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CARDIAC TREATMENT

Patients hit hard by costly stents

MOUDUD AHAMMED SUJAN

Mohiuddin Ahmed was extremely anxious. And it was just not because his 68-year-old father was undergoing a cardiac stent implantation surgery. He had no idea how he would pay back the creditors for the funds he borrowed for the operation in March.

His worries would not have been this overwhelming had the government not hiked the price of cardiac stents by 20-35 percent from February 1 to factor in the steep depreciation of taka against the dollar, making the already expensive cardiac treatment in Bangladesh more costly at a time when the ordinary people are grappling with the rising cost of living.

"It is too much for my family," Ahmed, a lawyer, recently said. He needed three weeks to arrange the Tk 3.64 lakh needed for the surgery at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) after the heart blocks were detected.

Each stent was billed at around Tk 1 lakh, more than double the price in India.

Take the case of the Xience Xpedition stent made by Abbott, an American medical devices manufacturer. It costs about Tk 47,000 in India and Tk 70,000 in Bangladesh.

But in Bangladesh, its maximum retail price is Tk 125,500 after the hike by the Directorate General of Drug Administration, up from Tk 108,628.

Such big differences were found in the case of stents of other companies like Boston Scientific's Promus Premier and Promus Elite, German company Biotronik's Orsiro and Medtronic's Resolute Onyx.

In India, the price of stents starts from Rs 9,842 and goes up to Rs 35,835.

The price of stents in Bangladesh is determined as per the markup set by the DGDA's price-fixing committee. The markup was set at 1.42 percent, which includes the taxes and profit margin of the suppliers as well as the dealers. It also includes an 11.5 percent "retail commission" for middlemen.

And the recent hike was made to factor in the depreciation of taka as per the markup set, said Mohammad Yousuf, the director-general of DGDA.

In the past year, the taka depreciated 23.7 percent against the dollar, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank.

"The stent market was in an unruly state. We tried our best to draw an accepted and transparent solution for the sake of patients," said Afzalur Rahman, a former director of the National Institute of Cardiovascular Disease (NICVD) who led the 2017 expert committee for fixing stent prices.

The time has come to revisit the markup formula to ensure transparency in the stent supply chain, he said.

The drug administration must explore ways to bring down the price, said Abdullah Wadud Chowdhury, head of the cardiology department at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

"Otherwise, patients would prefer going to India for cardiac care," he said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

- 45,000 cardiac stents are implanted every year
- Prices of stents normally higher than that in India, Nepal
- DGDA hiked the prices by 20-35pc on February 1



"If the suppliers did not need to pay a commission to the physicians, health staffers and different middlemen, the price would have been much lower like in India."

Chowdhury Meshkat Ahmed, professor at BSMMU's Department of Cardiology



The two-storey Dayaganj City Corporation Market in the capital is dilapidated and risky, but some city corporation cleaners have been living on the first floor with their families for years, putting their lives at risk. Some shops are also run on the ground floor. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Two tremors near Dhaka raise concern

Experts sound note of warning, call for preparedness

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Two earthquakes with epicentres very close to Dhaka jolted the capital in a span of just 11 days, raising concerns among leading experts about more quakes and the country's preparedness.

A 4.3 magnitude earthquake struck Dhaka and some other parts of the country early yesterday. Its epicentre was in Dohar upazila, some 30 kilometres away from the capital, according to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

Another 3.9 magnitude earthquake, the epicentre of which was in Bhulta of Narayanganj, about 24 kilometres away from the capital, hit Dhaka on April 25.

A total of 14 earthquakes took place within the 300 km radius of Dhaka in the last one month, says the National Center for Seismology of India.

Experts say these jolts are possible indications of a major earthquake which has not been reported in the country for a long

time.

"Our research showed that over 8-magnitude earthquake energy was accumulated in the plates in Bangladesh territory over the years and the energy can get released anytime. The recent earthquakes give indications of it," Syed Humayun Akhter, a former professor of geology at Dhaka University, told The Daily Star yesterday.

A 5.2 magnitude earthquake jolted Dhaka and several other parts of the country on December 5 last year. The epicentre of the quake was 520 km away from the Agargaon Seismic Centre in Dhaka.

Two major earthquake fault lines in the country are Madhupur Fault and Dauki Fault. The Madhupur fault line in Tangail is closer to Dhaka, while the Dauki fault line is in Sylhet.

Prof Mehedi Ahmed Ansary, a teacher at the Buet's civil engineering department, said, "There is a possibility of a major earthquake. Before a major quake, some mild ones called

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ROHINGYA REPATRIATION Situation 'not bad' at Maungdaw

Says RRRC after Rakhine visit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

The situation at Myanmar's Maungdaw township where Rohingyas will be resettled is "not bad", said Rohingya Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner Mizanur Rahman yesterday.

"We did not see anything bad at Maungdaw. We have seen many Rohingyas doing trade and business there. As per my data, 80 percent of the people there are Rohingya," he told reporters in Cox's Bazar.

He said this after returning from a visit to the township with a delegation of 20 Rohingyas to see the arrangements made by the Myanmar authorities for a planned repatriation of a group of Rohingyas by the end of this month.

The delegation was accompanied by seven government officials led by Mizanur.

"We have seen the willingness of Myanmar authorities to facilitate repatriation. The problem, which has been around for about 60 to 70 years, will not be solved overnight. We are hoping that it [repatriation] will be sustainable," he added.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Hasina holds talks with Sunak

Interacts with King Charles at C'wealth Leaders Event

STAR REPORT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina held a bilateral meeting with her British counterpart Rishi Sunak in London yesterday.

The meeting took place at the bilateral meeting room of the Commonwealth Secretariat, reports UNB quoting sources.

The two leaders discussed various issues related to mutual benefits of the two countries.

This was the first meeting of the two prime ministers after Sunak took office on October 25 last year.

In the afternoon, Hasina attended the Commonwealth Leaders Event at the Marlborough House of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

During the event, the PM had an interaction with

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina poses for a photo with the heads of government of the Commonwealth states at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London yesterday. She attended a meeting of the Commonwealth heads of government.

PHOTO: P10

BLAST AT N'GANJ STEEL MILL

It ran without valid papers, safety measures

RAFIUL ISLAM

The steel mill factory in Narayanganj, where an explosion killed four workers and injured three others on Thursday, had been melting iron for the last six months without approval from the authorities, said officials.

Rahima Industrial Complex Steel Mill went into production without clearance certificates from the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) and the Department of Environment (DoE), said officials of those departments.

Besides, a fire service official said there were no fire extinguishers at the factory. He also alleged that workers were not provided with proper safety gear.

An explosion inside the furnace of the factory spilled molten iron on seven workers on Thursday, killing three of them -- Shanker, 40, Elias Ali alias Yeasin, 35, and Niyon, 20.

Another injured worker Md Alamgir, 33, died at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in Dhaka yesterday.

He had 90 percent burns, said Inspector Bachchu Miah, in charge of Dhaka Medical College Hospital police outpost.

The condition of three other injured is critical, said hospital sources.

The factory did not get any clearance certificate from DIFE as it lacked safety measures, Mehedi Hasan, an inspector of the department who visited the factory after the explosion, told The Daily Star yesterday.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

PRESS FREEDOM RSF report fictitious, intentional Says info minister

UNB, Dhaka

The recent report of Reporters Sans Frontiers is nothing but an “intentional and fictitious” story, Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud said yesterday.

He made the remarks while replying to a question from a journalist about the report that showed Bangladesh’s position below Afghanistan in this year’s World Press Freedom Index.

“Press freedom in Bangladesh is an example for developing countries in the world today. In many cases, the press in Bangladesh enjoys more freedom than many developed countries,” he told reporters after laying the foundation stone of the Multipurpose Building of Bangladesh Betar in Chattogram.

ATTACK ON UNO UP chairman, three others arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Police yesterday arrested four men, including a union parishad chairman, for their alleged involvement in the attack on Madhukhali upazila nirbahi officer Ashikur Rahman Chowdhury.

The arrestees are Saha Asadujjaman, chairman of Domain Union Parishad, Kobirul Biswas, 40, Ibrahim Mridha, 19, and Prince Mollah, 32, of Nischintapur village in Madhukhali.

According to police sources, two cases were filed with Madhukhali Police Station on Thursday night and yesterday morning in this connection.

Asaduzzaman, also a member of the executive committee of Madhukhali upazila unit of the Awami League, was made the prime accused in both cases.

Sumon Sheikh, driver of the UNO, filed the first case on Thursday night and Prabir Kumar Biswas, sub-inspector of Madukhali Police Station, filed another yesterday.

Twenty-seven named and 200-250 unnamed people were made accused in the two cases.

Police arrested Ibrahim and Prince on Thursday and Asadujjaman and Kobirul yesterday, said Sohridul Islam, officer-in-charge of Madhukhali Police Station.



A delegation of 20 Rohingya yesterday visited Maungdaw township in Myanmar to see the arrangements, including these houses, made for their resettlement.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

‘Large number of children’ killed in Sudan

Warns UN as fighting rages in Khartoum;
civilians complain of being forgotten

AGENCIES

The UN yesterday warned that large numbers of children were dying in the Sudan conflict, pointing to reports indicating that seven children were being killed or injured every hour.

“As feared and as warned, the situation in Sudan has become fatal for a frighteningly large number of children,” James Elder, spokesman for the UN children’s agency Unicef, told reporters in Geneva.

He said the agency had received reports from a trusted partner – not yet independently verified by the UN – that 190 children were killed and 1,700 injured in just the first 11 days of the conflict that began on April 15.

Elder pointed out that those numbers had been gathered from health facilities in Khartoum and the Darfur region, reports AFP.

That means it only covers the children that actually made it to healthcare facilities in those areas, he said, warning that “the reality is likely to be much worse”.

Hundreds of people have been killed and hundreds of thousands have fled their homes in Sudan since battles began three weeks ago between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan’s forces and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo’s Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The sides have agreed to a string of short ceasefires, but none has been fully respected, and yesterday heavy gunfire echoed around Khartoum again and there was no sign of any

letup in fighting as civilians trapped in the Sudanese capital said their plight was being ignored by both the army and its rival, reports Reuters.

“It’s been four days without electricity and our situation is difficult... We are the victims of a war that we aren’t a part of. No one cares about the citizen,” said Othman Hassan, 48, a resident of the southern outskirts of Khartoum.

Unicef received reports from a trusted partner that 190 children were killed in just first 11 days of the conflict.

Across swathes of Khartoum, factories, banks and shops have been looted or damaged, power and water supplies have been failing and residents have reported steep price rises and shortages of basic goods.

“Sudan’s warring armies are showing reckless disregard for civilian lives by using inaccurate weapons in populated urban areas,” said Human Rights Watch Sudan researcher Mohamed Osman, in a report by the group documenting damage to hospitals and water treatment plants caused by fighting.

The Sudanese Doctors Union said one of the country’s main maternity hospitals, Aldayat in the adjoining city of Omdurman, had been looted and occupied by forces on Thursday.

Man held for killing wife, daughter

UNB, Lakshmipur

A man was arrested for killing his wife and daughter over a family dispute in Ramganj, Lakshmipur.

Jamal Uddin and his wife Raushan Ara Begum had been in a domestic dispute since their marriage, said Mahmudul Hasan, commander of RAB II Noakhali, CPC, at a press conference yesterday afternoon.

Jamal lived in Dhaka’s Rayedbagh area with his family. On April 15, he allegedly strangled Raushan to death and killed his one-year-old daughter by suffocating her while she was sleeping, said RAB.

He then left Dhaka for Noakhali loading the bodies in a wardrobe on a pickup. At one point, he aborted going to Noakhali and dumped the bodies in a canal in Ramganj.

On April 19, police found the decomposing bodies and subsequently filed a murder case with Ramganj Police Station against an unidentified accused.

Rain, thundershowers likely across country

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) yesterday predicted rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind in different parts of the country within 24 hours, till 9:00am today.

“Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely to occur at one or two places over Dhaka, Mymensingh, Khulna, Barishal, Chattogram and Sylhet divisions with hails at isolated places,” read a Met office bulletin.

The weather may remain mainly dry with temporary partly cloudy skies elsewhere over the country, the bulletin added.

Meanwhile, both the day and night temperatures will rise slightly all over the country, according to the bulletin.

A trough of westerly low lies over India’s West Bengal and adjoining areas.

6 members of a gang arrested in Teknaf

STAR REPORT

Rab last night arrested six members of a gang with firearms and bullets at Baharchara in Teknaf, Cox’s Bazar, said a Rab officer in a Facebook post.

The arrestees are Prakash Saleh Uddin, chief of Saleh group, his main associate Sohel, and four others.

They were arrested in a raid at a remote hill around 9:15pm, wrote Abu Salam Chowdhury, additional superintendent of police and senior assistant director of Rab-15, in a Facebook group of reporters.

The raid was conducted after a two-hour-long gunfight between a Rab team and Saleh group, he added.

Missing girl found dead; family claims murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Police recovered the body of a 12-year-old girl from a forest in Kotbaria village of Kewabunia union in Barguna Sadar upazila on Thursday evening.

Ripa Akter, daughter of former UP member Shahjahan Howlader, had been missing since Tuesday. She was a student of Kotbaria Kaderia Dakhil Madrasa.

Her body was sent to the Barguna General Hospital morgue for autopsy yesterday, said Barguna Sadar Police Station OC Ali Ahmed.

“The autopsy report will confirm how she died. If the victim’s family files a case, legal action will be taken after an investigation,” he added.

After the girl went missing Tuesday night, her father recorded a general diary (GD) with the Sadar police station the next day.

Meanwhile, Shahjahan said, “We suspect Al Amin, a neighbour, killed my daughter and left her body in the forest. He often harassed her.”

Al Amin has been on the run ever since the girl went missing.

This correspondent tried to contact Al Amin but his phone was found switched off.

Situation ‘not bad’

FROM PAGE 1

Asked whether the Rohingyas are satisfied with the arrangements, he said, “Both the parties must have a self-sacrificing mindset. We want to begin the repatriation.

“As per the accord... some [Rohingyas] may be relocated to the place of their origin, while others may be to a place nearby. It will go through a process.

“Myanmar officials will visit here and talk to Rohingyas. We are doing all these to build their [Rohingays’] confidence and to make them feel assured.”

However, Mohammad Selim, a member of the delegation, told reporters that Rohingyas would not return until they were granted citizenship.

“We visited the area and talked to them [Myanmar authorities]. They have told us we will be relocated there.

“But we don’t want to live in a camp in our country. We want to live on our own land in our village. We don’t want financial assistance.

“Besides, they told us we would not be given citizenship. We will be given some kind of permission to live there. But we don’t want that. We want citizenship.

“We will return to Myanmar only after our demands are met.”

Selim did not say anything about the resettlement arrangements made in Myanmar.

Yesterday was the first time a Rohingya delegation visited Rakhine since their largest influx in 2017.

A community leader, a teacher, an imam, and three women were among the 20 delegates.

The team departed Teknaf by a boat on the Naf river at 9:20am.

After the delegates reached Nakfura ghat in Myanmar, they were first taken to villages to see the construction work for their resettlement. Then they visited a transit centre in Maungdaw through which the repatriation would be conducted.

Patients hit hard by costly stents

FROM PAGE 1

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority in India fixes the price of stents for foreign manufacturers, while the global companies supply at a discount to Nepal, considering the country’s economic status, according to Chowdhury.

“In the case of Bangladesh, however, they follow the European standard. If we can bargain with the companies, the price can be lowered,” he added.

On May 2, the DGDA along with the experts sat with the representatives of Boston Scientific Corporation and Abbott Laboratories at its office in Dhaka.

The representatives agreed to submit a proposal regarding a feasible price cap for their stents, The Daily Star has learnt from officials informed on the proceedings.

DGDA officials said they will also

sit with the rest of the principal companies as early as possible.

Chowdhury Meshkat Ahmed, professor of the Department of Cardiology at the BSMMU, however, highlighted another reason for the higher price.

“If the suppliers did not need to pay a commission to the physicians, health staffers and different middlemen, the price would have been much lower,” he said.

The Daily Star found credence to Ahmed’s claim after speaking with four local suppliers of cardiac medical devices.

“Mainly the physicians get the commission and it is 20-50 percent of the stent price. Every supplier has their own strategy in this regard. Some may also pay the other health staffers involved in the process,” said an official of a local supplier on the condition of anonymity.

“We will file a case if we don’t find the factory to be safety compliant,” he added.

Workers and locals alleged that various authorities refrained from taking action because of underhand dealings with factory officials.

About the allegations, Rajib said they would take action if they receive any official complaint against anyone. Abdullah Al Mamun, deputy director of DoE in Narayanganj, also said the factory did not obtain the final clearance for going into production.

“Although the mill authorities had clearance for construction of the factory, there was no final clearance for production. An Environmental Impact Assessment must be submitted for production,” he said, adding that the factory did not submit the EIA.

“Since they started production without clearance, our enforcement branch will take action. In this case, in addition to fines, their licence can also be revoked,” he added.

Ahmed went on to call for transparency in the supply chain. “The physicians need to stop taking financial benefits from the companies. Otherwise, patients will continue to suffer,” he said.

Each year, about 45,000 stents are implanted in around 25,000 patients, according to Chowdhury.

For now, the price hike of stents will leave more cardiac patients out of treatment, according to Mir Jamal Uddin, director of the NICVD.

“Were the price of stent less than Tk 50,000, it would have been bearable for our family amid the high inflation,” said Mohammad Unus, whose father-in-law was undergoing the same procedure as Ahmed’s father at the same time on March 20.

Inflation averaged 8.85 percent in the first 10 months of the fiscal year, way higher than the 5.6 percent target set for fiscal 2022-23 in the budget.

Shafiqul Islam, a supervisor of the factory, however, yesterday claimed that they ensured safety for workers while in production.

Shaheed Alam, sub-station officer of Araihaazar Fire Station, said the factory authorities did not inform them about the explosion.

“Being informed by others, we visited the site and found no fire extinguisher there. We also received allegations that the workers were not provided with safety gear.”

Preferring anonymity, a worker of the factory said, “Do the factory owners have the time to think so much about worker safety?”

“If they provide a safety jacket one day, they do not do it on another day. A majority of us work without a [safety] jacket,” he said.

“Would the workers have been so severely burnt if they were provided with safety jackets?” he asked.

No case has yet been filed in connection with the explosion and deaths.

ETHNIC TENSIONS IN INDIA’S MANIPUR 20,000 evacuated to camps

REUTERS, Guwahati

Authorities in India’s northeastern state of Manipur have evacuated some 20,000 people to camps under army protection to prevent escalation of ethnic violence just days after clashes between tribal and non-tribal groups.

There have been incidents of looting and arson in parts of the remote state, which borders Myanmar, in recent days and at least 20 people, including two local lawmakers were injured in clashes during a protest on Tuesday. Internet services have been suspended in the state to prevent social media from being used to stir up unrest.

“The situation is not fully under control but it is gradually improving,”

P. Doungel, the state’s top police official told reporters in Imphal, the state capital.

“More soldiers were being deployed to strengthen security and about 20,000 people were evacuated from violence-hit areas,” he said adding that three makeshift camps had been set up to lodge and protect people.

Tensions have been rising between the Meitei community, who live in mostly in the main valley, and numerous tribes in the hilly state.

The Meitei people have been agitating to be granted scheduled tribe status. But the recognised tribes in Manipur oppose that status being extended to the Meitei, who are the largest single ethnic group in the state.

Hasina holds talks with Sunak

FROM PAGE 1

King Charles III, head of the Commonwealth, at the Delegate’s Lounge.

Hasina also joined the King’s



reception for heads of states, governments and overseas representatives at the Buckingham Palace ahead of the coronation of the King and the Queen Consort today, reports BSS.

The PM reached London from Washington DC early yesterday on an official visit to the UK to attend the coronation of the British King. She will represent Bangladesh at the ceremony today.

She is expected to return home on May 9, concluding her 15-day visit to Japan, the US and the UK.

JOINT COMMUNIQUE SIGNED

Dhaka and London yesterday signed a joint communique to establish an “aviation partnership” for the necessary cooperation in the development of Bangladesh’s aviation sector, including purchase of passenger and cargo aircraft from Airbus, reports our diplomatic correspondent, citing a statement of the Bangladesh High Commission in the UK.

The statement said Bangladesh’s trade and investment relations with the UK and the other European partners of Airbus will be strengthened through this initiative.

“Bangladesh can also get long-term credit facilities from UK Export Finance scheme on easy terms for the purchase of aircraft from Airbus,” it said.

New building to be built in Bangabazar

Decision regarding floors, shops to be taken next week

DIPAN NANDY

Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) is planning to start the construction of a multi-storey market on the Bangabazar market grounds, following the devastating fire which occurred there a month ago.

The design of the modern multi-storey market will be prepared based on the advice and recommendations of the shop owners association and various business organisations, which used to operate on the market complex.

According to the Local Government Act 2009, priority will be given to the owners of the affected shops in the fire while constructing the new market building.

The market land of Bangabazar Complex was handed over to Dhaka City Corporation from Bangladesh Railway in 1985. After the 1995 fire, the market owners' association built the three-storey Bangabazar complex -- a tin-shed market

AT A GLANCE

Total floors: 12, with two basements

Approved shops: 4,576

Car parking: 141

Total Area: 67,332.53 per floor (up to 5th floor)

-- at their own expense.

According to the Revenue Department of DSCC, there were 2,961 shops in the market. Later, in 2016, Mayor Sayeed Khokon appointed Shahidullah Associates Limited as a consultant to demolish the tin-shed market and build a multi-storey building there. The consulting firm designed the building -- intended to be a 10-storey steel structure -- up to the sixth floor.

According to the design, a total of 4,413 shops, including 726 shops on the ground floor, 754 on the first floor, 727 on the second floor, 754 on the third floor, 717 on the fourth floor, and 735 ones on the fifth floor were approved.

Each store's allocated area was around 25 to 30 square feet in the design.

The plan also included 141 parking spaces in one of the two basements and an area of around 67,332.53 square feet per floor up to the fifth floor.



Demanding that the minimum wage for RMG workers be set at Tk 23,000, Sommilito Garments Sramik Federation brought out a rally and held a human chain in front of Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

‘Emphasise women’s vulnerability’

Speakers tell event on climate change

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pointing out that women are more vulnerable to climate change, speakers at a workshop yesterday suggested emphasising women's issues to make the initiatives relating to climate change successful.

They made the remarks at a national workshop organised to develop a strategy for climate change and its impact on women in Bangladesh. Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), International Land Coalition (ILC) and Landesa, USA, jointly organised the two-day long workshop at a hotel in the capital.

Khushi Kabir, president of ALRD and coordinator of Nijera Kari, said lots of projects are taken for women but their issues are not given importance.

“Although women are the most affected group by climate change, their issues are never discussed. But addressing climate change will not be successful without addressing the issue of women who are more than half of the total population,” said Shamsul Huda, executive director of Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD).

Lawmaker Shirin Akhter said the issue of women in climate change and adaptation should be given special importance in the national budget.

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Imdadul Haque Soofi, information and research affairs secretary of Dhaka's ward-18 unit of Awami League, is a beneficiary of the Dhaka South City Corporation Mayor's discretionary funds.

He is the editor of a newspaper, while his wife is a grade-II officer in the Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR). His elder son works in a non-government organisation as a communication specialist.

Soofi lives with his four-member family at the BCSIR staff quarters.

Despite being financially solvent, Soofi received Tk 2,00,000 from the mayor's discretionary fund in September last year.

“I had a very good relationship with the mayor. I was in a financial crisis, which is why I applied for the fund,” Soofi told The Daily Star. His Facebook posts also contain photos of him with DSCC Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh.

Like him, affluent people and political leaders, including former and incumbent councillors of the city corporation, often become the beneficiaries of the Mayor's Discretionary Fund in the absence of a guideline, found this newspaper.

Besides, political activists -- mostly affiliated with the ruling party -- are receiving a larger sum than others from the fund, meant for the residents of DSCC who are in financial crisis.

For instance, in March last year, DSCC disbursed Tk 2,90,000 to three persons. Of them, Salahuddin Badal, a member of Dhaka city (south) unit Awami League, received Tk 2 lakh alone.

The city corporation distributed Tk 25 lakh to 42 people in August last year. Six AL leaders got Tk 12 lakh, nearly half of the total amount, according to the DSCC document.

Another instance of affluent political activists receiving funds is Khabir Ahmed, religion affairs secretary of AL's ward-18 unit,

“

If the fund has been used to ‘help’ nepotistically selected well-off persons depriving the needy, it is an example of abuse of power to serve personal interests. The alleged use of the fund to serve partisan political interest is also questionable.

IFTEKHARUZZAMAN
Executive director, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB)

The authorities have a policy that outlines the criteria for the allocation of funds. Only those who meet the requirements are eligible to receive the funds. Nobody was given the fund going beyond the policy. Those who received the funds were eligible.

ABU NASER
DSCC spokesperson

under its New Market thana unit.

He received Tk 1,52,000 from the mayor's fund in October last year, to pay his daughter's due tuition fees. He is the co-owner of a publication and owns a flat in Dhaka's Nilkhet area.

Contacted, Khabir refused to make any comment on the issue and said the matter is “between him and the DSCC mayor”.

Moreover, many of the beneficiaries

are residents of the DSCC mayor's former constituency Dhaka 10. Out of the 311 persons who got the funds between January and December last year, 71 beneficiaries belong to that area.

Convener of Dhanmondi thana unit Krishak League Liton Mollah got Tk 2 lakh for his daughter's wedding.

Sabina Pervin is a councillor in the reserved seat of ward-9 under DSCC. She received Tk 2 lakh for treatment purposes in August last year.

In her electoral affidavit, she mentioned owning a six-storey building on 1.5 katha land in Kamrangirchar and 30 tola gold.

Contacted, she told this newspaper that she applied for the fund as she was sick and needed it for treatment.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

There are no rules that specify the criteria for those receiving the funds.

Section 75 of the Local Government (City Corporation) Act (2009) mentions that on special purposes -- upon the sanction of allocation by the government -- a mayor could carry out emergency work in the public interest without causing hindrance to the city corporation's regular activities and spend from the funds allocated for the corporation.

Section 11 of the sixth schedule says rules can be formed on the “Custody, investment, operation, regulation and application of corporation fund; establishment and maintenance of sinking funds [a special fund to pay off loans] and other special funds”.

But no rules have been formulated on the Mayor's Discretionary Fund.

The current DSCC mayor took the initiative to formulate a policy on the fund on October 27 last year. A draft was placed at a board meeting, but it was not finalised, said officials of the Social Welfare and Slum Development Department of DSCC.

This newspaper could not reach the mayor over the phone. He did not respond to this newspaper's messages as well.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

WDB sues NGO for filling portion of the Karatoya

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Water Development Board (WDB) filed a case against non-government organisation Thengamara Mahila Sabuj Sangha (TMSS) for filling a portion of the Karatoya river and blocking the water flow in Bogura's Sadar upazila, following an executive magistrate's order.

Md Hasanuzzaman, deputy assistant engineer of Bogura WDB, filed the case with Sadar Police Station on Thursday night, OC Noor-E-Alam Siddiqui said yesterday.

Earlier on May 2, an executive magistrate, WDB executive engineer, and a police team conducted a raid in TMSS Eco park area. During the raid, Executive Magistrate Md Nurul Islam found that TMSS was filling the river with five drum trucks. The mobile court then seized the trucks but failed to detain anyone from the spot.

Later, the magistrate issued a written order to Bogura WDB to file a case against TMSS.

On April 20, WDB issued a notice to the surveyors of WDB, upazila land office, and the municipality that a joint survey to mark the banks of the Karatoya was ongoing. Therefore, all concerned parties were specifically requested to stop filling, excavating, or building any structure on the river.

However, the TMSS authorities continued to fill the river, according to the case statement.

As per the section 4 of the prevailing Balumahal and Soil Management Act, 2010, it is a punishable offence to obstruct the flow of a river.

On May 3, after the mobile court drive, this correspondent asked Hosne Ara Begum, executive director of TMSS, about the filling of the river and seizure of the trucks.

“On March 23, WDB and Sadar Upazila Land Office finalised the boundary of the Karatoya and separated my [NGO] land from river. Since then, I started dumping soil on this land. That part of the river is my [NGO's] property,” she said.

During the raid, Executive Magistrate Md Nurul Islam found that TMSS was filling the river with five drum trucks. The mobile court then seized the trucks but failed to detain anyone from the spot.

Electrocuted, youth dies in Gazipur

UNB, Gazipur

A 30-year-old man died after being electrocuted in Gazipur's Tongi yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Sadekul Islam, hailing from Netrokona's Durgapur upazila and a resident of Tongi.

Police and locals said the electrocution occurred at noon when Sadekul, a day labourer by profession, was hanging banners of a madrasa on the seventh floor of Firoz Khan

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8



A car closely moves past a gaping hole with protruding rods on the North Jurain road. The entire stretch of the road is covered with holes as such, making it extremely risky for commuters to use the road. Locals informed that the road has been in this state for the last four months, and the authorities are yet to act on this matter. This photo was taken in Shyampur area recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Georgia lauds Bangladesh's socio-economic development

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has expressed his gratitude for passing a resolution in the Georgia State Senate praising Bangladesh's economic development and contribution to regional peace for more than a decade.

During his official visit to Washington DC on Tuesday, Momen was handed over an official copy of the resolution on behalf of Georgian Senator Sheikh Rahman, according to a press release of the Bangladesh foreign ministry.

On the occasion of Bangladesh's Independence Day, the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

‘Karl Marx still relevant’

Speakers tell seminar on his 205th birth anniv

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Marx's philosophies cannot be denied if we are to pursue the emancipation of people and establish an egalitarian world for all, said speakers at an international seminar held on the occasion of Karl Marx's 205th birth anniversary.

Shantanu Dey, a theoretician of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), said that Marx is still relevant, pointing out that the philosopher had a deep understanding of the crises that we are facing today, despite having identified them over 200 years ago.

The event was organised by the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) on its 75th founding anniversary, which was held at the Sirajul Islam Chowdhury Lecture Hall at Dhaka University.

Dey cited various surveys and research to argue that capitalism has been widely rejected by well-informed people around the world due to its adverse impact.

According to Prof Sobhanlal Dattagupta, a renowned Marxist social scientist in India, Marx and Marxism are constantly being rediscovered

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

PRAYER TIMING

MAY 6

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha

AZAN 4:15 12:45 5:00 6:34 8:00

JAMAAAT 4:50 1:15 5:15 6:38 8:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Wahidur’s death anniv

STAR REPORT

Today is the 10th death anniversary of educationist Md Wahidur Rahman, said a press release.

Graduated in Chemical Engineering, Wahidur was born on December 13 in 1941 at Sandweep in Chittagong. He served in various capacities in Ammunitions Research and Development for Bangladesh Army.

Special prayers will be offered at his East Rampura home seeking eternal peace of the departed soul.



People suffer

FROM PAGE 5

Contacted, contractor Moniruzzaman said the work would resume within the next week.

“We had to stop our work due to the sudden price hike of construction materials,” he said.

Ahmed Abdullah, executive engineer of Moulvibazar LGED, said if the work does not start quickly he will take action to cancel the work order of the contractor.

“They will also be fined. The work will be completed by calling for new tenders and appointing new contractors,” he added.

DHALESWARI RIVER

Illegal sand lifting poses erosion threat

MIRZA SHAKIL

Illegal sand extraction from Dhaleswari river in Tangail Sadar upazila’s Charabari area has put riverside villages and an important bridge connecting several char unions in danger of erosion.

The sand extraction is allegedly being carried out by a local influential quarter, despite being a punishable offence under the Sand Quarry and Soil Management Act of 2010.

Meanwhile, heavy dump trucks engaged in sand and soil transportation are causing the dilapidation of rural roads and accidents.

Sumon Dewan, a former union parishad chairman, is leading an influential group to illegally extract sand close to Charabari Bridge, alleged locals.

Md Rafiqul Islam, executive engineer of the Local Government and Engineering Department in Tangail, said sand lifting and cutting of soil within 100 metres of the Charabari bridge are prohibited. “It is the local administration’s responsibility to enforce the rule.”

Iqbal Ahmed, incumbent chairman of Katulee Union Parishad, said he sought the deputy commissioner’s intervention in this regard.

The issue took a violent turn when sand traders – led by Sumon Dewan and Azad Dewan – attacked three, including Abbas Ali, a former vice-chairman of Tangail Sadar upazila



parishad, who has been protesting the illegal sand lifting.

“The administration needs to take immediate action,” said Abbas.

However, Sumon claimed that locals had carried out the attack as Abbas and his “cohorts” were extorting them.

Tangail UNO Ranuara Khatun said they will take action after an investigation.

Georgia lauds Bangladesh’s

FROM PAGE 3

resolution was adopted unanimously in the Georgia State Senate following the initiative of Senator Sheikh Rahman for the last two years. “We thank all the people’s representatives of Georgia for passing a resolution praising the

ongoing development of Bangladesh under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,” said the foreign minister.

A resolution (SR 426) adopted by the Georgia State Senate on March 29, marking the 51st anniversary of Bangladesh’s

independence, praised Bangladesh’s remarkable progress and humanity in various fields, including its remarkable economic development, said the release. The resolution, tabled by State Senator Sheikh Rahman (Democrat), said: “For more than a

Karl Marx still

FROM PAGE 3

everyday. While some critics have argued that Marx’s ideas are Eurocentric, his writings after 1871 demonstrate his engagement with issues in Russia, Latin America, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent.

However, Dattagupta also criticised the proposal accepted at the 3rd World Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1921, which called for communist parties worldwide to be modeled after the Communist Party of Russia. He said leftist parties should be formed based on local thinking, tradition, and culture, and to better understand the pulse of the societies they are seeking to serve.

Bhanudev Dutta, a veteran leader of the Communist Party of India and a historian, delivered a keynote speech at a seminar on the topic of how Marx, Engels, and The Communist Manifesto were first introduced in Bangla.

For those in need or those in power?

FROM PAGE 3

Contacted, DSCC spokesperson Abu Naser claimed that the authorities have a policy that outlines the criteria for the allocation of funds.

Only those who meet the requirements are eligible to receive the funds, he said.

“Nobody was given the fund going beyond the policy. Those who received the funds were eligible,” he added.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Talking to The Daily Star, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh

(TIB) Iftekharuzzaman said, “Even if it may be in the mayor’s discretion to use this fund, since it is taxpayers’ money, which under all circumstances can only be used in the public interest. It is a governance failure that there are no specific guidelines to ensure its proper use.”

“If the fund has been used to ‘help’ nepotistically selected well-off persons depriving the needy, it is an example of abuse of power to serve personal interests. The alleged use of the fund to serve partisan political interest is also

questionable.”

“If appropriate mechanisms cannot be established to prevent the use of public money in a transparent and accountable manner, there should be no provision of such allocation. Anyone can have unrestricted authority to use any amount of personal income for such purposes but not even a penny of the taxpayers’ money. The failure to distinguish between what is public and what is personal is unfortunate,” said the TIB executive director.

Choshma Pora Hanuman

FROM PAGE 5

“There have been no extra precautions taken to safeguard wild animals from electrocution. If the electric lines running through the forest had a specific rubber cover, wildlife would not have died.”

Md Rumizzaman, the beat officer and in-charge of Lathitila forest, reported that three Phayre’s Leaf Monkeys died in the last two months after coming into contact with electric wires in the reserved forest. “This is a scary stat,” he said. “If they continue to die in this way, the almost extinct animals will disappear for good,” he added.

AKM Ashrafur Huda, AGM of Barlekha Zonal Office of Pally Bidyut, said

the forest department has sent a letter urging to cover the electric lines in the Lathitila reserved forest.

The design has been sent to the head office for construction, but Huda does not know exactly when will the electric lines be covered.

Environmentalist Kamrul Hasan Noman, a member of the Patharia Wildlife Conservation Team, added that various types of wild animals live in the Lathitila forest, if they continue to die, everything will soon be lost. “It is necessary to take necessary measures to protect them,” he stressed.

Meanwhile, the forest department has set up a “canopy bridge” in the

forest for the movement of various wild animals, including Phayre’s Leaf Monkeys. Although locals saw a group crossing the bridge a few days ago, it is not enough to protect them, he added.

Electrocuted

FROM PAGE 3

Tower in Tongi’s Sataish Sharif Market area. The electrocution left him dead on the spot.

Shah Alam, officer-in-charge of Tongi Paschim Police Station, said they brought the body to the police station after being informed of the incident.

Actions will be taken after an investigation in this regard, the OC added.



Canadian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Dr Lilly Nicholls posing for a photograph with the students and teachers after visiting Canadian International School Bangladesh (CISB) on May 4. Mohammad Kamal Uddin, chairman of CISB; Janice Smells, principal; and Angela Dark, counsellor and senior trade commissioner, High Commission of Canada in Bangladesh, were also present on the occasion.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

New building to be built in Bangabazar

FROM PAGE 3

During that time, the owners association objected to constructing the market building without rehabilitating the shopkeepers. The shopkeepers went to court and filed several writ petitions in this regard.

However, the court was in favour of the construction of the new building. And so, the shop was demolished and the construction work began.

DSCC Spokesperson Abu Naser told The Daily Star that in 2016, the tender was prepared after completing the floor designs up to the sixth floor.

“Now, the number of floors and shop sizes need to be decided again. We also need to think about whether we want to build the market according to the previous design. All these issues will be decided during a meeting with all the stakeholders, scheduled to be held next

week,” said Naser.

Representatives of Bangabazar Shop Owners Association, Bangladesh Shop Owners Association, FBCCI, DCCI and MCCI will participate in the meeting. The decision-makers will prepare a new design and start the construction by calling for tender, he added.

Jahirul Islam, acting general secretary of Bangabazar Complex Shop Owners Association, told The Daily Star that a

meeting will be held next week regarding the issue of constructing a new building in Bangabazar.

“Shops will be allocated in the new building as per the market law of the city corporation. However, as the new building will increase the number of shops, we demand that after the allocating shops to the shop owners affected in the recent fire, the remaining shops be given to the affected traders,” he added.

Four teachers appointed against two vacant

FROM PAGE 5

the biochemistry and molecular technology department, also a member of the academic planning committee, acknowledged the fact, but refused to reply to further queries, saying, “It’s a matter of the higher authorities. The regent board and the vice chancellor are responsible for the recruitment process.”

Chair of the pharmacy department Prof Mizanur Rahman said, “The university administration appointed two teachers in our department, although we recommended one appointment.”

He said the selection board might have recommended recruiting two teachers, which was later approved by the regent board.

When asked if the authorities can do so, he refused to comment,

saying, “The administration know better...”

The Daily Star obtained some documents, signed by the university registrar, which show that the selection board for the biochemistry department recommended the recruitment on October 25 last year. The board for the pharmacy department did the same on January 21, just a day before the regent board meeting.

Later on February 4, the university authorities issued them appointment letters.

“The recruitment was done violating the university act. We are embarrassed over the matter,” said Prof Md Masuder Rahman, general secretary of MBSTU Teachers Association.

He said, “We met the VC on behalf of all teachers and asked why the authorities did so, ignoring the circular

and the said departments’ recommendations. They said it would not happen again,” said the professor.

“We will hold a meeting and keep protesting the move,” said Prof Masuder.

A regent board member, seeking anonymity, said, “When the proposal was placed, a few members questioned the decision and expressed dissatisfaction over it. The VC himself placed it for approval. But we kept asking why they would appoint four against two posts.”

Quoting the VC, he said, “The decision was taken following the selection board’s recommendation. We went on appointing additional teachers as we found more qualified candidates during the selection process.”

“An external member in the meeting also raised questions...,” the member told The Daily Star.

Registrar Prof Touhidul Islam refused to comment on the issue.

Contacted, VC Forhad Hossain said, “We should have followed the circular and appointed one teacher against one post...”

“There are inadequate teachers in those departments. As we got some qualified candidates, the external teachers in the selection board recommended appointing them. Besides, the teachers we appointed are more qualified than we expected. So, there was no scope of nepotism or any other irregularities in the appointments,” the VC said.

When asked how the authorities appointed four teachers ignoring the circular and the departments’ suggestions, Prof Forhad said, “The regent board will decide whether it’s ethical or not. I don’t want to comment on it.”

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার			
জেলা সমাজসেবা কার্যালয়, পাবনা।			
জেলা সমাজসেবা কার্যালয় পাবনার আওতাধীন দুটি প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিবাসীদের ২০২৩-২৪ অর্থবছরের খাদ্য, খাদ্যানুযায়িক, শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, প্রসাদনী এবং বিবিধ মালামাল সরবরাহের নিমিত্তে বাংলাদেশের প্রকৃত সরবরাহকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে দরপত্র আহবান করা যাচ্ছে।			
দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি			
স্মারক নং-৪১.০১.৭৬০০.০০০.০২.০৫৬.০৯-২৬৯		তারিখঃ ০২/০৫/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ	
১.	মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ	ঃ	সমাজকল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়
২.	এজেন্সি	ঃ	সমাজসেবা অধিদফতর ঢাকা
৩.	সমগ্রাহক সত্তার নাম	ঃ	মহাপরিচালক, সমাজসেবা অধিদফতর, ঢাকা এর পক্ষে জেলা প্রশাসক, পাবনা
৪.	সমগ্রাহক সত্তার জেলা	ঃ	পাবনা
৫.	যে কাজের দরপত্র	ঃ	২০২৩-২৪ অর্থবছরে সমাজসেবা অধিদফতর কর্তৃক পরিচালিত পাবনা সরকারি শিশু পরিবারের নিবাসীদের ও সমন্বিত দুটি প্রতিবন্ধী শিক্ষা কার্যক্রমের নিবাসীদের জন্য খাদ্য, খাদ্যানুযায়িক, শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, প্রসাদনী ও অন্যান্য এবং বিবিধ মালামাল সরবরাহ
৬.	দরপত্র নম্বর ও তারিখ	ঃ	৪১.০১.৭৬০০.০০০.০২.০৫৬.০৯-২৬৯ তারিখঃ ০২/০৫/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ
৭.	দরপত্র প্রচারের তারিখ	ঃ	০৬/০৫/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ
৮.	সমগ্র পদ্ধতি	ঃ	উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি (ওটিএম)
৯.	বাজেট এবং তহবিলের উৎস	ঃ	রাজস্ব বাজেট, জিওবি
১০.	দরপত্র প্যাকেজ নং	ঃ	৪টি
১১.	দরপত্র প্যাকেজের নাম	ঃ	২০২৩-২৪ অর্থবছরে সমাজসেবা অধিদফতর পরিচালিত পাবনা সরকারি শিশু পরিবারের নিবাসীদের জন্য গ্রুপ-ক খাদ্য ও খাদ্যানুযায়িক (অপচনশীল ও পচনশীল), গ্রুপ-খ শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, প্রসাদনী ও অন্যান্য এবং সমন্বিত দুটি প্রতিবন্ধী শিক্ষা কার্যক্রম আটখরিয়া, পাবনার নিবাসীদের জন্য গ্রুপ-খ খাদ্য ও খাদ্যানুযায়িক (অপচনশীল ও পচনশীল) এবং শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, প্রসাদনী ও অন্যান্য এবং গ্রুপ-৩ পাবনা সরকারি শিশু পরিবার (বালিকা) এবং সমন্বিত দুটি প্রতিবন্ধী শিক্ষা কার্যক্রম, আটখরিয়া, পাবনার নিবাসীদের জন্য বিবিধ মালামাল সরবরাহ
১২.	দরপত্র সিডিউল বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ	ঃ	০৭/০৫/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ হতে ২৮/০৫/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ অফিস চলাকালীন পর্যন্ত ০৭/০৬/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ হতে ২১/০৬/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ অফিস চলাকালীন পর্যন্ত (১ম পুনঃদরপত্রের প্রয়োজন হলে) ০৪/০৭/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ হতে ১৮/০৭/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ অফিস চলাকালীন পর্যন্ত (২য় পুনঃদরপত্রের প্রয়োজন হলে)
১৩.	দরপত্র দাখিলের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	ঃ	২৯/০৫/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ দুপুর ১২.৩০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত ২২/০৬/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ দুপুর ১২.৩০ ঘটিকা (১ম পুনঃদরপত্রের প্রয়োজন হলে) ১৯/০৭/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ দুপুর ১২.৩০ ঘটিকা (২য় পুনঃদরপত্রের প্রয়োজন হলে)
১৪.	দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ ও সময়	ঃ	২৯/০৫/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ দুপুর ০১.০০ ঘটিকার ২২/০৬/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ দুপুর ০১.০০ ঘটিকা (১ম পুনঃদরপত্রের প্রয়োজন হলে) ১৯/০৭/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ দুপুর ০১.০০ ঘটিকা (২য় পুনঃদরপত্রের প্রয়োজন হলে) দরদাতা বা তার মনোনীত প্রতিনিধির উপস্থিতিতে খোলা হবে (যদি কেউ উপস্থিত থাকেন)
১৫.	কার্যালয়ের নাম ও ঠিকানা ক. মূল দরপত্র দলিল বিক্রয় খ. দরপত্র দলিল গ্রহণ	ঃ	● সরকারি শিশু পরিবার (বালিকা), কবিরপুর, পাবনা ● জেলা সমাজসেবা কার্যালয়, আড়াইকুলা রোড, শালপাড়িয়া (মাসুম বাজার সংলগ্ন), পাবনা ● জেলা সমাজসেবা কার্যালয়, আড়াইকুলা রোড, শালপাড়িয়া (মাসুম বাজার সংলগ্ন), পাবনা ● সরকারি শিশু পরিবার (বালিকা), কবিরপুর, পাবনা ● জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, পাবনা ● পুলিশ সুপারের কার্যালয়, পাবনা
গ. দরপত্র দলিল খোলা	ঃ	●	জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, পাবনা
১৬.	দরদাতার যোগ্যতা	ঃ	১) বৈধ সরবরাহকারী প্রতিষ্ঠান ২) সিডিউল ক্রয়ের ট্রেজারি চালানের মূলকপি ৩) পূর্বে অনুগ্রহ কাজ করার অভিজ্ঞতার সনদপত্র ৪) হাল নাগাদ ট্রেড লাইসেন্স ৫) ব্যাংক স্বাক্ষরতার সনদ ও ব্যাংক স্টেটমেন্ট শেষ ০৩ মাসের) ৬) আয়কর সনদ (২০২২-২৩) ও ভ্যাট প্রদানের সনদ ৭) ২ (দুই) কপি ছবি সত্যায়িত ও নাপরিকল্প সনদপত্র
১৭.	দরপত্র সিডিউলের মূল্য	ঃ	দরপত্র সিডিউলের মূল্য ট্রেজারি চালানের মাধ্যমে কোড ১-২৯৩১-০০০০-২৩৬৬ (অফেরতযোগ্য) জমা দিতে হবে
		গ্রুপ	সরফিস্ত বিবরণ
		ক	খাদ্য ও খাদ্য, খাদ্যানুযায়িক (অপচনশীল ও পচনশীল)
		খ	শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, প্রসাদনী ও অন্যান্য
		ঘ	খাদ্য ও খাদ্য, খাদ্যানুযায়িক (অপচনশীল ও পচনশীল) এবং শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, প্রসাদনী ও অন্যান্য
		ঙ	বিবিধ মালামাল
			সিডিউলের মূল্য
		ক	৫০০/-
		খ	৫০০/-
		ঘ	২০০/-
		ঙ	২০০/-
			মন্তব্য
		ক	সরকারি শিশু পরিবার (বালিকা), পাবনা
		খ	সমন্বিত দুটি প্রতিবন্ধী শিক্ষা কার্যক্রম, আটখরিয়া, পাবনা
		ঘ	সরকারি শিশু পরিবার (বালিকা) এবং সমন্বিত দুটি প্রতিবন্ধী শিক্ষা কার্যক্রম, আটখরিয়া, পাবনা
		ঙ	সরকারি শিশু পরিবার (বালিকা) এবং সমন্বিত দুটি প্রতিবন্ধী শিক্ষা কার্যক্রম, আটখরিয়া, পাবনা
১৮.	টেন্ডার সিডিউলটির পরিমাণ	ঃ	উক্ত সনের ২%
১৯.	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার নাম	ঃ	বিশ্বাস রাসেল হোসেন
২০.	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার পদবী	ঃ	জেলা প্রশাসক, পাবনা
২১.	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার ঠিকানা	ঃ	জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, পাবনা
২২.	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার সাথে যোগাযোগের মাধ্যম	ঃ	০২৫৮৮৮৪৪৯৯
শর্তাবলী:			
১. পিপিএ-২০০৬ এবং পিপিআর-২০০৮ (সংশোধিতসহ) এ প্রদত্ত জমা সংক্রান্ত পদ্ধতি যথাযথভাবে অনুসরণ করা হবে।			
২. গৃহীত দরদাতার নিকট হতে উক্ত সনের ১০% পারফরমেন্স সিডিউলটি অর্থপ্রাপ্তি সাপেক্ষে কার্যবাহী প্রদান করা হবে।			
৩. “ঙ” গ্রুপ ক্ষেত্রে বরাদ্দ প্রাপ্তি সাপেক্ষে কার্যবাহী প্রদান করা হবে।			
৪. কর্তৃপক্ষ কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ অথবা সকল দরপত্র বাতিলের ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।			
৫. বিশেষ নির্দেশনা/বিস্তারিত তথ্য দরপত্র সিডিউলে বর্ণিত আছে।			
৬. সমন্বিত দুটি প্রতিবন্ধী শিক্ষা কার্যক্রম, আটখরিয়া, পাবনার ছাত্র ভর্তি ধাকা সাপেক্ষে সরবরাহ দিতে হবে।			
৭. নির্দিষ্ট সময়ের পর আর কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ করা হবে না।			
জিডি-৭৮৬			
১৫০৬০১০৬০৬ (বিশ্বাস রাসেল হোসেন) জেলা প্রশাসক, পাবনা ফোন নং-০২৫৮৮৮৪৪৯৯৯			

K.M. Shoyeb
03.05.23
(কালী মেজ হোয়াইব)
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ইন-চার্জ স্ট্রেনি সেক্টর, বরিশাল।
ফোন : ০২৪৭৮৮৬৩৮২৩ ফ্যাক্স : ০২৪৭৮৮৬১৩৬৭
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China assures Russia, India of deepening ‘co-operation’

REUTERS, Beijing

Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang assured his Russian and Indian counterparts of deepening bilateral ties, promising that “coordination and cooperation” will only grow stronger, in a show of solidarity with two of China’s biggest neighbours.

Qin met in India on Thursday with other foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, a bloc of nations spanning most of Eurasia, with Beijing seeking to preserve stable relations with countries in the region as ties with the West, particularly Washington, remain tense.

During his meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of the SCO meeting, Qin said China is “willing to maintain communication and coordination with Russia to make tangible contributions to the political settlement of the crisis” in Ukraine.

The two sides also agreed to strengthen communication and coordination with other SCO member-states and maintain the bloc’s “unity”, according to a statement from the Chinese foreign ministry yesterday.

They additionally agreed to strengthen coordination in the Asia-Pacific, the ministry said, without giving details.

In a separate meeting with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyan Jaishankar, Qin said China is willing to deepen “coordination and cooperation” on international and regional issues with India and bring ties back to a “healthy” track of development.

China’s ties with India have deteriorated since 2020, when their troops clashed on a disputed Himalayan border and 24 people were killed. Last month, Beijing published a map showing Arunachal Pradesh, claimed by India, as part of Tibet, angering New Delhi.

Qin told Jaishankar that the situation on the border is “generally stable”.

“We should draw experience and lessons from history, grasp bilateral relations from a strategic height and a long-term perspective, respect each other, learn from each other, and achieve mutual success,” Qin told Jaishankar.

Currently the SCO bloc includes Russia, India, China, Pakistan and four Central Asian countries. Iran and Belarus are expected to be inducted into the SCO at a summit in New Delhi in July.



Britain’s King Charles meets well-wishers during a walkabout on the Mall outside Buckingham Palace ahead of his and Camilla, Queen Consort’s coronation, in London, Britain yesterday. Charles, 74, and his wife Camilla will be crowned at London’s Westminster Abbey today in a glittering but solemn religious ceremony with traditions dating back some 1,000 years, followed by a procession, resplendent with pomp and pageantry.

PHOTO: REUTERS

RUSSIAN MERCENARIES vow to quit Bakhmut

Blame lack of ammunition; Ukraine says they are piling in

REUTERS, Kyiv

Russia’s main mercenary group yesterday announced plans to pull out of the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, but Ukraine said the mercenaries were reinforcing their positions to try to seize it before Russia marks victory in World War Two next week.

Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin said his men had been starved of ammunition and would expect the army to take their place in Bakhmut next Wednesday, jeopardising what has long been Russia’s main target in its attempt to carve up its neighbour.

“My lads will not suffer useless and unjustified losses in Bakhmut without ammunition,” Prigozhin said in a video accompanying a written withdrawal announcement addressed to the head of general staff, the defence ministry, and President Vladimir Putin as supreme commander.

The announcement said “bureaucrats” had held back supplies despite knowing that Wagner’s target date to capture the city was May 9, when Moscow holds its World War Two Victory Day.



“If, because of your petty jealousy, you do not want to give the Russian people the victory of taking Bakhmut, that’s your problem,” Prigozhin added in the video.

Ukrainian troops have been pushed back in recent weeks but have clung on in the city to try to inflict as many losses as possible on their Russian opponents ahead of Kyiv’s planned big push against the invading forces along the 1,000 km (620 mile) front line.

It was not clear if Prigozhin, who often makes impulsive comments, would go ahead with the withdrawal if his men got extra ammunition or if the row might even be a smokescreen.

A senior Ukrainian official said Russia was bringing Wagner mercenary fighters from along the front line to Bakhmut so as to capture it by Victory Day.

“We are now seeing them pulling (fighters) from the entire offensive line where the Wagner fighters were, they are pulling (them) to the Bakhmut direction,” Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Maliar said on Ukrainian television.

The Kremlin declined to comment on Prigozhin’s statement.

But the threat and the video highlighted the pressure Russian forces are under as Ukraine makes the final preparations for a counter-offensive backed by thousands of Western-donated armoured vehicles and freshly trained troops.

Ukraine said two people had been killed in the eastern Donetsk region and nine wounded over the past 24 hours and electricity distribution networks had been damaged by shelling in Donetsk and the southern Kherson region.

Russia has been largely untouched by the conflict, but Russian news agencies reported a second drone attack in as many days on the Ilsky oil refinery in the south yesterday, causing a fire but no casualties.

ENDING J&K SPECIAL STATUS

Pak-India talks hurt by Delhi’s decision: Pak FM

REUTERS, Goa



Pakistan’s foreign minister yesterday said India’s decision to end the special status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) territory in 2019 has undermined the environment for holding talks between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. The onus was on India to create a conducive environment for talks, Foreign Minister

Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari told reporters on the sidelines of a meeting of regional bloc Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in the Indian state of Goa. The visit by Bhutto-Zardari to India is the first by a Pakistani foreign minister to Delhi in over a decade and has garnered a lot of media attention in both countries. The two have fought three wars, share frosty relations and have downgraded their diplomatic ties. The Pakistani foreign minister said, however, that despite his rare visit to India, there was no change in the status of diplomatic relations. But he added that politics and foreign policy should not hold “hostage” sporting ties between the rivals. “I hope we’re in a position to not have sports suffer as a result of foreign policy,” Bhutto-Zardari said when asked if Pakistan would send its team to India for the event.

SUNAK’S ELECTORAL TEST UK Tories suffer losses in local polls

AFP, London

Britain’s ruling Conservatives yesterday suffered high-profile losses as results poured from Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s first major electoral test since he took office last year. In the depths of the worst cost-of-living crisis in decades, the local council elections held Thursday across swathes of England illuminated the main parties’ standing ahead of a UK-wide general election expected next year. Sunak admitted it was not looking good for his Tories. “It’s always disappointing to lose hard-working Conservative councillors,” the prime minister told Sky News. But he vowed to press ahead with the “people’s priorities” – including halving double-digit inflation, restoring economic growth, and stopping boatloads of migrants crossing the Channel. The vote counting will only be complete later yesterday, just as Britain gears up for today’s coronation of King Charles III. But the main opposition Labour party crowed that the trend was already clear from the 230 English districts electing more than 8,000 council seats. “These results have been a disaster for Rishi Sunak as voters punish him for the Tories’ failure,” said Shabana Mahmood, Labour’s national campaign co-ordinator. “These results show that we are on course for a majority Labour government,” she added. By 9:20 am (0720 GMT), 62 councils had declared their results. Sunak’s Conservatives had lost 228 seats – one-third of the total they were defending so far.

ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN TALKS

Peace deal ‘within reach’: Blinken

AFP, Washington

A peace deal to end Armenia and Azerbaijan’s three-decade-old dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave is “within reach” after four days of talks in Washington, US top diplomat Antony Blinken said Thursday.

The discussions between Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan and his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov did not result in a deal to end the territorial conflict between the two ex-Soviet republics, but Blinken said progress had been made.

“The two sides have discussed some very tough issues over the last few days, and they’ve made tangible progress on a durable peace agreement,” the secretary of state said.

“I hope that they see and I believe that they do, as I do, that there is an agreement within sight, within reach,” he said.

Blinken added later that the

two sides “demonstrated a sincere commitment” to normalizing relations and ending their longstanding conflict.

“Both Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed in principle to certain terms and have a better understanding of one another’s positions on outstanding issues,” he said.

The two countries put out identical statements following the talks, saying they had laid out their positions on normalization.

“The Ministers and their teams advanced mutual understanding on some articles of the draft bilateral Agreement on Peace and Establishment of Interstate Relations,” the statements said.

Both sides acknowledged, however, “that the positions on some key issues remain divergent.”

Armenia and Azerbaijan were both republics of the Soviet Union and gained their independence when it broke up in 1991.

The two sides have gone to war

twice over disputed territories, mainly Nagorno-Karabakh, a majority-Armenian enclave inside Azerbaijan.

Tens of thousands were killed in the wars, one lasting six years and ending in 1994, and the second in 2020, which ended in a Russia-negotiated peace deal.

But clashes have broken out regularly since then.

Azerbaijan injected new tensions last week when it placed a checkpoint on the Lachin Corridor, the only land link between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenia views the move as a violation of a ceasefire negotiated between the two sides.

The four days of talks between Mirzoyan and Bayramov took place out of the view of media in a secure State Department facility in Arlington, a suburb of the US capital.

Ahead of the talks, a US official said they wanted the sides to sit down together and the primary aim was to move toward normalizing relations.

One dead, 4 hurt in Nepal helicopter crash

AFP, Kathmandu

One person was killed and four were injured when a helicopter crashed in eastern Nepal yesterday, officials said, the latest in a string of aviation accidents in the country.

The chopper had dropped off goods for a hydroelectricity project in Sankhuwasabha and was heading to another destination in the same district.

“Two helicopters were deployed to rescue five people injured soon after the crash, including the pilot. We have (to) report that one person has died,” said Jagannath Niroula, a spokesman for Nepal’s civil aviation authority.

Three people were being airlifted to Kathmandu for treatment, Niroula said. The fourth person was also being brought to the capital.

The spokesman said he had not received details on the cause of the crash.

ANTI-TERROR OP 5 Indian soldiers killed in Kashmir blast

REUTERS, New Delhi

Five Indian Army soldiers were killed and one wounded during an operation against militants in Kashmir yesterday, the army said.

Indian defence forces have launched several operations in the Rajouri sector of the Himalayan region since unidentified attackers opened fire on an Indian Army vehicle last month.

A military search team came across a group of militants in an area which is “thickly vegetated with rocky and steep cliffs” yesterday morning, the army said in a statement.

“The terrorists triggered an explosive device in retaliation,” the army said.

Two soldiers died in the attack and another three succumbed to their injuries later in the day, it added.

“Indian Army columns have been conducting relentless intelligence-based operations to flush out a group

of terrorists involved in an ambush on an army truck in the Tota Gali area of Bhata Dhurian in the Jammu region,” said an army spokesperson.

He said that additional troops from the vicinity have been directed to the site of the encounter.

According to the army, initial reports suggest a group of terrorists is trapped in the area and there is a “likelihood of casualties in the terrorist group”.

The incident appeared to be a repeat of an October 2021 operation in the Rajouri-Poonch region, when five soldiers were killed in an encounter with terrorists.

During the operation that followed, four more army soldiers were killed in an ambush by terrorists. After a month-long operation, no terrorist could be tracked down, reports NDTV.

Kashmir is claimed in full but ruled in part by nuclear-armed neighbours India and Pakistan.

Dhaka, Moscow sign nuclear fuel deal

FROM PAGE 12

supplying the Russian arms industry with components, technology and raw materials for missile fuel, aiding Moscow’s continuing onslaught on Ukraine, reported The Washington Post in January.

TVEL and its parent company Atomenergoprom are not in the sanction list, in what can be viewed as a relief for Bangladesh which has little choice to power the Russian-made reactors of the \$12.65 billion nuclear power plant in Ishwardi, Pabna.

As per the agreement, Russia will not charge Bangladesh for nuclear fuel for the three years of the plant’s commissioning.

The agreement was signed by Md Shaikat Akbar, project director of Rooppur nuclear power plant,

and AV Diary, vice-president of Atomstroy Export, in the Russian city of Novosibirsk. Kamrul Ahsan, Bangladesh’s ambassador to Russia, and Jahedul Hasan, deputy director of Rooppur nuclear power plant, was present among others.

Originally, the first unit of the 2,400MW Rooppur nuclear power plant was supposed to start commercial operation in December 2023, but it is now gunning for an early 2025 start date for commissioning.

The ambitious project has run into a snag after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the subsequent Western sanctions on the Soviet nation’s apparatus.

Already, Bangladesh has run into difficulty servicing a \$500 million loan taken in 2013 from Russia for

the Rooppur project’s primary work following Western sanctions on Russian banks.

While a preliminary agreement was struck to service the stalled payments in Chinese currency, that modality is unlikely to progress after the latest round of US sanctions.

But the stuck payments pose another problem for Bangladesh: risks of being classed as a defaulter of foreign loan.

Subsequently, the Economic Relations Division, the government wing responsible for handling foreign loans, has decided to open an escrow account with the Bangladesh Bank.

Payments for Rooppur would be deposited in the escrow account, which is an account where funds are held in trust while two or more parties complete a transaction.

HK police seize dismantled Tiananmen protest statue

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong national security police yesterday seized an “exhibit” that has been identified by local media as a dismantled statue commemorating the deadly Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989.

The eight-metre-high (26-feet) “Pillar of Shame” by Danish artist Jens Galschiot – featuring anguished faces in a twisted tower – sat on the University of Hong Kong’s (HKU) campus for more than two decades.

Two tremors near Dhaka

FROM PAGE 1

foreshocks occur. We are experiencing foreshocks on a regular basis. These are possible indications of a major earthquake,” he added.

As unplanned urbanisation takes place in Dhaka city and many buildings have been constructed here without following the national building code, the entire city is at risk of turning into rubble if a major earthquake hits, warn experts.

According to a survey conducted by Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk), some 865,000 buildings may collapse in the capital if an earthquake of 6.9 magnitude originates at the Madhupur Fault in Tangail.

Some 210,000 people would die and another 229,000 would sustain injuries if the quake happens in

daytime.

The survey was conducted on a 1,528 sq km area of Dhaka city from 2018 to 2022 as part of the Urban Resilience Project.

Prof Humayun said the number of earthquakes happening around Dhaka has been on the rise over the last decade. Six quakes took place in Cumilla and Chandpur between 2008 and 2012, he added.

There is no alternative to creating awareness about earthquake preparedness, he observed.

He stressed the need for holding regular earthquake drills and developing mobile apps to make people aware.

Mehedi Ahmed said Dhaka’s buildings should be assessed by a “third party” to find out whether those are in good condition.

A songbird called NANDITA

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

Deep dark kohl eyes, a mesmerising smile and a silvery smooth voice—Sanzida Mahmood Nandita has been ruling over our hearts with her soothing performances in Coke Studio with *Darale Duaarey* and *Bulbuli*.

Amidst the rainy season, the gorgeous singer dropped by The Daily Star for a hearty conversation.

How did your love for music begin?

My love for music started when I was just 3 and a half years old, my mom wanted me to become a musician, and so I started getting training under Ustad Dilip Majumder. I was so small that I couldn't even play the harmonium properly – he would take me in his lap and helped me play. Sweet memories they were.

An old video from Bangladeshi idol, where judge Mehreen predicted that you will excel, become viral again on social media.

It was really great seeing the video again. I am really happy that I was able to impress people with my recent work so much that they dug out an old video which showcased my journey in showbiz.

Bangladeshi idol was really special and Mehreen madame's comment about me being a 'beautiful soul' stayed with me. I am really thankful to that person who uploaded or shared the audition video. Thanks to them people got to know about my beautiful journey.

Tell us the backstory behind your Coke studio songs 'Bulbuli' and 'Darale Duaarey'

I started my journey in Coke studio with Shuvendu. He is the music composer of both the songs. At that time, Ritu Raj and I were together at an event, and he approached us to sing *Bulbuli*. Thankfully, our song was a hit and everyone who listened to it thought my portion was catchy.

In season 2, I didn't have any time to prepare for *Darale Duaarey*, but I still gave my best. Ishaan was amazing in the song, he voiced it with so much ease. While rendering the song, I tried to incorporate a few improvisations. Shounak played the *sarengi* so perfectly, especially the chord which made it hauntingly beautiful. I remember I couldn't hold back my tears while listening to the song.

You are Arifin Shuvoo's 'celebrity crush'. How does it make you feel?

I saw the video and thought it was really cute. My friends tagged me to the post, and didn't know how to reply! He is really sweet.

Do you have any special fan moment to speak of?

I was travelling in Dhanmondi, when a girl approached me. I was wearing a casual tee with mask on my face. She told me that she loves *Bulbuli* and that she has been a fan since Bangladeshi idol and hugged me. I was feeling sick at that time, but that moment literally gave me goosebumps, as it made me feel special for the first time in a while.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED
MUA: FARHANA PARVEEN
STYLIST: PROTYASHA

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story



Hoichoi
Mohanagar



Chorki
Myself Allen Swapan



Disney+
The Mandalorian



Amazon Prime
Pathaan



STYLE STATEMENT BAD BUNNY

The internet has been overtaken by celebs in black and white, paying homage to the late Karl Lagerfeld in his signature colours. The Latino artiste joined in on the MET 2023 red carpet in a dashing white suit and rosette covered cape by Jacquemus. Unlike traditional suits, Bad Bunny's one was a back-cut-out ensemble, with a chained pendant gracing the musicians back. Despite the whimsy of both women's and men's attire on the red carpet, this was an out of the box statement. The singer paired his outfit with pearl studs and a slicked back hair-do, with a chain and pendant with the letter "J".



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



Headbangers Paradise
May 12 | 12 pm – 10:30 pm
Bangladesh-China Friendship
Exhibition Center



Saturday Night Comedy Show
May 6 | 7:30 pm – 9 pm
Naveed's Comedy Club



**Titumir Art Club
Exhibition 2023**
April 1 – 25 | 4 pm – 8 pm
Kala Kendra

TV TALKIES

Russian Doll

What if you died and then came back, and died again? *Russian Doll* created by Leslye Headland and Amy Poehler, does exactly that with their gritty and smoke damaged protagonist Nadia (Natasha Lyonne), who, upon her 36th birthday party, ends up dead. Somehow, somewhere, Natasha ends up dead and then wakes up in the same bathroom that started it. In the same birthday party, with the same friends, Nadia looks for the answers behind the loop that she is stuck in. She instead finds little quirks that she hates about her friends, unlikely characters that he hadn't noticed before around her neighbourhood and every other thing she had ignored in the times when it was not still.

The 2019 series tackles existentialism in the most New York way possible with the gritty and quick witted Lyonne headlining the role. A mix of quirky satirical quips and pert sci-fi turns, *Russian Doll* delves into what it means to be alive and how it feels to be trapped in your mind, diluting the essence of trauma narrative with notes of the current world streamlining within the show.



Here we go again

Another round of price hikes of essential items, more misery for ordinary people

Whatever little hope we had of a respite from inflation in the coming days seems to have disappeared once again, with a fresh hike in prices of essential items. Earlier this month, data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) suggested that food inflation had declined by 28 basis points in rural areas and four basis points in urban areas in April, leading to an overall decline – though slight – in inflation. Over the past week, however, the price of one-litre bottled soybean oil increased by Tk 12, while the price of loose soybean oil increased by Tk 9 a litre. A kg of loose sugar now costs Tk 10 more, while prices of potatoes and onions have gone up by Tk 5 a kg. The retail price of eggs – a vital source of protein for people who have already cut down on chicken and fish consumption – also rose by Tk 10 a dozen.

The spiralling costs have already paralysed many households, with even the most basic necessities becoming increasingly unaffordable. As prices continue to soar, an overwhelming majority of people are being forced to make difficult choices between paying bills, putting food on the table, and meeting other essential expenses. With this new round of price hikes, how are people, who have already cut down on food consumption significantly to make ends meet, going to survive, with no corresponding increase in their disposable incomes?

We are disappointed at the government's lacklustre efforts to curb inflationary pressure and make food affordable to all, despite assurances of adequate food supply. While we understand that the supply chain disruptions brought about by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war has hugely impacted the economy and food imports in a way the government could not have predicted, the fact remains that it has not done nearly enough since then to check collusion and corruption within its supply chains, and to address the governance failures that are pushing prices ever upwards. As a result, though prices of many essential items, including sugar, oil and flour, have remained stable or fallen in the global market, the fates of Bangladeshi consumers have not changed for the better.

Meanwhile, dishonest businessmen, aided and abetted by dishonest policymakers and bureaucrats, are making a mockery out of people's miseries, taking advantage of the global cost-of-living crisis to artificially raise prices in the domestic market. Take, for instance, the price of soybean oil, which has decreased significantly in the global market (by 29 percent in March this year). But when the government withdrew the VAT exemption privileges in light of the price drop, businessmen hiked up the prices again, using it as an excuse to earn extra profits. It's high time the government seriously addressed the issue of greedflation. It should be obvious that conducting drives and fining some traders from time to time cannot make up for the failure of regulatory oversight.

Given that the Russia-Ukraine war is likely to cause fluctuations in supply in the near future, the government must also find alternatives to and/or reduce its import dependence for essential commodities. But none of this can happen unless our policymakers come down from their ivory towers to the level of the ordinary people, living from hand to mouth, to fully understand the urgency of the crisis and react to it accordingly.

Tourist spot or dumpster?

Why are hotels and resorts without STPs being allowed to operate in Cox's Bazar?

We are alarmed that untreated sewage from hundreds of hotels, motels, and resorts in Cox's Bazar is polluting the environment of the town as well as the sea. According to a recent Prothom Alo report, among the 538 hotels, motels, resorts, and cottages built in the Kalatali area next to the beach, 532 do not have any sewage treatment plants (STPs). These hotels and motels are still using septic tanks for their sewage management, which are leaking and spreading sewage around the city and into the sea. The situation particularly worsens during the peak season and also during monsoon. The untreated sewage is now posing a serious threat to the marine animals and the biodiversity of the area, while also degrading the overall environment of the tourist city.

The question is, what were the authorities doing when all these hotels and resorts were built without STPs? Did they make it clear to the owners that STPs were mandatory in their establishments? According to the hotel owners, they didn't. Instead, they reportedly allowed them to build three-chambered septic tanks underground. And there are still many hotels that do not even have septic tanks. Now, when thousands of people crowd these hotels during the peak seasons, the sewage management systems in these hotels completely fall apart.

Unfortunately, sewage pollution from hotels is just one of the many problems that Cox's Bazar has been facing in recent years. The tourist town still does not have a proper waste management system, and plastic pollution has become one of the major threats to its ecology. Moreover, sewage from shrimp hatcheries is directly polluting the sea at many points. By now, a large part of the district's forests, mountains, and rivers have been grabbed by influential encroachers. Many projects taken up by the government have also proven harmful to its environment. The saddest part is, such environmental destruction has been going on under the very nose of the authorities and despite the existence of several High Court orders and directives to stop them.

We urge the Cox's Bazar Development Authority (CoxDA), the Department of Environment and other relevant government agencies to do what is needed to save the town from pollution and encroachment once and for all. As for setting up the STPs, the CoxDA should construct a central sewage treatment plant in the town as soon as possible – with the help of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), since they are reportedly interested to invest.

And to stop unplanned constructions in the town, the authorities must take action against those who have built their hotels without environmental clearance, no matter how powerful they are. They should also prepare a master plan of town development and ensure that all the structures are constructed following the rules and regulations. All this must be done to retain the beauty of the beach town and safeguard its ecological balance.

Trouble brewing in AL's backyard



THE STREET VIEW

Mohammad Al-Masum Molla
is chief reporter at The Daily Star.

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Elections are festive times providing an opportunity for the candidates to connect with their voters, and for the voters to have the ear of their candidates. It is a rule of thumb that the ruling party candidates pledge to continue with the government's initiatives, while the opposition candidates slam the government for failing to ensure the people's welfare and pledging that they would do a better job if elected to office. This electoral sparring between the government and the opposition is a common phenomenon in the election campaign culture.

But the statements and declarations from the mayoral aspirants in the upcoming five city corporation elections, following the announcement of nominations by the ruling Awami League, seemed to flip that script.

Let's begin with Barishal, where Abul Khair Abdullah got the party ticket to run for mayor – the position currently held by his nephew Serniabat Sadiq Abdullah. Abul Khair's first announcement after getting the party nomination was to say, "My only goal is to turn Barishal city, which lacked development activities over the last five years, into a *tilottoma* (modern) city, to restore the dignity of the citizens of all classes and occupations in this city."

On April 29, Zaheed Farooque, local lawmaker and the state minister for water resources, said at a programme that the prime minister had nominated Abul Khair Abdullah to stop the injustice, exploitation, and criminal activities happening in Barishal. "The people of Barishal can breathe today," he pronounced. He also said that people even teased them as they talked about turning Barishal into a city like Singapore. Seeing the dilapidated roads, even rickshaw pullers scoffed at these promises, the state minister added. His comments were quite in line with those of the mayoral candidate.

All this rhetoric is presumably directed at the incumbent mayor. Both the challenger and the incumbent are from the ruling party and belong to the Serniabat family, akin to royalty



Abul Khair Abdullah, the Awami League-nominated mayoral candidate in the Barishal City Corporation elections, exchanges greetings with the locals in Barishal city on May 4, 2023.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

within the Awami League, ranked after the Sheikh family. However, such disparaging remarks about a ruling party mayor and slamming of the state of law and order essentially point the finger at the ruling party itself, accusing it of having failed the citizens of Barishal.

Whether this is a reflection of internal party feud or not, the question that begs to be asked is why Barishal citizens should vote for the same party (as the mayoral election is partisan) a second time despite its abject failure, and that, too, when the admission of failure is implicit in discarding the incumbent and nominating another candidate.

Turning to Gazipur, we see that a former mayor, failing to secure the party's nomination, decided to submit his nomination as an independent

declared a city corporation and had its first elections.

Zahangir Alam, too, had filed his nomination for Gazipur mayor in the 2013 elections, going against the party wishes to support Azmat. He allegedly went missing as he refused to step aside at the time. He reappeared just before the polls and announced his support for Azmat, visibly weeping while addressing a press conference.

This time, after tendering his nomination, he alleged, "I may be arrested or disappeared after tomorrow."

Then, when the election officials rejected his nomination, Zahangir said, "The Election Commission has deviated from the neutral position it had. I don't know under whose pressure they buckled. But I want justice."

Zahangir's allegations not only

election office disqualify his candidacy.

It appears, then, that the Awami League's bold rhetoric of development and prosperity, transparency and good governance, and fostering democracy is rendered hollow by its own partymen – unwittingly or not.

With the ruling party's own men making such allegations, it appears to have taken the words out of the opposition camps' mouth, because this is essentially what the party has been trying to say all long. When the ruling party's own leaders are disgruntled and disillusioned so as to articulate the opposition's argument better than the opposition itself, it does not bode well for either the ruling party or the government.

For now, the BNP can simply watch from the sidelines as the Awami League men slam their own party.

The heat is on

Unravelling the spectacle of the Dhaka (North) chief heat officer



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

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

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

There has been a heated welcome for the new chief heat officer in Dhaka. Comments started pouring in as scores of people rushed to judge and ridicule the appointment of an official who will oversee a heat action plan in the city. Most of these comments slandered the assignment. Our sexist patriarchal national psyche came to the fore as most commentators smeared the position with many innuendos.

It has become a trend to extend our opinion on any topic without thinking it through or knowing the full facts. The Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has signed an MoU with the Adrienne Arsht Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center (Arsht-Rock) to build individual and community resilience in the face of climate change impacts. The Heat Action Platform is designed to assist regional or municipal authorities across the world in reducing the "human and economic impacts of extreme heat."

The breadcrumbs of the appointment of the chief heat officer (CHO) by the DNCC led me to the Arsht-Rock site and its resilience-in-action initiative. The foundation has estimated that "by 2050, heatwaves will affect more than 3.5 billion people worldwide – half of them living in urban centres – affecting human lives and livelihoods."

Heat is a silent killer, the most

lethal among all the meteorological phenomena. The casualties of heat outnumber those of floods, tornados, and cyclones. Cities are the most vulnerable as the lack of greenery as well as the type of materials used for accommodating the dense population in a compact area result in the creation of "urban heat islands." There can be an excess of four degrees Celsius in the cities due to the use of certain construction materials, emissions from cooling devices and other utility services. Heat also harms our productivity, which can dent the GDP.

Under the pilot project, Arsht-Rock has so far appointed seven CHOs in Florida, US; Santiago, Chile; Freetown, Sierra Leone; Melbourne, Australia; Athens, Greece; and Dhaka (North), Bangladesh. They also have a responsible officer at the UN headquarters. The stated job descriptions of these CHOs include unifying their city governments' responses to extreme heat.

Bushra Afireen, the newly appointed CHO of DNCC, holds a bachelor's degree in global development studies and drama from Queen's University in Canada. Her CV tells us that she has worked to make Bangladesh's garment sector sustainable, advocate the Animal Welfare Act, and bring in microfinance initiatives. Bushra has the potential, resources, and networks to become

a policy advocate at a local level and liaise with our international partners. The fact that her father is also the city father, whose office has processed her nomination for the CHO post, indicates that she can be a real changemaker.

The blogs posted by the other CHOs suggest different strategic interventions undertaken by the partnering cities. Miami, Melbourne, and Freetown have undertaken urban greening projects by installing green canopies for concrete jungles. In Santiago, the focus is on protecting the workers from extreme heat.

Last month, when the temperature was hovering at 40 degrees Celsius, our phone smartly reminded us that it "feels like 45." Our boiled brains looked for ideas. There were social media posts about leaving water troughs for birds and stray animals. But I don't think we talked about giving heat-protective gear to our workers who work under extreme heat, or making enough provisions to keep them hydrated.

The DNCC's move to partner with Arsht-Rock is a welcome one as it will introduce us to some of the best practices in Dhaka North. But questions need to be asked: why did both the city corporations not join this initiative? Is the other part of Dhaka way too cool to consider the heat impact? Why nominate a family member for this post? Was there an open call for the position? Without taking away any credit from Bushra's credentials, the due diligence requires a transparent recruitment process that would have averted the controversy.

The title of the position lacks cultural sensitivity. I understand there is a hook to make this position noticeable. But as an international organisation, which has so far recruited female-only officers

for this post, it should have been more imaginative in making the title more meaningful. The function related to heat should have been focused on instead of tagging heat to the officer.

Funnily enough, this happened around the time when news broke that there was a protest going on in the Dhanmondi area of the city's southern parts as thousands of trees had been chopped down in a bid to correct the road islands – once again. The endless circus of construction and reconstruction of Dhaka reminds me of the proverbial ghost in a popular folklore that agreed to be the servant of a barber after being defeated in a battle of wit, on the condition that the man would keep assigning the ghost tasks. Otherwise, the ghost would break his neck. Soon enough, the man did not have any more wishes left. He thus ordered the ghost to erect a long bamboo pole, grease it with the finest butter, and then climb to the top. The ghost climbs up only to slide down. And the saga continues.

The same goes for our city development projects. The ghost comes in different sorts, shapes and sizes. They prefer going up and down, enjoying the butter all along. From the spectator's perspective, the project is nothing but to keep its potential killer distracted.

Our city fathers keep us distracted with the spectacle of endless destruction and creation. One will raze trees; the other will come up with plans to plant plants. The political mercury keeps rising with the election around the corner. People who are rushing to judge will soon rush to the polling booths to keep their judgements. So, it's better to make things accountable and transparent so that everyone can make informed decisions.



The Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) Accord was signed between the then Awami League government and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) on December 2, 1997.

FILE PHOTO

IMPLEMENTING THE CHT ACCORD

Will the government listen to the UN call?



Mangal Kumar Chakma is information and publicity secretary at the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS).

MANGAL KUMAR CHAKMA

The 22nd session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII) was held on April 17-28, 2023, at the UN headquarters in New York. During this session, the PFII called upon the Bangladesh government to make further efforts towards the full implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Accord. It also welcomed the progress made so far to implement the accord.

Based on a press statement from the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN, The Daily Star (alongside other media outlets) published a news report on this issue on April 30. In this context, CHT Development Board Chairman Nikhil Kumar Chakma posted partial information on Facebook, only stating that the government's efforts to implement the CHT Peace Accord has been welcomed at the PFII.

But Mr Chakma seems to have carefully sidestepped the PFII's call for Bangladesh to "make further efforts towards the full implementation of the CHT agreement." By sharing only a fragment of the PFII's message, he tried to convey to the countrymen that the UN is satisfied with Bangladesh's progress in implementing the CHT Accord.

At the PFII session, the Bangladesh government delegation highlighted that this year, 40 projects have been implemented for the CHT region's development, and 1,555 more projects have been approved. But how sustainable will the development plan be for the Indigenous Jumma people? Will the Jumma villagers lose their land, be evicted from their ancestral land and homesteads, be deprived of their right to self-governance as well as self-determination of development priorities, as per the CHT Accord? Will the biodiversity, environment and water resources of the region be protected, or will the Jumma people be deprived of their traditional farming and livelihoods?

According to what the government delegates told the UN forum, 65 clauses out of the 72 in the CHT Accord have been fully implemented, three clauses have been partially implemented, and only four remain unimplemented. If that were true, then why is the special governance system and the overall situation in the CHT region still as fragile as the pre-Accord period? On the 25th anniversary of the signing of the

treaty last year, the government presented information about the full implementation of 48 clauses, so it is really surprising how another 17 clauses got fully implemented over the last five months.

If what the government delegation said at the PFII session is true – that 65 clauses out of 72 are fully implemented – why are the characteristics of tribal-inhabited areas in the CHT, as recognised in Clause 1 of Part A of the accord, slowly deteriorating? Why are the laws, rules, and regulations applicable in the CHT, including the CHT Regulations, 1900, not amended in line with the CHT Accord, which was stipulated in Clause 2 of Part A? Why has the settlement of the case filed with the High Court against the CHT Accord been pending for so many years?

The elections to the three hill district councils, as stipulated in Part B of the accord, has not been held over the past 25 years. The voters' list with the permanent residents of the three hill districts has not yet been made either, which is also stipulated in the accord. Even the electoral roll rules and election rules for the hill district councils have not been formulated. Furthermore, law and order, police, land and land management, forest and environment, development of a communication system, etc have not been handed over to the hill district councils. The hill district police force has not been formed. Despite the decision of the Accord Implementation Committee, the jurisdiction to issue Permanent Resident Certificates, vested upon the deputy commissioners in violation of the accord, has not been abrogated.

And if only four clauses of the accord remain unimplemented and three partially unimplemented, why is the process of coordination and supervision of the CHT Regional Council over the general administration, law and order, and development of the three hill districts not being executed as per the provisions inserted in Part C of the accord? Why has the process of overall supervision and coordination of the matters entrusted to the three hill district councils – including all development activities by the regional council – not been introduced? Why is the CHT Development Board not performing its duties under the general and overall supervision of the Regional Council?

On the other hand, the India-returned Jumma refugees have not yet gotten their land back, violating Clause 1 of Part D of the accord. The internally displaced tribal families (IDPs) were not rehabilitated on their own land either. One of the main problems in the CHT is the land problem. If 65 clauses of the accord have been fully implemented, why hasn't a single land dispute been resolved over the last 25 years? Why are the Jumma people constantly losing their land and being evicted from their homesteads? Why is the land lease given to non-locals cancelled? Why has two acres of land not been allocated to the landless Jumma families? Why are there more than 400 temporary camps and "Operation Uttaran" in the CHT still? Why are the innocent Jumma people constantly being subjected to arrest, jail, oppression, house searches, extrajudicial killings?

Can the government delegation answer these questions?

The main question here is: will the government step forward to implement the CHT Accord hearing the call from the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues? Already, at its 10th session in 2011, the PFII made recommendations regarding the implementation of the CHT Accord. In August 2022, the UN high commissioner for human rights also called on the Bangladesh government to implement the accord and allow independent actors unrestricted access to the CHT region. On December 2, the UN special rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples also highlighted the overall situation in the CHT region due to non-implementation of the accord, and strongly called upon the government for proper and full implementation of the treaty. The UN specialised agency ILO and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Human Rights Council have also urged the government for the full implementation of the CHT Accord. But the government remains ignorant to all these calls.

It must be mentioned that there is no room to think that the deluge will stop if the government continues to ignore international calls for CHT Accord implementation. The Jumma people are being oppressed in the country, and attempts have been made to suppress the voices of Jumma rights activists through surveillance and intimidation at international platforms like the United Nations.

It is not possible to resolve the CHT issue by suppressing and spreading false propaganda at home and abroad. The only way to resolve it is politically and peacefully through the proper, speedy and full implementation of the CHT Accord. By doing this, there is no doubt that the sovereignty and integrity of Bangladesh will be stronger, as mentioned in the preface of the CHT Accord.

SATIRE

This election year, why not opt for rose-tinted glasses?



NO STRINGS ATTACHED

Aasha Mehreen Amin is joint editor at The Daily Star.

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

The media should take a sabbatical this election year. Everyone knows what happens when elections are coming up. It is only natural that the party in government will want the media to put on those rose-tinted glasses and focus on the "phenomenal" achievements in taking the country forward – the shiny new bridges, metro rail that will even have underground routes just like in London, the magnanimous amounts of money poured into social safety net programmes, the abundant food reserves, the unprecedented empowerment of women (just look at the number of women in parliament, in the garment sector, in the banks, NGOs), the unprecedented remittance flows and RMG exports, and our glorious strides into the digital, smart stage of development. And why not?

They will harp on about workers in the garment factories not getting minimum wages and how they cannot cope with the spiralling prices of essentials and healthcare. Don't they realise how important this sector is – that Bangladesh exported garment products worth over \$42 BILLION in the last fiscal year? On second thought, that may be a little counter-intuitive ...

Basically, instead of looking at the RMG miracle, they will focus on nit-picking on living wages, non-payment of Eid bonuses, unpaid arrears of wages, and so on.

There is also this tendency to talk to "experts" for every little thing and rely on data for every little observation, which is a reflection of this unnecessary negativity. So, instead of focusing on



ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKRABORTY

Most of these things are true – there is no need to really dig deep to find dirt. Just stay on the surface and all will be well.

So it's a little mean when, instead of appreciating the fact that we have electricity in Dhaka city – practically all the time, especially in the areas where there are English newspaper readers – we bemoan that our relatives in the villages have forgotten what it's like to have continuous electricity throughout the night, that it makes a guest appearance only for a few hours, if at all. Are these people starving? Are their children not going to school? Are there not leafy trees even after massive deforestation and ponds to cool off in even after all the major rivers have been encroached upon and dumped with garbage? Do they not know what a "hurricane lamp" is? And is it not true that practically everyone has a smartphone these days – especially the young ones who can use TikTok and Imo to their hearts' content, as long as they remember to charge their phones during the short stints of power supply?

Plus, it's a good thing that people in rural areas don't stay up late watching TV. Villagers have a million different things to do in the morning – they need to get up early and go to the fields, prepare the grains to ensure that the rest of us are fed. They can't tire themselves out watching rubbish on the tube – well, alright, maybe a little BTB news on the unbelievable accomplishments of the government. The media should focus on the gleaming grins of the farmers as they harvest high yields, not their whining about the low prices they will have to sell their crops for that barely cover the production costs.

It's a question of seeing the cup half full or half empty. Journalists who take their profession too seriously will incorrigibly choose the latter perspective. It's not just that bad news sells better, it's because journalists are a bitter lot and are out to be killjoys of any party, especially the ruling one. So they will keep talking about the sorry state of public hospitals, the 51 percent of girls marrying before 18 and dropping out of school, the lack of teachers in government schools, the increasing costs of megaprojects, the broken roads, dilapidated buses, lack of jobs for the youth, "inefficiencies and anomalies" in various public service sectors. The tirade never ends.

the government providing Tk 500 each to a whopping 5.7 million elderly people and 2.5 million widows under its social safety net programmes, they will rain on even this parade by talking about 30 percent of the elderly and 33 percent of widows who are ineligible beneficiaries, with 12 percent of the beneficiaries getting multiple allowances.

Such "think tanks" have the audacity to suggest increasing the allowances (of what they think are eligible beneficiaries) from Tk 500 to Tk 2,500 in view of the rise in prices of essentials! As if all those extra crores needed to cover this will just magically "appear" like the crores of taka from local bank loans fattening up accounts in banks in Singapore, Switzerland, Canada or Dubai.

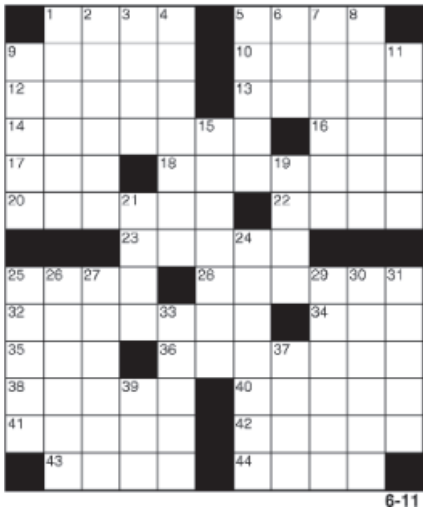
Journalists who take their profession too seriously will incorrigibly choose the latter perspective. It's not just that bad news sells better, it's because journalists are a bitter lot and are out to be killjoys of any party, especially the ruling one.

By the way, during an election year, is it really necessary to bring up the Digital Security Act (DSA) so many times? Yes, it is a bit draconian, has been misused and led to many people going to jail, even being tortured, some of them being journalists. But what did they expect? How can a government trying so hard to change the trajectory of a country, towards an ascending economic growth and eye-catching infrastructural development – at least in the eyes of the relevant public and the world – allow people to just say what they like and have their own opinions? This is election year, you dummies; can't you just keep your opinions, your fact-based reporting to yourselves and avoid them going viral on social media? Can't you exercise a bit of restraint and wear those rose-tinted glasses that many of your smart friends have chosen?

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
1 Unruly groups
5 Take cover
9 Old gold coin
10 Keats, for one
12 Houston player
13 Strong suit
14 Recited, as from a list
16 Poetic contraction
17 Affection, informally
18 Determined
20 Pilot Earhart
22 Money sources
23 Fidgeting
25 Forest youngster
28 Encourage to buy add-ons
32 Galena, e.g.
- 34 Mad, in Marseilles
35 Form 1040 org.
36 Move toward
38 Jeweled crown
40 New Hampshire city
41 Cavalry sword
42 Spanish hero
43 Existence
44 Solemn act
- DOWN**
1 Curator's place
2 Music range
3 Poet-singer
4 Was a replacement
5 1992 Nicholson film
6 Wedding words
7 Most dreadful

- 8 High regard
9 "Little Rascals" girl
11 Scout shelters
15 Trait
19 Year parts
21 Touch down
24 House leader
25 Moves like a moth
26 Reception aid
27 Pungent condiment
29 Upshot
30 Canadian coin
31 Enticed
33 Midwest hub
37 Pastrami emporium
39 Foul caller



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS





Victor Osimhen turned up for Napoli yet again, scoring the goal against Udinese that secured a 1-1 draw and clinched only the third Serie A title in the club's history on a Thursday night that saw celebrations long into the next morning. Naples immediately exploded into life, with fireworks dominating the skyline as the city celebrated its first Scudetto since triumphs fashioned by Diego Maradona in 1986-87 and 1989-90. The newspapers the day after reflected on the success, with La Gazzetta dello Sport going with the headline 'Napoli in paradise' while Tuttosport put a simple twist on a famous chant about the city's golden son, reading 'Did you see that, Maradona?'. PHOTO:AFP/REUTERS/TWITTER



'If you dream it, you can make it'

AGENCIES, Naples

Napoli manager Luciano Spalletti broke down in tears and hitman Victor Osimhen described himself as "overwhelmed" after his side claimed their long-awaited third Serie A title with a 1-1 draw against Udinese on Thursday.

"Seeing the Partenopei smiling and happy is the biggest emotion for me. They are the ones who transmit their happiness," Spalletti said after the match. "There are people here who will now be able to overcome difficult moments in their lives because they remember this moment. These people deserve all the joy."

Meanwhile, Osimhen, whose scored his 22nd league goal of the season to clinch a first league crown since 1990, said it was a campaign he would never forget.

"It is an amazing feeling. We have waited so many years for this moment. To be able to deliver the Scudetto to the Neapolitans is something that we will never forget. It will continue to live in our hearts for the rest of our lives," Osimhen said.

"I'm overwhelmed right now, I don't know the words to use to really quantify this feeling... Nobody has deserved this Scudetto more than the Neapolitans," added Osimhen.

One of the architects of Napoli's great season, Kvicha Kvaratskhelia, wrote on Instagram: "If you dream it, you can make it happen. Dreams come true. Forza Napoli always, thank God for everything".

Amidst all the celebration, there was also a hint of melancholy as the club's biggest icon in history was not around to witness the momentous triumph.

"It's a pity Diego's not here," 61-year-old Brazilian Alemao, who won Serie A with Napoli in 1990 alongside late legend Diego Maradona, told AFP. "[Seeing Napoli win the third Scudetto] would have made him really happy -- it would have completed his party."

But Spalletti was well aware of the feelings that Maradona continues to inspire, even among his title-winning side, saying: "These fans saw Diego Armando Maradona play and maybe his protection is also felt in this success."

Naples revels in victory hangover

AFP, Naples

Naples woke up Friday still giddy with joy after a night spent celebrating Napoli's first Serie A title in 33 years, a party marred, however, by one death and hundreds of injuries.

"It was the most beautiful night," enthused Francesca Raucci, who was taking her son to school in the southern Italian city after getting to bed at 4:00 am.

"It was a unique emotion, there was a flood of people, they were hugging each other, dancing."

Throughout the night, Naples' narrow streets were filled with the sounds of cheering, chants, firecrackers and flares, cars and scooters honking their horns, their passengers waving flags and banners.

Napoli's 1-1 draw at Udinese Thursday evening had secured the Scudetto for Luciano Spalletti's side, their first since the era of Diego Maradona, who led the team to victory in 1987 and 1990.

Fans had prepared for weeks to celebrate, as Napoli built up an increasingly unbeatable lead against nearest-placed rivals Lazio.

Blue flags and bunting adorned every possible surface of the city centre, as did images of Maradona and star striker Victor Osimhen, whose goal on Thursday night pushed southern Italy's biggest club over the line.

Emanuele Canzano, 42, was among those who did not get much sleep, but on Friday morning set off for work happily in his Napoli jersey.

His newborn son also went to sleep in Napoli pyjamas.

"We waited 33 years, he only waited ten days!" Canzano said, laughing.

Garbage collectors were busy cleaning up debris Friday morning, and one street vendor in a cowboy hat continued

to try to drum up business, shouting "Flags, jerseys, scarves -- Go Napoli!"

Celebrations were marred by the death of a 26-year-old man from gunshot wounds following an incident in which three other people were hurt.

But it was not immediately clear if the shooting was linked to the celebrations, with news reports suggesting the victim was linked to a local mafia clan.

A total of 203 people were treated in the city's hospitals overnight, according to health authorities, 22 of them seriously.

There were knife wounds, people injured by firecrackers or suffering from smoke inhalation, and one cocaine overdose.

King Diego Napoli's victory made the front pages of all Italy's major newspapers Friday, while the local Il Mattino ran a bumper special edition under the headline: "Naples Sings".

"Under the sign of King Diego" read another of its headlines, demonstrating the enduring love for the Argentine great in this city.

Maradona, who died in 2020 at age 60, led Napoli to their first two titles earning the eternal adoration of the club's fans.

Many of those celebrating -- including coach Spalletti -- described how Maradona was watching over the team.

The celebrations are set to run into the weekend, at least until their next home fixture against Fiorentina on Sunday evening.

Still euphoric after Thursday's celebrations, local Giuseppe Posticione, 46, was headed to work amid streets littered with bottles and other reminders of the party.

"After 33 years it was magnificent," he said of the victory. "Sunday at the stadium will be great, and we'll be there."



Osasuna seek first trophy against mighty Real

AGENCIES

The romance of the Cup heads to Seville on Saturday when Osasuna, who have never won a major trophy in their 103-year history, look to break their duck in the Copa del Rey final against the mighty Real Madrid, who have won them all several times over.

Real Madrid are hunting down their 20th Copa del Rey in their 40th final, albeit their first in a decade since 2014's Clasico triumph under Carlo Ancelotti.

The Copa del Rey was Ancelotti's first trophy with Real Madrid. There's a chance it might be his last too, with Los Blancos in all likelihood conceding the La Liga title to arch-rivals Barcelona.

Real Madrid have actually now lost four of their last eight league games during a disappointing run, making it all the more important for Ancelotti and his side to gain momentum through confirming their season's first silverware tonight and taking the momentum to next week's Champions League semifinal first leg against



Manchester City.

However, by contrast, the final mean much more to Osasuna than it would mean to Real -- at least that's what Osasuna's sporting director Braulio Vazquez thinks.

"For Madrid, it's another final of so many, but for us, it's 'the' final," Braulio told a news conference Wednesday.

"There's excitement and nerves. We will enjoy it but we're also going to

compete.

"What we'll live through we will never forget but we're not just going there to have beers on the Guadalquivir (river)."

Osasuna have only reached the Spanish Cup final once in their history, in 2005 when they lost to Real Betis in extra-time. Their trophy cabinet only contains a handful of second and third division titles.

Real Madrid will again definitely be without the services of Ferland Mendy due to a calf problem, but the France international is the team's only confirmed absentee at this stage.

David Alaba and Luka Modric are both battling to recover from hamstring problems in time for the match, but it seems likely that the pair will be on the bench if they manage to make the squad.

Karim Benzema was rested against Real Sociedad and will be available to return here, while Vinicius Junior and Eduardo Camavinga will also be back after serving suspensions last time out.



Number one ODI batter Babar Azam reached yet another milestone as he became the fastest to 5000 runs in the format during his 117-ball 107 -- the Pakistan skipper's 18th century -- in the fourth match of their five-match ODI series against New Zealand in Karachi on Friday. Azam, who reached the landmark figure in his 97th innings in 99 ODIs, improved on former South Africa batter Hashim Amla's feat of reaching the milestone in 101 innings from 104 matches. PHOTO: AFP



SINGLE EXCHANGE RATE Fitch keeping tabs on its rollout

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The central bank's planned move to a single, more market-determined, exchange rate would be central towards stabilising the precarious foreign exchange reserves and reducing external imbalances, said global ratings agency Fitch yesterday.

"Bangladesh's external finances, particularly foreign-exchange reserves, have been under pressure since early 2022," said Fitch's report titled "Bangladesh: Twin Deficit Pressures to Ease".

While the reserves now are roughly around pre-Covid levels, they are lower as a percentage of current account payments, it said.

"Current account pressures have eased somewhat recently, due to resilient exports, moderation in commodity prices and lower imports on account of various import control measures. We expect the current account deficit to remain well below the average for 2021 and 2022 of 3.2 percent of GDP."

However, upside pressure on the current account deficit is likely to remain as import restrictions are lifted gradually and global uncertainties could weigh on export performance.

"The planned move to a single, more market-determined, exchange rate would likely to be central towards stabilising the foreign exchange reserves and reducing external imbalances," said the report, which was categorised a 'non-rating action commentary'.

With the view to safeguarding the strained dollar stockpile, the Bangladesh Bank introduced two exchange rates: one for export proceeds and remittances and another for import payments.

For exporters and remitters, the exchange rate is Tk 104.5 per dollar. Importers buy greenbacks based on the weighted average exchange rate plus Tk 1. The average rate is derived from the rates paid to exporters and exchange houses.

Thanks to this multiple exchange rate system, there has been a diversion of dollars to the illegal channels, with the official reserves continuing to drain.

As of May 2, official gross reserves stood at \$30.99 billion, down 29.7 percent from a year earlier, according to BB's latest published data.

In the past year, the taka depreciated 23.7 percent against the dollar.

Subsequently, the government committed to adopting a market-determined exchange rate for all foreign exchange transactions by June as part of the International Monetary Fund's \$4.7 billion loan programme.

This is one of the eight reform actions the government has pledged to take before the IMF staff mission sits down to review the programme and take a call on whether to authorise the next instalment of the loan.

Risks of a further deterioration in credit metrics remain "significant", but the implementation of the IMF programme and reforms should help alleviate pressures under Fitch Ratings' baseline, the report said.

Bangladesh's external debt repayment profile remains manageable, it said, adding that the government debt-GDP ratio will stabilise.

Earlier on September 29 last year, Fitch continued with its 'BB-' rating with a 'Stable' outlook for Bangladesh despite heightened external and macro challenges. There has been no rating update since.

Fitch's global peer Moody's on December 9 placed Bangladesh's long-held credit rating of Ba3 on review for downgrade.

ROOPPUR PLANT Dhaka, Moscow sign nuclear fuel deal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and Russia yesterday signed a protocol that clears the way for procurement of nuclear fuel for the first unit of the Rooppur nuclear power plant.

The nuclear fuel will be supplied by global market leader TVEL Fuel Company, a subsidiary of Russian state-owned nuclear power conglomerate Rosatom.

The first shipment from TVEL, which controls 38 percent of the world's uranium conversion and 46 percent of uranium enrichment capacity, is expected to arrive in October.

Another subsidiary of Rosatom JSC Nauchno-Issledovatel'skiy i Konstruktorskiy Institut Montazhnoy Tekhnologii Atomstroy (NIKIMT) is the engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contractor for nuclear power plant.

On April 12, the US Treasury and State departments imposed sanctions on NIKIMT along with four entities and one individual that are part of Rosatom.

The sanctions come after documents showed that Rosatom has been

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Hand fans made from palm leaves are being loaded on to rickshaw vans in front of the Curzon Hall of Dhaka University yesterday. The hand fans, which are now rare in the country, would be sold to wholesalers for Tk 20 each.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Nobody responsible for BM Depot blast!

Says police report, finds no negligence of 8 accused depot officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police have found no negligence on the part of the eight BM Depot officials who were accused in a case filed over the deadly explosion and fire at the depot in Chattogram's Sitakunda on June 4 last year.

Fifty-one people were killed and 250 others injured in the incident.

In the final report of the case, police said the accused were not responsible for the blast and it was not an act of sabotage, but an accident, SM Shafiullah, superintendent of Chattogram police, told The Daily Star.

DB Inspector Mostaq Ahmed Chowdhury, also the investigation officer of the case, submitted the report to the general recording officer of the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court of Chattogram on Wednesday, but the development came to light yesterday.

The eight accused are Nurul Akter, deputy general manager (operations); Khaledur Rahman, manager (admin); Abbas Ullah, assistant admin officer; Nasir Uddin, senior executive (admin and complaints); Abdul Aziz, assistant manager (inland container depot); Saidul Islam, in-charge (container freight station); Nazrul Islam, assistant depo in-charge; and

Nazmul Akter Khan, deputy general manager (sales and marketing).

On June 8 last year, Ashraf Siddique, sub-inspector of Sitakunda Model Police Station, filed the case accusing them of negligence. The name of BM depot's owner was not included in the case.

SP Shafiullah said, "Police submitted the report to the

"We have not found any criminal offence or ill motive."

In the case statement, police said the deaths and casualties were due to the fire and explosion that happened because the accused stored hazardous chemicals in the depot without taking the necessary precautionary steps.

Meanwhile, a probe committee,



court saying that it [the case] was a mistake of fact. During the investigation, we found that the eight officials were not responsible for the incident. They did not show any negligence to their duties. It was an accident.

led by Chattogram Additional Commissioner Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, had made 20 recommendations to avoid recurrence of any such incident in its report submitted on July 6 last year.

Historian claims to have located 'Mona Lisa' bridge

CNN ONLINE



Leonardo Da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" is one of the best-known artworks in the world, famous for its beauty as well as the mystery surrounding the identity of the model and the location painted behind her.

A source of debate for centuries, the village of Ponte Buriano, a suburb of Arezzo in the Tuscany region of Italy, is so convinced the bridge behind Mona Lisa is the Ponte Buriano that they've made it a key feature of their local tourism campaign, even laying claim to the bridge on the village's welcome sign.

But now, historian Silvano Vinceti says that the bridge behind Mona Lisa is actually the Romito Bridge in the nearby Tuscan town of Laterina.

"The distinctive form of the Arno [River] along that stretch of territory corresponds to what Leonardo portrayed in the landscape to the left of the woman depicted in the famous painting," Vinceti said at a media conference at the Foreign Press Association in Rome on Wednesday.

Vinceti also made a virtual reconstruction of the bridge to show the similarities, and drew on documents from the state archives in Florence.

The "Mona Lisa" was painted in the early 16th century. Between 1501 and 1503 Da Vinci lived with Cardinal Cesare Borgia near Laterina, Vinceti found. The bridge was in use and had four arches -- as depicted in the artwork.

On the other hand, the Buriano bridge has six arches, Vinceti said, and Ponte Bobbio, a bridge in Piacenza that some say features in the painting, has more than six arches.

COVID PANDEMIC WHO declares end to global emergency

REUTERS, London

Covid-19 no longer represents a global health emergency, the World Health Organization said yesterday, a major step towards the end of the pandemic that has killed more than 6.9 million people, disrupted the global economy and ravaged communities.

The WHO's Emergency Committee met on Thursday and recommended the UN agency declare an end to the public health emergency of international concern, which has been in place for over three years.

"It is therefore with great hope that I declare Covid-19 over as a global health emergency," said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, adding the end of the emergency did not mean Covid was over as a global health threat.

The WHO's emergency committee first declared that Covid represented its highest level of alert more than three years ago, on January 30 2020. The status helps focus international attention on a health threat, as well as bolstering collaboration on vaccines and treatments.



Ignoring risks, a woman sits close to rail lines in the capital's Malibagh and sorts out onions. The photo was taken at the makeshift kitchen market near the rail lines yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



A boy collecting fare from leguna passengers.

PHOTO: AHMAD ISTIAK

Childhood trapped in ‘leguna’

Over a hundred children working as human haulier helpers or drivers to support their families

Prior to Covid-19, there was an Out-of-School Children Education Programme, run by the non-formal education bureau, for children aged 9-14, who are most likely to drop out. The programme can be utilised to bring back most of the children who have left school during the pandemic period.

AHMAD ISTIAK

“This is Mohammadpur, get off,” a child yelled out to the passengers of a leguna, otherwise known as human hauliers, which had reached the area as early as 7:00am.

Dressed in drab clothes, evidently tired and overworked, the 12-year-old still had the innocence of his age etched all over his face.

He then called out, “Next stop, Gabtoli! Gabtoli!”

When he was asked about his work schedule, the child said he remains on duty from 6:00am to 10:00pm, with only 20-minute breaks for lunch and dinner. The driver of the leguna, of which Abbas is a helper, helps cover the cost of his meals.

Despite the harsh realities of life that he is forced to face regularly, the child could not stop smiling when spoken to.

On good days, his earning varies between Tk 300 and Tk 400. Anything extra is taken by the driver.



This 16-year-old also works as a leguna driver.

leguna helpers.

According to the Children’s Act 2013, working as a driver’s assistant is identified as hazardous for those under 18 years of age. The labour and employment ministry on its official website has a list of jobs considered extremely hazardous for children. In it, “driver’s assistant” or helper was one.

Despite these regulations, traffic police remain silent and do not take any action due to humanitarian reasons.

Speaking to this correspondent, an on-duty traffic sergeant in the Mohammadpur-Beribandh area, preferring anonymity, said, “If we stop them [from working], their families will starve since they depend on their earnings.”



A leguna stand in Jatrabari where many children work as helpers or drivers.

One of the reasons the number of children working as leguna helpers had increased was the Covid-19 pandemic.

During a recent visit to the leguna routes, it was found that the majority of children working are those who were compelled to discontinue their education during the Covid-19 period.

Previously a madrasa student, Siam, 16, now works as a helper on the Jatrabari-Postogola leguna route.

Around 40 more – all of whom had to drop out of school for the pandemic’s impact on their families’ financial situation – work alongside.

A Unicef and Unesco report, titled “Situation Analysis on the Effects and Responses to Covid-19 on the Education Sector in Asia”, published in October 2021, revealed that pandemic-induced school closures since early 2020 affected the education of 37 million children in Bangladesh.

In contrast, the Annual Primary School Census (APSC) 2021, prepared by the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), disclosed that the number of students dropped from 21,551,691 in 2020 to 20,090,057 in 2021 – meaning there was a 1,461,634 fall.

Shah Rezwan Hayat, director general of DPE, said, “DPE is working towards reintegrating these children back into school by increasing scholarships and the availability of non-formal education, and introducing half-day meals in primary schools from this October.”

This correspondent also found that older children were working as drivers. Though the National Transport Act stipulates that professional drivers must be at least 21 years old, there is little to no practical enforcement of this rule.



This 12-year-old works as a helper on Mohammadpur-Gabtoli route.

Speaking to some of the drivers, it was learnt that owners usually benefit from hiring children as helpers as it is cheaper than hiring adult helpers, and children can also work for longer hours.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Speaking to The Daily Star, Prof M Wahiduzzaman of Dhaka University’s Institute of Education and Research said there was an urgent need to bring children involved in labour back to mainstream education.

“Prior to Covid-19, there was an Out-of-School Children Education Programme, run by the non-formal education bureau, for children aged 9-14, who are most likely to drop out. The programme can be utilised to bring back most of the children who have left school during the pandemic period.

“Furthermore, providing vocational training and one-time financial assistance for education security, along with raising awareness among families and implementing these solutions as quickly as possible, can bring a considerable portion of the children back to the mainstream education system.”

Rasheda K Chowdhury, executive director for the Campaign for Popular Education, echoed the same and urged for the proper implementation of the government’s non-formal education programme.

“Due to severely limited information, it’s unclear how many children are involved in child labour. Thus, the government must ensure that all dropped-out children are included in the non-formal education system,” she said.

THE ROUTES WITH MOST CHILDREN

The Mohammadpur area of the capital

has four leguna routes – Mohammadpur-Farmgate, Mohammadpur-Shyamoli, Dhaka University-Shyamoli, and Mohammadpur-Mohakhali.

Shockingly, one-third of the 125 helpers working on these routes are children who do not have access to education.

The Jatrabari area has over 10 operational leguna routes – the highest in the capital.

The Jurain and Abdullahpur routes have 70 legunas, with at least 40 child labourers, operating almost 23 hours a day.

There is no specific information on the number of children working as helpers on legunas in different areas of the capital.

However, the Bangladesh Passenger Welfare Association conducted a survey in 2016 which revealed that 35 percent of the labourers on 85 Leguna routes in Dhaka were children.

Its secretary general Mozammel Haque Chowdhury said, “The number has certainly increased since then.”

Delwar Hossein Chunnu, a member of Dhaka Metropolitan Human Haulier Owners Association, said children continue to work on legunas, despite efforts to stop child labour as they have no other means of earning a living and their families depend on them.

He suggested the government provides alternative opportunities for these children.

EFFORTS STILL ON

Due to the strict implementation of the Children Act 2013, child labour has become an issue of the past on several leguna routes in Dhaka.

The Daily Star’s investigation found that no children are working on the Nilkhet-Chawk Bazar, Nilkhet-Gulistan, Nilkhet-Section, and Nilkhet-Farmgate routes.

Saiful Islam, a leguna driver on one of these routes, said they used to employ child helpers but had to stop due to strict enforcement of the law by the administration.

Similarly, no children are working in Gulistan, which has the largest leguna route. However, no helpers are employed there for cost-cutting purposes.

Mohammad Mujibur Rahman, additional commissioner (traffic) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, admitted that due to the abundance of leguna routes in Dhaka, they have been unable to entirely eliminate child labour in the sector.

“Nonetheless, we have managed to stop it in some routes by handing punishment to owners and drivers who employ children. Moreover, we are collaborating with various organisations to raise awareness,” he added.

(The names of the children have been changed and their faces in the pictures blurred to protect their privacy.)

Translated by Nilima Jahan, staff reporter, The Daily Star

Due to severely limited information, it’s unclear how many children are involved in child labour. Thus, the government must ensure that all dropped-out children are included in the non-formal education system.



Many start working as leguna helpers at an early age.

OPINION

So, ChatGPT can write? Ahem!

Writers are genre sticklers. Ernest Hemingway, for example, had nothing to do with science fiction and philosophy. Steven Pinker has nothing to do with novels and poetry. No writer is ambidextrous. ChatGPT is. As such, it re-defines writing built on the foundational flaw that humans can write anything, anytime.

MOHAMMAD SHAMSUZZAMAN

The correlation between writing and technology is as old as writing, for writing is technology. Technological advances such as papyrus, the printing press, the mechanical pencil, the fountain pen, and the typewriter have complemented writing. Writing and technology are not exclusive. Despite being a technology, writing remains manual and human. Writing is labour, in which the body and the brain participate. Likewise, composition professional Donald Murray claims that writing is an intellectual activity carried out in an emotional environment. Writing, then, presupposes both cognition and affect that humans embody. Technologies that underpin writing embrace these dimensions of writing. ChatGPT (Generative Pre-Trained Transformers) does not. Therefore, a conflict between writing and technology has ensued worldwide, when OpenAI released ChatGPT this past November.

While writing and technology are not exclusive, ChatGPT is. It's a predatory technology that threatens to subvert writing. It doesn't ease writing as all technologies do; it, instead, writes itself. And it promises to write everything. Writers, by contrast, are limited by their interests and expertise. A writer doesn't—and can't write everything. Writers are genre sticklers. Ernest Hemingway, for example, had nothing to do with science fiction and philosophy. Steven Pinker has nothing to do with novels and poetry. No writer is ambidextrous. ChatGPT is. As such, it re-defines writing built on the foundational flaw that humans can write anything, anytime. And because ChatGPT is a model (i.e., Large Language Model, LLM) based on algorithms, it's science. Disregarding it on the surface seems to be doltish. Nevertheless, Noam Chomsky, Ian Roberts, and Jeffrey Watumull regard ChatGPT as "faux science" in their pitch, "The False Promise of ChatGPT," in *The New York Times*.

It is indeed so given that the science of writing has a neurobiological dimension that ChatGPT disregards. Writing is an adult engagement. Research in neuroscience establishes that the human brain is not adult enough until the second decade of our life, when it completes neural wiring. Even when the brain is developed, different activities are undertaken by either of the brain's two hemispheres—maths for the left hemisphere, for example. Gabrielle Rico claims in *Writing the Natural Way* (first published 1983) that writing is a unique activity that must engage both the hemispheres of the human brain. Writing that endures combines both the critical intelligence of the left



hemisphere and the creative excellence of the right hemisphere. Influential composition professional Peter Elbow also claims that excellent writing utilises a synergy between first-order thinking (i.e., intuitive, creative) and second-order thinking (conscious, directed, controlled). Because these attributes of writing are neurobiologically determined and specific to adults, everyone is not meant to produce compact and compelling prose. With ChatGPT, anyone who writes a prompt, writes. This is zany!

That's because writing presupposes pre-writing. It is one of the most critical phases of writing (the other two are: writing and rewriting), which consumes about 85 percent of our time and energy in a writing task, as composition professional Donald Murray claims. Pre-writing involves researching, brainstorming, consulting sources, and sequencing the various stages of writing. The physical act of writing flows from a frame of mind, which swings between procrastination and creative tensions during pre-writing. Skipping pre-writing warrants re-defining writing, because pre-writing situates writing in the cognitive and emotional meshwork that humans are endowed with. Pre-writing is the soul of writing. The version of writing that ChatGPT spits out emerges independent of it. It writes instantly, uninterrupted. It is unfamiliar with the "wise passiveness" that William Wordsworth urges in his poem, *Expostulation and Reply* (written between October 1798 and February 1799). Over his desk, likewise, Franz Kafka had one word, "Wait." That's what all writers do. ChatGPT doesn't! So, it doesn't write. It, instead, manufactures writing.

As a consequence, ChatGPT is a

scourge to have around. It denigrates the discipline of composition studies, for it's a clear case of disciplinary trespassing. Composition studies is an independent discipline with intellectual and pedagogical agendas. Its knowledge base is expansive, as it heavily draws from the rhetorical traditions of ancient Greece. Composition professionals are specialised scholars. They know the patois of their guild. They know that the best-kept secret for the discipline doesn't lie in cracking some engineering codes. Writing, rather, is problem-solving through a sense of judgement mediated by language. Statisticising writing as an informed guesswork—as ChatGPT does—is insular and romantic. The architects of ChatGPT are criminally innocent about the options and restrictions of writing. ChatGPT as such is a wrong thing coming from the wrong people exploited by the wrong people. It's an example of technological turpitude, which we all are victims of these days. ChatGPT threatens to re-define writing, which is the work of "a noiseless, patient spider," as Walt Whitman implicitly claims in his titular poem. ChatGPT begins the dark dawn of writing with serious ethical and intellectual consequences in the days ahead.

Matthew Kirschenbaum, in his pitch, "Prepare for the Textpocalypse" in *The Atlantic*, apprehends that we might quickly find ourselves facing a textpocalypse, where machine-written language becomes the norm and human-written prose the exception. Because machines surpass humans in speed and productivity, we may soon be swept away by a tsunami of stilted and trite text. Consequently, language degenerates. Thinking diminishes. Civic discourse coarsens. Aesthetics covers

to conveniences. Human agency and intent recede. What emerges under such a circumstance is not writing whatsoever. It's, instead, a synthetic patchwork that ChatGPT does. Writers are pack rats, who know, understand, and contemplate "the best that has been thought and said," as Matthew Arnold suggests in "Culture and Anarchy" (1869), published in the *Cornhill Magazine*. And authentic writers write with soul, as Rachel Toor claims in her essay "Writing with Soul," in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. ChatGPT can't write with soul, for it doesn't have sentence. When, then, ChatGPT goes mainstream, and machine-generated prose metastasizes further, we will hardly believe anything we would read on or off line. That portends an ethical and a human crisis.

Despite these essential shortcomings, how does ChatGPT gain ground in writing? Writing is not glib scripting. Writing is breathing life into words generating taut prose that informs, inspires, and enlightens. While the basic tool of a writer's trade is words, a writer is not a mere wordsmith. Writers are deep thinkers, extensive readers, and compulsive editors of their writing. These attributes that underpin writing are not natural. These are habitual. Most people do not know about the habits writers cultivate. Neither do they want to form the habits themselves, because it requires an unwavering commitment to investing time and energy to master the craft of writing. As such, our academic or intellectual development is often not commensurate with the development of writing skill. Our vulnerability with writing continues to compound. The architects of ChatGPT used this fault line to come up with the kitschy attempt to take the sting out of writing. They can't do so, because writing

is "back-breaking, mind-breaking work," as Mark Edmundson claims in *Why Write?* (Bloomsbury USA, 2016). ChatGPT is vulnerability and ignorance commodified. If we would collectively resist a vaccine invented by a group of historians to deal with a fatal virus causing a pandemic, why won't we resist a cure all writing app from a group of technology boffins from Silicon Valley? There's no correlation between expertise and invention here. The connection, therefore, between ChatGPT and writing is apocryphal.

So, it's a sobering time for writers and writing professionals. Written words continue to mean less and less these days, for we're becoming a culture of images. Because we can show and see almost everything, we no longer have to use words to know about the world. An author is no longer an authority, because she is not rare and exceptional. On the internet, everyone is a scribe. Consequently, the gap between writing and typing is already significantly reduced. With ChatGPT around, the gap between writing and typing diminishes further. As it turns out, everyone is a writer, and everything is writing. That's lunatic, toxic thinking. ChatGPT as such unleashes unqualified violence against writing and writers. Writers and writing professionals are artists, who are pushed, or who push themselves, to a time of apprehension and uncertainty. Toni Morrison avers in her essay, "No Place for Self-Pity, No Room for Fear," (2015) in *The Nation*, that artists must not choose to remain silent in times of dread. She further claims, "There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal." Are we speaking and writing enough contra ChatGPT to heal our civilisation that it threatens to disrupt?

I wish we did! Technology is so widespread these days that we always see what technology has done to our civilisation. Hardly do we think about what technology has undone already. Physicist Robert Oppenheimer used to lament that he had blood on his hands because of his involvement with the Manhattan Project, leading to the development of the atom bomb. The world has never been the same ever since. What the atom bomb is to the world is ChatGPT to writing. Our relationship with writing will never again be the same. Trust me. I'm a composition professional. I know what I am talking about.

Mohammad Shamsuzzaman is an associate professor at the Department of English and Modern Languages, North South University, Bangladesh.

CREATIVE NONFICTION

An odd memory in Dhaka city

NOUSHIN NURI

The only thing I like about this city is the thought of leaving it. And I was leaving it finally, after one and a half months, my longest stretch of stay in the last three years. Juggling my luggage with one hand and my phone with the other to get Google Maps directions while I balance myself on the rickshaw racing through bumpy Dhaka roads—it is a metaphor that sums up my life in this city.

It was 11:15 PM at night, and the roads were empty.

I was surprised, pleasantly, to see my favourite tea stall open at this hour. Without stopping the rickshaw, I halted right in front of Shohagh bus counter after a fierce ride through the wrong side of the road. I suppose that's what Dhaka is—a city of rule breakers.

I got a print of my e-ticket and headed into the waiting room only to experience the dearth of decency in this city's men. One of the passengers, oblivious to the possibility that someone might be trying to reach the empty seats to his right, stretched his legs and blocked my way as if the way forward were his kingdom. I heard an "Excuse me" from behind and realised that while recounting the infinitude of Dhaka's inconveniences, I too was adding to it by blocking someone else's way. It was time to retire to one of the seats.

I got up and headed out after a while, and my memory dug out the story of how my dad's bag had gotten stolen in a bus counter once.

It was yet to dawn when my dad, a young doctor at the time, reached Dhaka for a professional exam. He was alone, and the attention-sucking smartphone hadn't yet been invented. When another man, possibly a fellow passenger, struck up a conversation, Baba was happily engaged until the sun rose and it was time for him to leave the counter. Surely, he could ask the amiable stranger to look after his luggage for a few minutes—a bag full of his clothes, books, and important documents like his admit card.



DESIGN: SARAH ANJUM BARI

When he returned, the man and the bag both were gone.

I didn't ask anyone to look after my bag when leaving the bus. I didn't want the inconvenience of walking around with luggage either. It was 11:39 PM and my bus was scheduled to leave in six minutes. Factoring in the usual delay, I had around 10 minutes in my mind. Dragging a bag along would have slowed me down. I left it there and hastened my steps.

I crossed the road, walked ahead, then turned left. The yellow lights smiled welcomingly against the night backdrop. A sign became clearer: "Ekhane khati gorur dudher cha pawa jay". Not everything about this city is bad, I thought. And I wanted a sip of goodness before I left.

The first time I stumbled upon this shop, I was in a confused state; left

befuddled by Google Maps' directions. It had dragged me into a constricted back alley in Kalabagan and then kept asking me to step into someone's private property, while my intended destination was a commercial building by the main road. I was forced to do away with Maps and reverse my way out of the alley. That's when, to my right, I saw milk being stirred in a half-moon korai. My heart had already started swimming in it. Dhaka street food has taught me better than to go by the look of things. But I ordered a cup nonetheless. It was winter, and the smoke wafting from the clay cups into the post-Maghrib fog wouldn't let me down even if the taste of the tea did.

One sip was enough to wash down all my scepticism. Ever since then, I have been coming here whenever I have the

luxury of time on my fortnightly visits back home to Chattogram.

The shopkeeper smiles with recognition and apology when I walk in this time. The thick black iron pot that slowly sediments malai is in its usual place. But the pot is empty and the low flame extinguished. They don't make tea this late at night. I start walking back to the bus.

I keep returning to this city out of obligation. But this tea might make me voluntarily come to Dhaka someday. My thoughts don't keep up with my footsteps.

I'm back at the counter and no one has stolen my bag.

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POETRY

The Mandalorian

DEBPROSHAD HALDER

A Mando,
-Weapons, a part of religion to him-
The holy Sabbath, a workless drudgery,
A droid like programmed manacle
Needing job, bounty hunting,
A comet revolving across the galaxies;
The armored mercenary, as he pierces through
The Homeric world of Iliad,
An Achilles, the uncompromised warlord,
How doleful he razed against Agamemnon for bounty!
The heart, wandering across the Sub-Sahara,
Over the mountain top, floating through
Thick and thin, rests at razor's edge.
Home? It is where the heart is!
What a bliss, that a cactus
Is drenched by the drippings from heaven,
An unparalleled sentiment in deserts!
The Mando, having more pressing matters
To protect the kid, no bounty, no task ordained
To him. He loves its cooing, its soft forehead,
Appealing spell cast by the marveled eyes.
Who dares to let them apart, as he quested
The burden to carry?
A father-the sphinx, embryonic off the ashes!
The beat accompanying the heart,
In its systolic and diastolic pressure,
The Echo following Narcissus
Repeating! Repeating! Repeating with the last words!

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CRISIS ENGULFING RIVERS OF SOUTH

To protect croplands from saline water, a 4,800km embankment was built between 1961 and 1971 in the country's southern coastal area. However, the dyke impedes the natural flow of water to many tributaries of rivers and canals. Silt has started accumulating in the rivers. As a result, the rivers are losing navigability. For this, the life of humans and other organisms in the area have changed drastically. According to the Water Development Board, the embankment had serious consequences on some 50 rivers over the last two decades. The Kumar, the Nabaganga, the Chitra, the Bhairab, and the Kapatakkhya are some of the worst affected rivers. The photos were taken in Khulna, Jashore and Satkhira recently.

PHOTOS: HABIBUR RAHMAN





The shoes that KILLED FOOTBALL

In a tell-all interview back in 2027, the football boss said that he wanted to make football elite, because that is the only way standards would be raised.

CLUELESSPONDENT, *from the future*

The month of May, 2077.

The BFFE (Best Friends Forever and Ever) are holding a grand ceremony to celebrate 50 years of the successful eradication of any kind of football-related activities in the country.

For decades at the BFFE headquarters, informally known as Bluffufo, a celebration has been taking place this time of the year.

May marks the pivotal month when, 54 years prior, BFFE ensured that half the sports journalists could not cover football any longer. It stemmed from one classist "inside joke" from the then and the now president of the football board, Don Vito Salamanca.

This reporter -- who travelled through time as part of an inter-temporal investigation to find out what drove a board to declare war on the very sport they were assigned to steer to growth -- first learned upon arrival that no one could recall exactly when the term "Bluffufo" was coined.

Rumours had it that a certain leading spyware company of the 2020s hacked the BFFE website and replaced its name in an act of protest, saying Salamanca was hampering their business by leaking sensitive content himself.

The rumour refers back to when the BFFE chief was overheard demanding that sports journalists must carry a photo of their fathers

wearing shoes to secure entry to the BFFE House.

It first drew ire from people from all walks of life, and some naive folks even thought that was to be the last straw for Salamanca but the reality was different.

The remaining half of the journalists, who had the required photos, faced further challenges as Salamanca demanded pictures with their fathers wearing "branded shoes", and DNA results showing Caucasian ancestry.

Once sports journalists were eliminated, Salamanca's elitist attitude did not spare the footballers as they too were subject to the demands, and by May 2077, had stopped playing the game altogether. The spectators were gone before any of this happened.

In a tell-all interview back in 2027, the football boss said that he wanted to make football elite, because that is the only way standards would be raised.

Fast forward to 2077, and it is impossible to find any sports reporter who once covered football or knew anyone who admitted to doing so.

Asked, a sports journalist who covers Crazeball -- a hybrid of cricket and baseball, the most popular game here -- said football is a taboo topic in this part of the world, mainly because it triggers PTSD in people.

During the 50-year-celebration, this reporter discovered a bizarre costume party

going on, where BFFE officials were dressed in red and white -- reminiscent of the uniform worn by the East India Company.

Moreover, the hosts were seen sipping on this particular drink. It was learned that the so-called beverage, considered sacred at BFFE, was made by soaking the boots and socks of their beloved colonial masters for at least 12 years.

Football is not completely dead, though. A few BFFE officials, who requested several times that their names be mentioned, told this reporter that they have been taking the video game industry quite seriously for a while now and expected more funding from FIFA, EA Sports, PlayStation et al in future.

They also mentioned that spreading the FIFA game to the grassroots is their primary goal, following which everyone laughed hysterically and made a toast.

Soon Salamanca, still BFFE president somehow, tuned in via a hologram from an undisclosed location, somewhere in Europe.

Salamanca was accompanied by his personal lawyer and psychologist. He began his speech, saying, "We must not let every Abul, Mokbul and Emily play the football video game; only the ones whose great-great grandparents had tickets, passports, etc. to show that they had travelled to England can play. It should be made mandatory, alright?"

Farmers confused by helmet-wearing seasonal farmers

MAHBUB ALAM MUNNA

Chapasthan has employed student leaders of universities and colleges, especially those who wear helmets regardless of whether they have bikes to boost agriculture.

Not only did their addition to the paddy fields during harvesting season change the profile of agriculture, it changed their social media profile pictures too.

Bhair Er Chotobhai, a first-year university student, recently added a new profile picture where he was seen standing with shears in hand right in the middle of a paddy field, with disturbed farmers in the corner of the frame.

When asked whether he abandoned his studies for farming, Bhair Er Chotobhai said, after taking his helmet off, "No, not yet. We are just helping our helpless farmers. I doubt whether they could take their crops home if we didn't come forward to help them."

The leader of students, Aadu Bhair, whose age implies that he is more an uncle than a brother, has asked everyone not to be confused by the helmets of his soldiers.

Bhair Er Chotobon, another dedicated soul who prefers uttering slogans to studying, was caught reaping crops whimsically, apparently to draw the attention of the photographers as she stopped doing so as soon as the photographers left.

When asked what exactly brought her out underneath the scorching sun instead of studying in an air-conditioned room, Bhair Er Chotobon said, "Well, no other work can be as great as helping our farmers!"

But the farmers continue to be baffled by this practice. Anxiety grips them as their crops get smashed by the unwanted parade of helpers.

The leader of students, Aadu Bhair, whose age implies that he is more an uncle than a brother, has asked everyone not to be confused by the helmets of his soldiers.

"Look, we are witnessing the hottest summer of the last few decades. Our boys are using helmets



PHOTO: FREEPIK.COM

while helping you in the paddy fields just to save them from the scorching sun. Neither they nor their helmets pose any threat, especially for farmers," Aadu Bhair said loudly in front of the crowd, of which 70 percent were media people, 20 percent local inhabitants and 10 percent farmers.

Farmers, on the other hand, remained disrupted as they couldn't accept "the new farmers" on their fields. They remained clueless about what exactly compelled these bikers to leave the roads and join farmers in the fields.

When asked how they were feeling as they didn't have to do the toil, Tausif, the lead farmer, said, "Have you really been present here since morning? How will I fix my spoiled crops, smashed by the helpers? It actually doubles my work. We need more farmers, not bikers who act like farmers."

Living in a loving society

NAZIBA BASHER

We are lucky to be growing up in a society so caring and loving.

Through a series of questions, this society shows its undying affection for all its members.

These very thoughtful questions are asked from the heart, with the need to make the person questioned feel important and loved (read: humiliated and traumatised).

One of the very first questions a Bangalee, anywhere in the world, will ask at the very first meeting is "Desh er bari kothay (which district are you from)?"

This is an all-important question, because each district has a distinct set of characteristics irrevocably associated with the locals.

So, when they find out you are from Noakhali, whether they ever meet you again or not, they will know to keep dinner invitations short. If, say, you are from Barishal, in the two minutes that you spend with this caring Bangalee questioner, you will come off as someone with anger issues, and just a bad person overall.

If you are from Cumilla, you are supposedly selfish. If from Chattogram, you are all things terrifying.

With this particular information, it is easy for society to analyse and dissect your character to judge you better to know precisely how much and what kind of importance and love to give you.

Your "desh er bari" dictates who and how you are -- regardless of your manners, your morals, or your charming smile.

The next question on the list, more often than not, is "Matrik/inter kon shale (When did you sit for SSC/HSC exams)?"

This is society's caring, tactful way of finding out your age.

However, questions following this one will include your grades, your future plans, your subject of interest and whether or not you are getting a Master's degree and a PhD.

Again, all these matters matter very much because without answers to these very crucial questions, one cannot find enough material with which to judge you, very lovingly of course.

Another thoughtful question



parents face is "Bachchar result ki (What is your child's exam results)?"

Because who doesn't love watching parents crumble in embarrassment if by any chance there is a child who did not get to flash the infamous V sign this year?

Whether they have passed the exams or not is the least of their concerns. They have to know the exact numbers, for how else can they compare your child with theirs and everyone else's?

Because society has taken it upon itself to make sure you know whether or not your child is stupid -- out of sheer love and concern.

But society reserves the most incisive inquiries for when you enter adulthood.

While you are already conflicted regarding what you want to do in life, society never fails to remind you that you are always falling behind.

Behind what, no one knows. But your time is somehow "running out". Forever.

Any wedding you attend after the

age of 18, you will be asked "biye kobe korba (When will you get married)?"

Because how many suitors you have and which one you pick (or picks you) is all you have left to "achieve" after all those degrees they want you to have. And society just wants you to achieve, because it cares.

If, "luckily", you have someone you will be getting married to, men will face "Meye ki forsha (Is the girl fair skinned)?"

Mind you, she cannot be foreign, lest you want to become an outcast, but she has to be fair like foreigners.

Meanwhile, the ladies hear "Chhele koi chakri kore, salary koto (Where does the boy work, how much does he earn)?" Because, if you are a woman, you cannot be the one making the money. You must be making the sandwich with the bread he buys with his money. And society must know if he can buy you that bread.

And if, by any small chance, you are already married and thinking, "Hah! No more ridiculous, beyond-personal questions now!" you will be slapped on the face with a "Bachcha kobe niba (When will you have kids)?"

You have kids?

"Bachchar results ki?"