will take on hosts New Zealand, West Indies and England in their next three group stage games on March 7, 18, and 27 respectively.

Squad: Nigar Sultana Joty (Captain), Salma Khatun, Rumana Ahmed, Fargana Hoque Pinky, Jahanara Alam, Shamima Sultana, Fahima Khatun, Mst Ritu Moni, Murshida Khatun, Nahida Akter, Most. Sharmin Akter Supta, Lata Mondol, Sobhana Mostary, Mst Fariha Islam Trisna, Suraiya Azmim, Mst Shanjida Akther Maghla.



Medvedev stands in Nadal's path to Slam greatness

AFP, MELBOURNE

Daniil Medvedev won a tempestuous Australian Open semi-final against Stefanos Tsitsipas on Friday and will face Rafael Nadal, who is bidding to become the all-time men's Grand Slam leader, in Sunday's final.

World number two Medvedev beat fourth-ranked Tsitsipas 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 6-4, 6-1 to reach his second straight Australian Open final.

Earlier the 35-year-old Spanish great powered past the Italian seventh seed Matteo Berrettini 6-3, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3.

Nadal is level on 20 majors with his golden era rivals Novak Djokovic, who was deported on the eve of the tournament, and Roger Federer, who is absent with injury.

It gives the Spaniard an opportunity to go clear at the top in Sunday's final and add to his lone 2009 Melbourne Park crown in his sixth Australian Open final.

Medvedev was in a fiery mood and given a code warning after raging at the chair umpire during his clash with fourth seed Tsitsipas, whose father Apostolos was also given a warning for coaching from the player's box before inadvertently helping trigger his son's collapse.

Medvedev is shooting for back-to-back major titles after upsetting Djokovic in last year's US Open final.

Like in New York last September, when he stopped Djokovic from completing a calendar Grand Slam of titles, Medvedev will

strong player and I need to show my best to try and win this match."

But Nadal said the Australian Open title meant more to him than a record 21 career Grand Slams. "For me at the end it's about more than all these statistics, it's about being in the final of the Australian Open one more time. That means a lot to me," Nadal said.

"To me it's more important to be in the final of the Australian Open and fight to win another Australian Open than the rest of the statistics for the history of the sport.

"I just feel happy to be part of this amazing era of tennis, sharing all these things with another two players." "That's it. In some ways it doesn't matter if somebody achieve one more or one less."

It has been an extraordinary effort from Nadal at the year's opening major, having to modify his game to compensate for a degenerative bone disease in his left foot that ended his 2021 season last August.

He then caught Covid in December which, he said, made him "very sick". Yet Nadal brushed aside Berrettini's challenge with precision shot-making, while last year's Wimbledon finalist could not overcome his sluggish start.

Later in a stormy night semi-final under

a closed roof because of rain, Medvedev had a massive blow-up with the chair umpire during a changeover at 5-4 in the second set.

He was furious at the umpire over what he claimed was coaching from Tsitsipas's coach and father Apostolos from the player's box and the Russian received a code violation. Medvedev raged at the umpire and later said he regretted doing it.

"His father can talk every point. Can you answer my question please?" he pleaded.

"Oh my God, you are so bad man. How can you be so bad in the semi-final of a Grand Slam? Look at me! I'm talking to you!"

Medvedev was contrite after. "I regret it all the time, because I don't think it's nice. I know that every referee is trying to do their best," he said.

"I can get really emotional. I have been working on it. Helps me to win matches, I know. In the heat of the moment, I just lost it."

Tsitsipas levelled up taking the chaotic second set as tensions bubbled over and Medvedev went ahead by taking the third set to gain the edge in a titanic duel shortly after Apostolos Tsitsipas was warned for coaching.

Tsitsipas fell away after his father's warning, losing five straight games as Medvedev surged to victory to take his place in the final.



be trying to derail Nadal's tilt at making men's tennis history.

"I'm going to play against one of the greatest and someone going for the 21st Slam," Medvedev said.

"I'm ready, I know that Rafa is a very

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SKIRTING DISASTER... Four youngsters on roller skates go round a curve on the capital's Topkhana Road yesterday. This is risky because they are rolling alongside much faster and bigger vehicles including buses, the drivers of which often operate recklessly and with little regard for smaller vehicles or pedestrians. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

It's 'out of vengeance'

Mahbub fires back at CEC

MOHUDDIN ALAMGIR

Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukdar yesterday hit back at Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda saying that the latter criticised him "out of vengeance" as they had differing positions on different election issues.

Mahbub in a statement said the EC bears medical expenses of all its current and former commissioners according to rule, and CEC Huda also availed it.

"As an election commissioner, it is my right to get proper medical treatment. The CEC has chosen the worst option to wreck his vengeance on me due to my differing stance on election-related issues," said Mahbub.

Huda and Mahbub on several occasions traded barbs in public in recent years.

Speaking at a press meet on Thursday, Huda said Mahbub has a "personal agenda".

Asked about Mahbub's criticism of candidates



"He [Mahbub] had been in ICU and CCU, spent Tk 30 lakh to Tk 40 lakh a year as medical expenses ..."

Chief Election Commissioner
Nurul Huda



"As an election commissioner, it is my right to get proper medical treatment."

Election Commissioner
Mahbub Talukdar

getting elected unopposed and other election related issues, the CEC said, "The Election Commission cannot do anything if political parties do not contest polls.

"He [Mahbub] had been in ICU and CCU, spent Tk 30 lakh to Tk 40 lakh a year as medical expenses, which was paid by the Election Commission, and he made comments for getting those published by the media."

Mahbub in his statement said the CEC did not give accurate information about his medical expenses.

He said he had been suffering from prostate cancer; went to Singapore and Chennai, India for treatment as per advise from BSMMU medical boards.

"I did not go abroad for treatment on government expenses in the last two years. But I went to [United States of] America for treatment on my own expenses during these two years," he added.

On January 6, Huda said Mahbub was "intentionally spreading falsehood, with an agenda to defame the Election Commission".

He was countering Mahbub's comment that violence was an integral part of the ongoing union parishad elections.

On November 14 last year, Huda differed with Mahbub's comment that election was now in ICU, democracy on life support.

"I don't believe that there is no proper atmosphere for elections...the comments he [Mahbub] made are not decent," the CEC said.

Speaking at an event on March 2 last year, Mahbub said local government elections turned

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Star HEALTHLINE
 Know your deshi 'superfoods'
GOOSEBERRIES

STAR HEALTH DESK

Gooseberry, or Amlaki, is widely available in Bangladesh and the subcontinent. It has a following throughout the world as a "superfruit" and rightfully so.

The small berries are round and bright yellow-green. They are quite sour and bitter when eaten raw and a 100gm serving contains almost as much vitamin C as 20 oranges.

There are many ways you can consume it, such as in jelly or curry forms. Here are some of the health benefits the fruit offers.

Diabetes control: The soluble fibre in gooseberries helps slow the rate of our body's absorption of sugar, helping diabetes patients.

Better digestion: Eating gooseberries regulate bowel movements and may help relieve symptoms of conditions like irritable bowel syndrome.

Healthier eyes: The richness of the fruit in vitamin A can be key to improvement of eye health.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

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COVID DETECTION BEFORE TRIP

Migrants forced to cancel flights

RASHIDUL HASAN

Some 550 Bangladeshi expatriate workers, including 200 UAE-bound ones, are forced to cancel their flights every day at the last moment, said sources at Dhaka airport.

Their tickets get cancelled as they test positive for coronavirus, said officials of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, seeking anonymity.

Talking to The Daily Star, multiple expatriate workers expressed serious concerns over their return to workplaces before the expiration of visas.

One such expatriate worker Jumadin Ahmed, of Madaripur, said he was scheduled to go to Dubai on January 26.

"As required by the papers, I took a coronavirus test 48 hours before the flight and I tested negative.

"I went through the same test six hours before the flight again and this time I tested positive."

Another such passenger Mohammad Rakibul Hasan was scheduled to leave the country on January 25. He too could not fly for testing positive six hours before his flight.

As per the rules, all UAE-bound passengers will have to undergo a coronavirus test six hours before their flights and receive a negative report.

Both Jumadin and Rakibul said that

their visas would expire by early February and that they would be in serious trouble if they did not manage to reach their workplaces before that.

In such a situation, the authorities of Dhaka airport and different airlines suggested passengers book a fresh ticket after around 14 days.

Around 10,500 passengers, the majority of whom are expatriate workers, leave the country to join workplaces in different countries every day, HSI sources said.

Of them, between 150 and 200 UAE-bound passengers return from Dhaka airport as they test positive for the virus six hours before their flights, the sources added.

Apart from the UAE, outbound passengers to other countries need to go through the Covid-19 test 36 to 72 hours before their flights.

Officials at the HSI said around 350 to 400 passengers who test positive for Covid-19, do not come to the airport for their flights every day.

Dr Shahriar Sajjad, assistant director of HSI health desk, said around 2,500 to 3,000 UAE-bound passengers take the Covid-19 test at the airport every day.

Analysis of the data collected from expatriate migrant workers whose flight was cancelled due to the infection showed that most of them bought flight tickets

keeping a close gap with their joining date at their workplaces abroad.

At the last moment, they meet their relatives and friends, increasing the risk of coronavirus infection among them.

Most of the migrant workers whose flights were cancelled say they had no Covid-19 symptoms.

Doctors at the HSI said that most people think that if they are infected with coronavirus, they will get symptoms like fever, cough and cold.

"Many people are being affected nowadays whose bodies do not show any symptoms."

Shahriar said outbound passengers should be very careful from seven days before their flights at least.

They will have to stop shopping and meeting with relatives seven days before their flight date, he said.

He also said that the passengers must ensure social distancing and follow health guidelines while they are going outside.

According to the health directorate, if any outbound passenger is tested Covid-19 positive, he or she will not be able to go abroad within the next seven days.

The directive, issued in June 2021, further said that the infected passengers will have to test negative from a government-run lab before flying abroad after those seven days.

Turn the screw on Myanmar junta

UN rights chief urges world ahead of coup anniversary

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations yesterday urged the world to ramp up the pressure on Myanmar's junta to cease violence against the country's own people and quickly restore civilian rule.

One year on since the military seized power, UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said the country's people had paid a high price in terms of lives and freedoms lost.

Bachelet said that while there had been near-universal condemnation of the coup and the ensuing violence, she branded the international response as "ineffectual", saying it "lacks a sense of urgency commensurate to the magnitude of the crisis".

"It is time for an urgent, renewed effort to restore human rights and democracy in Myanmar and ensure

that perpetrators of systemic human rights violations and abuses are held to account," she said.

The former Chilean president said the UN Security Council and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations had not done enough to convince the junta to facilitate humanitarian access.

Myanmar's military seized power on February 1 last year, ousting the civilian government and arresting its de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

The UN Human Rights Office said that since the coup, at least 1,500 people had been killed by the military in a brutal effort to crush dissent, while thousands more would have been killed in the wider armed conflict and violence.

At least 11,787 people have been arbitrarily detained for voicing their opposition to the military, the office said.



Pedestrians walking past a mound of garbage consisting of discarded masks, face shields, gloves, PPE, etc. right next to the Dhaka-Aricha highway near Baliapur in Savar on the outskirts of the capital. Disposing Covid-19 safety equipment in an open space like this increases health risk. The photo was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



HOW TO BE A VC

PHOTOS: SHEIKH NASIR

ASIFUR RAHMAN AND
TUHIN SUBHRA ADHIKARY

At least 12 teachers associated with DU, who held posts with the Blue panel or were elected to different administrative posts after being nominated by the Blue panel, are now VCs of different universities.

Although there are no specific rules for the appointment of vice-chancellors (VCs) in public universities, there appears to be an unofficial yet mandatory criterion—a teacher has to be affiliated with a pro-government teacher's panel to be nominated for the top post.

Or so the data suggests. The Daily Star found that at least 39 out of 48 VCs of public universities have held posts in different pro-government teachers' wings during their career.

Although it could not be ascertained whether five other VCs held such posts, they were widely considered to be "pro-government"; two even held posts in different government agencies before being appointed as VC.

The Daily Star reached this conclusion based on an analysis of the CVs of VCs, interviews with campus sources, published media reports and various websites.

It was also found that the chances of appointment rose exponentially if one was tagged with the AL-backed Blue panel at the University of Dhaka (DU), which produced the highest number of VCs in the country.

At least 12 teachers associated with DU, who held posts with the Blue panel or were elected to different administrative posts after being nominated by the Blue panel, are now VCs of different universities.

Two more DU teachers are also holding the top posts in two other universities, although it could not be ascertained whether they held posts with the Blue panel.

Such affiliations can easily triumph over qualifications. For example, a PhD degree—once a mandatory requirement for being a professor—now appears optional for those with political affiliations.

Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), who has been facing a huge backlash over the past two weeks, has no PhD degree. Neither does Prof Abul Kashem of Bangladesh University of Textiles (BUTEX).

Despite repeated attempts, Prof Farid and Prof Mashur could not be reached for comments.

Blue is the most powerful colour
Six of the VCs, who hailed from DU, were involved with a faction of Blue panel formed to oppose the panel backed by the then DU VC Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, while one was affiliated with the pro-Siddique panel.

Among other VCs, Prof Rafique Ullah Khan of Sheikh Hasina University in Netrokona was convener of the Blue panel at DU. Prof Imdadul Hoque of Jagannath University was elected dean of the Biology faculty with the backing of the Blue panel in 2017.

Prof Akhtaruzzaman of DU also served as secretary and vice president of DUTA nominated by the panel.

Meanwhile, all public universities have pro-government and anti-government teacher panels under different names, even if they are not called the Blue or White panels.

Prof Matiar Rahman Howlader of Sylhet Agricultural University was a leader of Bangabandhu Krishijibi Parishad, a pro-AL professional body.

Prof Goutam Buddha Das of Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University is

Chattogram University (CU) and even took part in an election of the teachers' association in 2009.

But later he was appointed VC of the university because of his "good rapport with a former top official of Prime Minister's Office", CU sources said.

Contacted, Prof Ahsan outright rejected his involvement with the White panel. "This is a blatant lie. I was not a very active member of [AL backed] Yellow panel but I was always associated with the Yellow panel," he added.

Ousted VCS
During the 13-year tenure of this AL-led government, four VCs were forced to leave their posts following the protest of students or teachers.

Prof Shariif Enamul Kabir of Jahangirnagar University (JU) was forced to resign in 2012 when a student, Jobayer Ahmed, was killed by the cadres of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL).

Then DU teacher Prof Anwar Hossain took charge but he too was forced to resign in January 2014 following months of agitation by a section of teachers and students on different issues including his inaction over assaults on a teacher by a BCL leader.

Prof Khondokar Nasiruddin of

Guideline needed to appoint VCs: UGC Chairman

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

There should be a guideline for appointing vice-chancellors to public universities to reduce political manoeuvring in the appointment process, opined University Grants Commission Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah.



The candidates should have strong academic credentials and administrative acumen for becoming VCs. Besides, a VC should be appointed for one term only to reduce "politicking", he proposed. "There should be no scope for

someone to raise questions about the academic excellence of the VC of a public university," Prof Shahidullah told The Daily Star.

Currently, there is no guideline in place that can determine who is eligible or disqualified to be the vice-chancellor of a public university.

"In our country, in good faith, it is assumed that anybody who is a professor, theoretically, becomes eligible to be appointed as a VC," he said.

The UGC chairman also said that a person aged at least 52 years and experienced at least for 10 years should be appointed as VC.

Until now, respective laws of four large public universities—Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong and Jahangirnagar universities—have provisions that VCs of these universities would be appointed by the President after getting elected by the senate of the respective universities.

But, in most cases, un-elected VCs run the universities. Currently, VCs of RU and CU are not elected.

However, there is no criteria for the appointment of VCs in other universities.

As per the rules of those universities, the President holds the jurisdiction to appoint a VC, but he does so following the consent of the prime minister after the Education Ministry sends a list of potential candidates.

The UGC prepared a Strategic Plan for Higher Education for 2006 to 2026 which recommended that the existing system of appointing VCs needed to be changed, as it left much "scope for political manoeuvring".

The chancellor could form a national search committee, giving it adequate legal backing to recommend the appointment of VCs, it proposed.

The BNP government at the time did not implement any of the recommendations choosing, instead, to appoint loyalists.

"If someone can fulfill the criteria like having sound academic track, 25 years of teaching and

POLITICALLY APPOINTED VICE CHANCELLORSHIP

39/48 VCs of the country's public and government universities have held posts in a pro-Awami League teachers' panel.

4 Vice Chancellors left their posts following student protests in the last 13 years – the tenure of the Awami League govt.

WHAT'S IN A COLOUR?

At least **12** DU teachers who previously held posts with the Blue panel are now VCs at different units.

Among these 12, 6 VCs can be found involved in a divided Blue panel, which was formed as an opposition of former DU VC Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique. The Blue panel is made up of DU teachers aligned with Awami League.

All the public universities have pro-government and anti-government panels in different names.

10 former and present VCs (at least) face allegations of staff appointments as favours and graft during the Awami League's rule.

- 4 major public universities are supposed to be run by the 1973 Order. But in most cases, un-elected VCs and appt running the universities. Currently, the VCs of RU and CU are not elected.
- No criteria for the appointment of VCs in other universities.
- As per the rules, the President holds jurisdiction to appoint VC, with consent of PM after Education Ministry sends a list of potential candidates.
- Prof M Maniuzzaman Miah National Education Commission of 2003 and UGC's 20 year plan (2006-26) made recommendations for appointing VCs through a committee. But the then BNP-led government did not follow it, and instead picked VCs on the basis of political affiliation.
- The army-backed caretaker government appointed VCs of several universities through search committees in 2008.
- Successive governments of the AL-led grand alliance then reverted to the old ways of picking political loyalists.

a lifetime member of Bangabandhu Krishibid Parishad, another pro-AL professional body.

Prof Shahidur Rahman Khan of Khulna Agricultural University was the general secretary of Ganotantrik Shikkhok Forum, Bangladesh Agricultural University.

Prof Shahidur Rashid Bhuiyan, VC of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University in Dhaka, was elected president of its teachers' association after being nominated by the AL-backed forum.

Prof Giashuddin Miah, VC of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University (BSMRAU) in Gazipur, was president of Ganotantrik Shikkhok Parishad, the pro-AL teachers' panel.

Prof M Kamruzzaman, VC of Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University in Dinajpur, was member secretary of BSMRAU's Shikkhok Parishad.

The rest, too, AL men
Although The Daily Star could not ascertain whether the VCs of five universities—Chandpur Science and Technology University (CSTU), Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (KUET), Bangladesh University of Textiles (BUTEX), Islamic University (IU) of Kushtia, and Noakhali University of Science and Technology (NUSC)—held posts in any pro-AL teachers' panels, most of them did have some form of affiliation with these bodies.

For instance, Prof Didar-ul-Alam of NUSC, originally a DU teacher, tried but failed to receive nomination from the Blue panel in 2017 for dean elections, sources said.

DU teacher Prof Sheikh Abdus Salam, now VC of IU, used to take part in meetings of the Blue panel and served as an acting dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences of DU in 2009. He was director general of the Press Institute of Bangladesh in 1996 during the first tenure of the AL-led government.

BUTEX VC Prof Abul Kashem served as director general of the Directorate of Technical Education before being appointed to his current position.

The only VC to come from a non-AL background is that of Islamic Arabic University.

Prof Muhammad Ahsan Ullah was involved with the BNP-Jamaat-backed White panel in

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University in Gopalganj was forced to resign in September 2019 amid student protests over his alleged involvement in irregularities and corruption.

In April 2019, SM Imamul Haque, VC of Barisal University, was sent on forced leave over similar allegations.

VCs who completed their tenure despite allegations

A probe committee of the Education Ministry in May 2021 found that the immediate past VC of Rajshahi University, M Abdus Sobhan, had violated the constitution, university law, and a government embargo by appointing 137 teachers and staffers on his last day at office



Only those who have sound academic background and can play the role of a guardian should be appointed as VC. Under no circumstances should they be partisan.

The main job of a VC should be to create an enabling environment on campus in which all bodies, including student unions, are functional, and cultural activities and critical thinking can flourish. There should be exchange of ideas between teachers and students beyond the classroom. The process of social and cultural development is absent in our universities.

Though four universities have their own laws, it's the government who ultimately picks the VC. That's a fact. Universities should be seen as academic institutions—otherwise nothing will change. The overall environment of universities needs an overhaul. I cannot even imagine universities that don't have student unions.

Serajul Islam Choudhury, Professor Emeritus, DU

as well as relaxing the rules to appoint his daughter and son-in-law as teachers at the university.

Prof Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah, former VC of Begum Rokeya University, hogged the headlines with his absence on the university campus. He was absent for a total of 1,207 days during his 1,447-day tenure.

Prof Kalimullah allegedly withdrew many allowances without any proper reason. A group of teachers and students published a 'white paper' containing 111 allegations, which he denied.

Former VC of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University Prof Kamal Uddin Ahmed faced allegations of appointing teachers and officers in violation of rules.

No action was taken against any of them.

administrative experience, it would reduce the chance of politicisation," Shahidullah said.

"I don't see a problem if political connection can play a 20 per cent role," he added.

Shahidullah said a search committee on many occasions does bring desired results, but then the question arises, who are the members of the committee and are they independent.

Regarding the corruption allegations against VCs, Shahidullah said that UGC had probed different allegations charges against 13-14 VCs in recent years.

In many cases, the allegations hardly had substances, he claimed.

"We have probed and in some cases forwarded the report to the education ministry. They are supposed to take actions," he said.



Besides, eight VCs obtained PhDs from Bangladeshi universities, while nine VCs obtained their degrees from India, nine from Japan, seven from European countries, and the rest from other countries.

No one obtained a PhD from the United States, which has the highest number of universities in the top 100 list by the prestigious QS World University Rankings.

Controversial past not a hindrance
It appears that a teacher's controversial past at his/her respective university did not act as a deterrent when it came to their appointment as VC.

For example, SUST VC Prof Farid Uddin, who served as president of Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) from 2013-16, was implicated in scandals over leakage of question papers for the admission test of D unit in 2015 and 2017.

He was the dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the time, and his office was directly involved in the process of supervising the tests.

Allegations of plagiarism were also raised against at least three articles published in the Social Science Review, when he was the editor of the publication.

Prof Mashur Rahman, a teacher of the Sociology Department of DU, once faced allegations of plagiarism, but managed to dodge punitive action allegedly because of his affiliation with the Blue panel. He unsuccessfully contested the syndicate election from the Blue panel.

He was appointed as Pro-VC of National University in 2017 and later promoted to VC in 2021.

REVIEWING THE VIEWS

Admission limit on LLB (Hons) programme in Bangladesh universities: A call for review

M RAFIQUZ ISLAM

Bangladesh universities, public and private, run their LLB (Hons) programme pursuant to a judicially determined and imposed admission limit of 50 students per semester. This limitation may well have compelling reasons at the time of its imposition. This write-up argues that the limitation so far does not appear to serve its intended purpose and that it warrants a reappraisal with a view to its annulment.

A dispute emerged from the competing (mis)management claims by the Trustee Board of Darul Ihsan University, a private university. Some of its LLB (Hons) graduates were barred from appearing at the Bar examination by the

students in a calendar year ... [the] BBC itself shall monitor the admission process of the LLB (Honours) course in the private universities': *Professor Syed Ali Naki and Ors. v Bangladesh and Ors.* (2016) 36 BLD (HCD) 417, para 130, 154. On appeal, the Appellate Division (AD) held: 'No public or private university shall admit students in bachelor of law course more than 50 students in a semester': *Bangladesh Bar Council v AKM Fazlul Karim* (2017) 14 ADC 271, para 101.

Where did this magic admission number come from and what were the reasons for setting this limit? Nobody knows and the judgments are silent. It is not expected that the public should always understand and be happy with every judgment. But courts are in positions of power to provide justice, and in exercising this power on behalf of the people, they must be able to defend and explain the ways in which they exercise their judicial powers. This 'one number fits all' public and private universities regardless of sizes, capacities, resources, and ages of all law departments requires the century old Dhaka University law department to enrol the same number as that of a recently or yet to be established counterparts. This parity ignores these diversities and creates winners and losers among universities which set dissimilar departmental admission limit based on their logistics and strengths.

The HCD order on all private universities' academic management went beyond any relevance to the relief sought - the eligibility of the Darul Ihsan law graduates to sit for the Bar examination. The AD on appeal rebuked the HCD for passing an order for all private universities when only one of them was a party to the case and found it inconsistent with the law: *Bangladesh Bar Council v AKM Fazlul Karim* (2017) 14 ADC 271, para 61. Previously, the AD had advised the HCD not to 'enter into academic discussion' and 'go out of their

The limit on law admission seems unfair and discriminatory for prospective law students. It has curtailed their freedom of choice of study and employment options. It is discriminatory because prospective non-law students do not face this restriction external to universities. Restricting supply sources does not necessarily improve legal education and the quality of law graduates.

way to find such topics': *Bangladesh and Ors. v Idrisur Rahman and Ors.* (2009) 29 BLD (AD) 79, para 260. Authorising the Bar Council to be the monitor of 'the admission process of the LLB (Hons) course in the private universities', the HCD apparently created a supra-private university authority over and above the law departmental and university administration, the university academic councils and syndicates, and the University Grants Commission. The Private University Act 2010 prescribes no such authority; nor did the Parliament enacting the Act envisage it. The BBC's Legal Education Committee has a role in regulating entry into the *professional practice of law*, not private universities' legal education. The HCD drew no distinction between 'Bar admission to be practicing lawyers' and 'university admission to be law graduates'.

The Bangladesh Legal Practitioners and Bar Council Order 1972 authorises the BBC to take measures to 'promote legal education and to lay down the standards to such education in consultation with the universities in Bangladesh imparting such education'. Did the BBC propose and pursue any standard-setting measures to promote legal education and consult with private universities? If restrictive law admission was meant 'to promote legal education', it was done by the Courts, not the BBC. There are instances of joint venture for the promotion of legal education in some countries, where legal professional bodies, law firms, and individual donors provide funding to enrich university law libraries, hire new chairs/professors, establish new seminar/mooting facilities, and offer scholarships/awards for high performing law students. A new law building, called 'the change maker' at Macquarie University, Australia, is named after Justice Michael Kirby, a retired apex court judge in recognition

of his substantial financial contribution to the construction of the building.

The limit on law admission seems unfair and discriminatory for prospective law students. It has curtailed their freedom of choice of study and employment options. It is discriminatory because prospective non-law students do not face this restriction external to universities. Restricting supply sources does not necessarily improve legal education and the quality of law graduates. Rather it exposes to the risk of unintentionally minimising competition and maximising monopoly of enrolled lawyers. Presumably, a preconceived notion that whoever studies law will end up as a practicing lawyer lies at the root of this limit, a perception no longer tenable. With the steady WTO-sponsored liberalisation and deregulation of professional and skilled service trade, many law graduates compete with non-law graduates for national and cross-border regional and international employment markets. These law graduates and others working as law firms' advisors, consultants, and interpreters do not need the Bar enrolment. This explains why universities should concentrate on producing law graduates with competitive generic skill like all other graduates. Admittedly, it is widely shared view that the university education quality has deteriorated across the board, not only in legal education. The professional legal system is also not free from criticisms of being cost-ineffective and time-inefficient, among others. There appears to be no tangible evidence of mitigating these systemic problems since the imposition of the limit on law admission. Shifting this role to universities is a misplaced bid to improve the standard of legal practice.

The writer is Emeritus Professor of Law, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.



Bangladesh Bar

Council (BBC). In their Writ Petition to the High Court Division (HCD), these law graduates challenged the legality of the ban. The HCD was to determine whether the ban was lawful. But the HCD went beyond the relief sought and imposed restrictions on law students' admission, set the admission criteria, and commented upon the management of the law departments of all private universities. It held: 'No private university shall be permitted to admit more than 100

LAW ANALYSIS

Reviewing the New Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act

SHWEATA MISHRA AND ZAHIRUL BASHAR

The new Act seeks to amend the Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act 1974. The provisions of the 1974 Act were not coherent with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and were proposed to be amended since the UNCLOS 1982 entered into force later.

The new amended Act of 2021 has a completely new overhaul regarding maritime zone and has brought several changes to the provisions of the previous law of 1974. The Act has inserted several new definitions in section 2 such as Artificial Island, Continental Margin, Dumping of wastes, Martine Pollutions Installations, Internal Waters, Maritime Zones, Maritime Tribunal, Blue Economy, Seabed, Nautical Miles, Waste, and Warship.

The newly added provisions address the sovereignty of Bangladesh over Internal Waters regarding water column, the seabed and its subsoil, and the air space, the extraterritorial application of Act which means Bangladesh has jurisdiction of trial against any person or vessel for any offense even if the offense committed outside of the Maritime Zones.

Additionally, new 3A, 3B and 3C have elucidated the Rights of Innocent Passage in the Territorial Sea, criminal and civil jurisdiction over a foreign ship in the Territorial Sea, and the explanation of Remotely Operated Underwater Vehicle (ROV), Autonomous Underwater Vehicle (AUV) and Unmanned Underwater Vehicle (UUV).

The new Act referred the jurisdiction and sovereign power of the Bangladesh government over the Contiguous Zone, EEZ and the prohibition on the exploration or exploitation in the EEZ. Under section 5, the government has power over the EEZ concerning exploration, exploitation, conservation and management of the natural resources and exclusive rights and jurisdiction for construction, maintenance or operation of an artificial island, off-shore terminal, installations and other structures and control of marine scientific research, to preserve and protect the marine environment and to prevent and control marine pollution. Additionally, section 5A bars any person to conduct any kind of exploration of the marine biodiversity without authorisation from the government.



Moreover, sections 7, 7A and 7B specifically address the Continental Shelf of Bangladesh, Rights and jurisdiction in the Continental Shelf. Similar to the EEZ, Bangladesh has jurisdiction over the Continental Shelf regarding authorisation and regulation of the construction, operation, maintenance and use of artificial islands, off-shore terminals. section 7B bars any person from exploiting the natural resources in the continental shelf without authorisation from the government. New provisions regarding the High Seas are mentioned in section 7C.

Section 7F addresses provisions of Blue Economy and under the new legislation, the Government of Bangladesh may make policies, work-plan and implement economic activities that directly or indirectly take place in the Maritime Zones. Coupled with this, to enrich the blue economy and to enhance the economic benefits, the government of Bangladesh takes appropriate measures for sustainable use of marine resources or minerals, including through sustainable management of fisheries,

Since the provisions are in sync with the UNCLOS, the new provisions have vested new jurisdictional power and have given several rights to enjoy over the maritime boundary.

mariculture, marine tourism, marine biotechnologies, marine transportation, development of ports and harbors, shipbuilding and recycling.

Furthermore, section 7H embodied Marine scientific research, Hydrographic survey and Military survey and use of research as well as a survey in Territorial Sea, EEZ and Continental Shelf.

To control marine pollution, the government can make rules under section 8 and for marine pollution, the punishments are three years' imprisonment with a minimum of two crore BDT to maximum of five crore BDT as monetary fine. Previously it was five thousand BDT only. For the failure to take any actions to prevent pollution, the punishment is five years imprisonment with a fine not less than ten crore or both.

In the previous provisions of the 1974 Act, if any robbery or theft took place in shipping ports, those were termed as 'piracy'. In the new amendment, piracy, armed robbery, maritime terrorism, theft and unlawful acts against safety of maritime navigation are defined to

categorise different crimes.

With new amendments, the government has the power to punish for the violation of innocent passage, for contravention of the law by submarine or any other underwater vehicle, for throwing nuclear or hazardous wastes, for breaking or injuring a submarine cable, telegraphic or telephonic communications.

With amendments under the Act of 2021, Bangladesh has strengthened its maritime law. Since the provisions are in sync with the UNCLOS, the new provisions have vested new jurisdictional power and have given several rights to enjoy over the maritime boundary. With the new provisions, the government of Bangladesh can control marine pollution and take appropriate measures to sustain, preserve the marine diversity and boost the blue economy.

The writers are lawyers of MCLaw Services, being the Head of the Chambers and Apprentice lawyer of MCLaw Services respectively.

After winning disputes with India and Myanmar, the sovereignty of Bangladesh concerning territorial waters has extended. As a result, Bangladesh has got a new command over the Territorial Sea, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and Contiguous Zone. To have proper control over the maritime boundary as well as to sustain, protect and persevere the marine resources, the government of Bangladesh has enacted a new legislation, Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones (Amendment) Act, 2021.

Memories of Kabul

An Evening to Cherish

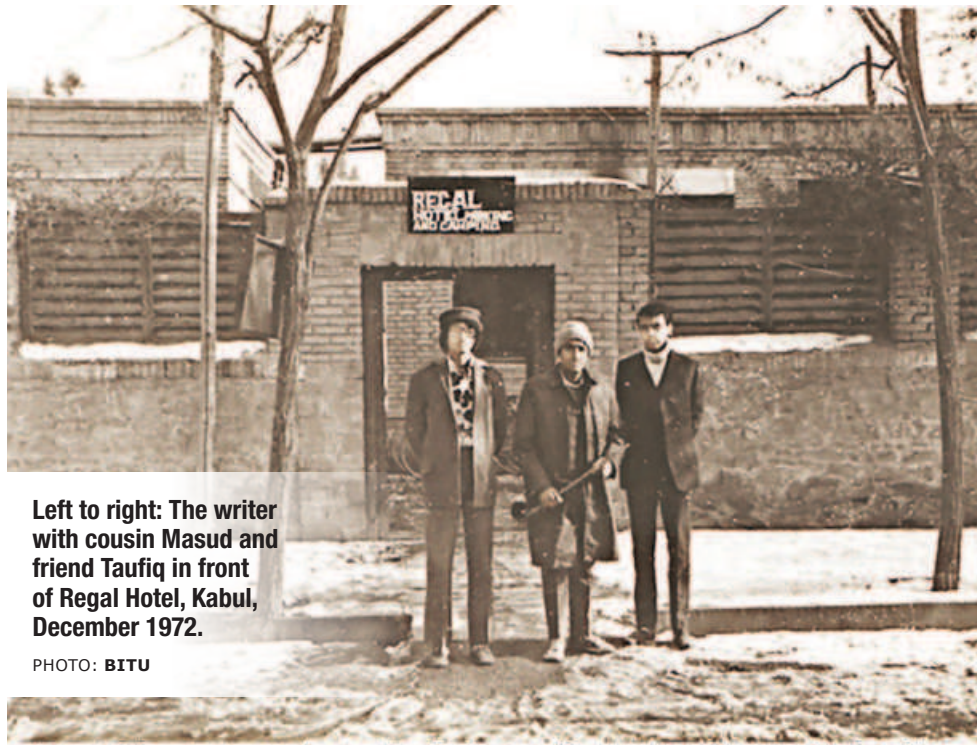
In the wintertime, the craggy heights of the Margalla Hills which provides a picturesque backdrop to Islamabad would sometimes be snow-capped, not to mention the faintly visible Murree hills... a distant bluish-white haze. However, until Kabul I had never lived through a snowfall, let alone a blizzard. Therefore, the first intermittent yet heavy snowfall I experienced and lived through for almost three weeks with incredibly low wind-chill factor was in Kabul. And, in the early evening of that Christmas Eve, we witnessed our first 'White Christmas,' which incidentally is also the title of a memorable song sung and recorded in 1942, by the world-famous American crooner Bing Crosby, the first multimedia star of the 20th century.

WAQAR A KHAN

It was in Kabul, Afghanistan, on 24th December, 1972, when suddenly in the late afternoon the first snow flurries of the season began. It was a gorgeous sight with an unmatched beauty of its very own. The snow-flakes came floating down gently at first like the feathers of a white dove and, then copiously draping everything in white. It seemed to coax nature into hibernation. Although, while living in Islamabad, Pakistan, we had sometimes experienced frigid temperatures and occasionally saw some hoar frost in the early mornings, we had never experienced any real snowfall. Whenever, we visited the colonial era hill-station of Murree in winter, it was always after a snowfall. In the wintertime, the craggy heights of the Margalla Hills which provides a picturesque backdrop to Islamabad would sometimes be snow-capped, not to mention the faintly visible Murree hills... a distant bluish-white haze. However, until Kabul I had never lived through a snowfall, let alone a blizzard. Therefore, the first intermittent yet heavy snowfall I experienced and lived through for almost three weeks with incredibly low wind-chill factor was in Kabul. And, in the early evening of that Christmas Eve, we witnessed our first 'White Christmas,' which incidentally is also the title of a memorable song sung and recorded in 1942, by the world-famous American crooner Bing Crosby, the first multimedia star of the 20th century.

It all started when in late December, 1972, a group of us – all young Bengali men – intrepid adventurers, albeit enforced travelers had just escaped from Islamabad to Kabul with the help of a Pathan cartel on our way to New Delhi and thence to newly liberated Bangladesh. For further details of our 'great escape from Pakistan', you may like to visit Google to see my feature article in The Daily Star entitled, 'From the Labyrinth of Memory'.

And, on that particular Christmas Eve, as snow blanketed Kabul and a light blizzard with howling winds rattled the mock French windows of our hotel room, we listened to some great music by: Isaac Hayes (of the 'Shaft' fame), James Brown, Santana, Doors and a lot of jazz. On that memorable evening



Left to right: The writer with cousin Masud and friend Taufiq in front of Regal Hotel, Kabul, December 1972.

PHOTO: BITU

in our makeshift hotel named, 'Regal Hotel' (unregal, really!), we were joined by Andrew, an African American with a portable cassette player and an inviting bottle of Jack Daniel's and, a little later by a tall, lanky, long haired Netherlander (Dutch) with a guitar and bongo. Outside in the snowfall, groups of boisterous inebriated young Westerners on the hippie-trail went by ringing bells and singing Christmas Carols. And in the faint mellow light, amidst the moaning wind and a mini-blizzard which we could view through the large windows, we were treated by Andrew to a cassette-recording of a soul-searing blues song sung by the incomparable American jazz singer 'Lady' Carmen McRae in her inimitable style of raw passion, the tone and tenor of her voice – virile – almost masculine! It was a powerful rendition of the song 'The Look of Love' (1967), which ends with a heartbreaking piteous pleading, "Don't ever go, because I love you so." It is a song that I cherish to

this very day. I was already fond of Jazz, but became enamored of it ever since that particular evening. Later on, I would have my fill while in the US in the early 1970s, where I attended a number of exhilarating jazz festivals, in some former antebellum Southern states, especially in New Orleans which has left an indelible impression in my mind.

However, on that particular evening long years ago, the ambience in our hotel room in Kabul was such: we were six young men with yet miles to traverse, far away from our kith and kin, suddenly thrust into a latter day 'medieval kingdom,' kept warm by the glow of an 'ancient' wood-lit fireplace while listening enraptured to an amazing blues song, the sheer intensity, beauty and pathos of which seemed to slowly but surely seep deep into our finer sensibilities.

Waqar A Khan is the Founder of Bangladesh Forum for Heritage Studies.

Empty Mirror

ZAARA OMAR

Come dawn, I am a daughter
Sweet
Obedient
Caring
Oh mother, father,
For you I'd do anything

Come noon, I am a friend
Spirited
Playful
Loyal
Oh comrades,
For you I'd do anything

Come evening, I am a lover
Adoring
Indulgent
Devoted
Oh darling,
For you I'd do anything

Come dusk, I am me
Lonely
Empty
Confused
Oh mirror, do tell me
What am I now?

Zaara is a seventeen-year-old tennis player living in Spain. She is currently doing her A-Levels. Her passions include cooking, eating, reading and writing.



FICTION

DILEMMA

KHAMA MAHMUD

TRANSLATED BY: AMREETA LETHE

Pushing the glass door open, Anita heaves a sigh of relief as she leaves the office for lunch. The sun is blazing down outside. Sometimes this place feels like a gold cage. Even working at her desk job in this air-conditioned room – chilly enough for anyone who just walked in to mistake it for somewhere in Antarctica – inside the corporate office of a renowned advertising firm in Motijheel, leaves Anita out of breath.

I really need to switch jobs soon, she thinks. Images of two and three-storeyed NGO offices in Lalmatia, verdant and secluded, fill her mind. They at least work for poor people; you could still justify working in a place like that. But this corporate environment, obsessed with ceaselessly tracking and counting its own profits and losses, has not suited her at all. She isn't one to trade her entire life for a job like this, chasing after profits and a swelling bank balance; surely, work has to be a little more meaningful. Counting down days and collecting cheques at the end of each month can't be all there is

around more and more these days. It's been so long since she last attended a song rehearsal at Chhayanaut. She has been left out of quite a few recitation programs already too, since she just couldn't make the time. She had to start her career working at this cutthroat corporate job, didn't she, where the only thing that matters is how much money is being made!

The visage of a tall man gradually grows clearer as he approaches. Their offices are close to each other – a brief walk apart. They leave their separate Mohammadpur houses in the morning, catch the bus together, and commute to work. Raihan drops her at work first and then leaves for his own office. If there isn't too much work, the two try to meet up in the afternoon for lunch.

"Don't even get me started. Trouble showed up just as I was getting ready to leave," Raihan says as he catches up to her. "Let's go." They walk forward towards Kosturi. The place serves excellent Bangali food. It's a mutual favourite.

"So, what do you want to get?" All the restaurants located in Motijheel's "office neighbourhood" buzz with people around this time. For however little time, using lunch as an excuse, these people come outside to breathe a little more freely. There are so many people here, thinks Anita, so many people and so many of their stories taking up each occupied table.

"Tell me what you want to eat." Raihan's voice snaps Anita back to reality. She looks up to see the waiter standing by the table waiting for their order.

"Ah, anything light works for me." Once the waiter leaves with Anita's order of spicy chicken curry and Raihan's catla fish curry, mashed taki fish, and daal, Raihan shifts his gaze to Anita. "Something wrong? You sure don't look like everything's fine."

"Same old. Nothing that serious," replies Anita. "Did you go out somewhere?" Raihan asks again.

Anita nods. She works as a client service executive, so she has to go out rather frequently to meet her clients. Since she's still new, a senior typically accompanies her if she's meeting with someone important. Once they're acquainted, Anita can meet them by herself whenever needed.

"Tell me what happened," Raihan insists. "Piklu Bhai and I visited a really important client's office today, and I'm still quite angry

about what happened there. We're working with them on a particularly lengthy report, and it still had a lot of errors that needed to be fixed. The deadline's over, so we went there today to show them the final draft. And then Piklu Bhai suddenly says to me, 'You go and talk to them. I'll be downstairs.' I was dumbfounded. He hadn't even briefed me about the state of the report. I had tagged along with him so that I could learn what the project.

"What was the point of pulling something like this with such an important client? The lady was a foreigner, too. After I went to her room and introduced myself, I showed her the draft; she had an outburst. Not only had I never seen this side of a foreign woman before, but I hadn't even imagined I would ever experience something like this! She was deeply dissatisfied with the quality of the work, and pointed out the numerous mistakes to me. And this was apparently supposed to be sent to the press in a day or two. Can you imagine how that felt? Anyway, I told her a few things along the lines of 'I'll look into it' and 'It won't happen again,' had the work properly explained to me, and left. And once I go downstairs, I see the one and only

Don't even get me started. Trouble showed up just as I was getting ready to leave," Raihan says as he catches up to her. "Let's go." They walk forward towards Kosturi. The place serves excellent Bangali food. It's a mutual favourite.

Piklu Bhai having a smoke nonchalantly. You know what I think? Piklu Bhai doesn't speak English too well, and that's why he pushed me into this mess."

Raihan bursts out in laughter. "This is just business as usual for these corporate types. Happens to us pretty regularly, too. A job ultimately means you have to suck it up and accept it. It's a slave's work, you know? At the end of the month, they send a handful of crisp notes to your bank, and if you're a little careful with regular expenditure, you're good to go. A few added benefits...that's about it. And in exchange, we're the pawns that they've bought. Do you understand, my lady?"

There are so many people desperate to get any job they can get their hands on. Then,

why do we have such strange thoughts about work? Anita wonders.

The food arrives as they continue their conversation. Puffs of steam waft into the air. The fresh, steaming hot food here is why everyone crowds to these restaurants.

"How have things been on your end?" asks Anita.

"Same old..." Raihan looks up at her as he eats. "The work situation is more or less the same everywhere. You just have to accept it and move on. It all depends on how well someone can adapt to these conditions. I keep feeling so restless too, every now and then. There's so much work to get done at the office that I barely get any time to work on what I really want to. My novel – the one I wrote half of – has been gathering dust...by the time I get home at night I'm so worn out...nothing comes to mind anymore. I don't know how long I can keep going like this. And this is just the beginning! It's been eating me up inside...but I need the money, too. We're getting married in another six months and..."

Anita grows increasingly troubled the longer she listens to Raihan. She finished eating sometime ago, so she listens on and watches him eat. His love of fish comes through with each bite, as he quite contentedly finishes the fish curry and then the daal. After washing his hands and lighting a cigarette, Raihan says, "Let's go. I need to catch a meeting."

"I guess, things will continue as they are, and it'll be fine as long as you're with me..."

Chuckling a little, he looks at Anita, places his hand on hers and gives it a squeeze, as if replenishing his fill of oxygen for the day. He feels bad for Anita too...she's part of a brilliant creative sphere. She sings so beautifully, and recites as well, but getting into a job has sidelined all of these pursuits. How will she find a way to move forward with these interests when this titan of a job devours any time she has? And once they're married...newer responsibilities will just keep cropping up.

With his concerned gaze still focused on Anita, his thoughts continue to coil and tangle like cigarette smoke.

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At the end of the month, they send a handful of crisp notes to your bank, and if you're a little careful with regular expenditure, you're good to go. A few added benefits... that's about it. And in exchange, we're the pawns that they've bought. Do you understand, my lady?"



to it. Still ruminating on her work, she looks towards Shapla Chattar to try and see if Raihan is coming. He's usually here much earlier. Work must be holding him back. We're both in the same position, she thinks. It has barely been a year since they started working. Anita hasn't received her Master's results yet, although she was called in for the job anyway. The crickets in her head have been chirping



VC gets intimate about his campus protest experience

Turns out calling the cops on your students is not the coolest thing ever? Now they're asking me to resign? That's just preposterous. Who's going to sign all the papers if I'm gone?

SHOAB AHMED SAYAM

The following is an excerpt from the diary of a VC, which Satireday obtained when he left home to get sushi after the end of the students' hunger strike:

So there I was, just chilling, when I saw a bunch of stupid students chanting against one of the hall provosts. We give them a bed and ceiling; what more could they be asking for?

"Here we go again," I thought, "a new day, a new demand, a new protest."

Being the head of an institution for so long, I knew how to handle this. I just had to agree with these dimwits and tell them, "We will take the matter into consideration."

Fast forward, the provost is gone, and I'm trapped inside a building. Guess I didn't know how to handle this.

While I was a teacher of economics in my earlier days, what I was actually interested in was "thugonomics", the subject

world-renowned wrestler John Cena did a doctorate in.

With that in mind, I had one simple solution. After some time, I heard rubber bullets being fired, sound grenades going off, and the hiss of tear shells.

And eventually I got out. Yay!

I thought everything was all good in the hood. I thought wrong.

Turns out calling the cops on your students is not the coolest thing ever? Now they're asking me to resign? That's just preposterous. Who's going to sign all the papers if I'm gone?

I didn't budge. I knew this university is nothing without my sexy, voluptuous brain.

But then these buffoons started a hunger strike unto death.

After witnessing so many symbolic hunger strikes, I thought this wasn't such a big deal. They'll eventually get hungry and call it off. Thinking about all this had made me hungry, so I ordered some sushi.

After a couple of days, my food deliveries stopped coming, and my power went out. I knew something was gravely wrong.

I then found out that the doo-doo brains blocked the entrance to my residence and cut off the electricity! Oh, and they were still hungry, by the way. Now, how will I get my sushi?

If that wasn't bad enough, apparently a sound clip of me saying women of a certain university are "unmarriageable" got leaked.

Look, I, being an empath, was just concerned for those students. Since marriage is the biggest event in a girl's life, I was just looking out for them. I guess this world doesn't deserve caring and thoughtful people like me.

The good news is everything's calming down. Two people came to the campus and somehow convinced the students to stop being hungry and remove the barricade in front of my crib. So, I'll be back on my grind pretty soon.

Country in shock after finishing 2nd on corruption list despite 1st-class performance

MAHBUB ALAM MUNNA

The country is in sheer despair after becoming the second most corrupt country in South Asia. The year-long endeavours and performances were rendered futile in just a matter of seconds as soon as the Winning Opacity Worldwide (WOW) list was published.

"Have you ever felt the pain of being second even after showing a world class performance that deserved to be first?" performance minister of Chapasthan asked, visibly disappointed.

The overall performance is even more frustrating as the country stood 13th among the most corrupt countries of the world. WOW has been publishing this report for years to show the people of Chapasthan their annual performance just like every organisation does for their employee rating. "There was a time when we reigned the world and dominated the list. Standing 13th globally and 2nd regionally clearly shows our slow but continual downfall. It's a shame that we are behind Afghanistan," the performance minister continued to show his despair.

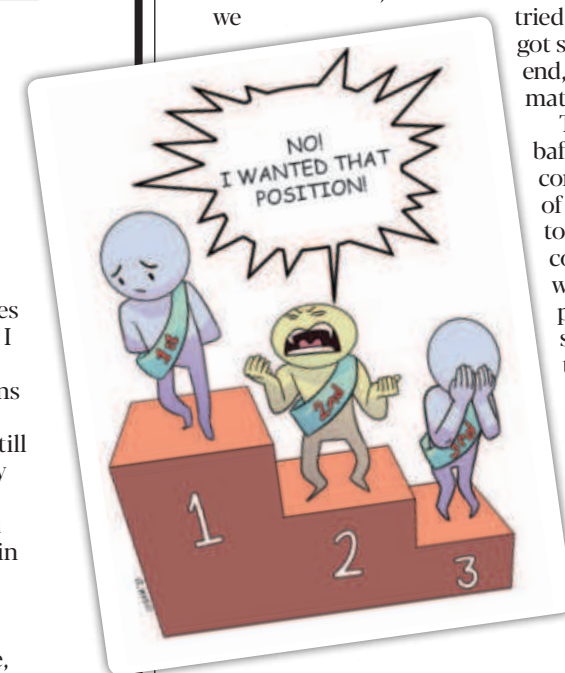
However, corrupt officials couldn't believe their eyes because they expected a better position. No sooner was the report published than every citizen, who contributed massively or minimally, became shocked as they thought they were going to obtain the first position regionally and under top 10 globally.

When asked what exactly went wrong despite countrywide performance in corruption, one of the officials said,

"Brother, believe me, we tried so hard and got so far, but in the end, it doesn't even matter."

The report baffled the common people of Chapasthan too. A group of conscious people were taking preparation to start a petition to compel WOW to review the report as they believe that no other country in South Asia deserves to be first as much as Chapasthan does.

"There is no way Afghanistan could outplay Chapasthan. Dude, they don't have a legitimate government, let alone officials. Then who performed? The whole world is against us. They intentionally put us in second position. Actually, they fear to recognise our first-class performance and development," a conscious person, while crossing the road unconsciously, raised the allegation.



Older millennials having babies just to be able to say 'back in my day'

A recent shortage in both high-end formula milk and diapers for new-born babies made social scientists take a long, hard look at the economic and social link between this shortage and the coming-of-age of a certain age group.

NAAYENTEES ALAM

Older millennials are rushing to have babies as they hit their late and early thirties milestones – a receding hairline, a growing tummy and aching joints.

A recent shortage in both high-end formula milk and diapers for new-born babies made social scientists take a long, hard look at the economic and social link between this shortage and the coming-of-age of a certain age group.

The social scientists were also joined by a group of psychologists because this particular group of academics wanted to publish a scientific article that covered all bases and that would receive no criticism.

The paper which was published early this year revealed some eye-openers regarding older millennials and their desire to become parents despite the knowledge that parenting is harder than rocket science.

"Older millennials have moved to managerial positions in their workplace now after putting in nearly 10 years in the job market. Many started working as teens and have continued since. They are now hiring more and more youngsters who are coming up with new-fangled ideas which the older millennials do not entirely agree with. This is why they are having babies, so that they can raise them to be less difficult adults and also to

tell this current generation of youngsters that back in their day they would respect elders, take their bullying and had a thick skin about it while doing so," said the lead author of the article when asked to explain the findings of the paper in brief.

The strange part about the paper, however, is the section which details the contradictions presented by the focus group.

"While older millennials think younger millennials are ruining everything about the good old 90s, when it comes to parenting styles, they cannot seem to agree with their parents either, who they think are too old school in their parenting styles. We actually follow a sleep and wake window, use apps to monitor the child's milestones and are up to date with the latest research in raising a child," the lead author added.

The scientific article has caused a stir among new parents who feel awfully seen and have sharply criticised the paper.



PHOTO: FREEPIK.COM