

## For Dhaka, the balancing act is more difficult

Says a veteran diplomat, author from Singapore on geopolitics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pointing out the critical position of Bangladesh in global geo-politics, veteran diplomat turned academic from Singapore, Kishore Mahbubani, yesterday said while most of the countries have to deal with China and the US in their rising rivalry, Bangladesh, unlike others, has to deal with three major powers – India, China, and the US.

"I have no doubt that Bangladesh will have difficulties and challenges managing the present contest between China and the US. Because you want to have good ties with both, and of course, very good relations with India," he said.

He was the main speaker in a discussion on "Emerging Asian Nations in Global Geo-Politics: Implications for Bangladesh" organised by Cosmos Foundation at a hotel in the capital.

He said it will be better for Bangladesh to handle the US-China rivalry if it can speak at a forum like the ASEAN. It is, however, hard for South Asia because the SAARC is not as cohesive as ASEAN. This creates a challenge for this region.

"The role of India is critical. Though it has come closer to the US by joining the Quad, it can still take independent

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A woman at a candlelight vigil held for freedom fighters lost in the Liberation War. It was organised by Natopakha at the Kendriya Shaheed Minar last night.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON



## Hasina 42nd most powerful woman on Forbes' list

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been ranked 42nd on the Forbes' list of the most powerful women in the world.

Last year, she was ranked 43rd.

Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, was named the most powerful woman in the world in the list. She was followed by European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde and US Vice President Kamala Harris.

Indian Financial Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is

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## LEUKAEMIA TREATMENT Breakthrough raises hope



Alyssa

AFP, London

Doctors in Britain have hailed a pioneering treatment for an aggressive form of leukaemia, after a teenager became the first patient to be given a new therapy and went into remission.

The 13-year-old girl, identified only as Alyssa, was diagnosed with T-cell acute lymphoblastic leukaemia in 2021.

But her blood cancer did not respond to conventional treatment, including chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant.

She was enrolled on a clinical trial of a new treatment at London's Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children (GOSH) using genetically engineered immune cells from a healthy volunteer.

In 28 days her cancer was in remission, allowing her to receive a second bone marrow transplant to restore her immune system.

Six months on, she is "doing well" back home in Leicester, central England, and receiving follow-up care.

"Without this experimental treatment, Alyssa's only option was palliative care," the hospital said in a statement yesterday.

Robert Chiesa, a GOSH consultant, said her turnaround had been "quite remarkable", although the results still

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## BHANGA-JASHORE-BENAPOLE HIGHWAY Estimated outlay jumps before project approval

Road expansion to now cost Tk 13,841cr

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The proposed Bhangra-Jashore-Benapole Highway development project will be setting an example of how poor planning and uncertainty over funding can escalate the implementation costs sharply.

Even before the project got the nod, its estimated cost has increased by 25 percent or about Tk 2,800 crore – which is more than the Roads and Highways Department's annual budget for road maintenance in last fiscal year, officials said.

In the original development project proposal (DPP) submitted to Road Transport and Highway Division earlier this year, the cost for turning the 129.17-kilometre highway into a four-lane with service road on both sides was estimated to be Tk 11,050.04 crore.

Now, the cost has spiralled to Tk 13,841.11 crore, according to the re-casted DPP submitted last month.

The cost jump has been pinned on the change in RHD's rate schedule, according to officials. RHD would be implementing the project.

The original DPP was prepared following RHD's rate schedule for 2019 and the re-casted one is based on the latest rate schedule approved this year.

This cost – Tk 13,841.11 crore – would be on top of the cost of another project that would be taken up for land acquisition and utility relocation for the expansion of the two-lane highway.

The estimated cost for land acquisition and utility relocation is Tk 4,236.60 crore, so the total cost of expansion of the road would be Tk 18,077.71 crore – making it the costliest

RHD project.

But the project is necessary. The country is failing to reap the maximum benefit of the enhanced connectivity after the opening of Padma bridge and Madhimati bridge as the road from Faridpur's Bhangra to Jashore's Benapole is still not ready for increased vehicular movement.

THE PROJECT

A plan for turning the two-lane Bhangra-Benapole road into a four-lane highway was chalked out long ago but it saw little progress thanks to uncertainty over funding.

Bangladesh in October 2017 signed a \$4.5 billion line of credit agreement with India and the Bhangra-Jashore-Benapole road expansion is one of the projects selected, RHD officials said.

RHD in July 2019 submitted a DPP to the Road Transport and Highways Division for acquiring land and moving the utility services lines as part of preparations for starting the physical work.

But the Planning Commission asked RHD to recast the DPP.

When RHD re-submitted it to the division again after the necessary changes, the commission in February asked for another recast.

RHD resubmitted the DPP three-four months ago, where the cost for acquiring land and moving the utility services lines has been put down as Tk 4,236.60 crore. The government will bear the full cost.

On the other hand, RHD in December 2020 placed a DPP for the main project. But the division in June 2021 asked RHD to recast it.

When the DPP was resubmitted with an

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## It's against democracy Say 24 eminent citizens as they condemn police activities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Frisking citizens and checking their mobile phones are violations of human rights and contrary to democracy, noted citizens said in a statement condemning the way police checked people ahead of Saturday's BNP rally in the capital.

What the government had done before the event was repression, said the statement.

Police have shot one person dead, injured many others, arrested BNP leaders and activists en masse, it said, adding that these acts violated the right to speech and organise rallies.

Programmes like rallies are recognised by the constitution as a right, it added.

"We urge the government to refrain from violating these rights," read the statement, adding that the BNP activists arrested without specific evidence should be released.

Signatories to the statement include M Hafizuddin Khan, former adviser to a caretaker government; Hameeda

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## World's first commercial moon mission launched

AFP, Washington

A Japanese startup's spacecraft was launched to the Moon yesterday in the country's first ever lunar mission and the first of its kind by a private company.

The launch was carried out by Elon Musk's SpaceX at Cape Canaveral in the US state of Florida after two postponements for additional pre-flight checks.



The spacecraft, produced by Tokyo-based startup ispace and carrying a UAE-built rover, blasted off aboard a Falcon 9 rocket at 2:38 am (0738 GMT), live footage of the launch showed.

"Our first mission will lay the groundwork for unleashing the Moon's potential and transforming it into a robust and vibrant economic system," the startup's CEO, Takeshi Hakamada, said in a statement.

So far only the United States, Russia and China have managed to put a robot on the lunar surface.

The space mission is the first of a program called Hakuto-R, which means "white rabbit" in Japanese.

The company said its lunar lander was expected to touch down on the visible side of the Moon in April 2023 – the Year of the Rabbit in the Japanese zodiac.

Measuring just over two by 2.5 meters, the spacecraft has a payload that includes a 10-kilogram rover built by the United Arab Emirates.

The Gulf country is a newcomer to the space race but sent a probe into Mars' orbit last year. If the rover, named Rashid, successfully lands, it will

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## Kabir Bin Anwar new cabinet secretary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Kabir Bin Anwar, senior secretary to the water resources ministry, has been made the new cabinet secretary.

A notification was issued by the public administration ministry in this regard yesterday.

Anwar will take up the new position after the tenure of incumbent Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam expires on December 15.

He will only be serving this post for 13 working days as he is slated to go on post-retirement leave on

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PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

A woman taking care of bean plants in Kalghar area of Chattogram's Chandanaish upazila. Beans are in high demand during winter. Besides beans, farmers here produce other vegetables. The photo was taken yesterday.

## SHELLING FROM AFGHANISTAN Pakistan says six civilians killed

REUTERS, Quetta

Heavy gunfire and artillery shelling by Afghan border forces killed six civilians across the border in Pakistan yesterday and wounded another 17, the Pakistan army said.

Pakistani troops retaliated at the Chaman border crossing in southwestern Balochistan province, the army said in a statement, without giving details of any losses on the other side.

Afghan official Noor Ahmad, in Kandahar, the province on the Afghan side of the border, told Reuters the incident was accidental and the situation had returned to normal after the two sides had a meeting.

He gave no further details on any casualties on Afghan side.

The Pakistan army statement described the incident as an "uncalled for aggression" and said Pakistani troops had responded proportionately, avoiding the targeting of civilians on the other side.

The busy Afghan border crossing at Chaman, used for trade and transit, was closed for some hours before reopening, officials on both sides said. The crossing was closed for several days last month after similar clashes.

## Indefinite ban on tourists in Rowangchhari, Ruma

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bandarban district administration yesterday imposed an indefinite ban on tourism in Ruma and Rowangchhari upazilas.

Bandarban Deputy Commissioner Yasmin Parvin Tibriji signed a notice in this regard, reports our Bandarban correspondent.

According to the notice, the decision was made following a request of the army concerned with the safety of tourists in Bandarban region.

The travel ban in Ruma and Rowangchhari was first imposed on October 17. The ban was extended multiple times and Thanchi and Alikadam upazilas were

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