Covid pandemic not over yet

Says WHO chief

AFP, Geneva

The head of the World Health Organization on Thursday tempered his assertion that the end of the Covid-19 pandemic was near, warning that declaring the crisis over was "still a long way off".

Tedros Adhanom Last week, Ghebreyesus told reporters that the world had "never been in a better position to end the pandemic... The end is in sight."

And US President Joe Biden went further in an interview broadcast Sunday, declaring that the pandemic in the United States "is over".

But speaking to the media again Thursday from the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, Tedros appeared less upbeat, making clear that "being able to see the end, doesn't mean we are at the end."

He reiterated that the world was in the best position it had ever been in to end the pandemic, with the number of weekly deaths continuing to drop -- and now just 10 percent of what they were at the peak in January

Tedros pointed out that two-thirds of the world's population has been vaccinated, including three-quarters of health workers and older people.

"We have spent two-and-a-half years in a long, dark tunnel, and we are just beginning to glimpse the light at the end of that tunnel," he said.

But, he stressed, "it is still a long way off, and the tunnel is still dark, with many obstacles that could trip us up if we don't take care."

'We're still in the tunnel."

In its latest epidemiological update, the WHO said over 9,800 fatalities were reported last week, down 17 percent from a week earlier, while 3.2 million new cases were reported.

The UN health agency has warned that the falling number of reported cases is deceptive, since many countries have cut back on testing and may not be detecting less serious cases.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's technical lead on Covid, told reporters the virus is still "circulating at an intense level," although the situation varied in different countries.



An organiser places garlands on idols of deities at the Raj Mondir in Kobutarkhali village of Pirojpur's Mathbaria upazila yesterday as part of final preparations for the Durga Pura. The biggest Hindu festival will begin on October 1.

Russia proxies in Ukraine hold breakaway polls

UN probe accuses Moscow of committing 'war crimes'

Voting on whether Russia should annex Kremlin-controlled regions of Ukraine opened yesterday as the West denounced the referendum that has dramatically raised the stakes of Moscow's sevenmonth invasion.

The voting began as UN investigators accused Russia of committing war crimes Donetsk and Lugansk regions, as well as in on a "massive scale" in Ukraine, listing bombings, executions, torture and sexual violence, but said it was too soon to prove crimes against humanity.

from the Moscow-backed separatists, territorial integrity of all countries must contesting territory the Kremlin seeks to

The votes in four regions are the latest shock development in a ferocious war that UN investigators said had seen violence like executions and torture -- that amounted to war crimes.

The referendums in the eastern the southern Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions have been dismissed as a "sham" by Kyiv's Western allies.

And even diplomats from Russia's As polling got underway, Ukrainian closest ally since the war began, Beijing, forces said they were clawing back territory told Ukraine that the "sovereignty and

be respected".

Earlier this month, Ukrainian forces seized back most of the north-eastern Kharkiv region in a huge counter-offensive that has seen Kyiv retake hundreds of settlements that had been under Russian control for months.

On Friday, Russian news agency TASS showed officials in Donetsk alerting residents to the polls by loudspeaker, surrounding one local as he voted.

Denis Pushilin, a pro-Russian separatist leader in the Donetsk region -- part of the industrial Donbas region – Telegram that "Donbas is Russia".

3 arrested for online gambling

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Rab on Thursday arrested three men on charges of gambling online in Patnitala upazila of Naogaon, and seized their computers, smartphones, and

Ata Rabbi, 20, Rasel Hossain, 21, and Mithun Karmaker, 30, were arrested in different areas of the town, said Major Mostafa Zaman, Rab commanding officer in Joypurhat.

They were accused of cyber crime in a case filed with Patnitala Police Station, Mostafa added.

Woman hacked to death in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police yesterday recovered the body of a 35-yearold woman from her home in Akua area of Mymensingh town, hours after she complained to police about being harassed by a neighbour.

Sathi Akter, 35, mother of a 10-year-old, was hacked to death, police said.

Quoting family members, Shah Kamal Akanda, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said the woman was often harassed over the phone by a man named Ridov.

After she protested this, Ridoy and his uncle Babul threatened Sathi with dire consequences on Thursday morning.

Sathi informed police that night and an officer visited the area immediately but could not find Babul and Ridoy, said the OC.

Her dead body was found the next morning, he

US, China top diplomats meet to contain high tensions on Taiwan

AFP, New York

The top US and Chinese diplomats yesterday met in New York as soaring tensions show signs of easing, but Beijing issued a new warning against support for Taiwan.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi shook hands but only exchanged pleasantries before the cameras before sitting down with aides on the sidelines of the annual United Nations summit.

It was their first encounter since extensive talks in July in Bali where both sides appeared optimistic for more stability.

One month later, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan, infuriating Beijing which staged exercises seen as a trial run for an invasion of the self-governing democracy.

Audit fails to determine Evaly's dues

The auditors traced transactions amounting to Tk 48,000 crore through seven bank accounts of Evaly in 2018 and 2019 but there is no paperwork at the company's end, Manik told The Daily Star on Thursday.

who deposited them, who withdrew firm SR Islam & Co. money and why they were withdrawn... there is no clue in Evaly's office."

Evaly, which began its journey on December 16, 2018 amid an advertising blitzkrieg and unbelievable discounts. did not keep any log of who its vendors and customers are, let alone what sum they are owed or what they have paid.

"So, we are suspecting money laundering might have taken place," Manik said

For instance, the board found some copies of cash cheques but there is no mention of who were those issued to and for what purpose.

Similarly, the audit found many vouchers were dispensed but there is no mention of why those were made

This was their modus operandi for

wind up the company after making a fortune through fraud," he said, adding that it is not possible to conclusively determine how much Evaly owes.

To keep up its pretence, the company furnished fake audit reports on the Why people deposited those sums, letterhead of chartered accountancy

"We have confirmed it with the firm they said they didn't audit Evaly.' Manik said.

The audit could not determine whether further transactions took place beyond the seven bank accounts. For instance, Evaly disbursed its payroll in cash.

"They were shown a salary of Tk 1 lakh but were given Tk 65,000 in cash. There was no tax deduction."

Meanwhile, Tk 25 crore currently lies in different escrow accounts belonging to Evaly and another Tk 25 crore worth of goods lies in its two warehouses. This amount is a drop in the ocean

when compared to the claims made against the company.' Asked if there is any possibility of the

customers and merchants getting their fraud. Evaly was started with the intent money back, he said that Evaly does not

of fraud. They knew that they would have the means to pay back the sums. "However, if any investor comes

on board, then there are some possibilities," Manik added. But for Manik and his board, they must feel they have done the best they

could given the chaotic circumstances. "I handed over the responsibility on Wednesday. We are no longer involved with Evaly," Milon told The Daily Star.

That baton has been passed to a new board that includes Shamima Nasrin, the original chairwoman of Evaly and the wife of Evaly founder Mohammad Rassel, her mother Farida Talukdar Lily and her sister's husband Md Mamunur Rashid, as per an HC order on August

The order came following three separate applications filed by the trio. In April, Nasrin walked out of jail on bail after her arrest on September 16 last year by the Rapid Action Battalion along with Rassel in a case filed by a customer over an undelivered order. Several other cases followed suit.

Although Rassel secured bail in nine embezzlement cases, he is yet to be freed as he has other cases pending.

US aircraft carrier arrives in S Korea to 'deter' Pyongyang

Korea yesterday for the first time the official added. in nearly five years, ahead of joint drills in a show of force aimed at the nuclear-armed North.

The nuclear-powered USS Ronald Reagan and vessels from its strike group docked in the southern port city of Busan, part of a push by Seoul and Washington to have more US strategic assets operating in the

South Korea's hawkish President Yoon Suk-yeol, who took office in May, has vowed to beef up joint military exercises with the United States, after years of failed diplomacy with North Korea under his predecessor.

"The deployment of the carrier USS Ronald Reagan to Busan demonstrates the strength of the South Korea-US alliance," a South Korean defence ministry official told

 $A\,US\,aircraft\,carrier\,arrived\,in\,South\quad Korea's\,nuclear\,and\,missile\,threats",\quad nuclear\,test.$

has conducted a record-breaking blitz of weapons tests this year, and earlier this month revised its nuclear law, enshrining a "first strike" doctrine and vowing never to give up its nukes.

The US Navy said the USS Ronald Reagan is accompanied on the South Korea visit by two vessels from its strike group -- the USS Chancellorsville, a guided-missile cruiser, and the USS Barry, a guided missile destroyer.

They will take part in joint drills of South Korea's east coast this month, the Yonhap news agency said, adding that the nuclear-powered submarine USS Annapolis is also expected to participate.

The carrier's visit comes after months of warnings from South Korean and US officials that North

Korean leader Kim Jong Un is The visit aims to "deter North preparing to conduct another

> The isolated regime has tested nuclear weapons six times since 2006. Its last and most powerful one in 2017 -- which Pyongyang claimed was a hydrogen bomb -had an estimated yield of 250 kilotons. Washington is Seoul's key security

> ally and stations about 28,500 troops in South Korea to protect it from the North.

> The two countries have long carried out joint exercises, which they insist are purely defensive but North Korea sees them as rehearsals for an invasion.

> Last month, the United States and South Korea staged their biggest combined military drills since 2018

> the resumption of large-scale training sessions that had been scaled back due to Covid-19 and the bout of failed diplomacy with Pyongyang.

Missing Khulna woman 'found dead' in M'singh a hand pump adjacent to her home in disappearance case.

photos of the decomposing body sent to her by police, Moriom told officers that she believed that this was her mother because the facial features and the clothes matched. Moriom travelled to Phulpur with

looked at the clothes in person and told reporters yesterday that she was sure that the unidentified woman was her However, OC Abdullah Al Mamun said it seemed that the body was of a

her two sisters and a sister-in-law,

woman aged around 30, and Moriom's mother was much older. He added that a DNA test would probably be able to confirm the identity. "After seeing the clothes, photos, and hearing a description of the body,

Moriom claimed it was her mother's body," he said. 'Moriom filed an application for a DNA test. Her petition will be produced before a court on Sunday. If the court gives permission, DNA samples will be

sent to Dhaka for matching." Moriom also talked to the individuals who found the unidentified

body, and those who had buried it. 'I am sure the body is my mother's. A child does not need proof to recognise her mother's hair, forehead, eyes and hands. Who will recognise her if I can't? If these are not enough, we are eager to go through the legal procedure," she

told reporters. Rahima Begum has been missing since she left home to bring water from Banikpara area of Khulna city around 10:00pm on August 27.

Her husband later went downstairs and found her sandals, a scarf and the Moriom's sister Adari Akhter filed

a case with Daulatpur Police Station accusing several persons. On September 14, a Khulna court ordered the PBI to investigate the case.

Contacted, PBI Superintendent of Police Syed Mushfiqur Rahman said, "Police and Rab have arrested six suspects so far. A remand prayer will be heard in the court." Family members said Moriom's

mother Rahima often received death threats from some of her neighbours whom she had sued in 2019 over a land Last year, the accused neighbours

assaulted Rahima and vandalised her house following which she filed another case against the neighbours. Her house in Banikpara area of

building on an eight-katha plot. Monir Hawladar, a tenant, said Rahima had not lived there after she was assaulted and only occasionally

visited the property.

Khulna city is a squalid two-storey

"She came to the house a day before she went missing. I was in my room and did not hear anything," he added. Nazrul Islam, OC of Daulatpur Police

Station, said law enforcers arrested Rahima's husband Belal Howladar and neighbours Golam Kibria, Mohiuddin, Palash, Jewel and Helal Sharif in the

[Our correspondents in Khulna and Mymensingh contributed to the

BNP cautious

After this particular incident, most of the central leaders took a stance in morale of activists up. The protest programmes held in Mohakhali,

police and BNP activists in Munshiganj left a Jubo Dal leader dead.

in the capital, the party's standing committee member, Gayeshwar leaders and workers to keep their movement in the days to come.

focus on exposing how "repressive"

the government is and waging a

movement to materialise its demand

for a free and fair election under a

non-partisan neutral administration.

favour of counter-attacks to keep the Mirpur, Khilgaon and some other places saw leaders and activists swarming the meeting venues with bamboo sticks and pipes. On Wednesday, clashes between

The same day, speaking at a rally Chandra Roy, called upon party spirits high to initiate an all-out

Insiders, however, said the party wants to take cautious steps keeping in mind the huge criticism it faced for arson attacks and violence ahead of the January 2014 election. This time the party wants to of the region.

policy, and full repatriation of dividends, capital on exit. "Let us once again join our hands

Hasina told the businesspeople. Hasina said Bangladesh establishing 100 special economic zones (SEZs) and several hi-tech parks in different parts of the country. Having more than 6,00,000 freelancing professionals, Bangladesh is the right destination

for a mutually inclusive partnership

for sustainableeconomic growth,"

for IT investments, she added. "Moreover, skilled resources at a competitive wage is an added advantage in Bangladesh. Even if required, we would be happy to offer a dedicated Special Economic Zone for the US investors."

She said the US-Bangladesh Business Council can play significant role in this regard.

Noting that Bangladesh will graduate from the LDC status by 2026, the PM said the country needs adequate support to enhance its global competitiveness and export basket. "I am sure that the United States can be our most robust partner in this challenging endeavour."

The premier said Bangladesh is a pioneer in South Asia inregional connectivity. Bangladesh's location offers tremendous potential for the

US can be 'our most robust partner': PM

The proximity of Bangladesh to India, China, and Southeast Asian countries means it is in the middle of a combined market of 4 billion people, she said. "Technology and innovation are the keys for fast-track economic growth. Thus, Bangladesh has become the second largest RMG exporter, third largest producer of vegetables, fourth largest producer of rice, and fifth largest producer of inland fisheries in the world."

Hasina said Bangladesh would consistently pursue economic diplomacy with its neighbours and global players, including the United States. "We're continuously improving our physical, legal, and financial infrastructure and enhanced connectivity in the country.

She said completion of the Padma Bridge has enhanced both the domestic and regional connectivity, while Dhaka Metrorail Project is expected to open in December, which would enable faster domestic mobility.

The PM said Bangladesh made socioeconomicstrides in the last 13 years, particularly in the fields of women empowerment, poverty alleviation, nutrition, maternal and child health, primary education, and ICT. Continuity of government,

country to become the economic hub investment in the rural economy, and women empowerment were the keys to success. "Bangladesh is set to graduate into

> middle-income country by 2026 and on track to become a developed country by 2041," she added. She noted that Bangladesh is in the process of transforming

> "Digital Bangladesh" into a "Smart

Bangladesh", where ICT is playing a significant role. the Bangladesh She said government recognises the necessity of ensuring labour rights in the country. The ILO Roadmap provides a clear plan of actions and timeline

to address the concerns and suggests

remedial measures in the labour "My government is adequately engaged with the United States and other development partners for continuous improvements in this

sector," she said. The PM informed that 102 percent of the targeted population (121 million) received at least two doses of Covid vaccines in Bangladesh. "Thus, our economy has shown great resilience in the face of the

pandemic." She deeply appreciated the US government for donating more than 75 million Covid vaccines to Bangladesh through COVAX.