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TO KNOW

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**Lanka gets six months to repay BB's \$200m****Chattogram phase of BPL begins today****Biden urges US Congress to reign in Big Tech****Ekushey Boi Mela: Celebs who will publish this year**

"The terrorist state and its propagandists are trying to pretend that part of our town of Soledar ... is some sort of a Russian possession. But fighting continues."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky



Power price hiked by 5pc

BERC procedure bypassed; new rate to take effect this month

ASIFUR RAHMAN

The government yesterday raised the electricity price for consumers, on average, by 5 percent, skirting around procedures of Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC).

On January 8, a BERC committee had recommended a 15 percent hike. For now, this may appear the government has struck a middle ground, there are, however, indications that more hikes are on the cards.

The new rate will be applicable from this month, said a notification from the power, energy and mineral resources ministry.

The weighted average tariff charged by power distribution companies per kilowatt-hour will now be Tk 7.49, up from Tk 7.13.

So, a person who has been paying Tk 1,000 for power will have to pay Tk 1,050 in February.

The move to hike the retail price comes after the bulk price was hiked by 19.92 percent in November last year by BERC, a quasi-judicial organisation that regulates the prices for gas, power, and petroleum products.

While announcing the bulk price hike, Nasrul Hamid, the state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, and BERC Chairman Abdul Jalil had said the electricity price at the retail level would not rise.

However, the same week, six power distributors had submitted proposals to increase the electricity price at retail level by an equal percentage.

BERC on January 8 held a public hearing on those proposals, and there its technical evaluation committee recommended a 15 percent hike at the consumers' end.

The five-member BERC was supposed to sit after January 15 and decide on any price hike by 60 working days from last Sunday.

Yesterday's power price hike announcement was unusual in that it came from the ministry, not BERC.

"From now on, there won't be any hike at one go," Nasrul said yesterday, adding that the electricity price would be adjusted at regular intervals like the LPG price.

The move to increase the prices by the ministry itself did not sit well with experts.

"It seems the government has hiked the power tariff slightly, which may appear to be a good decision, but bypassing BERC is actually giving it a death blow."

The price hike might lessen the government's subsidy burden as prescribed by the International Monetary Fund, he said, adding that the prices might be raised further in the days to come.

M Shamsul Alam, dean of Daffodil University's faculty of engineering, said, "We are going backwards with such decisions -- BERC is an exemplary organisation."

"The government's decision is dangerous and reckless ... they destroyed the BERC brutally ..."

BERC was supposed to announce its decision on the electricity price hike over the next two months, but the ministry went around BERC procedures and came up with the announcement, leveraging a recent amendment to the law.

President Abdul Hamid last month issued an ordinance amending the BERC Act 2003 to include a provision that would allow the government to adjust the prices of gas, electricity, and fuel bypassing BERC.

The government had assured that the provision, which is yet to be approved by parliament, will only be used in the case of emergency.

Asked if any emergency prompted this decision to hike prices, Nasrul Hamid said electricity generation cost has increased 20 times; the price adjustment was necessary considering the global and domestic situation.

The power price hike would have an impact on inflation, which crores of consumers are enduring. Inflation averaged 8.76 percent in the first six months of the fiscal year.



"It seems the government has hiked the power tariff slightly, which may appear to be a good decision, but bypassing BERC is actually giving it a death blow."



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Vehicles caught in a long tailback on the Kuril flyover and Airport Road in the capital yesterday afternoon. Commuters had to suffer delays on this busy road all the day mainly due to the rush of devotees towards the Biswa Ijtima ground. The first phase of the religious congregation begins on the Turag today.

Nightmare on Airport Road

Thousands suffer as traffic goes haywire; many miss flights

SAJJAD HOSSAIN and HELEMUL ALAM

Dhaka dwellers and commuters suffered immensely yesterday as traffic came to a standstill on the Airport Road. Thousands were stuck for hours on end and many missed appointments, meetings and even flights.

The trouble began around Wednesday midnight, when a massive rush of devotees to reach the Biswa Ijtima ground, along the busy Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Tongi, started to peak.

The narrowed-down road in front of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport due to the construction work for the Bus Rapid Transit added to the problem.

Poor traffic management planning ahead of the second largest congregation of the Muslims has been blamed.

The queue of vehicles was 17km long on the south end, up to Mohakhali. Nearby roads came to a standstill due to the cascading effect.

Many commuters spent several hours on the

highway as vehicles were only inching forward during the morning rush. Standstill traffic was seen on the Kuril and Mohakhali flyovers at least until 2:00pm.

Finding no other way, many started to walk. "My daughter and grandchildren started from our Gulshan-2 home at 7:00am to catch a flight for London that was scheduled to depart at 11:00am. The flight was delayed by an hour, yet they missed the flight as they could not reach the airport by then," said a frustrated father.

He said the airlines told them that around 30 people missed the flight.

Pankaj Talukder, who was to fly with Qatar Airways to New York, said, "My flight was scheduled for 11:15am. I started in a microbus from Farmgate at 8:00am. After getting stuck for an hour in Banani, we took a turn towards Mirpur DOHS and reached the airport via Diabari-Uttara road.

"We arrived at the airport at 11:10am. There were 30 others who arrived late due to the

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GRAFT AT UNIVERSITIES Empower UGC to take legal action

The regulatory body asks govt citing inaction by edn ministry

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

University Grants Commission wants power to take actions against irregularities and corruption in universities if probes find evidence to substantiate the allegations.

The commission hopes to have such power since the education ministry on most occasions doesn't take actions even after submission of UGC probe reports that find allegations of irregularities and corruption to be true.

"It is important for the commission to have the power to take legal action against irregularities in the recruitment of university teachers, admission of more students than seats available, financial irregularities, certificate trade, and irregularities in development projects of universities," the UGC said in its annual report for 2021.

A UGC delegation, led by its Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah, submitted the report to President Abdul Hamid at the Bangabhaban last night, UGC member Prof Muhammed Alamgir told The Daily Star.

The report made a set of recommendations. "Everybody wants effective steps be taken based on the findings of probe reports. What is the benefit of

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SOCIAL MEDIA

Government to launch 'lawful interception'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has taken initiative to introduce an "Integrated Lawful Interception System (ILIS)" to monitor social media and thwart various anti-state and anti-government activities, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told parliament yesterday.

He was responding to a query from Awami League MP from Dhaka-10 Shafiqul Islam, who wanted to know whether the government would increase vigilance to thwart local and foreign conspiracies.

The minister said law enforcement and intelligence agencies were working relentlessly to foil any kind of conspiracies against the country.

"Besides, modern technology like Open Source Intelligence Technology [OSINT] has been included in the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre [NTMC under the home ministry] to prevent anti-state and anti-government activities through monitoring social media"

According to sources, the NTMC uses OSINT to track mobile and land-line phones to identify and locate suspects.

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Chemicals from plastic factories nearby being discharged into the Buriganga in the capital's Swarighat area, polluting the river and environment. Locals have difficulties breathing as the water emits a strong odour. Though releasing chemicals into rivers is prohibited, the authorities concerned seems to have turned a blind eye to it. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Work together for a just, fair economic order

PM urges world leaders

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the world leaders to work collectively for a just and fair economic order as the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict with sanctions and counter-sanctions have created havoc throughout the world.

"Taking current global economy into account, it is high time to work collectively for a just and fair economic order," she said.

The PM was addressing the inaugural leaders' session of the "Voice of Global South Summit 2023" through a virtual platform.

India is hosting the two-day virtual summit by bringing together the countries of the Global South to share their perspectives and priorities on a common platform. The theme of the event is -- "Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose".

Some 120 countries have been invited to participate in this summit. The outcomes of the two-day event will be channelled into the Indian's G20 presidency.

Hasina said Bangladesh welcomes India's vision as the G20 president to ensure inclusive development under the theme "One Earth, One Family, One Future".

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Bangladesh has made remarkable strides: Haas

UNB, Dhaka

US Ambassador Peter Haas yesterday said Bangladesh's economic development over the last 50 years has been remarkable and that the US has been a proud partner in this transformation.

"We look forward to working with Bangladesh over the next 50 years and beyond," he added.

The US envoy said this while delivering the opening remarks at the Indo-Pacific Business Forum Infrastructure Panel titled "Mobilising Infrastructure Investment in Bangladesh and the Indo-Pacific".

For the past 50 years, Haas said the US has partnered with the governments and the people of Bangladesh by providing over \$8 billion to tackle issues like public health, education, energy, environment, food security, natural disasters, and more.

"We're also working with the government through technical

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SURVEILLANCE TOOLS

Such move threatens rights: TIB

UNB, Dhaka

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday expressed concern over an international media report on the Bangladesh government's purchase of highly controversial surveillance technology from Israel.

In the absence of specific policies, the use of such technology will pose a serious risk of undermining several fundamental constitutional rights, the graft watchdog said in a statement.

Such a terrible tool was bought with public tax money and people have the right to know the answer to the fundamental question that for what purpose, in what context and in whose interest it will be used, it said.

According to a report by the Israeli media Haaretz, Bangladesh bought surveillance technology from

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This grab taken from AFP video footage shows a member of Ukraine's military looking away as a BM-21'Grad' MLRS 122mm rocket launcher fires on the outskirts of Soledar, Ukraine on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Second batch of classified Biden documents found

REUTERS, Washington

Aides to US President Joe Biden have discovered at least one more batch of classified documents in a location separate from a think tank office he used after serving as vice president, US news outlets reported on Wednesday, citing unnamed sources.

Biden aides have been searching for additional classified materials that might be in other locations since a set of classified documents was found in November at the Washington-based think tank, according to a report in NBC News, which first broke the news, and CNN.

The NBC News report said the classification level, number and precise location of the additional documents was not immediately clear. It also said it was not clear when the additional documents were discovered and whether the search

for any other classified materials Biden may have from his time as vice president is complete.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Reuters.

Senator Mark Warner, the Intelligence Committee's Democratic chairman, has asked for a briefing on the first Biden document discovery, he said Tuesday.

A spokesperson for Senator Marco Rubio, the committee's Republican vice chair, said Rubio and Warner had written to Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, asking for access to the classified documents.

The two senators also requested a damage assessment by the intelligence community and a briefing on the retention of classified documents by both Biden, a Democrat, and Republican former President Donald Trump.

The request echoed a similar one sent to Haines on Tuesday by Republican Representative Mike Turner of the House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

The reports came two days after a White House lawyer said classified documents from Biden's vice presidential days had been discovered in November by the president's personal attorneys at the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement think tank.

Biden's attorneys discovered fewer than a dozen classified records inside the office at center, and informed the US National Archives of their discovery, turned over the materials, and said they were cooperating with the Archives and the Justice Department. The president said on Tuesday he and his team were cooperating fully with a review into what happened.

Empower UGC to take legal action

FROM PAGE 1

conducting investigations if the recommendations are not implemented? If things don't change, UGC officials might lose interest in investigating. Again, people will say that probes are carried out just for show as no actions are taken," Alamgir said.

After conducting several investigations into allegations of irregularities and corruption at universities, the commission found the allegations to be true and recommended taking actions against the vice-chancellors concerned and others. But the recommendations apparently fell on deaf ears as the education ministry has so far let most of those VCs go unpunished.

Over the last two years, the commission submitted at least seven probe reports on corruption and irregularities to Rajshahi University (RU), Noakhali Science and Technology University (NSTU), Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University (BSMRSTU) in Gopalganj, Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur, Khulna Agricultural University (KAU), Jahangirnagar University and Islamic Arabic University.

The VCs of RU, NSTU, and Begum Rokeya University completed their tenures without facing any punishment even though the UGC recommended taking actions against

them.

Only the BSMRSTU VC resigned in September 2019 in the wake of student protests.

The only actions the education ministry took so far are stopping recruitments to the RU and Khulna Agricultural University after probes found anomalies, education ministry officials told The Daily Star.

"Such inaction against the VCs is disappointing. It sends a wrong signal to the authorities concerned, and it's a kind of impunity," said a UGC member.

Asked about the commission's allegation of inaction, Abu Yousuf Miah, additional secretary (university) of the Secondary and Higher Education Division, refused to comment without seeing the UGC annual report.

"But I can say that the allegation is not true for the period of last six months as I joined my current position six months ago," he added.

The UGC annual report 2021 said that national media carried many news reports on nepotism and corruption in appointment of teachers and staffers to public universities. It tarnishes the image of higher education institutions and the government.

The regulatory body recommended formation of an independent recruitment commission for appointing teachers and staffers

at public universities to ensure transparency.

Speaking at the Dhaka University's 53rd convocation on November 19 last year, President Hamid said, a vice-chancellor is supposed to supervise the administrative and academic activities of a university. "In recent times, sadly, various news reports claim that the main responsibility of some vice-chancellors is to provide jobs to family members and their loyalists, and to take administrative and financial benefits in various ways."

The UGC in the new report suggested forming an implementable policy to appoint VCs, pro-VCs and treasurers from renowned academics on the basis of UGC opinion. Currently, the UGC has no say in the appointment of top administrators to public universities.

A number of private universities don't hold meetings of boards of trustees, syndicates, finance committees and academic councils. Many don't even have VCs, pro-VCs and treasurers approved by the chancellor. Moreover, many do not submit audit reports to the education ministry. As a result, Private University Act-2010 is being violated, said the new report.

The commission also recommended closing evening, weekend and executive courses at public universities as they negatively

impact universities' image.

It, however, said universities can run diploma and short courses and vocational training after taking approval from the UGC and following specific policies.

The report suggested that the government should create an endowment fund to provide education loan to university students, and have a ranking of universities.

The government can take effective steps to formulate a policy to determine the land size for setting up campuses of the newly established universities, it added.

According to the UGC report, the tendency to launch educational programmes without having minimum infrastructure, laboratories and teaching staffs at newly established universities raises question about the quality of higher education. The government and the UGC can take initiatives to formulate a specific policy fixing the time for those universities to start educational activities.

There are 158 universities, including 50 public ones, in the country. Six of the private universities are yet to start academic activities, show UGC data.

There are 44.41 lakh students, including 20.65 lakh females, at the university level. The private universities have 3.10 lakh students, including 95,017 females.

China FM urges greater African voice in global governance

AFP, Addis Ababa

Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang said Wednesday that Africa should have a greater voice in the UN Security Council and other international bodies, long a demand of the continent's leaders.

Qin made the call in a statement issued as he met the head of the African Union Commission who voiced frustration at what he said was the exclusion of Africa from international governance.

"We should boost the representation and voice of developing countries, especially those of African countries, in the UN Security Council and other international organizations," Qin said at the inauguration of the Chinese-funded headquarters for the African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa.

Two children drown

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Two children, who were also cousins, drowned in a pond in Patuakhali's Galachipa upazila yesterday.

Rafia, 4, daughter of Nizam Mridha, and Maryam, 7, daughter of Masud Mridha, both from Sutabaria village, went to play by a pond near their house in the afternoon.

Neighbours and family members later found their bodies floating in the pond and rushed them to Chiknikandi Union Health Service Centre where the doctors declared them dead, said Chonit Kumar Gayen, officer-in-charge of Galachipa Police Station.

The bodies were handed over to their family members without an autopsy upon their request.

Gold bars worth Tk 2.5 crore seized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Border Guard Bangladesh yesterday arrested a man with 20 gold bars worth over Tk 2.5 crore from the bank of Naf river in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar early yesterday.

A BGB team arrested Mohammad Yash Noor, 22, of Uttarpara village, in a drive at Shahparirdwip and seized gold bars weighing 3.32kg, said Lt Col Sheikh Khalid Mohammad Itekhhar, commanding officer of BGB Battalion-2.

Yash admitted he, along with two others, smuggled the gold bars into Bangladesh from Myanmar, he added.

A case was filed with Teknaf Model Police Station against the three people while the police are on the lookout for the other two.

Israeli forces kill Palestinian in West Bank

AFP, Ramallah

Israeli forces killed a Palestinian in the occupied West Bank yesterday, the Palestinian health ministry said, as the army claimed rocks were thrown at Israeli forces during a raid.

"Samir Aouni Harbi Aslan, 41, was killed after he was wounded by a bullet of the Israeli occupation army that penetrated his chest during the aggression on Qalandia camp" for Palestinian refugees near Ramallah, the ministry said.

The Israeli military said troops fired on people who "hurled rocks and blocks from the rooftops aiming at soldiers operating beneath".

Eighteen people were arrested in overnight raids across the West Bank, the Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group said.

Government to launch

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Home ministry sources said devices for remote interception of calls, rogue BTS identification, dark and deep web monitoring, and content blocking and filtering have been purchased.

Social media monitoring tools require less time to process data and reveal sources. The OSINT supports collection and analysis of relevant and targeted information for a variety of needs, they said.

Earlier, the NTMC had purchased "Vehicle Mounted Data Interceptor" to help combat militant activities and also beef up security for the country's important persons, according to sources.

NID JOB UNDER HOME

Explaining the logic behind bringing

Work together

FROM PAGE 1

"Let's work together to have a better future and a better world," she said.

The premier said global recession, crises of food, fuel and fertilisers have added to the rising impacts of climate change making peoples' life unbearable. She said bold, concrete and concerted actions are required at the global level to face these challenges.

Hasina also highlighted before the G20 platform six important points for sustained economic growth and development of the Global South.

"First, global peace and stability must be maintained for the greater benefit of humanity. Second, need a new paradigm that will address inequality in a holistic manner in parallel with SDGs. Third, special financing needs of the most vulnerable countries, including LDCs, climate vulnerable countries, etc. must be met during their transition," she said.

Raising the fourth point, the PM called for bridging the "Digital Divides" to ensure equal opportunities for all, including women. "Take advantage of the 4th Industrial Revolution by investing in young population for which financing and technology transfer support is vital," she said.

In the fifth point, Hasina said all human beings should have equal rights to lead a decent life. "The global community must not forget ensuring return of the unfortunate forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals to Myanmar."

In her final point, the premier stressed the need for strengthening South-South and Triangular cooperation to ensure global human

the jobs related to national identity cards under the home ministry, Asaduzzaman told parliament that the Election Commission has no involvement in the use of NIDs except for polls.

In reply to a query from Gonoforum MP Mokabbir Khan, the home boss said, "The national identity registration process is done under the executive department in almost all countries in the world. In view of the reality, it should be under the executive department in Bangladesh.

"For this reason, the process of bringing it [issuance of NID cards] under the security service department of the Ministry of Home Affairs is ongoing."

development. "Here, support from partners, international financial institutions, private sectors, think-tanks, and other stakeholders are crucial," she said.

Hasina congratulated her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi and the Indian government on assumption of G20 presidency. "I deeply appreciate his strong commitment to make the G20 platform more meaningful by consultative engagement on inclusive development," she said.

She thanked the Indian government for inviting Bangladesh as a guest country to this important summit.

Talking about Bangladesh's recent development, the PM said the country has achieved rapid economic growth ensuring social justice for all.

"We've reduced the poverty rate from 41.5pc to 20pc in the last 14 years. Our per capita has tripled in just a decade. Bangladesh has fulfilled all criteria for graduating from the LDC category to a developing country."

Hasina said the IMF's latest report revealed that Bangladesh is the 35th largest economy of the world in terms of nominal GDP.

She said Bangladesh is ranked as world's fifth best Covid resilient country, and South Asia's best performer.

The Group of Twenty (G20) comprises 19 countries -- Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Türkiye, United Kingdom and United States -- and the European Union.

Government desperate to suppress opposition

Alleges Fakhrul

UNB, Dhaka

B N P Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir



yesterday alleged that the government has become “desperate” to suppress the opposition leaders and activists, being afraid of the ongoing pro-democracy movement. “You (AL leaders) used to say a few days back that we didn’t have the ability to stand on the streets and our backs were broken. But now you have become so restive that you are oppressing people by using all might to stop our movement,” he said.

Fakhrul made the remarks while speaking at a press conference at the BNP chairperson’s Gulshan

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A policeman gets cloaked in thick black smoke as two buses rev their engines and pass him by on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway. When this photojournalist conversed with the law enforcer, he informed that when he checked the fitness papers of the buses, they were in order, despite the fact that these vehicles are clearly unfit to ply the road. This photo was taken in Jatrabari area recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

JAMA’ATUL ANSAR

Five members of new militant group arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rab claimed to have arrested five members of the newly surfaced militant group “Jama’atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya” from Bandarban district on Wednesday.

Four of the arrestees have been identified as Nizamuddin Hiron alias Yousuf, 30, Saleh Ahmed alias Saiha, 27, Sadikur Rahman Suman, 30, Bayzid Islam alias Muaz, 31.

The fifth arrestee is a 17-year-old boy. All the five are in the list of 55 persons who left their homes for Hijrah in last two years, Khandaker Al Moin, Rab’s Legal and Media wing director, told a press briefing at Bandarban Rab camp yesterday.

Sadikur is among four youths left their Sylhet homes while the underage boy was among the eight persons who went into hiding from Cumilla in August last year, he added.

They were arrested in separate drives from the district’s remote Thanchi and Rowangchhari upazila, the Rab official said.

With the five, Rab has so far arrested three dozen members of the newly surfaced militant group.

Counterterrorism officials of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) also arrested some members of this group, said police.

According to Rab, more than 50 youths left their homes in the last two years to join the militant group.

Rajattwa, the metro baby! Woman gives birth in Agargaon station



Surrounded by scout members, Rajattwa in the safe arms of his father at Agargaon Metro Station yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Soniya Rani Roy was supposed to get admitted to a Dhanmondi hospital yesterday as she was in her last stage of pregnancy.

Like the previous time, she boarded the metro rail with her husband from Uttara North Station, intending to get down at Agargaon station and then take a ride to go to Renaissance Hospital in Dhanmondi.

But minutes after the train departed from Uttara station, Soniya began to experience labour pain. After getting down at Agargaon, her husband sought help from the metro-rail staffers, who took Soniya to the station’s first-aid room.

And then, she gave birth to a baby boy right there with the help of a female doctor, who was Soniya’s co-passenger, and scout members.

“It [the service we got at the station] was completely unexpected for us. It’s like the kind of services we get in developed countries,” Soniya’s

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Mountain police for CHT on cards

Government to deploy three battalions in camps left by the army

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Three specialised battalions of armed police will soon be deployed in Bandarban, Khagrachhari and Rangamati to ensure public safety and security.

In line with the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, the government will deploy the forces in camps left by the army, said home ministry officials.

The home and public administration ministries have already approved the proposal of forming the three battalions, said Farooque Ahmed, additional deputy inspector general (organization and management) of Police Headquarters.

“The proposal now remains pending at the finance ministry. We are hoping to get their approval soon,” he added.

The proposal was first sent to the home ministry on March 15, 2021. Following a series of meetings, a revised proposal was finalised on November 25, 2021.

On December 30, 2021, the proposal was forwarded to public administration ministry to allocate a manpower of 2,650 people to form the three battalions.

The public administration ministry, on July 27, 2022, approved a manpower of 2,260 people.

Meanwhile, on May 25, 2022, police received administrative approval from the home ministry to conduct operational activities of the battalions. According to the proposal, the

AT A GLANCE

70 officials under a DIG to look after 3 hill districts

Total additional DIGs: 5

Total SPs: 11

NUMBER OF OFFICIALS

Proposed posts: 2,260

Bandarban: 730

Rangamati: 730

Khagrachhari: 730

battalions would be named “Armed Police Mountain Battalion”.

The three units will be APMB-18 in Rangamati, APMB-19 in Bandarban, and APMB-20 in Khagrachhari. The battalions will be formed under the leadership of a deputy inspector general of police.

According to CHT people, these police battalions are supposed to have a certain percentage of human resources from the hill tracts. However, the proposal did not mention any such clause.

The Daily Star obtains a copy of the proposal.

The DIG office, responsible for the battalions, will have 70 members while the battalions will have 730

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CJ assigns HC bench to dispose of Holey Artisan attack case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Hasan Foez Siddique yesterday assigned a High Court bench led by Justice Shahidul Karim to hold hearing and disposing the death reference and appeals of the Holey Artisan attack case, as its paper book has already been prepared by the office concerned of the court.

The HC bench of Justice Shahidul Karim will now fix a date for starting hearing of the death reference and appeals of the case, Supreme Court spokesperson Mohammad Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

On July 1, 2016, five militants, armed with guns, machetes, and grenades, stormed the upscale eatery in the diplomatic zone in Gulshan and held the diner hostage before brutally killing 20 of them – three Bangladeshis, seven Japanese, nine Italians, and one Indian.

The militants were killed during a rescue operation by army commandos. Two police officials and a chef of the café were also killed during the 12-hour standoff while another injured staffer of the eatery died later. A Dhaka court on November 27, 2019, sentenced seven militants to death for their involvement in the attack.

AL to stay on streets to prevent BNP’s anarchy: Quader

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League will remain cautious about BNP’s movement and stay on the streets to protect people’s lives and property, said Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday.

“We will be cautious about BNP’s movement so they can’t create any anarchic situation. We are on the streets and won’t leave as we’ll perform our duty to protect the lives and property of people,” he said.

Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, made the remarks while talking to reporters at the secretariat on current issues.

While replying to a question about BNP’s leadership, Quader said, “Awami League will join

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MONEY LAUNDERING

Two top Destiny officials denied bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday denied bail to Destiny Group Managing Director Md Rafiqul Amin and Destiny Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd Chairman Mohammad Hossain in a money laundering case involving Tk 2,000 crore.

Two separate HC benches dismissed two appeals filed by Rafiqul and Hossain seeking bail in the case.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Khizir Hayat dismissed the appeal of Hossain and the bench of Justice SM Kuddus Zaman and Justice Fahmida Quader dismissed the appeal of Rafiqul.

A Dhaka court on May 12 last year sentenced all 46 accused, including Destiny Group Managing Director Rafiqul Amin and Destiny-2000 president Lt Gen (retd) Harun-Ar-Rashid, to different terms of imprisonment in the money laundering case.

Brac to hold ‘Hope Festival’ next month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Marking its 50 years of founding, Brac will organise a three-day festival in the capital in February, upholding stories of people’s successes and hosting a range of cultural performances.

Brac made the announcement during a press conference at a city hotel yesterday.

The “Hope Festival”, which is open for all, will be held at Bangladesh Army Stadium on February 9 to 11, from 11:00am to 10:00pm.

Anyone can register on the website -- brachopefestival.net -- to attend the festival, which will be the “epilogue” of Brac’s yearlong observances marking 50 years.

Brac Bangladesh Executive Director Asif Saleh said they started their 50th anniversary celebration about a year ago. Their plan was to

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A celebration of culture

Four-day Parbatya Mela starts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It was as if a piece of life on hills were brought to the capital. In this carnival of exchanging cultures, the people of the hills gathered to give a glimpse of their lives to the citizens of living in concretes.

Dhaka residents were seen busy browsing through traditional clothes or tasting the flavours brought fresh from the hills.

Such was the sight at “Parbatya Mela” currently ongoing at the Shilpakala Academy yesterday.

The four-day fair has been organised by the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, aiming to introduce and promote the products of the small ethnic communities.

State Minister for Cultural Affairs KM KHalid inaugurated the fair as chief guest with Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Minister Bir Bahadur Ushwe Sing in the chair.

At the end of the inaugural event, people started gathering on the complex premises. The shops opened, with bits and pieces of Bandarban, Rangamati, Khagrachhari in them.

Traditionally cooked dishes from the hill tracts were being sold at some stalls, including the famous Kola Pitha, Bora Pitha, Sanni Pitha, bamboo chicken and bamboo fish.

Meanwhile, many were decorated with agricultural products and fruits, including Binni rice, jhum pineapple, orange, perennial jackfruit, coconut kachu and Banglalkala.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



A woman uses a traditional handloom for weaving at the Parbatya Mela organised at Shilpakala Academy in the capital yesterday. The four-day fair includes traditional food, clothes and other items of the hill tracts, and cultural performances by artists from Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Naima Haider new chair of SC Legal Aid committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Justice Naima Haider of the High Court Division of Supreme Court has been appointed as chairman of the Supreme Court Legal Aid Committee (SCLAC), which provides legal assistance to poor litigants free of cost.

She is the first female chairperson of the Supreme Court Legal Aid Committee, which started its journey in September 2014.

Chief Justice Hasan Foez Siddique made the appointment because the outgoing chairman of SCLAC, Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim, was promoted as a judge of the Appellate Division of SC on December 8 last year.



Mountain police for CHT on cards

FROM PAGE 3
members each, said a PHQ official.

“Each battalion will be led by a police officer of additional DIG rank,” he added.

The human resources will be given specialised training before deployment in the hill areas, said a top official of the PHQ requesting anonymity.

Primarily, each battalion will set up 10 camps in the three districts, according to sources.

The battalions will conduct patrols and prevent criminal activities while the cases will be filed and investigated by the district police units, they said.

Contacted, Naimul Huq, superintendent of Khagrachhari police,

said there are places in the district where police vehicles cannot move at all.

“The newly formed battalions will set up camps in those remote areas and build roads,” he added.

“This way people will get access to police in every corner of the district,” he further said.

“Among other crimes,

we are frequently receiving complaints about conflicts between the settlers and hill people,” Naimul Huq told The Daily Star yesterday.

“We firmly believe that we will be able to solve the issue once we ensure robust access to the remote corners of the region and improve relationship with the people,” the SP explained.

Ghiyas Uddin no more

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Md Ghiyas Uddin, former professor of Sylhet MC College and father of



President Abdul Hamid's assistant press secretary Md Imranul Hasan, passed away yesterday.

Ghiyas, 77, died at his residence in Sylhet, said a press release of Bangabhaban.

The president expressed deep condolence at his demise.

In a condolence message, the president prayed for the salvation of the departed soul and expressed his condolences to the bereaved family.

First death anniversary of Abdul Matin

CITY DESK

Today is the first death anniversary of ABM Abdul Matin, former



director general (assistant secretary) of the external publicity wing at the foreign ministry.

As a veteran press and media personality, he served various home and diplomatic assignments in different senior capacities. He also made significant contribution to the Language Movement.

Relatives, friends and well-wishers are requested to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

A celebration

FROM PAGE 3

The fair will be open for everyone from 10:00am to 9:00pm. Various cultural events have been scheduled for each evening as well, according to the event organisers.

An effort to meet

FROM PAGE 5

lake, a playground, green belts, and other amenities.

Although the port city's masterplan states that the Chattogram Development Authority must undertake one housing project every year, it is failing to do so, Sahinul Islam Khan, a city planner, told The Daily Star recently.

Zahirul Alam Dubash, chairperson of CDA, told this newspaper that the development authority

is aiming to create new housing to address the housing crisis and boost CDA's income.

Founded in 1959, CDA has been implementing a dozen other housing projects, including the ones in Agrabad, Nasirabad, Salimpur, Kolpolok and Anonya areas.

It has already allocated 6,660 plots under 12 housing projects being implemented in those locations.

Tuition Wanted (IB)
If you (native/ foreign national) need an experienced and articulate tutor for IB math/ physics (SL/HL), I am that tutor. Contact: **01407-392145**

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LAND FOR SALE
ATTRACTIVE READY PLOT FOR SELL IN BASHUNDHARA R/A, BLOCK- M (4 KATHA) AND BLOCK- N (3 KATHA) NEAR MADANI AVENUE. FOR DETAILS: **PLEASE CALL: +88 01718704740**

Luxurious Apartment Sale
A Luxurious 4500sqft. Apartment on South-West corner Plot with all modern facilities-swimming Pool, Gym etc will be sold in DOHS, Banani. Pls Contact: **01711-353089**

Job Opportunity of European Union Funded TA SSSR Project Senior Expert: Labour Component
The European Union (EU) is providing support to the Government of Bangladesh through its Budget Support to the Finance Division and Technical Support to the Cabinet Division and Line Ministries in implementing the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS). The EU is also funding a Technical Assistance to Support Social Security Reforms (TA SSSR) which is supporting the GoB to strengthen their capacities in implementing strategic reform priorities in the social security sector.
TASSSR is looking for a position of Senior Non-Key Expert (SNKE) for its Labour component with the following requirements:
Expert's Profile/Requirements:
• At least a Masters level qualification • Over 10 years' professional experience, with 5 years in designing and delivering social development programmes • Knowledge and understanding of the social protection programmes • Government liaison to support programme implementation • Working experience in the export-oriented sectors and associations • Ability of support and establish worker database and capacity building to stakeholders.
For more details interested candidates are requested to send email to recruitment.tassr@gmail.com for ToR and send their CVs to the address by **20th January 2023**. Only short-listed applicants will be contacted.

Brand New Lake View G+8 (Full House) for Rent at SAVAR DOHS
Address : Plot # 429, Road # 104, Savar DOHS
Total Flat : 15
Size : 1300 Sft (Each flat)
Flat Details : 3 x Beds, 3 x washrooms
1x Kitchen, 1x Dining Room, 1x Drawing Room
Parking : 10
Completion Status : Ready
Any local and foreign companies can take the entire house for rent. We humbly request not to contact for only one or two flats.
Contact Number : 01973002228, 01864740726 Rent : BDT 4,00,000 (Negotiable)

Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF)
PKSF Bhahan, E-4/B, Agargaon Administrative Area, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207
Phone: 8181658-61, 8181664-69, 8181169 Website: <http://www.pksf.org.bd>
Vacancy Announcement
Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF)-an apex development organization was established by the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1990 for sustainable poverty reduction through employment generation. Since its inception, PKSF has been implementing various poverty alleviation programs and projects through its Partner Organizations (POs) all over the country.
PKSF is implementing a project titled 'Pathways to Prosperity for Extremely Poor People-European Union (PPEPP-EU)' financed by the European Union. The objectives of the project are to contribute to poverty reduction and resilient livelihoods in the targeted regions of Bangladesh. This project is being implemented in the north-western, south-western, north-eastern Haor region and specially focused areas for ethnic minority & disadvantaged groups of Bangladesh.
PKSF hereby invites applications from the suitable candidates for the following position under the PPEPP-EU project:

S.N.	Name of the Position	No. of Post	Consolidated Monthly Salary (BDT)
1	Project Director	01	450,000/-

The employee will be recruited initially for one year with an opportunity for annual performance-based renewal during the project period. Interested candidates who fulfill the requirements may submit online application by 22 January 2023. Please visit PKSF website (www.pksf.org.bd) for detailed job description and instructions to apply.
Only short-listed candidates will be contacted. PKSF is an equal opportunity employer. Any kind of persuasion will be treated as disqualification of the candidate. PKSF reserves the right to cancel this recruitment process without assigning any reason whatsoever.
*** Women are especially encouraged to apply.
Senior General Manager (HR)

Dhaka South City Corporation
Office of the Executive Engineer
Zone-1 (Nagar Bhaban)
e-Tender Notice
Memo No. egp/dscc/zone-01/06/2022-2023
Those are online tenders, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).
e-Tenders are invited in e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Executive Engineer, Zone-1, Dhaka South City Corporation for the procurement of:

Sl. No.	Tender ID & Package No.	Name of works	Publishing date & time	Last selling date & time	Tender opening date & time
1.	774631 WR39/Z-1/MF_D10/ FY22-23	Development works of road & drainage system from HN-19/1 to 23/B Kathal Bagan bi-lane, From 34 Free School Street to 63/3 through 35 Free School Street, From 73/C to 64/A, From 35 Free School Street to 41/1 through 42/5 and bi-lanes of North road in Ward No. 16 of Zone-01 under Dhaka South City Corporation (FY 2022-23).	15/01/2023 21:00	31/01/2023 13:00	31/01/2023 17:00
2.	777765 (Re-Tender) WR30/Z-1/C_G/ FY22-23	Development works of road & drainage system for Kalibagan 1st lane (from HN-15 to HN-25), Lake Circus bi-lane (from HN-98/1 to HN-99 & HN-104 to HN-106/1) Partial part of Daffin Gully (HN-93 to HN-44/4) in Ward No. 17 of Zone-01 under Dhaka South City Corporation (FY 2022-23).	15/01/2023 21:00	29/01/2023 13:00	29/01/2023 17:00
3.	777785 (Re-Tender) WR11/Z-1/W_21/ Dhaka Gate/ FY22-23	Renovation of "Historical Dhaka Gate".	15/01/2023 21:00	29/01/2023 13:00	29/01/2023 17:00

Mithun Chandra Shil
Executive Engineer
Zone-1
Dhaka South City Corporation
Telephone No. 02-223388454
E-mail: zenzone1dscc@gmail.com
ডিসেম্বর/প্রিন্সিপাল/১৩/২০২২-২০২৩
GD-63

a female doctor was in the train and helped her give birth to the baby,” Mahfuzur told this newspaper yesterday.

Later, the newborn and mother were sent to Renaissance Hospital in an ambulance, he said, adding that all metro rail stations have first-aid rooms for passengers.

This is the second baby boy for Sukanta, a police official, and Soniya, a home-maker.

Asked whether they will name the baby with something related to the metro rail, he said they had already set his name. “Our first baby is Rajbir, and the name of our second son would be Rajattwa.”

AL to stay on streets

FROM PAGE 3

the next election under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina but who is BNP's leader? In the last election they took part in the election under

the leadership of Kamal Hossain.”

“Without Jamaat, BNP is powerless as BNP and Jamaat are the two sides of the same coin..” he said.

Brac to hold

FROM PAGE 3

arrange a festival last year, but it was delayed because of emerging situations like the flood and pandemic.

Brac Enterprises Managing Director Tamara Hasan Abed said they want to uphold and celebrate the stories of how people changed their own lives in the past 50 years alongside the country's progress.

There will be three thematic areas – “A tribute to Bangladesh”, “The power of potential”, and “Building a world we want” – for each day of the festival.

In the festival, a group of young change-makers will be felicitated with the “Amra Notun Network

Young Changemakers Award” for their contributions. Besides, “TAAGA Outstanding Young Professionals Award” will be given to women for their contributions at the workplace.

In each evening, cultural performances will feature popular artists and groups of the country.

Bkash, Brac Bank, IPDC Finance and Brac University are partners of the festival.

The press conference was also addressed by Brac Bank Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Selim RF Hussain, IPDC Finance MD and CEO Mominul Islam, and Bkash CEO Kamal Quadir.

Government

FROM PAGE 3

office, condemning the attacks on BNP's sit-in programme in Faridpur and Mymensingh and some other areas in the country by police and ruling party activists on Wednesday.

He said the government has lost the ground beneath its feet. “The government has become so scared that they are carrying out attacks on our peaceful programmes.”

The BNP leader also said the ruling party leaders are making various unguarded comments about the ongoing movement sensing their fall.

He alleged that the armed “cadres” of the ruling party attacked BNP's programme in Faridpur and Mymensingh in presence of law enforcers.

The police not only played the role of a silent spectator there but also attacked the leaders and workers of BNP, lobbed teargas shells and charged batons on them.

The BNP leader claimed that the law enforcers also arrested over 100 BNP leaders and activists from the two divisions while over 250 others were injured during the attacks.

Besides, he said police filed a case against BNP leaders and activists in Faridpur in connection with the clash.

About Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader's remark on the outcome of the simultaneous movement with small parties, Fakhrul said people do not care about what the ruling party leader says. “Like me, people all over the country don't give any importance to his remarks.”

NO PROGRAMME AT DISTRICT LEVEL ON JAN 16
Fakhrul said their party

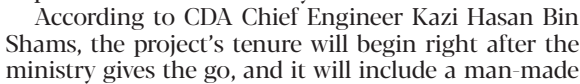
will hold a rally and procession programme on January 16 in all cities and upazila headquarters to press home their 10-point demand and protest the government's power price hike decision.

“Yesterday (Wednesday) I said the programme will also be observed in all districts. But the programme will be observed only in all metropolitan cities and upazilas, not in the districts.”

HOUSE WANTED
A Diplomatic Mission in Dhaka is looking for a new, ready for immediate occupancy, independent building or apartment complex preferably Gulshan/Baridhara having spacious rooms with attached bathrooms, a reception room, large parking space, guard room and drivers' room. Interested owners are requested to mail details of their building at **kuwait_embd@yahoo.com** at the earliest.

The outpatient department can facilitate surgeries, and orthopaedic, dental, and maternal and paediatric care, said Health Minister Zahid Maleque.

It will cost Tk 40 lakh to develop one residential plot and Tk 1 crore for a commercial plot. The project outline states that CDA will develop 167 residential and 18 commercial plots on Lope Road in Bayazid Bostami area.





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স্বাস্থ্য সুরক্ষার উপায়

Memo No. 46.16.6700.015.09.048.2020. Date: 12-01-2023

e-Tender Notice No. 05/2022-23

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of goods by NCC Own & ADP fund under Re-settlement of small Businessman and construction of Aparajita School in Narayanganj City Corporation. Details are given below.

No.	Tender ID No.	Package No. & Description of work	Online tender notice publication date	Online tender closing date
1	775099	NCC-Aparajita-G-2 Supplying of Furniture for Aparajita School under Narayanganj City Corporation.	12/01/2023	Please see tender notice in e-GP

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd). This notice is also available in Narayanganj City Corporation website (www.ncc.gov.bd). Payments for the supplied goods will be made in accordance with the availability of fund.


Md. Abdul Aziz
 Superintending Engineer
 Narayanganj City Corporation
 Ph: 02-7645032

GD-62



EKUSHEY BOI MELA

Celebs who will publish this year

Since 1991, Ekushey Padak-winning actor, Abul Hayat has been publishing new books at the fair. This year, the noted actor will publish a storybook, titled “Ronjit Godhuli”.

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

As February approaches, writers are gearing up for this year’s Ekushey Boi Mela, in hopes of publishing their books and interacting with fans. Like every year, several celebrities are also busy with publishing and promoting their new books.

Since 1991, Ekushey Padak-winning actor Abul Hayat has been publishing new books at the fair. This year, the noted actor will once again be publishing a storybook, titled *Ronjit Godhuli*. The book will be published under the Priyo Bangla Production house.

“I write for my passion and love of the craft. I feel really good when readers receive my books with love. So, I hope they will also enjoy my new book as well,” shared Abul Hayat.

National Award-winning actor and director, Tauquir Ahmed has been publishing his poetry and drama books for a few years now. This year, he will be releasing a book on theatre plays, at the book fair.

Director Animesh Aich will also be publishing a novel this year, titled *Ek Botal Ondhokar* under the Kingbodonti publication house. Speaking about the moment, Animesh said, “I feel accomplished when I see people reading my book.”

Film director Arun Chowdhuri has been writing books for quite some time, to better connect with readers. This year, he will be releasing a new book titled *Koyek Fota Jol*



Ashna Habib Bhabna

under Annanya publications.

Prominent actress Ashna Habib Bhabna became quite popular amongst readers for her books. So far, she has published a total of three novels at the Ekushey Boi Mela. This year, she will be launching her fourth novel, titled *Kajer Meve*, under Kingbodonti publication house.

Readers can also look forward to *Premtantrik Prithibir Shopno Theke Bicchuto Hoyar Age* by singer Sajia Sultana Putul, which will be hitting the stalls at this year’s book fair. Putul has been a regular



Putul Sajia Sultana

writer at the fair for the last couple of years.

“I am very grateful to my readers for receiving my books so positively, over the past few years. I hope they won’t be disappointed with my new book this year,” said Putul.

Lux Superstar and actor Shanu has already published 11 books of stories and poems. This year, she will be publishing a poetry book and a novel titled, *Bhalobashar Epar Opar* and “Lipstick”, respectively. The poetry book will be published under Ajob publication, while the novel will be released under Annanya publication.



Rakhi Sawant is now ‘Fatima’ after marriage

In a recent social media post that went viral, it was unveiled that Rakhi Sawant and boyfriend Adil Khan have tied the knot. Photos, videos and even the marriage certificate have now been unveiled to the media.

It was on that certificate, that it was revealed Rakhi had also made an addition to her name. She has taken on ‘Fatima’ as her nickname, making her Rakhi Sawant Fatima.

Her wedding photos went viral amidst the turbulent times Sawant is going through. Rakhi herself informed her audiences about her mother’s illness, on her social media platform.

BTS’s concert film to hit theatres in February

Following the massive success of BTS’s free of charge show in Busan last year, the group has more in store for the fans. After seeing an upwards of 50,000 attendees, the fans who had missed out will now have the chance to enjoy the full performance from all angles as a movie, called *BTS: Yet to Come in Cinemas*.

The group announced sale of tickets and the screening mediums on their social media yesterday.

The movie is set to be released worldwide on February 1, 2023.



NEWS

Numbers drop sharply

FROM PAGE 12

targeted families of the dissidents located abroad.

“The Foreign Ministry reportedly prepared a list of dissidents abroad, who are committing ‘anti-state’ activities, and authorities increasingly targeted relatives of expat dissidents,” said the report.

It further mentioned that the brother of London-based news editor Shamsul Alam Liton was arrested after he published a critical editorial of the ruling party and organised protests in Britain against disappearances.

The report also said that the brother of another correspondent of that newspaper, Abdul Muktaadir Manu, was also arrested. In addition, the sister of US-based journalist Kanak Sarwar spent six months in prison.

It said the government continued to arrest critics under the draconian Digital Security Act and ignored pleas from the United Nations and international partners to suspend and

reform the abusive law.

Thereport slammed the deregistration of the NGO Odhikar, saying that this is a part of the longstanding harassment to punish the organisation for reporting extrajudicial killings by Bangladesh security forces in 2013.

It also spoke about the alleged custodial death of indigenous activist Nabayan Chakma Milon, saying that the torture and death of Milon sheds light on state abuses in the Chittagong Hill Tracts without redress.

“Governments that fail to live up to their legal obligations to protect human rights at home sow the seeds of discontent, instability, and ultimately crisis.

“Left unchecked, the egregious actions of abusive governments escalate, cementing the belief that corruption, censorship, impunity, and violence are the most effective tools to achieve their aims,” said Tirana Hassan, acting executive director of HRW, in the report.

Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 2

assistance programmes to create more efficient logistics systems and unleash private investment in areas like clean energy, ports, and railways,” Haas added.

In Bangladesh, as in other low and middle-income countries across the region, infrastructure is critical to driving inclusive and sustainable development.

Infrastructure connects workers to good jobs; allows businesses to grow and thrive; and creates opportunities for all segments of society, including underserved communities.

“But delivering high quality infrastructure takes more than just financial investment. It also requires working to support the necessary institutional and policy frameworks, regulatory environment, and human capacity to structure projects to attract private investment,” said the ambassador.

It requires strong engineering, environmental, social, governance, and labour standards to ensure a positive impact, he added.

Infrastructure comes in many forms and sizes, from the large-scale energy systems that power inclusive economies to the local healthcare networks that contribute to global

health security, to cellular towers and undersea cables that move our data and enable a seamless, open worldwide exchange of information.

Meeting infrastructure needs across the Indo-Pacific requires a wide range of public and private financing options.

“No one country can go it alone. That’s why in June 2022, President Biden announced the United States aims to mobilise an additional \$200 billion in investment as part of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment,” said the envoy.

The US has always been a strong supporter of development finance through the multilateral system, Haas added.

The US embassy co-hosted two panels for this year’s Indo-Pacific Business Forum with the Japanese embassy in Bangladesh featuring Ambassador Haas, Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Iwama Kiminori and Economic Relations Division Secretary Sharifa Khan.

Panellists discussed how to ensure infrastructure investment benefits bring a positive impact across society, and how connecting major corporations with women-owned businesses can foster women’s economic empowerment.

Such move

FROM PAGE 2

a company run by a former Israeli intelligence commander, which arrived here in June last year.

In this regard, TIB Executive Director Ittekkharuzzaman said people have the right to know the government’s precise explanation regarding the purchase and use of technology that undermines people’s privacy, security and freedom of speech and above all, threatens the lives and livelihoods of individuals.

“Nothing was purchased directly from Israel” – the government’s interpretation does not mean that this Israeli technology was not imported,” he said.

The published news clearly mentions that the purchase was made through intermediaries in Cyprus at a cost of around Tk 60 crore due to the lack of diplomatic relations between Israel and Bangladesh, he added.

The National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC) commander and other senior officials even visited Greece in 2021 and 2022 to learn how to operate this technology, Ittekkharuzzaman said, referring to the Israeli media report.

“If this information is false, it is the responsibility of the authorities concerned and the government to prove it. After all, there is no room for doubt that this technology has already reached the relevant agencies of the government,” he added.

“There is no option to use this technology until a concrete policy involving all parties is formulated to ensure the constitutional rights of individuals. If not, Bangladesh will be considered as a completely surveillance-based state by trampling public interest.”

Situation in Soledar

FROM PAGE 12

Russian forces fighting in Soledar and in other battles.

“Huge work has been done in Soledar, absolutely selfless heroic actions, not only in Soledar, but also in many places,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

“There is still a lot of work ahead. The main work is yet to come,” he added.

On Wednesday, Moscow announced a major military reshuffle, putting Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov in charge of its operations in Ukraine.

‘Guitarist’s guitarist’

FROM PAGE 12

B.B. King.

In 2022, Beck released his final album: “18,” a 13-track collection of mostly cover songs, with Hollywood star Johnny Depp.

“We slowly built songs that we just like. We didn’t really make any design,” Beck said at the time.

A native of Wallington, England, Beck won his first Grammy award in 1985 with the instrumental “Escape.” He would go on to win seven more of the gold-plated statuettes in his career.

Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi mourned Beck’s death on Twitter, saying he was shocked to hear of his passing.

“Jeff was such a nice person and an outstanding iconic, genius guitar player - there will never be another Jeff Beck,” Iommi wrote. “His playing was very special & distinctively brilliant! He will be missed.”

Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page, also a former Yardbirds member, paid tribute to Beck, saying his technique was unique and imagination limitless.

“The six stringed Warrior is no longer here for us to admire the spell he could weave around our mortal emotions. Jeff could channel music from the ethereal,” he said. “Jeff, I will miss you along with your millions of fans.”

Govt may embark

FROM PAGE 12

elevated road instead of constructing any dam in the haor areas.

“It’s not a luxury project; rather it is essential for the hoar people,” Speaking to The Daily Star, Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, termed the project luxurious.

“It is not the right time to undertake such a project amid the depletion of the forex reserves. This project can be taken up at a convenient time later,” he said.

Mansur added that import of construction materials might increase the project cost as elevated roads usually need heavy metal and other accessories, prices of which are high in the international market now.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the project is essential, but the government should move slowly at this time amid the ongoing austerity measures.

‘It poses no health risk’

FROM PAGE 12

conducted between January and June, 2022.

The BARC ran tests on 315 samples of 1,200 broiler chickens and poultry feed, collected from five district towns, to examine the presence of 10 antibiotics and three heavy metals, said Razzaque at the press briefing, organised at the Press Information Department at the Secretariat.

Of the 10 antibiotics, seven were sent to SGS Laboratory in Chennai of India for examination.

These are Enrofloxacin, Ciprofloxacin, Neomycin, Tylosin, Cholestyline, Amoxycillin and Sulfadiazine.

Three others – Chloramphenicol, Oxytetracycline and Doxycycline – were tested at a laboratory of the Department of Livestock in Savar.

“No presence of the seven antibiotics that were sent to India for testing were found in broiler chickens,” Rafiqul told the Daily Star.

The BARC found the presence of two antibiotics, oxytetracycline and doxycycline, and three leads – arsenic, chromium and lead – in the meat, which is far below the maximum residue limit (MRL).

The MRL is the maximum amount of pesticide or other chemical residue that is expected to remain in food products when a pesticide is used according to label directions. If the MRL is maintained, that food will not be a concern to human health.

For instance, the presence of Oxytetracycline in the chickens was found to be eight micrograms per kg, while the MRL is 100 micrograms per kg.

The presence of Doxycycline was 9.1 micrograms per kg, while the MRL for that is also 100 micrograms per kg.

“Just like the people of the country use paracetamol for cold or light fever, many poultry farmers use these antibiotics frequently ... Representatives of some medicine companies also prescribe poultry farmers to use these,” Rafiqul said.

The department concerned should take measures to discourage the practice and bring the use of antibiotics down to zero, he said, adding that excessive use of antibiotics in poultry can make the consumers become resistant to it.

The levels of antibiotics and lead in the chicken’s bones, liver and

kidney were also found to be lower than the MRL.

Responding to a question, Rafiqul said the government should strictly monitor the market to prevent unscrupulous businesses from cashing in on the research findings and misusing it for business profit.

Earlier at the press briefing, Razzaque brushed aside the concept of using tannery waste in poultry feed.

“The yearly demand for poultry feed is about 95 lakh tonnes, whereas only 85,000 tonnes of tannery waste is generated per year. Compared to the demand, the tannery waste is insignificant,” he said.

Dr Sitesh Chandra Bachar, professor of Dhaka University’s pharmacy department, suggested bringing down the use of antibiotics further.

“Farmers use it for the good growth of poultry, but we also have to consider its negative impacts on human health,” he said, adding, “The amount that is found is not significant but the authorities concerned should increase monitoring so that its arbitrary use can be stopped.”

Matia elected

FROM PAGE 12

leader of parliament.

Matia, an MP from Sherpur-2, is also a former agriculture minister.

Names of veteran AL leaders Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Matia Chowdhury and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim were discussed for the post after Sajeda’s death.

There is no legal obligation to fill the post of deputy leader in parliament.

During the 2001-06 tenure of the BNP Jamaat government, then prime minister Khaleda Zia did not appoint anyone to the post.

However, AL has always filled the post with a senior party leader.

Webb telescope

FROM PAGE 12

Wednesday at the 241st meeting of the American Astronomical Society in Seattle.

“The fact that it is also a small, rocky planet is impressive for the observatory,” Stevenson said.

Better policy needed to boost remittance

Authorities should take migrant-friendly initiatives to encourage them

With millions of its migrant workers spread around the world, particularly in the Middle East, Bangladesh could boost remittance inflow and thereby its forex reserves simply by following a "stick and carrot" policy: carrot (or incentives) for migrants sending in remittances through legal channels, and stick (or punishment) for hundi cartels/operators facilitating illegal transfer of remittances. Unfortunately, it has managed to do neither. Its current policy can be summed up as a jumble of part-carrot-but-no-stick measures. As a consequence, even after the biggest surge in its history of migrant worker outflow recorded last year, it didn't amount to a surge in remittance receipt.

In fact, according to a report by *The Daily Star*, while more than 11.35 lakh Bangladeshis left for jobs abroad in 2022 – nearly doubling the figure from 2021 when 6.17 lakh flew abroad – remittances sent in through formal channels actually registered a 6.65 percent drop. The amount in 2022 was USD 21.28 billion; in 2021, it was USD 22 billion. How to explain this inverse effect? Why have we failed to translate a record migrant outflow into an increase in remittance inflow?

This would be a worrying development at any time. But it has special significance now, coming as it does at a time when Bangladesh is struggling with a protracted dollar crisis to pay for escalated imports. Already, owing to lower remittance receipt and moderate export earnings, the country's forex reserves declined from the January 2021 high of USD 44.95 billion to a disquieting low of USD 32.52 billion earlier this week. Bangladesh desperately needs to shore up its reserves, and remittance – as a crucial player at both macro and micro levels of our economy – could do the trick.

The reasons for the decline in remittance numbers are not unknown. Many migrants choose unofficial channels because of the ease of sending money. Many have no legal status, which deters them from using official channels. Not having financial literacy, or sufficient incentives from the government, is also an issue. Hundi, for them, offers a more advantageous alternative. But most importantly, in recent times, the yawning gap in the dollar rates offered by the informal market and the banking channel has emerged as a big motivation for those using illegal channels. It's no surprise, then, that in a desperate bid to collect/process remittance, a number of banks are ignoring directives to not offer over Tk 107 for each US dollar coming in as remittance.

This speaks of a deeply unsustainable, unregulated foreign exchange ecosystem that neither serves the country nor the migrants in the long run. The authorities need to address this issue urgently. As economists have suggested, the central bank should allow a market-oriented exchange rate and beef up surveillance to rein in illegal transfer of remittances. The government also needs to take firmer action against hundi cartels, and raise awareness among migrants and their families about the importance of using formal channels. Increasing the government incentive on legal remittance transfer from the existing 2.5 percent to 5-10 percent, as an expert has suggested, can work as an extra motivation.

Stop polluting waters with untreated sewage

Dhaka Wasa's continued failure to prevent this is inexcusable

It is quite frustrating to learn that sewage from Dhaka's posh residential areas such as Gulshan, Baridhara, Banani and Niketan is landing, untreated, into nearby lakes and other water bodies as well as the open drains of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC), with Dhaka Wasa taking hardly any action to prevent it. There is no proper sewage management system in these neighbourhoods. According to a report by *Prothom Alo*, the DNCC mayor has launched drives in these areas against those responsible for polluting water bodies. Reportedly, the DNCC cleaning staff has stopped some illegal sewer connections temporarily by shoving banana trunks into the pipes. While the mayor deserves our support for taking some action against the law-breaking building owners of the areas, we need to look at the broader picture to fix the problem permanently.

Building owners, of course, are guilty of polluting the water bodies, but the main culprit is Dhaka Wasa, the agency responsible for taking care of the city's overall sewage management system. Reportedly, Wasa has been regularly charging sewer bills from city residents without providing them any service in this regard. As reported in the media, between FY 2018-19 and FY 2020-21, it collected Tk 1,066 crore from the residents for sewage treatment. While it took some projects to improve Dhaka's sewage management networks, we still do not know of any visible progress being made in this regard.

A *Prothom Alo* report from last year revealed how the sewage system of Dhaka has completely broken down over the last decades. The report also found that in over 80 percent of city areas, there was never any proper sewage management system in place. Often the pipelines are faulty, or the required treatment plants are missing. And it is because of Wasa's inefficiency, mismanagement and irregularities that the city still does not have such a system. The result of its inefficiency has been reflected in a survey done recently among 550 houses in Baridhara. It has been found that only five of all the houses surveyed have a proper sewage system, while 342 houses have sewage connections directly leading to open drains or lakes.

In such a situation, the drives conducted by the DNCC were more than necessary. This would not only give a message to the building owners that they cannot continue polluting water bodies, but would also put pressure on Dhaka Wasa to do its job properly. In recent years, the agency and its controversial, long-time managing director were repeatedly in the news for failing to perform their mandated responsibilities. Various allegations of irregularities have also been raised against the MD for which he must answer to the public.

In simple words, Dhaka Wasa must be held accountable for its failure to prevent wholesale contamination of our water bodies. It must be made to serve the residents.

Graduate unemployment: Who's to blame?



Dr Manzoor Ahmed is professor emeritus at Brac University, chair of Bangladesh ECD Network (BEN), and vice chair of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE).

MANZOOR AHMED

A two-day-long job fair was hosted during January 7-8 in Gazipur, by the deputy commissioner of the district. The purpose was to help connect job-seekers and employers – a commendable objective. The event drew media attention when the minister of liberation war affairs, AKM Mozammel Haque, as chief guest, said, "Universities have become factories that churn out unemployable people. The resources and talents of the country are being wasted." He also observed that a job advertisement by the district administration for an office peon would attract applications from a thousand people with Master's degrees.

An Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) report in 2014 had claimed that 47 percent of university graduates in Bangladesh were unemployed. That is almost half of the graduates. A 2017 Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) report went a step further and reported 66 percent unemployment among graduates.

The EIU report attracted media attention and was challenged on several counts. The method generally used for measuring unemployment did not capture the specific situation of the graduates. For instance, a portion of graduates did not accept jobs that did not meet their expectations in respect of salary, working conditions, or fit one's aptitude and field of education. A large number of women graduates, as many as one-third, chose not to be in the job market. The methodology of measuring unemployment does not account for underemployment (part-time jobs or jobs paying lower than comparable market wage), seasonal employment, and paid or casually paid employment in family enterprises. And the questions posed about the EIU report also could be asked about the BIDS report.

But to mention the failings of the EIU or BIDS reports is not to deny the problem with respect to both education and employment. It just points to difficulties of defining the problem.

In fact, having a higher youth (15-24 years) unemployment rate than the general unemployment rate is a global phenomenon. In Bangladesh, according to BBS, this stood at 10.6 percent in 2021, more than twice the overall national unemployment rate of 5.2 percent.

The populist remedies for youth and educated unemployment, echoed by the minister, include: providing more technical and vocational training

at tertiary and pre-tertiary levels; restricting expansion of and entry into higher education; providing more job-related academic programmes and courses; and making tertiary education more practical for life (besides just making students tech-savvy). There are also boilerplate demands for better teaching learning, curriculum reform, more research, and so on.

All these points have some validity, but taking each remedy in an isolated manner without a coherent and coordinated plan, and more importantly, not following through with effective implementation steps cannot produce the desired results.



VISUAL: TEENI AND TUNI

At the secondary level, in the last two decades, participation in technical-vocational education has risen from one percent to 15 percent, but the result has not been satisfactory with respect to training quality and marketability of learners. This is especially the case with vocational courses in general secondary schools.

Bangladesh actually remains behind many other developing countries in providing higher education opportunities. And so, employability of graduates has remained an issue.

With rapidly changing technology, labour market and job profiles, it is unrealistic to expect an arithmetic symmetry between skill requirements of jobs and what is learned in tertiary institutions. Universities can provide generic skills useful for a range of jobs. Job-specific skills are better acquired through internship, apprenticeship, induction training, short training courses, and on-the-job upgrading, which demand university-industry collaboration. This result is attained

when an acceptable quality of instruction is maintained.

The flexible supply-demand relationship in the job market puts a premium on the quality of education, irrespective of the subject or discipline of a student. This is where the greatest failure of Bangladesh's tertiary education system lies. When employers complain about not finding the workers they need, they are often talking about job-seekers lacking communication and literacy skills, the ability to think rationally and critically, computer skills, creativity, and soft skills such as working in a team, maintaining discipline, and taking pride in one's work.

There are policy and strategy measures needed in education, not just for higher education. A rapidly changing job market, dominance of digital technology in future jobs, and need for the capability to adapt to change and upgrade workers' skills accordingly demand an acceptable quality of general secondary schools. The secondary level – as provider of

foundational competencies for the future workforce of the nation (in both the formal and informal economy) – has to ensure that competencies in language and communication, maths, and science are acquired by all to an acceptable level. The beginning, in fact, has to be made in the early childhood development stage and must continue through primary and secondary education.

All the deficits of school education cannot possibly be overcome at the tertiary level when students already arrive there unprepared in terms of the basic skills and knowledge needed to pursue higher education at colleges, universities, and higher level technical training institutions. But there is a lot that also has to be done to improve the performance of tertiary education.

A Strategic Plan for Higher Education Development (SPHED 2018-30) was prepared by the University Grants Commission (UGC) with assistance from the World Bank. The president of the country (as the chancellor of

universities), the prime minister, and the then education minister wrote messages endorsing the plan and encouraging its implementation.

An initiative, with government approval and Unesco and Global Partnership for Education support, to develop an education sector plan was undertaken and a draft was prepared in 2020. The education authorities, for reasons not quite comprehensible – except perhaps customary inertia and a preference for the status quo – have not taken any steps to move it forward. The draft sector plan for Bangladesh sits idle on the website of the Global Partnership for Education. Meanwhile, the first five-year phase of the strategic plan for higher education approved by the government passed without any demonstrable steps taken for implementing it.

A few of the key points of the SPHED and the draft education sector plan worth highlighting are: a) Political and administrative decision-makers should vow to protect higher education from destructive, shortsighted and politically-motivated decisions and actions.

b) The highest priority should be given to bringing institutions up to agreed-upon standards and no new institutions should be established without a guarantee of maintaining these standards for physical facilities, teaching personnel, and educational activities.

c) An urgent action plan should be initiated for colleges under the National University regarding physical facilities, teaching staff, and accountable management; division-wise affiliated universities should be set up as anticipated in the Quadrat-e-Khuda Education Commission.

d) The UGC should be transformed into a Higher Education Commission with the authority, capacity, and resources to supervise the quality improvement of public and private higher education entities.

e) The 1973 public university ordinances and the 2010 Private Universities Act should be appropriately amended, balancing academic autonomy, fostering an academic environment, and promoting accountable governance.

f) Investment and capacity-building in educational technology should lead to widespread adoption of blended learning among all institutions and learners.

The way ahead lies in a strategic agenda, based on a social compact to promote the complementarity of public and private contributions within a regulatory framework aimed at optimising the "public good" aspects of skills development and tertiary education.

The irony is that this is a political settlement challenge, which has hindered progress so far.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

America's missing ambassador to India



AWAKENING INDIA

Shashi Tharoor, a former UN under-secretary-general and former Indian Minister of State for External Affairs and Minister of State for Human Resource Development, is an MP for the Indian National Congress.

SHASHI THAROOR

The recent decision by President Joe Biden's administration to renominate former Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti to be US ambassador to India has highlighted the peculiar state of the bilateral relationship.

Since Biden took office two years ago, the US has not had an ambassador in New Delhi – and this at a time when the US is assiduously courting India as a potential counterweight to China in the Indo-Pacific. Together with fellow Quad members Australia, Japan, and the US, India is essential to maintaining the balance of power in the region. And as a member of the fledgling I2U2 partnership, which also includes Israel, the UAE, and the US, India has a crucial role to play in containing Chinese influence in the Middle East.

Given India's strategic importance, why has the White House left the ambassador position vacant for two years? The answer has nothing to do with India.

Garcetti was nominated in July 2021, a few months into the new administration. But his Senate confirmation ran into trouble over

allegations that, as mayor, he ignored sexual harassment complaints against one of his aides.

Garcetti's alleged awareness of his aide's misconduct and his failure to act led some Democrats to join Republicans in refusing to call a vote on his appointment. In April, nine months after his nomination was announced, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer admitted that he might not have the votes to confirm Garcetti, leaving the ambassador position in limbo.

Indian officials, initially nonplussed, became irritated. Over the past 20 months, several US envoys served as chargé d'affaires at the New Delhi embassy, but they were all transferred and replaced before they could establish the local relationships vital to their success.

The absence of a US ambassador has raised questions about America's commitment to deepening ties with India. Biden has called the US-India partnership "one of the most important relationships we have" and hailed the country as an "indispensable" partner. But the

administration's inability to name an ambassador has led some Indians to wonder whether the US would have left the same post in London or Paris vacant for so long.

Meanwhile, the strategic relationship between the US and India has never been more crucial. For years, India resisted pressures to take sides in the US' escalating rivalry with China. But China's recent encroachments on Indian territory in the Himalayas have caused India to challenge Chinese expansionism.

India is also an important economic partner. The US is one of the subcontinent's biggest sources of foreign direct investment, with annual FDI standing at USD 45 billion in 2021. Unnerved by China's dominance over global supply chains, US officials have been encouraging domestic companies to establish manufacturing bases elsewhere, placing India at the centre of the administration's "friend-shoring" agenda. Apple, for example, is expected to produce roughly 25 percent of its iPhones in India by 2025. Similarly, the Indian pharmaceutical industry is capable of replacing China as America's main supplier of common generic medications.

But the failure to confirm Garcetti has undermined this mutually beneficial relationship. His confirmation struggles aside, Garcetti is a good choice for the post. He is young (51) and energetic, and his close relationship with Biden suggests that he would enjoy direct access to the president.

Having a US ambassador who has the president's ear is advantageous for the host country. Roosevelt House, as the ambassador's residence in New Delhi is called, has been occupied by colourful figures like economist John Kenneth Galbraith, who famously went straight to his close friend President John F Kennedy whenever he wanted to bypass State Department bureaucracy, including during the Sino-Indian War.

While White House officials shrug and privately blame the Senate confirmation process for the absence of a permanent ambassador, the question remains: If India matters as much as the US says it does, why has the administration not acted more forcefully to get its nominee confirmed?

India, which assumed the G20 presidency in December, fits remarkably well into America's global vision, and the two countries have much to gain from cooperating on common concerns such as climate change and Islamic terrorism. While they seem to disagree on how to contain China's rise, that is all the more reason to ensure that the mechanisms of diplomacy are functioning properly.

Above all, the White House must expend the political capital necessary to confirm an ambassador who can cultivate the personal relationships needed to maintain America's most important partnership in Asia. It is time for the Biden administration to get its act together and put Garcetti on a plane to New Delhi without further delay.

Can AI solve the insanity of Dhaka’s traffic?



NO STRINGS
ATTACHED

Aasha Mehreen Amin
is joint editor at
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AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

Might be wrong but when we talk about artificial intelligence (AI), isn't it assumed that some plain, regular "intelligence" must preclude it? In other words, it is expected that before jumping into the rather new and unexplored realm of artificial intelligence, we should have at least dabbled a bit in some old-fashioned "common sense."

The announcement of the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) installing an AI-driven signalling system to fix Dhaka's number-one debilitating disease – its paralysing traffic congestion – is a bit of a jolt to our pea brains. After all, how can we forget the much-hyped-about automated traffic lights in all the main streets installed 15 years ago, at a cost of Tk 119 crore, that may be described by brutal critics as resulting in "a big fat zero"?

Experts are not impressed with the latest news and are decrying that "no science will work unless roads are expanded and discipline enforced." Let's focus on the word "discipline" and see what we have of it when it comes to our streets.

Along the less than seven percent of the city area that are roads, we have about 17.8 lakh registered vehicles rushing through. These include the over three lakh private cars, one lakh vans, 84,000 plus minibuses, 78,000 trucks, 37,000 buses, 30,000 taxicabs, thousands of other vehicles such as taxicabs, covered vans, human haulers, tempos, jeeps, tractors, auto-rickshaws, nasimons

and so on, which are circumvented by daredevils zigzagging on about nine lakh motorbikes. Interspersed between all this are the snail-paced rickshaw vans carrying everything from garbage to furniture, and the thousands of rickshaws driven by nonchalant pullers who actually try to race against private cars and will take sharp turns on the busiest roads.

But let's not forget the hordes of self-righteous jaywalkers who will perform praiseworthy acrobatics to climb over or squeeze through road dividers, consciously risking dismemberment and death, rather than walk to the footbridge just a few feet away. They will also think nothing of calmly crossing a busy thoroughfare with just the power of The Hand. The expectation is that no matter what speed the motorised vehicle is running at, it must come to a screeching halt as soon as that magical raised hand is seen.

Given these realities, it is not surprising that the streets resemble a battlefield where the victorious is whoever can elbow the others out to come out first. This is no football game where foul moves will entail red cards or penalties – the referees, in this case, the traffic cops, are either absent, or busy halting commoners for VIP movement. No, this is full-on war where one must go to one's destination and be ahead of others, at all costs.

In the hierarchy of vehicles, buses have all the power. They may be



ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

rickety – with broken windshields and backlights, and battered, with most of their coating scraped off, and emitting the blackest of smoke – but they rule the roads completely and always have "right of way." They can stop in the middle of the road to pick up passengers, ram into smaller vehicles, nudge other buses while in a high speed race against them – in the middle of the road, perhaps flattening the human bodies that dare to come in their way – and zoom away without inviting even a cursory glance from the traffic police who has been made indifferent with some magic "tea money." Trucks, too, enjoy this power, but only after dark do they live up to their "killers on the road" title.

The next in rank are the monstrosity large SUVs that usually belong to a VIP or a "VRP" (very rich person), and both titles come with similar levels of entitlement. These vehicles will just keep edging away the little vehicle, be it a sedan or an auto-rickshaw, using their special sirens (sometimes wireless speakers) to intimidate and shoo away the minions.

But private sedans, some of them swanky sports cars, do enter the race – especially if they are driven by the offspring of a VIP or VRP. In fact these precious creatures often think of themselves as little Schumachers and will whiz by on Airport Road and the little lanes of residential areas alike, adding to the thrills and

palpitations of those in the other vehicles or travelling on foot.

Obviously logic and common sense do not have any role to play in Dhaka's mad and maddening traffic, which is why the much celebrated automated traffic signals did precious little and the traffic police went back to the age-old way of controlling traffic – with their hand movements and a rusty whistle.

Against this backdrop, how will AI signalling work? Will AI be able to fix the complete lack of regard for traffic rules and basic decency of drivers and jaywalkers when they are on the streets? Will this "intelligence" be able to stop the wheeling and dealing that make it possible for dilapidated vehicles and

stuntmen disguised as drivers to go about their business of making Dhaka the seventh worst city in traffic management? Will AI be able to make sure motorised and non-motorised vehicles do not ply the same roads? Will it help to expand the road area to the 25 percent level needed to detangle the continuous gridlock? And will it clear the footpaths, stop the double and triple parking on busy streets? Most importantly, will artificial intelligence be able to prevent the 40 plus new private cars entering Dhaka's streets every day?

Perhaps we need to introduce some good old "natural intelligence" to our traffic management, before elevating it with the artificial kind.

When the American Nightmare kills a Bangladeshi Dream

Prithwi Raj Chaturvedi
is a researcher and political analyst.

PRITHWI RAJ CHATURVEDI

It is always unsettling to hear about people's lives being taken under the most arbitrary pretexts by law enforcement agencies who are in charge of ensuring the overall security of all citizens. The assertion that George Floyd's death would be – and must be – the last such killing at the hands of law enforcement spread throughout the weeks following his murder by a Minneapolis police officer on May 25, 2020.

Unfortunately, there has been no progress in the rate of fatal police violence in the US.

the police officer who opened fire. The victim's family has denied the police's claim that Faisal was carrying a large knife. As of yet, no evidence has been provided by authorities. The very public debate about police brutality in the US has been rekindled by this deadly use of force by the police.

Statistics from the last two decades show that US society is confronted with a wide range of domestic human rights issues, and hate crimes, mass shootings, structural racism, and police violence have increased alarmingly. According to a new study in *The Lancet*, there have been around 32,000 police-related killings in the US during 1980–2019, with nearly 55 percent of these killings being misclassified or unreported.

documented by *The Washington Post*, which concluded that since 2015, police have killed almost 1,000 individuals annually.

This shocking regularity of killings suggests that nothing has changed substantially under the Biden administration to disrupt the nationwide dynamic of police brutality. Instead, it appears to be getting worse year after year.

Extrajudicial executions are wrong in every way, both morally and judicially. They violate core human rights and supersede the "right to justice" in addition to breaking international laws and conventions. But unfortunately, a culture of impunity for police brutality also exists in the US judicial system. Police officers are given unique legal protections under US

the population, the rate of fatal police shootings of unarmed black people is more than three times as high as it is for white people.

In light of recent developments, Robert Reich, Clinton's secretary of labour, said the socioeconomic structure in the US today is identical to the apartheid system in South Africa.

Numerous studies have found that gun violence has escalated to be a serious social issue that cannot be stopped. The US-based think tank Pew Research Center estimates that a total of 45,222 people died in gun violence-related incidents in 2020, which is 43 percent higher than a decade ago, 25 percent more than five years ago, and 14 percent more than the year before.

The most fundamental human right – the right to life – is threatened by gun violence. It has significant and lasting psychological impacts on individuals, families, and on the larger community. In a 2014 report, the NGO Human Rights Watch noted that minority populations are disproportionately affected by these violations: "Victims are often the most vulnerable members of society: racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, children, the elderly, the poor, and prisoners."

Despite the US' advanced technology and well-trained police force, more than a thousand people are killed by on-duty police officers each year without due process of law. Now, concerns have been raised regarding US police's role in reducing the rising tide of violence. Human rights organisations accused the US government of failing to do more to halt these atrocities.

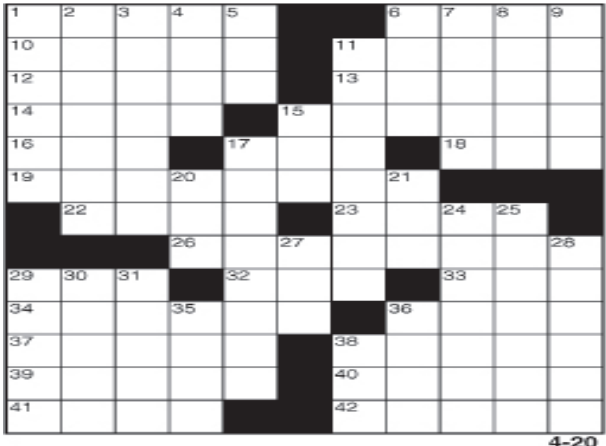
The State Department's goal of promoting human rights abroad would undoubtedly be called into question by the bleak picture of the human rights situation there. Since the United States has an undeniable history of police brutality and its police departments have been guilty of countless murders, it would be challenging for Washington to uphold its moral standing to pass judgement on other countries.

Finally, extrajudicial executions by law enforcement agencies aren't normal in any society, whether it be in the developed world or the developing world. Every crime must be tried in fair tribunals, and offenders must receive just punishment. Governments must not be allowed to normalise police brutality. Washington's moral position to criticise other nations on rights issues will gradually erode until it is willing to uphold such rights itself.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

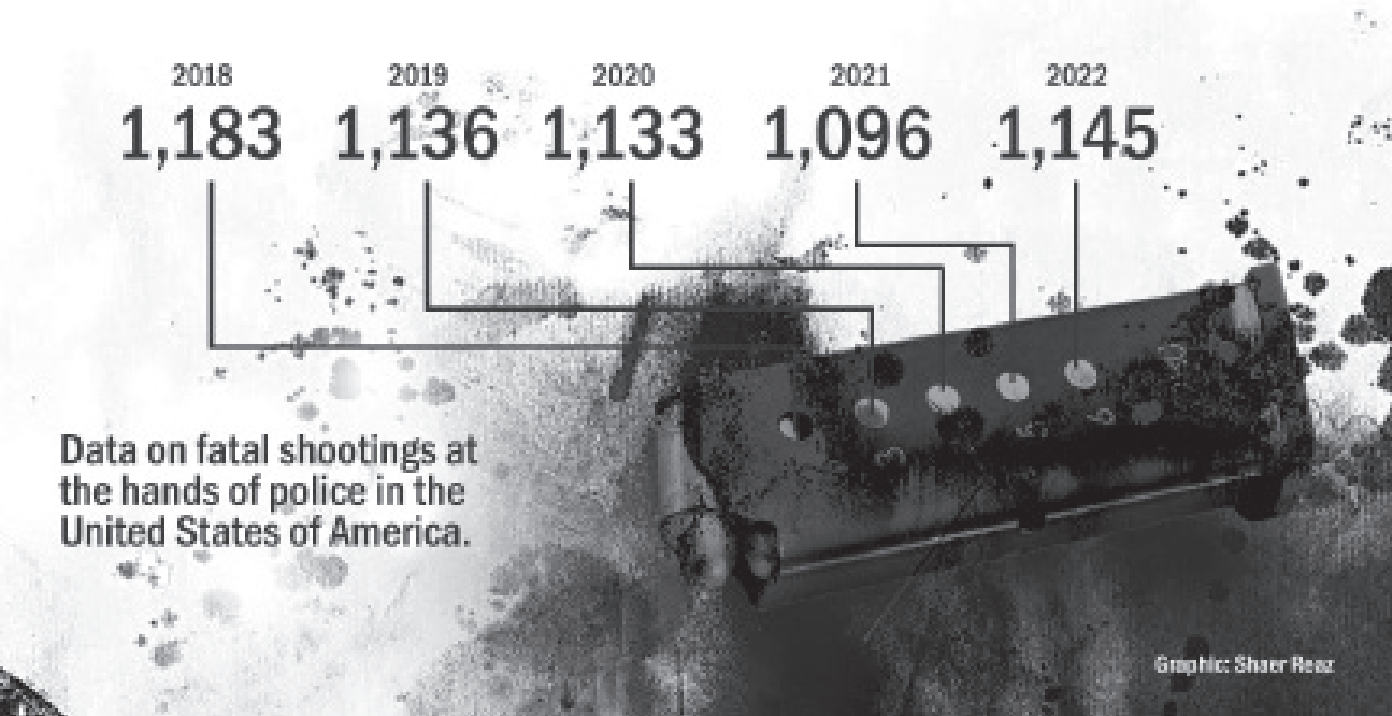
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1 Check marks	34 Vim	11 With cunning
6 Ticket half	36 ERA or RBI	15 Old hand
10 Extreme pain	37 Concur	17 Security clip-ons
11 Like new pennies	38 Personal record	20 Research setting
12 Enticed	40 Bert's buddy	21 Pester
13 Words to a hitcher	41 Dance unit	24 Big Sky setting
14 "Citizen –"	42 Intended	25 Give the oath of office to
15 Magic word		27 Put down
16 Binary digit	DOWN	28 Procrastinator's words
17 Hot blood	1 Discuss	29 Succotash half
18 Evergreen shrub	2 Big lizards	30 Silver bar
19 Collapse	3 Ithaca school	31 Audacity
22 Thick slice	4 Pants part	35 Take in
23 Blocks	5 Barrett of Pink Floyd	36 Royal address
26 Debutante's wear	6 Oxford, e.g.	38 Rep.'s rival
29 Storage spot	7 Slightly drunk	
32 Calendar box	8 Brink together	
33 Role for		

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SUNDAY'S ANSWERS

M	E	L	O	N		C	E	L	I	A
E	L	E	N	A		O	M	E	N	S
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In a tragic turn of events, a young Bangladeshi student, Sayed Arif Faisal, was fatally shot to death by police in the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts, on January 4. This has spurred protests and enraged the Bangladeshi community living in the US state. The Bangladesh Association of New England (BANE), which described the death as a "racist incident by white police officers," strongly denounced the "brutal killing" and demanded a fair probe of the incident and punishment of

The racist actions of the Trump administration are well-known. But it is distressing to note that there has been no change in the situation of racially-motivated police violence during the current Biden administration. Despite Biden's pledge to end the situation, law enforcement organisations killed 1,183 people in 2022, averaging about three deaths per day, according to Mapping Police Violence, a non-profit research organisation. Similar patterns have been

law in both criminal and civil proceedings.

Racial discrimination permeates the fundamental fabric of US society and the country's political system. Sadly, racial profiling is still a regular practice in a number of US states. It leads to the hypothesis that white US Americans' perception of black people in the US, a country that preaches democratic values, is nonetheless still aligned with the mindset prevalent in times of slavery. Despite making up only 13 percent of



REVIEWING THE VIEWS

Revisiting the BITs of Bangladesh

Many of the investment protection treaties of Bangladesh include potentially broad and vague provisions which could be interpreted by the arbitral tribunal in a manner giving preference to investment protection over Bangladesh's exercise of regulatory power to adopt measures directed at achieving legitimate policy objectives.

IMTIAZ AHMED SAJAL

In an interdependent global economy, the movement of capital from one part to another has become a common phenomenon. Every state needs to maintain friendly economic relationship with other states, which is done ordinarily by multilateral or bilateral free trade agreements. This facilitates cross-border movement of goods and services. Globally, there are more than 3000 international investment agreements (IIAs), including 2850 bilateral investment treaties (BITs) today. The proliferation of BITs depicts the accelerated engagement of states in inter-state economic activities and capital transfer. Some countries have good production base, but they do not have enough capital to utilise that. Other countries have more capitals, but they do not have adequate facilities to invest that. This is how countries cooperate in importing and exporting of capitals. Capital importing countries offer fair treatment and safeguard for foreign investments. Capital exporting countries then enter legal relations to secure their investments in other countries.

Bangladesh has signed a considerable number of IIAs with different countries and regional economic integration organisations. Bangladesh started signing BITs in 1980 with the UK as part of its larger policy shift towards economic liberalisation through boosting multilateral trade and foreign investment flows into and out of the country. Immediately after signing the BIT with the UK, Bangladesh enacted the Foreign Private Investment (Promotion and Protection) Act 1980 to secure all foreign investments. Till now, Bangladesh has signed 31 BITs with countries from different parts of the world. Bangladesh has also entered 4 other treaties with investment provisions. As

a founding member of the WTO, Bangladesh is committed to carrying out its multilateral trade obligations.

While foreign investors demand strong protection of their investments under the BITs by incorporating provisions scrutinising any legitimate acts or measures of host state amounting to violations of foreign investments protection standards, host state is actively advocating for their sovereign right to regulate. Regulatory power is the ability of the host state in adopting variety of measures to achieve wide ranging policy objectives. Right to regulate is the sovereign prerogative of a country arising from the control over its own territory. Historically, the divergent position of investment protection and sovereign regulatory power started suddenly after the World War II with the evolution of newly independent (formerly colonised) states. These newly independent states of Global South realised that most of their natural resources are in the hands of private entities having origins in their colonisers. It is in this context that those newly independent developing states, by using their numerical majority in the General Assembly of the UN, passed the resolutions on Permanent Sovereignty over natural resources; New International Economic Order; and Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States. In all these, they have reiterated their sovereign power to regulate foreign investments in their territories.

At the same time countries of the Global North started entering into new deals/agreements, designed solely with the single objective of protecting their own investments, with developing countries who were unaware of the consequences of those treaties. As such, international investment law has been almost purposefully developed

in isolation. Some states, as well as scholars, have argued that such compartmentalised development aids in the promotion of the sectional interest in investment protection to the detriment of the global interest in environmental protection, as well as the protection of human rights, labour rights, cultural rights, and the rights of indigenous peoples. With the increase of South-South cooperation, intra-developing states investment has also increased considerably in recent past. This new paradigm has led to another phenomenon. Now the more powerful developing countries (prospective investors) want to dictate the terms of IIAs in diminution of host states' regulatory power to incapacitate their weaker counterpart.

Many of the investment protection treaties of Bangladesh include potentially broad and vague provisions which could be interpreted by the arbitral tribunal in a manner giving preference to investment protection over Bangladesh's exercise of regulatory power to adopt measures directed at achieving legitimate policy objectives. Bangladesh can go for re-negotiation of its first-generation BITs (where sole purpose is to secure investment, and protection of foreign investment has been given priority over other considerations) to insert an express provision to protect legitimate public welfare objectives so that it will not constitute expropriation or nationalisation. Bangladesh as a capital importing country must tailor the four core provisions of BITs namely – fair and equitable treatment; expropriation; non-precluded measures; and monetary transfer provisions to safeguard its regulatory power as host state.

The Writer is Lecturer in Law, Bangladesh Army International University of Science and Technology (BAIUST), Cumilla.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

A passenger's guide to legal provisions on the Metro Rail

SURIYA TARANNUM SUSAN

Bangladesh has stepped into a milestone in public transportation through the inauguration of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Line-6 project, also known as the metro rail on 28 December 2022. Hitherto, the Metro Rail Act, 2015 was enacted to consolidate all the metro rail-related legislation under a legal framework. Amongst all the provisions in this Act, the regulations on compensatory claims and penalties concern the passengers the most.

Compensation to an injured person

Section 25 provides for compensation to a person injured or dead as a result of injury arising from the operation of metro rail. The licensee (a person licensed under this Act for the construction, maintenance, operation, and development of metro rail) will be obliged to pay compensation to the injured person, or his family as prescribed by law. Section 26 mandates the licensee to arrange the transfer of any injured person owing to metro rail operations in the nearest hospital. In case the injured person receives his own treatment, the licensee must reimburse the injured person in consonance with the prescribed rules.

Compulsory insurance payout

Compulsory insurance of metro rail, its passenger and third parties are a must for a licensee under section 28 (l). In case of any accident, the licensee shall, on its own accord, inform the insurance company within 90 days and pay the reparation money to the injured person.

Compensation to third parties

A similar provision applies in case of injury suffered by any person or his property apart from Metro rail and its passengers (section 29).

Along with these provisions, the Act also provides an array of criminalised acts and mentions their penalty.

Unauthorised entrance in a prohibited area

Unauthorised entry into a restricted area of metro rail is penalised with maximum one year imprisonment or a fine not exceeding Tk 5 lakh, or both (section 34).



Disruption in the metro rail and passengers' safety

Any disruption in the metro rail and the safety of its passengers shall be punished with imprisonment not exceeding five years, or a fine of maximum Tk 50 lakh, or both (section 35).

Unauthorised sale of tickets

Selling metro rail tickets or passes without authorisation, distorting or falsifying the tickets is punishable with imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years or a fine of Tk 1 crore, or both (section 36).

Travelling without tickets

Commuting the train without a ticket or pass is penalised with a fine which will be ten times the metro rail's fare (section 40). On non-payment of the required fine, there shall be imprisonment of six months.

Aiding, abetting, inciting, and conspiring

Assistance, incitement, and conspiracy in the commission of any offence within the purview of this Act which leads to the commission of that offence are punishable with the penalty prescribed for that offence (section 43).

Recurrence of crime

If a previous convict repeats the offence, his penalty shall be twice the maximum punishment (section 44).

These legal provisions shall enlighten a passenger on compensatory claims and penalties surrounding the metro rail.

The Writer is Contributor, Law Desk, The Daily Star.

LAW EVENT

Human Rights Summer School: An unconventional legal education model

As the Covid pandemic retires, Empowerment through Law of the Common People (ELCOP) organised the 21st edition of the Human Rights Summer School (HRSS) for law students. It took place in Proshika HRDC, Koitta, Manikganj, from 17 to 27 December 2022.

HRSS is an intensive residential human rights short course organised usually at a rural-based venue. *Adhikarbhumi* (the land of rights) is a fictitious land for the participants to showcase their legal skills for ten days. This year's theme for the summer school was "Human Rights and Bangladesh: Leadership in Prospect". A total of 42 participants from 19 universities in Bangladesh, Nepal, and India, attended the HRSS.

Professor Mizanur Rahman, the leading human rights educationist in the country, started this unique residential model of law and human rights teaching in 2000. Professor Rahman champions the idea of "Lawyering with the poor is lawyering for justice". A flock of law teachers from both home and abroad trains summer school participants to craft the technique of human rights advocacy and interpret the law through the lens of the disadvantaged.

Following the clinical method of legal education, the HRSS allows the participants to understand human rights and other related issues. The residential training comprised class lectures, brainstorming, small group exercises, presentations, simulations, community visits, negotiations, and mootings.

In the simulation segment, the students were tasked with a fact-finding mission in which various fictional characters were created and played by the residential instructors and volunteers. The students played the role of the fact finders, and the instructors shadowed them throughout the process and provided them with their

The participants made a day-long community visit to the remote villages of Manikganj to investigate the socio-legal grievances of the community.



insights on the student's performance. In short, the principle of "I listen, I forget; I see, I remember; I act, I understand" was followed in the process.

The participants made a day-long community visit to the remote villages of Manikganj to investigate the socio-legal grievances of the community. The purpose of this visit was to acquaint the students with the reality of society and get their mindset out of the mere assembly of words in law books. With the direct contact of

the people in a community, the stages of implementation of laws written in the text can be realised.

This year summer school conducted a negotiation simulation where the participants assumed the role of various stakeholders such as the government, international development bank, human rights defenders (NGOs), and community members. It helped to nourish creativity among the students by encouraging them to seek new and unorthodox approaches to

legal issues.

Leading scholars, media personalities, judges, advocates, and academics from the USA, Nepal, and Bangladesh attended the HRSS as speakers and trainers. Professor Biswajit Chanda, Dr. Manmay Zafar, novelist Harishankar Jaladas, dramatist Mamunur Rashid, storywriter Professor Syed Manjoorul Islam, essayist and critic Professor Salimullah Khan, freedom fighter Lt. Col. Sajjad Ali Zahir Bir Pratik, among others, conduct sessions. Roshani Adhikari of Tribhuvan University received Professor KAA Quamruddin Memorial Trophy for being adjudged as the Best Fellow of the Summer School. Jannatul Ferdous Shrabony of Jahangirnagar University bagged the Professor ZI Choudhury Award for showing Academic Excellence, while Noor Ariya Alam of East West University received the KM Subhan Memorial Best Mooting Trophy for her brilliant submission on moot fact. Baishakhi Karmakar of Jagannath University was awarded the Best Fact-Finding Trophy named after late Professor M Shah Alam.

Event report by Shanto Deb Roy, Law Student, Jagannath University, and Participant in the 21st HRSS.

Messi resumes normalcy upon return

AGENCIES

Lionel Messi scored in Paris Saint-Germain's 2-0 win over Angers in Ligue 1 on Wednesday on his first appearance since leading Argentina to victory in the 2022 World Cup. The Argentina captain broke a bunch of age-old records in Qatar and the latest strike saw Messi bag 696 goals across his senior club career for Barcelona and PSG since debuting for the former in the 2004-05 season. Messi and Cristiano are now tied on the number of goals scored in Europe's top five leagues – featuring England, Spain, Italy, Germany, and France. Messi's 24th goal for the Parisian side following his move from Barcelona in 2021 now places the 35-year-old five shy of Ronaldo's 701-goal tally in club football, which the 37-year-old Portuguese superstar netted during his illustrious career for Manchester United (118, and 27 in second spell there), Real Madrid (450), Juventus (101), and Sporting CP (5), where he kick-started his club-career in the 2002-03 season. As the Portugal captain had said his "work is done" in Europe after being unveiled as a player of Saudi Arabian club Al Nassr earlier this month, Messi could soon be the second but the youngest in history to hit the 700 mark and then surpass Ronaldo in becoming the all-time highest scorer in club football. The two had long been inseparable due to their outrageous and consistent performances, especially during their overlapping spells in Spanish League. However, despite remaining a continent apart, Ronaldo and Messi could soon be reunited on the pitch as PSG are slated for a friendly against a team made up of players from Al Nassr and Al Hilal in Riyadh on January 19. Earlier, Messi had rested for PSG's first three matches following the long break in the season caused by the World Cup but he returned to training in Paris a week ago and was back in the starting line-up for this game against Ligue 1's bottom side.

In the meantime, the absence of Kylian Mbappe meant that young striker Hugo Ekitike again started in the home attack at the Parc des Princes and he opened the scoring in the fifth minute from a Nordi Mukiele cross at the end of a move in which Messi also featured. PSG were not at their sparkling best but Messi swept in his 13th club goal of the season to make it 2-0 with 17 minutes left. Ekitike and Mukiele were again involved before Messi applied the finish. The goal was initially disallowed for offside but a VAR check allowed it to stand.



Lionel Messi scored the second for PSG in their 2-0 win over Angers as he returned to action for Les Parisiens on Wednesday night. The goal was the Argentine's 696th strike in European football, as many as Cristiano Ronaldo scored for Manchester United, Real Madrid and Juventus combined.

PHOTO: PSG



Spinners have been a non-factor in the Bangladesh Premier League so far and although the wickets in Chattogram are far more batting-friendly than in Mirpur, spinners like Taijul Islam -- who is yet to play a single game -- will be hoping to finally get going and make an impact in the country's premier T20 tournament.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

A need for growing T20 bowling skills

SPORTS REPORTER

It was Fortune Barishal skipper Shakib Al Hasan who said that bowlers have not quite turned up at the ninth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), especially during night fixtures where pitches offered big scores. As a format, the T20 mindset and culture is still in its primary period. The lack of T20s in the domestic circuit, except the BPL, has been brought up as a key reason for why it is more difficult to bring up players ready for the format. The batters have found some rhythm and a few bowlers have shown their mettle so far, but as the Chattogram phase begins on Friday – with Chattogram Challengers taking on Fortune Barishal in the day's opening fixture – the onus will be on the bowlers to respond in kind on wickets where runs are expected. Barishal's Ebadot Hossain talked about the same need for improvement. Although he referred to the quicks, spinners need to get on their game too. "Chattogram's wickets are always batting friendly. The fast bowlers need to improve their skill and bowl intelligently. Given that wickets are friendly for batters, the pacers with more skill will do better compared to others," Ebadot said while talking to reporters at Chattogram yesterday. The national team pacer was not just talking about BPL success.



He himself was at the receiving end of a bitter end to Bangladesh's Asia Cup campaign last year, when he bagged crucial wickets but Sri Lanka targeted him at the death and took him for runs to seize the game away from the Tigers. With ICC wickets providing sporting surfaces at the very least, it is the need of the hour to get accustomed to bowling on batting-friendly surfaces. India recently scored over 400 runs in the third ODI in Chattogram but the Bangladesh bowlers can take valuable lessons from the experience. Sylhet Strikers skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is the leading wicket-taker with seven wickets in this BPL alongside Al Amin Hossain. Mashrafe has brought his experience and new-ball bowling skills and has not been hit for too many runs. Al Amin though suffered, conceding an economy rate of over nine. Sylhet's other pace duo Rejaur Rahman Raja and Mohammad Amir are second on the list with six wickets. The freedom

to express themselves has not only allowed batters but also the bowlers of Sylhet to shine. "Raja bagged four wickets in the first game of the Dhaka phase. Everyone said that although the wicket was good, Raja bowled well. Wickets got better and better after that in Dhaka. Chattogram is always good, so if we can do well on these surfaces, it will help in the upcoming World Cup," said Ebadot. When batters were able to show superiority, bowlers were not often on the mark. The yorkers have not come through while slower deliveries have been picked off when the surface has not held up slightly. "You have to be accurate with your yorkers and slower," he reminded, with death-bowling still a headache for the national side. Ebadot said he has been working with his Bangladesh teammate and Comilla Victorians pacer Mustafizur Rahman to develop his cutters. "My strength is to bowl fast and I have the yorker going for me. Along with that I am working on cutters and their accuracy. Mustafizur is good at cutters and I was learning from him. He changed the grip of my slower bouncers and it helped me," he said. Working as a unit always works for pacers. Ebadot has Khaled Ahmed in his side. If the pacers can get their execution right in these BPL tracks, it will be the best thing for the national team.

'Bayern have obligation to sign a goalkeeper'

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich manager Julian Nagelsmann said on Thursday the club "have an obligation" to sign another goalkeeper in winter, with first-choice stopper Manuel Neuer set to miss most of 2023 with a broken leg. Nagelsmann said he has been impressed with Neuer backup Sven Ulreich at training, but felt another 'keeper was necessary. "From my perspective, we have an obligation to sign another goalkeeper," Nagelsmann told reporters. Bayern sit four points clear at the top of the Bundesliga table and will meet Ligue 1 giants Paris Saint-Germain in the first leg of the Round of 16 of the Champions League on February 14. "The goalkeeper market (in winter) is complex. There is no team which would gladly give up its first-choice goalkeeper. "There are not many players on the market – and you can't just build one (a goalkeeper)," Nagelsmann added.

Women footballers to gauge progress in Olympic Qualifiers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh, winners of the SAFF Women's Championship 2022, are all set to feature in the Women's Olympic Football tournament 2024 Asian Qualifiers this year. Bangladesh were pitted against strong Iran, Myanmar, and Maldives in Group B in Round 1 of the tournament during a draw in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. The group matches are scheduled to be held from April 3 to 11 at a neutral venue which has not been fixed yet. Some 26 teams, split into seven groups, will play Round 1 with the champions from each group advancing to the second round where DPR Korea, Japan, Australia, China PR, and Korea Republic will take part directly. Four teams from Round 2 – the three group winners and the best-ranked runners-up – will then face off in Round 3. The top two teams from the Round 3 will eventually qualify for the Paris 2024 Women's Olympic Football Tournament. "To be honest, we have been pitted against strong teams like Myanmar and Iran and it is tough to overcome them as we lost to Myanmar 0-5 during the Asian Qualifiers of the Tokyo Olympics in 2019 and suffered a 0-5 defeat against Iran during the Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers 2021," said Bangladesh women's team head coach Golam Rabbani Choton. "However, I am optimistic to perform better this time as the girls are now more mature," Choton said. "We want to see the progress we have made in the last couple of years by taking part in 2024 Qualifiers."

Afghans slam 'pathetic' CA

AFP, Sydney

Australia pulled out of an upcoming series against Afghanistan in the United Arab Emirates on Thursday, citing Taliban moves to further restrict women's rights. The men's team were due to face their Afghan counterparts in three ODI games in March following a tour to India. The Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) in Kabul described Australia's decision as "pathetic". "The decision to withdraw... is unfair and unexpected and will have a negative impact," the ACB said in a statement, which did not mention the shrinking of women's rights in Afghanistan nor the Taliban's ban on female sport. The ACB said it would contact the International Cricket Council and was considering withdrawing its players from Australia's domestic Big Bash League in retaliation. Cricket Australia (CA) said their decision was taken after talks with concerned parties that included the Australian government. "This decision follows the recent announcement by the Taliban of further restrictions on women's and girls' education and employment opportunities and their ability to access parks and gyms," it said in a statement. "CA is committed to supporting growing the game for women and men around the world, including in Afghanistan. "(We) will continue to engage with the Afghanistan Cricket Board in anticipation of improved conditions for women and girls in the country," it said. The games against Afghanistan were part of the ICC Super League. Australia will forfeit 30 competition points for the series, which go towards World Cup qualification. However, they have already secured automatic qualification for the 50-over tournament in India later this year.

Nadal's path rocky from the get-go

AGENCIES, Adelaide

Rafael Nadal will face a difficult opening test at the Australian Open against British lefty Jack Draper, while Novak Djokovic and Nick Kyrgios are in the same quarter of the draw, it was revealed Thursday afternoon at Melbourne Park. Defending champion Nadal will need to be sharp from his first match against Draper, especially after he stormed past Karen Khachanov and into the Adelaide International semifinals on Thursday. "It'll be amazing to play on court with him, he's a great champion," Draper said of his impending clash against Nadal. "[There are] a lot of emotions obviously when I think of playing him, but that's one thing, I've still got to go and play tomorrow and hopefully do well in this tournament first. "Whatever happens, it'll be a special occasion for me, still very young in my career, so it's great to have these sort of experiences and exposure to playing someone like Rafa on a big court like that. But I want to play really well and I want to compete hard and do the best I can." If 22-time major winner Nadal navigates past the British star, his path will not get easier, with one of two Americans – Mackenzie McDonald or reigning Next Gen ATP Finals champion Brandon Nakashima – waiting in the second round. Also in the Spaniard's quarter is seventh seed Daniil Medvedev, which means a rematch of the 2022 Australian Open final between Nadal and Medvedev could be played in the last eight. Sixteenth seed Frances Tiafoe, who upset Nadal at last year's US Open, is a potential fourth-round opponent. Nick Kyrgios landed in the opposite quarter. The 19th-seed could play ninth seed Holger Rune in the third round and fifth seed Andrey Rublev in the fourth



round before a quarterfinal clash against Djokovic, who begins his pursuit of a record-tying 22nd major title against Spaniard Roberto Carballes Baena. In the women's side of the draw, world number one

Iga Swiatek is the one to beat without retired great Serena Williams and last year's champion Ashleigh Barty. With two-time Melbourne winner Naomi Osaka also missing, it is almost certain that there will be a new name in the Daphne Akhurst trophy. The only former title-holders left in the draw are out-of-sorts Sofia Kenin, who won in 2020, and Victoria Azarenka, the Belarusian whose second Australian Open triumph was a decade ago. Poland's Swiatek is clear favourite, having dominated women's tennis following the retirement in March last year of the Australian Barty. Swiatek secured eight WTA titles in 2022 and became the first woman in six years to win two Grand Slams in the same season -- at Roland Garros and New York -- to cement her place at the top of the rankings. Now she has her sights on a maiden title at Melbourne Park, which would leave the 21-year-old needing only a Wimbledon championship to complete a career slam. "I'm going to try to kind of cut off everything that happened last year and just focus on the future because I feel like I can take a lot of experience from these tournaments last year," she said earlier this month. Ons Jabeur, the world number two, also enjoyed a breakthrough season in 2022, reaching two Grand Slam finals, and her first major cannot be far away. Should Swiatek falter, the Tunisian will be in the hunt, as will American teenager Coco Gauff. 18-year-old Gauff, who last year broke into the top 10 for the first time, kicked off her season by clinching the Auckland Classic title last week for a third WTA crown. "This gives me a lot of confidence," Gauff, touted as the natural heir to Serena Williams, said. "I wanted a win but did not expect it in the first tournament of the year."

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Matia elected deputy leader of the House

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League Presidium Member and former minister Matia Chowdhury has been elected the deputy leader of the House.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader proposed her name for the position at a meeting of its parliamentary party (ALPP) at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban last night.

The proposal was seconded by ALPP Secretary Noor-E-Alam Chowdhury Liton, also the Jatiya Sangsad chief whip.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina chaired the meeting. Some party leaders had assumed that Matia would become the country's next president. But AL President Hasina wants her to perform duties as the deputy leader of the House, party insiders said.

The post of the deputy leader of the House fell vacant after Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury died on September 11 last year.

A former presidium member of the ruling AL, Sajeda was appointed for the third consecutive term as the deputy leader of the 11th parliament.

The AL has been in power for three consecutive terms since 2009. The party now has an absolute majority in parliament.

From 2009 till her death, Sajeda had been the deputy



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OUT-OF-SCHOOL LESSONS ... A student observes the murals painted on the boundary walls of SFX Green Herald International School in the capital's Mohammadpur, on his way back home with his mother yesterday afternoon. The authorities of the school have put up the murals to teach children about how to be good citizens -- such as following traffic rules, taking an interest in the arts, planting trees as part of saving the environment, assisting the elderly etc.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BROILER CHICKEN 'It poses no health risk'

Says agri minister citing lab tests

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque yesterday said there was no health risk in consuming broiler chicken, as the levels of antibiotic and heavy metal found in its meat was much lower than the permissible limit.

Broiler chicken meat, bones and composites mainly contain trace amounts of two antibiotics (oxytetracycline and doxycycline) and three heavy metals (arsenic, chromium and lead), which is not unusual, he said while disclosing findings of a research conducted by Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council (BARC).

He added, "Furthermore, the levels were far below the maximum acceptable level."

Mohammad Rafiqul Islam, chief scientific officer (livestock division) of BARC, led the research

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'Guitarist's guitarist' Jeff Beck no more

REUTERS

Jeff Beck, the influential, genre-bending English guitarist who rose to fame with The Yardbirds before embarking on a solo career, has died at the age of 78, his family announced on social media on Wednesday.

He passed away peacefully on Tuesday after suddenly contracting bacterial meningitis, the family said.

Beck is a two-time Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee - in 1992 for his work with The Yardbirds and as a solo performer in 2009. In 2015, Rolling Stone magazine ranked Beck as the fifth greatest guitarist of all time, one spot ahead of blues icon

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

Numbers drop sharply since US sanctions

Says HRW report on Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Numbers of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances have dropped drastically in Bangladesh since the US imposed sanctions on Rab and seven of its former and current officials for alleged human rights abuses, the Human Rights Watch observed in its annual report.

Released yesterday, the HRW report said the drop shows that the authorities have the ability curb incidents of abuse by security forces. It, however, also mentioned that enforcement agencies continued to repress opposition activists last year.

"Following the US Global Magnitsky human rights sanctions against Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion [RAB] and some of its top commanders in December 2021, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances dropped dramatically, indicating that authorities have the ability to bring security force abuses under control," the report said.

However, instead of taking steps toward reforms, the authorities launched a campaign of threats and intimidation against human rights defenders and families of victims of enforced disappearances, it added.

Starting in August last year, there was an increase in attacks against political opposition members, raising concerns about violence and repression ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections, stated the report.

It mentioned that the government went to lengths to

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15.31KM ELEVATED ROAD IN HAOR

Govt may embark on Tk 5,651cr project

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

The government has a plan to undertake a Tk 5,651-crore project to construct a 15.31km elevated road in the haor region of Kishoreganj to establish the district's direct road links with Dhaka, Sylhet and other districts.

The initiative is aimed at ensuring smooth road communications in all seasons in the hoar areas and transporting agri-products easily.

It will help flourish tourism in the country's northeastern region, Planning Commission documents say.

Amid the government's call for austerity measures, the spending of Tk 5,651 crore on the project has sparked criticism.

Experts urged the government not to take up such a big project.

However, the government says it is going to undertake the project considering the haor people's interest.

The project of constructing the elevated road from Mithamain upazila town to Morichkhali in Karimganj upazila of Kishoreganj may be placed before a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) on January 17 for approval, Planning Commission sources said.

The Bangladesh Bridge Authority is the implementing agency of the project.

Apart from the elevated road, the

authorities will also widen 13.40km road from Nakwanga intersection to Morichkhali Bazar under the project.

The Bureau of Research, Testing and Consultation of Buet carried out a feasibility study on the proposed elevated road.

The project is expected to start in March 2023 and be completed in June 2028. The government will fund the project.

"If the project is implemented, a road network will be established between Ina, Mithamain, and Astagram upazilas of Kishoreganj and its surrounding haor areas with Kishoreganj district town and Dhaka, Sylhet and other districts," according to the Planning Commission documents.

About the government austerity measures, Planning Minister MA Mannan said the government underscores the need for austerity, but never said about stopping development works.

The government has taken the project considering the interest of the haor people, he said.

"We never say that we will stop development works. If we do it, the economy will be ruined. We are taking up the project after verifying the viability of the project," said Mannan.

This project will not harm the environment anymore as we will build an

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Webb telescope discovers exoplanet for the first time

CNN ONLINE

The James Webb Space Telescope can add another cosmic accomplishment to its list: The space observatory has been used to confirm the existence of an exoplanet for the first time.



The celestial body, known as LHS 475 b and located outside of our solar system, is almost exactly the same size as Earth. The rocky world is 41 light-years away in the Octans constellation.

Previous data collected by Nasa's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite, or TESS, had suggested the planet might exist.

A team of researchers, led by staff astronomer Kevin Stevenson and postdoctoral fellow Jacob Lustig-Yaeger at Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory in Laurel, Maryland, observed the target using Webb. They watched for dips in starlight as the planet passed in front of its host star, called a transit, and watched two transits occur.

"There is no question that the planet is there. Webb's pristine data validate it," Lustig-Yaeger said in a statement.

The planet's discovery was announced

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THE ROLLER'S ARRIVAL

An Indian Roller about to land atop a wooden stump somewhere in Kushtia's Daulatpur upazila. This beautiful azure-coloured bird, as its name suggests, is found mostly in India, but is also distributed across south and central west Asia. While in India and Bangladesh, it is called "Neelkanth" or "Neelkontho", the English name "roller" is influenced by the aerobic displays the male performs to attract mates during breeding season -- something that has also inspired many an Asian dance form. This non-migratory bird usually prefers solitude, but once a mate is found, they share responsibility in incubating the eggs and nurturing the young until they are ready to fly independently. While the Indian Roller prefers thin forests, grasslands and cultivated lands, they can also be found perched on tree branches, or electric wires in urban areas. The IUCN has listed it in its "least concern" category, but a decline in their population has been visible due to high numbers of traffic collision.

PHOTO: ARIF AHMED

Situation in Soledar 'difficult'

Says Kyiv; Russia puts chief of general staff in direct command of Ukraine invasion

AGENCIES

Ukraine said yesterday its forces were fighting to retain control of Soledar in the eastern Donetsk region but cautioned it was coming up against "difficult" resistance from Russian troops.

The Kremlin has made capturing the industrial region of Donetsk its primary objective after nearly one year of fighting that has seen its forces capitulate on larger goals like seizing the capital.

"The fiercest and heaviest fighting is continuing today in the area of Soledar," Ukraine's Deputy Defence Minister Ganna Malyar told reporters.

"Despite the difficult situation, Ukrainian soldiers are fighting stubbornly," she said. The Russians were "moving over their own corpses".

Malyar said Russia had increased the number of units in Ukraine to 280 from 250 in the past week as it seeks to regain the initiative.

Russian mercenary group Wagner claimed earlier this week its forces had captured Soledar, but the defence ministry in Moscow said fighting was ongoing and Ukraine denied any full takeover.

Both sides have conceded heavy losses in the fight for Soledar and the nearby larger town of Bakhmut, also key to Russia's aim to wrest all of Donetsk away from Ukraine. The Kremlin yesterday praised the "heroic" work by

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