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1.7m students drop out in pandemic

Covid-induced financial hurdles of
families key factor, say experts

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Education in Bangladesh took a major hit from the Covid pandemic, which caused 17.62 lakh students to drop out of educational institutions, according to government data.

A total of 2,49,159 university students discontinued studies between 2020 and 2021, according to a report of the University Grants Commission.

Besides, 62,104 secondary school students and 14,50,719 primary school-level students dropped out in the same period, according to data from Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (Banbeis) and the Directorate of Primary Education.

Educationists say many of these students permanently left educational institutions.

Noted educationist and former chairman of

University Grants Commission Prof MA Mannan said the economic crunch caused by the pandemic was one of the main reasons behind the fall in the number of students.

According to the Unesco Global Education Monitoring Report 2022, households cover almost two-thirds of the total cost of education in Bangladesh.

"Many parents married their daughters off during the pandemic. Some of them [students] left the country as migrant workers," said Prof Mannan.

Many university students used to meet their study expenses by working as tutors. But they lost that source of income during the



Bangladesh Railway is implementing the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project, the railway's biggest project, to build a 169-km rail line from Dhaka to Jashore via the Padma Bridge at a cost of Tk 39,247 crore. The authorities are hopeful of opening the Dhaka-Bhanga section of the line within June this year. Installation of tracks on a major part of the section has already been done. The photo was taken at Mawa Railway Station in Munshiganj yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

LEVEL	NUMBER OF STUDENTS 2020	NUMBER OF STUDENTS 2021
Primary	2,15,51,691	2,01,00,972
Secondary	1,02,52,126	1,01,90,022
University	46,90,876	44,41,717

pandemic and dropped out of universities, he said.

Educational institutions were closed on March 17, 2020 due to Covid, and partially reopened on September 12, 2021. The 543-day school closure in Bangladesh was one of the longest in the world.

The UGC report submitted to President Abdul Hamid on Thursday night shows that there were 44,41,717 university students in 2021, down from 46,90,876 in 2020.

According to the Banbeis education statistics, there were 1,01,90,022 secondary school students in 2021, while the number was 1,02,52,126 in 2020.

Of the 62,104 students who dropped out of secondary schools, 52,838 were girls.

The Annual Primary School Census 2021 said there were 2,15,51,691 students in the primary schools in 2020 and the number came down to 2,01,00,972 the following year. Of the 14,50,719 students who left the schools, around 10 lakh were girls.

Talking to this newspaper, Prof Nehal Ahmed, director general of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), blamed the pandemic for the drop in the number of students. He, however, added that many students were coming back to schools, and hoped it will be reflected in the government reports for 2022.

He added that the number of girl students fell as many guardians married off their daughters during the pandemic.

UGC member Prof Muhammed Alamgir also attributed the fall in the number of students to the pandemic.

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BNP'S CARETAKER MOVEMENT

Final phase when Dhaka units ready

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The BNP wants to make a final push to realise its demand for holding the next general election under a neutral caretaker administration only after the top brass finds the party's Dhaka city units fully prepared for an all-out movement.

Insiders said the BNP was successful in staging massive protests in the last few months despite various obstacles from the ruling party and administration. It all has fuelled enthusiasm among leaders and activists who now can't wait anymore for the final phase of the movement.

But the party high-ups were not satisfied with the performance of the Dhaka city leaders on the last two occasions -- the December 10 Dhaka rally and January 11 mass sit-ins.

These issues were on the agenda in the BNP standing committee meeting, the highest policymaking body of the party, on Thursday night, when the leaders discussed in detail the future course of action and analysed the two big events.

Party's acting chairman Tarique Rahman virtually chaired the meeting where they also talked about the arrest of Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and standing committee member Mirza Abbas and the police raid on the party's Nayapaltan headquarters.

Contacted yesterday, standing committee member Goyeshwar Chandra Roy said the movement has already begun and gradually it will be intensified. "Our movement will continue till the goal is

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US assistant secretary flies in today

DIPLOMATIC
CORRESPONDENT

US Assistant
Secretary at
the Bureau
of South
and Central
Asian Affairs
Donald Lu
will arrive in
Bangladesh today on a two-day visit.



Donald Lu

Lu will meet senior government officials and civil society groups during the visit.

He has plans to discuss bilateral issues including trade, economy, human and labour rights, and Indo-Pacific strategy.

Assistant Secretary Lu served as the US ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic and Albania. He also worked on the Ebola crisis in West Africa.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Almost entire family lost to house fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chattogram

Khokon Basak woke up around 2:00am yesterday hearing his children scream.

"Father, father, there is a fire. Come out of the room..."

All six members of the family rushed to the veranda of their house to escape through the only exit. But there were flames on the way out.

Khokon, 42, somehow managed to rush out asking the others to follow him, but no one else could. His wife, two children and parents were burned to death inside the house, said Khokon's neighbour Saju Basak.

The tragedy unfolded in Parua union of Chattogram's Rangunia upazila.

The dead are Khokon's father Kangal Basak, 68, mother Lalita Basak, 57, wife Rakhi Dey, 33, son Sourav Basak, 12, and four-year-old daughter Shayanti Basak.

Khokon, an autorickshaw driver, was undergoing treatment at the Burn and Plastic Surgery Unit of Chattogram Medical College Hospital with 20 percent burns.

Dr S Khaled Chowdhury, assistant professor at the burn unit, said Khokon's respiratory tract was badly damaged.

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First phase of Biswa Ijtema begins

UNB, Dhaka

The first phase of the three-day Biswa Ijtema, billed as the second largest congregation of Muslims after Hajj, began yesterday morning on the bank of the River Turag in Tongi after two years of Covid hiatus.

The 56th edition of the annual event started with the "ambayan" (general sermons) of Pakistani Islamic scholar Maulana Ziaul Haque after Fajr prayers.

Thousands of devotees from home and abroad -- including India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Syria, Chad, Tajikistan, Turkey, Afghanistan, Palestine, the UK, and the US -- thronged the bank of Turag to listen to scholars reciting and explaining verses from the Quran and renew their commitment to Islamic values.

Tablighi Jamaat has been organising the congregation at the venue since 1967. In 2011, it divided the Ijtema into two phases to accommodate the large number of attendees.

The second phase of Ijtema will be held from January 20 to 22.

In the afternoon yesterday, the country's largest Juma prayers, led by Maulana Hafez Zobair Ahmad, leader of a faction of Tablighi Jamaat, was held at the venue.

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People offering Juma prayers on Tongi Station Road in Gazipur during the first phase of Biswa Ijtema yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Mild cold wave sweeping some parts of country

UNB, Dhaka

A mild cold wave is sweeping several parts of the country but it may abate in some areas, said the Met office yesterday morning.

The regions that are under the cold spell include Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions and Faridpur, Madaripur, Manikganj, Moulvibazar, Cumilla, Feni, Jashore, Chuadanga, Kushtia, Barishal, and Bhola.

Temperature between 8 to 10 degrees Celsius is considered a mild cold wave, 6 to 8 degrees Celsius a moderate cold wave and less than 6 degrees Celsius a severe cold wave.

The lowest temperature in the country was recorded at 8 degrees Celsius in Dinajpur in the 24 hours till 6:00am yesterday. The highest temperature was recorded at 30.2 degrees Celsius in Teknaf.

Besides, moderate to thick fog may envelop the river basins and light to moderate fog may occur elsewhere from midnight to morning and it may continue till noon at places.

"The weather may remain mainly dry with a temporary partly cloudy sky. The night and day temperatures may rise slightly," the BMD said.

Pregnant woman killed in truck-bike collision

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Jashore*

A pregnant woman was killed on her way to a hospital with her husband yesterday, when a truck hit their motorcycle in Jashore.

The deceased Shirin Akhtar, 25, was from Tajpur village of the district's Manirampur upazila, confirmed Manirampur Police Station Officer-in Charge Sheikh Mohammad Moniruzzaman.

Her husband, Ruhul Quddus, who was injured in the incident, said they were on their way to visit a gynaecologist at Queen's Hospital on a motorcycle around 10:30am.

When they reached Muragachha market, a truck coming from the opposite direction hit their motorcycle, seriously injuring both of them, he added.

After they were rescued and admitted to Jashore General Hospital, Shirin Akhtar died while undergoing treatment around 1:30pm.

Vichitra Mallick, a physician at the hospital's emergency department, said the husband and wife were brought in with serious injuries. "The pregnant woman died due to excessive bleeding. And her husband is currently receiving treatment."

OC Moniruzzaman said the body of the deceased was handed over to the family without conducting a postmortem.

Cuba takes reins of UN 'Group of 77 and China'

AFP, *United Nations*

Cuba on Thursday took over the rotating presidency of the Group of 77 and China, which advocates for developing countries' interests at the United Nations.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez took over leadership from last year's chair Pakistan.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said at the handover ceremony that in many ways, the Group of 77 and China reflects the goal of the United Nations itself.

"Year in and year out, you stand together to discuss, debate and amplify global solutions to realize the better, fairer and more sustainable future every country deserves," he said.

He also highlighted the challenges facing the world: growing poverty and inequalities, pandemics, recession, unemployment, climate change and the rights of women and girls being disrespected.

"While each challenge is different, they are all felt most keenly in the countries you represent," he added.



A photograph taken yesterday shows debris in front of a damaged building in the town of Siversk, Donetsk region amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

PHOTO: AFP

Full brunt of financial tightening 'yet to bite': IMF

AFP, *Washington*

Countries have yet to see the full impact of tightening financial conditions, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva has said, warning that central banks have some way to go in their inflation battle.

Global growth is expected to slow further this year, as central banks including the US Federal Reserve have raised interest rates to cool surging prices.

While sectors like housing have been reeling in the United States for example, the labor market remains strong with low joblessness.

"As long as people are employed, even if prices are high, consumers spend.... But we all know that the impact of tightening financial conditions is yet to bite, in terms of unemployment," Georgieva told reporters on Thursday in a briefing on the world economy.

"Inflation remains stubborn, and in that sense, the job of central banks is not yet done," she said.

This suggests central banks may need to continue hiking interest rates, walking a fine line between easing demand and avoiding tipping economies into recession.

Doing so comes with risks, and Georgieva stressed the need to watch how

tightening conditions hit the labor market and possibly translate into "more tensions between employers and workers."

Governments have been quick to provide policy support thus far, adding a buffer between consumers and surging food and energy costs, but this policy space is "shrinking," she cautioned.

The International Monetary Fund also expects the global slowdown to "bottom out" towards year-end, and for the world economy to trend towards a higher growth trajectory in 2024, Georgieva said.

The IMF maintains that a "global recession can be avoided" even if some countries see downturns.

But this is subject to an absence of negative shocks like growing social unrest and spillovers between countries, climate events, or a worsening in Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"We are now in a more shock-prone world," she said.

While tighter financial conditions will have a "dramatic" impact on countries with high debt levels, Georgieva said the IMF does not see a "systemic debt crisis on the horizon."

She added that a new global sovereign debt roundtable is set to meet for the first time in February, on the sidelines of a Group of 20 finance officials meeting,

bringing key creditors and private finance together.

Weighing in on specific countries, Georgieva noted that China needs to "stay the course" in reopening from nearly three years of a strict zero-Covid policy that has battered business activity.

China's rebound from its latest surge in coronavirus cases since recently lifting lockdowns, quarantines and mass testing would have significant implications globally, she said.

The world's second biggest economy used to deliver up to 40 percent of world growth.

"What is most important is for China to stay the course, not to back off from that reopening," Georgieva said.

If so, it could turn into a "positive contributor" to average global growth by mid-year or thereabouts, she added.

Meanwhile, Georgieva expressed optimism over "remarkable" market resilience in the United States, with Covid-era support helping consumer demand in the world's biggest economy.

"It gives some... expectation that the US would avoid falling into a recession," she said, adding that a potential downturn will likely be very mild.

"For now, the dynamic seems to be more indicative for a soft landing," she said.

Child burned to death in Dinaipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Dinaipur*

A five-year-old boy was burned to death in a housefire in Dinaipur's Parbatipur upazila around 10:45pm on Thursday.

Yusuf Imran, of Chandipur union, was sleeping when his house caught fire, said police.

Furnitures, cash and other valuables were also burned in the fire, said Abul Hasnat, officer-in-charge of Parbatipur Police Station.

The residents of the house, in association with the neighbours, could manage to extinguish the fire, he added.

The reason behind the fire could not be known immediately, he further said.

15 more Covid cases registered in 24hrs

UNB, *Dhaka*

Bangladesh registered 15 more Covid-19 cases in 24 hours till yesterday morning.

With the new numbers, the country's total caseload rose to 2,037,346, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

However, the official death toll from the disease remained unchanged at 29,441 as no new fatalities were reported during this period.

The daily case test positivity rose to 0.51 percent from Thursday's 0.23 percent as 2,939 samples were tested during this time.

The mortality rate remained unchanged at 1.45 percent while the recovery rate slightly increased to 97.64 percent, it added.

In December last year, the country reported seven Covid-linked deaths and 540 cases.

Bangladesh registered its highest daily caseload of 16,230 on July 28 in 2021 and daily fatalities of 264 on August 5 the same year.

Shipbreaking worker dies after falling from ship

UNB, *Ctg*

A 24-year-old shipbreaking worker died after falling off a ship in Chattogram's Sitakunda Thursday night, said police.

The deceased is Abdul Rahim Tushar, of Kurigram.

Tushar fell off the ship while working on it at Tahsin Shipbreaking Yard in Sonaichhari union near the Bay of Bengal, Tofail Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Sitakunda Model Police Station, said.

"Tushar was rushed to Chattogram Medical College Hospital with a critical head injury. He was declared dead at the hospital at 10:00pm," he added.

Iran top diplomat hopes to restore Saudi ties

AFP, *Beirut*

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian expressed hope that diplomatic ties between Tehran and Riyadh could be restored through dialogue between the two regional arch-rivals, as he visited Lebanon yesterday.

Saudi Arabia cut ties with Iran in January 2016, after protesters attacked its embassy in Tehran and consulate in second city Mashhad following Riyadh's execution of Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr.

Almost entire family

FROM PAGE 1

"A burn patient with seriously damaged respiratory tract is considered to be critically ill," he said.

Speaking to this correspondent, Saju Basak said all family members were asleep around 2:00am when the fire broke out from a wood stove at the kitchen. The flames later spread to other rooms.

The blaze was brought under control around 4:00am with the help of five fire engines, said police and locals, adding that they recovered the five charred bodies from the house.

The fire might have originated from the wood burner in the kitchen of Khokon's tin-shed house in Mahajanpara area of Parua union, said Md Anwar Hossain Shamim, additional superintendent of police (Rangunia Circle).

According to neighbours, Khokon was the breadwinner for his family.

His autorickshaw, which was next to the kitchen of his house, was also damaged in the fire, they added.

First phase

FROM PAGE 1

Gazipur Metropolitan Police Commissioner Mollah Nazrul Islam said additional police personnel have been deployed in and around the Ijtima ground to ensure the security of the devotees. The venue has been brought under CCTV camera surveillance.

Also, the government set up health camps for the devotees to provide them with treatment like the previous years.

Meanwhile, another devotee died yesterday at the Ijtima venue due to old age complications. Two others died from cold-related illnesses on Thursday.

The first phase of Ijtima will end tomorrow with Akheri Munajat (final prayers).

US west coast girds for more damaging storms

AFP, *Los Angeles*

Western US states were bracing for yet more torrid weather yesterday and into the weekend as so-called atmospheric rivers lined up to dump heavy rain and snow across the already soaked region.

California has been battered by weeks of downpours that have killed at least 19 people, flooding communities, toppling power lines and threatening deadly mudslides.

Forecasters now say the first of two cyclones churning in the Pacific Ocean and bearing down on the west coast will spread the rain further north, forming a band from northern California to the states of Oregon and Washington.

"The most impactful precipitation will remain focused along the coasts of northern California and the Pacific Northwest through Friday night, then precipitation will expand south on Saturday and east on Sunday," the National Weather Service said in a Thursday statement.

"Northern California has been hammered with heavy precipitation events over the past couple weeks, and any additional rainfall could pose a threat of flash flooding."

Forecasters said they expect up to six inches (15 centimeters) of rain to fall over 48 hours near Seattle.

Avalanche warnings were in effect for a tranche of Washington state, with the storm bringing wetter, heavier snow into the mountains.

"Dangerous, large avalanches are expected to run naturally during this snowy, wet weather event," the Northwest Avalanche Center (NWAC) said.

So-called wet slab avalanches were a particular concern as the wetter snow piles up on top of fluffier, lighter snow, making the snowpack unstable.

"Wet slab avalanches are not something to tiptoe around, and this is a day where it's a good idea to stay off steep slopes and runouts beneath avalanche paths," the NWAC said.

In northern California, up to six feet (1.8 meters) of snow was forecast over the mountains between Friday and Tuesday, with winds gusting up to 50 miles (80 kilometers) an hour.

Final phase when Dhaka units ready

FROM PAGE 1

achieved. The intensity of the movement will increase and at some point, success will come."

Sources said the meeting discussed Dhaka city north BNP Convener Aman Ullah Aman's comment that Bangladesh will be run under the leadership of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia after December 10.

"Things got complicated after his (Aman's) statement. The party must seek an explanation from him why he made such a comment," said another standing committee member, wishing not to be named, adding that Tarique asked Fakhrul to look into it.

Meeting sources said a few members questioned Aman's loyalty to the party especially because he secured bail the day after he was arrested from the party office on December 7.

Aman, as the party's Dhaka north unit convener, was supposed to preside over the Nayapaltan sit-in on January 11. But he took the role of the

moderator while standing committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain was in the chair.

Before this, a rumour spread that the Dhaka city north BNP would be dissolved. Tarique even particularly wanted to see the presence of the unit leaders and activists in the sit-ins.

When Mirza Abbas was addressing the audience during the Nayapaltan event, a central leader showed Tarique the presence of Dhaka north BNP leaders and activists through a video call.

The meeting also discussed the formation of "Samomona Ganatantrik Jote", which came into being with 15 organisations at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office.

A standing committee member asked Tarique how can such an alliance can be formed right at the chairperson's office when the party is focusing on simultaneous movement.

Referring to Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader's mockery that 54 parties are against

Sheikh Hasina and it seems 54 horses will lay 54 eggs, the BNP leader said, "It needs to be known who was behind that sudden initiative [the alliance of 15]."

Currently, the 54 political parties and organisations are waging a simultaneous movement demanding election under a non-party interim government, BNP leaders say.

When the alliance of 15 organisations was announced, BNP standing committee member Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku was there.

At Thursday's meeting, Tuku was present but another senior leader said the whole issue was orchestrated by Aman.

Then Mirza Fakhrul said, "Who gave Aman this authority?"

Aman could not be reached over the phone despite repeated attempts.

This correspondent contacted three other standing committee members about the issues but they declined to say anything on record.

1.7m students drop out

FROM PAGE 1

According to a DSHE report released in August 2022, at least 47,414 girls were victims of child marriage and 77,706 children became labourers in 2021. The data is from only 11,769 of the country's 20,960 secondary schools.

Prof Mohammad Tariq Ahsan of the Institute of Education and Research (IER) at Dhaka University said many of those, who had to leave the universities to take up jobs during the pandemic, found out whatever they had learnt in classrooms were of little use in "real life".

"They are thinking about the amount of money and time they must spend by returning to the educational

institutions to earn a certificate that may not even be useful in their jobs," he said.

There should be a "life-oriented" education system, he added.

To bring back the students, the authorities should keep their needs in mind and make school hours more flexible, he said, adding that the second-chance education programme should be strengthened by the primary education directorate.

Prof MA Mannan said the government should provide incentives to the students to bring them back to classrooms. They should be provided with technical and vocational training, he added.

US assistant secretary

FROM PAGE 1

Lu's visit comes less than a week after the visit of Rear Admiral Eileen Laubacher, senior director for South Asia at the US National Security Council. More US officials are likely to visit Dhaka later this month and the next.

"Besides election and human rights, we will talk about all other issues..." Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen told reporters on Wednesday.

Bangladesh has a number of issues to discuss with Lu, while the US too has some expectations, he said, adding, "We hope to frankly discuss those."

The US is Bangladesh's single largest destination for readymade garments. It is also the largest donor for humanitarian assistance for the Rohingya refugees.

The US also wants to boost defence and maritime cooperation with Bangladesh.

Bangladesh wants the US to withdraw the sanctions on Rab, reinstate the GSP facility for apparel import and make more investments in infrastructure, renewable energy, and help mitigate climate change fallout.

"The big powers want to have deeper engagement with us. If we can

remain engaged, it is good for us," Secretary Momen said.

Asked if Bangladesh is joining the US-led IPS, he said the US, Canada, the EU and Japan have their strategy on the Indo-Pacific.

"We will also have our own strategy on how we want to see our Bay of Bengal and beyond."

China operates first domestic Boeing 737 MAX flight since 2019

AFP, *BEIJING*

A Boeing 737 MAX took off from southern China yesterday, the first domestic flight using the aircraft model since March 2019 when it was grounded after two deadly crashes.

The resumption of flights is a boost for the American manufacturer in one of its most important markets.

China was among the first countries to ground the plane after two fatal accidents involving its flight control software in 2018 and 2019, and was the last major Boeing market to rescind the ban.



A girl sits on tyres placed on a wooden plank while her brother pulls it with the help of a rope. Such simple joys of childhood have now become a rare scene in the urban landscape. This photo was taken in Barishal's Babuganj upazila recently.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Good yield, fair

FROM PAGE 5
maunds of turmeric.
"I have sold 100 maunds of turmeric at Tk 1150 per maunds," Zahangir said.
Last year, he cultivated the crop on 1.5 acres land and got 250 maunds. He cultivated on less land this year as he had to sell turmeric at only Tk 800 per maunds.

Grower Nitish Biswas of Ratandia in Kalukhali said turmeric cultivation is more profitable than other crops like chilli, brinjal and pumpkin. Farmers sow turmeric seeds in November every year and it took nearly a year to harvest the crop, he said.

Md Miraz of Ramdia said this year he cultivated turmeric on 50 decimals leased land and made a

profit of Tk 45,000, which was only Tk 15,000 last year. Ripon Sheikh of the area said he got 50 maunds of turmeric from only 30 decimals of land this year.

Alongside turmeric, he also cultivated onion and wheat in his other lands.

Kamal Parvez, a turmeric trader at Baliakandi Bazar said, he has been doing the business for 12 years now.

He buys turmeric at Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,200 each maund, and sells the product at Tk 5,500 to Tk 6,000 per maunds.

Rajbari DAE Deputy Director SM Shahid Nur Akbar said turmeric cultivation saw a slight fall due to increase in jute and onion cultivation this year, but the price and yield of the produce have increased significantly.

Rajbari DAE Deputy Director SM Shahid Nur Akbar said turmeric cultivation saw a slight fall due to increase in jute and onion cultivation this year, but the price and yield of the produce have increased significantly.

Consider running

FROM PAGE 3
fellow of Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the movement should stir policymakers, politicians ahead of the election to commit to protecting the environment.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental

Lawyers Association, said the development that stems from need doesn't harm environment. But if it stems from greed, it destroys rivers, forest and air.

Professor Nazrul Islam, vice-president of Bapa, also spoke at the event, presided over by Khandakar Bazul Rahman of Bapa.

Ex-DU teacher

FROM PAGE 3
Police Station over the matter.

A video clip obtained by The Daily Star showed that people were shouting at the driver to stop the

car which kept dragging the woman towards Nilkhet.

Jafar was sacked from Dhaka University in 2018 due to his prolonged absence.

AL govt ensures security

FROM PAGE 5
attack was also launched on Suranjit Sengupta's public rally.

"In that period, we gathered at Russel Squire with 40-50 people and were charged with baton repeatedly. Central leaders — Matia Chowdhury, Muhammad Nasim and many others — were also baton charged," he said.

On the contrary, not a single BNP leader faced such situation during the incumbent AL

government's tenure.

Hasan urged the AL leaders and activists to highlight the country's development and successes of the present government throughout the Rajshahi division to make the meeting a total success.

Rajshahi Mayor and Awami League Presidium Member AHM Khairuzzaman Liton addressed the event as chief guest with the city unit president Muhammad

Ali Kamal in the chair.

AL Organizing Secretary SM Kamal Hossain, Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder, Deputy Speaker of Jatiya Sangsad Shamsul Haque Tuku, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam and State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak, AL Population and Health Affairs Secretary Dr Rokeya Sultana, local lawmakers and Rajshahi city and district AL leaders also joined the meeting.

Risky road divider removed

FROM PAGE 5
the authorities concerned to remove it.

RHD recently constructed a new six-lane road in Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila. The road connects Rajopara area of

Kalapara on Patuakhali-Kuakata highway to Payra thermal-power station, and the 50-metre long divider was built at the entry point of the road at the Rajopara end.

In the last one week

alone, at least 20 vehicles have accidentally rammled into the now dismantled divider, according to Officer-in-Charge of Kalapara Police Station Md Jasim Uddin.

Karnaphuli tunnel

FROM PAGE 3
Quader, also the general secretary of Bangladesh Awami League, said once upon a time, none thought that Bangabandhu Tunnel would turn Chattogram into "one city with two towns" like Shanghai in China.

He said revealed that the feasibility study of metro rail project in Chattogram will be completed on January 31.

He also said, "We are going through a difficult

and challenging time. Russia-Ukraine war is going on, and sanctions and counter-sanctions of Europe and America are being imposed on each other, and as a result, one-third of the world's countries are now moving towards a big rescission."

Mentioning that the living cost in Europe has reached a record 40-year high, he said Sri Lanka's foreign reserve stands at the bottom while Pakistan's reserve is also in a critical

condition now.

He said there is no doubt that the prices of all commodities have increased in Bangladesh.

Amid the global economic crisis, Bangladesh's reserve is still in a good position, Quader added.

He said the reserve of Bangladesh, a developing country, is now US\$ 34 billion and still it has the capacity to import goods for five months with the reserve.

B'baria lawyers withdraw court

FROM PAGE 3
The HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Razik-Al-Jalil also issued a rule asking Tanvir, Akkas and Zubayer to show cause as to why contempt of court proceedings should not be initiated against them for their misconduct with the judge and creating chaos in the courtroom.


On January 10, the same HC bench summoned 21 lawyers from Brahmanbaria court, directing them to appear before it on January 23 for shouting slogans against Judge Sharmin Nigar and hampering judicial functions on January 5 and 8 after this bench issued a contempt of court rule and

summons order against other three lawyers — Tanvir, Akkas and Zubayer.

The 21 lawyers, including Babul, have been ordered to appear before the HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Razik-Al-Jalil on January 23 to explain their conducts.

The HC issued the summon orders and contempt of court rules on a suomuto move after Chief Justice Hasan Foez Siddique sent matters to the bench for their disposals.

IN MEMORIAM



32nd Death Anniversary of Late Abul Qasem FCD (1919-1991)

Founder President (ICAB),
Former President (DCCI),
Founder, A. Qasem & Co., Chartered Accountants

In Fond Remembrance

Shakil, Farzana, Sohel, Jabeen, Sanjida, Mostaq
Sadaat, Sajid, Navid, Sanjida Khan, Sadaat, Omair, Ahnaf, Afraz
&
All Partners, Directors, Staff and Students of A. Qasem & Co.

COMMERCIAL SPACE FOR RENT AT GULSHAN-1

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01733804924

We Mourn

Mr. Ahmed Kamrul Hasan, son of Mr. A K M Delwar Hussain died on December 22, 2022 in Popular Medical College Hospital, Dhaka at the age of 89 due to old age complications. (Inna Lillabe Wa Inna Ilabe Rajoun). He left behind 1 son & 1 daughter.

Mr. Hasan was a Retired Library Development Officer, Senior Education Service, Directorate of Secondary & Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Bangladesh. During his professional tenure he organized 2 Govt. Public Libraries which are Chittagong & Khulna Public Library as Librarian in Charge. He also Achieved Leadership Development Award from IASL (International Association of School Librarianship), Seattle, Washington USA, 1991. Mr. Hasan is a Life member of LAB (Library Association of Bangladesh).

His family is seeking prayer for his eternity soul.

Vacancy Announcement/ Recruitment

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NB: Applicants applied earlier needn't apply further.

D-2 **President (GB)**

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A girl sits on tyres placed on a wooden plank while her brother pulls it with the help of a rope. Such simple joys of childhood have now become a rare scene in the urban landscape. This photo was taken in Barishal's Babuganj upazila recently.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Good yield, fair

FROM PAGE 5
maunds of turmeric.
"I have sold 100 maunds of turmeric at Tk 1150 per maunds," Zahangir said.
Last year, he cultivated the crop on 1.5 acres land and got 250 maunds. He cultivated on less land this year as he had to sell turmeric at only Tk 800 per maunds.

Grower Nitish Biswas of Ratandia in Kalukhali said turmeric cultivation is more profitable than other crops like chilli, brinjal and pumpkin. Farmers sow turmeric seeds in November every year and it took nearly a year to harvest the crop, he said.

Md Miraz of Ramdia said this year he cultivated turmeric on 50 decimals leased land and made a

profit of Tk 45,000, which was only Tk 15,000 last year. Ripon Sheikh of the area said he got 50 maunds of turmeric from only 30 decimals of land this year.

Alongside turmeric, he also cultivated onion and wheat in his other lands.

Kamal Parvez, a turmeric trader at Baliakandi Bazar said, he has been doing the business for 12 years now.

He buys turmeric at Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,200 each maund, and sells the product at Tk 5,500 to Tk 6,000 per maunds.

Rajbari DAE Deputy Director SM Shahid Nur Akbar said turmeric cultivation saw a slight fall due to increase in jute and onion cultivation this year, but the price and yield of the produce have increased significantly.

Consider running

FROM PAGE 3
fellow of Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the movement should stir policymakers, politicians ahead of the election to commit to protecting the environment.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental

Lawyers Association, said the development that stems from need doesn't harm environment. But if it stems from greed, it destroys rivers, forest and air.

Professor Nazrul Islam, vice-president of Bapa, also spoke at the event, presided over by Khandakar Bazul Rahman of Bapa.

Ex-DU teacher

FROM PAGE 3
Police Station over the matter.

A video clip obtained by The Daily Star showed that people were shouting at the driver to stop the

car which kept dragging the woman towards Nilkhet.

Jafar was sacked from Dhaka University in 2018 due to his prolonged absence.

AL govt ensures security

FROM PAGE 5
attack was also launched on Suranjit Sengupta's public rally.

"In that period, we gathered at Russel Squire with 40-50 people and were charged with baton repeatedly. Central leaders — Matia Chowdhury, Muhammad Nasim and many others — were also baton charged," he said.

On the contrary, not a single BNP leader faced such situation during the incumbent AL

government's tenure.

Hasan urged the AL leaders and activists to highlight the country's development and successes of the present government throughout the Rajshahi division to make the meeting a total success.

Rajshahi Mayor and Awami League Presidium Member AHM Khairuzzaman Liton addressed the event as chief guest with the city unit president Muhammad

Ali Kamal in the chair.

AL Organizing Secretary SM Kamal Hossain, Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder, Deputy Speaker of Jatiya Sangsad Shamsul Haque Tuku, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam and State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak, AL Population and Health Affairs Secretary Dr Rokeya Sultana, local lawmakers and Rajshahi city and district AL leaders also joined the meeting.

Risky road divider removed

FROM PAGE 5
the authorities concerned to remove it.

RHD recently constructed a new six-lane road in Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila. The road connects Rajopara area of

Kalapara on Patuakhali-Kuakata highway to Payra thermal-power station, and the 50-metre long divider was built at the entry point of the road at the Rajopara end.

In the last one week

alone, at least 20 vehicles have accidentally rammled into the now dismantled divider, according to Officer-in-Charge of Kalapara Police Station Md Jasim Uddin.

Karnaphuli tunnel

FROM PAGE 3
Quader, also the general secretary of Bangladesh Awami League, said once upon a time, none thought that Bangabandhu Tunnel would turn Chattogram into "one city with two towns" like Shanghai in China.

He said revealed that the feasibility study of metro rail project in Chattogram will be completed on January 31.

He also said, "We are going through a difficult

and challenging time. Russia-Ukraine war is going on, and sanctions and counter-sanctions of Europe and America are being imposed on each other, and as a result, one-third of the world's countries are now moving towards a big rescission."

Mentioning that the living cost in Europe has reached a record 40-year high, he said Sri Lanka's foreign reserve stands at the bottom while Pakistan's reserve is also in a critical

condition now.

He said there is no doubt that the prices of all commodities have increased in Bangladesh.

Amid the global economic crisis, Bangladesh's reserve is still in a good position, Quader added.

He said the reserve of Bangladesh, a developing country, is now US\$ 34 billion and still it has the capacity to import goods for five months with the reserve.

B'baria lawyers withdraw court

FROM PAGE 3
The HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Razik-Al-Jalil also issued a rule asking Tanvir, Akkas and Zubayer to show cause as to why contempt of court proceedings should not be initiated against them for their misconduct with the judge and creating chaos in the courtroom.


On January 10, the same HC bench summoned 21 lawyers from Brahmanbaria court, directing them to appear before it on January 23 for shouting slogans against Judge Sharmin Nigar and hampering judicial functions on January 5 and 8 after this bench issued a contempt of court rule and

summons order against other three lawyers — Tanvir, Akkas and Zubayer.

The 21 lawyers, including Babul, have been ordered to appear before the HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Razik-Al-Jalil on January 23 to explain their conducts.

The HC issued the summon orders and contempt of court rules on a suomuto move after Chief Justice Hasan Foez Siddique sent matters to the bench for their disposals.

IN MEMORIAM



32nd Death Anniversary of Late Abul Qasem FCD (1919-1991)

Founder President (ICAB),
Former President (DCCI),
Founder, A. Qasem & Co., Chartered Accountants

In Fond Remembrance

Shakil, Farzana, Sohel, Jabeen, Sanjida, Mostaq
Sadaat, Sajid, Navid, Sanjida Khan, Sadaat, Omair, Ahnaf, Afraz
&
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AL govt ensures security to BNP programmes

Says Hasan Mahmud

BSS, Rajshahi

Information Minister and Awami League joint general secretary Hasan Mahmud yesterday said BNP had carried out grenade attacks on Awami League rallies but the AL government is now ensuring security to BNP programmes.

"This is the difference between them and us. We are strong with people's power. But they believe in conspiracy and power of arms," he said.

Hasan was addressing a views exchange meeting with local AL leaders ahead of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Rajshahi on January 29.

Rajshahi city and district units of Awami League arranged the meeting at Rajshahi Medical College auditorium, attended by leaders and activists of the party from all eight districts under Rajshahi division.

Hasan Mahmud is tasked with overseeing organisational activities in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions as joint general secretary of AL.

Hasan said BNP is holding meetings in different parts of the country and the government is extending cooperation to hold the rally.

"When we were in opposition and they were in power, 24 people were killed and over 400 people, including Sheikh Hasina, got injured in the grenade attack on August 21, 2004," he said.

A dozen of people were killed in the attack on Sheikh Helal's public rally and Kibria and Ahsanullah Master were killed in bomb attacks, he said, adding that

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



A group of women, under the banner of Samajtantrik Mahila Forum, forms a human chain in front of Jatiya Press Club yesterday, demanding equal pay and safe working environment for women. The organisation held the event marking its 39th founding anniversary. PHOTO: STAR

PATUAKHALI-KUAKATA HIGHWAY

Risky road divider removed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The Roads and Highways Department removed a risky road divider on Thursday, which was causing accidents in the Patuakhali-Kuakata highway, much to the relief of motorists and commuters.

"The divider was removed following instructions of the higher authorities," confirmed Patuakhali RHD's Executive Engineer AM Atiq Ullah.

Earlier on Thursday, The Daily Star published a report titled "Road divider or death trap?", which shed light on how the road median was



turning into a menace due to its small size, poor positioning, lack of proper reflective paint and effective warning signs, which prompted

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



With stores being closed on Fridays, this toy-seller sets up shop in front of shutter-down stores in Barishal city's Chowkbazar area, hoping that the colourful set up will attract the little ones. Every day, he sells toys worth Tk 1,500. PHOTO: TITU DAS

Good yield, fair price bring cheer to turmeric growers



Mohammad Miraz and his family members, residents of Ramdia village in Rajbari's Kalukhali upazila, harvest turmeric from the field. PHOTO: STAR

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Bumper production of turmeric and good market price have brought smiles on faces of Rajbari farmers this season.

According Rajbari Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), a total of 1,175 hectares of land have been brought under turmeric cultivation this season, compared to 1,220 hectares last season.

Agriculture officials said growers in the region got good production of turmeric due to favourable weather conditions.

During a recent visit to different villages of Rajbari Sadar, Baliakandi and Kalukhali upazilas, this correspondent saw growers were passing busy time in harvesting turmeric from their lands.

A number of turmeric growers said they are satisfied with good yield and fair price of their produce.

Turmeric is being sold at Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,200 per maund in local markets, which was Tk 700 to Tk 900 last year.

Farmer Firoz Sheikh of Paikkandi village in Baliakandi upazila said, "I have cultivated turmeric on 3.3 acres land, spending Tk 1.5 lakh this year."

He had already harvested 200 maunds of the crop and hopes to get another 350 maunds more, he said.

Another grower Zahangir Sheikh of Narayanpur said, he cultivated turmeric on 90 decimals land this year, and got 150

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Petition seeks permission to ply bikes on Padma Bridge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A writ petition has been filed with the High Court seeking its directives on the government to allow people to operate motorcycles on the Padma Bridge.

KM Abu Hanif Hridoy, president of Bangladesh Republican Party, a political organisation, submitted the petition as a public interest litigation to the HC last month, also challenging the legality of the government decision that on June 26 last year banned motorcycles on the Padma Bridge from June 27.

Citing the petition, Hridoy's lawyer larul Islam said the government decision prohibiting operation of motorcycles on the Padma Bridge has violated article 36 of the constitution that ensured people's right to freedom of movement.

The article reads, "Subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the public interest, every citizen shall have the right to move freely throughout Bangladesh, to reside and settle in any place therein and to leave and re-enter Bangladesh."

The HC bench of Justice M Khasruzzaman and Justice Md Iqbal Kabir Lytton may hold hearing of the petition tomorrow, as the case has been included in its hearing list on that day.

The bridge division under the ministry of road transport and bridges on June 26 last year banned the operation of motorcycles on the Padma Bridge from 6:00am on June 27 last year until further notice.

Two people were killed in an accident while riding on a motorcycle on the Padma Bridge on June 26 last year, the very day it opened for public.

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2022 among 8 hottest years on record: UN

AFP, Geneva

The past eight years were the hottest since records began, the United Nations confirmed Thursday, despite the cooling influence of a drawn-out La Nina weather pattern.

Last year, as the world faced a cascade of unprecedented natural disasters made more likely and deadly by climate change, the average global temperature was about 1.15 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the World Meteorological Organization said.

The US NOAA and Nasa released similar 2022 global temperature figures on Thursday and Bill Nelson, head of the US space agency, described them as "alarming."

The WMO, a UN agency, said the past eight years "were the warmest on record globally, fuelled by ever-rising greenhouse gas concentrations and accumulated heat."

The hottest year on record was 2016, followed by 2019 and 2020, it found.

Last year marked the eighth consecutive year that annual global temperatures were at least one degree over the pre-industrial levels seen between 1850 and 1900.

The Paris Agreement, called for capping global warming at 1.5C, which scientists say would limit climate impacts to manageable levels.

The UN agency highlighted that the warmest eight years on record had all been since 2015, despite consecutive La Nina events since 2020.

The weather phenomenon has a cooling effect on global temperatures.



Palestinian relatives mourn the death of Abdulhadi Nazzal, reportedly killed during a raid by Israeli forces in Qabatia town, during his funeral in the same village in the occupied West Bank, yesterday. Israeli forces killed three Palestinians in two separate incidents in the occupied West Bank Thursday, the Palestinian health ministry said.

PHOTO: AFP

FINANCIAL CRISIS

Sri Lanka to cut army by half

AFP, Colombo

Bankrupt Sri Lanka will drastically slash its military, the defence ministry said yesterday, as the government works to overhaul its shambolic finances after an unprecedented economic crisis.

The island nation is still reeling from months of food and fuel shortages that made daily life a misery for its 22 million people last year.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe has hiked taxes and imposed harsh spending cuts to smooth the passage of an expected International Monetary Fund bailout following a government debt default.

Sri Lanka's armed forces are next on the chopping block, with the defence ministry announcing it would retire 65,000 soldiers from its 200,000-strong army over the year.

The cuts make up the lion's share of plans to downsize Sri Lanka's land forces to



100,000 by the end of the decade.

"The overall aim of the strategic blueprint is to broach a technically and tactically sound and well-balanced defence force," a ministry statement said.

Sri Lanka's armed forces remain bloated more than a decade after the end of the country's traumatic ethnic civil war.

Nearly 400,000 people served in the

military at its peak strength in 2009, the year government forces crushed the Tamil Tigers separatist movement during a no-holds-barred offensive that saw thousands of civilian casualties.

Defence accounted for nearly 10 percent of public spending last year, and according to expert analysts, pay for security force personnel makes up half the government's salary bill.

Sri Lanka warned this week it had barely enough revenue to pay public employees and pensions despite huge tax hikes at the start of the year. The economy shrank an estimated 8.7 percent last year as the public endured lengthy blackouts, long queues for petrol, empty supermarket shelves and runaway inflation.

The crisis peaked in July when protesters angered by the crisis stormed the official residence of then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who briefly fled the country and tendered his resignation from abroad.

Trump Org fined \$1.6m for tax fraud

AFP, New York

A New York judge yesterday fined Donald Trump's family business the maximum penalty available of \$1.6 million for committing tax fraud.

The sum, paltry to the billionaire real estate developer, is symbolically significant as the ex-president eyes the White House again amid a host of legal woes.

The Trump Corporation and Trump Payroll Corp., entities of the Trump Organization, were found guilty last month of running a years-long scheme to defraud and evade taxes through falsifying business records.

They were convicted of all 17 counts following a trial, marking the first time the companies had ever been convicted of crimes.

Trump himself was not charged but the verdict inflicted further reputational damage as he seeks nomination for the presidency in 2024.

Longtime CFO Allen Weisselberg was sentenced to five months in prison on Tuesday, and agreed to pay \$2 million in fines, for his role in the scam. He pleaded guilty to scheming with the company to receive undeclared benefits such as a rent-free apartment in a posh neighborhood, luxury cars for him and his wife and his grandchildren's fees at an expensive private school.

The 75-year-old admitted 15 counts of tax fraud and testified against the Trump Organization as part of a plea bargain.

Lisa Marie Presley, daughter of Elvis, dies

AFP, Los Angeles



Singer-songwriter Lisa Marie Presley, the only child of rock and roll legend Elvis Presley, died

Thursday hours after being hospitalized, her family said. She was 54. Presley, who led a tumultuous life in the sprawling shadow of her world-famous father, and who attended a high-profile awards ceremony just this week, had

been rushed to a California hospital's intensive care unit for cardiac arrest. Presley was found "unresponsive" by her housekeeper at home Thursday morning in the celebrity-studded Los Angeles suburb of Calabasas, entertainment website TMZ reported. Lisa Marie Presley was Elvis's only child. She previously controlled Elvis Presley Enterprises, but sold the bulk of shares in the company to a private equity firm in 2005.

Momen says

FROM PAGE 12

Bangladesh and the United States," Momen said.

Donald Lu will have meetings on a range of priorities including energy, trade, security cooperation, religious freedom, labour, and human rights.

He will meet with senior Bangladeshi officials and civil society leaders to discuss strengthening their bilateral relationship, expanding economic engagement, and hear their perspectives on labour and human rights, according to the US Department of State.

Momen said Bangladesh and the US believe in the same values and promote democracy and human rights.

Bangladesh has set an example in the world by sacrificing 30 lakh lives to establish democracy, and ensure justice and human rights, Momen said, adding that "Our principles and values are almost the same."

He said the US is a friendly country and Bangladesh accepts if they come up with any constructive suggestions.

Train runs over

FROM PAGE 12

Sumi Begum jumped in front of the train with her children, but police have started looking into the matter.

The condition of the rescued child is not good. If necessary, he will be sent to Rangpur Medical College Hospital for advanced treatment, said the OC.

Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 12

make the semifinals before the final on January 29 at Potchefstroom

Alongside Bangladesh, Group A contains Australia, Sri Lanka and the USA. Bangladesh will be buoyed by their wins in warm-up fixtures leading up to the showpiece event. They defeated South Africa by seven runs (D/L) method on Monday before defeating India in a tight game by just three runs on Wednesday.

Bangladesh will play their next match against Sri Lanka on January 16 before taking on the USA on January 18, both at the same venue.

Among the 15-member squad, which left for Johannesburg on January 1, captain Disha Biswas along with Marufa Akter and Dilara Akter have played in international fixtures, with the skipper having featured for the senior team during their tour of New Zealand.

South Africa had been a happy hunting ground for the men's U-19 team in 2020 and the women's side will be hoping to create some memories of their own this time around as the first edition of the tournament commences.

UP chairman's men

FROM PAGE 12

including Adu Nagar and Sufinagar areas.

The UP chairman spearheading the operation of damaging the environment, is known as a "hill-grabber", said Anwar Kamal, president of Co-Management Committee, which coordinates volunteers with the help of the Forest Department to protect Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary.

"The UP chairman has deployed people to extract sand from the stream and by ripping apart hillocks. A few weeks ago, a worker died while cutting trees. Last year this time around, he used to fell trees on a regular basis to feed brick kilns," he said.

Sanjida Rahman, whose family has been involved in raising awareness for generations to conserve the forest, also confirmed that the local UP chairman has been tearing down trees in the forest without any interruption.

"Every day, dozens of trucks take away sand, earth and trees from various parts of the forest. Once celebrated for its conservation feat, the forest has now lost its grandeur due to mindless grabbing," she said.

Contacted, Chunati Union Parishad Chairman Joydul Abedin denied his involvement in razing hillocks.

"I didn't touch any forest there, nor did I raze any hillock. You can visit the spot to verify the allegations," he

claimed over the phone.

When this correspondent provided evidence of speaking to locals, labourers and truck drivers who said that he was behind the razing, Joydul Abedin abruptly ended the call.

Kamruddin, grandchild of the chairman, denied the allegation as well, claiming they did not even enter the forest.

Mahmud Hossen, range officer of Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, told The Daily Star that the area was barricaded with bamboo so that no truck could enter the forest. He also mentioned that they have planted saplings to stop environmental degradation.

"We have utilised our sources there in an effort to collect evidence for filing cases against the perpetrators," he said.

Asked about the identities of the perpetrators, Hossen said they heard the name of the local UP chairman as well as another group. "But we can't file a case without evidence."

Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary consists of 7763.4 acres of forest land and is divided into two ranges - Chunati and Jaldi.

Compared to other Asian countries, Bangladesh has less designated forestry - only 17 percent of its total area - according to FAO. Various research studies have warned against continuous degradation of the hill forest of the Chunati beat.

World's longest river cruise

FROM PAGE 12

He emphasised the need to build a modern multi-modal network of waterways and talked about partnerships with Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries that have strong water connectivity with the northeastern part of India, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

After the virtual launching, the private cruise vessel MV Ganga Vilas left Modi's parliamentary constituency Varanasi on its maiden journey with 32 tourists from Switzerland who signed up for the entire length of the journey.

Operated by India's Antara Cruises, a private enterprise, MV Ganga Vilas will travel 3,200km through five states in India and parts of Bangladesh over 51 days.

The 62-metre-long vessel with three decks has 18 suites. Equipped with a gym and spa, the vessel can accommodate 36 tourists. For a tourist,

the cruise will cost between 25,000 rupees to 50,000 rupees per day, the cruise's director Raj Singh said.

According to the website of the operator of the cruise, tourists who prefer a shorter itinerary can do so in two parts - a 20-night trip from Varanasi to Kolkata (or vice-versa) along the Ganges, and a 30-night trip from Kolkata to Sivasagar (or vice-versa) via Bangladesh.

Besides connecting India's National Waterway 1 (NW1) which includes the Ganges and National Waterway 2 (NW2) on Brahmaputra, the cruise will cross 27 river systems.

The cruise is planned to touch 50 tourist spots including World Heritage Sites including the Sundarbans, Kaziranga national park in Assam, river ghats, historical sites and major cities like Patna in Bihar, Sahibganj in Jharkhand, Kolkata in West Bengal, Dhaka in Bangladesh and Guwahati in Assam.

Russia claims

FROM PAGE 12

But Serhiy Cherevatyi, spokesperson for Ukraine's eastern military command, told Reuters by telephone Soledar had not been captured: "Our units are there, the town is not under Russian control."

CNN said on its website that a reporting team just outside the town could hear mortar and rocket fire yesterday afternoon and saw Ukrainian forces ferrying troops in what appeared to be an organised pullback.

A Ukrainian officer in the area, speaking on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to the media, also told Reuters by telephone the Russians had not fully taken the town.

Ukrainian officials said on Thursday more than 500 civilians, including 15 children, were trapped inside Soledar.

In an overnight video address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked two units in Soledar he said were "holding their positions and inflicting significant losses on the enemy." He did not give more details.

After Ukrainian forces drove Russia into humiliating retreats for much of the second half of 2022, the front lines have barely budged for the past two months. Meanwhile, the battles around Bakhmut and Soledar became what both sides called a "meat grinder" - a brutal war of attrition claiming the lives of thousands of soldiers.

Kyiv's Western allies see it as a fight for marginal gains on a stretch of front where neither side can make a big breakthrough, a sideshow from battles further north and south, where Ukraine hopes to push through Russian lines.

"Even if both Bakhmut and Soledar fall to the Russians, it's not going to have a strategic impact on the war itself," US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters at the White House, "and it certainly isn't going to stop the Ukrainians or slow them down."

Meanwhile, Ukraine's defence minister said the country has effectively become a Nato member despite the military alliance's reluctance to get embroiled in a wider conflict with Russia.

Oleksiy Reznikov said he was confident that Western allies would shed their inhibitions about supplying Ukraine with heavier weapons such as tanks and fighter jets.

"This concern about the next level of escalation, for me, is some kind of protocol," he told the BBC in an interview broadcast Friday, dismissing Nato fears about provoking Russia.

Biden probed over

FROM PAGE 12

the White House of a cover-up over the affair, swiftly announced their own inquiry to run independently of the criminal probe.

The disclosures have prompted comparisons to the special counsel investigation of Trump's hoarding of hundreds of classified materials at his Florida beachfront home and his alleged obstruction of government efforts to get them back.

"I take classified documents and classified material seriously. We're cooperating fully (and) completely with the Justice Department's review," Biden told reporters.

"As part of that process, my lawyers reviewed other places where documents from my time as vice president were stored, and they finished the review last night."

The president said a "small number" of documents with classified markings had been found in storage areas and his library and that the Justice Department was notified immediately.

Biden declined to take shouted questions from the press, but a White House lawyer said later the documents had been "inadvertently misplaced."

Hur is a former assistant US attorney who worked in the DOJ from 2007 until 2014 and returned to public service under Trump as the principal associate deputy attorney general.

He promised a swift investigation

and pledged to be "fair, impartial and dispassionate."

The first cache of Biden documents was discovered a week before last year's midterm elections but only acknowledged by the White House on Monday, prompting accusations from Republicans that it was kept secret for party political reasons.

James Comer, head of the powerful House oversight committee, said he would be leading an investigation into the "mishandling of classified documents and the Swamp's efforts to hide this information."

"There are many questions about why the Biden administration kept this matter a secret from the public, who had access to the office and the residence, and what information is contained in these classified documents," he said.

Trump, who is facing multiple criminal and civil probes, took to his Truth Social platform to call for an immediate end to his investigation "because I did everything right."

Legal analysts have pointed to major differences between the cases, particularly over the size of the huge hoard of documents Trump had stored at his residence after leaving the White House in 2021.

The FBI carted away some 11,000 papers after serving a search warrant in August, and Trump could face obstruction of justice charges after spending months resisting efforts to recover his trove.

Pharaoh Ramses II's

FROM PAGE 12

to San Francisco and will not be included when the rest of the exhibition packs up and heads to Sydney.

The gesture marks gratitude towards Paris, where scientists preserved Ramses II's mummy by treating it against fungus when it was exhibited in 1976.

This time, the sculpted coffin will be shown empty, as Egyptian law now forbids transporting royal mummies abroad.

It depicts the recumbent king in bright colours with his arms crossed on his chest holding his sceptre and whip of office.

His eyes outlined in black, he wears a striped pharaonic headdress and a braided false beard.

One of the best-known pharaohs, reputed as a great warrior and builder of temples, Ramses II ruled from 1279-1213 BC.

Inscriptions on the sarcophagus' sides detail how his body was moved

three times from 1070 BC, after his tomb in Luxor's Valley of the Kings was raided by grave robbers.

Its final resting place was discovered in 1881, just as it too was being pillaged.

As well as the coffin, the Paris exhibition will include vast numbers of ancient Egyptian objects, solid gold and silver jewels, statues, amulets, masks and other sarcophagi.

Only animal mummies will be on show, including cats which were "raised and sacrificed to the gods", Farout said.

Other treasures come from the capital Tanis that Ramses II built east of the Nile Delta, including a solid silver coffin, finger and toe sheaths and solid-gold masks decorated with jewels.

Exhibition organisers hope large numbers of people will make the trip to the La Villette exhibition centre in northeast Paris. A previous exhibition about Tutankhamun drew 1.4 million visitors to the same place in 2019.

12 months, 5 films ONE SHUVOO

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

Arifin Shuvoo often talks about his 'Made in Bangladesh' six-pack - and it is true that he has worked incredibly hard for his body transformation over the years, especially for *Black War*, which released yesterday.

The actor also has quite a few projects coming up in 2023, including *Noor*, *Unish Bish* and *Mujib: The Making of a Nation*.

We have a cup of (non-sugar) coffee with him to talk about his hopes for the year.

Tell us about your six-pack transformation. How difficult was it?

'Six pack' transformation is a wrong concept. A transformation doesn't necessarily mean that

you have to build your body. You can change your body from one shape to another which is called 'transformation'. You have seen my six-pack transformation of *Black War* and *Mission Extreme*, I had a radical transformation for *Mujib: The Making of a Nation*, where I had to increase my body fat for my role. When I joined the project, I was about 84 kgs, but I had to increase my weight up to 98 kg gradually. I am 86 kg right now, as I have to be lean for two upcoming movies. They require a lot of hard work, as well as a rigid commitment.

Last year you didn't have a single movie released.

We couldn't release any movies last year due to delays in post-production. However, I



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

have great news for my fans as I will be releasing 5 films in 12 months, which in itself is a huge deal.

Why do you think people will watch 'Black War'?

People who love action movies and want to admire my 'Made in Bangladesh six packs' will definitely come to the theatres.

Do you think you have gained the respect you deserve for your work in

Dhallywood?

I work in movies because of my own satisfaction as an artiste, I don't wander around for industry recognition. I only care about whether my films have good scripts or if my characterisation is perfect or not. I don't want to be dependent on others to judge my work.

Is there any truth to rumours of you dating 'Black War's' heroine, Oishee?

The industry loves to make up rumours about an actor's personal life. I know my truth, and so I don't need to add any verification to their claims.

Any message for your fans?

Black War is an action film which will surely entertain you and make you smile. Meanwhile, we got great responses for it. Please don't compare our movies to Hollywood movies. We have tried our best and please do consider our limitations and watch the movie with a free mind.

Out and about IN DHAKA



What's on The Playlist
January 14 | 5:00 pm
Naveed's Comedy Club



Acoustic Eve
January 14 | 7 pm
Esscre's Dreamcatcher, Dhanmondi



Rockkaven 2023
January 15 | 1 pm - 10 pm
International Convention City
Bashundhara (ICCB)

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
Alice in Borderland

Deepto Play
Kajoler
Dinratri

Chorki
The Red Sleeve

Amazon Prime
Hunters (Freevee)

Disney plus
Star Wars:
The Bad
Batch



TV TALKIES

FLEABAG



Phoebe Waller-Bridge's *Fleabag* is a comedy-drama TV series, created and written by the actress—based on her one-woman stage show. The actress originally performed *Fleabag*'s stage version at the 2013 Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

At its core, *Fleabag* is quite different from the average comedy. Phoebe Waller-Bridge constantly breaks the fourth-wall, having short monologues with the audience about the hilarious situations she often finds herself in.

More than just a comedy, the show also features deep and intricate moments women find themselves in, challenged by society, their families, men and so much more. With only just two seasons, *Fleabag* is in many ways a masterpiece that everyone should check out.



STYLE STATEMENT

Jenna Ortega

As the Golden Globes wrapped-up on Wednesday, the red carpet was abuzz with stars. *Wednesday* star Jenna Ortega deviated away entirely from her newfound gothic style, with a stunning burnt-champagne Gucci number. Ortega, who has risen to immense popularity, both for her commitment to her characters as well as her acting prowess, has been making statements since the end of 2022, for being the new 'it' girl.

Ortega rise to fame began with her Disney series and continued as she took on more expressive roles in Netflix's *You*. At that time, her style was similar to her character, very edgy with a drop of Disney-esque modesty to it. Which, in retrospect happens to all Disney stars.

On the Golden Globe carpet, however, the actress sported her new shaggy wolfcut, dyed a warm red to match the geometric cut-out gown she wore. She paired multiple twinning Tiffany & Co necklaces to go with her flowing ensemble. Previously, Jenna had always made appearances dressed akin to the recent character she played, which might make the viewers think, is this a foreshadowing for a new character she might be playing soon?

What about the right to privacy?

‘Lawful interception’ cannot be a carte balance to breach privacy

The home minister’s acknowledgement in parliament that the government has taken the initiative to launch an “Integrated Lawful Interception System” to monitor social media is as chilling as it gets. It appears to be part of ongoing efforts to increase the government’s surveillance capacity to “prevent anti-state and anti-government activities”. The legal cover potentially serves as a protection against any legal challenges in this regard. Moreover, we’re told that modern technology like Open Source Intelligence Technology (OSINT) has already been included in the arsenal of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC) for the same purpose.

There is nothing to rejoice at the vibe coming off the floor of parliament. Publicly acknowledged or not, any effort by state actors to intercept communications lends itself to the suspicion, by now well justified, that it might be abused. The gap between interception and legal interception has always been thin and at times blurred. And when terms like “anti-state” and “anti-government” – which, in Bangladesh, have been mostly a byword for political repression – are thrown around to justify it, we have more than enough reasons to be wary of such initiatives.

The home minister says that there are local and foreign conspiracies afoot that must be thwarted to protect the interests of the country. We can’t argue against that. But “anti-government” is not necessarily “anti-state”, and “anti-state”, without a clear, acceptable definition, has been known to be used interchangeably with the former to muzzle the voices of critics. Citizens would like to have the assurance that this will not be repeated. They would like to have a clear picture of said conspiracies – which is seldom given, however – and a reliable, transparent mechanism to deal with that.

Unfortunately, while the government seems keen to increase its surveillance capacity, it doesn’t seem to believe that gaining public trust in the process is as important. Last week, Haaretz, an influential Israeli newspaper, reported that Bangladesh had purchased advanced surveillance equipment including a “Vehicle Mounted Mobile Interceptor” from an Israeli company, despite the two countries having no diplomatic ties. One can hardly expect any accountability of the use of spyware collected through such dubious methods. The new interception system adds to the government’s growing arsenal of surveillance tools. It can, using OSINT, track mobile and land-line phones to identify/locate suspects. It has devices for remote interception of calls, content blocking and filtering, etc.

So much effort to increase digital surveillance – but what about people’s right to privacy? Where is the initiative to protect it? Even if used for a public purpose, can citizens trust that these tools and systems will be handled responsibly without encroaching on our fundamental rights? The government must answer these questions, and must be very convincing in that. There is already deep-seated resentment against its handling of social media rights and issues, because of repressive laws and practices. It must try to improve the situation.

Exploitation is built into global RMG industry

We need to find a way to hold brands accountable

In the global imagination, Bangladeshi RMG factories are the hotbeds of worker exploitation. However, while there are justifiable criticisms of the apparel industry, which has systematically failed to address workers’ rights violations and ensure dignified wages, what is often overlooked in international discourses is the complicity of the global brands in enabling such terrible conditions.

A recent survey of 1,000 Bangladeshi factories making garments for global brands highlights that more than half of the factories were subjected to order cancellations, refusal to pay, price reductions or delayed payment for goods during the pandemic. This resulted in massive job losses, lower wages for workers, and high staff turnover, with one in five factories reporting they could not even pay the legal minimum wage as a result. At the height of the pandemic, when no alternative employment opportunities were available, over 26 percent of the total workforce were simply left to fend for themselves – or rather, starve to death – without so much as payment of due benefits.

The study shows that many big brands, including H&M, Inditex, Primark, C&A, Gap, and Walmart, engaged in such dubious practices. The bigger their influence, the more likely they were to pressurise suppliers to accept unfair terms. Of the 78 brands buying from four or more factories, 90 percent were reported as engaging in unfair practices, with 86 percent cancelling orders, 85 percent reducing the price arbitrarily, 50 percent refusing to pay for goods already in transit/production, and 85 percent delaying payment for goods already dispatched for more than three months. Seventy-two percent of brands with 15 or more suppliers were reportedly purchasing from factories at below the cost of production, while 96 percent were reported as purchasing from factories struggling to pay the minimum wage.

Even more alarmingly, the brands did not stop these practices once the factories reopened after lockdown, and continued to pressurise suppliers for reduction of prices, despite the increase in cost of raw materials and Covid-19 mitigation measures. With suppliers consistently failing to negotiate fair terms with retailers, the burden of increased costs was inevitably pushed on to the workers, who were forced to work long hours under tremendous pressure, often without pay, to meet unrealistic targets.

It is unacceptable that global brands would be allowed to simply get away with such unfair practices, in the absence of any mechanism to hold them accountable. Attempts to regulate the global supply chain have thus far been met with little success, with retailers severely pushing back on any sort of binding agreements. The US and EU, which house most of these big brands, have not taken concrete steps to hold non-compliant retailers accountable, even though they regularly criticise and pressurise supplier nations to adhere to labour rights. Suppliers and supplier countries, on the other hand, are afraid to raise their concerns in case they lose orders.

We, therefore, need a global regulatory framework that prioritises the interests of the RMG workers. We urge all stakeholders to find a workable solution to this long-standing problem.

Afterthoughts on Dhaka Lit Fest

BLOWIN’ IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza is a professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA



What the capital witnessed during this year’s Dhaka Lit Fest (DLF) was nothing short of brilliance. The stellar presence of Nobel laureates, Booker International, Booker Prize, Oscar, and Masterchef winners, among others, made the 10th edition of the DLF truly exceptional. Neither the coronavirus-inflicted hiatus of three years nor the exceptionally fog-canopied cold weather could dampen the spirit of the fest. Dhaka won the hearts of the visitors, as is evident in their many complimentary remarks. And there was much to learn from visitors themselves.

In its 150-plus sessions, participated in by 500 speakers and panellists, the four-day event celebrated the theme of coming together through stories. We heard stories of different kinds – of sports and music, of genres and genders, of struggles and survivals, of place and memory, of humans and non-humans. Above all, we heard stories of the triumphs of science – innovations that helped us navigate through the pandemic. We also heard about the importance of stories – both big and small. We heard how travelling to Dhaka changed the minds of our honoured visitors; how the event put us on a global map.

Meeting the writers and thinkers in person, who have the special ability to present the world in words, asking them questions on specific issues, sharing a selfie moment or getting a copy of their book signed are all part of the DLF package. The ambience was great, with a lot of screenings, interactive sessions, activity corners for children, mind-blowing performances, and a wide range of book and food stalls. The only glitch in the system was the introduction of tickets for the first time. The price was deemed too much and social media became divided in its characterisation of DLF as an “elite fest.”

In their pre-event press conference, one of the three directors of DLF, Kazi Anis Ahmed, mentioned that the subscription was needed to reduce the

dependency on corporate sponsorship. But critics seemed unconvinced and unsatisfied. They sensed a deep-seated conspiracy to turn culture and literature into a profiteering scheme.

The commodification of art is a notorious topic. While the sensory perception of artwork, painting, or sculpture initiates a cognitive and emotional process, paying for such an experience is another ballgame. Art has



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MURSHED

traditionally benefited from a culture of patronage. People in positions of power have historically funded artists to outfit their homes or homelands and writers to narrate their lives and experiences. The Medici family, for instance, was responsible for the majority of Florentine art during the Italian renaissance. The same can be said about the Nauratnas (nine gems) in the courts of the Hindu emperor Vikramaditya, the Mughal emperor Akbar, and the feudal lord Raja Krishnachandra.

However, some artists are not willing to put a price tag on their creativity.

The nature of the sponsors has changed over the years. From the

religious commissioning of churches to charitable foundations, and from the sponsorship of aristocrats to that of plutocrats, there has been a radical shift in the artistic and literary world. With the hefty inflation of art prices and the celebrity status assumed by writers, the shift involves an obscene amount of money.

DLF is an expensive affair. I am not in a position to comment on how much of a ticketing fee is right to make an event of the stature of DLF viable. I am rather interested in a tangential strain of thought I picked up during this meeting of minds.

Two young members of the audience, at a session on climate change on the first day of DLF, objected to the playful tone of the panellists. One compared the scenario to that of the musicians who played their instruments to calm the passengers of the Titanic in the ship’s final moments of sinking. Is

is not enough to keep on beating the old drum of ethical responsibility in an imaginative space.

Last October, climate activists across the globe started a unique protest by glueing themselves to several iconic art pieces in European museums to raise awareness about climate change. Two groups of young activists, under the banners of Ultima Generazione and Just Stop Oil, vandalised many paintings to point out, “Maybe they don’t understand that the inconvenience we created is nothing compared to one billion climate migrants and the many deaths that the climate crisis is causing already.”

Is it possible for art to be an ally in promoting the climate conversation?

Amitav Ghosh, who attended DLF as one of the featured authors, recalled how his ancestral homes kept changing with the changing course of the River Padma. The vulnerability he faced as a climate migrant had a lasting impact on his creative and intellectual makeup. His novels have been instrumental in expanding the social conversation about climate change by inviting his readers to imaginatively engage with the world that we inhabit. His work inspires us to retool our inner climate while acknowledging the fear and guilt that dominates the climate conversation.

The two young individuals who asked the questions during the aforementioned DLF session seemed less convinced that art and artists are doing enough to save the world.

In another session featuring Amitav Ghosh and Abdulrazak Gurnah, a 15-year-old schoolboy stood up to ask what advice the panel has for their 15-year-old selves. The panellists ducked the query.

For me, these questions by our young generation have been the highlights of DLF 2023. The fest provided a space where the current generation can rise to the occasion and raise questions. Such space is more and more getting squeezed in Dhaka. DLF, with its international orientation, opened it up.

We must curate many such moments and occasions. I am sure by now DLF has created many friends who can take up a financial plan to make the greatest show in Dhaka easily accessible. It is important that our young generation gets exposed to the best minds and can then prepare to be the best versions of themselves.

On fighting disinformation during the next general election

Dr SM Rezwan Ul Alam is associate professor of media and journalism, and director of public relations at North South University.

SM REZWAN UL ALAM



The upcoming parliamentary election in Bangladesh is fast approaching, with the prime minister announcing it will likely take place in January 2024. In light of this, it is important to consider how to combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation before, during, and after the election. Recent media reports suggest that the authorities are forming an inter-ministerial committee to fight disinformation at home and abroad. It may be mentioned here that Facebook had shut down a number of fake news sites that had spread disinformation ahead of the 2013 general elections. In 2018, the government unofficially downgraded mobile internet before and during the elections, slowing down broadband internet and blocking mobile banking.

Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information that is shared unintentionally, while disinformation is false or misleading information that is spread with the intention of tricking or controlling others, often for a specific agenda or motive. There are many ways that false information can get out, such as through social media, the news, etc. Disinformation, on the other hand, is often spread by individuals or organisations with a specific agenda or motive to advance a political cause or gain an advantage over a competitor. Disinformation can be spread through the same channels as misinformation, but it is often more carefully planned and calculated.

There have been numerous research studies on the effects of disinformation and fake news during elections, and the findings indicate that it can have several negative impacts. One of the most significant effects is that it can undermine the public’s trust in institutions and the democratic process. When individuals are exposed to false or misleading information, it can cause them to question the legitimacy of elections, government officials, and other vital institutions. This can lead to a loss of faith in democracy and a decline in civic engagement.

Another adverse effect of fake news during elections is that it can contribute to the polarisation of society. There are plenty of examples of these in several presidential elections in the US. When people are exposed to information that reinforces their existing beliefs, it can lead to a confirmation bias, where they are more likely to believe information that aligns with their views and are less likely to consider other perspectives. This can create echo chambers, where individuals are only exposed to information that reinforces their beliefs and can further entrench political divisions.

Finally, fake news can also undermine the free and fair exchange of ideas, a cornerstone of democratic societies. Exposure to false or misleading information can distort the public discourse and make it difficult for individuals to

make informed decisions. This can ultimately undermine the integrity of the democratic process.

Fighting fake news during election time can be challenging, but there are several steps that individuals and organisations can take to help combat its spread. One crucial step is to fact-check information before sharing it. This can be done by using reputable sources such as news organisations, government websites, and fact-checking organisations to verify the accuracy of the information. Facebook and Google have set up a special system to monitor fake news in Bangladesh.

Another critical step is to avoid sharing information from unverified sources, particularly on social media. This can help prevent the spread of disinformation and fake news, as well as other types of misinformation.

Promoting media literacy and critical thinking skills can also help fight fake news. This can include teaching individuals how to identify the signs of fake news, such as sensational headlines and unverified sources, and encouraging them to think critically about the information they encounter.

Finally, it can be helpful for organisations and individuals to work together to combat fake news. This can include reporting fake news to social media platforms or collaborating on efforts to educate the public about the dangers of fake news and how to identify it.

There are several strategies that the Bangladesh Election Commission can adopt to tackle disinformation or fake news during elections. One key strategy is establishing a real time rapid response team to identify and address disinformation. This team can monitor social media and other online platforms to check the spread of false or misleading information and work to debunk it and provide accurate

information to the public quickly.

Another strategy is to engage with social media platforms and other technology companies to combat disinformation. This can include working with these companies to develop algorithms and other tools to identify and remove disinformation and collaborate on public education campaigns to promote media literacy and critical thinking skills.

Additionally, the election commission can also work to educate the public about disinformation and how to identify it. This can include providing information and resources on their websites and through other channels, such as public service announcements, to help individuals recognise the signs of disinformation and avoid sharing it.

Finally, the election commission can also work with other organisations, such as media outlets and fact-checking organisations, to promote accurate and reliable information. This can include collaborating on fact-checking initiatives and amplifying accurate information through various channels.

The Bangladesh media, both print and electronic, must plan and train their journalists and newsroom managers to overcome the challenges of clickbait or breaking news journalism. The media’s reputation is at stake here.

The global good practice examples warrant that the government should refrain from controlling information flow through restrictive legal measures or a surveillance-centric approach. No evidence indicates that using sweeping and disproportionate measures such as shutdowns and censorship will stop the spread of online disinformation and propaganda. Instead, it should be the principal facilitator of dialogues among citizens and institutions by enabling the right information environment during elections.



Historical documents indicate that the greatest minds of the time met at the Temple of the Warriors to accurately predict the dates of eclipses by using the Mayan calendars.

PHOTO: MAHJABEEN HAIDER

Visiting the spirits of the Maya



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QUAMRUL HAIDER

One of the best ways to understand the social structure, distinctive religious practices, elaborate hieroglyphics, sophisticated calendar systems, and extraordinary achievements in the areas of astronomy and architecture of the Maya, who ruled a large part of Mesoamerica for more than 2,500 years, is by visiting their ruins in the Yucatán Peninsula.

Over the course of a week in December 2022, my wife and I stepped back in time and walked the footsteps of those who lived in the Mayan era at Chichén Itzá and Chacchobén in Mexico, and Nim Li Punit in Belize.

Chichén Itzá

Recognised as a Unesco World Heritage site, Chichén Itzá, meaning “mouth of the well of the Itzá,” is a jewel of the Mayan empire in the Yucatán Peninsula. It was inhabited between the sixth and 12th centuries AD, but fell into a rapid decline from 1200 AD onward.

The most iconic structure at Chichén Itzá is El Castillo – an imposing pyramid-like temple built to honour the feathered serpent deity Kulkulcán. Considered one of the seven wonders of the modern world, it was built on top of a cenote – a deep, water-filled sinkhole – because cenotes held great religious significance for the Maya. It has 365 steps, one for each day of the year, and is oriented to mark the solstices and equinoxes. During equinoxes, the setting sun casts shadows on the steps of the pyramid that resemble the body of Kulkulcán.

The Maya were masterful astronomers whose knowledge of the celestial bodies – of Venus, in particular – led to the creation of the Mayan calendars. To them, Venus is a deity and a companion of the sun. From the nearby observatory called El Caracol (“The Snail”) and the well-preserved Platform of Venus, they tracked the planet carefully and calculated with amazing accuracy its orbital cycle of 584 days. They also used Venus to determine the length of the year, as well as to schedule various

religious rituals.

Flanked by hundreds of columns with carved figures of Maya warriors is the Temple of the Warriors, a massive structure that was used for ceremonial gatherings. Historical documents indicate that the greatest minds of the time met here to accurately predict the dates of eclipses by using the Mayan calendars.

Another interesting structure is the Platform of the Eagles and Jaguars, displaying images representing the course of the sun across the sky during the day and its descent to the underworld at night. The eagles and jaguars on the walls of the edifice are deemed to symbolise two warriors who captured victims and offered them as sacrificial gifts to the gods.

Near El Castillo is the largest ancient ball court in the Americas, where the Maya played Pok-Ta-Pok, a game considered to be metaphorical for the constant battle between the forces of good and evil, and the cycle of life and death. Pok-Ta-Pok involved shooting a rubber ball through a small stone hoop that was incredibly high on a wall using only one’s hips, knees, or elbows, without ever using their hands, feet, or head.

The Maya were ahead of their time in many other ways. Their system of numbers and mathematics looks distinctly modern. They invented the concept of zero some 500 years before its introduction in the Eurasian world by Hindu mathematicians, around 600 AD.

Chacchobén

Also known as “The Palace of Red Corn,” Chacchobén is an ancient place of Mayan pilgrimage characterised by large temples and massive platforms. Evidence collected during excavations date the earliest human settlements in Chacchobén at around 1000 BC. The site seems to have been abandoned around 1000 AD.

Many temples are still in their natural condition, covered with vegetation and awaiting to be restored to reveal their

secrets. Soaring above the canopy of the tropical forest, the stairs of the Gran Basamento (“Great Basement”) – leading to a sacred plateau where religious rituals and human sacrifice were enacted – expresses the grandeur of Chacchobén’s sophistication.

Nim Li Punit

Nim Li Punit is a small but architecturally unique ancient Mayan site in southern Belize. It flourished from the fifth through eighth centuries AD. In the Maya Kekchi language, Nim Li Punit means “Big Hat,” so named due to the depiction on a stela (stone column) of one of its rulers wearing a large hat.

A small museum at the site houses an impressive collection of carved stelae that tell the story of the sovereigns of the city-state in the Maya hieroglyphic script. The largest of them, featuring the eponymous “Big Hat,” is one of the biggest stelae ever discovered at Nim Li Punit. A well-kept ball court is also located within the complex.

According to archaeologists, the city was deserted suddenly in the ninth century AD, probably because of area-wide overpopulation exceeding the region’s supporting capacity for the then prevalent intercropping farming system. Nevertheless, more than just a pile of rubble, the ruins of Nim Li Punit tell the story of its glorious past.

Despite the punishing heat, humidity, and arduous trek, it was an educational trip for us. We were transported to the past, and witnessed how the Mayan civilisation looked centuries ago. We learned that the Maya deeply believed in the cyclical nature of life: nothing was ever “born” and nothing ever “died.” This belief inspired their view of the gods and the cosmos, which, in turn, encouraged their imaginative efforts in the arts and sciences, mathematics, astronomy, and engineering.

Finally, although their cities were abandoned and their culture was subsumed by the Spanish conquistadors in the 16th century AD, the Maya have not vanished.

Today, they farm the same lands, travel the same roads, navigate the same rivers, speak the same indigenous languages, practise the same rituals, and still carry forward the traditions of their great ancestors.

Biden to Democrats: Nominate me, whether you like it or no



Norman Solomon is the national director of RootsAction.org and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy.

NORMAN SOLOMON

With 2023 underway, Democrats in office are still dodging the key fact that most of their party’s voters don’t want President Biden to run for re-election. Among prominent Democratic politicians, deference is routine while genuine enthusiasm is sparse.

Many of the endorsements sound rote. Last month, retiring senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont came up with this gem: “I want him to do whatever he wants. If he does, I’ll support him.”

Joe Biden keeps saying he intends to be the Democratic nominee in 2024. Whether he will be is an open question – and progressives should strive to answer it with a firm “no.”

The next presidential election will be exceedingly grim if all the Democratic Party can offer as an alternative to the neo-fascist Republican Party is an incumbent who has too often served corporate power and consistently serves the military-industrial complex.

The Biden administration has taken some significant antitrust steps to limit rampant

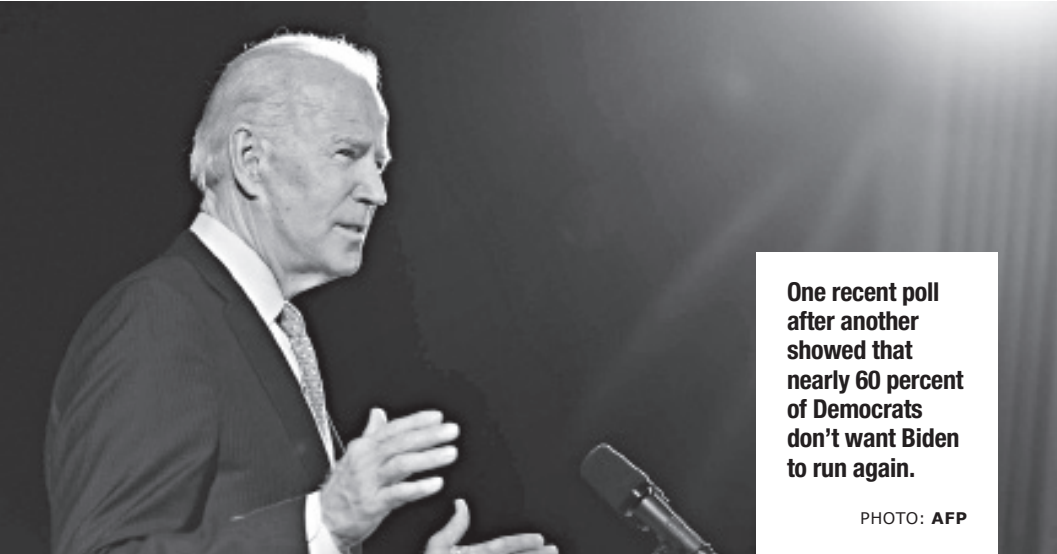
Biden seems unable or unwilling to articulate a social-justice approach to such issues. As for the continuing upward spike in Pentagon largesse while giving human needs short shrift, Biden was full of praise for the record-breaking, beyond-bloated USD 858 billion military spending bill that he signed in late December.

While corporate media’s reporters and pundits are much more inclined to critique his age than his policies, what makes Biden most problematic for so many voters is his antiquated political approach.

Running for a second term would inevitably cast Biden as a defender of current conditions – in an era when personifying current conditions is a heavy albatross that weighs against electoral success.

A Hart Research poll of registered voters in November 2022 found that only 21 percent said the US was “headed in the right direction” while 72 percent said it was “off on the wrong track.”

As the preeminent symbol of the way things are, Biden is all set to be a vulnerable standard-



monopolisation. But overall realities are continuing to widen vast economic inequalities that are grist for the spinning mill of pseudo-populist GOP demagogues.

Meanwhile, President Biden rarely conveys a sense of urgency or fervent discontent with present-day social conditions. Instead, he routinely comes off as “status-quo Joe.”

For the future well-being of so many millions of people, and for the electoral prospects of the Democratic Party in 2024, representing the status quo invites cascading disasters. A few months ago, Bernie Sanders summed it up this way: “The most important economic and political issues facing this country are the extraordinary levels of income and wealth inequality, the rapidly growing concentration of ownership, the long-term decline of the American middle class and the evolution of this country into oligarchy.”

Interviewed days ago, Sanders said: “It pains me very, very much that we’re seeing more and more working class people voting Republican. Politically, that is a disaster, and Democrats have to recognise that serious problem and address it.”

But President Biden doesn’t seem to recognise the serious problem, and he fails to address it.

During the last two years, domestic policy possibilities have been curbed by Biden’s frequent and notable refusals to use the power of the presidency for progress. He did not issue many of the potential executive orders that could have moved the country forward despite Senate logjams.

At the same time, “bully pulpit” advocacy for workers’ rights, voter rights, economic justice, climate action and much more has been muted or non-existent.

bearer in a country where nearly three quarters of the electorate say they don’t like the nation’s current path.

But for now anyway, no progressive Democrat in Congress is willing to get into major trouble with the Biden White House by saying he shouldn’t run, let alone by indicating a willingness to challenge him in the early 2024 primaries.

Meanwhile, one recent poll after another showed that nearly 60 percent of Democrats don’t want Biden to run again. A poll by *The New York Times* last summer found that a stunning 94 percent of Democrats under 30-years old would prefer a different nominee.

Although leaning favourably toward Biden overall, mass-media coverage has occasionally supplied the kind of candour that Democratic officeholders have refused to provide on the record. “The party’s relief over holding the Senate and minimising House losses in the midterms has gradually given way to collective angst about what it means if Biden runs again,” NBC News reported days before Christmas.

Conformist support from elected Democrats for another Biden campaign reflects a shortage of authentic representation on Capitol Hill. The gap is gaping, for instance, between leaders of the Congressional Progressive Caucus and the constituency – the progressive base – they claim to represent. In late November, CPC chair Pramila Jayapal highlighted the gap when she went out of her way to proclaim that, “I believe he should run for another term and finish this agenda we laid out.”

Is such leadership representing progressives to the establishment or the other way around?

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/Opinion

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Cashew family tree

6 Milk buy

11 Naples' nation

12 Korean or Thai

13 Reserved

14 Act the siren

15 Crowd scene players

17 – Mahal

19 That woman

20 Enraged

23 Kind of reactor

25 Rani's gown

26 Disturb the peace, in a way

28 Begged

29 Set straight

30 Green and Gore

31 Big snake

32 Fork over

33 Orchestra clasher

35 “Aladdin” villain

38 Fuming

41 San Antonio mission

42 Dance's de Mille

43 Like fake fruit

44 Rocket parts

DOWN

1 Use pews

2 Hagen of acting

3 Get people laughing

4 Baseball's Rodriguez

5 Nixon of “Sex and the City”

6 Persian Gulf nation

7 Calls on

8 Target

9 Cardi B's music

10 Booming stuff

16 Place for play

17 Lightning home

18 Even a little

20 Think ahead

21 Sporting site

22 Song

24 Dr.'s field

25 Biol. or geol.

27 Speedy horse

31 “Darkness” poet

33 Arrived

34 Jason's ship

35 Mould mover

36 Imitating

37 Long distance copy

39 Palmer's peg

40 Curry letter

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11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22

23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44

4-21

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

T	I	C	K	S		S	T	U	B
A	G	O	N	Y		S	H	I	N
L	U	R	E	D		H	O	P	I
K	A	N	E		P	R	E	S	T
O	N	E		I	R	E	Y	E	W
F	A	L	L	D	O	W	N		
S	L	A	B		D	A	M	S	
				B	A	L	L	G	O
B	I	N		D	A	Y		N	E
E	N	E	R	G	Y		S	T	A
A	G	R	E			D	I	A	R
N	O	V	A	S		E	R	N	I
S	T	E	P			M	E	A	N

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

UGH! THESE BUGS! I WISH I HAD A BUG COLLAR LIKE OTTO

HE DOESN'T NEED A COLLAR...

GROWL!

THEY WOULDN'T DARE BITE HIM

8/15

GREG MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

CAN I SIT BY YOU ON THE BUS?

FORGET IT.

COME ON. ZOE! LET ME SIT HERE!

I CAN'T. I'M SAVING IT FOR SOMEONE.

WHO??

ANYONE WHO ISN'T YOU.

8/15

JOHN KIRKMAN & SCOTT

TOURNAMENT FACTS

This is the inaugural edition of the tournament, being hosted by South Africa.

All 41 fixtures will be played in two venues -- Benoni and Potchefstroom.

A total of 16 teams, divided into four groups, will be participating.

Top three sides from each group will qualify for the Super Six round, where teams will be pooled in two groups of six. Group 1 will comprise the three teams each from Groups A and D, while Group 2 will have three teams each from Groups B and C.

Bangladesh will play the opening game against Australia in Benoni today.

Both the semifinals and the final will be played in Potchefstroom. The semifinals will be played on January 27 while the final is scheduled for January 29.

Fans can follow the World Cup via ICC Digital Platforms.

Fans from Bangladesh can follow select matches on Rabbithole.



Captains of the 16 teams pose with the trophy as the inaugural edition of the ICC Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup is all set to begin in South Africa today. Bangladesh, following victories in both their warm-up games against hosts South Africa and India, will begin their World Cup campaign by taking on Australia in the tournament opener at Willowmoore Park in Benoni. PHOTO: ICC

Chattogram pitch continues to impress

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

The Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium maintained its reputation for producing high-scoring encounters as Fortune Barishal registered the second 200-plus total in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League in the first game of the tournament's Chattogram phase against Chattogram Challengers yesterday.

It turned out to be a batting paradise, with Barishal posting 202 for seven after being sent to bat, powered by Pakistan batter Iftikhar Ahmed's blistering 57 off just 26 balls which was punctuated by five sixes and three fours.

Courtesy of Iftikhar's late carnage, Barishal managed to score 63 runs in the last five overs of their innings. Afghan batter Ibrahim Zadran also added a quick 48 off 33 balls after openers Anamul Haque (30) and Mehedi Hasan Miraz (24), promoted to an opening slot, provided a flying start.

The trust in the surface from the batters was evident although Chattogram skipper Shuvagta Hom opted to field and was looking to chase considering the positive nature of the Chattogram pitch.

In reply, Chattogram managed to put up a fight and reached 81 for two in 11 overs after Usman Khan's 19-ball 36.

Hard-hitter Ziaur Rahman raised the home support's hopes by raining down sixes and remained unbeaten on 47 off 25 balls with four sixes and three fours, but it was not enough. The hosts fell short by 26 runs, ending up on 176 for four after 20 overs.

Low-scoring encounters have always proved an issue in previous editions of the BPL, but Chattogram proved to be a lifesaver with the surfaces on offer. This



time around, the port city is living up to its reputation again.

Despite being on the losing side, Chattogram's Ziaur was full of praise for the surface, adding that such pitches could help foster batters willing to emerge as hard-hitters, which the Tigers have sorely lacked in the shortest format for a long time.

"I think the habit is important. Once the wickets are better, power-hitting will come automatically. But if the surfaces are not good enough, you won't be able to hit no matter how good your technique is because you need the ball to come to bat," Ziaur told the media after the game.

However, despite the sporting surface, Khulna Tigers were unable to post a

decent total against Rangpur Riders in the night game yesterday.

Tamim Iqbal disappointed with a tentative batting approach and handed a return catch to Azmatullah Omarzai after being caught in two minds on a length delivery after scoring just one run.

Khulna's poor batting approach was a stark reminder that a positive mindset from the batters is important even if the surface plays well and executing rather chancing the bat at every delivery is key.

They are still searching for a first win after three games and were reeling on 80 for six inside 13 overs after being sent to bat. Even the batting-friendly track could not inspire them to a fighting total as they were eventually bowled out for 130 in 19.4 overs.

Dorielton wondergoal lifts 10-man Kings

SPORTS REPORTER

A show-stopping bicycle kick from Dorielton Gomes steered hosts Bashundhara Kings to a 1-0 win against Bangladesh Police FC at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday while Abahani signalled their intention to remain in the title race with a 5-1 drubbing of their Chattogram namesakes at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

A hard-fought win meant defending champions Bashundhara Kings made it to five straight wins, despite having to fight with 10 men against a strong Police FC, who held Abahani to a goalless draw in their previous match.

However, they kept their winning run intact thanks to a 27th-minute strike from Brazilian forward Dorielton, who met a perfect cross from Rakib Hossain to the far post with a bicycle kick that bulleted home.

The defending champions then held onto their



lead after being reduced to 10 men for the last 24 minutes.

In Cumilla, hosts Abahani shrugged off the initial pressure from Chittagong Abahani and dominated proceedings to bounce back in the title race, raising their tally to 11 points from five matches, four behind Bashundhara Kings.

Eleta Kingsley made early inroads in the 11th minute with a clever drive from the top of the box before Nigerian defender David Ifeoku equalised in the 32nd minute with a free-kick from outside the box.

After resumption, Abahani got a stranglehold, scoring four more goals through Mehedi Hasan, Kingsley, Daniel Colindres and Nabib Newaj Jibon -- who struck one goal apiece in a 28-minute span.

In Mymensingh, visitors Muktiyoddha Sangsad tasted their first win after five matches, edging newcomers Azampur FC Uttar. Nigerian winger Najeem Junior netting the all-important goal in the 60th minute.

China's charge at Australian Open

AFP, Melbourne

Gifted 17-year-old Shang Juncheng will lead a historic Chinese charge at the Australian Open next week -- more evidence of the growing strength of tennis in the Asian country.

Three male Chinese players including the teenager will compete in Melbourne in the main draw, a first at any Grand Slam since the Open era began in 1968, officials at the tournament and Chinese media said.

Former junior number one Shang -- also known as "Jerry" -- battled through qualifying and faces Oscar Otte of Germany in the first round, where he will be joined by fellow Chinese athletes Zhang Zhizhen and Wu Yibing.

There will also be seven Chinese players in the women's singles draw in Melbourne, led by the fast-emerging Zheng Qinwen, 20, who is ranked 30th in the world and touted as a possible future major champion.

Resurgent United seek revenge against City

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester United were outclassed by Manchester City in the last local derby but the mood could not be more different as they prepare to host their city rivals in the Premier League on Saturday in the middle of a remarkable run of form.

League leaders Arsenal, meanwhile, face another test of their credentials in a derby of their own away to Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday on a weekend where local rivalries could have a huge say in the title race.

Arsenal lead the standings on 44 points after 17 games, five ahead of second-placed City. United are fourth on 35 points while Tottenham, who have played one game more, are fifth on 33.

Since being thrashed 6-3 by City on Oct. 2, United have won 15 out of 18 matches in all competitions while losing only once, while they are on a run of eight consecutive victories.

Their resurgence has been led by in-form striker Marcus Rashford, who has scored seven goals in his last six matches, and midfielder



Casemiro.

The Brazilian was surprisingly left out of the line-up for the last derby but has started all 10 of United's league games since then and has added some much-needed stability, as well as aggression, to Erik ten Hag's midfield.

He has made more tackles than any player in the league's top six this season, according to statistics website FBref.com, and has contributed three assists in two goals despite being the team's most defensive midfielder.

Another key influence in United's turnaround is coach Erik ten Hag, who has been firm with players on

team discipline, dropping Rashford to the bench when he turned up late to a team meeting and banishing the now departed Cristiano Ronaldo from the squad for leaving a match early.

"Nobody is bigger than the team, everybody has to contribute to the team. That's not about 11 players but the whole squad. It's the team around the team," Ten Hag told radio station Talksport this week.

"Everyone has one aim and they're contributing to that and working hard for that with togetherness. When we keep this going, we can achieve a lot."

City have rarely reached the heights of that sparkling performance in October and are in stuttering form ahead of the derby, dropping points twice in their last four league matches while they slumped to a surprise 2-0 defeat at Southampton in the League Cup on Wednesday.

Coach Pep Guardiola was scathing of his team after the result, declaring: "I know my players well and today was not even close to what we are."



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Planners' Cricket Tournament 2023 was held yesterday at the Clemon Indira Road Cricket Academy in Khamarbari, Dhaka. Organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Planners, the tournament featured seven teams, formed by the seven URP Alumni Associations of seven different public universities in Bangladesh. BIP President Fazle Reza Sumon and General Secretary SM Mehedi Ahsan were present, among others, at the opening ceremony.

“When I worked with women’s football in 2013, there was nothing to mention as most of the players could not shoot the ball properly but now there were good players in other teams as well. They can play football; they understand their positions; they understand how to defend but they are not mature enough for competitive matches.”

Bashundhara Kings head coach Syed Golam Jilani



Lack of interest and competition stunting growth of women’s league

The stats pretty much sum up the story of the league underlining Kings’ absolute domination. Kings won all 37 league matches they played in the last three editions and scored a whopping 442 goals, averaging 11.94 goals per match.

ANISUR RAHMAN

The success of women’s football across different age-groups had demanded the re-introduction of the women’s football league in a bid to provide female footballers with a foundation for them to stay in football and hone their skills for international competitions.

After two seasons in 2011-12 and 2012-13, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) brought back the league in 2019-20 and has run two editions since then but has struggled to bring quality to the field due to a lack of interest from well-known professional clubs.

The first two editions of the league saw top flight outfits like Sheikh Jamal, Mohammedan, Abahani, Brothers Union, Arambagh, Dhaka Wanderers, and Wari Club participate which helped produce a few competitive matches but the overall standard was not up to the mark.

Since then, however, the



performances of female footballers have significantly improved, especially at international level and the country’s football fans have begun to rally behind the women’s team following their SAFF Championship

triumph in 2022.

But when it comes to providing structure through the women’s league, clubs still show a lack of interest, with the aforementioned clubs opting to sit out in the last three seasons.

Quite naturally, the women’s league has now turned into a one-horse race, with the Bashundhara Kings roping in almost all national team players forming a team that has been largely unchallenged as they won a hattrick of league titles, while the other teams have largely been there to make up the numbers.

The stats pretty much sum up the story of the league underlining Kings’ absolute domination. Kings won all 37 league matches they played in the last three editions and scored a whopping 442 goals, averaging 11.94 goals per match.

This further intensifies the

argument for having Bangladesh Premier League clubs participate in the league which could make things more competitive.

Kings, though, deserve appreciation as they made room for the national team players offering payments that ranged from Tk 3 lakhs to Tk 8 lakhs this season, considerably higher compared to some of the other clubs like Ataur Rahman Bhuiyan College and Uttara FC that paid around Tk 50,000 to Tk 1.5 lakhs to most of their players.

It has also been learnt that a couple of teams fielded players without making any payments.

BFF had previously struggled to convince clubs to enter the women’s league but this time around, they completed the fifth edition with 12 teams – the highest ever and four more than the previous edition. The league featured nearly 250 players from across the country.

Despite the lack of competitiveness, national team coach Golam Rabbani Choton felt there was some improvement in the league, especially in terms of competition between the table toppers and the rest.

“I think the league has improved a bit compared to the previous editions because participating teams tried to play competitive football following some organised training,” Choton told The Daily Star.

“Though the performances of the small teams were not quite reflected in the scorelines, they improved match by match,” he added.

Around 64 national players from the senior national team and different age-group teams played in the league.

“For the first time, I picked four promising players for the U-17 and U-20 teams from the league and this means the league has gradually improved. Kings played the only competitive match against ARB

College but they won the remaining matches without much effort,” said Choton.

Kings’ head coach Syed Golam Jilani, who coached the national side in 2013, also admitted that the only challenge his side faces was from the ARB College, which featured players from U-20 and U-17 national teams.

“To be honest, the last match (between Kings and ARB College) was the only competitive match in the entire league,” Jilani said.

“When I worked with women’s football in 2013, there was nothing to mention as most of the players could not shoot the ball properly but now there were good players in other teams as well. They can play football; they understand their positions; they understand how to defend but they are not mature enough for competitive matches,” said the AFC A-licensed coach.

‘Football drives me in everything’

Bangladesh women’s team striker Krishna Rani Sarkar, who hit a brace against Nepal in the final of SAFF Women’s Championship last year, played a vital role behind Bashundhara Kings’ hat-trick triumph of the Women’s Football League. She emerged as the third top-scorer with 11 goals this year after finishing top of the chart with 28 goals in the last edition. Krishna talked to The Daily Star’s Anisur Rahman about different aspects of women’s league and women’s football.

The Daily Star (DS): How was the experience of playing the latest league?
Krishna Rani Sarkar (KRS): It was more or less good because the matches of the league and our play have been improving day by day. So far, my teammates and I have enjoyed the women’s football league.

DS: How was the competitiveness of the league compared to the previous two editions?
KRS: It was previously seen that one team conceded a lot of goals and their players stayed packed inside their half or box, but this time things changed a lot with all teams showing their attacking attitude. It was a different case for Bashundhara Kings though, which is full of national players.

DS: Did you enjoy playing one-sided league matches for star-studded Kings?
KRS: I think our opponents went down morally after hearing the name of Bashundhara [Kings] and they could not put up a fight against us, thus conceding a lot of goals. This time, we played our first match against Uttara FC and they conceded only two goals. It proved that if the opponents wanted to fight against us, they could. I think the girls from our opponents were not instructed as they should have been. They likely had been instructed to keep the margin of defeat less and the girls played accordingly.

DS: Will playing league matches help you at international stage?
KRS: To tell you the truth, many players are coming out because of the women’s



football league. Also, some talented players have been called up for the different age-group national teams. I think playing in the league will help those players perform well at the international level. It is evident that there have been some creative players who could not draw the attention before due to lack of matches, but through the league they could make their presence felt.

DS: To improve performance of senior players at international level, what kind of league matches do you need to play?
KRS: No doubt, we need to play more competitive matches because a team scoring one goal after another, while the other conceding a goal after another, is not at all competitive. The way I see it, I won’t personally be able to improve my game playing such one-sided affairs, rather the competitive matches could

give us an opportunity to improve performance and rectify the mistakes collectively or individually. Nevertheless, we should play more competitive matches to improve ourselves. To achieve this, the league needs more competitive teams.

DS: How do you evaluate the performances of the budding players outside the national camps?
KRS: I think they are also good players. Having watched the international achievements we delivered, they are also dreaming of representing the national team and trying to get a place in the national camp. I believe if they get more opportunities to play and proper support from the respective organisations, they can reach our level. It is more important to keep them engaged in football because they are getting to play only the women’s football league.

DS: Do those girls interact with you and the national team’s players for inspiration?
KRS: After the completion of our league matches, most of the girls from

the opposing team approached us and talked about different aspects of football. Sometimes we senior players went to their tent to console them, saying that they played well, and inspired them to do better next time.

DS: How was the payment from the club this time? How do you continue to support your family by playing football?
KRS: As our performance is upward, the payment is also improving day by day. Now, we need big clubs like Abahani, Mohammedan SC, Sheikh Jamal in the women’s league. If they form the squad for the women’s football league, it will benefit the players. My family members, teachers and many others have gotten recognition through me and they feel proud of me.

I built a house playing football and continuing to help my brother to study. I help my family whenever they need it. To be honest, football drives me in everything.

DS: You once played a lot of international matches for different age-group teams but you are getting less international matches to play at senior level. How do you maintain the international standard playing only domestic league?
KRS: I heard the federation will arrange the international matches during the FIFA window. I believe the federation will take the steps for the betterment because it is not wise to sit idle round the year. Besides, it won’t be not bad if we are invited to play different international tournaments.



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Russia claims capture of Soledar

Ukraine rules it out

REUTERS, Kyiv

Russia yesterday said its forces had taken control of the town of Soledar in eastern Ukraine, in what would be a rare success for Moscow after months of battlefield reverses, but Kyiv said its troops were still fighting in the town.

Reuters could not immediately verify the situation in Soledar, a small salt mining town that has been the focus of relentless Russian assault for days.

Kyiv and the West have played down the town's significance, saying Moscow sacrificed wave upon wave of soldiers and mercenaries in a pointless fight for a bombed-out wasteland, unlikely to affect the wider war except insofar as the huge losses have sapped manpower on both sides.

But the capture of the town has taken on an outsized importance as it would, if confirmed, give Moscow a trophy for one of the bloodiest campaigns of the war following major battlefield setbacks throughout the second half of 2022.

"The capture of Soledar was made possible by the constant bombardment of the enemy by assault and army aviation, missile forces and artillery of a grouping of Russian forces," Moscow's defence ministry said.

Seizing the town would make it possible to cut off Ukrainian supply routes to the larger nearby city of Bakhmut, and trap remaining Ukrainian forces there, it said. Moscow has been trying to seize Bakhmut for months.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

PHOTO: MOSTAFA YOUSUF

A hillock being razed at Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary in Chattogram's Lohagara upazila to sell the soil and wood to brick kilns. The illegal activity that puts the wildlife and natural resources at risk has been going on at the sanctuary for years. The photo was taken recently.

Ready to do whatever necessary

Momen says on US Indo-Pacific Strategy

UNB, Dhaka

Ahead of US official Donald Lu's visit, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said Bangladesh stands ready to do whatever necessary for the people's welfare, noting that the government is still looking into the issues related to US Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS).

"It's not that transparent. It's not mentioned there how it will bring benefits. We are studying," he told reporters while talking about the IPS and its economic component.

Donald Lu, who became assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs on September 15, 2021, is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka today, wrapping up his India tour.

"We will raise our issues. It's very normal to have good relations between

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

World's longest river cruise on its way

Modi flags off 51-day voyage thru India, Bangladesh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday virtually flagged off the world's longest river cruise that will travel through India and Bangladesh, offering tourists a unique opportunity to experience the art, culture, history, and spirituality of both countries.

While stressing the importance of waterway connectivity between the countries, the Indian PM also inaugurated a multi-modal terminal in West Bengal's Haldia port.

Modi, while addressing the event virtually, said the terminal, which is connected with India-Bangladesh protocol waterways, will link the Kolkata port with Bangladesh, facilitating businesses from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal states.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 2

CHUNATI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY UP chairman's men plundering it for yrs

Say locals; hillocks razed, hundreds of trees felled as forest dept, admin remain indifferent

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, back from Lohagara, Chattogram

For years, under the nose of the Forest Department and the local administration, a syndicate led by a local union parishad chairman has been razing hillocks and tearing down trees at Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary in Chattogram's Lohagara upazila.

The country's first ever wildlife sanctuary, Chunati was widely lauded for its conservation efforts. Now a temporary road has been cut through the forest in Sufinagar area of Chunati union to transport the logs and sand from the hilly areas of the forest cover.

Visiting the area on December 17, this correspondent spotted workers dredging hillocks. A large part of a hillock was totally destroyed, resembling a dead patch of land.

Md Manik, a labourer, was shoveling sand into a truck in Sufinagar, adjacent to Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway.

"This sand belongs to Md Kamruddin, grandchild of Chunati Union Parishad Chairman Joynul Abedin Jonu. The sand is being collected by cutting hillocks from the sanctuary," he told The Daily Star.

Md Junayed, driver of the truck carrying the sand, however, provided a false narrative at first. He claimed the sand was collected from Chakaria, a neighbouring upazila. After some pressing questions, he quickly admitted that the mud and sand was collected by razing hillocks at the Chunati sanctuary.

The sanctuary, overseen by Chattogram Divisional Forest Office (Wildlife and Nature Conservation), was established in 1986. It is a major corridor for the movement of Asian elephants -- categorised as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The government designates the sanctuary for the protection of wildlife and natural resources.

A study in 2021 found that about 16 percent of the well stock of Chunati beat was degraded by illegal logging and encroachment of reserve forest area.

Further havoc is currently being wrecked in various parts of the sanctuary,

SEE PAGE 6 COL 2

Train runs over woman, daughter in Lalmonirhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A woman and her daughter were crushed to death on rail tracks at Patgram upazila in Lalmonirhat yesterday morning.

The deceased were identified as Sumi Begum, 26, wife of Rasheduzzaman, and their daughter, Tasmira Tabasum Tasin, 6, of Dhabalsuti Rahmanpur area of Burimari union in the upazila, reports our Lalmonirhat correspondent.

According to locals, Sumi Begum, along with her two children, jumped in front of the train when the Burimari-bound passenger train from Lalmonirhat crossed Beltali Ghunti area around 10:30am.

Her two-year-old son survived but was critically injured and locals took him to Patgram Upazila Health Complex.

Patgram Police Station Officer-in-Charge Omar Farooq said there was no definitive proof whether

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

Pharaoh Ramses II's sarcophagus to return to Paris on loan

AFP, Paris

The sarcophagus of ancient Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II is to return to Paris in April for the first time in almost 50 years, on a rare loan of the relic outside Egypt.

The ornate coffin will be on show in the French capital from April 7 to September 6, the star attraction alongside an exhibition previously shown in San Francisco and which will conclude in Sydney -- minus the sarcophagus.

"I almost wept for joy that I would be seeing him again here when they told me he was coming to Paris," said Dominique Farout, an Egyptologist at the prestigious Ecole du Louvre art history school who is scientific commissioner to the exhibit.

"I was 16 in 1976" when Ramses II was last in Paris, Farout added. "I had a big poster in my bedroom. I went eight times in a row."

Farout said Egyptian authorities had made an exception in loaning the yellow-painted cedar-wood sarcophagus to France. It did not travel

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5

U-19 WOMEN'S T20 WC Bangladesh face Australia in the opener

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The inaugural ICC U-19 Women's T20 World Cup will kick off today with Bangladesh taking on Australia in their Group A clash at Willowmoore Park in Benoni.

The match will start at 2:00 PM (BST) and will be telecast live on sports streaming site Rabbithole.

The UAE will face Scotland in the other game at the same time while hosts South Africa will take on India and Sri Lanka will play against USA at 05:45pm (BST).

16 teams were divided into four groups, with the top three from each making it to the Super Six, which consists of two groups of six. Group 1 will have three teams each from Group A and Group D while Group 1 will have teams from Group B and Group C. The top two from each Group 1 and 2 then

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

People buy warm clothes from street vendors on Bangabandhu Avenue. They sell the products at cheaper prices than the shopping malls do. However, their presence contributes to traffic congestion in the capital's Gulistan area. The photo was taken last week.

Biden probed over improper storage of classified docs

Special counsel appointed; Republican announces enquiry

AFP, Washington

The US attorney general named an independent prosecutor Thursday to investigate President Joe Biden's handling of classified documents, after a furor over secret papers found at his former office exploded with the discovery of a second batch.

The new find -- like the original, from Biden's time as vice president -- was uncovered in the garage of his home in Wilmington, Delaware, where he often spends weekends, the White House said.

Attorney General Merrick Garland announced that Robert Hur, an appointee of Biden's predecessor Donald Trump, would be empowered to examine whether the cache violated any law.

"Under the regulations, the extraordinary circumstances here require the appointment of a special counsel," Garland, who runs the Justice Department, said.

The appointment came hours after the White House acknowledged the finding of second batch of papers but did not address their contents -- supercharging a scandal over a first set found at a Washington think tank where Biden had an office.

Republicans in Congress, who have been accusing

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5

DHAKA LIT FEST 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

‘KHANDITO NAZRUL’

Why he is and should be relevant

With Manmay Zafar as moderator, Nashid Kamal, Rachel McDermott and Winston E Langley discuss the resurgence in Nazrul studies in Bangladeshi academia and beyond.



COLLAGE: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

“Nazrul has become ‘khandito’”, she said—the perception of Nazrul changes depending on the geopolitical location. Some consider him to be Islamic, while some see him as a secular poet.

ABDULLAH RAYHAN

“Scheherazade from Arabian Nights had more time than I have today, you know?” The moderator Manmay Zafar, who is Assistant Professor of English at Jahangirnagar University, started the 10th Dhaka Lit Fest’s session on Kazi Nazrul Islam with a joke about the small amount of time he could allow each speaker. But the 15 minutes each of the speakers got on January 6, Day 2 of the DLF, were enough for the audience to discover Nazrul in new lights.

Singer and translator Nashid Kamal talked about how Nazrul’s creations have vastly influenced her life. In addition to her family connections with Nazrul, she has felt obliged to carry his legacy because she discovered all the ways his literary endeavours attempted to remove enmity from society. By using a wide range of references from different religions and bringing together various religious

fiction within the same line, Nazrul created a bridge between distinct groups. However, as Nashid Kamal explained, this has also made it challenging to translate Nazrul. His words have diverse connotations, making it complicated to find equivalent vocabulary for them in other languages.

Rachel McDermott, Professor of Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures at Barnard College, added to the discussion, specifying factors that made it difficult for the study of ‘khandita Nazrul’ to rise in the west.

The difficulty of translation is one of the reasons why he is not discussed as extensively as Tagore in the west, she explained. She, too, agreed that Nazrul is difficult to translate because of not only the references from other languages, but grammatical issues as well. Yet the study of Nazrul has been flourishing in recent times, and the credit goes to the encouragement from Bangladesh, she expressed.

Though McDermott herself admitted that her main interest lies in Nazrul’s Shyama-sangeet, she pointed out the problem with his selective acceptance. “Nazrul has become ‘khandito’”, she said—the perception of Nazrul changes depending on the geopolitical location. Some consider him to be Islamic, while some see him as a secular poet. Just one example is how a particular type of songs by the national poet was popular in Bangladesh when she first started studying his work, while in India, it was mainly the Shyama Sangeet that were widely appreciated.

In her years of research on Nazrul, Professor McDermott has found that this attempt to divide Nazrul has always been there. The elites attempted to forge him into one Pakistan. There was an apparent attempt to de-Hindunise him. His works focusing on ‘Hindu ideas’, or works that brought Hindus and Muslims together, were rejected by many publishers. In some cases, certain words were changed to allow the diction to satisfy Islamic sentiments. Although Nazrul could save his works from the influence of political pollution during the time when he was active, he couldn’t preserve the essential integrities and authenticity after he became a ‘blank slate’ in the later period, she explained.

Fortunately, nothing could prevent his essence from surviving these attempts. Winston E Langley, journalist and Emeritus Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Massachusetts Boston, pointed out that Nazrul is “one of the greatest advocates of human rights among poets”, and this will keep him alive forever. Nazrul’s emphasis on self-identity, spirituality, and optimism has secured him a permanent place in society. Professor Langley agreed that Nazrul is not as widely known as he ought to be, but he believes this is changing. As evidence to support this claim, he mentioned that Hammarskjöld High School, a cosmopolitan high school in Canada, has Nazrul in their curriculum. This is a hint that the study of his work in the west has already begun and will flourish in the future.

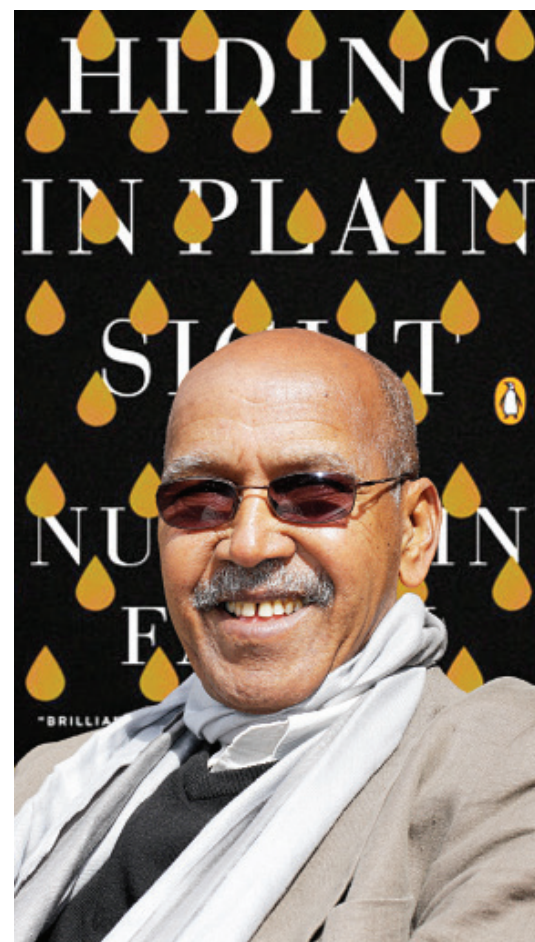
Professor Langley has noticed interesting similarities between Nazrul and some revered western figures. What Nazrul and Robert Burns, the national poet of Scotland, have in common is comparable backgrounds, meagre lifestyles, and a tendency to use local language rather than following the established norm. Most importantly, both their contemporary academic elites rejected them.

Nazrul was a religious existentialist, Professor Langley pointed out, comparable with Søren Kierkegaard. He also compared Nazrul to Neruda for their affinity for ordinary objects and ordinary people. In addition, he explained that Nazrul can be found in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s novel, *Paradise*.

A brief Q&A session after the discussion was followed by Nashid Kamal’s short yet mellifluously astounding performance of one of the famous Nazrul songs, “Laili tomar eshechhe firia.”

This session offered an extensive understanding of why Nazrul is essential, necessary, and relevant. As moderator Manmay Zafar explained, not only will Nazrul forever be relevant, we need him to be relevant in our society because where there lies diversity, advocacy of unity is essential.

Abdullah Rayhan is studying English Literature at Jahangirnagar University.



FEATURE

On discovering Somali novelist, Nuruddin Farah, at the Dhaka Lit Fest

USRAAT FAHMIDAH

On each edition of the Dhaka Lit Fest, you leave having discovered a brilliant author. Last time, it was the humorous and adorable Jan Blake whose performance storytelling left me captivated.

Among the luminaries on the DLF panel this year, it was Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah’s candour and humour that left an impression on me. For those unfamiliar with his work, Farah’s debut novel, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), is considered “one of the cornerstones of modern East African literature”. In his panel on ‘Lost Country, Last Words’, Farah discussed the trajectory of his life and literary journey with writer, publisher and DLF Director K Anis Ahmed.

It is the story of Ebla’s struggle to maintain her identity and autonomy in a patriarchal society where women are treated as commodities. For a book like that to come out in 1970 was revolutionary in itself.

Nuruddin Farah was born to a merchant father and poet mother in Somalia. Three years after Somalia’s independence, he had to flee. He went to university in India and the UK and has lived in different parts of the world. This has made him a citizen of the world, but he continues to write about Somalia.

As a young man, Nuruddin Farah studied English, Arabic and Amharic. Asked by K Anis Ahmed as to why he writes in English, Farah shared that it was also possible for him to write in Italian and Arabic.

“I found that I was very very lucky in discovering a typewriter that was strong enough to withstand the weight of my fingers. Whenever I tried the Italian typewriter, it broke under the weight of my fingers”, he recalled with a touch of wit. “The other thing that was very important was that my intellectual makeup, in terms of reading and understanding literature, were either in Arabic or English.”

His first book was revolutionary for multiple reasons. Being a man, he was writing in a woman’s voice. His book is about a young orphan, Ebla, who flees her home in rural Somalia after discovering that her grandfather has arranged for her to marry an older man. It is the story of Ebla’s struggle to maintain her identity and autonomy in a patriarchal society where women are treated as commodities. For a book like that to come out in 1970 was revolutionary.

With over 13 novels written, Farah has also authored essays and plays since then. “When I count my children, I have more than 13”, he said jokingly.

Throughout the session, I noticed the 77-year-old take several pauses before answering in a thoughtful manner while the crowd listened intently. He has a vigour to the way he speaks that, as a young listener, I could not help but admire.

How did he end up studying in India? The author shared that he came looking for spirituality and inner peace—an illusion which quickly broke as soon as he reached the country. So, he made the best use of the bad hand he was dealt with and completed his education there.

Farah describes his younger self as a “rebellious” spirit.

“Writing the first book is easy”, he said. “Writing the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, the seventh becomes more and more difficult. Because you move away from your own life and into the lives of others and to a world created through one’s imagination and so on”, he shared.

“One way to keep my sanity is to keep busy writing”, he added.

Usraat Fahmidah is a freelance journalist and writer. You can reach her on twitter @usraatfahmidah.

DHAKA LIT FEST 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

Goddesses of Bengal: The living myth of Devi Manasa, Bon Bibi and more

Kaiser Haq and Rachel McDermott with Shamsad Mortuza on January 6, Day 2 of the Dhaka Lit Fest

MALIHA HUQ

Many ancient Bengali tales and folklores have revolved around the archetypes of divine feminine energies. These energies are represented as different forms of goddesses. Apart from their theological importance, goddesses have easily accessible mythical archetypes. Their stories of evolution, interaction and emotional entanglement with human beings have continued to be areas of great interest to people.

The cosmology of goddesses in the orient versus the occident was a topic of discussion in ‘Goddesses of Bengal’, a session with Kaiser Haq, poet, critic, translator, writer and Professor of English at ULAB, and Rachel McDermott, Professor of Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures at Columbia University, moderated by Shamsad Mortuza, educator, poet, translator, columnist and Professor of English at the University of Dhaka.

Professor McDermott finds great interest in the relationship of a community to their goddess, be it Durga, Kali or Jagatdhatri. “You can ask for her refuge, you can express your anger, you can complain about your frustrations—from getting your son into medical school to attaining Moksha, goddesses are always there for you.”

There is a sort of reimagining of the meaning of their image and different portrayals in modern socio political situations. Remythologizing is bound to happen for living cultures. Misappropriation can come along with these situations. The reason being, stories are powerful; stories mean something to people. One story can have multiple interpretations based on the onlookers’ motive and projection.

From a religious aspect, South Asian Hindus have been worshipping goddesses since the beginning of Sanskrit cosmopolis. Additionally, everyone in the South Asian region and beyond are connected to the myths of



COLLAGE: MAISHA SYEDA

these goddesses. “Myths are still a living part of the culture here. Stories of the folk goddesses are so relevant that they have become a part of popular culture as films, songs, dramas, etc. One good example is the myth of Behula and Lakhindar from *Manasamangal*”, said Professor Kaiser Haq, who has retold the myth of the Manasa goddess in prose form in *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

Every monsoon season in Mymensingh, a folk theatre troupe performs *Manasamangal*, Haq points out. They go seven bends in the nearby river as part of the Mangal Kavya ritual. What is most interesting is that all the performers there are Muslims and two among them claim to be Hajis. This is almost a kind of a public ceremony where the audience and performers are deeply connected with each other through the legend of Manasa. Unfortunately, modern media has replaced the intimacy of these performances, a terrain previously occupied by folk cultural practitioners. Haq added, “These folklores and performative arts can only be imagined in their truest forms at a village setting.”

Kaiser Haq further discussed the legend of *Manasamangal*, “The

deities of the *Mangal Kavyas* have a more folk background. They have human attributes of greed, lust, jealousy, deceit and easily bend the rules of conduct as opposed to the traditional Aryan gods.”

Shiva, for instance, as described in the Brahmin tradition, is a great ascetic, yogi and master of fertility. In *Mangal Kavya*, however, Shiva is depicted as “a bhanga addict and a lecher with multiple dalliances.”

“Folk literature has a typical way of setting up the traditional gods and goddesses. The North Indian god, Shiva is very different from the Shiva in Bengali folklores.” Manasa, the snake goddess, was born out of Shiva’s semen unintentionally and thus, not readily recognized as a goddess. Manasa is known to be the goddess for low caste Hindus. Shaivism is generally associated with the upper class Hindus. Chand Sadagar from *Manasamangal* is a representative of the upper class. He was a devotee of Shiva and the tragic hero of *Mangal Kavya*. Representation of these deities through folklores is a way of marrying the Brahmin tradition with the indigenous folk tradition. And *Manasamangal* is not merely a folklore; it is a sociological drama, a class conflict is going on here.

“For Muslim Bengalis, the pujas are

just colourful events”, said Haq. But the regional myths of these goddesses are meaningful to many non-Hindus. The myth of Bonbibi and Dakshin Roy is very popular in the Sundarbans area. Amitav Ghosh has written about the legend of Bonbibi in his novel, *Gun Island* and his verse retelling of the folk epic in *Junglenama*. Shamsad Mortuza pointed out that Bonbibi is identified as the prophet’s daughter, Fatima by many Muslims of the Sundarbans region. To which Kaiser Haq responded, “People believe in the regional myths irrespective of their religion. For people living in Sundarbans, Bonbibi is real. Paying a visit to Bonbibi’s temple and asking for her blessings before entering the forest is a must for them.”

“The anthropomorphism of the goddess is actually in some sense a justification for or a mirroring of or an opportunity to experience the feelings that people feel about their own daughters”, McDermott pointed out while discussing the history of the Durga Puja, which originated in the 18th century around the story of a little girl named Uma, who got married to Shiva and left for Kailash. Every year, Uma comes back to her parents’ home for three days. It also became a norm at around that time for married women to return to their parents’ homes during Durga puja. “But the remythologizing of goddesses happens over time, especially if you think about how they are used as commentary in modern politics, political cartoons, social situations, etc.”

However, “there is absolutely no necessary relationship between the worship of goddesses and the treatment of women”, she said. “Think of Italy, which has lots of virgin Marys and lots of machismo. Just because one reveres a goddess in the heavens doesn’t necessarily mean that you treat women well. It can help, but there are field studies that show both sides of this.”

Maliha Huq teaches English at DPS STS School, Dhaka.

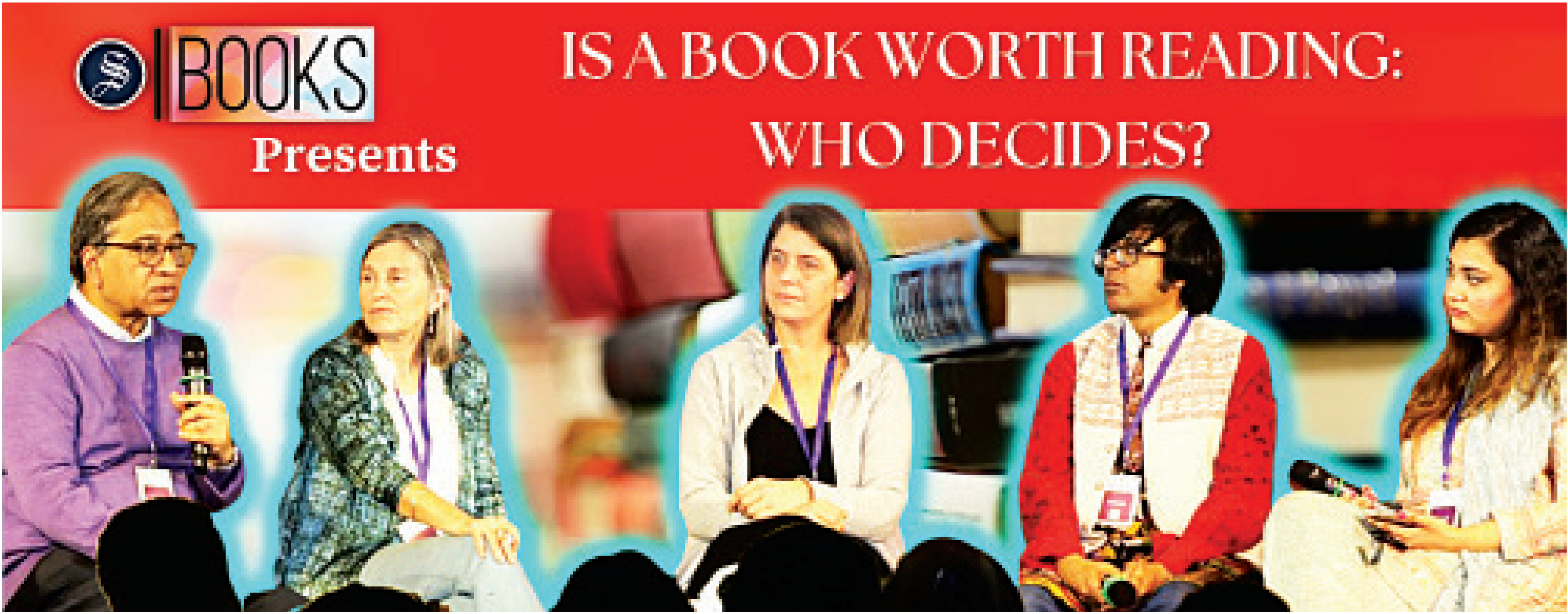


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS; COLLAGE: MAISHA SYEDA

INTERVIEW

Foreign literature is a very precious tool for peace

What I'm really trying to do is to not favour too much of the Anglophone world, meaning the white, classical English and American. We tend to be overwhelmed by translations.

SARAH ANJUM BARI

Daily Star Books' panel on January 8, Day 4 of the Dhaka Lit Fest sought to take the audience to a more existential aspect of what the festival attempts to do. Who chooses which stories deserve to become books? Who chooses whether news of those books will even reach readers? Does book criticism truly help the flow and business of literature within and across national borders?

Moderated by DS Books Editor, Sarah Anjum Bari, the panel included writer, editor, translator, critic, and academic Fakrul Alam; French author, journalist and literary critic Florence Noiville; researcher and academic Mashrur Shahid Hossain; and Annette Köhn, a Berlin-based graphic designer, illustrator and publisher of young and emerging artists.

What are some of the factors that come up when we're deciding the 'worth' of a book?

Fakrul Alam: With a good review, you can tell that a book has stirred a reader's imagination. There are two kinds of book reviews in Bangladesh—one that, like a magic carpet, takes you somewhere else, and the other is when somebody you know has written a book and they dump it on you. I can say no to some, but it's something that you have to do.

Annette Köhn: For me the worth of a

book is that it has to be touching—you learn about a part of the author that is inside the story. The second is that it helps you learn something about a topic.

Mashrur Shahid Hossain: The very nature of the book defines whether it is worth reading and reviewing. I would like to differentiate between book reviews that appear right after a book is published—its major objective is to engage and inform the reader to read it or not read it, and literary criticism—which has more methodical rigour. The point is whether the book brings to the fore something new and something relatively less explored. As Annette pointed out, whether it is well presented is also important in order to make the book engaging for a reader.

Florence Noiville: I completely agree. If Tagore were republished by Galimard, that is something I would want to highlight. Forgetfulness is very common among us all and it's important to make links between authors of now and the past.

I also pay attention to small presses—they are the ones who make the discoveries and take all the risks.

Media coverage is not the only way we find out about books. First, we study them in classrooms. How much are we able to innovate our school and university syllabi in order to nurture readers?

Mashrur Shahid Hossain: How many of our hundreds of national and international authors are covered in

our textbooks? We choose a certain number of authors and we consider them representative of a language or a culture. The very first choice of what to read is made by curriculum makers. The question to ask here is whether these curriculum makers incorporate literary critics. It is the critic who helps to develop or generate a literary and cultural tradition of a country. Which author we will use to be proud of our country, which author we will learn from about other countries, that is somehow defined and conditioned by the choice of writers and texts that we cover in our syllabi.

We have noticed some problems in the recent reconfiguration of our syllabi regarding writers from which language, religion, or ethnicity will be included or excluded. When a particular ethnicity or religion is represented in a curriculum, that gives us the idea that they do not exist. For instance, how many non-Bangla writers do we accommodate in our conception of Bangladeshi literature?

My point is that let us not fake objectivity. If I have a stance, let me make it clear that I have a stance so the reader can decide how they will perceive my choices.

Fakrul Alam: I have more experience selecting texts for Honours and Masters curricula in Bangladeshi universities. So how did I choose? It was based partly on my reading but also on the fact that I was privileged enough to

travel abroad and get books that you wouldn't get here. So over the years of shaping the English department syllabus, I think I have contributed my bit to keeping us occura—with books from recent decades. The best thing to do is international networking. Going back and forth.

How much freedom do university lecturers and even students have in selecting what to read in classrooms?

Fakrul Alam: We have a top-heavy system. I would say that the selection is more nuanced now than before. We have African literature, we have Latin American literature—previously it was only English literature. Cultural studies has also contributed to this widening of the syllabus.

As for students, they can choose if only they read a lot. I just took a national university class for college teachers, and all of them were complaining that no students read. I told them, did you ever ask yourself if you taught them how to read? So I'm not blaming the students at all.

Read the rest of this conversation on The Daily Star website and on Daily Star Books' Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

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FEATURE

The art of moderating literary conversations

NAZIFA RAIDAH

Dhaka Lit Fest swept the netizens of Dhaka till Sunday, January 8, engaging them in stimulating discussions and leaving them with a thought to take away. Viewers pondered, roamed under the open skies (and at times in auditoriums), witnessing discussions of eminent panellists—an event that is quite the rarity in this city.

Behind the flashy lights and names, I witnessed what made the audience attend a particular session, among so many others that went on, and what made them get up and leave a session in between.

And eventually, I figured it all came down to the grip of the moderator.

The goal of a moderator ideally should be to facilitate a productive and respectful conversation among participants, while also ensuring that the discussion stays on topic and is conducted in a professional manner.

Sadaf Saaz, Producer and Co-Director of Dhaka Lit Fest, shares, “We spend a lot of time selecting different speakers for a topic, often putting together seemingly ‘unusual’ combinations, which spark discussion and debate, and ensure a balance of what they can each bring to the panel.”

These are the choices that leave a mark on the audience.

Maitreyi, a writer and visitor to the DLF this year, points out, “In the *Tomb of Sand* session with Geetanjali Shree and Daisy Rockwell, Rifat Munim highlighted how a



DESIGN: SARAH ANJUM BARI

moderator can be a catalyst to an engaging dialogue between the panellists and the audience, as opposed to each question going off on a different tangent. Their conversation had us rapt with attention.”

When asked how he achieved this effect, writer and editor Rifat Munim responds, “When the topic is the book *Tomb of Sand* by Geetanjali Shree, the objective is to make the author speak about her experiences of writing the book and from there, many relevant aspects come up, which can be broken down further. It's important to research the topic and to familiarise yourself with any relevant background information. This can help to

ensure that the discussion stays on topic and that all participants are on the same page.”

Sabrina Fatma Ahmad, Deputy Editor of MW magazine and founder of the annual Sehri Tales challenge, who was also a speaker and a moderator at DLF, said, “As a panellist, I would expect the moderator to at least have an idea about what I do professionally and what I've been up to, with regards to my work.”

Another key aspect is the ability to manage time effectively, ensure that all participants have an opportunity to speak and be prepared to redirect the discussion if any disruptions arise.

This includes being aware of any conflicts or tension that may arise among participants or with the audience, and working to resolve them in a way that is fair and respectful.

Indian politician Mohua Moitra was especially effective with this in her session on 'Settling Scores' with authors Iflat Nawaz, Shehan Karunatilaka, Elizabeth Shick and Vivek Menezes—“Let's remember that they have to be questions”, she asserted before opening the floor to the audience.

In interactive sessions especially, it's also important for a moderator to actively listen. This means paying close attention to what participants are saying, and being able to understand their perspectives. This can help identify any areas of confusion or

“For example, in my sessions [on *Microtales*], Sabrina Ahmad shares, “we were doing a verbal exercise. I noticed that most of the crowd were too shy to participate. So halfway through the session we decided to change it up and I started walking through the rows of the audience to make the session more lively and informal.”

disagreement, and address them in a way that is respectful and non-confrontational.

“For example, in my sessions [on *Microtales*], Sabrina Ahmad shares, “we were doing a verbal exercise. I noticed that most of the crowd were too shy to participate. So halfway through the session we decided to change it up and I started walking through the rows of the audience to make the session more lively and informal.”

At times, even choosing the seemingly “right” people as moderators doesn't cut it. As a spectator, I've witnessed many moderators who were seemingly well-versed in the topic, lead very mundane sessions—where the conversational flow eventually became quite generalised. Eventually, those sessions were greeted with yawns, as opposed to “oohs and aahs”.

“Moderating is an art”, Sadaf Saaz reflects, “Despite the best laid plans we have surprises. Some moderators surpass our expectations, and make the sessions brilliant rather than just good. Some may not bring out what we had initially thought—but then manage to take the discussion in a wonderful unanticipated direction.”

“We try and choose those who are conceptually clear, understand the breadth of the topic, but also help bring out the nuances”, she adds.

Nazifa Raidah is a sub editor at the City desk, The Daily Star.

LADAKH DIARIES **PART 3**

DZO ZONGO EAST

Mission accomplished



Salehin Arshady is an explorer, mountaineer, youth activist and writer. He has climbed and documented all the highest peaks of Bangladesh over 3000 feet and explored many trekking routes in the Indian and Nepal Himalayas.

Want to share your travel experiences with us? Please send your stories to holiday@thedailystar.net

SALEHIN ARSHADY

Why do you climb? Why do you risk everything over scaling a summit?

For the last decade, I have been continuously bombarded with such questions. At first, I tried to answer just like legendary mountaineer George Mallory did in 1923: "Because it's there". However, I have learnt the hard way that my answers won't satisfy everyone. Now I don't bother anymore.

It is okay if no one understands you. Well, maybe I am not being honest with myself. These questions, sometimes, come to my mind too. Facing hard choices on the high mountains, doubt does creep in.

19 September 2022, was one such day.

We were in the Markha Valley of the Western Himalayas located in Hemis national park of Ladakh, a mostly high-altitude frozen desert nestled between the Himalayas and Karakoram. We chose this part of the Himalayas for our expedition, not only for its high-altitude giants but also for its spectacular landscape. The deep-rooted Tibetan culture of the region was a bonus.

We, my partner Imran Khan Ozil and I, were there to climb four high-altitude peaks -- Kang Yatse II (6254m), Dzo Zongo East (6214m), Regioni Mallai Ri- I (6120m) and Conga Ri (5755m) -- in just ten days as part of the GoZayaan Expedition



PHOTOS: **IMRAN KHAN OZIL**

Out of the blue, Ozil announced that he couldn't feel his toes. I immediately decided to go down. The mountains are a demanding, cold place, and they don't allow for mistakes. Ozil was hesitant at first but followed me. We were leaving behind a golden opportunity to climb three six thousanders in a row! Our hearts sank as we knew how close we were to completing a unique feat. We knew that our expedition was over.

When we were back at the bank of Nimaling Chu River, the sun was already up. The ethereal sunrise of the Himalayas failed to lift our spirits. Ozil was restless the whole time. He couldn't quite accept the decision to abort the climb midway.

bags.

After sunset, Ozil's restlessness infected me. Should we attempt to climb Dzo Zongo again? Ozil's toe seemed okay and he was feeling a lot better. But there were other issues at hand too. If we attempted, could we return to Leh in time to catch our return flight back home? And most importantly, did we have enough energy left in us for another attempt at a six-thousander?

Ozil was adamant to give it another try. But I was sceptical. The weather forecast wasn't promising, and we had a flight to catch. If we attempted, it had to run smoothly.

Then a crazy idea popped up: what if we start our summit bid after

You carry all those things you need to survive in those harsh conditions in a backpack. There's no one to help, no one to guide you. Your destiny lies within your hand. You make a mistake and you're gone. There's none to blame, none to thank but you!

The expedition's fate was hanging by a thread and I made up my mind.

At around 10:00pm, I told Ozil that we would make another attempt on Dzo Zongo, and this time we would start after sunrise. And surprisingly, that night I had the best sleep of the entire expedition.

At 6:00am, we had some coffee and started again for Dzo Zongo east, the 6214-meter giant. Without any tiredness or trouble, we reached the glacier snout. And to our utter disbelief, we found ourselves at the wrong glacier.

First, I felt anger. How could we make such a mistake? The route was well defined and it was hard to miss! Then, I was sad. Another attempt to go in vain! We sat there for around half an hour to calm our nerves down. Should we retreat?

We were so close to our goal! The choice was easy. I told Ozil that if we move fast, we can make the summit before sunset. Ozil didn't need any pursuing. So we hit the trail towards the top, once again.

It was not easy. Now there were two glaciers that we had to cross. The first glacier was short and the gradient was relatively easy. We put our crampons on and traversed the glacier to reach the eastern flank. Then we descended

to the second glacier. This one was huge and full of crevasses. Ozil hesitated for a while but followed me eventually. After an arduous climb, I was able to reach the ridge and soon started for the summit. That ridge was very peculiar. Defying the high wind, there were giant blocks of rock along the whole ridge, making the summit a little more challenging.

At around 4:30pm, we were on the top of Dzo Zongo East. Our five-year-long dream finally came true.

As with all the Himalayan peaks, the view from the top was stunning. However, we had to move fast as the weather was showing signs of trouble. We started to descend without wasting time.

But it worsened sooner than we anticipated. It started snowing heavily and within minutes, it was a complete whiteout. As our visibility reduced to mere 10 feet, we lit our head torches and followed one another. At the mid ridge, my GPS watch stopped working. That forced us to use all the skills we mastered from previous Himalayan experiences to reach our tents at around midnight.

With all the misfortunes and troubles, we could climb three six thousander Himalayan peaks in a single expedition. And that is satisfying!



Practising alpinism in the Himalayas is one of the most liberating experiences one can have. There's no one to help, no one to guide you. Your destiny lies within your hand. You make a mistake and you're gone.

Ladakh expedition.

We departed Dhaka on September 4 and arrived in Leh, the capital of Ladakh, the following day. After obtaining the required permits and logistics, we started the trek towards Markha Valley on September 8 and two days later reached our first base camp, located at an altitude of about 5100 meters above sea level.

After summiting Kang Yatse II (6254m) and Regioni Mallai Ri- I (6120m) respectively on September 12 and 15, our next goal was to scale the 6214m high Dzo Zongo East.

On 18 September 2022, we were able to establish our third basecamp, all thanks to our superhuman porters Ajay and Aman, a duo from Kishtwar Kashmir. We started our summit push just after midnight. If successful, it would be our third six thousander within a week. As you can assume, we were pumped. We hiked up to 5500 meters in mere three hours.

Should we attempt to climb Dzo Zongo again? There were other issues at hand too. If we attempted, could we return to Leh in time to catch our return flight back home? And most importantly, did we have enough energy left in us for another attempt at a six-thousander?

After resting for a while, he was constantly insisting that he was feeling better. He also put on an extra layer of socks in the meantime.

Suddenly he offered, "as we couldn't climb Dzo Zongo let's try Konga Ri (5755m)".

And guess what, we crossed the river and started climbing again. Ozil summited Konga Ri at around noon while I took a nap just below the summit point. And when we got back to the base camp, the clock had yet to hit 3:00pm. We had our dinner with Dal Bhaat and put our exhausted bodies into the warmth of sleeping

sunrise, thus we could avoid the cold at night and move fast in the daylight? It was an insane idea. No one starts the summit bid of a Himalayan six-thousander this late. Under sunlight, melting glacial ice and loose rocks most likely would make the route more difficult and riskier. Too many questions and we didn't have any answers.

We climb mountains for various reasons. But personally, it's the sense of freedom that I find in alpinism that drives me most. Practising alpinism in the Himalayas is one of the most liberating experiences one can have.





‘I own many houses in the US only to make better sewerage systems back home’

Says chief of Chasa

“I pay water bill every month, but I get juice instead. Neither me nor my children are interested to drink juice constantly. Will Chasa ever listen to us and stop blessing us with their juice?”
Arparina, a local from Gatrabari.

MAHBUB ALAM MUNNA

Task Jong Un, one of the most intense workaholics in Chapasthan, exhibited his diligence once again by taking his responsibilities to another level.

He has been observing the US's highly developed water supply sewerage system for years in order to improve Chapasthan's system.

We have all heard of swimming lessons and khichuri-cooking lessons held in some foreign countries. Task Jong Un, the emperor of Chapasthan Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Chasa), partook in such a learning session titled 'How to Manage Your City' in the USA.

He has already completed his decade-long training, according to new photos where he was seen checking the water and sewerage systems of some 14 houses in the US.

When asked what he was actually doing, he said, "You guys have always abused me for living in America while working in Chapasthan, but you don't know the actual reason. Had you known, you wouldn't have dared bother me with such silly questions while I am working to give you Chapasthani fellas a good life."

After an official apology, our correspondent

asked the reason again and the man said, "Well, you should always be sorry instead of worrying about my job. You guys don't do what you are supposed to do. However, I built here several houses, of course with my own money, just to see how America's water and sewerage system works. Once I have gleaned all necessary learnings, I will go back to my country and implement there. Maybe it is taking some time, but I promise you, I will do it before the end of the 21st century."

People of Dhoka city have been blessed with water and other supplies provided by Chasa. But they have been complaining about what the authorities have termed a "beautiful problem".

People are getting slightly orange-coloured juice instead of water. Of course, juice costs more than water, but still most of the people prefer water to juice.

"I pay water bill every month, but I get juice instead. Neither me nor my children are interested to drink juice constantly. Will Chasa ever listen to us and stop blessing us with their juice?" Arparina, a local from Gatrabari.

"If ST Coleridge were alive today and he had to write The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner

again, he would write, "Juice, juice everywhere, not a drop to drink," Munna, a local poet who has been publishing his romantic poems exclusively in girls' inboxes, said.

But the unimaginable and eccentric long-term plan of the Chasa emperor should now soothe the Dhoka dwellers' headaches.

Houses in foreign lands with water and sewerage facilities have already been built and the observation, by the emperor himself, is underway. The reason these houses were built is crystal clear to everyone and a round of applause for the emperor can be expected.

This Satireday correspondent asked the emperor if there were any alternative plans if his "housebuilding and observing" plan failed, he said, "Of course, I have Plan B. There are a lot of homeless people in Chapasthan sleeping next to the road. If I cannot succeed in my 'observation' plan, I will bring those homeless people to America and gift my houses to them. Now, stop criticising a humanitarian like me."

At the end of the interview, Task was spotted in deep conversation with an engineer, leaving this correspondent thinking that the process of building house number 17 may have just started.

Chuadanga man hospitalised due to malfunctioning weather app

FROSTBITTEN CORRESPONDENT

A man in Chuadanga was hospitalised with pneumonia on Thursday because he kept walking around the district town in a sleeveless shirt and shorts even as the mercury had dipped to below 7 degrees Celsius, the lowest recorded temperature this season.

Smart Latif, 27, was admitted to hospital after he was found violently shaking and shivering on the ground in front of the Chuadanga rail station around 11:00am. People who took him to the hospital said they heard Latif repeat the words through chattering teeth, "But it was 28 degrees just a minute ago."

Doctors were still trying to stabilise his temperature at the time of writing.

Latif's friends and family members told this correspondent that he had always been overdependent on his smartphone, which is what led to his current condition.

He had recently gotten a brand new phone and always boasted about its features and state of the art connectivity.

"I knew something was wrong when he woke up today [Thursday] and proclaimed that winter was over," his wife Rashida told Star Satireday. "I could barely get my feet out from under the three layers of blankets and here he was, going to the roof without a shirt to see the sun rise on 'a new season'."

"I told him that it was less than 10 degrees and even showed him my phone where the weather app showed the temperature, but because my phone was from an 'inferior competitor', he refused to believe me, and became even more insistent that it was indeed 28 degrees, as displayed on his 'best smartphone of 2022'."

"When I tried telling him that there must be no internet on his phone, he said that there was no internet on mine and stormed out."

From what could be gathered after talking to his friends and family, Smart Latif's weather app was displaying old data and at the same time his mobile data had run out.

"His wife called me around 9:30am in the morning, saying that Latif had gone out wearing shorts and a sleeveless shirt, and that I had to save him. I tried calling him on WhatsApp, but the call wouldn't go through," said Mansur, Latif's friend.

Mansur said he had called Rashida back, on WhatsApp, and learned that Latif's phone had no data connection.

"Rashida promised that she would pay me back if I sent Latif some data, so around 11:00am, I did."

"I immediately noticed him because, come on, he was walking around in shorts when everyone else was covered up like it was the North Pole," said Mehdi, a porter at the station.

"I saw him take his phone out, look at the screen, scream out and then fall to the floor shivering."



PHOTO: FREEPIK.COM

Marriage in trouble after man refuses to break traffic rules

ONE-WAY CORRESPONDENT

A couple in Dhaka has admitted that a single instance of the husband refusing to drive against traffic during a traffic jam has landed the marriage in hot water.

Wishing to remain unnamed, the husband said they had been stuck in a long pileup while exiting the capital on Thursday evening.

"Basically, the other side of the road was absolutely free, and here we were sitting in a line maybe five kilometres long," the wife said. "Oh, and I want to be named. My name is Faria, and his name is Tanim, and he is a buffoon."

"Anyway, around 30 minutes into waiting at the same spot and waiting for some movement before geological time set in, we saw at least 35 cars zoom by on the empty side of the road,

and they sped off into freedom. At first, I asked him gently whether he would do the same, because I didn't want to spend my life on the road, you know?"

Th husband said, "Well, she asked me to break the law, and I told her that it would be the unwise thing to do as the cars that were speeding off on the wrong side of the road as if it was Fast and the Furious would actually create more trouble because there would be a standoff down the road with cars coming from the opposite, and right, direction."

Faria said she could see the point at first, but after an hour, she could not see it anymore.

"Man, at one point, even cars that must have started their journeys after ours had reached this point started to pass us by. I knew he was doing this only because I disagreed. He always does this. And at one

point, you have to ask what kind of man is so timid that he wouldn't take the small risk that literally hundreds of others were taking. He wouldn't do it even though he knew it would make me happy."

"A stand-up guy, that's who!" Tanim shot back.

It was learnt that the couple were still stuck in the jam as of yesterday evening.



PHOTO: STAR