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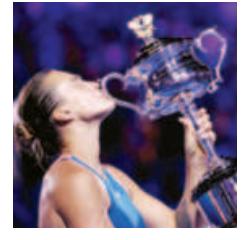


PADMA BRIDGE

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Sabalenka breaks thru



REUTERS, Melbourne

Aryna Sabalenka powered her way to a maiden Grand Slam title at the Australian Open with a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 win over Kazakh 22nd seed Elena Rybakina on Saturday in a thrilling final.

With Russian and Belarusian players only allowed to compete as individual athletes without national affiliation at Melbourne Park due to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, fifth seed Sabalenka also became the first neutral athlete to win a major.

Success has followed a period of introspection

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After work in Bhola town, people cross the Tentulia river on foot to get to their home in Majher Char of Sadar upazila. As the water levels of the Meghna-Tentulia have gone down and trawlers are unable to operate, the char inhabitants have to wade through the knee-deep water to get to the town and back. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: MONIR UDDIN ANIK

INAUGURATION OF 25 PROJECTS

Rajshahi all set to welcome PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi is all set to welcome Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today for her first public rally in the district in five years.

Following a month-long preparation for the programme, a 5,000sqft stage has been set up, with a black boat as the base and white scaffolding on top, at the Madrasa Maidan in Rajshahi, now known as Haji Muhammad Mohsin Government High School ground.

Hasina, also the Awami League president, will address the rally in the afternoon. The venue will open to visitors in the morning. Local artists will sing songs of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra.

Al. Presidium Member AHM Khairuzzaman Liton said they were expecting that about seven lakh people would throng the city centring the rally.

Some 12 LED screens and 220 loudspeakers have been installed at some important city points so that people can watch the rally without going to the venue, he said.

More than 500 volunteers have been deployed to serve the people while 1.5 lakh water bottles will be kept at different places, other than two water tanks to quench people's thirst.

The city streets have been covered with PVC posters, banners, and festoons have been put up on city streets showcasing the development activities of the government.

Organised jointly by AL Rajshahi city and district units, the rally will attract people from across the eight districts of the division.

Liton said, "People from far-flung areas will rush



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MATERNAL HEALTHCARE

Slum women left to fend for themselves

NILIMA JAHAN and TAHIRA SHAMSI UTSA

Eighteen-year-old Julekha Begum, of Tejgaon slum, was married off at 15 and is currently in the ninth month of pregnancy.

Even with a history of stillbirths, throughout this pregnancy, she visited a local private hospital only once at the cost of Tk 1,500.

A 2016 WHO guideline recommends a minimum of eight visits to reduce perinatal mortality -- the number of stillbirths and deaths in the first week of life -- and improve the expectant mothers' care.

Despite suffering from sharp abdominal pains, Julekha is reluctant to make further visits due to the cost, and is instead opting for a home birth with an untrained midwife.

Even with considerable development in the country's maternal healthcare, there is visible ignorance when it comes to mothers in city slums.

Compared to mothers in non-slum areas, those in slums don't receive the required antenatal or postpartum healthcare, nor have access to essential prenatal micronutrients or a trained birth attendant.

Sabina Begum*, 20, gave birth to her firstborn recently, after having

suffered from severe water breaking, long before her expected delivery date -- without any antenatal care (ANC), the care mothers get from health professionals during their pregnancy.

A 2021 Bangladesh Urban Health Survey (BUHS), conducted by the National Institute of Population Research and Training, shows that only 40 percent of pregnant women

An overwhelming majority of the expectant mothers in slums showed preference for home births, unless they experienced earlier pregnancy complications or suffered from any life-threatening conditions.

in slums received over four antenatal care checkups.

Dr Ferdousi Begum, president of the Obstetric and Gynecological Society of Bangladesh, said ANCs ensure the routine care of mothers and newborn children to detect possible problems, prevent maternal deaths and birth complications, and prepare mothers for childbirth.

"Inadequate ANCs can cause major

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Indian foreign secretary to visit Dhaka next month

PORIMOL PALMA

Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra will visit Dhaka in mid-February to discuss the preparations for the upcoming G20 summit, which will be held in Delhi on September 9-10.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is the only South Asian leader invited by India to the summit of the world's most powerful economies.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen will visit Delhi to attend the G-20 foreign minister's meeting in mid-March and Kwatra's visit will be part of preparations for the meeting, diplomatic sources said.

"Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan is likely to visit Dhaka on February 14," a diplomatic source in Delhi said.

He is likely to call on Prime Minister Hasina, Foreign Minister Momen and Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen.

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METEORITE IN ANTARCTICA

It contains oldest material in solar system

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Researchers in Antarctica have discovered one of the largest meteorites ever found on the continent. The space rock found in December 2022 weighs 7,600kg.

Antarctica is a favourite spot for researchers hunting for meteorites. While the continent is not hit by meteorites more often than anywhere else on Earth the continent's cold dry weather helps preserve those that do land. Active glaciers also churn up ancient meteorites buried beneath the ice.

Helpfully the uniform white boulders makes spotting the dark rocks easier. The team that found the asteroid also used satellite data about Antarctica's surface and machine learning tools to predict where meteorites would most likely be found.

Finding a meteorite this large is very unusual. Over the past hundred years, more than 45,000 meteorites have been found in Antarctica but the majority have been micrometeorites, which weigh at most a few hundred grams.

The meteorite appears to be made of chondrite, the most common type of meteorite material. These meteorites likely originated in the asteroid

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Traders have stacked large bags full of discarded plastic bottles right under electricity transformers at Islambagh in the capital's Lalbagh, putting the area at risk of fire. Some of the bags are in direct contact with electricity cables connected to the transformers. The photo was taken recently.

'Big attacks' on key installations were their aim

Say cops after arrest of Huji leader, 5 aides

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fakhrul Islam went to Pakistan in 1988 to join the Afghan war when he was only 24.

He returned to Bangladesh after 10 years, but before that he spent several years in Pakistan, Iran, and received training in Afghanistan's Kandahar on operating AK-47 rifles, submachine guns (SMGs), and even rocket launchers.

He became an expert in assembling SMGs, able to complete the task in just 30 seconds.

During those 10 years, Fakhrul, now 58 years old, met Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and Taliban leader Mullah Omar, and held several meetings with them.

Since his return, he had joined Harkat ul-Jihad al Islami Bangladesh (Huji-B) and till his arrest on Friday, was working to revive the outfit's operations by collecting funds and conducting activities through social media. He even visited Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar to recruit new members.

He was planning to carry out "big militant attacks" on major establishments in Bangladesh to show that Huji-B was not yet wiped out.

This was the information that the cybercrime investigation division of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit said it gathered, following the arrest of Fakhrul and five others of the outfit from different areas of the capital on Friday.

The five others are Fakhrul's son Saiful Islam, 24, Suruzzaman, 45,

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Last two JS polls were devastating Eminent citizens call for consensus on polls-time govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 15th constitutional amendment, which abolished the caretaker government system allowing national elections under partisan government, had devastating impacts on the last two parliamentary polls, eminent citizens said yesterday.

The last two elections held in 2014 and 2018 were examples of "failed and one-sided elections", they said, adding that a free, fair, participatory, and credible election is a must to put an end to the ongoing political crisis.

Speaking at a webinar, the eminent personalities called for a consensus on election-time government, and constitutional and administrative reforms.

The event titled "Shongbidhan Shongshodhoner 'Opo'rajniti" was organised by Forum for Bangladesh Studies, a platform of researchers, academics and analysts.

Delivering the keynote address, Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shushashoner Jonno Nogorik, said the caretaker government system was a politically settled issue, and it was introduced following a movement and based on political consensus. The national elections held in 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008 under the caretaker government system were free, fair and acceptable.

He said scrapping of the system created a lack of democracy and good governance in the country, and the ineffectiveness of check and balance in parliamentary democracy.

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Digital Security Act needed in present context Says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said the Digital Security Act is required in the present context.

"No one talks about the reasons why the Digital Security Act was formulated," he said, adding that people keep saying that the law was enacted to curtail the freedom of speech and freedom of press, but that is not correct.

Misuse of any law is not unusual, the minister told a seminar organised by the Post and Telecommunications Division at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital.

He further said the Data Protection Act will have to be enacted after discussions with the stakeholders and there is no room for confusion about it.

The controversial Digital Security Act was enacted in 2018 amid widespread criticisms from the civil society members and journalists.

