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"In Moscow, everything that the alliance ... is doing is seen as direct involvement in the [Ukraine] conflict."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov



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The Iranian nightmare



Ukraine sets sights on fighter jets



Who runs the country?



Business climate improves slightly

OWNING NON-AGRI LAND Govt mulls a 40-bigha cap

Land minister discloses on concluding day of DC conf'ce

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is likely to limit the individual ownership of non-agricultural land to 40 bighas in an attempt to cope with the scarcity of farmlands in the country.

The land ministry made the proposal in its draft of the Land Ownership and Uses Act, which aims to protect agricultural land, ensure food security, and reduce the effects of climate change.

However, the authorities will allow ownership of over 40 bighas of non-agricultural land if it is used for setting up large industries, says the draft which will be placed at a cabinet meeting next week.

Land Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury talked about the draft while meeting the deputy commissioners at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital. He, however, didn't go into further details about the draft.

Currently, there is no limit on acquiring non-agricultural land.

Another draft law of the ministry called Land Crime Prevention and Redress Act has been sent to the Cabinet Division for final approval. It is illegal occupation of land as a criminal offence.

On the final day of the three-day DC conference, the DCs met with the top bosses of over 12 ministries and divisions.

They were asked to be prepared for a free and fair 12th national election, slated for January next, and to monitor private clinics to check whether they are charging patients extra for service.

They were also asked to watch out for rumours spread by unregistered online portals and IPTVs.

At the Bangabhaban last night, President Abdul Hamid told the DCs that they should make sure they stay away from corruption and don't abuse power.

The president then asked them to keep the global situation in mind and utilise maximum utilisation of resources and successful implementation of development programmes.

Hamid also urged them to free the land offices from corruption.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan told the DCs to start preparing for the national election.

This was the last DC conference before the national election.

The directive also comes at a time when the BNP and like-minded parties are regularly demonstrating for a polls-time caretaker government while the government

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DIRECTIVES FOR DCs

- Staying away from corruption
- Playing due role for free, fair nat'l polls
- Monitoring travel agencies to stop human trafficking
- Keeping watch on unregistered online portals and IPTVs to stop spread of rumors
- Staying vigilant to prevent pvt clinics from charging excessive fees



BREAKING FREE ... A painter puts finishing touches on the mural of a woman defiantly riding a motorcycle in a rural setting as her scarf and the sky become one and the same. The artwork at the TSC on Dhaka University campus is part of an exhibition by Brac with the theme of women leading social changes. It will conclude on February 2.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Human trafficking rife, conviction rare

Shows UN report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Only one person was convicted in a human trafficking case in Bangladesh in 2020, according to a UN report highlighting the concern over low convictions of the crime.

The number of people convicted in trafficking cases was nine in 2019, up from four in 2018, said the report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Dhaka division saw the highest 40 percent of human trafficking cases filed in 2020, followed by Khulna (22 percent) and Chattogram (17 percent).

A total of 373 people were arrested in 2020 while the number of arrestees was 199 in 2019 and 688 in 2018, said the report titled "Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh", which was shared yesterday during the regional launch of UNODC's global report on "Trafficking in Persons 2022".

The report, which was produced by the UNODC with support from the government, attributed the lack of resources, bribery by traffickers

and insufficient evidence to the low conviction.

It, however, said only one conviction in 2020 was due to reduced capacity caused by the pandemic.

"Nevertheless, the number of convictions from previous years illustrates an equally low level compared to a much higher number of arrests," it said.

Trafficking cases should be closed within 180 working days. However, in practice, the process may be far more protracted due to a lack of resources, it said, adding that investigations are further hindered by high levels of corruption.

The report pointed out that economic need was the most significant determinant of trafficking in persons in Bangladesh.

The other factors are discrimination and marginalisation often in combination with economic need creating multiple layers of vulnerability for certain people to fall into trap of traffickers.

"Poverty and lack of prospects for income generation may lead people to accept risky employment

opportunities as 'the marginal gain potentially derived from the prospective job opportunity significantly outweighs the cost of inaction'."

Though the country saw its per capita income rise and poverty rate decline between 2009 and 2019, many people in rural areas remain relatively poor.

This relative lack of economic opportunities functions as a push factor, enticing people to seek employment abroad under promises of better wages and jobs in countries in North America, Europe and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

While victims from all Bangladeshi regions are detected in the countries of the GCC, those districts sharing borders with India near larger city centres disproportionately report repatriated victims.

For example, Khulna, which shares its western border with West Bengal and is not far from Kolkata in India, reported the most repatriated victims in 2020.

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Sugar price to go up by Tk 5 a kg from Feb 1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Refiners are set to raise the price of sugar from February 1, their second hike in three months, as the higher price of unrefined sugar in the global market and depreciation of taka continue to push up their production costs.

This time, they are set to raise the price by Tk 5 per kilogram following a discussion with the commerce ministry and Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission, according to a statement issued by Bangladesh Sugar Refiners Association yesterday.

From February 1, the retail price of loose sugar will be Tk 5 more at Tk 107 per kilogram. The price of packaged sugar will be Tk 4 more at Tk 112 a kg.

Refiners last raised the prices of sugar on November 3 last year -- to Tk 102 a kg for unpackaged sugar and Tk 108 for packaged sugar -- citing the same reasons.

Retailers in Dhaka have been selling sugar at Tk 120 per kg.

Globally, sugar prices edged up in the last two months of last year, according to World Bank Commodities Price Data released early this month.

The price hike is set to pile on the expenses for ordinary people during Ramadan, which is set to begin in March.

Talking to The Daily Star, Ghulam Rahman, president of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said, "The market for the sweetener has become unstable before the fasting month. It should be controlled. Otherwise, people will suffer during Ramadan."

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US SANCTIONS ON RAB Nothing but political

Momen tells JS; all efforts in place to get them lifted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told parliament yesterday that the US sanctions on Rab were nothing but a political matter.

The lifting of sanctions is a long-term process, the minister said, adding that strong diplomatic efforts were made since the beginning to resolve it.

Responding to a question from Jatiya Party MP Mujibul Haque Chunnun, he said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other agencies of the government are working together to get the ban withdrawn and prevent such bans in future.

The Bangladesh embassy in Washington continues to maintain round-the-clock communication with the US State Department. As per their advice, the foreign ministry is taking immediate steps.

The ministry is also coordinating regularly with the Rab, legal aid agencies, law ministry and the Bangladesh mission in this regard.

Highlighting the steps taken by the government to have the ban on Rab withdrawn, the minister said, "I spoke to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken over the phone after the ban was imposed. At that time, there was an open discussion about how Bangladesh and the United States

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The escalator-equipped footbridge in front of the Dhaka airport used to be a relief for pedestrians, especially the elderly and the ones carrying heavy bags. However, the escalator broke almost two months ago and people now climb up and down the staircase.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Cop's noble act reunites mother, child

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A mother was forced to sell her two-month-old child for Tk 30,000 to repay debts.

Three days after the heartbreaking incident, a police team reunited the mother and her child yesterday.

Lima Hanufa, the mother, said her husband could not secure a job in the last five years after a road accident left him crippled.

After giving birth to their youngest child, Lima, her family's only wage earner, too could not work.

As a result, the amount of the family's debt recently increased to Tk 30,000 -- Tk 12,000 in rent, Tk 10,000 in grocery, and Tk 8,000 in pharmacy, she said.

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Bela team attacked during Ctg field visit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A team from Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association was attacked yesterday allegedly by the aides of a councillor during a field visit in Lake City residential area of Chattogram where hills were razed for a housing project.

The team along with journalists first visited the housing project and later visited Kalirichara Khal, a water body filled up by grabbers. A group of youths started to follow Bela's Chief Executive Sayeda Rizwana Hasan and at point started quizzing her.

Some minutes later, Ward 9 Councillor Jahurul Alam Jashim appeared on the scene along with his men. He also started questioning Rizwana, said Bela officials.

Talking to The Daily Star, Rizwana said, "Due to their aggressive behaviour, we were forced to postpone our visit and leave the spot. While we were waiting for our vehicle, some youths were seen roaming with

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Murad granted pardon from AL

STAR REPORT

After withdrawing expulsion of former Gazipur City Corporation mayor Zahangir Alam from his party post, the ruling Awami League has now granted a pardon for disgraced former state minister Murad Hassan.

Murad, who had been serving as the health affairs secretary of Jamalpur Awami League, was relieved from the post and also party membership for his offensive remarks on women that sparked waves of criticism.

On December 22 last year, Murad wrote to AL chief and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after a decision was made at a meeting of the AL National Committee on December 17 last year to withdraw the expulsion orders for those who formally apologised for misdeeds.

In the letter, he asked for pardon and promised not to do anything in future that may embarrass the party or the party chief.

While talking to reporters after attending AL's Mymensingh divisional delegation meeting at the party's Gulistan headquarters, Murad

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People gather around a building damaged and burned by Israeli troops during a raid on the West Bank's Jenin refugee camp, yesterday. The raid killed 9 Palestinians including an elderly woman, Palestinian officials said, also accusing the army of using tear gas inside a hospital.

PHOTO: AFP

Israeli raid kills 9 in West Bank

Palestinian Authority cuts security ties with Israel

REUTERS, Jenin

Israeli commandos killed seven gunmen and two civilians in a raid on a flashpoint town in the occupied West Bank yesterday, Palestinian officials said, stirring fear of further flare-ups after the largest single death toll in years of fighting.

The Palestinian Authority said it was ending its security coordination with Israel, which is widely credited with helping to keep order in the West Bank and preventing attacks against Israel. It has frozen the cooperation numerous times in a sign of protest.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel was not looking to escalate the situation, though he ordered security forces "to prepare for all scenarios in the various sectors."

UN and Arab mediators spoke with Israel and Palestinian factions to try to keep the clash in Jenin, among areas of the West Bank that have seen intensified Israeli operations, from sparking a broader confrontation.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to Egypt, Israel and the West Bank next week to discuss the situation.

Israel's military said it sent special forces into Jenin to detain members of the Islamic Jihad armed group suspected of having carried out and planning "multiple major terror attacks", shooting several of them after they opened fire.

Islamic Jihad said two of its men died battling the unusually deep raid on Jenin's refugee camp, a militant bastion. Four slain gunmen were claimed by Hamas, another by an armed wing of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah faction.

The two other dead were a civilian man and woman, local residents said.

"We consider that security coordination with the Israeli occupation government no longer exists as of now," the Palestinian leadership who gathered to discuss Jenin said in a statement.

US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leal said they were pushing to calm tensions and that the security coordination should be deepened, not cut.

During the three-hour clash, gunfire echoed through the camp's cramped alleys, as well as occasional explosions from improvised bombs set off by militants. Youths pelted army vehicles with rocks. There were no Israeli casualties.

After the troops withdrew and the smoke and tear gas cleared, civilians who had kept away streamed into the camp to check on casualties. A two-storey building that had been the focus of the fighting was heavily damaged.

Separately, a Palestinian was killed during a clash with Israeli security officers in the city of Ramallah, said Palestinian health officials. A spokesperson for Israel's border

police was not reachable for comment on the report.

Violence has surged since a series of lethal Palestinian street attacks in Israel in March and April. The attendant diplomatic stalemate has helped rally Palestinian support for Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which refuse coexistence with Israel - where the new hard-right government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu includes members opposed to Palestinian statehood.

An Islamic Jihad official told Reuters the group had told international mediators to warn Israel that the Jenin violence "could spread everywhere". Deputy Hamas chief Saleh Al-Arouri said in a statement that an armed response "will not take long".

Tor Wennesland, a UN mediator, said on Twitter that he was "actively engaged with Israeli and Palestinian authorities to de-escalate tensions, restore calm and avoid further conflict".

Israeli officials gave no public indication they were in truce talks. Lauding Israeli forces on the Jenin raid, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir said: "Any terrorist who tries to harm our personnel should know that his blood is forfeit."

According to the Palestinian health ministry, at least 30 Palestinians, including gunmen and civilians, have been killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank since January 1.

Cop's noble act

FROM PAGE 1

Facing constant pressure of repayments from the creditors and finding no way out of this crisis, the mother sold her child to a neighbouring childless couple for Tk 30,000 on Monday.

Lima used the money to pay off her debts.

On information, Ashraf Islam, officer-in-charge of Tongi East Police Station, visited the childless couple, paid them Tk 30,000 from his own pocket, and reunited the child with her mother.

Besides, the OC also arranged a job for the child's father in a local factory, said Yeasin Arafat, sub-inspector of the police station.

SI Yeasin was the first responder after police got information about the incident via national helpline 999.

Swarna Akhter, who bought the child, said, "We spent Tk 30,000 on the child. We later gave the child back to the mother in accordance with the police's instructions."

BNP to start

FROM PAGE 1

to Shyampur and from Mugda to Malibagh on February 1.

In reply to a query, Fakhru said, "The BNP announced the programme and will discuss it with like-minded political parties. If they want to, they can observe the same programme."

The BNP leader said their march programmes would be held peacefully with spontaneous participation of people from all walks of life.

Sugar price

FROM PAGE 1

Rahman demanded that the government make sugar available and bring down the prices to Tk 80-90 a kg during the fasting month.

Market insiders said a section of traders is taking advantage of the supply shortage in the market.

In the first six months of the fiscal year, raw sugar imports fell 22 percent year-on-year to 7.33 lakh tonnes, shows data from the commerce ministry.

The opening of letters of credit for the import of raw sugar also slumped 28 percent year-on-year to 3.75 lakh tonnes in the October-December period of 2022.

Bangladesh requires 20 lakh tonnes of sugar annually, 98 percent of which is met through imports.

Govt mulls a 40-bigha cap

FROM PAGE 1

is saying the next election will be held under the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina-led government.

According to the law, the Election Commission will conduct the election, but the DCs play a vital role in the districts because they will be the returning officers.

"People want a free, fair and credible election. The whole world is also looking at it. For a fair election, you will play a key role. Prepare yourself to present the nation with a fair election," he said.

The security forces are capable of tackling any situation during the election period, he said, adding that the government will have no control on the security forces during the election period as the Election Commission will lead them and the home ministry will discharge its routine work.

Termining the use of drugs a big challenge, Asaduzzaman said the DCs should be proactive in reducing the use of narcotics. "We asked them to work along with the public representatives to reduce its [drugs] use."

A section of Rohingyas are involved

Human Trafficking rife

FROM PAGE 1

Climate change is also emerging as a root cause of trafficking, according to the report.

The study's findings indicate traffickers targeting victims affected by environmental disasters caused by climate change such as floods and droughts that erode livelihoods and heighten levels of vulnerability.

Bangladeshi trafficking victims are detected in many parts of the world, with the top destinations being countries in the GCC, Thailand, Malaysia and India as well as Europe and the Americas.

Between January 2015 and May 2021, on the Central Mediterranean Route, linking North Africa to Italy, Bangladeshis comprised 5.7 percent of all those arriving on this route and comprise the main citizenship group of non-African origin.

Bangladesh is also used as a transit country by traffickers to transport South Asian victims to other destinations, it added.

Since 2002, the Bangladesh

in smuggling in yaba to Bangladesh, the home minister said, adding that the army, police and intelligence agencies are working to stop it.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen asked the DCs to take action against illegal hill cutting and filling up of ponds and canals.

He also alerted them to human trafficking by travel agents.

Emerging from the meeting, he told reporters that the Myanmar government was not sincere about taking back the Rohingyas.

"Our priority is to repatriate Rohingyas. Myanmar also said they will take back Rohingyas. But it has been six years. Not a single Rohingya has returned," he said.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud asked the DCs to inform the ministry about rumours spread by the unregistered online portals and IPTVs so that legal actions are taken and counter-messages against the rumours are spread to create awareness among the people.

"There are many unregistered online portals and IPTVs in the districts. These are used to spread

misleading information and rumours," he said.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque asked the DCs to visit private clinics and check whether the patients are charged extra and unnecessary C sections are performed.

After a session with the DCs, Law Minister Anisul Huq said the data protection law will be enacted to protect data, not to control it.

"We will place the draft of the Data Protection Act in parliament. That does not mean suggestions from the stakeholders will not be heard," he said.

Regarding the Digital Security Act, he said, "We have taken measures to ensure that cases are registered after proper verification..."

The government has taken an initiative to raise the salary of public prosecutors and government pleaders.

The three-day conference concluded yesterday with a session conducted by Cabinet Secretary Mahub Hossain.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina opened the conference on Tuesday. The DCs made 245 recommendations and participated in 26 sessions.

Nothing but political

FROM PAGE 1

will work to lift the ban.

"Later, on his invitation, I visited Washington and held a bilateral meeting. In the meeting, Bangladesh's position on the ban on Rab and the development of the human rights situation in Bangladesh were highlighted."

Momen said, during that visit, a meeting was held with various individuals, including senators and congressmen. "I requested their support in lifting the ban. I also emphasised the need for the formation of the Congressional Bangladesh Caucus."

During a meeting, Assistant Foreign Minister Donald Lu, who visited Bangladesh recently, especially praised the current activities of Rab, he added.

Momen said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Bangladesh embassy in Washington, along with legal aid organisations, have continued strong diplomatic efforts to get the ban on Rab lifted.

Russian missile

FROM PAGE 12

strikes against energy infrastructure across Ukraine, with temperatures currently near zero degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit).

Energy Minister German Galushchenko accused Russia of seeking to "create a systemic failure in Ukraine's energy system."

The attacks delayed the visit of French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, who arrived in Odessa to discuss aid with Ukraine's top diplomat Dmytro Kuleba.

The Ukrainian air force said its units also shot down all 24 Iranian-made drones launched by Russian forces from near southern Ukraine.

By announcing heavy tank deliveries, the United States and Germany on Wednesday swept aside long-standing misgivings and signalled a new surge of Western support for a counteroffensive against the Russian invasion.

Release Satkhira journo

FROM PAGE 12

Dainik Projonmo Ekattor, was detained by plainclothes police officials around 11:00am on Monday.

"Kha was detained after reporting on a land dispute in Khalishakhali area of the southwestern Satkhira district," the CPJ statement said.

Citing sources, it said police arrested Raghunath and two others over allegations of their involvement in an attempt to explode bombs in coordination with the local landless people, adding that the authorities concerned initially denied he was in custody.

"When the journalist appeared in court the following day, he was unable to stand properly and said that police severely beat him, electrocuted him and threatened to kill him if he continued reporting on the landless people," the statement said.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Raghunath's wife Supriya Rani Kha said, "When he saw me in the courtroom, he put his arms around me through the bars of the cell and started crying like never before. He told me - and the full court - that the police had electrocuted his earlobes for half an hour. They also repeatedly hit the back of his head with a baton."

Raghunath was also charged with sabotage and extortion in cases filed

No Covid-19 death in 24hrs, positivity rate 0.77pc

STAR REPORT

No Covid-19 death was reported in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, according to a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services.

The total number of Covid-19 deaths in the country remains 29,441 and the death rate 1.44 percent.

At least 16 new infections from Covid-19 were recorded in this 24-hour period. The total number of cases rose to 20,37,494, added the release.

The current positivity rate is 0.77 percent while the total positivity rate stands at 13.37 percent, said the press release.

A total of 2,072 samples were tested across the country during this time.

At least 213 patients recovered from Covid-19 during the period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 19,91,792 and the recovery rate is 97.76 percent.

Policeman dies in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

A police officer died in a collision between two motorcycles in Chapainawabganj yesterday afternoon.

The victim is Nurul Islam, 33, sub-inspector of special branch of the district police. He was posted at Islampur police outpost.

Alamgir Jahan, officer-in-charge of Chapainawabganj Sadar Police Station, said the accident took place around 1:00pm when Nurul was heading towards Chataidubi village from the outpost.

When he reached near the School Intersection area, another motorcycle coming from the opposite direction hit Nurul's bike, leaving him critically injured, the police official said.

Locals rushed him to a nearby hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Lawyer sues Godagari UNO for filling up pond

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A lawyer yesterday filed a case against Rajshahi's Godagari Upazila Nirbahi Officer Jana Alam for filling a pond without regard to environmental laws.

Lawyer Salah Uddin Biswas filed the case against seven people, including the UNO, with the Environment Court in Rajshahi.

The court's senior judicial magistrate Abu Taleb accepted the case and fixed the date for hearing on the case on May 22 in presence of an inspector from the Department of Environment.

Contacted, the UNO said the pond was under illegal occupation of some local people for last 15 years.

"The land grabbers are now taking new strategies to keep the land under their occupation," he added.

Saraswati Puja celebrated amid festivity

AGENCIES

Saraswati Puja, a major religious festival of the Hindu community, was celebrated across the country yesterday with much enthusiasm, festivity and religious fervour.

The puja is celebrated on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of the Bangla month of Magh.

The day is called "Vasant Panchami".

Hindu devotees, especially students, worship Goddess Saraswati and celebrate the puja at educational institutions and temples.

The celebrations also included offerings of Devi Aradhona, puspajoli, archanas, anjolis, aratis, distribution of prashad, arati competitions, cultural functions and staging of dramas at temples and educational institutions.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also greeted the Hindu community on the occasion of Saraswati Puja.



A child prays intently to goddess Saraswati, who represents education, creativity, and music, in hope of her blessings, possibly for an upcoming exam. Devotees all around the country gathered at different mandaps to celebrate Saraswati Puja yesterday. The photos were taken at Dhaka and Chattogram mandaps.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON, PRABIR DAS

Do not form committees with family, relatives

Quader urges AL members

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday asked party members not to include any "family members or relatives" in AL committees.

"Forming any committee with family members or relatives will not be allowed. Make committees with those who are devoted and were with the party during its bad times... Do not make anyone a leader just because they are a known face," said Quader while speaking at AL's Mymensingh divisional delegation meeting held at the party headquarters in the capital's Gulistan.

Addressing the leaders, Quader, also road transport and bridges minister, said, "Do not form committees through internal dealings or nepotism; committees have to be formed with devoted activists. Please form the committees immediately."

Meanwhile, he claimed that BNP never follows the path of democracy.

"We practise democracy; BNP does not. Awami League is the only one in the country that practises democracy within the party."

"BNP complained to foreigners that there is no democracy in Awami

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'Interference unacceptable' Writers, artists concerned over bureaucratic influence on Bangla Academy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-three writers and artists yesterday showed their concern over the alleged interference in Bangla Academy by bureaucrats and demanded the removal of the secretary of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

In a statement, they also demanded not to put any interference in the activities of Bangla Academy, which is an autonomous body. They also mentioned that they do not want any bureaucratic interference in the internal affairs of Bangla Academy in the future.

According to the statement, Bangla Academy is a statutory autonomous organisation or institution as per section 3's sub-section 2 of the Bangla Academy Act, which was passed in the National Parliament in 2013. This institution will be run by the executive council.

This council will have three representatives from the government, and other members will comprise important personalities of the education, art, literature and cultural arenas. The secretary of the Ministry of Cultural

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The Iranian nightmare

Trafficking syndicate, with help of 2 Dhaka airport staffers, confine, torture Bangladeshi migrants, reveals CID

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Jahangir Alam Badsha, 41, is a security staff of the Civil Aviation and Mahamudul Hasan, 27, is an outsourcing staff at the air condition service of the engineering service inside the Dhaka airport.

However, they had another side hustle to take care of. When a fortune seeker, trapped by a transnational human trafficking syndicate, went to the airport to leave Bangladesh on a visit visa, their task on behalf of the syndicate was to help the aspirants board the plane without any obstacle.

In the last two years, this syndicate has trafficked at least 50 Bangladeshis to Iran. The syndicate comprises at least 15 Bangladeshi members with some Iranian nationals.

The serious crime unit of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) disclosed the findings yesterday following the arrest of Badsha and Mahamudul from the capital's Dakkhin Khan area.

Md Nazrul Islam, special superintendent (SS) of CID's serious crime unit, confirmed the development to The Daily Star. "The duo used to charge Tk 15,000 to Tk 20,000 per client," he mentioned.

Besides the airport management, the duo was also involved in manipulating people to identify themselves as top airport officials, said Nazrul.

CID found out about their



PHOTO: COLLECTED

The arrested Dhaka airport staffers with CID officials.

The Irani members of the syndicate would record the migrants being tortured and send the clips to their family members, asking for ransom.

MD NAZRUL ISLAM
Special Superintendent of CID's serious crime unit

involvement with the syndicate while investigating a case filed with the airport police station of Dhaka Metropolitan Police on November 10 last year.

A trafficking victim, who has managed to get out of the captivity of the syndicate and return to Bangladesh from Iran with an international NGO's help, filed the case, said CID officials.

Earlier on January 15 this year, CID arrested another member of the syndicate — Abdus Salam alias Selmat Ullah, 34, — from the capital's Abdullahpur area.

The syndicate used to target those who want to go to middle

east, especially to Iran or Saudi Arabia. For the journey, the syndicate first charged Tk 1 lakh and then send the fortune seekers to Dubai on a visit visa.

Dubai-based Bangladeshi members of the syndicate used to receive the aspirants from there, and charged Tk 2.5 lakh from each of them, said investigators.

To sell the migrants to locals, they would then hand them over to the syndicate's Irani members and board them on an Iran-bound boat, said SS Nazrul Islam of CID.

Upon their arrival in Iran, the syndicate used to confine and torture them for money. The nightmare does not end here. The Irani members of the syndicate would record the migrants being tortured and send the clips to their family members, asking for ransom, said Nazrul, citing the findings from the primary investigation.

The families of the migrants would then be asked to pay the ransoms to different mobile financial service accounts in Bangladesh. "A victim has paid around Tk 7 to 8 lakh to the syndicate to be released from their captivity," said Nazrul.

SS Nazrul Islam also said they have already started correspondence with the Iran Embassy in Bangladesh to identify the Irani nationals involved with the syndicate.

"We are also working to trace the syndicate's local members and rescue the Bangladeshi victims confined in their torture cells," he added.

On the run for nine years

Death-row convict in photojournalist Aftab murder case arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A death-row convict of Ekushey Padak winning photojournalist Aftab Ahmed murder case has been arrested in Dinajpur nine years after he went into hiding after obtaining bail.

The convict, Raju Munsi, 25, had been hiding in Mymensingh, Jamalpur and Dinajpur under different guises and he never even contacted his family to avoid arrest in nine years. He worked as an assistant of a mason.

The members of Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) of police arrested Raju from Shalgram bordering area in Phulbari upazila on Wednesday, said ATU Superintendent of Police (Intelligence) MM Hasanul Zahid at a press conference yesterday.

The 79-year-old photojournalist was killed during a robbery at his home on Wapda Road in West Rampura, Dhaka on December 24 in 2013. Police recovered the body the next day.

M a s t e r m i n d e d by Aftab's car driver Humayun Kabir, Raju and several others entered Aftab's house, saying that they would rent the house

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Data Protection Act to protect data, not control

Law minister reiterates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday reiterated that the Data Protection Act will be enacted to protect data, not to control it.

"We will place the draft of the Data Protection Act in parliament. It does not mean that suggestions from the stakeholders will not be addressed," the minister said while talking to reporters after the Deputy Commissioners' Conference in Dhaka's Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

"This act is for protecting data and will be enacted as per this policy," he added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Bangladesh, India ties see significant achievements

Momen tells event marking 74th Republic Day of India

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said the Bangladesh-India relationship has seen "transformative changes", reaching a new height with significant achievements through cooperation and collaboration.

"Bangladesh attaches the highest importance to its relations with India," he said while speaking at a reception on the 74th Republic Day of India.

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pranay Verma hosted the reception.

Momen said the relationship between the two countries, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

BANNING SINGLE-USE PLASTIC

Bela serves contempt of court notice to secretaries, DoE DG

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) served contempt of court notice to secretaries of five ministries and director general of the Department of Environment over their failure to comply with a court order that banned single-use plastic in coastal areas.

The secretaries are from the commerce, environment, water resources, civil aviation, and textile ministries.

Apart from this, the chairperson of Plastic Manufacturing and Import Association was served the notice as well.

Contacted, Supreme Court lawyer S Hasanul Banna told The Daily Star that Bela along with 10 environmental organisations filed a public interest litigation with the High Court, seeking the ban, in January 2020.

Hasanul said the court on December 31, 2020, in a ruling, asked why failure to rein in plastic menace would not be declared unlawful.

It directed the ministries concerned and Department of Environment to execute the total ban of single-use plastic, by creating an action plan and executing it by 2022.

"The court also asked them to stop the use of single-use plastic at hotels, motels and restaurants in coastal areas — as well as production, carrying and sale of polythene," he added.

"As they failed to carry out the court order, we served them with the notice in this regard," he told The Daily Star.

Once a saviour, now needs saving

The depressing state of Bibi Mariam cannon

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The task to visit Dhaka's Osmani Udyan and find the Bibi Mariam cannon might not be as easy as it seems. The area where the structure is supposed to be is completely surrounded by garbage, to the point that it seems like it's nothing but a dumping site, let alone a historical one.

The historical cannon is under the jurisdiction of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC). Even though it stands right in front of Nagar Bhaban, the artefact is rotting away due to lack of proper care.

A c c o r d i n g to historian Prof Muntassir Mamoon's book "Dhaka Samagra", Bibi Mariam was constructed in the capital during the Mughal era to protect the city from attacks by the Magh or Arakanese bandits. Local technicians, under the guidance



of Mughal engineers, built the weapon. Subedar Mir

Jumla used the cannon during a war with Assam. It was then put in front of Bara Katra at Swarighat as a war memorial. Later, it was moved to several different locations,

such as Chawkbazar, Sadarghat, and Gulistan. In 1983, it was finally placed in front of Osmani Udyan's main gate.

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw Bibi Mariam surrounded by garbage, tree branches and bricks, with plants growing all around it. The paint was peeling off the structure's body, which is covered with dirt. The disturbed eyes and nostrils

of visitors are proof that pedestrians regularly use the spot as a toilet.

Kamal Hossain, a resident of Gulistan, said this negligence is unacceptable, and something needs to be done about it.

"The cannon is a pride of Dhaka residents, and it deserves respect and care," he said.

Aslam Uddin, a nearby shopkeeper of the area, said the structure rots in negligence because no one has been assigned to take care of it.

"It's losing its historical value every day. The authorities concerned should take steps to ensure that it is properly taken care of," he added.

Meanwhile, DSCC and the Department of Archaeology (DoA) have no idea about Bibi Mariam's present condition.

Historian Prof Muntassir Mamoon expressed his anger while talking to this correspondent.

"We are fortunate that such an important artefact has not been stolen or lost in the long course of history. However, its current state is completely unacceptable," he said.

Contacted, Architect Taimur

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

12 NSU faculty members awarded for research



STAR REPORT

North South University yesterday awarded 12 faculty members for their research excellence during 2021 and 2022, said a press release.

The awards were given through a ceremony held at NSU auditorium in the afternoon, chaired by NSU Vice Chancellor Prof Atiqul Islam.

Organised by NSU's Office of Research, the event was addressed by chief guest Biswajit Chanda, a member of the University Grants Commission and a professor of the Department of Law and Land Administration at Rajshahi University.

The awardees received gold, silver and bronze medals according to merit, a certificate of recognition, and monetary award.

Prof Norman K Swazo, director of the Office of Research NSU, oversees research administration at the university.

Brahmaputra bank now a dump zone

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The long-running practice of disposing of industrial and household waste on the embankment of Brahmaputra river in Mymensingh city has been causing severe environmental pollution and posing serious health risks to locals.

Despite residents' continuous protests and pleas, authorities are yet to take any step to stop garbage dumping.

Waste dumped in the city's Kalibari Puran Gudaraghat (Old Ferry Ghat) area gradually makes its way into Old Brahmaputra river.

Locals living near the dam throw their household wastes round the clock amid lack of monitoring by Mymensingh City Corporation authorities, said Shibbir Ahmed, secretary of Mymensingh Poribesh Rokkha O Unnayan Andolon.

They have submitted memorandums to the DC and mayor on several occasions, but to no avail, Shibbir said.

Advocate Nazrul Islam Chunu, convener of civil society forum Jonoudyog, said waste dumping has been going on unabated in broad daylight for years, but authorities seem reluctant to provide any permanent solution to stop the ill practice.

Locals, however, said they dump waste on the embankment as there is no designated spot for garbage dumping.

Although MCC authorities have fixed a designated place for garbage dumping at Char Kalibari, drivers of garbage trucks avoid the bridge due to traffic congestion, locals alleged.

Admitting that there is no dustbin in the area, Mohabbat Ali, waste-management officer at MCC, said they have taken an initiative to collect garbage door-to-door from next month.

Around 500 tonnes of garbage are produced in the city daily, and they have a capacity to manage 400 tonnes, he added.



Household waste remains piled up on the embankment of the Brahmaputra in Mymensingh city's Kalibari Old Ferry Ghat area as authorities continue to turn a blind eye. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Three-day science fair begins in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A three-day science fair, organised by Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR), began in Chattogram yesterday.

Around 300 students from 16 schools, colleges and clubs are displaying a total of 150 projects at 70 stalls in the fair being held on the BCSIR premises at Baluchara.

BCSIR Chairman Dr M Aftab Ali Sheikh inaugurated the fair at a programme with its Ctg branch Director Mohammed Mostafa in the chair.

Mohammed Mostafa said out of 70 initiatives, they would choose the top three models to participate in the national-level programme.

Data Protection

FROM PAGE 3

Regarding the DSA, he said, "We have taken measures to avoid immediate arrest and ensure that cases are registered after proper verification."

The law minister said

they have also formed a committee after consulting the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the best practices in this regard. "If necessary, we can certainly amend the Digital Security Act."

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Fax: +88 02333301123, E-mail: commero@cdcl.gov.bd, Website: www.cdcl.gov.bd
23.02.1565.341.53.006.23.438 Dated: 26 January 2023

Invitation for Tender

1. Procuring entity	Chittagong Dry Dock Ltd.		
2. Invitation for	Purchase of Universal Lathe Machine with Associated Accessories - 01 (One) Set (Detail Technical Specifications Mentioned in Tender Document)		
3. Reference No.	23.02.1565.341.53.006.23.	Date:	26 January 2023
4. Tender closing	12 March 2023 at 12:15pm		
5. Tender opening	12 March 2023 at 12:30pm		

N.B. All other relevant terms and conditions are available at CDCL website (www.cdcl.gov.bd).

Head of Commerce & Purchase Department
GD-129 For Managing Director

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD
Narsingdi Road Division
Bashali, Narsingdi
eenar@rhd.gov.bd

Memo No. 35.01.6800.542.07.001.21-86 Dated: 26/01/2023

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of works as stated below.

Sl. No.	Tender ID & Package No.	Name of work	Publication and closing date & time
01.	783349 e-GP/EE/NRD/Dev-02/2022-2023	Sub-Soil Investigation for overpass design at 31st km of Nayapur-Araihazar-Narsingdi-Raipura Road (R-114) and for Bridge design at (Ch. 7+275m), at (Ch. 19+300m) & Overpass design at (Ch. 7+125m) of Itakhola-Mothikhola-Katiadi Road (R-211) under Narsingdi Road Division during the year 2022-2023.	26-Jan-2023 13:00:00 13-Feb-2023 14:00:00

The interested persons/firms may visit the website www.eprocure.gov.bd to get the details of the tender.

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Executive Engineer, RHD
Narsingdi Road Division
GD-130

Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 3

created opportunities for robust cooperation to achieve more together.

The foreign minister said there are huge untapped opportunities on the trade front for both countries.

Momen emphasised the possible partnership for addressing global challenges, including the impacts of Covid, the crisis in Europe and the imminent global economic recession.

He thanked India for inviting Bangladesh as a "guest country" at the G20 Summit to be held in September 2023 under the presidency of India.

He also hoped that the two countries would continue to work together for the betterment of the people and shared peace and prosperity in the region.

Several cabinet ministers, ambassadors and dignitaries attended the event.

On the run for nine

FROM PAGE 3

and tried to loot money and gold ornaments. As the journalist tried to stop them and kept shouting, they strangled Aftab to death.

In March 2017, a Dhaka court sentenced five people to death in the case.

Aftab had a long and illustrious career, during which he served as chief photographer for the Bangla newspaper, the Daily Ittefaq. He received the Ekushey Padak in 2006.

The five death row convicts are Aftab's driver

Md Humayun Kabir Mollah, Billol Hossain Kislul, Habib Hawladar, Raju Munshi and Md Rasel. Another suspect, Md Shabuj Khan, has been jailed for seven years.

Last year, the High Court upheld the lower court order sentencing five people to death and another to seven years' imprisonment.

Police arrested Raju, son of Nurul Islam Munshi from Patuakhali, in 2013 and was in jail for a year. He went into hiding after securing bail from a court.

People suffer as LGED

FROM PAGE 5

either side of all the vulnerable bridges, vehicles and pedestrians were seen using the bridges risking their lives.

A local named Tajul Islam said it is a wonder how a 40-foot-long bridge was built over a river which is 60 feet wide.

Cracks started to develop after the re-dredging work was done, he said.

Kulaura Upazila Project Implementation Officer (PIO) Shimul Ali said under the Bridge Culvert Construction Project, there is no approval to build any bridge over a width of 50 feet.

However, the width of the Fani river has increased a lot after the river re-excavation work, the PIO said.

"At the moment, we do not have the scope to

construct any bridge over the width of 50 feet," he added.

Contacted, Moulvibazar LGED Executive Engineer Azim Uddin Sardar said due to unplanned re-dredging of the river, the condition of the bridges is too awful now.

Meanwhile, refuting the allegation of unplanned re-dredging of the river, Moulvibazar WDB Executive Engineer Mohammad Aktaruzzaman said the re-dredging work was done to control flood and maintain the water drainage system.

"The bridges were built a long time ago and the authorities concerned constructed those bridges without taking into account the measurement of the river at that time," he added.

Once a saviour, now

FROM PAGE 3

Islam, chief executive of Urban Study Group, questioned, "If DSCC does not understand the importance of this cannon, how will it take care of the city's other historical assets?"

"The DoA is not taking any steps to preserve the cannon either. These two bodies should be looking into the issue," he added.

Halima Afroj, assistant director of the DoA, said,

"I'm trying to look into the current condition of the Bibi Mariam cannon."

According to DSCC, Osmani Udyan is currently going through a renovation as part of a city corporation project to recover the parks and playgrounds in the city.

DSCC's Public Relations Officer Abu Naser said he does not know the cannon's present state as well. However, he assured that DSCC will look into it and take steps.

Qulkhwani of Ahmed Shafi tomorrow

STAR REPORT

The qulkhwani of Ahmed Shafi Choudhury will be held tomorrow at 4:30pm after the Asr prayers at Mohakhali DOHS mosque, said a press release.

Shafi's family has requested his relatives, colleagues and friends to attend the qulkhwani and pray for the departed soul.



Interference

FROM PAGE 3

All affairs cannot interfere in any internal affairs of the Academy under any circumstances, read the statement. The signatories of the statement also mentioned that they learned about secretary of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs threatening Bangla Academy officials to take the Ekushey Book Fair under the ministry's control from media reports.

They expressed their utmost shock at this sort of behaviour coming from a government official.

The signatories of the statement include thespian Mamunur Rashid, film director Nasiruddin Yousuf Bacchchu, poets Shamim Azad, Hafiz Rashid Khan, Ferdous Nahar, Khaled Hossain, Shamim Reza, Shoaib Zibran, Henri Swapan and Shamim Shahan.

Do not form

FROM PAGE 3

League. But they [BNP] do not hold any conference or meeting centrally. How would they establish democracy in the country?"

He alleged that propaganda is being spread about AL. He directed AL activists to form a cell to prevent propaganda.

Boro farming on 57 beels faces

FROM PAGE 5

up 19 shallow machines near Pathra sluice gate for draining out water from Panjia-Pathra Beel since December 16 last year.

Water extraction is going on with 20 shallow machines in Buruli sluice gate area, he said, adding

that it required diesel worth Tk 2 lakh every day.

Many farmers alleged although there is a condition to drain out the beels during winter,

the influential enclosure owners are yet to start the draining work of all the beels. The enclosure owners

are reluctant to drain out the beels, because if Boro farming is delayed their fish will get more bigger and earn them good profits.

Panjia UP chair Jasimuddin said saplings planted on Bagdanga Beel have gone underwater due to stagnant water.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD
Road Division, Cumilla
Telephone No. 081-64725
E-mail: eecom@rhd.gov.bd

Memo No. 35.01.1933.410.551 Date: 26-01-2023

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following work. Details are given below.

Sl. No.	Package No. & Tender ID	Description of work	Tender last selling (date & time)	Tender closing (date & time)	Tender opening (date & time)
1.	e-GP/48/CRD/2022-2023 (Tender ID: 783053)	Construction of Steel Foot Over Bridge (Gumta Ishaquia High School & Gumta Government Primary School) at Ch. 57+700 of Dhaka (Jatrabari)-Cumilla (Moinamati)-Chattogram-Cox's Bazar-Teknaf National Highway (N-1) under Road Division, Cumilla during the year 2022-2023.	26-Feb-2023 17:00	27-Feb-2023 12:00	27-Feb-2023 12:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through and registered bank's branches up to 17:00pm at dated 26-Feb-2023 (Tender ID: 783053).

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Executive Engineer, RHD
Road Division, Cumilla
GD-131

প্রধান প্রকৌশলী (পূর্ব) এর কার্যালয়
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১.	xenpne/east/e-tender/22-23/48	773358	Works: ON CD branch: Construction of ballast protection wall at K.M. 30/2-3 (Both side) = 400'-0", K.M. 30/4-5 (Right side)= 100'-0", K.M. 31/1-3 (Right side) = 300'-0", K.M. 31/5-7 (Both side)= 200'-0", K.M. 32/0-32/1 (Left side)= 100'-0", K.M. 33/4-5 (Both side)=300'-0", K.M. 34/4-5 (Right side)= 100'-0", K.M. 35/8-9 (Both side)= 300'-0", K.M. 36/4-5 (Left side)= 100'-0", K.M. 36/7-8 (Both side)= 300'-0", & K.M. 37/1-5 (Both side)= 1600'-0" Total=3800'-0" in between PTW-KNNR station including repairs to cess & bank and other allied works as per drawing.	OTM (NCT)	30-Jan-2023 12:00pm

সিদ্ধান্ত

১. শুধুমাত্র ই-জিপি সিস্টেমে নিম্নলিখিত এগ্রেজেন্সি শর্তাবলী পূর্বকারী মরগার আহ্বান সফলভাবে করতে পারবেন।
২. মরগার আহ্বানসময় জমা মরগার পলিশ ও মরগার জামানত বকেয়া অর্থ নির্ধারিত ব্যাংকে জমা করতে হবে।

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RISKY BRIDGES ON FANAI RIVER

People suffer as LGED, WDB trade blame

MINTU DESHWARA

A total of six bridges built on Fanai river, flowing through the southern part of Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila, have either collapsed or partially broken down allegedly due to unplanned dredging of the river.

Finding no alternative, more than one lakh people of several villages under the upazila have been compelled to use those risky bridges on different rural roads for nearly two years, risking their lives.

Contacted, the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) authorities in Moulvibazar, alleged that the bridges have been completely damaged due to the re-dredging of the river in an unplanned way by Water Development Board (WDB).

On the other hand, the WDB authorities claimed that LGED constructed the unplanned bridges without taking into account the proper measurement of the river.

According to the LGED authorities, a 40-foot-long bridge on Palgaon-Mukundapur road in Rautgaon union was constructed under the Bridge Culvert Construction Project of the Department of Disaster Management at a cost of Tk 22 lakh in 2011-12 fiscal.

In 2018-19 fiscal, another bridge was constructed on Bhabanipur-Helapur road under the same project, spending about Tk 33 lakh.

Meanwhile, LGED constructed the other four bridges -- on Hashimpur-Laxmipur road, Bhabanipur-Nortan-Tilasijura road, Mukundapur-Kabiraji road and Gutguti-Kabiraji road -- at a cost of about Tk 30 lakh in 1997-98 fiscal.

In 2021-22 fiscal, WDB re-excavated about 40 kilometres of the Fanai, spending Tk 17 crore.

However, before the re-excavation work was completed, heavy rain from the upstream caused landslides that damaged the bridges, according to WDB.

During a recent visit to these areas, this correspondent saw the bridge on Palgaon-Mukundapur road had collapsed due to the landslides.

Locals placed a makeshift bamboo platform on the collapsed part for movements, but major accidents can happen at any time.

Only CNG-run auto-rickshaws and motorcycles were seen plying the other five vulnerable bridges.

Out of the six bridges, two bridges collapsed over a year ago.

Although LGED hung signboards on

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



This bridge on Hashimpur-Laxmipur road in Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila has partially collapsed due to alleged unplanned dredging of the Fanai river.

PHOTO: STAR

Evercare Chattogram replants amputated hand successfully



STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Evercare Hospital Chattogram has successfully replanted an amputated hand of a patient.

During a press conference at the hospital yesterday, Dr Rivu Raj Chakraborty, a trauma surgery specialist, said the right hand of Mokarram Hossain, 42, was severed in an attack by criminals in Moheshkhali of Cox's Bazar on January 11.

Local police sent Mokarram, driver of a CNG-run three-wheeler, to the hospital along with his severed hand.

"With the consent of the patient and his family, we decided to perform a quick surgery," Dr Rivu Raj said.

The bones, blood vessels, nerves and muscles of his hand were attached through an 11-hour surgery, he added.

It was a very time-consuming and complicated surgery which require advanced technology and management, he said, adding, "We are glad that we could conduct the surgery successfully."

After the surgery, the patient was kept under proper observation and he was able to go home after eight days, the physician said. While talking to reporters at the conference, Mokarram said, "I express my sincere thanks and gratitude to Dr Rivu Raj and his team. My family and I are very satisfied with the management and overall services of the hospital. I am now doing well and can move my wrist now."

Dr Rivu Raj's team members, cardiovascular surgery specialist Dr Md Sanaul Haque Sarkar and the patient's relatives were also present at the press conference.

It was a very time-consuming and complicated surgery which require advanced technology and management.

DR RIVU RAJ CHAKRABORTY
A trauma surgery specialist

NAJIRGANJ-DHAWAPARA ROUTE

Ferry service limps due to poor facilities

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Although ferry services on Najirganj-Dhawapara route, connecting Pabna and Rajbari districts through the mighty Padma river, kicked off on January 1, it failed to attract travellers and bring any fruitful result for lack of necessary facilities.ccc

Roads and Highways Department (RHD) used to operate small utility ferries on the same route for nearly 25 years. But the service was irregular due to lack of RHD's expertise.

Recently, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) took charge of the route and started operating k-type ferries. But the operations began without arranging necessary facilities, including construction of a terminal, an alternative pontoon (ghat) and road widening works.

Trucker Abdul Kader, who was carrying poultry feed from Sirajganj to Madaripur, said travelling through Najirganj ferry ghat reduces at least 150km path, but sometimes they have to wait for hours to board on a ferry.

"Although ferries are available here, ferry service is delayed for lack of sufficient vehicles," he said.

Jahidul Islam, a BIWTC official at Najirganj Ferry Ghat, said in order to operate a ferry it needs at least 10 heavy vehicles or trucks on board.

Sometimes, they have to wait for hours to get sufficient vehicles for ferry operation.

"Currently, two k-type ferries are operational on the route every day, but most of the times none of those get sufficient vehicles," he said.

Ashrafur Islam, another truck driver, said sometimes they have to



A goods-laden truck struggles to board a ferry due to this narrow road that connects the pontoon at Najirganj Ghat in Pabna's Sujanagar.

PHOTO: STAR

wait for five to six hours.

But as there is no parking facility, they are forced to park the vehicles on the narrow road connecting the ghat, he said.

If four to five 5 trucks are parked on the road, it badly hampers vehicular movements, he added.

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw only 20 to 25 vehicles can cross the river on ferries every day due to lack of necessary facilities.

Moreover, about 25 BIWTC staff were found working on either side of the newly inaugurated route.

BIWTC Manager Shafayet Ahmed, also in charge of Najirganj-Dhawapara ferry service, said, "For smooth ferry operation, two pontoons (ghats), one in low and the other in high water level, are required."

Besides, vehicles often struggle to reach the spot on time as the road, connecting the pontoon, is narrow.

Meanwhile, many passengers, who were travelling to Rajbari from Pabna, alleged that an influential syndicate have been forcing them to travel on small boats at double cost.

"I often need to go to Rajbari for professional reason and if I take the ferry, it costs me Tk 30." "But when I reach the ferry ghat, men of the lease holder often forces me to travel on boats, spending Tk 70," Sirajul Islam of Pabna's Sujanagar upazila said.

Contacted, Kazi Shajahan, one of the lease holders of the ferry ghat, said boats are there to carry the passengers in case the ferries are unavailable.

"We've take lease of the ghat for a year," he added.

ROHINGYAS, HOST COMMUNITY
USAID announces \$75m assistance

UNB, Dhaka

The USAID has announced an additional USD 75 million in humanitarian assistance to help Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar and members of the host community to meet ongoing needs that have been exacerbated by the increasing costs of food and fuel.

With this new funding, USAID will work with the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) to provide critically needed food and nutrition assistance, infrastructure maintenance, disaster risk reduction, and logistics support, said a press release.

This new funding will provide assistance to nearly 600,000 people. The food and nutrition assistance includes electronic vouchers for staple and fresh foods at designated distribution sites as well as support to feeding programmes for malnourished children six months to five years of age, and pregnant and lactating women, it said.

A better world for the children

Global campaign 'Generation Hope' launched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In order to tackle economic inequality by ensuring fair funding to prioritise children's rights and well-being, Save the Children, in partnership with child-rights organisation Breaking the Silence, launched the global campaign "Generation Hope" yesterday.

The campaign will be implemented nationwide for the next five years. Generation Hope, which was launched at hotel in the capital, is a global flagship campaign of Save the Children that focuses on accelerating action to address the connected crises of economic inequality and climate emergency to create a better world for children.

Dr Ian Fry, United Nations special rapporteur, joined the event virtually as a special guest.

Tasmima Hossain, chairperson of Breaking the Silence; Onno van Manen, Save the Children Bangladesh's country director; Dr Shamim Jahan, deputy country director; and Iftekhar Mahmud, Prothom Alo special correspondent, among others, spoke at the event.

Eight more hospitalised with dengue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least eight dengue patients were hospitalised in the last 24 hours till yesterday morning, three of them from outside Dhaka.

With the new cases, the total number of dengue cases rose to 523 while total number of deaths this year is six, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

Some 48 dengue patients are still undergoing treatment, added DGHS.



Water is being drained out using shallow machines from a beel at Katakali village in Jashore's Monirampur upazila.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

DELAY IN DRAINING OUT WATER

Boro farming on 57 beels faces setback

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Boro farming on 57 beels (waterbodies) is facing a serious setback in Jashore's Keshabpur and Monirampur upazilas due to a delay in draining out water from the low lands by influential fish enclosure owners.

As a result, hundreds of farmers in the eastern part of the upazila are in fear that they may not be able to plant Boro saplings in time this season.

Farmers alleged that although they have paid the water drainage bill in advance, owners of the fish enclosures are reluctant to drain out the water during the high time of the ongoing Boro season.

Of the 57 beels, 27 beels are in Keshabpur and 30 in Monirampur upazila.

After monsoon, stagnant water of all the 57 beels are drained out through eight sluice gates at Katakali and Mangalkot in Monirampur upazila.

The drained-out water of the beels falls into the Srinadi river through Pathra Canal.

Farmer Habibur Rahman of Pathra village said according to the agreements, owners of the enclosures will drain out the stagnant water of the beels within the Bangla month of poush, so that farmers can prepare the low lands for Boro cultivation.

This season the enclosure owners are demanding Tk 1,200 from the farmers for draining out per bigha land, but such condition is not included in their agreements, he alleged.

Even though farmers have already paid Tk 26 lakh as electricity bill, the closure owners are neither returning their money back nor draining out the water timely, they alleged.

Mahiruddin Biswas, present of Water Drainage Committee, said they have set

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

PRAYER TIMING
JANUARY 27

Fajr	Juma	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
5:35	12:30	4:15	5:46	7:15
JAMAAT	6:10	1:15	4:30	5:50
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION				

50 years of Aranyak Natyadal

Founder Mamunur Rashid sits down with The Daily Star

“Whenever Chanchal or Babu are praised, I remember how they have grown up within our theatre troupe. I almost feel like a primary school teacher, who held their hands during their initial journey. This feeling is wonderful.”

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Ekushey Padak-winning actor, Mamunur Rashid founded the Aranyak Natyadal in 1972, along with a group of young people who had returned from the war. Today marks the 50th anniversary of the group. To celebrate the occasion, an eight-day festival has been organised, which will end on February 3.

A pioneer of Bangladeshi theatre, Mamunur Rashid sat down with The Daily Star at his Dhanmondi residence, to talk about the special occasion, his career, and much more.

Being here on the 50th year of Aranyak Natyadal, who do you remember the most?

Everybody. I am one of the founding members of Aranyak Natyadal. Most of those who were with me at the start, are no longer here. There is no Aly Zaker. There is no Subhash Dutta. Dr Enamul Haque is also no longer with us.

Mujib bin Haque is no longer in the country. Nazmul Hossain works in a completely different field. After them, came the new additions to the team. Some remained, some left. Many have been with our troupe since the 1980's.

Mannan Hira, for example, joined Aranyak Natyadal in the 1980's. He passed away after spending many years with the group. Year after year, the troupe has continued to work. The work is real. After 50 years, I can fondly recall many words, many events and many memories.

Could you tell us about this festival?

The first ever play I worked in was called *Kobor*. This play will be staged in this year's festival. Every day, there will be plays staged. Our production *Rajnetra*, which has been written and directed by Haroon Rashid, will also be staged.

'Ora Kadam Ali' will be returning to the stage after almost 25 years.

I wrote *Ora Kadam Ali* at the age of 26. At the



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

time, it was one of the most staged plays. There isn't a place in Bangladesh where it wasn't staged. I even performed this play in places where there were no stages. In the 1970's, *Ora Kadam Ali* really spread amongst the masses and I am glad to see it returning after so long.

Many artistes including the likes of Azizul Hakim, Fazlur Rahman Babu, Chanchal Chowdhury have come into the limelight after having been in your theatre troupe. How does this make you feel?

This kind of thing brings me a lot of joy. I really enjoy seeing them succeed. Whenever anyone praises them, I feel that I am being praised as well. I know many people usually become jealous, however I don't understand that logic at all.

Whenever Chanchal or Babu are praised, I remember how they have grown up within our theatre troupe. I almost feel like a primary

school teacher, who held their hands during their initial journey. This feeling is wonderful.

When I visit Kolkata, people older than me bow down and praise Chanchal's performances. At the same time, when Chanchal visits Kolkata, he always speaks about me during interviews.

What drama will the festival close with?

The festival will end with a performance of *Sangkranti*. It is a drama that evokes an immense response from the audience, which makes it one of my favorite plays.

Are you ever left feeling that you want more, or that there is something you haven't achieved yet?

Life is not perfect and there is no end to human desire. We will always have the desire to do more, reach more people, spread our art to as many people as possible. This desire, as a human, will never cease to exist.



Mosharraf Karim, Niloy to star in a new rom-com

Get ready to see this year's most entertaining trio as Mosharraf Karim, Niloy Alamgir and Jannatul Sumaiya Heme come together for CMV's latest production *Rangila*. The romantic comedy will see the two protagonists, Salman and Razzak fighting for Laila's love.

In the drama *Laila* (Heme) will be seen playing the role of a dancer in the village, while Razzak (Mosharraf Karim) will be seen as a canvas painter and Salman (Niloy) dons the role of a pick pocket.

Rangila will be released on the CMV Youtube channel soon.

'Pathaan' triumphs over 'KGF: 2' in box-office

Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone starrer *Pathaan*, was finally released on January 25, making fans flock to the cinema halls. Unsurprisingly, the film broke the first-day box-office opening record for a Hindi film—earning Rs 55 crore.

Beating record-holders *KGF: Chapter 2*, which earned Rs 53.9 crore, Shah Rukh Khan's new action-thriller has been crowned the highest box-office opening film. Even though the film wasn't released on a holiday, *Pathaan* performed stunningly.

According to media outlets, the film earned Rs 55 crore from all around India on its opening day, and Rs 2 crore more from the dubbed version release, bringing it to a total of Rs 57 crore in its first-day collection.



NEWS

75pc money laundering

FROM PAGE 12 fabricated fake certificates, the paper said.

Since the amendment of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2015, the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate has filed 95 cases for money laundering involving Tk 3,201 crore, Sadiq said.

The infrastructure of most of the land customs stations in the country is also very fragile.

Due to a lack of proper infrastructure, the service delivery of traders is being

hindered and it is not possible to establish the necessary customs controls, it said.

As a result, trade facilitation is being hindered.

On the other hand, the country's revenue and security are at risk due to the inability to impose customs control.

The NBR is taking various plans, programmes and projects to overcome this situation, it added.

In the era of free trade, the overall development of

the country is not possible in any way without further facilitation of trade and commerce, said NBR Chairman Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem.

Ease of doing business is a big challenge for Bangladesh to survive in a competitive world, he said.

To meet this challenge, the capacity of Bangladesh Customs will have to be increased further.

"That's why various types of activities have been taken," Muneem added.

Murad granted pardon from AL

FROM PAGE 2 said he did not receive any letter about the pardon yet but got the confirmation.

Contacted, an organising

secretary of the AL central committee confirmed that Murad is among the leaders who have been pardoned.

During an interview

on the Facebook page of NahidRains Pictures, posted on social media in 2021, Murad made some offensive comments on

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, acting chairman Tarique Rahman and his daughter Zaima Rahman. He then got embroiled in

another controversy when an audio clip of a phone call between him and actor Emon and actress Mahi leaked and went viral on social media.

Bela team attacked during Ctg field visit

FROM PAGE 2 blunt weapons. They blocked our driver while he was coming to pick us up.

"They freed our driver after we informed the police. When we boarded

our microbus, they started chasing us and pelted stones targeting the vehicle," she claimed.

AKM Mohiuddin Selim, assistant commissioner (Pahartali zone), said, "A

group of local youths cordoned off Rizwana's vehicle during their visit."

On information, police rushed to the spot and escorted the Bela team. "We will take legal action if

anyone files a complaint in this regard," Selim said.

Contacted, Councillor Jashim said he was at his farmhouse during the incident. "I don't know who carried out the attack."

Locals said the allegation of hill cutting and land grabbing is not new against Councillor Jashim, who is also the joint convener of Uttar Pahartali ward unit Awami League.

At the mercy of highway robbers

FROM PAGE 12 van's door to open it without damaging the sealed padlock. They steal 30 to 40 percent products from each carton, refill those with jhut and sand and again seal the cartons. The nuts of the bolt are screwed again, the exporter added.

Shahidullah Azim, vice president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said CCTV cameras are yet to be installed along highways.

Bangladesh is the world's second largest garment exporter. The country exported garment worth \$42.61 billion in the last fiscal year, according to data of Export Promotion Bureau.

Leaders of BGMEA, BKMEA and law enforcement officials said theft of readymade garment products has increased significantly in the last few years. However, neither of the associations nor the law enforcers have the exact number of stealing.

A Rapid Action Battalion official who led several drives against

such theft said BGMEA and BKMEA leaders informed them that at least 30 stealing of RMG products took place last year. However, the actual figure is much higher, he said wishing anonymity.

According to BGMEA, two RMG theft on highways were reported in 2019, nine in 2020 and at least 22 were recorded till July in 2021.

On December 23, Rab-4 raided an abandoned factory in Dhaka's Demra and arrested seven such gang members, including Tawhidul Islam, the leader of a gang, recovered stolen RMG products worth Tk 6 crore and seized a covered van.

Rab officials said Tawhidul used to sell clothes on footpaths 10 years ago. He got involved with a gang and became a millionaire in last three years. He now owns a house in Dhaka and an expensive car.

On September 8 last year, Rab arrested four members of another inter-district RMG theft gang in Cumilla, recovered stolen garment products worth about Tk 4 crore and

seized a covered van.

"We have recovered stolen garments products worth about Tk 30 crore in seven such drives and arrested around 50 members of different theft gangs," said Jahidul Islam, additional SP of Rab-4.

BGMEA Director Rajib Chowdhury said RMG theft has increased significantly in recent years, but the victim exporters didn't always report such incidents.

BKMEA President Mohammad Hatem said theft of readymade garments has been on the rise as those involved in such criminal activity are securing bail easily following the filing of cases. After walking out of jail, they again get involved in stealing, he added.

Exporters demanded recording of RMG theft cases under the Special Powers Act as the crime is damaging the country's image abroad and putting the sector at risk.

বাংলাদেশ শিল্পকলা একাডেমির প্রশিক্ষণ বিভাগে ভর্তি চলছে

শিক্ষাবর্ষ: ২০২৩

দেশব্যাপী লক্ষাধিক প্রশিক্ষার্থী অংশগ্রহণে ৬৪ জেলায় প্রশিক্ষণ কার্যক্রম চলছে

আবেদনপত্র সংগ্রহ ও জমাদানের শেষ তারিখ ৩০ জানুয়ারি ২০২৩

৬৪ জেলা শিল্পকলা একাডেমির প্রশিক্ষণের বিষয়:

- শাস্ত্রীয় ও সাধারণ সঙ্গীত
- নটক/আবৃত্তি
- চাবুকলা
- শাস্ত্রীয় ও সাধারণ নৃত্য
- তালবাদ্যযন্ত্র

জেলা সমূহের ভর্তি তথ্য ও আবেদনের জন্য সংশ্লিষ্ট জেলা শিল্পকলা একাডেমিতে যোগাযোগ করুন।

বাংলাদেশ শিল্পকলা একাডেমি, ঢাকায় প্রশিক্ষণ বিষয়:

সঙ্গীত:

- শাস্ত্রীয় সঙ্গীত
- লোকসঙ্গীত

সাধারণ সঙ্গীত শিল্প:

ক) প্রথম-পঞ্চম শ্রেণী খ) ষষ্ঠ-দশম শ্রেণী পর্যন্ত

আবৃত্তি:

- আবৃত্তি

বাদ্যযন্ত্র:

- সেতার
- সরোদ
- গিটার
- সারঙ্গী
- বেহালা
- বশি
- তবলা
- দোতারা
- স্ট্যাক নোটেশন ও পিয়ানো

শাস্ত্রীয় নৃত্য:

- ভরত নাট্যম
- কথক
- ওড়িশী
- গৌড়ীয়

চারুকলা:

- ফটোভেশন কোর্স (এক বছর): বয়স ৪-৮ বছর
- বেসিক কোর্স (তিন বছর): বয়স ৯-১৮ বছর

শাস্ত্রীয় সঙ্গীত, লোকসঙ্গীত ও সাধারণ সঙ্গীত, স্ট্যাক নোটেশন ও শাস্ত্রীয় নৃত্যের ক্ষেত্রে বাছাই পরীক্ষা হবে। অন্যান্য বিষয়ে সরাসরি ভর্তি নেওয়া হবে।

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আবেদনপত্র ও ভর্তি সংক্রান্ত তথ্য পেতে: www.shilpakala.gov.bd

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- সংগীত, নৃত্য ও বাদ্যযন্ত্র ভর্তি তথ্য ও ফরম: ২য় তলা, সংগীত আবৃত্তি ও নৃত্যকলা ভবন
- চারুকলা ভর্তি তথ্য ও ফরম: ৫য় তলা, প্রশিক্ষণ ভবন বাংলাদেশ শিল্পকলা একাডেমি, সেতুনবাগিচা, রমনা, ঢাকা।

বাংলাদেশ শিল্পকলা একাডেমি

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Meta to restore Trump's accounts

AFP, San Francisco

Social networking giant Meta announced Tuesday that it would soon reinstate former US president Donald Trump's accounts on Facebook and Instagram with "new guardrails," two years after he was banned over the 2021 assault on the Capitol.

"We will be reinstating Mr. Trump's Facebook and Instagram accounts in the coming weeks," said a statement by Nick Clegg, Meta's president of global affairs.

It was not clear when or if Trump, who has already announced a third White House bid, will return to the platforms, and his representatives did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Facebook banned Trump a day after the January 6, 2021 insurrection, when a mob of his supporters tried to halt the certification of his election defeat to Joe Biden by storming the US Capitol in Washington.



People take shelter inside a metro station during massive Russian missile attacks in Kyiv, Ukraine, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Kyiv eyes fighter jets after tanks

REUTERS, Kyiv

Ukraine will now push for Western fourth generation fighter jets such as the US F-16 after securing supplies of main battle tanks, an adviser to Ukraine's defence minister said.

Ukraine won a huge boost for its troops on Wednesday as Germany and the United States announced plans to provide heavy tanks for Kyiv, ending weeks of diplomatic deadlock on the issue.

"The next big hurdle will now be the fighter jets," Yuriy Sak, who advises Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov, told Reuters by phone.

Ukraine's Air Force has a fleet of ageing Soviet-era fighter jets that came off the assembly line before Kyiv even declared independence more than 31 years ago. The warplanes are used for intercept missions and to attack Russian positions.

"If we get them (Western fighter jets), the advantages on the battlefield will be just immense... It's not just F-16s (U.S. multirole fighter jets): fourth generation aircraft, this is what we want."

Western military support has been vital for Kyiv and has rapidly evolved during the war. Before the invasion, even the idea of supplying lethal aid to Ukraine was highly controversial but Western supplies have since shattered taboo after taboo.

"They didn't want to give us heavy artillery, then they did. They didn't want to give us HIMARS systems, then they did. They didn't want to give us tanks, now they're giving us tanks. Apart from nuclear weapons, there is nothing left that we will not get," Sak said.

Ukraine, which was invaded by Russia last February, has also said it wants to receive long-range missiles from the West.

Myanmar opium cultivation surging: UN

REUTERS

Opium cultivation in military-ruled Myanmar jumped 33 percent last year, reversing a six-year downward trend in the strife-torn country, a United Nations report said yesterday.

The growth was "directly connected" to the political and economic turmoil in Myanmar since the military took power in a coup nearly two years ago, an official at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said.

Myanmar's economy has declined since the coup, with the kyat currency plummeting against the dollar and food and fuel prices spiralling upwards.

The cultivated area in 2022 expanded by a third to 40,100 hectares (99,000 acres), while the average estimated yield rose 41% to nearly 20 kg (44 lb) per hectare, the highest value since the UNODC started keeping records in 2002, the report said.

The eastern Shan State, which borders China, Thailand and Laos, saw the biggest increase in cultivation, at 39%.

The value of opium produced annually in Myanmar can reach up to \$2 billion, with much of the drug smuggled out to neighbouring countries, the report added.

REPUBLIC DAY PARADE India showcases military might and diversity



REUTERS, New Delhi

India showcased its military and its cultural diversity in a colourful parade yesterday at the revamped colonial avenue in New Delhi to mark Republic Day, the anniversary of the day the country's secular Constitution came into effect in 1950.

Several thousand people watched the parade from seats around Kartavya Path - or path of duty - braving the cold on a foggy morning in New Delhi, while millions more watched on television. Known as Rajpath since independence, and as King's Way

during British colonial rule, the ceremonial central boulevard was renamed in September last year.

Accompanied by marching bands, troops from the country's military, border and police forces paced in perfect synchronisation towards the dais where President Droupadi Murmu took the salute.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was the chief guest for the event and 144 soldiers from the Arab nation's armed forces also participated.

India's PM Narendra Modi, chief of defence staff and the three service chiefs were also present at the parade, which featured more

women in the military contingents.

The country's rich and diverse heritage was showcased in vibrant tableaux from different states and ministries, highlighting the central theme of 'nari shakti' or women power.

The army's tableaux comprised only locally-made weapons, reflecting India's drive to become more self-reliant in the defence sector. The event climaxed with a flypast by 45 aircraft of the Indian Air Force, with French-made Rafales, Russian-made Su-30s and the Indian-made Tejas fighter jets putting on an impressive aeronautical display.

Protest as fate of Beirut blast probe hangs in balance

REUTERS, Beirut

More than 200 people protested outside Lebanon's justice palace yesterday over efforts to derail an investigation into the deadly 2020 Beirut port explosion, as top judges cancelled a meeting to discuss the fate of the inquiry.

Judge Tarek Bitar announced on Monday he was resuming his investigation into the blast that killed more than 220 people, after a 13-month suspension caused by legal wrangling and high-level political pressure.

But Lebanon's top public prosecutor Ghassan Oweidat objected, filed charges against Bitar for allegedly mishandling the inquiry, and released the remaining 17 detainees still held over the investigation.

Yesterday, Oweidat - himself charged by Bitar this week with unspecified offences - issued an additional decision telling the judiciary not to accept any orders, warrants or other documents issued by Bitar.

The explosion, one of the largest non-nuclear blasts on record, was caused by hundreds of tonnes of ammonium nitrate that had been unloaded at the port in 2013.

Egypt unveils golden mummy

AFP, Saqqara

Egypt yesterday unveiled a gold-laced mummy and four tombs, including of an ancient king's "secret keeper", discovered in the Saqqara necropolis south of Cairo.

The vast burial site at the ancient Egyptian capital Memphis, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is home to more than a dozen pyramids, animal graves and old Coptic Christian monasteries.

Archaeologist Zahi Hawass, Egypt's former antiquities minister, announced the latest discovery, dating from the fifth and sixth dynasties -- around the 25th to the 22nd centuries BC -- to reporters at the dig site.

Down a 15-metre shaft, the expedition also found a large limestone sarcophagus that had remained sealed "just as the ancient Egyptians left it 4,300 years ago", Hawass said.

Inside was a mummy featuring "gold leaf covering" that belonged to a man named Hekashepes, according to Hawass, who described it as one of the oldest and most complete non-royal mummies ever found in the country.

Egypt has unveiled many major archaeological discoveries in recent years.

Critics say the flurry of excavations has prioritised finds shown to grab media attention over hard academic research.

But the discoveries have been a key component of Egypt's attempts to revive its vital tourism industry after years of political unrest, as well as after the Covid pandemic.

The government's plans -- the crowning jewel of which is the long-delayed inauguration of the Grand Egyptian Museum at the foot of the pyramids in Giza -- aim to draw in 30 million tourists a year by 2028, up from 13 million before the pandemic.

ASYLUM POLICY

EU wants to send more people back to 'home'

REUTERS, Stockholm

European Union migration ministers were set to meet yesterday to discuss visa restrictions and better coordination inside the bloc to be able to send more people with no right to asylum in Europe back to their home countries.

Three years after the 27-nation EU agreed to restrict visas for countries deemed failing to cooperate on taking their people back, only Gambia has been formally punished.

The EU's executive European Commission proposed similar steps vis-a-vis Iraq, Senegal and Bangladesh, though two EU officials said cooperation with Dhaka on returning people has since improved.

Still, the EU's overall rate of effective returns stood at 21% in 2021, according to Eurostat data, the latest available.

"That is a level that member states consider unacceptably low," said one of the EU officials.

Immigration is a highly politically sensitive topic in the bloc where member countries would much rather discuss stepping up returns, as well as reducing

irregular immigration in the first place, than revive their bitter feuds over how to share out the task of caring for those who make it to Europe and win the right to stay.

"Establishing an effective and common EU system for returns is a central pillar of well-functioning and credible migration and asylum systems," the Commission said in a discussion paper for the ministers, which was seen by Reuters.

Some 160,000 people made it across the Mediterranean in 2022, according to U.N. data, the main route to Europe for people fleeing wars and poverty in the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia. On top of that, nearly 8 million Ukrainian refugees were also registered across Europe.

The ministers meet two weeks before the 27 EU national leaders gather in Brussels to discuss migration, and are also expected to call to send more people away.

"Swift action is needed to ensure effective returns from the European Union to countries of origin using as leverage all relevant EU policies," read a draft of their joint statement, which was also seen by Reuters.



Employees of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, take part in an anti-government demonstration to propose tax reforms against country's economic crisis, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Rising farming cost threatens food security

Authorities must ensure farming is profitable for farmers

Despite repeated calls to lower the cost of farming and raise the profit margin for farmers, nothing seems to be happening as expected. With the Boro season underway, a report by this daily says that hundreds of thousands of farmers in 16 northern districts – which account for 26.5 percent of the total cultivable land for Boro paddy in the country – are struggling with what some have estimated to be a 25 percent rise in farming cost compared to last year's. For marginal farmers, this is too much to cope with, a reality, one can imagine, they share with farmers across the country. That customers will be forced to pay even more than they currently do for this staple is a foregone conclusion.

The reason for the cost hike is not unknown. Ever since the government raised the prices of fertiliser and diesel – needed for the tiller machines and water pumps – everything related to farming has become more expensive. While the price of diesel was increased by 42.5 percent, the price of each kg of urea fertiliser leaped to Tk 22 from Tk 16 in 2021. The prices of pesticide, seed, farm labour, etc. have also risen simultaneously. Farmers in the northern regions of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Bogura – each with four districts – face additional risks if the threats of flooding and extreme weather are factored in. In these regions, Boro will be cultivated on 13.25 lakh hectares of land. Last year's average production cost in Rangpur and Dinajpur was Tk 14,900 per bigha, and in Rajshahi and Bogura it was Tk 17,450. There will be a hefty bill to pay for all this season.

The question is, how are the ordinary farmers going to cope with this hike-fest? Many can't get a loan at low interest, and therefore have to turn to loan sharks just to be able to farm. For many, end-of-season earnings are unlikely to be sufficient enough to pay back and make a reasonable profit to prepare them for the next season, meaning many will have to suffer indefinitely as a result. Experts, therefore, have urged the government to provide farmers, especially those who are marginal, with cash support as well as further subsidies to cut down farming costs. True, the government already pays huge subsidies in agriculture. But it must do more to ease the struggle of farmers, because it is directly related to our food security.

In the end, what matters most is the interest of ordinary farmers and customers. We must ensure that the former is able to pay bills and makes profits, and the latter can buy at reasonable prices. Unfortunately, because of the all-round increase in the cost of just about everything and the machinations of unscrupulous traders involved in production and supply, both have been suffering for long. This must be reversed. We urge the authorities to take steps to reduce the cost of farming. They must ensure proper regulation to ensure no one can take advantage of the vulnerability of farmers and ordinary customers.

Humanity learned little from horrors of war

Time to renew pledges of peace in a conflict-prone world

On this International Holocaust Remembrance Day, it is important to remember the horrors and suffering that war, any war, inevitably brings. The Second World War resulted in the extermination of six million Jews across German-occupied Europe – in concentration camps, gas chambers, pogroms and mass shootings, etc. – as well as millions of others who died directly or indirectly as a consequence of the war. January 27 marks the day when the Auschwitz concentration camp – a major site of the Nazis' "final solution to the Jewish question" – was liberated in 1945.

After the war, many hoped that the atrocities that the world had witnessed would result in the end of all conflicts, leading to some dubbing it as "the war to end all wars." Unfortunately, in the subsequent years, such lofty hopes have been dashed repeatedly by self-serving world leaders, whose greed and quest for power – and, in some cases, hatred for others – have led to millions of more deaths, displacement, and other forms of atrocities.

During the Nuremberg trials, the world tried to establish the idea that following orders to commit atrocities is itself an unpardonable crime. Yet, there has been little change in that regard, as the orders of so-called leaders to commit atrocities are still mostly blindly followed. Therefore, as disappointing as it may sound, the reality is that the lessons that the world should have learned following the tragedies of World War II, and World War I before it, have been mostly ignored.

In fact, we have even seen the state of Israel and its Western allies use innocent Jewish people once victimised by the Nazis to persecute the people of Palestine for more than seven decades. Peoples' legitimate concern for human rights violations has been weaponised to make way for other wars of aggressions to victimise millions of more people, all, ironically, in the name of upholding human rights. The international community, meanwhile, has failed to protect the legitimate victims of wars and atrocities.

We have seen that happening in the case of the Rohingya also. Even though more and more countries are recognising what the Myanmar army, along with religious extremists in the country, have perpetrated against the Rohingya people as genocide, the world is yet to take any meaningful action to hold the perpetrators to account, or stand beside the victims.

According to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, the world today is closer to doomsday than ever before. The main driving force for that is the ongoing war in Ukraine, which is drawing Russia and the West ever closer to a direct conflict. So, while paying homage to the memory of the Holocaust victims, we must renew our pledge to end the madness of wars and conflicts. It is time to ensure that such horrors are never visited or indulged under any pretext whatsoever.

ELECTED GOVERNMENT VS PERMANENT BUREAUCRATS

Who Runs the Country?



THE THIRD VIEW

Mahfuz Anam is the editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

MAHFUZ ANAM

There is no question as to who runs the country. It is Sheikh Hasina, our prime minister. But who does she run it through? Is it through the parliament and the political forces? Or is it through the bureaucrats? That is the question we try to answer in this column.

For a functional democracy, we need both elected political masters and non-elected public servants. The first changes on the basis of public support, while the second is permanent. The former makes policies, while the latter implements them. The former's proclivity is to be populist, while it is the duty of the latter to ensure accountability. The political leadership is funded by public support, while the other is paid for by the taxpayers' money – perhaps leading to the term "public servant."

This combination of a changing political leadership and a "non-changing" governmental structure is the key to successful governance. Thus, there exists a supreme need to have a fine balance between the two.

Unfortunately, we have totally distorted that balance. And it has happened from both ends. Politicians politicised the bureaucrats, and then bureaucrats bureaucratized politics. Both try to extract maximum benefits from the other with the ordinary people being totally ignored, as there is none to fight for their concerns.

At the moment, the bureaucrats seem to be in the driving seat. The consequent marginalisation of our politicians is not only pathetic but also dangerous because, however distorted and skewed, the politicians have some sort of accountability to the people in the form of party, local, and national elections. Our bureaucrats' accountability is only to their seniors, which, over time, has become fundamentally self-serving.

Today, more and more decision-making rests in the hands of powerful bureaucrats who have greater access to the centre of power in the person of the PM who, over the last several years, has come to rely more on the bureaucrats than on her political colleagues.

Where the politicians have lost out wholesale to the bureaucrats is in the gradual diminution of the power, effectiveness, relevance, and prestige of the parliament. When parliament is reduced to practically nothing except self-praise and opposition-bashing – even when it is virtually non-existent – politicians as a group, regardless of whether they belong to the treasury or the opposition bench, lose. Now, the role of our MPs in overall policy formulation or in the general oversight process is next to nothing. We do not pay any attention when they speak because their comments hardly carry any weight.



ILLUSTRATION: BIPOB CHAKROBORTY

I would love to be proved wrong when I say that no issue of any significance ever gets debated in our parliament. The climate crisis has not been a subject of any serious discussion, even though we have been identified as one of the most, if not the most, vulnerable country in the world. Starting from the pandemic to the global economic crisis, to money laundering, to loan defaults, to quality health services and education, and specific topics like why Bangladesh has among the highest numbers of road crashes in the world – none of these subjects of public interest appears to attract the attention of our MPs.

Ironically, the bureaucracy's involvement in politics was legalised during BAKSAL, when the stature of our politicians was highest in our history. Later, the military's illegitimate entry into government and their natural dependence on the bureaucracy greatly enhanced the latter's power in the political sphere.

We received a golden opportunity for a fresh start to build democratic institutions with the toppling of the quasi-military autocratic government of General Ershad through a peaceful mass agitation. The grand coalition of political forces constituted a total victory, which set forth the future direction of politics in the country. (See this writer's column titled "Dreams Reborn," from January 14, 1991). However, the extreme rivalry between the BNP and AL gradually weakened this grand alliance and split the political forces, creating an opening for bureaucrats to regain power and political influence.

Perhaps the fatal shot in the process came when "Janatar Mancha" was set up by City AL chief and the first elected mayor of Dhaka, Md Hanif, outside the secretariat. A large number of bureaucrats joined it to protest against Khaleda Zia's government. For the first time – overtly of course, for they were always a covert force – bureaucrats became a factor in determining which

that the development funds that an MP, a union parishad chairman or other elected public representatives get will not fully be used for the purpose it is allocated for. This automatically leads to tighter bureaucratic control and a tilting of power towards the officials. The recent distribution of pandemic-related assistance, allotment of Ashrayan houses, relief goods, and

party was to come to power. And they never looked back.

At the moment, the power of bureaucracy is symbolised by the rise of the Prime Minister's Office – the all-powerful PMO, which is manned by senior bureaucrats only. The principal secretary, the secretary of the PMO, and the cabinet secretary constitute the triumvirate that serves our all-powerful prime minister. If we add to them the finance secretary, the governor of Bangladesh Bank (also a bureaucrat), and maybe one or two other secretaries, then we have almost the total picture of the power structure that runs the country. The cabinet – the most crucial decision-making body in most governments – is essentially a rubber stamp, as is the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC), where suggestions mostly made by bureaucrats are signed off.

The rise of the bureaucracy's power cannot be fully understood without considering the gradual lowering of the quality of our politicians, and especially of their ethical norms and standards. Politicians were never judged by their "degrees," but by the degree to which they associated themselves with the hopes and aspirations of the people, and their commitment to serve them. When all that became substituted by one's wealth, ability to fund local *mastans*, indulge in violence (particularly in cornering their rivals), and buying their way through party nominations and the election process, their overall stature diminished.

Today, government officials assume

other government handouts through local administration (sidestepping local elected entities) bore testimony to the general mistrust of local political bodies.

"Bureaucracy" usually refers to administrative cadres, but taken in its larger incarnation – including all other cadres in education, health, etc, and especially the police and all the intelligence branches – we really get the full picture of the massive administrative body, which wields enormous power that has reached unfathomable proportions due to the gradual diminution of all accountability structures. This, coupled with the huge amount of resources allocated in our annual budget and mega-projects that are completely under bureaucratic control, the power of our bureaucrats has reached unimaginable levels, making for a lethal combination of political influence and control over allocation of funds.

Seldom, if ever, did our bureaucrats enjoy so much authority, such unbridled power and discretion. Not to mention the perks. It is as if the government is on its toes to take every step that will win them over to its side.

Why? Because so much of our politics now depends on the bureaucrats – especially the elections. It is the latter that gives our larger bureaucracy the final edge. Unless we restore elections to their free and fair status, the bureaucracy's power will continue to rise. And the stature, prestige, and power of our politicians will continue to decline, making for an ominous future for our democracy.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

The Next Globalisation



Mark Leonard, director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, is author of "The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict" (Bantam Press, 2021).

MARK LEONARD

Is globalisation coming back to life? That was the big question at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, where WEF founder Klaus Schwab asked whether it is possible to have cooperation in an era of fragmentation.

For the past decade, the steady demise of "Davos Man" – the avatar of global business and cosmopolitanism – was the big story here, seen as signs that globalisation had gone too far and would be thrown into reverse.

But the mood at this year's meeting was slightly more optimistic. Despite much concern about conflict and economic strife, the world seems to be doing a little better than global elites expected when they last met in May.

While the globalisation of goods seems to have peaked, services are becoming ever more globalised, owing

to the revolution in telework during the pandemic.

There is also an accelerating revolution in energy, driven partly by the war in Ukraine. At the same time, advances in artificial intelligence are opening vast new possibilities, while also creating tensions over microchips and renewed fears about joblessness and rogue robots.

Developments in all three areas – telework, renewables, and AI – will bind countries together in new networks of interdependence.

But the re-globalisation glimpsed in Davos will be fundamentally different from previous iterations. While the old model was about corporate profits, the new one is about national security in all its dimensions. Western countries have portrayed the war in Ukraine as a defence of the liberal, rules-based

order against unilateral aggression by Russia (and, by extension, China). They are, therefore, busy decoupling from Russia and rethinking their economic ties with China.

But to many outside the West, Europe and the US are just as guilty of disrupting the global order – and with enormous consequences for their own security and prosperity. The way they see it, the West made a decision to turn the war into an economic conflict (through the most ambitious and far-reaching sanctions package in history), with devastating consequences for billions of people.

Back in Davos' halcyon days, the dollar-based financial system was seen as a global public good that would spread prosperity to every corner of the world. But now, it is increasingly seen as a cudgel with which the US can enforce its ideological and strategic preferences.

Whereas Britain and the US were, respectively, at the center of the first two waves of globalisation, this new one will be multipolar, and thus multi-ideological. China has not only closed the economic gap with the US, but has surpassed it as the biggest trading partner to most countries in the world. That implies a major shift in the balance of economic power.

This new dynamic suggests that

the world will be divided not only by nationalism, but by fundamentally different ideas about order. Davos attendees got a flawless illustration of this when Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky beamed in to deliver a speech, calling on the world to rally against Russia's unprovoked war. While half the audience cheered enthusiastically, the other half appeared unmoved. Even if many sympathise with the Ukrainians, they fear that the conflict is being used to precipitate a Cold War 2.0 that will divide the world into democracies and autocracies.

That is the last thing most political leaders want. In private discussions, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American leaders complain that their countries already suffered a loss of sovereignty and control during the first Cold War. For them, there is little to be gained from having to pick sides yet again.

Even the US' allies are against having to choose. I spoke to a Japanese tycoon who is very worried about China's current foreign policy but also vehemently opposed to decoupling.

Ultimately, Schwab may be right to hope for cooperation in our time of fragmentation. But we must bear in mind how the next globalisation will differ fundamentally from the last one.



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Clarification, or admission of guilt?

Bangla Academy statement on Adarsha ban muddies the water further



Kamal Ahmed is an independent journalist. His Twitter handle is @ahmedkhal

KAMAL AHMED

Following a social media storm, the Bangla Academy has now explained its decision as to why it barred the publishing house Adarsha from taking part in this year's Ekushey Book Fair, the most desired annual book exposition for publishers and readers. The clarification issued by the academy, however, raises more questions than explaining the rationale behind its decision. The worst part in the academy's attempt to clear the air is the admission in its statement that it had not read the alleged offending book before deciding to exclude its publisher from the exhibition.

The Bangla Academy press release, issued on January 21, 2023, and signed by its deputy director Mohammad Akbar Hossain, stated that the academy's attention had been drawn to news reports in various media outlets, which claimed that Adarsha was not allotted a stall at the book fair. It noted that the lottery for allocations of stalls was scheduled to be held on January 22, 2023.

Up until this point, it seemed the academy was simply refuting an unjustified claim based on assumption. But the statement then added that the management committee of the Amar Ekushey Book Fair had collected the book "Bangaleer Mediocrity-r Shondhane," written by Faham Abdus Salam and published by Adarsha. According to the press release, the committee members opined that the book did not meet the conditions set out in sub-paragraphs 14.14 and 14.15 of Article 14 of the Rules and Regulations of the Book Fair.

It also spoke about contacting Adarsha CEO Mahabub Rahman on behalf of the committee, seeking assurances that the disputed book would not be kept and displayed at the book fair, which he refused to accept. It added that, in this situation, the

book fair management committee decided that the publishing house will be considered ineligible to participate in the stall allocation lottery, in view of its refusal to comply with standard stall allocation conditions.

The chronology of the developments given by the academy is very different from what the Adarsha owner has been saying to the media and in his Facebook posts. Mahabub started making his suspicion of being banned from the fair known much earlier by saying that he had received forewarnings about three books that were very critical of the government and its policies and actions. The books he named are "Oprotiroddho Unnayaner Obhabonio Kothamala" by Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, "Bangaleer Mediocrity-r Shondhane" by Faham Abdus Salam, and "Unnayan Bivram" by Zia Hasan. He termed it as an attempt to censor or gag freedom of thought and expression.

The academy statement seems to have given more credence to this allegation of the ban being predetermined. Otherwise, why would the committee be screening a particular book before holding the lottery? Why carry out a preemptive action, when it has the authority to cancel any allocation for violating the code of conduct or rules they agree to abide by?

In the past, there were quite a few instances when the academy shut down a couple of stalls for allegedly violating its rules, though not without commotion and protests.

The book in dispute, mentioned in the academy statement, is written by Faham Abdus Salam, who happens to be married to one of the daughters of BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir. This raises questions about his apparent victimisation for political association. Discarding such allegations isn't easy, as the publisher has claimed that the book

was displayed and sold in the Ekushey Book Fair in 2022.

Critics of the academy's decision have termed it a violation of freedom of speech, and against the spirit and ideals of the Language Movement. The Bangla Academy was established on the values and ideals of the Language Movement, and therefore, it should never allow its institutional role to be used as a tool to suppress political dissent.

These decisions, too, are not universal, but are divided along partisan political lines. As a result, such acts of politically motivated censorship keep happening.

Although the Bangla Academy was supposed to be strengthening its independence and self-regulation, the Bangla Academy Act 2013 has made it easier for the government to exercise direct and indirect control over running the affairs of the academy. The Act, which came into effect on September 22, 2013, allows the government to nominate greater numbers to the executive committee than the numbers nominated by the general assembly – the body representing general members – and fellows of the academy.

In the midst of this controversy, the latest story is that the academy has been forced to replace thousands of invitation cards to include the government's emblem above the academy logo, for the first time since the enactment of the act. This is a clear intervention in the affairs of a statutory autonomous body, which is undesired and deplorable.

Despite the fact that Article 20 (1) of the act says, "Subject to the other provisions of this Act, the overall authority of the Academy shall vest in the General Assembly," and article 20(2) says, "The General Assembly shall supervise and review the activities of the Academy and shall give necessary directions to the Executive Council," the dominance of bureaucrats and partisan academics establishes de facto control of the government over the academy.

Unless these legal loopholes are amended, for which strong social unity is necessary, there is little hope that the institution that emerged as an icon of free speech will ever be truly autonomous.

The 'War on Trees' is winning



NO STRINGS ATTACHED

Aasha Mehreen Amin is joint editor at The Daily Star.

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

Unlike the "War on Terror," a script written and executed by US President George W Bush, the "War on Trees" has been far more successful.

The War on Terror actually perpetuated terror by unleashing unprecedented violence on civilian populations, when the US decided that it would have to bomb Iraq to smithereens to combat the threat of mythical weapons of mass destruction. The War on Terror has not made the world any safer; it can be argued that human populations are even more vulnerable to terror in many guises and forms as a result of it. Terror keeps multiplying like a crazy virus.

The war on trees, meanwhile, is straightforward and simple. It does exactly what it says – attacks the trees, killing them and its residents along with it – no fuss, no frills.

The latest "kill" was in Habiganj's Chunarughat, on a land leased by Hatimara Tea Garden. It was a land full of trees – many around a hundred years old – and home to many kinds of wildlife. There were barking deer, Indian civets, langurs, apes, mynas, herons, squirrels, and so on. Near it was the Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary.

According to a report by *The Daily Star's* Sylhet correspondent, a horrible tragedy unfolded on January 19. The tea estate decided they needed to expand the tea garden. To do so, they began to "clear" the land – by setting the trees on fire, with all the animals and birds still present. It was their land, and they could do whatever they liked with it.

Unsurprisingly, the fire spread to the sanctuary, increasing the death toll – though "officially," there is no such thing. Three days passed but no one from the local administration, not a single forest official, came to stop the fire as living beings screamed their death

cries. Around 140 trees were cut down and burnt. Operation Clear Forest was successful!

No doubt, most of the traces of this crime have been cleverly covered up. The dead bodies of animals and birds, that our correspondent saw himself, have probably been buried or turned to ash, along with the trees. The tea estate representatives can shrug their shoulders and say that they own the land, end of story.

But is there no law that states that you cannot just cut down trees and burn them, along with all the wildlife in them? What about the Wildlife (Preservation and Security) Act 2012, created to monitor and protect wildlife, and the laws against violating sanctuary rules?

The constitution mandates the state to protect all wildlife. Not that the constitution has stopped anyone from grabbing land, encroaching on river banks, filling up water bodies, and destroying the habitats of thousands of animals and birds before. Which makes it easy for various government agencies and development projects to also take up pieces of the pie – or, in this case, forest. According to reports, this amounts to about 1.65 lakh acres of forestland. The results are balding forests in Cumilla, Gazipur, Mymensingh, Tangail, and more.

Reserve forests, in fact, are the prime targets of this war on trees. Don't forget the various forms of "essential construction" approved by the government, which involve felling hundreds and thousands of trees.

Think of the 20 acres of a reserve forest in Ramu, given to the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) to build a residential training facility. Recall the image of stumps of freshly cut trees in one of the remote forests of Bhola's Manpara Island to fuel brick kilns (*The Daily*

Star, March 2019). Imagine the reality if the Roads and Highways Department succeeds in getting the 174 acres of the Ramgarh-Sitakunda Reserve Forest in Chattogram – one of the oldest reserve forests in the country – to widen a road going through it. Dread the catastrophic effects on the Sundarban mangrove forest when the Rampal Power Plant is in full operation, along with over a hundred industrial projects close by.

The war on trees has been kept alive and kicking in our cities, too. Chattogram has lost half of its greenery to real estate development. Dhaka's concrete jungle has eaten away thousands of trees, leaving wild animals and birds homeless and lost. Monkeys attacking city dwellers and desperately looking for food, dwindling bird populations, and no respite, for animals and humans alike, from the glaring sun and choking smog – all a result of this insatiable desire to obliterate any kind of greenery in sight if it comes in the way of urban development. Which is why your neighbour may send an assassin at an unholy hour to saw off your cherished *krishnachura* tree. It is why housing projects will involve taking up every bit of the land, shaving off the original trees, and leaving no space for new ones to be planted.

In Singapore, wilfully destroying a tree can lead to a fine of up to 10,000 Singapore dollars. Even if the tree (to be felled) is within one's own property, applications have to be made to the government body concerned, stating the reasons why the tree must be cut. Closer to home, Hyderabad has become the only city in India to be given the distinction of being a "Tree City of the World" by Arbor Day Foundation and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

So why are we on this suicidal path while cheerleading environmental conservation abroad? How have we forgotten why we need our trees, our forests that shield us from cyclones and tsunamis, that give shelter to precious wildlife and absorb the toxic carbon we so copiously produce? Why are we so fixated on this insane war on trees?



ILLUSTRATION: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

Opinion

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Dairy buy
5 Aesop's works
11 Valhalla VIP
12 Friend of George and Jerry
13 Lady of Spain
14 Firstborn
15 Lift, stateside
17 Salon stuff
18 Sailing boats
22 Analyze grammar
24 Pitch
25 Copying
26 "The Matrix" hero
27 Join the big leagues
30 Vigilant
32 Clear sky
33 Gear part

DOWN

1 Manner
2 Reversed one
3 Simple chart
4 Rascals
5 Yard divisions
6 Brass and bronze
7 Unjust charge
8 Use deceit
9 Print units
10 Ready to go
16 Pub product

19 Pinot or Merlot
20 Lusty look
21 Place for a coin
22 Book unit
23 Bunches
28 Snappy answer
29 Ultimatum words
30 Poker card
31 Legislative holdup
35 Sediment
36 Over again
37 Clutter
38 Motor part
39 Director
40 Airport sight

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CROSSWORD

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4-28

MONDAY'S ANSWERS

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N	O	P	E	T	S		K	N	E	

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

THAT WAS GOOD. READY FOR DESSERT?
I'M FULL

YOU'RE SKIPPING DESSERT?
I DIDN'T SAY THAT

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

SO, ZOE VOLUNTEERED YOU TO BE CLASS MOM?
CLASS EVENT COORDINATOR, BUT YEAH.

NOW I GET TO PLAN FIELD TRIPS, DO FUNDRAISING, DECORATE FOR PARTIES, AND BE A SUBSTITUTE CROSSING GUARD!
I DIDN'T VOLUNTEER YOU IN MY CLASS, BECAUSE I WASN'T PAVING ATTENTION.

THANKS... I THINK.

RIGHTS WATCH

Legality of targeted recording of women in public places



PHOTO CREDIT: INDIATIMES.COM

Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights says that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his/her privacy.

RAFID AZAD SAUMIK

With the rapid advancement in technology all over the world, it has become much easier and efficient to capture photos and record videos. However, this seemingly amazing phenomenon has its drawbacks as well. This 'blessing of modern science' has made it easier for people to capture or record videos of women as means to blackmail, extort, harass, annoy or fulfill their vile sexual gratifications. This type of harassment is on the rise not just in our country but all over the world.

The first thing to understand regarding this is whether taking photos of others in public places should be criminalised. This is a legal question which has divided even the scholars. Some scholars argue that people have no rational right to privacy in public places. Others argue that just because someone is in the public sphere does not mean he/she has given up all rights of privacy. In fact, article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights says that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his/her privacy. Many countries have tried to make laws prohibiting taking photos or recording videos without consent, specially of women. For example, in India, under section 354C of its Penal Code, it is an offence to take photos of or even watch a woman in circumstances where she would usually have the expectation of not being observed. Moreover, section 354D of the Indian Penal Code prohibits stalking of any

kind, whether done in person or online. Even in Germany, section 201a of the German Criminal Code prohibits the transmission of any photo to any third party which is of such nature as to significantly damage the reputation of the person depicted.

However, it is unfortunate that the laws of Bangladesh on the matter are quite vague. The Constitution of Bangladesh does not deal with privacy in the public sphere. However, right to privacy may fall within the ambit of right to life and liberty under article 32 of the Constitution. In the landmark case of *Puttaswamy v Union of India* (2017) 10 SCC 1, it was held that right to privacy is an integral part of article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which is similar to article 32 of the Constitution of Bangladesh. In this case, Justice Chandrachud famously said, 'privacy was not surrendered entirely when an individual is in the public sphere'.

As for statutory laws in Bangladesh is concerned, firstly, section 509 of the Penal Code, 1860 comes into play, which deals with outraging a woman's modesty. However, as this entire phenomenon is very novel and unique, there has not been sufficient judicial development regarding this. Most pertinent to the issue in hand is section 26 of the Digital Security Act, 2018 that prohibits unauthorised collection, use, etc. of identity information of anyone. Moreover, this section along with section 29 of the same Act deals with the problem of spreading such photos or videos online with mal-intention. While transmitting these photos or videos

sometimes they are even distorted and converted into pornography to further annoy, harass, or extort the victims. In case of such scenarios, section 4 of the Pornography Regulation Act, 2012 and section 29 of the Digital Security Act, 2018 are relevant to mention. Even though there are certain statutory provisions regarding this issue, no law addresses this problem specifically. As a result, we see that victims of this type of sexual assault are confused about their rights and do not usually seek legal assistance after facing such incident.

It is of great importance to mention here that in *BNWLA v Bangladesh* (2009) 21 BLD 415 the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh gave directives in the form of an eleven-point guideline to protect the women and children from sexual harassment filling the legislative vacuum in the nature of law. In these directives, the Court suggested a detailed definition of sexual harassment that included all other existing definitions of non-contact sexually connoting offences. It also incorporated the modern means of erotic insults against the women that are prevalent in our present age of information technology.

However, as we know any such law that specifically addressed all such issues is yet to be enacted in Bangladesh. It is high time that clear penal provisions regarding taking photos or recording women without consent were made and this problem is resolved conclusively.

The writer is an Intern, Law Desk, The Daily Star.

LAW LETTER

Need for addressing diplomatic immunity

TAHEFA SAMIN AND JUWEL KOBIR

Diplomatic immunity is a well-recognised concept of international law that provides the safe exit and legal protection of diplomats wherever they represent their own country and aims to ensure their freedom and safety.

Granting diplomatic immunity has been a common practice for thousands of years. Even though the limelight is on the euro-centric approach to diplomats' immunity, it is indeed clear that similar practices existed in ancient Greece, the Ottoman empire, and the Chinese empire. With the introduction of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (VCDR) of 1961, the custom was finally given a legal framework.

The VCDR grants protection to individuals based on their rank in a diplomatic mission and the necessity for immunity in the performance of their responsibilities. It protects diplomats, their families, and diplomatic property in several ways. The primary objective of the VCDR is to let diplomats carry out their duties without interference from the receiving state.



For example, the receiving state cannot punish diplomats and must protect them and their families and property. However, of all the protections provided by the VCDR, none has raised as much controversy as article 31 has done, according to which, diplomats should not be subject to the local laws and regulations of the host country. Article 37 provides that this immunity also applies to both administrative and technical staff members of diplomatic missions, who also enjoy a degree of immunity. Nonetheless, the Convention makes it clear in the preamble that 'the purpose of such privileges and immunities is not to benefit individuals but to ensure the efficient performance of the functions of diplomatic missions as representing States'.

Diplomatic immunity is a widely accepted principle throughout the international community but is not always respected. This often occurs only when the diplomat has committed an offence that breaches fundamental human rights unrelated to their diplomatic function or has witnessed such a heinous act.

It is indeed true that diplomats are shielded from the host country's judicial, civil, and administrative jurisdiction. However, article 32 empowers the host nation to request that the diplomat's immunity be revoked. If the exemption is granted, the diplomat will be held accountable for his or her offences, like any other citizen. Under article 9, the host nation has the right to declare any member of the diplomatic mission persona non grata. This may be done at any moment, and there is no obligation to explain such a decision. Governments often abuse this authority when there are no specified reasons for declaring a diplomat persona non grata. This shortcoming has prompted nations to engage in reciprocity. In such instances, the host nation would often return the individual or terminate his diplomatic activities.

Diplomatic immunity regulations have evolved throughout the years, with no universally practiced codified law in force. While the VCDR has acknowledged and brought to attention the significance of diplomatic privileges and immunities to a significant extent, there is still room for advancement as it does not permit the receiving state to punish crimes committed by diplomats from the host nation. The receiving state's hands are tied, and in most cases, it cannot take any action that violates fundamental human rights or constitutes grave abuse of power. To secure both human rights and the intent of the law, it is required to make some changes. Therefore, the VCDR should be reformed in a way that limits diplomatic immunity. Diplomats should not enjoy immunity from committing grave offences. It should only apply in specific circumstances to criminal cases.

To sum up, it can be stated that the legislation on diplomatic ties is highly dependent on several external circumstances, such as the political situation in particular nations and the stability of relations between states, yet diplomatic crime is a global problem that must be addressed to ensure offenders face punishment for their crimes.

The writers are Law Graduates, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP).

LAW REVIEW

The Evidence Act, 1872: "digital" amendment already obsolete?

S.M. MAHBUBULLAH

The much anticipated amendment of the Evidence Act, 1872 was put into effect on 20 November 2022. The amendment brought digital and electronic records into the fold. It also made forensic evidence admissible under sections 3(3), 45, 45A, 73B, and 89A. The controversial provision of "character evidence" was also done away with. These changes are welcome. However, the real question is whether the amendment is really as "up-to-date" or as effective as the legislature might believe it is. Let us evaluate how impactful this amendment will be, in the wake of 2023.

The first thing to mention is that digital content had already been used in the trial as evidence in certain circumstances, even before this amendment. For example, in *State v Qamrul Islam & Others* (2017), it was held that video footage is to be considered as a "document", under the meaning of section 2 of the 1872 Act. A similar court ruling in *Biswajit Murder Case* (2018) declared video footage, and still photographs as admissible evidence. Moreover, in *Rifat Murder Case* (2020), CCTV footage was used in the trial as substantial evidence that helped in identifying and convicting the accused.

Considering these facts, the inclusion of a specialist section, as opposed to a generalised one, leaves much to be desired. The definition clause of "digital evidence" in section 3 of the Act specifically picks certain existing



technologies as the namesake. If we consider the exponential innovation of technology in recent years, it is very likely that the way we perceive, and store information will advance, making much of the current technology obsolete. That could create the need for further amending of the law in the very near future.

The use of forensic evidence has been a fact in our courts, for a fairly long time. The new section 3(3) includes blood, semen, hair, organs, DNA, fingerprints, eye impression as forensic evidence. This will hopefully remove any doubts and confusion, if there still were any, as to their admissibility in court. However, the specific nature of the provision

brings valid criticism, in that it may as well prevent the admissibility of newer types of emerging forensic technologies that are not yet in widespread use but will be available soon; for example, "proteomics" and "molecular profiling", to name a few.

Secondly, the amendment has removed the much controversial "character evidence". Section 146(3) has been amended, making questions about a rape victim's character possible only with the court's permission. Such wide discretion of the judge allows a certain bias of the judge to play a dangerous role. In addition, section 155(4), which allowed for the credit of a witness to be impeached, based on "immoral

character", has been completely omitted.

Although the omission is certainly worthy of praise, only time will tell how much effective it really is. Experts suspect that the changes brought in the "character evidence" provisions will not be enough. That is because character evidence can still be produced in court, bypassing section 155(4), through section 11. Under section 11(l), facts not otherwise relevant are relevant if they conflict with any fact-in-issue or relevant fact. The section can easily be interpreted by clever lawyers into allowing any facts regarding a victim's character. Thus, the high threshold placed in section 146(3) can be rendered useless by this loophole. The interesting thing is the exact same situation took place in India after its Evidence Act was amended. Character evidence continued to haunt the process of the courts in this way. There is no reason to believe that Bangladesh will not meet a similar fate.

However, this amendment is not all doom and gloom. Despite its many flaws, the amendment has succeeded in removing any vagueness and confusion that existed in the courts in admitting digital and forensic evidence. This will certainly help in speeding up the court process. But the amendment is unlikely to impact our evidence system in any major, meaningful way. Hopefully, the government notices these flaws, and fix them in due time.

The writer is a Student of Law, University of Dhaka.

Babar, Sciver scoop top ICC awards

STAR SPORT DESK

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Thursday recognised the star performers for the year 2022, and it was Pakistan skipper Babar Azam who won the most noteworthy accolades, bagging the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for the ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year and also the ICC Men's ODI Cricketer of the Year Award for a second consecutive year for outstanding performances across the formats.

"It's a matter of great honour for me. My family members' blessings and my teammates helped me a lot with their services," Babar was quoted as saying in a video by the ICC.

Babar further elevated his game in 2022 as the inspirational skipper broke more individual records. The right-hander amassed a whopping 2598 runs at a staggering average of 54.12 across formats in the calendar year, becoming the only player to breach the 2000-run mark in 2022.

A total of eight hundreds and 17 fifties was also Babar's career-best showing in a calendar year. The Pakistan skipper, however, picked two innings to highlight from an incredible 2022.

"I want to highlight two performances from the previous year. One was my 196 against Australia [in a Test in Karachi], and the other one was in white-ball cricket, a hundred against England [110* off 66 in a T20I in Karachi]. I think these two innings were the two best knocks of mine



last year. Mainly because I played both these innings on my home ground, in front of my home crowd," Babar added.

Babar's 425-ball 196 not only fetched him his first Test century in two years but also his highest Test score, which almost saw Pakistan pull off an incredible victory from the jaws of an inevitable defeat.

Babar enjoyed a tremendous year in Test cricket, despite team results not always going his way. He accumulated 1184 runs from just nine matches and did the bulk of the heavy lifting for Pakistan in the longer format.

The winner of the 2021 ODI Player of the Year continued to rule in the 50-over format, scoring 679 runs in nine matches. It is a testament to his consistency that he registered scores of 50 or more in eight of those innings.

Nat Sciver wins Women's Cricketer of the Year Meanwhile, jaw-dropping knocks and being a non-stop threat with the ball helped England's Nat Sciver claim the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy for the ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year.

In total, Sciver hit 1346 runs and took 22 wickets in 33 matches in the year, captaining England for much of her side's home summer.

Stokes and Suryakumar recognised

England all-rounder Ben Stokes defined the year of Test cricket more than any other in 2022 and was deservedly named the winner of the ICC Men's Test Cricketer of the Year award. In 15 Tests played in 2022, Stokes scored 870 runs, including two centuries, at 36.25 average and scalped 26 wickets.

Meanwhile, India's Suryakumar Yadav was named the T20I Cricketer of the Year as he became only the second batter to score more than 1000 runs in a calendar year in the format and ended the year as the highest run-getter, scoring 1164 runs at a ridiculous strike-rate of 187.43.



Pakistan pacer Mohammad Wasim Jr. could not help but pause his training to take a snap of the picturesque Sylhet International Cricket Stadium on Thursday. Wasim's Fortune Barishal will take on Chattogram Challengers in today's second fixture as the Sylhet phase of the Bangladesh Premier League commences.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'All I have is love for Bangladesh cricket'

SPORTS REPORTER

Sylhet Strikers skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Bangladesh's most successful captain, has a way of making things tick for his sides, even in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

Sylhet have never won a BPL title before, but under Mashrafe's leadership, the team built on a balanced budget are banking on the confidence of youngsters such as Towhid Hridoy, Nazmul Hossain Shanto and Rezaul Rahman Raza and dreaming of something special.

The 39-year-old spoke to the media yesterday, poignantly answering questions about issues such as social media attacks, local stars needing time to settle into international cricket and even speaking about dignified exits from the national team although he had no expectations for himself in that regard.

The Narail native has a way with words and brought the difficulty players face in Bangladesh's national team compared to other countries under the spotlight. He also compared the abuse that someone like Liton Das or Shanto gets on social media to players in the past, relating it to the point he wanted to make about settling down in the international circuit.

"There are only a few players, maybe two or three, who have not been attacked on social media

despite playing international cricket for a long time. If social media was similar to the present back then [when his batch was coming through], Tamim [Iqbal] may not have become Tamim. In these kinds of tournaments, someone plays well in one or two editions and plays in the national side. But that doesn't mean they have a strong base. Even those who play in [India's] Ranji Trophy or



[Australia's] Sheffield Shield or English county cricket can struggle when it comes to international cricket. Since our base is not as strong, it's normal to take four-five years to settle," Mashrafe reflected.

He not only talked about youngsters such as Shanto, who he claimed was one for the long haul, but also his national teammates that are nearing the end of their time on the international stage.

Only Barishal captain Shakib is reaching new peaks in this BPL with the bat. Mash, who spoke positively about this edition of the BPL because it allowed local players to be gauged against good bowling attacks, told The Daily Star that Shakib was 'finding his way as world-class stars do'.

"He changed his stance and is now playing all around the wicket. What you expect from Shakib is that he will come like a king and perform like a king," he told The Daily Star after the presser.

Mash bore no expectations that his international career would end on a positive note with a final game on the field. He reserved that expectation for other stalwarts.

"Those that are playing, such as Shakib, Tamim, Musfiqur [Rahim] and [Mahmudullah] Riyad, are legends of Bangladesh even if someone doesn't want to admit it. I wish people get the opportunity, so that these players can leave the field with the deserved respect. People often count how much money they got, but they don't look at the sacrifice.

"I hope they get respect so that young and middle-aged players can have faith that they will at least get that respect when they leave the game. That's it. But I don't have any anger [about how my chapter closed]. All I have is love for Bangladesh cricket," the skipper concluded.

Bashundhara windfall for women's football

SPORTS REPORTER

The women's football structure received another welcome boost as Bashundhara Group signed a three-year sponsorship agreement with the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) to further the development of women's football yesterday.

"Bashundhara are our elite sponsors. We will use one-fourth of the sponsorship money for the women's football league and the rest will be spent to develop women's football teams," stated BFF women's committee chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiran, who signed the contract with Bashundhara Group managing director Sayem Sobhan Anvir.

The FIFA executive member added: "Bashundhara Group is a real sports loving group. If they weren't, we could not have signed this deal. We hope women's will go further."

Although neither party disclosed details of the contract, it was learnt that Bashundhara -- who also have a team in the Bangladesh Women's Football League aside from three clubs in the top-tier Bangladesh Premier League -- would provide one crore taka per year.

Dhaka Bank have been sponsoring the national women's teams for a quite a while, but with their contract set to expire in 2024, Kiran believes the new agreement will not clash with their deal with Dhaka Bank.

"We did not come here for exposure. We have become associated with them with a view to improve the standard of women's football. Women's football has had comparatively more successes than the men's team, so if we can support the women in every way, I believe they can bring more glory," Bashundhara Kings deputy managing director and BFF vice president Imrul Hasana said.

Rybakina, Sabalenka set up final showdown

REUTERS, Melbourne

Elena Rybakina stormed to her first Australian Open final with a 7-6(4), 6-3 victory over twice champion Victoria Azarenka on Thursday and the Russian-born Kazakh will face Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka after the fifth seed beat Magda Linette 7-6(1), 6-2.

Wimbledon champion Rybakina wore down Azarenka in a contest that was cagey early on and had some wild momentum swings before she dominated her opponent on Rod Laver Arena to prevail.

Rybakina held her nerve as 24th seed Azarenka foundered in a messy first set tiebreak then dropped serve twice to fall 5-2 behind in the second.

The Kazakh was broken as she served for the set but Azarenka double-faulted to concede three match points in the next game, allowing Rybakina to close out an emphatic win.

"I'm super happy and proud. Without my team it would be difficult to be here so thanks a lot to them," Moscow-born Rybakina, Kazakhstan's first Grand Slam champion, said on court.

"It was an incredible atmosphere and I'm super happy to be in the final and play again here.

"It was difficult conditions, I couldn't play offensive tennis but I'm happy I managed to win."

Sabalenka joined the 22nd seed in the final after dismissing Linette following a cold start on a chilly evening on the main



showcourt, as the 24-year-old reached her first Grand Slam final after three previous semi-final defeats.

The victory also extended Sabalenka's winning run this year to 10 matches following her successful march to the Adelaide title which warmed her up nicely for the season's first major.

"I'm super happy that I was able to get this win and she's an unbelievable player," Sabalenka said of Linette. "She played really great tennis. The atmosphere was unbelievable.

"Just being in the final in this kind of atmosphere, to play on this court it's a great experience for me and I hope it's going to help tomorrow. Sorry, Saturday."

Rybakina's serve has propelled her through the tournament, and she clubbed nine aces earlier against Azarenka.

But she double-faulted on the first point of the match, raising a low gasp from the terraces.

They needn't have worried. She thumped down three consecutive aces to hold then served out to love in her next effort.

After that start, it was a surprise when Azarenka picked her off at the net to break her in the fifth game.

Rybakina shrugged it off then broke Azarenka twice, repeatedly outtrailing the powerful Belarusian.

Azarenka responded with her own firepower.

Running full tilt, she saved a set point with a forehand passing shot and put the pressure back on Rybakina.

The Kazakh cracked, hitting a backhand long, and Azarenka yelled "Let's go!" as she put the match back on serve.

Though failing to land a first serve 11 times in succession, Rybakina saved three break points at 5-5 before momentum shifted again when Azarenka tightened up in the tiebreak.

The Belarusian double-faulted to fall 4-2 behind, punched a backhand long to concede two set points, then slapped a forehand well wide as she failed to deal with Rybakina's aggression.

Having lost the tiebreak, the errors piled up for Azarenka as she dropped serve again in the second set and all but surrendered with a wild forehand to fall 5-2 behind.

Rybakina wobbled when serving out the match, a double-fault coughing up three break points and opening the door for Azarenka.

But any hopes of a comeback slipped away as Azarenka imploded on serve.

Though she saved a match point, her bid for a third title at Melbourne Park ended flatly, with a backhand hammered into the net, one of 27 unforced errors.

"It's kind of hard to digest, obviously," a gloomy Azarenka told reporters, wearing sunglasses at her post-match media conference.

"Obviously I had quite a few chances that I gave myself. I cannot really say I'm really proud of how I played."

Proteas seek WC qualification points

AFP, Bloemfontein

South Africa go into a one-day international series against England in Bloemfontein on Friday needing a strong performance to ensure automatic qualification for the Cricket World Cup later this year.

The three-match series is part of the International Cricket Council's World Cup Super League, from which the top eight teams will qualify for the World Cup in India in October and November.

South Africa need to win at least three of their remaining five fixtures -- they also have to play two matches against the Netherlands -- to climb above West Indies, who are currently in eighth place after completing their programme.

But Sri Lanka could also leapfrog the West Indies if they win at least two matches in their final series in New Zealand in March. South Africa can guarantee qualification by winning all five of their remaining games.

Teams that fail to win a World Cup place automatically will have to play in a qualifying tournament in Zimbabwe in June and July.

The England ODI series comes at a time of transition for South Africa, following the resignation of Mark Boucher as head coach.

Eight of England's squad have been playing in the SA20 competition, including captain Jos Buttler, who is the leading run-scorer, and fast bowler Jofra Archer, who has shown good form in five matches for the MI Cape Town team.

Injuries have prevented Archer from playing for England for almost two years.



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RMG SHIPMENTS

At the mercy of highway robbers

SHARIFUL ISLAM

Readymade garment manufacturer A Plus Sweater Ltd had sent an RMG consignment to Chattogram Port from its Gazipur factory on eight covered vans on October 29 last year for shipment to Brazil.

Sweaters packed into 898 cartons reached Chattogram the following day. The buyer-nominated freight forwarder, APL, a foreign shipping line, received the consignment worth over \$1.25 lakh and shipped it to Brazil.

The buyer, one of Brazil's leading brands Mirsa, made the payment in full after the vessel carrying the consignment sailed off from the port, said M Tamiz Uddin Bhuiyan Salim, managing director of A Plus Group.

But a chill ran down Tamiz's spine after he received videos from the Brazilian buyer on January 6 soon after the consignment was received in the South American country.

"The videos showed some cartons were completely empty boxes while a good number of goods were missing from many others. I was dumbfounded," Tamiz told The Daily Star recently.

Law enforcers are conducting an investigation into the theft to ascertain when and where the incident occurred.

This is just one example of the growing theft of RMG products on their way to Chattogram Port. It is causing significant financial losses to exporters, and also putting them at risk of losing buyers' trust, and orders.

The stealing continues as some decisions taken in a meeting in July 2021 to stop theft are yet to be implemented. The home minister, top law enforcement officials, and BGMEA and BKMEA leaders took part in the meeting.

The decisions included tracking covered vans, screening the identities of drivers and their helpers who allegedly maintain links with the theft gangs, and installation of CCTV cameras at various places on highways leading to Chattogram.

The covered van drivers and their helpers who have links with RMG stealing gangs, park vehicles at some isolated places in Dhaka's Demra, Madanpur in Narayanganj, Cumilla, Feni and Chattogram on the way to Chattogram port, said an RMG exporter.

They then unscrew nuts from a side of the bolt attached to the covered

"Stealing readymade garments products has been on the rise as those involved in such criminal activities are securing bail easily following the filing of cases. After walking out of jail, they get involved in theft again."

BKMEA President **Mohammad Hatem**



CATCH ME IF YOU CAN! ... Two Red-Crested Pochards, a male and a female, playing a game of catch in Sunamganj's Tangaur Haor. These ducks can be considered quite global as their breeding habitats extend from southern Europe and the Black Sea to Central Asia and Mongolia. They are considered partially migratory and prefer spending their winters in the Indian Subcontinent and Africa.

PHOTO: MOSABBER HOSSAIN RIBON

Russian missile barrage hits Ukraine

11 killed; Kremlin says tank deliveries show West's 'direct involvement' in conflict

AGENCIES

A blistering wave of Russian strikes targeting Ukraine's energy infrastructure killed 11 people yesterday, a day after Germany and the United States pledged heavy tanks for Kyiv.

The latest wave of attacks came as the Kremlin said Moscow perceived the tank deliveries "as direct involvement in the conflict". France insisted that neither Paris nor its allies were fighting a war against Russia.

As a result of Russia's latest missile strikes, 11 people were killed and 11 others were wounded yesterday, Ukraine's emergency services said.

Earlier in the day officials said that a 55-year-old man was killed in Kyiv by fragments of a missile that was shot down by Ukrainian air defence systems.

The Ukrainian army said its forces destroyed 47 out of the 55 missiles launched by Russia.

Since October, Russia has launched regular

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75pc money laundering trade-based

Says NBR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 75 percent of money laundering in Bangladesh takes place through overseas trade, according to the National Board of Revenue.

Trade-based money laundering generally involves giving false information on imports and exports such as over-billing, under-billing, multiple billing, over/under shipping and quality misrepresentation.

The disclosure came in a paper that reviewed a host of money laundering cases. The paper was presented by Masud Sadiq, a member of NBR's customs policy and ICT, at an event observing International Customs Day yesterday.

Examining the cases, it was found that financial crimes were committed through various means, such as false declarations, submission of fake documents, false declaration related to exports and receiving export incentives by submitting

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

Release Satkhira journo from jail

Demands CPJ

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Committee to Protect Journalists has demanded the immediate release of Deepto TV journalist Raghunath Kha from jail.

In a statement issued last night, the international rights organisation alleged that Raghunath was electrocuted and beaten up in police custody.

Raghunath, Shatkhira correspondent of the private broadcaster Deepto TV and newspaper

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5







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