

AL plans a new alliance

It'll take to streets in support of govt, Hasina hints; 14-party to remain intact; 'won't budge on polls-time govt'

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has hinted that there will soon be a new political alliance and it will take to the streets in support of the government, according to sources familiar with the development.

Certain parties that believe in the spirit of the Liberation War and have shown interest in joining the Awami League-led 14-party alliance, will be in the new alliance.

But the current alliance will not be expanded, because most of the AL's partners are against expansion, the sources added.

The decisions were made at a meeting of the 14-party alliance at the Gono Bhaban last night. It was Hasina's second meeting with the alliance leaders since the AL

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



The Badda u-loop was congested for hours during the BNP procession, which started from Abdullahpur at 10:00am and ended in Jatrabari at 5:55pm, causing commuters to suffer. Many points in the capital were clogged yesterday as the ruling AL and opposition BNP brought out processions.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Political crisis needs political solution: CEC

The 12th parliamentary elections are only about six months away. But the two largest political parties – the ruling Awami League and opposition BNP – stick to their guns on one crucial matter. BNP wants the election to be held under a non-party election-time government. The AL says the election will be held under the incumbent government led by Sheikh Hasina. Meanwhile, both parties have resorted to showing strengths on the streets.

In this context, how much can the Election Commission do? And how will it ensure that the election is free and fair?

The Daily Star's **Mohiuddin Alamgir** interviewed Chief Election Commissioner **Kazi Habibul Awal** on the Commission's preparations, the ongoing political situation and more.



TDS: The people of the country look forward to the upcoming parliamentary elections. How is your preparation?

CEC: The Election Commission is not lagging behind. Preparation is progressing in line with the plan. One major change is that ballots will be used in all constituencies. The Commission earlier declared that votes in no more than 150 seats will be in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), subject to availability.

TDS: In the working plan for holding the 12th parliamentary election, the Election Commission mentioned that building the confidence of participating political parties in the government and the Election Commission is a challenge. What measures have been taken to overcome this challenge?

CEC: Certain political parties are expressing no-confidence in the current government and the EC. They have been demanding kind of a non-political neutral government for election time. It is a political issue that seems to be leading to sort of a crisis in holding an inclusive, participatory and peaceful election. The issue and the likely crisis need to be politically settled. The Commission has nothing to do with that.

TDS: How do you plan to ensure the neutrality of field-level admin and police officials who will perform election duties?

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

BIMAN RUNWAY INCURSION

Pilots almost caused disaster

RASHIDUL HASAN

There was a near miss on the runway of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Tuesday.

Without authorisation from Air Traffic Control, a Biman Boeing 777-300ER, which can seat 419 people, went onto the runway to take off while another aircraft was about to touch down.

The ATC noticed the runway incursion and was able to instruct a Novoair flight on final approach in time to go around.

Capt Shahadat Hossain in command of the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

BNP PROGRAMME

Violence on second day as well

AL, BNP offices vandalised in Ctg; vehicles attacked in Dinajpur

STAR REPORT

The BNP's programmes yesterday were peaceful in Dhaka and Khulna but there was violence in Chattogram and Dinajpur.

There were clashes between the BNP and Awami League supporters, and vandalism of vehicles and party offices of both parties.

BNP leaders later said the party

would no longer tolerate "political persecution" and would come up with a fitting response.

The BNP also said it would hold mourning rallies across the country at 11:00am today to protest the killing of an activist during their march in Laxmipur on Tuesday.

Awami League leaders in Chattogram alleged that BNP

PHOTOS ON PAGE 2

SEE PAGE 7 COL 1

Quit demo, join polls

AL urges BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League yesterday urged the BNP to quit the path of movement and join the next national polls.

"If you [BNP] want to retain the honour of the party, quit your movement and take part in the polls. In the last election, you got only seven [seats] ... In this election, people will not vote for you believing your words..." AL General

SEE PAGE 7 COL 6

UCB WINS 3 AWARDS

We are delighted to pronounce that UCB, the largest private commercial bank of the country has proudly secured three highly esteemed and prestigious banking awards, a testament to our unwavering commitment to excellence and innovation in the financial industry.

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- ★ Winner, The Best Resource Profile Bangladesh, Emerging Asia Banking Awards 2023
- ★ Runner Up, The Best Bangladeshi Bank Performance on Growth, Emerging Asia Banking Awards 2023

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Broken windows of ruling Awami League's campaign office for by-polls to Chattogram-10 after an attack allegedly by BNP activists. *Right*, ruling party supporters tearing down banners in front of the BNP office in retaliation.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

POWER SECTOR One of authors of IMED report suspended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The public administration ministry has suspended its Deputy Secretary Mohammad Mahidur Rahman, one of the authors of the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division's much-talked-about report on the power sector.

On Monday, he was made an Officer on Special Duty (OSD), considered a punishment post.

The report, which was uploaded to the IMED website on May 25, called the practice of paying capacity charges to power plants a "model of robbery" and is a reflection of ill-motivated contracts.

After a few media outlets ran pieces on the IMED report, titled "Research Report on Implementation Progress of Projects in Power Sector", the planning ministry division quietly revised the report, deleting the section that was critical of power sector's business model.

In a rejoinder to media outlets, the division said that the opinions made in the report were not of the IMED's.

Mahidur, who was a director of the IMED Sector-1, wrote the report, while SM Hamidul Haque, director general of the department, was the adviser.

Hamidul was made OSD on Sunday. This correspondent asked public administration ministry Deputy Secretary (Discipline-1) Nurul Haque why Mahidur was suspended but Nurul refused to comment.

Mahidur is suspended as per section 12 (f) of the Employee Discipline and Appeal Rules 2018, read a notification issued on Tuesday.

A three-member probe body, led by Additional Secretary Gazi Md Saifuzzaman, was formed on July 11 to investigate how the report was published on the website.

STRIKES ON UKRAINE'S ODESA Russia targeting grain infrastructure: Kyiv 60,000 tonnes of grain destroyed; Putin to skip BRICS summit under arrest threat, says S Africa

AGENCIES

Ukraine accused Russia yesterday of damaging grain export infrastructure in "hellish" overnight strikes focused on two of its Black Sea ports, vowing not to be intimidated from working to keep grain exports moving out of them.

Russia attacked the Odesa region for the second consecutive night after quitting a year-old deal allowing the safe passage of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea on Monday. Ukraine said it was setting up a temporary shipping route to Romania, reports Reuters.

Kyiv said Russia had destroyed 60,000 tonnes of grain meant for export in overnight strikes, according to AFP.

"Russian terrorists absolutely deliberately targeted the infrastructure of the grain deal," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on the Telegram messaging app. "Every Russian missile - is a strike not only on Ukraine but on everyone in the world who wants normal and safe life."

Ukraine's Prosecutor General's office said 10 civilians, including a 9-year-old boy, were wounded. Grains terminals were damaged as well as an industrial facility, warehouses, shopping malls, residential and administrative buildings and cars.

Meanwhile, South African presidency yesterday said Vladimir Putin, who is under an international arrest warrant, will not attend a BRICS nations summit next month.

Putin's potential visit has been a thorny

diplomatic issue for Pretoria.

The Russian leader is the target of an International Criminal Court arrest warrant -- a provision that South Africa as an ICC member would be expected to implement were he to set foot in the country.

"By mutual agreement, President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation

"By mutual agreement, President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation will not attend the (BRICS) summit," Vincent Magwenya, a spokesman for President Cyril Ramaphosa, said in a statement. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will represent Russia.

will not attend the summit," Vincent Magwenya, a spokesman for President Cyril Ramaphosa, said in a statement.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will represent Russia, Magwenya said, reports AFP.

The decision follows "a number of consultations" held by Ramaphosa recently, the latest of which took place last night, he added.

Pretoria is the current chair of the BRICS group, an acronym for heavyweights Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which sees itself as a counterweight to Western economic domination.

DISCUSSIONS ON 'SHARED PRIORITIES' US engages directly with Bangladesh officials

Says US State Dept

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United States has said it engages directly with Bangladeshi officials to discuss "shared priorities" for the two countries.

Talking to reporters during a regular briefing at the US State Department in Washington on Tuesday, Spokesperson Matthew Miller said Under Secretary Uzra Zeya emphasised in her recent trip the importance of the US and Bangladesh working together to achieve Bangladesh's goal of "free and fair elections" as well as the crucial role of civil society, human rights defenders, journalists, and labour activists, and accountability for human rights abuses.

"These are important issues in our bilateral relationship," he said, adding that senior officials from the US regularly travel to Bangladesh.

Miller said the under secretary also stressed the need for continuing to support the Rohingya refugees.

She visited Rohingya refugees as well as humanitarian partners and Bangladesh senior government officials in Cox's Bazar and announced \$74 million in additional humanitarian assistance to support Myanmar and Bangladesh response efforts.

"I will just say finally that the United States is dedicated to partnering with the government and civil society to address the scourge of human trafficking in the region," Miller said.

Man sentenced to death for killing wife for dowry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chattogram tribunal yesterday sentenced a man to death for killing his wife for dowry in Chattogram's Fatikchhari area.

Ferdous Ara, judge of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-7 of Chattogram, handed down the sentence in the presence of the convict, Mohammed Mohiuddin, at the court.

Meanwhile, the court acquitted two other accused in the case as allegations brought against them could not be proved.

According to the case statement, Mohiuddin of Datmara union under Fatikchhari upazila tortured his wife Sumi Akhter to death for dowry in his house in August 2019.

Sumi's father filed a case accusing the three. Police submitted a charge sheet to the court in January 2021 after an investigation.

BOTCHED C-SECTION Dr Mili gets bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Central Hospital's physician Maksuda Farida Akhter Mili yesterday secured bail in a case filed on charge of negligence of duty during a C-section which led to the deaths of a newborn and her mother.

Dhaka's Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Md Tofazzal Hossain passed the order after Mili surrendered before it and sought bail in the case. The bail order will remain valid till the submission of the probe report.

On Tuesday, two other physicians -- Shahzadi Mustarshida Sultana and Muna Shaha -- were granted bail from another Dhaka court in the same case.

Their bail order came after doctors at private hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres observed a two-day strike on Monday demanding the release of two physicians.

The newborn of Mahbuba Akter Akhi died while she was undergoing a C-section in the hospital on June 10. Akhi, 25, who was taken to LabAid Hospital and had been on life support there, died on June 18.

On June 14, her husband Yakub filed a case with Dhanmondi Police Station, accusing the doctors concerned and the Central Hospital of botched C-section and fraud.

Country reports 42 more Covid-19 cases

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh yesterday reported 42 more Covid-19 cases.

With the new numbers, the country's total caseload rose to 2,043,772, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

However, the official death toll from the disease remained unchanged at 29,465 as no new fatalities were reported.

The daily case test positivity stood at 4.28 percent as 981 samples were tested.

Bangladesh registered its highest daily caseload of 16,230 on July 28 in 2021 and highest number of fatalities of 264 on August 10 the same year.

AL plans a new alliance

FROM PAGE 1

formed the government in 2019 for a third consecutive term.

It was also decided last night that the AL will participate in the next national election under the banner of the 14-party alliance.

Hasina, president of the AL, directed AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader and alliance Coordinator Amir Hossain Amu to coordinate with the political parties that are interested in joining the 14-party alliance.

She said she would not go beyond the constitution to hold the polls and would not bow to anyone whatever pressure may be.

The election will be held on time, she told the meeting.

The government will be firm when it comes to the interest of the country and its people, Hasina told the meeting.

The foreign pressure on the country has little to do with democracy or human rights. Rather, the pressure is about defence purchases and the economy, the PM said.

Regarding the pressure her government has been facing, she said different countries want to sell different things to Bangladesh. The government will purchase what is needed for the country, she continued.

But Bangladesh will not buy anything from a country that imposes sanctions against it, she told the meeting.

However, Bangladesh will keep relations with all foreign friends and take their suggestions into account, she said.

At the beginning of the meeting, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu, Bangladesh Tariqat Federation Chairman Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizbhandari, Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) General Secretary Sheikh Shahidul Islam heavily criticised the government for the rising prices of essentials, corruption and syndication of traders of essentials.

As they urged the PM to address the problems, she said the government was taking initiatives to bring down the prices.

The alliance partners also requested Hasina to settle the election related issues with the alliance by October, said the sources.

They also said they will provide the AL with a list of their probable nominees and the desired constituencies. The AL chief will then decide which constituencies to give to the partners.

They then requested Hasina not to announce names of Awami

League candidates to run for those constituencies, sources said.

At the meeting, Nazibul Bashar Maizbhandari criticised the BNP and Jamaat, saying that the parties are conspiring against Hasina.

The conspiracy is not only to resist the election, it will also continue even after the election, slated to be held next January.

Maizbhandari also said Jamaat has a plan to conduct subversive activities to foil the national polls.

Jamaat has a plan to conduct subversive activities to foil the national polls and to launch a campaign about "judicial killings" which will refer to the execution of Jamaat leaders following the war crimes trial, Maizbhandari also said.

Most of the partners then requested Hasina to hold the election as per the constitution regardless of BNP's participation.

Rashed Khan Menon then blasted the visiting European Union delegation for meeting the Jamaat and Amar Bangladesh (AB) since these parties don't believe in Bangladesh.

The meeting also decided that all partners of the 14-party alliance would take to the streets from September.

Pilots almost caused disaster

FROM PAGE 1

Biman flight to Medina and First Officer Jamal made the runway incursion around 9:00am, said a senior captain of the national flag carrier.

Biman has grounded Capt Shahadat and First Officer Jamal. It, in a letter, asked its scheduling department not to put the duo on any flight until further notice.

The Daily Star has a copy of the letter issued on Tuesday.

A source at the HSLA said, "When the control tower noticed it [runway incursion], the Novoair aircraft was very close to landing. A possible collision was averted as the ATC immediately asked the Novoair pilots to go around and abort the approach."

A high official of Biman told The Daily Star that they have launched an investigation into the runway incursion incident and have already collected

voice records of communication between the aircraft and the ATC.

According to Federal Aviation Authority, any occurrence at an airport involving the incorrect presence of an aircraft, vehicle or person on the protected area of a surface designated for the landing and take-off of aircraft is called runway incursion.

A runway incursion is a serious offence, according to aviation experts.

This paper also obtained a copy of a safety report note and an email which mention that this was not the only error made by the Biman cockpit crew that day.

The flight upon reaching Medina parked in the wrong position and the plane had to be towed to the correct location.

Capt Shahadat does not have a stellar reputation to say the least.

He was removed from the post of

chief of planning and scheduling in March following various allegations against him.

In September last year, Biman's female cockpit crew members in a confidential letter to chief of flight safety said that they were being regularly harassed by their male bosses resulting in an unsafe working environment.

They alleged that Capt Shahadat, along with others, misbehave with the female cockpit crew members and use unprofessional language. The attitude of Capt Shahadat towards female pilots is offensive and abusive in nature, they said.

Several pilots involved in the runway incursion probe told this paper that Capt Shahadat was a member of the cockpit crew of flight BG-609 that crashed short of the runway in Sylhet in 1997.

Political crisis needs political solution: CEC

FROM PAGE 1

CEC: The Election Commission shall try its best under laws and rules to ensure and enforce neutrality of police and administration, if needed. In our 15 months, we did not find them to be unevenly siding with contesting candidates. We believe they will be neutral and professional as public servants in the next parliamentary elections due in December this year or January next year.

TDS: Many say that for domestic and international acceptance of elections, it should be an inclusive one. What do you think about it? What role the Commission will play in holding a participatory election?

CEC: According to the text and the spirit of the Constitution, elections should be inclusive in a multi-party democratic system. How the election will be seen by the international community and to what extent they will accept is one matter. But the more important matter is how the people of Bangladesh will accept the election. People should see and perceive that elections have been inclusive, participatory as well as free and fair. If not, the word "Republic" as envisaged in Article 7 of the Constitution will stand frustrated.

TDS: BNP is one of the largest political parties in the country, and they are repeatedly saying that they will not participate in any election under the current government and the current Commission. What steps have you taken to bring them to the polls?

CEC: We appealed to them to participate in elections. We wrote letters to them as well. But they made their stance known that no elections shall be held under the current political government. They also want the current government to be replaced by a non-political election-time government, and the current Election Commission to be replaced by a new Commission. According to them, the elections can only be held after that. But how will that be implemented?

TDS: The Ruling Awami League is saying that the next general polls will be held in line with the Constitution, meaning under the incumbent government, while the opposition BNP is adamant about having an election-time caretaker government. Will this difference of opinions have any impact on the next general polls?

CEC: It would be most welcome if the difference as stated above could be

politically resolved. It is difficult to predict how that may impact the next general elections. But that may lead to kind of an academic polemic over legality and legitimacy.

TDS: Many are saying that Election Commission's power to cancel election and its results has been curtailed through the latest amendment to the Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972. Do you agree with this?

CEC: We do not at all agree. Powers and responsibility of the Commission have been rather enhanced and more focused through the amendment. Article 91 of the RPO has been amended to substitute the word "election" with the word "polling" so as to make internal consistency or reconciliation between the words "election" and "polling". Why that was done was made clear in writing to the Ministry of Law and to the Parliament. They examined the rationale and agreed. Clause (a) of Article 91 of the RPO empowers the Commission to stop polls at any polling station or entire constituency. That remains as it was. Clauses (b) and (c) of Article 91 have nothing to do with stopping or advance postponement of polling or the election. There has been much ado about nothing with reference to that clerical correction in Article 91. A new clause (aa) added to Article 91 on top of it depicts how powers of the Commission have been enhanced. People may look at the other amendments as well made to the RPO to see how those have enhanced powers and responsibilities of the Commission and protected the rights of voters, candidates, media workers and observers.

TDS: Did the amendment take place in line with EC's proposal or were there any changes made? What are those changes, if any?

CEC: Amendments were made completely in line with the Commission's proposals. However, we agreed with the government's proposal of reconsideration for dropping the words "entire constituency" in the proposed new clause (aa) of Article 91. We found that to be quite logical. That makes no essential difference in the original proposal that we made. The Commission may withhold results of 99 out of 100 centres of a constituency, if needed, under the newly added clause (aa) of Article 91, though it was slightly modified by the Government with consent from the Commission. The said modification

is, therefore, immaterial.

TDS: Voters are one of the main stakeholders in the elections. In the recently held by-elections, local government elections, including city elections, the turnout was quite low. Many say that one of the reasons for this low turnout is the lack of people's confidence in the Election Commission and one-sided elections. What's your take on this?

CEC: Turnout was not really quite low in all city and by-elections. Turnouts have been about 59%, 66%, 49%, 48%, 51%, 56% and 47% in seven city elections. If elections at any level starting from union councils to parliament are well-participated and effectively contested, turnout of voters is likely to be higher. It does not depend of the EC alone; it rather depends more on how the candidates play out. In UP elections, as effectively contested, turnouts of voters are much higher. Low turnouts cannot be attributed to the lack of voters' confidence in the EC alone. Parliamentary by-elections were not politically contested in the real sense of the term. Many factors like weather conditions of excessive rainfall, chilling low temperature, demographic factor of the locality, seasonal issues like harvesting, extent of contest etc. combinedly determine the issue of turnouts.

TDS: What measures will you take to ensure that voters can cast their votes freely? Also, ballot stuffing and capturing of centres remain an issue of concern during elections. What special measures will you take regarding this?

CEC: Conducting of elections by the EC is not new. Laws and rules are there in respect to conducting elections. Further, we are learning lessons from past instances as well.

TDS: The Election Commission has installed CCTV cameras in some recent elections. Will you do the same in the national election?

CEC: CCTV cameras are an effective monitoring tool. The Commission has intents to use CCTVs. But National Parliamentary Elections will be held on the same day in about 42,000 centers having about 2,10,000 polling booths. About 300,000 cameras will be required for that. We are looking into whether that will be feasible and technically possible.

TDS: Thank you very much for your time.

CEC: Thank you very much.

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Denmark keen to invest \$1.3 billion in wind energy

Outgoing envoy tells PM

UNB, Dhaka

Denmark wants to invest \$1.3 billion for the generation of offshore wind energy in Bangladesh, the country's outgoing Ambassador Winnie Estrup Petersen said yesterday.

She made the offer while paying a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the morning at the latter's office.

PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters after the meeting.

The prime minister said Bangladesh needs assistance from friendly countries for its development. She mentioned that Bangladesh is setting up 100 special economic zones across the country where both foreign and domestic investments are required.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7



Outgoing Denmark Ambassador Winnie Estrup Petersen at a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the latter's office yesterday. At the meeting, Petersen said Denmark wants to invest \$1.3 billion for the generation of offshore wind energy in Bangladesh.

PHOTO: PID

RECENTLY-HELD POLLS TO 5 CITIES

67pc elected reps businesspeople

Show Shujan findings

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The recently held elections to the five city corporations were not competitive, said speakers at a webinar yesterday. They were merely a "formality" and voters did not get a chance to select their preferred candidates, they added.

The speakers said this while addressing a webinar organised by Shusashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan). Shujan also presented an analytical report on the recently concluded polls to Gazipur, Barishal, Khulna, Sylhet, and Rajshahi city corporations.

According to Shujan, around 67 percent of public representatives are businesspersons.

It said businessmen kept their dominance over the mayoral and councillor posts in the polls, while career politicians didn't find any space in the race of becoming public representatives.

In five cities, four elected mayors are from the business

community and one is a lawyer (Rajshahi mayor) by profession.

Shujan also found a similar trend in the councillor posts. Out of the 258 elected representatives, 172 were from the business community.

Of the rest, 37 are homemakers (14.34 percent), 12 are farmers (4.65 percent), and nine are lawyers (3.49 percent). Eight mentioned their profession as miscellaneous and 12 didn't mention anything in the affidavits that were submitted to the Election Commission.

The scenario of public representatives in the local government bodies replicated the national parliament, where people from the business community dominate public representation, leaving politicians far behind.

In the current parliament, 61 percent MPs are businesspersons, 13 percent are lawyers, 21 percent are from other professions, and only five percent have political

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Current govt or a neutral one?

GM Quader, Raushan Ershad lock horns over polls-time system

RASHIDUL HASAN

In a stark contrast to most of the political parties who have already decided on their preferred election-time government for the upcoming national polls, the Jatiya Party, the main opposition in parliament, finds itself in a disarray due to conflicting visions within its top leadership.

With the national polls scheduled for the end of this year or early next year, the party is yet to figure out what they want due to rifts between its Chairman GM Quader and Chief Patron and Leader of the Opposition Raushan Ershad.

GM Quader has been advocating for a new election system while Raushan in a statement yesterday said she is in favour of polls under the existing government.

Mentionable, ruling Awami League insists on conducting the elections under the current government as per the constitution and the BNP seeks a neutral government before polls.

According to JP insiders, this internal discord threatens to exacerbate the party's recent struggles and could push JP further into chaos, potentially jeopardising its results in the upcoming national polls.

In an interview with The Daily Star, GM Quader recently said

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



The next national election should be held in accordance with the constitutional provisions, under an independent and strong EC. The polls-time government will only assist the commission and JP will participate in that election.

Raushan Ershad



What she (Raushan) had said is her personal statement, not the party's decision. Besides, what Raushan is saying about the election is the version of the government and the government wants her to say this.

GM Quader

Dengue claims 19 lives, highest in a single day

HELEMUL ALAM

The country has been grappling with an alarming surge in dengue-related fatalities this July, with 99 deaths already recorded within the first 19 days of the month.

Nineteen lives were lost in the past 24 hours, making it the highest number of fatality in a single day since January, catapulting this year's death toll to 146.

The capital's hospitals alone accounted for 113 of these deaths, while the rest were reported outside Dhaka, proving the relentless spread of the disease.

In less than the first seven months of this year, the number of dengue cases has surpassed 25,000, setting a record since the disease first broke out in the country in 2000.

COMPARISON WITH 2019 The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) data show that 18,461 cases were reported from January to July in 2019, with 16,253 cases reported in July alone.

The nation experienced the most number of dengue cases (1,01,354) that year.

This year, 17,814 dengue cases have been logged so far in July. At least 40 people died of dengue in July 2019, meaning this year's July fatalities (99) is



over double of that in 2019.

Analysing these data, experts fear that the number might surpass all previous records this year in terms of dengue cases and deaths.

A GRIM FUTURE AHEAD With the new figures, the total number of cases this year stands at 25,792, till yesterday morning.

"August and September typically have the highest number of cases reported. The infection rate is most likely to surpass the August 2019 threshold (52,636) in the next couple of months," said

As dengue cases continue to rise, hospitals in the capital are struggling with the mounting pressure of patients for the past week. This photo was taken in Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON



'Such acts will create anarchy in the judiciary'

HC blasts Cox's Bazar judge for granting bail to 9 accused without following procedures

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday blasted Cox's Bazar District and Sessions Judge Mohammad Ismail for granting bail to nine accused in a criminal case without maintaining relevant procedures even before the magistrate court concerned rejected their bail petition.

"There will be anarchy in the judiciary if the judges don't maintain legal procedures properly. What you [Ismail] have done is not a usual phenomenon. Other judges don't do so. We have heard such things about you before. Looking at your actions, we don't think you want a prestigious departure," said the HC bench of Justice Md Habibur Gani and Justice Ahmed Sohel.

"Discipline gets hampered when irregularities and anarchy establish their dominance," the HC bench told Ismail during hearing of a criminal revision petition.

Earlier in the day, Ismail appeared before the HC bench in line with its June 21 summons order and offered "apology to the court for his unintentional and bonafide conduct".

He told the HC that he passed the bail order considering urgency of the case and he had no intention to disregard the court or court proceedings.

The HC bench said, "It is evident from the documents that the accused did not go to jail after the chief judicial magistrate's (CJM) court rejected their bail petition on May 21. But you have granted them bail

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Man stabbed to death in Jatrabari

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 30-year-old man was stabbed to death in Dhaka's Jatrabari area early yesterday.

The deceased – identified as Hasan Hawlader – was an employee of a motor workshop in Sayedabad area, said police.

Locals found him lying in a pool of blood around 1:00am in Bidyut Lane area of South Jatrabari.

Along with the members of police, they took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared Hawlader dead around 2:30am, said sub-inspector Mostafizur Rahman of Jatrabari Police Station.

There were stab wounds in his chest and left hand, he added.

Momin Hossain, brother-in-law of the deceased, said Hasan was returning to his Dhaka residence from his village home in Patuakhali Sadar upazila on Tuesday night.

He got off the bus at a stoppage in Dholaipar area and was walking to his home.

On the way, some unidentified persons stabbed him, he said.

Police recovered the body and sent it to hospital morgue for autopsy, said SI Mostafizur.



The BNP's road march, left, and the Awami League's "Peace and Development Procession", right, parade streets in the capital's Tejgaon and near Bashundhara residential area. The programmes by the two political archrivals slowed traffic to a crawl in parts of the city.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN, RASHED SHUMON

57 die in 54 waterway accidents in 6 months

Says reporters forum survey

UNB, Dhaka

At least 57 people have died, 50 were injured and 34 went missing in 54 waterway accidents in the last six months.

There are no women and children in the casualty list, according to a survey of Shipping and Communication Reporters Forum (SCRF).

The survey was released yesterday.

According to the report, no major launch accident occurred during this period.

The vessels involved in the accidents include passenger trawlers, speedboats, oil tankers, bulkhead (sand carriers), cargo and lighter vessels.

Most of these trawlers and sand barges do not have approved designs, annual fitness certificates (survey) and registrations.

According to the SCRF, this report has been prepared through regular monitoring of waterway accidents and based on information published in 12 Bangla and 5 English national dailies, 9 online news portals and news agencies, and 6 regional dailies.

No survivors were found two weeks after such accidents. With the missing ones, the death toll will be 91 in six months, it said.

SCRF identified 13 causes of accidents. They include: illegal boat movement across the country, unskilled and unlicensed masters and drivers, carrying passengers and goods beyond capacity, noncompliance of laws and regulations, operation of sand carriers at night in violation of orders of the Ministry of Shipping and lack of monitoring by BIWTA.



Fishers setting up traps in a local waterbody at Sylhet's Jaintiapur upazila. The traps are usually placed early in the morning and collected late at night. This photo was taken in Haripur village recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Dengue claims 19 lives

FROM PAGE 3
trend continues.

"Despite its extreme relevance, a lack of district-level surveillance is seen all year round. To enable local government agencies, community organisations, and educational institutions to carry out focused interventions, the government should set up an efficient surveillance system to locate dengue hotspots," he said.

Saifur also emphasised the joint duty of city corporations and residents to maintain awareness, and get rid of potential breeding sources to achieve efficient source reduction.

SAIFUR 2, DEN 3 ACTIVE

The Den 2 and Den 3 variants, which are termed more dangerous, are active this year.

Of them, Den 2 is more prominent among patients, said Tahmina Shirin, director of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research.

According to experts, dengue virus has four variants (Den 1-4), each of which is further subdivided

into distinct genotypes. Den 2, which consists of six genotypes (Asian/American, Asian I, Asian II, Cosmopolitan, American and sylvatic), is frequently associated with severe dengue infections and epidemics.

Mortality risks become higher if a previous patient with the disease is infected with a different variant. However, early detection and immediate hospitalisation can help lower the risks significantly.

Last year, the Den-3 variant was more prominent among patients.

"Being affected by Den 2 does not necessarily signal danger. However, cross infections are risky and may lead to more adverse effects if the patients are hospitalised timely. Delayed hospitalisation is one of the major causes behind the deteriorating conditions of dengue patients and their deaths," said Dr Tahmina.

"Consulting a doctor is essential if a patient is diagnosed with fever. A dengue patient should take in enough fluids. Coconut

water, saline, home-made fruit juices, and serbets will keep them hydrated while ensuring a supply of necessary vitamins and minerals needed to speed up their recovery process," she asserted.

Cleanliness is also necessary to prevent infections from spreading across. Dr Tahmina also urged people to make sure that their yards are clean and stagnant waters are removed following rains.

Lives upended

FROM PAGE 5
Shunil Kumar, executive engineer of WDB in Lalmonirhat, said they have started dumping sand bags to stop the erosion.

Kamruzzaman Sujon, chairman of Sadar upazila parishad, said they are preparing a list of the victims and the upazila parishad will give them financial assistance.

"I have also requested the WDB to take all necessary measures to stop the river from eroding," he added.

67pc elected reps

FROM PAGE 3
background, according to Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

But in 1973, 15 percent of the MPs were from the business community and it rose to 48 percent in 1996, 51 percent in 2001, 63 percent in 2008, and 59 percent in 2014.

At yesterday's press conference, Shujan also indicated that businessmen's interest to participate in polls and get elected has significantly increased. It also opined that candidates are filing affidavits with their nominations only for the sake of filing it and the Election Commission does not scrutinise the information properly.

Speaking at the event, lawyer Shahdeen Malik said elections are being held in Bangladesh "in South Africa style". In that country, a political party has taken over the power; in Bangladesh, a group has done the same, he added.

Outside this particular

group, the majority of the population does not get any benefit, he said. "A game is being played in the name of election without making it meaningful," he added.

Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said election means a voter will get an opportunity to pick a candidate of their choice. The recent five city corporation elections did not reflect that particularly after Islami Andolan Bangladesh boycotted polls in Rajshahi and Sylhet following an attack on their candidate in Barishal city polls, he said.

"The entire world saw that the Election Commission was inactive during the Dhaka-17 by-polls... it was not acceptable," he added.

At the webinar, Shujan revealed that among the five mayors, Khulna mayor Talukder Abdul Khalek is the richest having a net worth of Tk 14 crore. He was followed by Rajshahi mayor Khairuzzaman

Liton (Tk 7 crore), Barishal mayor Abul Khair Abdullah (Tk 5.71 crore), Sylhet mayor Anwaruzzaman Chowdhury (Tk 42 lakh) and Gazipur mayor Zaida Khatun (Tk 41 lakh).

Besides, the educational qualifications of the elected mayors in Barishal and Gazipur are below the SSC level while Khulna, Sylhet and Rajshahi mayors have completed their bachelor's degrees.

Moreover, out of the 190 councillors in those city corporations, 8.42 percent have achieved postgraduate degrees, 21.05 percent bachelor's degrees, 24.21 percent HSC, 21.58 percent SSC and 24.21 percent below the SSC level.

Although the five city mayors are not facing any criminal cases, 80 councillors are.

Meanwhile, 84 councillors faced criminal charges in the past while 43 faced criminal charges in the past and are still facing such charges.

Denmark keen

FROM PAGE 3

Both the premier and the envoy appreciated the 50 years of development partnership between Bangladesh and Denmark, said the press secretary.

During the meeting, the Danish ambassador lauded the leadership of the prime minister in socioeconomic development of Bangladesh.

Regarding the development of democracy in the country, the PM said, "We've a history of long

struggle for democracy in the country."

The Danish envoy said her country is the sixth largest exporter in the ICT sector globally. In this connection, Sheikh Hasina said the ICT sector of Bangladesh is also growing fast.

Ambassador Petersen said the two countries can extend cooperation in several fields including human development. "We've achieved many things through cooperation," she added.

200-year-old twin

FROM PAGE 5

government's custody," said Joyanta Kumar Saha, general secretary of the temple's management committee.

"Devotees panic while performing their rituals as they fear that the temple's roof may collapse," said Nayan Kumar Dey, a committee member.

"The situation gets worse during monsoon as

rainwater enters the temples.

Renovation work should start immediately, said Alok, a 65-year-old local.

Contacted, Afroza Khan Mita, regional director of DoA in Mymensingh, said a proposal urging the authorities concerned to initiate a renovation project has already been sent.

"The work will commence after the project is approved," she said.

Such acts will create

FROM PAGE 3

the same day even before the CJM's order was complied with."

Judge Ismail said he granted the bail at 4:00pm on May 21, but the stenographer of his court made a clerical mistake saying that the accused were in the jail custody for a long period of time.

The HC asked him whether he has taken any action against the stenographer.

Ismail kept silence and said he apologised to the court.

Child labour rises

FROM PAGE 5

number of child labour victims, stressed Md Matiar Rahman, director general of BBS. "The pandemic has further fueled the rise," he said.

Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education, urged the government to resume the mid-day meal programmes in schools as it may reduce the rate significantly.

The number of children working as domestic help should be recorded properly in future surveys. Children should not be working as housemaids, she said.

"Child labour has not risen as sharply as the population in the last decade," said Md Ehsan-E-Elahi, secretary to Ministry of Labour and

Employment.

"Following government initiatives, the number of children employed in hazardous occupations has declined. The authorities plan to eradicate child labour by 2025," he added.

Elahi also mentioned a project aimed at reducing child labour and rehabilitating the victims. They have already conducted the feasibility studies, and the Tk 2,500 crore project will commence soon.

Matt Cannell, deputy high commissioner and development director of British High Commission; Tuomo Poutiainen, country director of ILO's Dhaka office; and Shahnaz Arefin, secretary to the Statistics and Informatics Division, also spoke at the event.

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT



E-Zone HRM Limited is a management consulting group providing one-stop HR solutions.
E-Zone HRM Limited has a formal agreement with one of the United Nations agency to provide outsourcing services under a third party contract.

E-Zone HRM Limited is now seeking applications for a UN Organization from Bangladeshi Nationals for the following vacancies under third party outsourcing contract modality. For detailed Job Description, please visit the following website link to apply for the post.

Title: Upazilla Nutrition Supervisor, Consultant

Duty Station: Any Upazilla, **Contract Duration:** 11 Months (Renewable based on availability of funding). **Number of Vacancies:** 2 (Two), **Contract Type:** Contract with E-Zone.

Last Date of Application: 26 July, 2023

<https://hotjobs.bdjobs.com/jobs/ezone/un183.html>

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT



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E-Zone HRM Limited is now seeking applications for a UN Organization from Bangladeshi Nationals for the following vacancies under third party outsourcing contract modality. For detailed Job Description, please visit the following website link to apply for the post.

Title: Handicrafts Consultant

Duty Station: Dhaka (with weekly field visits to all divisions), **Contract Duration:** 06 Months. **Number of Vacancies:** 01 (One), **Contract Type:** Contract with E-Zone.

Last Date of Application: 31st July 2023

<https://hotjobs.bdjobs.com/jobs/ezone/un184.html>



VACANCY NOTICE


World Health Organization (WHO) invites applications from the interested and eligible candidates for the following position under following contractual modality:

- Data Manager (Special Services Agreement - SSA)

For further details on submission of applications including detailed post description please visit our websites:

<https://www.who.int/bangladesh/about-us/employment>
<https://careers.who.int/careersection/ex/jobsearch.ftl>

Qualified **female candidates** are highly encouraged to apply.

 **WHO has a smoke-free environment and does not recruit smokers or other tobacco users.**

PRAYER TIMING



JULY 20

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4-15	12-45	5-00	6-55	8-17
JAMAAT 4-50	1-15	5-15	7-00	8-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

বাংলাদেশ কর্মসূচি ব্যাংক লিমিটেড
সকল প্রকার আমানত, আকর্ষণীয়
কীম সহ জামানতবিহীন বিনিয়োগ,
উদ্যোক্তা, কৃষি ঋণ সুবিধা ও ক্রেডিট
কার্ড সহ আধুনিক ব্যাংকিং সেবার
আপনার বিশ্বস্ত সহযোগী।
বিসিবি

Invitation to Bid (ITB) (UNDP-BGD-00172)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is inviting potential suppliers to participate in an open tender to deliver "450 motorbike and Scooty" for AVCBIII Project.

This specific tender will be managed via "Quantum", a new ERP portal of UNDP. Interested Service Providers, must register in the system to access the bidding document (ITB)

Applicants can register a profile and apply using the registration link shared via the procurement notice: https://procurement-notices.undp.org/view_negotiation.cfm?nego_id=8632 and by following the instructions in guides available on the UNDP website: <https://www.undp.org/procurement/business/resources-for-bidders>. Do not create a new profile if you already have one. Use the forgotten password feature in case you do not remember the password or the username from previous registration.

The Pre-bid meeting to be held on:

-Date & Time: 24 July 2023, 11 a.m. (Bangladesh Local Time)

- Zoom meeting link: <https://undp.zoom.us/j/86802709915?pwd=eXZDV58xYlIEZDNiYnNzWmwwNEpZUT09>

For any technical support, E-mail to: bd.procurement@undp.org;

The deadline for submission of proposal is **Tuesday, August 08, 2023, 4:30 PM (BD TIME Zone)**.

TEESTA EROSION

Lives upended,
homes swept away

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

"We had a home and four bighas of arable land, all of which got washed away on Sunday. Now, we have become homeless and landless," said Koushulya Rani as she broke into tears.

The 50-year-old has been living on the roads since Monday with his family of five in Lalmonirhat Sadar's Rajpur village after the erosion by the Teesta river devoured all they had.

Around a hundred families are facing the same fate after the river engulfed their homesteads and over 150 bighas of arable land, including three fruit orchards, in the last couple of days.

Besides, acres of cropland are at risk as the erosion has turned severe following a continued rise in the river's water level, said locals.

The erosion intensified on Monday, informed Pulin Chandra, a 65-year-old victim who lost his home and two bighas of agricultural land on Tuesday.

"We would still have our lands if the Water Development



Due to the sudden erosion, at least 100 families have been rendered homeless in Lalmonirhat.

PHOTO: STAR

Board had taken the necessary measures in due time," alleged Pulin, who had to take shelter at a relative's house following the incident.

Like him, Naren Chandra, 60, was rendered homeless after the river claimed his three bighas of arable land.

"I have been living on the roads with my family of six for the last three days," he said.

Suresh Chandra, a 55-year-old farmer who lost two bighas of arable land in the last couple of days, alleged that WDB has initiated work to prevent erosion, but its quality is not up to the mark.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Tarek Paramanik is a popular figure among children in Khulna city. Every day, he visits various neighbourhoods and sells his meticulously handcrafted artificial flowers to them. Made with paper, cloth, and plastic, he sells 180-200 pieces of these colourful flowers for Tk 10 a piece. This photo was taken in front of Boyra area yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Child labour rises
by 4.5pc in a decade

Over 10 lakh engaged in hazardous jobs, says BBS survey

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 17.76 lakh children are currently victims of child labour in Bangladesh. The number has increased by 4.5 percent (77,203) in the last nine years, according to National Child Labour Survey-2022.

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) revealed the figures in an event held at its headquarters in the capital's Agargaon yesterday.

The number of children employed in hazardous jobs has declined by 2.12 lakh, while that of children in non-hazardous sectors has risen by 2.89 lakh, the report read.

The country is currently home to 3.99 crore children aged 5-17.

The BBS report discloses that the percentage of working children has risen to 8.90 percent in 2022, compared to 8.70 percent in 2013.

Income inequality, economic injustice, and discriminatory social structures are the main causes of child labour.

PLANNING MINISTER MA MANNAN

The report further highlights that over 37.02 children are currently not engaged in any type of labour.

Planning Minister MA Mannan was present at the event as chief guest.

"Income inequality, economic injustice, and discriminatory social structures are the causes of child labour," said the minister.

"We never see children from solvent families engaged in child labour. The more we work to reduce this socio-economic gap, the less children will fall prey to child labour," he added.

The government is working to reduce poverty and inequality. Reaching a better financial position will help reduce the number of children forced into child labour, he asserted.

Marginalised families often send their children to work at an early age, and this leads to the rising

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

TK 1.56CR GRAFT

ACC sues AL leader,
his wife in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday filed two cases against Sheikh Russel Ali Masud, the organising secretary of Pabna Sadar upazila unit of Awami League.

He is also the personal secretary of Pabna-5 lawmaker.

The cases were filed for allegedly amassing Tk 1.56 crore in illegal wealth, as revealed by the ACC's preliminary inquiry.

The commission had previously requested Masud to provide a proper wealth statement, which he reportedly failed to do.

Among the accusations, he is said to have earned Tk 1,29,75,979 without proper declaration, according to the case filed by ACC Deputy Director of Pabna Md Khairul Haque.

Russel's wife Nasrin Akter was also made an accused in the cases.

"Russel Ali Masud had received the ACC order copy along with the wealth statement form on April 4 this year; however, he failed to submit his wealth statement within the prescribed 21 days, as per ACC rules," the complainant stated.

Similarly, the ACC discovered that Masud's wife Nasrin, a community health care provider, allegedly amassed Tk 27,02,000 without any known legitimate source.

The primary inquiry revealed Nasrin's wealth as Tk 28.55 lakh, with an acceptable earning of only Tk 1,53,000, leading the ACC to determine her illegal earnings to be Tk 27,02,000.

"We'll investigate the case further," said Md Khairul Haque.

Contacted, Masud denied the allegations, saying this is all part of a conspiracy.

Two-week summer
vacation of secondary
schools cancelled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has cancelled the two-week-long summer vacation for secondary schools and colleges across the country.

The vacation was scheduled to begin today but it would be later adjusted with the winter vacation in December, said Education Ministry Public Relations Officer Abul Khair yesterday.

He said the ministry took the decision keeping in mind the possible "learning loss" of students due the next parliamentary polls.

The 12th national election is scheduled to be held in late December this year or early January next year.



The Dhaksinashar Mandir in Mymensingh's Muktagacha upazila continues to suffer as the authorities fail to keep their promise, made 30 years ago, of restoring the archeological heritage site.

PHOTO: STAR

200-year-old twin temples
continue to crumble

DoA delays renovation works for 3 decades

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Standing tall since 1820, the Shree Shree Anandamoyee Shiva and Kali Mata Mandir, also known as "Dhaksinashar Mandir," or "twin temple" in Mymensingh's Muktagacha upazila were once revered for their architectural beauty and spiritual significance.

However, the passing of time has not been kind to these temples, as they continue to suffer from the ravages of neglect. They are left to decay amidst bureaucratic delays in the Department of Archaeology's (DoA) much-needed renovation efforts.

Erected under the patronage of Shreemoti Bimola Devi, the mother of Zaminder Shashikanta Acharya Chowdhury, these twin temples have been an integral part of the local community's cultural and religious heritage for over two centuries.

Citing it as an archaeological site, the DoA authorities took over this temple in 1993, with the promise of



preserving and restoring them for future generations to admire and cherish.

There's a stark contrast between the department's assurances and the reality on the ground. While the locals have long awaited the revival of these temples, the government

body responsible for their renovation has remained apathetic, failing to initiate any meaningful steps toward their restoration.

Caught in a bureaucratic limbo, the temple authorities find themselves unable to carry out the much-needed renovations, citing the jurisdiction of the government.

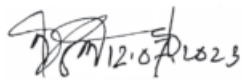
Religious events within these sacred walls have gradually dwindled, and the twin temples continue to languish in ruins.

The twin temple is oblong in shape with conical tops and small corridors. It stands on a high basement, which is connected to the staircase leading to a large pond.

However, due to a lack of maintenance, weeds and bushes have grown inside the temple, and several cracks have developed on its roof and walls.

"We cannot take up renovation works, even at our own expense, as the temples are now under the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh		
Bangladesh Climate Change Trust (BCCT)		
101, Old Ban Bhaban, Mohakhali		
Dhaka-1207		
www.bcct.gov.bd		
No. 22.06.0000.112.22.057.2021.403		
Date: 12.07.2023		
Request for Expression of Interest (Eol) for National Individual Consultant		
1	Ministry	Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MOEFCC)
2	Agency	Bangladesh Climate Change Trust (BCCT)
3	Procuring entity name	Secretary (BCCT), Bangladesh Climate Change Trust (BCCT)
4	Procuring entity district	Dhaka
5	Expression of Interest for Selection of	Individual Consultant (National)
6	Procurement sub-method	Selection of Individual Consultant (SIC)
7	Budget and source of funds	BCCT
8	Place of Eol collection, submission and opening	Room No. 702, 101 Old Ban Bhaban (Level-6), Bangladesh Climate Change Trust (BCCT), Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212.
9	Eol closing date and time	2.00pm on 24.08.2023
10	Eol opening date and time	3.00pm on 24.08.2023
11	Brief description of assignment	The assignment is to deal with the writ petitions, climate and environmental cases, administrative case and other legal issues of BCCT judiciously and efficiently in order to dispose of the BCCT related cases timely.
12	Bangladesh Climate Change Trust now invites Expression of Interest (Eol) from experienced Applicants under the following positions.	
13	Information for Applicant	
	Panel Lawyer (2 positions)	Minimum LLB (Hons) Degree from UGC recognized any University with minimum 10 (ten) years experiences as Advocate in Supreme Court of Bangladesh and at least 02(two) years experiences' as law officer with the government/semi-government/Autonomous organization in Bangladesh. Applicants must have Bar Council Enrollment Certificate for High Court Division. Applicants having Bar Council Enrollment Certificate for Appellate Division and 01 (one) year of experience in handling environmental cases in High Court Division will get privilege.
Other Information:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested Applicants are requested to submit their expression of interest Application Forms (complete CV with other details as required as per the Application Forms) in accordance with "Request for Application" (RFA) which may be collected during normal office hours. Expression of Interest Application shall be submitted in sealed envelope delivered to Secretary (BCCT), Bangladesh Climate Change Trust and be clearly marked "Request for Expression of Interest for Selection of Panel Lawyer". Consultants will be selected using the selection of individual consultant sub-method in accordance with Public Procurement Rules 2008 and Request for Application (RFA). The Procuring Entity reserves the right to accept or reject any/all Expression of Interest (Eol). This advertisement and details Terms of Reference (ToR) is available in the website: www.bcct.gov.bd 		
 Nasir-ud-Doula Secretary (Deputy Secretary) Email: nasir6318@gmail.com		
GD-1133		

Don't want to label myself as a 'niche artiste': Xefer

MALIHA MASHIAT

Xefer Rahman first broke into the industry with her song covers, capturing everyone's attention with her deep baritone voice. Since her foray into music almost 12 years ago, Xefer has slowly evolved into a style and youth icon as well, apart from continuing her pursuit of music—delivering hit songs like *Nei Proyojon*, *Jhumka*, *Harbo Na* and many more.

On a sun-lit afternoon, the young artiste shared a chat with The Daily Star about her visit to the Grammys, creating *Jhumka* and more.

You first broke into the industry with covers of English songs. By comparison, where would you say you are now as an artiste?

I did start with song covers and made my debut song in English, then made my way to working for films, making originals as well. Now I see a lot of people doing English originals, but back when I debuted, no one apart from me did that. However, after a while, that made me feel like I wasn't doing enough Bangla songs, which changed my journey as I'm focusing on Bangla songs more now. No more covers, rather more originals.

Many are saying that your upcoming concert with Muza and Dameer is for a select group of audiences. Would you agree with that sentiment?

I think my songs used to be niche, but that has changed. In the last three years or so, I have changed, now different people from different places know me. Muza makes music for audiences of all sorts, I don't think we can label ourselves as 'niche artistes'. Dameer has his niche I believe, but together, the three of us



PHOTOS: COLLECTED

have a variety of audiences, and I think it's good that way.

Your collaboration with Muza has become quite the hit. Would you say this is a pivotal point in your career?

The decision to do this song, that we took together, changed a lot for me. I have always been indecisive about my ability to pull off commercial songs, but I tried it. What people don't know is that we are the co-owners of the song, as we wrote and financed it together. I'm glad Muza inspired me to try folk.

In Bangladesh, there is a stereotype that female voices in this genre have to be sweeter, but I have a deeper voice and that

I think my songs used to be niche, but that has changed. In the last three years or so, I have changed, now different people from different places know me. Muza makes music for audiences of all sorts, I don't think we can label ourselves as 'niche artistes'.

brought a lot of criticism. But I was taken aback when the song went viral in both Bangladesh and internationally. People were making reels, Tiktoks and Indian celebrities were even dancing to it.

You recently visited the US with a group of artistes. Is something new cooking?

This was my second visit after the Grammys. We did create music and I can tell you we have some new things coming up. Around 12 musicians worked together, but not all of them will be featured in my next projects. However, I cannot say much about what's coming or when it will be released.



'Shurongo' ready to hit 29 halls in Kolkata

The much-exciting Bangladeshi film, *Shurongo*, starring Afran Nisho, has already captured the attention of eager audiences in West Bengal.

Tollywood's renowned production company, SVF has swiftly completed a contract with the film's producer, securing its distribution rights. As a result, *Shurongo* is all set to grace the halls in West Bengal on July 21.

Kolkata will witness the movie running simultaneously in 29 theatres, which is more than the number of halls that screened the film in Bangladesh.

Actor from 'Barbie' coming to Dhaka premiere



The excitement is reaching a fever pitch as the highly anticipated movie *Barbie* is set to hit the screens on July 21.

Adding to the excitement, it has been revealed that British-Bangladeshi actor Ramzan Mia, who played a South Asian Ken doll in *Barbie*, will attend the special premiere show of *Barbie* today, in the evening. The premiere show will be held at the SKS Tower branch of Star Cineplex in Mohakhali.

Barbie, directed by Greta Gerwig for Warner Brothers, promises to transport viewers to a colourful and fantastical world. Margot Robbie stars as Barbie and Ryan Gosling stars as Ken in the film.

NEWS

All 7 arrestees

FROM PAGE 12

a former office secretary, Mozahid a former organising secretary, Ashik a former assistant secretary and Ridoy a member, he added.

Asked about why they were arrested, OC Mostafizur Rahman said they were seen in a lane near the polling centre.

Sanwar is often seen in rallies organised by Tanti League and Sramik League while Sohel and Biplob are AL activists, said sources.

FOREIGN MISSIONS CONDEMN THE ATTACK

13 foreign missions in Bangladesh, including the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union, yesterday condemned the attack on Alom during the Dhaka-17 by-polls.

In a joint statement published by the US Embassy in Dhaka, they called on the government to conduct a thorough investigation and take legal steps against the attackers.

"Violence has no place in the democratic process. We call for a full investigation and accountability for the perpetrators. Everyone involved in the upcoming elections should ensure that they are free, fair, and peaceful," the statement reads.

The missions of Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the

Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland in Bangladesh are among the signatories.

Alom was physically assaulted at a polling centre in Banani around 3:20pm on Monday.

ALOM RAISES CONCERN ABOUT HIS SECURITY

During a press conference at a private hospital in Dakshinkhan yesterday, Alom said that a group of 8-10 individuals arrived and gathered in front of his office at Rampura Mahanagar Project around 5:30am yesterday.

They called out his name and demanded he come out while also vandalising the office gate. Expressing concern about his security, he said, "They are giving me threats. I am scared about my security. I am sharing this with all through you [journalists] as I am not receiving sufficient protection."

Referring to the assault he faced as an act of torture, he further alleged that he received no assistance from the law enforcement agencies on the day of the election.

Alom said that he was attacked right in front of the police who did not come forward to protect him. Those who attacked him are also being spared from arrest, he added.

ADB upgrades estimate to 6 percent

FROM PAGE 12

said in the latest update to its Asian Development Outlook 2023.

Last fiscal year, exports fetched a record \$55.56 billion, up 6.67 percent year-on-year, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau.

In the first 11 months of fiscal 2022-23, imports stood at about \$70 billion, down 14.15 percent from a year earlier, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank.

On the supply side, manufacturing firms of all sizes leveraged supportive government policies to contribute to growth, ADB said in the report.

"On the demand side, growth in public consumption outpaced expectations, as did public investment."

The lender kept the growth forecast for this fiscal year unchanged at 6.5 percent.

BSMMU to probe allegations over donor's identity

FROM PAGE 12

"He left home on Saturday [July 15] for training. We later learned about the transplantation from the news," she said, demanding justice for the negligence by the authorities concerned.

"It was the hospital authorities' responsibility to verify the identities. Now my husband will never be able to lead a normal life again."

Sources said that Suzon Roy, the kidney recipient, reached Sumit with the help of an organ trafficking ring.

Suzon, who was a migrant worker in Greece, told Sumit that he could also be taken to Greece if he donates one of his kidneys to him.

Suzon's son Sagor Roy told The Daily Star, "We received the kidney from Sumit Hawlader upon his consent. I have no such knowledge about my father telling him he would be taken to Greece. We didn't cheat him."

"We had no idea there was a fake name given. The hospital authorities knew everything."

Prof Habibur said, "Our legal authentication board secured proper authorisation from the metropolitan magistrate for the transplantation. I'm not sure how this happened."

About 11,000 BNP men sued

FROM PAGE 12

activities. SI Mozzammel Haque filed another case against 25 named and 1,500 unnamed people over assaulting police.

Local AL leader Nurul Amin Raju sued 250 unnamed people in another case over vandalising his home and a vehicle during the BNP's road march.

Rubel Hossain, a student of Government Bangla College in Dhaka, and Mohidur Rahman, a staff of the college, filed two cases with Darussalam Police Station yesterday against 229 named BNP leaders and activists and around 1,000 unnamed others.

According to the case statements, the accused attacked Rubel and some other college students, set a motorcycle on fire and vandalised the college's gate.

Police arrested 18 of the accused, said Aminul Bashar, officer in charge of Darussalam Police Station.

An SI filed a case against 80 named and 300 unnamed BNP leaders and activists with Pirojpur Sadar Police Station over Tuesday's clash between police and the opposition party men in the district town.

Police have picked up 15 of the accused, said the OC of the police station.

In Feni, two cases were lodged with Feni Model Police Station by an SI against 176 named and 4,000 unnamed people over the clash between BNP activists and police on Tuesday.

One of the cases was filed under the Explosives Substances Act and the other on charges of attacking police and obstructing their work.

District BNP Convener Sheikh Farid Bahar and Member Secretary Alal Uddin are among the accused.

Kishoreganj Model Police Station SI Fazlur Rahman sued 19 named and 70 unnamed BNP leaders and activists over Tuesday's clash between police and the opposition party men in the district town's Rothkhola area. The suspects were accused of attacking police and obstructing their work.

The clash left more than 50 BNP men injured.

In Joypurhat, 197 people were sued by police and Joypurhat district Chhatra League President Md Raza

with Joypurhat Sadar Police Station.

Four cases were filed in Bogura against 211 BNP leaders and activists and many other unidentified people over Tuesday's clashes in the district town.

Police filed three of the cases with Bogura Sadar Police Station while the other one was lodged by a bus owner with Dupchanchia Police Station on charges of assaulting police, vandalising a police station, exploding crude bombs and vandalising vehicles.

Police have so far arrested five of the accused, including Bogura district BNP General Secretary Ali Azgar Talukdar Hena.

In Khagrachhari, police filed a case against 850 leaders and activists of the BNP and its front organisations with Khagrachhari Sadar Police Station over Tuesday's clashes between the supporters of the BNP and AL and police personnel.

SI Minhazul Abedin of the police station lodged the case against 150 named and about 700 unnamed people accusing them of attacking police and obstructing their work.

Police arrested 15 of the accused till last night.

Momen irked by foreign missions' jt statement

FROM PAGE 12

next general election.

The minister said it is time to stop publishing or broadcasting such statements.

Responding to a question, the minister said US President Joe Biden wants to strengthen the relations with Bangladesh and that's why senior officials keep on visiting here.

Earlier, some foreign missions in Dhaka called for a full investigation and accountability of the perpetrators involved in the assault on Alom.

The independent candidate was assaulted while leaving a polling centre in the capital's Banani on Monday.

Awami League's Mohammad Ali Arafat, who won the parliamentary by-election, said what happened "just 20 minutes before the end of the polling is uncalled for".

PM calls for accountability

FROM PAGE 12

Hasina asked the ministries and divisions to ensure accountability by signing APAs with their subordinate offices.

"You [ministries] will sign the APA with your other offices so that communication and accountability is ensured [in government offices] up to the grassroots level. If we can work in this way, we can turn Bangladesh into a developed and prosperous country by 2041," she said.

The PM advised the top government officials to prepare their successors as competent ones to build the country as a developed, prosperous, smart and Golden Bangladesh by 2041 through implementing the government's action plans.

She hoped that the government would be able to take Bangladesh forward by overcoming both the natural and man-made disasters.

"Man-made disasters may occur alongside natural calamities. I believe that we will be able to take the country forward by overcoming all sorts of disasters."

State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain spoke at the event.

The APA Award for FY2021-22 and Integrity Award for FY2022-23 were distributed among the government officials for their excellent performance in APA implementation and rendering services.

Planning Division Secretary Satyajit Karmakar received the Integrity Award 2022-23.

The public administration ministry attained the first award in the APA implementation for 2021-2022, while the Power Division and the agricultural ministry secured the second and third positions respectively.

The ministries and divisions that attained fourth to 10th positions in the implementation of APA are Finance Division, ICT Division, IMED, Energy and Mineral Resources Division, Ministry of Water Resources, Planning Division, and the Rural Development and Cooperatives Division.

Thai reformist Pita’s PM bid crashes

AFP, Bangkok

Thai reformist leader Pita Limjaroenrat’s bid to become prime minister ended yesterday, despite his party winning the most votes in May elections, after the military and pro-royalist establishment blocked his bid for power.

The 42-year-old was dramatically suspended from parliament while seated in the chamber for discussions on his candidacy, which came to an end when lawmakers voted to refuse considering him for a second ballot.

Pita’s suspension came when Thailand’s Constitutional Court said it would proceed with a case that could see the leader disqualified from parliament altogether for owning shares in a media company.

Lawmakers are forbidden from doing so under Thailand’s constitution, though the television station in question has not broadcast since 2007.



Move Forward Party supporters attend a protest at Democracy Monument following the suspension of party leader and prime ministerial candidate Pita Limjaroenrat in Bangkok yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar’s education system in ‘crisis’

REUTERS

After violence erupted in Myanmar in the wake of the 2021 coup, most high school students in the remote township of Thantlang left their studies and took up arms to support a grassroots rebellion against the military, local school teacher Salai said.

Across Myanmar, one of Southeast Asia’s poorest countries that has been ravaged by widening fighting since the coup, only about 22 percent of eligible students are enrolled at the high-school level, the World Bank said in a report published in July.

Overall, enrolment rates in Myanmar’s education institutions have dropped by over 12 percent between 2017 and 2023, the World Bank said, underlining “a crisis in education access”.

A junta spokesperson did not answer a phone call seeking comment.

While other countries in the region have seen education enrolments bounce back after the pandemic, large numbers of children in Myanmar have not come back to school, the World Bank said. Teachers and students in Myanmar have been at the forefront of opposition movements against military rule for decades.

Is extreme weather the ‘new normal?’

CNN ONLINE

Summer in the Northern Hemisphere is playing out like an apocalypse movie: a tale of heat, floods and fire. But scientists warn this may only be a preview of the unpredictable chaos to come if the world continues to pump out planet-heating pollution.

Just over halfway through July and already a slew of extreme weather records has been broken.

A prolonged, unrelenting heat wave has scorched large parts of the South and Southwest United States. Temperatures in Phoenix, Arizona, have hit at least 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43.3C) for a record-breaking 19 consecutive days, and emergency departments are flooded with heat-related illness.

Southern Europe is experiencing one of its most extreme heat waves on record, with wildfires raging in Greece, Spain and Switzerland. And in Asia, temperatures have pushed above 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit) in China, while parts of South Korea, Japan and northern India are experiencing deadly flooding.

In a statement on Tuesday, Petteri Taalas, secretary general of the World Meteorological Organization, called this relentless cascade of extreme weather “the new normal.”

But some scientists now balk at that framing.

“When I hear it, I get a bit crazy because it’s not really the new normal,” said Hannah Cloke, a climate scientist and professor at the University of Reading in the UK. “Until we stop pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere we have no idea what the future looks like.”

She is one of many scientists who warn that, while this summer is very bad, it’s only just the beginning. As long as global temperature continues to rise, they said, the world should brace for escalating impacts.

Michael E Mann, a climate scientist and distinguished professor at the University of Pennsylvania, prefers to describe the weather we are



seeing as “the new abnormal.”

The new normal “wrongly conveys the idea that we’ve simply arrived in some new climate state and that we simply have to adapt to it,” he told CNN.

“But it’s much worse than that. The impacts become worse and worse as fossil fuel burning and warming continues. It’s a shifting baseline of ever-more devastating impacts as long as the Earth continues to warm.”

For scientists like Mann and Cloke, this year’s extreme weather has largely not been surprising. The development of El Niño, a natural phenomenon that has a global warming impact, layered on top of longterm, human-caused global warming, was expected to have a big impact.

But regionally, there have been “some remarkable anomalies,” said Mann, who pointed to record-low levels of winter sea ice in Antarctica and “off the charts” heat in the North Atlantic. “They are a reminder that we can not only expect to see records broken, but shattered, if we continue burning fossil fuels.”

As the climate crisis accelerates, the stage is set for more surprises.

“The weather extremes will continue to become more intense and our weather patterns could change in ways we yet can’t predict,” said Peter Stott, a science fellow in climate attribution, at the UK Met Office.

In some cases, the heat, fire and floods are already exceeding what climate models have predicted, Mann said. In part, this is due to changes in the jet stream, he said.

The jet stream is driven by the temperature difference between the poles and the equator. As the Arctic rapidly warms, that temperature difference reduces and the jet stream slows and weakens. This can mean that weather systems can get locked into place for prolonged periods.

“The same region gets baked day after day, or rained on day after day – just the sort of behavior we’re seeing this summer,” Mann said.

Separate climate from politics

Visiting US climate envoy tells China

REUTERS, Beijing

Climate change is a “universal threat” that should be handled separately from broader diplomatic issues, US climate envoy John Kerry told Chinese Vice-President Han Zheng yesterday after two days of what he called constructive but complex talks.

Acknowledging the diplomatic difficulties between the two sides in recent years, Kerry said climate should be treated as a “free-standing” challenge that requires the collective efforts of the world’s largest economies to resolve.

“We have the ability to ... make a difference with respect to climate,” he said at a meeting at Beijing’s Great Hall of the People, China’s sprawling parliament building.

Kerry arrived in Beijing on Sunday as heat waves scorched parts of Europe, Asia and the United States, underscoring the need for governments to take drastic action to reduce carbon emissions, which contribute to global warming and extreme weather events.

He has held meetings with China’s top diplomat Wang Yi and Premier Li Qiang.

34 killed in Algeria bus crash

AFP, Algiers

At least 34 people were killed when an Algerian passenger bus collided head-on with a commercial vehicle and burst into flames before dawn yesterday in the country’s southern desert, officials said.

One of the North African country’s deadliest road crashes in years also left 12 others injured, many with burn wounds, Algeria’s civil defence agency said.

Media images showed the mangled and charred hull of the bus after the 4:00 am (0300 GMT) accident near Tamanrasset, a city about a 2,000-kilometre (1,250 miles) drive south from the capital Algiers.

Local media reported burnt bodies were recovered from the bus wreck, near the town of Outoul.

‘Electrocution’ kills 16 in Uttarakhand

REUTERS, Lucknow

At least 16 people were killed and another six injured in a suspected case of electrocution in the north Indian state of Uttarakhand this morning, government officials said.

The incident took place inside a sewage treatment plant established in the Himalayan state’s Chamoli district as part of a flagship programme of the federal government that focuses on conserving the river Ganga.

The deceased include a police officer and three personnel from the Home Guard, officials said, adding that the latter are suspected to have died as they attempted to rescue the police officer.

MONSOON RAINS

11 killed in Pakistan wall collapse

AFP, Islamabad

At least 11 labourers were killed and five others injured yesterday when a wall collapsed during heavy monsoon rains on the outskirts of Pakistan’s capital.

Pakistan receives heavy – often destructive – rains during its annual monsoon season, which is crucial for agriculture and water supplies.

The men were crushed to death as they slept in tents next to the bridge that they were constructing in Islamabad.

“So far the dead bodies of 11 labourers have been recovered while five others have been injured in the incident,” said administration official Nehel Hafeez.

Sri Lanka passes anti-graft bill without vote

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka’s parliament approved an anti-corruption bill yesterday, aimed at improving governance in the crisis-hit country and meeting requirements linked to a \$2.9 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The legislation was passed without a vote in the 225-member parliament.

“The bill is passed with amendments,” Sri Lanka parliament Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena told lawmakers after more than two dozen pages of amendments were included into the draft legislation during the morning session.

AFGHANISTAN BEAUTY PARLOUR BAN

Shots fired, firehose used to disperse protesting women

AFP, Kabul

Security officials shot into the air and used firehoses to disperse dozens of Afghan women protesting in Kabul yesterday against an order by Taliban authorities to shut down beauty parlours, the latest curb to squeeze them out of public life.

“Don’t take my bread and water,” read a sign carried by one of the protesters on Butcher Street, which boasts a concentration of the capital’s salons.

Public protests are rare in Afghanistan – and frequently dispersed by force – but AFP saw around 50 women taking part in yesterday’s gathering, quickly attracting the attention of security personnel.

Protesters later shared videos and photos with journalists that showed authorities using a firehose to disperse them as shots could be heard in the background.

“Today we arranged this protest to talk and negotiate,” said a salon worker, whose name has not been published by AFP for security reasons.

“But today, no one came to talk to us, to listen to us. They didn’t pay any attention to us and after a while they dispersed us by aerial firing and water cannon.”

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) condemned the protest breakup.

“Reports of the forceful suppression of a peaceful protest by women against the ban on beauty salons – the latest denial of women’s rights in #Afghanistan – are deeply concerning,” it said in a tweet.



A fireman stands in front of the blazes of a fire in New Peramos, near Athens, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

FRENCH RIOTS

Over 700 sentenced to prison

AFP, Paris

More than 700 people have been sentenced to prison over riots in France late last month, the country’s justice minister said yesterday while lauding the fast-track trials that have alarmed some defence lawyers.

In total, 1,278 verdicts have been handed down, with over 95 percent of defendants convicted on a range of charges from vandalism, theft, arson or attacking police officers.

Although minor prison terms can usually be converted into a non-custodial punishment – usually the wearing of an electronic bracelet – around six hundred people have already been jailed, Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti said.

“It was extremely important to have a response that was firm and systematic,” he told RTL radio.

Why are so many still functionally illiterate?

It should be a wake-up call for our policymakers

It is gravely concerning that around 40 percent of adults in the country are still functionally illiterate, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistic's Literacy Assessment Survey 2023 report. In other words, as the survey shows, only 60.77 percent of people aged 15 years and above are functionally literate. The rate, however, stands at 62.92 for people aged seven years and older. The number of people functionally literate between the ages of 11 and 45 years stands at 73.69 percent, up from 53.70 percent in 2011. And given that the rate of functional literacy among younger age groups is higher, it can be expected that it will continue increasing going forward. Yet, the slow pace of progress and the still absurdly high rate of illiteracy – despite the government's commitment to turn this around – is disappointing.

According to BBS officials, anyone who can read, understand, interpret, communicate, and count verbally and in writing is considered "functionally literate". Hence, for this, the standard for someone to be considered as literate is slightly different from what was used in the Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2022 and the Population and Housing Census 2022 – where the literacy rate was found to be higher. One may argue, however, that the functional literacy rate gives a more complete picture of the nation's state and quality of literacy. In that regard, Bangladesh has evidently a long way to go in terms of enjoying the full benefits of literacy.

Another matter that needs to be looked at closely is the discrepancy in literacy among people of different genders and geographical locations. For example, among young people, it seems boys are falling behind girls in terms of functional literacy. Additionally, there seems to be a big difference in the functional literacy rate between people living in urban areas, at 71.06 percent, and those living in rural areas, at 56.12 percent. Clearly, much more focus needs to be put on providing quality education to individuals residing in rural areas.

The fact that nearly 40 percent of adults in the country are functionally illiterate should also raise questions regarding the overall quality of our education. Why is it that such a large percentage of people failed to pass the BBS' literacy requirement when the percentage of people who have received primary education is higher? This means that despite receiving education, many are failing to achieve functional literacy – which somewhat defeats the very purpose of receiving it. These are questions that deserve greater attention from our policymakers. The government needs to address them as well as find ways to speed up the rate at which functional literacy in the country is increasing.

We must save our nature and wildlife

Worrying reports about natural degradation question government's sincerity

Why is it that despite pledging to stop deforestation – and increase forestland by 25 percent – by 2030, Bangladesh continues to set far fewer examples of forestation than of deforestation the closer it gets to the deadline? Only the other day, we commented on the country's first-ever urban forest being planned in Dhaka's Purbachal Residential Area. But since then, we have had at least three reports on instances of environmental degradation, the first being about influential people cutting a hill in Chattogram's Lohagara upazila in order to build houses. And on Wednesday, we were again pitted against two reports on the destruction of forests elsewhere in the Chattogram region. The risk of failing to meet that COP26 target – which seems almost certain – is not our main concern, however. What we find most alarming is the total lack of urgency with which our environmental concerns are being addressed.

Take, for example, the existential threat faced by the critically endangered Asian elephants because of the newly constructed Dohazari-Cox's Bazar rail line. Reportedly, about one quarter of the 102-kilometre line cuts through three vital forested areas, namely the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, the Fasiakhali Wildlife Sanctuary, and the Medhakocopia National Park – key corridors essential for the elephants who move between habitats in search of food and water. However, Bangladesh Railway has built only one overpass and two underpasses to facilitate their passage, which is woefully inadequate. This, experts say, has only increased the risk of collisions between trains and elephants, who are already facing severe challenges to their survival due to widespread deforestation in the greater Chattogram region.

The second story from Wednesday sheds light on the senseless conversion of a five-acre mangrove forest into a shipbreaking yard in Chattogram's Sitakunda upazila. A once lush green forest – home to countless trees that acted as natural barriers against storm surges – now lies razed to the ground. What makes it harder to accept is that this was done with the authorisation of the district administration, which leased out the forestland to the company in question which, in turn, cleared the trees and nearby areas without obtaining permission from the Forest Department. And even though the district administration later cancelled the lease agreement amid criticism, the damage has already been done, leaving irreversible consequences for the area's ecological balance, biodiversity and wildlife.

Once you assess the cumulative effects of all such activities, which are occurring in some form every day, you cannot help but feel deeply worried. We, therefore, urge the government to take immediate action to halt further destruction of forests and habitats in the country, ensure strict adherence to relevant laws, and subject all its development projects to rigorous environmental impact assessments.

We are not taking our energy crisis seriously



Dr Badrul Imam is honorary professor at the Department of Geology of the University of Dhaka.

BADRUL IMAM

Bangladesh has 20 gas fields in production today, but 70 percent of the gas production comes from only two fields: Bibiyana and Titas. These two gas fields have been, in a sense, our safeguards as we reel under a severe gas crisis. Bibiyana, the highest producer – 1,100 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) on average – is operated by US-based Chevron Corporation, and Titas, the second highest producer – 400 mmcf on average – is operated by Bangladesh Gas Fields Company Ltd.

Bibiyana, with the original reserve of 5,755 billion cubic feet (Bcf), is left with only 250 Bcf at present, meaning that the gas field has already exhausted about 95 percent of its original reserve. It is envisaged that in a few years, Bibiyana will see an overwhelming reduction in production. At present, Bibiyana alone supplies about half of the total gas produced in the country. With its reserve shrinking, there is a general concern: what would happen if or when Bibiyana runs out? Titas, too, has exhausted about 70 percent of its original reserve and produces at a lower rate than it used to.

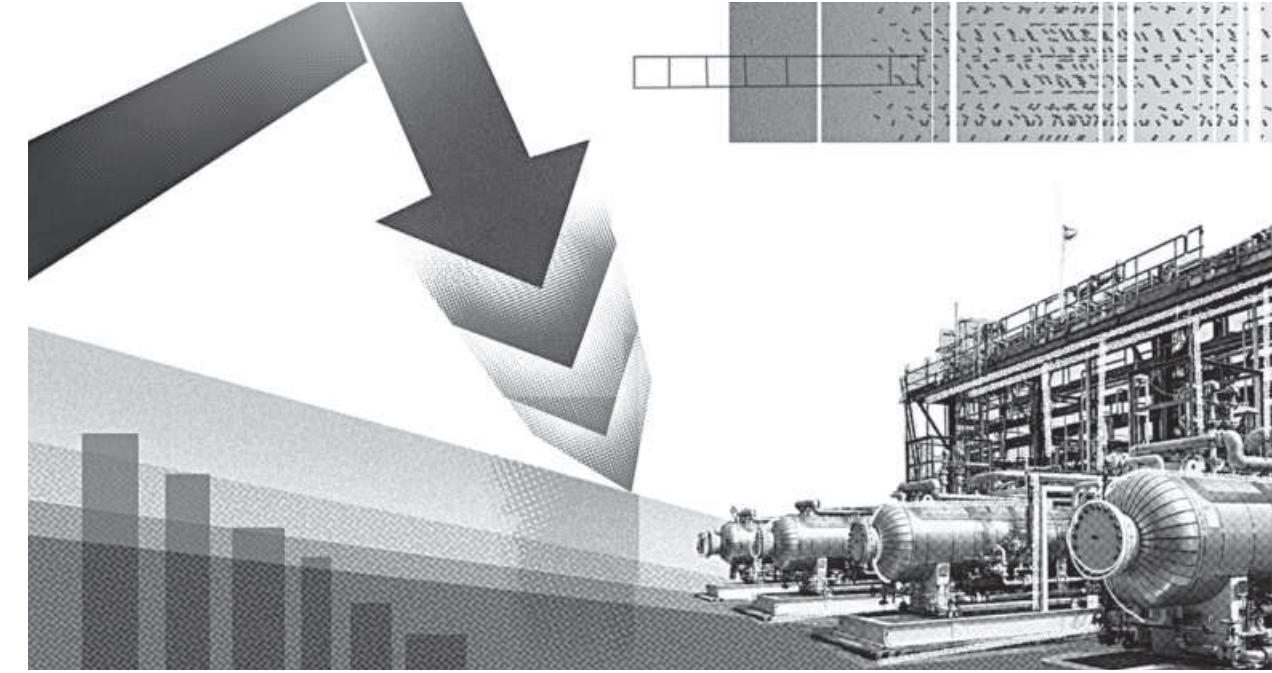
How can Bangladesh make up for the gap in gas production here? What sustainable alternative does the country have to face an incoming large gas shortfall? How concerned are our policymakers with this critical energy issue?

How the present crisis set in

In Bangladesh, natural gas has been predominant in the energy mix for decades since it became easily available to meet the demands in various sectors. As late as in 2010, the country used to generate about 90 percent of its electricity in gas-fuelled power plants. The natural gas production continued to slowly rise until 2016, but it could not grow any further and the fall began.

The decline of natural gas supply since late 2016 was slow and steady, but its effect was larger because by then the demand and consumption of natural gas had grown significantly. The government's decision to shut down or ration the supply of natural gas in industries, power plants and domestic sectors brought the problem up to the surface.

By 2022, the share of natural gas in power generation came down to 55 percent. To supplement the gas



VISUAL: REHNUMA PROSHOON

shortfall, the government started to import high-cost liquefied natural gas (LNG) in late 2018. The economic stress caused by the LNG import bill fell on the consumers' shoulders as the gas prices were increased.

The missed opportunity

The question is, why does this have to happen in a country like Bangladesh, a delta which is supposed to be very gas-prone for its inherent geological nature? The answer to that is simple. Since the gas reserve depletion trend in Bangladesh came to notice, there has never been a serious exploration initiative to replenish the depleted reserves. For example, we saw our gas reserve gradually shrinking from 13 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) in 2008 to less than nine Tcf in 2023, but did not care enough to replenish the reserve.

This may lead to yet another question: why were other sources not explored? Bangladesh won a vast expanse of offshore territory in 2014 through international court settlement of maritime boundaries among Bangladesh, India and Myanmar. Since then, our neighbours have both carried out enough exploration to find new gas reserves in their respective offshore territories, but we have not.

Several international oil companies (IOCs) have shown interest in offshore

gas exploration in Bangladesh, waiting for the bidding to open since last year, but the announcement for such a bidding round has been deferred numerous times, due to which some of the IOCs are bound to lose interest. Earlier this year, Exxon Mobil, the number one company in the world

highest producer Bibiyana gas field is alarming. The current efforts to find an extension of the gas horizon via new drilling, if successful, will keep the gas field running reasonably well only for a few more years. If not, the production plateau is likely to dip sharply sooner, and the gas field

We need a loss and damage report from the IPCC



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Dr Saleemul Huq is director at the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) and professor at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

SALEEMUL HUQ

The global activities to address climate change is divided into two major institutions and activities under the United Nations. The first is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), jointly run by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which deals with the latest scientific evidence on different aspects of climate change. The IPCC consists of representatives from every member country of the UN, mostly from national meteorological agencies, and it meets in a plenary session each year to discuss the next series of scientific reports to be commissioned.

The IPCC recently completed the sixth assessment cycle of climate change with a series of scientific reports, and the next plenary meeting is due later this month in Nairobi, Kenya, to select the new chair and Working Group heads for the seventh assessment report.

The second institution is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), where all governments are members and which takes policy decisions for actions to

tackle climate change at an annual Conference of Parties (COP). The UNFCCC was set up in response to the first IPCC reports, which alerted global policymakers about the dangers of human-induced climate change. The Kyoto Protocol at COP3 was in response to the second assessment report (AR2) of the IPCC, and the Marrakesh Accords at COP7 was in response to AR3.

Hence, the UNFCCC considers each assessment report from the IPCC in its decision-making process, and asks the IPCC for advice on the latest science on climate change.

While the main IPCC assessments consist of separate reports – from Working Group 1 on the climate modelling, Working Group 2 on vulnerability, impacts and adaptation, and Working Group 3 on responses, plus a final synthesis report based on all three Working Group reports. This involves hundreds of scientists from all the countries, from many different disciplines, who assess the scientific literature and prepare draft reports for very thorough reviews, which is why each cycle of assessment takes around five years.

However, there is also a possibility for the IPCC plenary session to commission a special report on a single topic, which can be delivered in two years only. Such special reports included one on the 1.5-degree-Celsius temperature rise, which was proposed by the developing countries in the last IPCC cycle. The special report on

As last year's decision to set up funding arrangements to address losses and damages from climate change has set up a Transitional Committee to come with recommendations by COP28, and developed further in the next few years, it is extremely important for the IPCC to provide the UNFCCC decision-makers with the latest scientific data on losses and damages.

1.5 degrees was extremely influential in getting decisions in the UNFCCC process, most importantly to get the target included in the Paris Agreement in 2015.

As the IPCC starts to plan its seventh assessment cycle, it's time for the developing countries to call for

a special report on loss and damage from human-induced climate change. As last year's decision to set up funding arrangements to address losses and damages from climate change has set up a Transitional Committee to come with recommendations by COP28, which is due in December, and developed further in the next few years, it is extremely important for the IPCC to provide the UNFCCC decision-makers with the latest scientific data on losses and damages.

Such a special report on loss and damage could be delivered within another two years to capture the significant amount of scientific research that is now being carried out and published on different aspects of tackling climate change. These include economic and non-economic losses and damages, and rapid onset events such as cyclones, floods, and heatwaves as well as slow onset events such as sea-level rise and droughts.

The topic of loss and damage from human-induced climate change is still little understood and quite complicated, so a credible scientific report from the IPCC will play a significant role in advancing the understanding of this issue by both decision-makers and the general public.

It is, therefore, important that the delegates from Bangladesh and all the other Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as well as other groups attending the upcoming IPCC plenary session in July in Nairobi support the inclusion of a special report on loss and damage in the upcoming AR7 IPCC cycle.



The Pillars of Creation in the Eagle Nebula – on the left is Hubble’s image, on the right is JWST’s image. PHOTO: NASA

Is the James Webb Space Telescope delivering on its promises?



Dr Quamrul Haider is a professor of physics at Fordham University in New York, U.S.

QUAMRUL HAIDER

The month of July marks the first anniversary when the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), the largest and most powerful space-based telescope ever built, began its long-awaited mission to unfold the universe before us. In a column published in this daily on July 16, 2022, I discussed five sensational discoveries made by JWST within days of coming online.

Although the breathtaking images mesmerised us, it is time to ask the following questions. Is the telescope delivering on its promises to transform our knowledge of cosmology? Is it worth the hefty price tag of \$10 billion? Before answering the questions, let me summarise some more groundbreaking discoveries made by JWST after its first images were released a year ago. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the significance of these discoveries.

Discovery of galaxies formed just after the Big Bang: As advertised, the telescope was designed to observe the earliest, and hence the most distant galaxies in the universe. To that end, in December 2022, scientists confirmed that JWST had indeed observed four most distant galaxies as they were when the universe was barely 300 million years old.

Moreover, JWST has peered deep into the cosmos, much deeper than Hubble Space Telescope could peer, allowing us to witness many more galaxies as they appeared a mere 500-800 million years after the cataclysmic Big Bang that occurred 13.8 billion years ago. An image released by JWST in June 2023 contains approximately 45,000 faint, distant galaxies. Some of these galaxies – roughly 700 – are new discoveries and the youngest ever observed.

The discovery of these primaeval galaxies is not only giving us a rare glimpse into a once opaque, turbulent universe flooded by light from the nascent stars, they are also helping scientists unlock the secrets of the early universe like never before.

Hidden stars in the Pillars of Creation and Tarantula Nebula: Equipped with its unique capabilities of detecting infrared light, JWST can see through cosmic clouds made up of interstellar dust, thereby revealing things hidden from telescopes like Hubble, which use mostly visible light. That is why one of Hubble’s most iconic images, the Pillars of Creation in the Eagle Nebula, captured only the nebula’s impressive clouds, but not the “creation” of stars taking

place within them. The infrared eyes of JWST, on the other hand, penetrated through the clouds and captured the creation in the form of numerous protostars – an early stage in the evolution of stars.

Besides, with the help of its infrared-sensitive instruments, JWST pictured the Tarantula Nebula, the largest and brightest star-forming region in the Large Magellanic Cloud galaxy. The picture reveals tens of thousands of newborn stars, which could not be photographed by Hubble because they were buried beneath layers of cosmic dust.

Phantom Galaxy: As the name suggests, the Phantom Galaxy in the constellation Pisces is difficult to see in the sky unless it is absolutely dark. Nevertheless, an image recorded by JWST shows the brilliance of

this galaxy, resembling a spinning wormhole – a hypothetical tunnel connecting two distant points in space or time – with fibre-like structures of heat-emitting dust and gas, emanating from a bright centre depicted in vivid eye-catching electric blue.

Cartwheel Galaxy: An amazing picture taken by JWST displays “gymnastics” performed by stars in the Cartwheel Galaxy in the constellation Sculptor. It also reveals more details about star formation, as well as about the galaxy’s central black hole. Furthermore, the picture provides information on the changes that took place in the ring of the galaxy over billions of years. Its shape, much like the wheel of a wagon, is the result of a high-speed collision between a large spiral galaxy and a smaller one about 400 million years ago.

Farthest active black hole: Using JWST, researchers have discovered the farthest active black hole ever recorded. Situated in the galaxy CEERS 1019, it was formed some 570 million years after the Big Bang,

making it the oldest supermassive black hole.

Brown dwarf with sand clouds: While many telescopes have identified exoplanets, JWST was not designed to do so. But it did discover one – an exceptionally weird discovery though. Originally identified by astronomers as a planet, it turned out to be too big to be a planet, but too small to be a proper star. It is a young brown dwarf, a so-called “failed star,” with sandy clouds and a turbulent atmosphere giving off a dim, reddish glow.

Dark matter: A team of researchers suggests that JWST has recently detected “dark stars” powered by dark matter that makes up around 27 percent of the universe’s mass. Its “partner in ambiguity,” yet to be detected dark energy, accounts for 68 percent, while only five percent of the mass is visible.

Out of a long list of astonishing discoveries made by JWST, a few more are a stunning never-before-seen details of the supernova remnant of Cassiopeia A, a fascinating star-studded, wreath-shaped spiral galaxy located in the constellation Pegasus, the chaotic merging of two galaxies in the constellation Delphinus, a deceptively peaceful

JWST has peered deep into the cosmos, much deeper than Hubble Space Telescope could peer, allowing us to witness many more galaxies as they appeared a mere 500-800 million years after the cataclysmic Big Bang that occurred 13.8 billion years ago. An image released by JWST in June 2023 contains approximately 45,000 faint, distant galaxies. Some of these galaxies – roughly 700 – are new discoveries and the youngest ever observed.

yet fiery spiral galaxy with tightly entwined arms formed after a violent “cosmic clash” between two different galaxies 500 million years ago in the constellation Vela, and new aspects of a cluster of three massive galaxies combining to form a mega cluster in a region of space known as Pandora’s Cluster.

Meanwhile, Nasa is celebrating JWST’s successful first year with a detailed image of the closest star-forming region to Earth: the Rho Ophiuchi cloud complex.

Finally, the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) is demonstrating that it is truly capable of the job it was built for – push the boundaries of astronomy and cosmology closer to the beginning of time, into the period when the first light from stars and galaxies cleared the thick fog that was obscuring our view of the universe. And it is doing so by providing us with jaw-dropping images of the cosmos since July of last year. Thus, JWST is not only delivering on its promises, it is living up to the hype and its price tag, too, by revolutionising our understanding of the universe.

Applauding Bangladesh’s remarkable health achievements



Dr Henry B Perry is a senior scientist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in the U.S.

HENRY B PERRY

The University Press Limited (UPL), in association with Bangladesh Health Watch, James P Grant School of Public Health of Brac University, and the Embassy of Sweden, has just published a monumental book of great importance, titled *50 Years of Bangladesh: Advances in Health*, edited by Ahmed Mushtaque Raza Chowdhury, Yasmin Ahmed, Khairul Islam, and Shishir Moral. It describes the progress that Bangladesh has made since independence in improving the health of its citizens. In global terms, compared to other countries at a similar level of development in 1971, Bangladesh’s achievements are astonishing – the collective result of (1) inspired dynamic leadership from thousands of individuals who have worked with communities, government, and non-governmental organisations; (2) government leadership and international support from donors and technical experts; (3) communities striving for the collective common good; and (4) millions of people giving their all for a better life for themselves and their families.

Among the many noteworthy achievements highlighted in this book since independence, several stand out: i) the improvement in life expectancy at birth to 72 years; ii) the reduction in under-five child mortality from 251 to 31 per 1,000 live births; iii) the reduction in the total fertility rate from 6.6 births per woman to 2.0; iv) the expansion of childhood immunisations to 86 percent and the elimination of polio; and v) the decline in the percentage of deaths from diarrhoea among children from 25 percent in 1970 to two percent in 2000 and since.

Progress in women’s empowerment, elimination of illiteracy, increases in the level of education (especially for girls), formation of women’s groups and microcredit and other poverty alleviation programmes, expansion of agricultural output, and improvement in roads, communications and other infrastructure have all helped to make the health achievements possible. The book concludes that “[c]reating a cadre of female health workers..., demystifying (healthcare) and making it more understandable for the general public have been found to be critical factors for success of Bangladesh’s health sector.”

Given Bangladesh’s projected economic growth over the next two decades, the overarching question is not whether there will be the money to reach “Health for All,” but whether this money will be used in a way that will bring the greatest benefits possible for the health of the population and particularly for the poorest members of society.

The way forward

There are eight key priorities for the next 50 years that arise from this remarkable book:

Support for bold innovations from “outside the box”

What has worked in the past is not necessarily going to work in the future. Bangladesh has picked much of the “low-hanging fruit” in its success in reducing child mortality and fertility, but picking the “high-hanging fruit” by creating a strong and effective primary healthcare system for all citizens will require a bold and innovative commitment of the government together with civil society.

Major expansion of funding for the health sector, with priority given to expansion of coverage at the lower levels of the health system

This new book informs us that, at present, the government’s health expenditure as a percentage of the GDP is the lowest in the world – 0.7 percent. Major expansions of funding for the health sector will be required together with large increase of the health workforce. This will require a tripling of the portion of the GDP for health to two percent.

Development of a strong primary health care system with continued outreach to every home

Bangladesh needs a strong, effective, and affordable primary healthcare system that gives emphasis on the prevention, early identification, and ongoing treatment of non-communicable diseases. The dangers of “hospital centrism” in which hospitals and specialty care capture a disproportionate share of public sector financing must be overcome by careful and transparent monitoring of government expenses for health and a political commitment to give priority to expanding the budget for the lower levels of healthcare delivery.

Creation of a strong professionalised cadre of community health workers

Bangladesh also needs to build on its strong tradition of CHWs by upgrading them to a strong professionalised cadre of well-trained, full-time workers who are well supervised and supported, and well-integrated into the primary healthcare system. Globally, CHWs are at the dawn of a new era and, in fact, in many countries, they are leading the way to “Health for All” as their potential for achieving high levels of population coverage of evidence-based interventions that would not be otherwise achievable.

Decentralisation of funding and authority for primary healthcare

The decentralisation of funds for primary healthcare and the decentralisation of authority over the use of those funds will be required in order to revitalise the primary healthcare system and to ensure that every locality has the funds it needs to provide essential services. The local entities that receive these funds will need to have the capacity to speak and act

on behalf of the communities they serve.

Provision of health coverage to all citizens

Bangladesh has the highest rate of out-of-pocket expenditures as a percentage of total health expenditure in the world – 67 percent. In 2016, 11 million people fell into poverty because of health expenditures. The global goal established by the United Nations of Universal Health Coverage by 2030 require in Bangladesh, among other things, the creation of a safety net to protect families from these tragedies.

Continuation and further enhancement of the culture of research and evidence in healthcare

Brac and icddr, among many others, have made enormous contributions by conducting field research related to health services implementation and effectiveness, with the learnings applied through iterative implementation. As Bangladesh has done so well already, innovations need to begin at the local level and gradually scale up with monitoring and evaluation at each level of scaling up.

Strengthening of civil society watchdogs and civil society leadership

A vibrant, informed civil society (that includes, of course, the NGO community) will be essential for Bangladesh to make progress on all these fronts. This calls for a strong role for Bangladesh Health Watch and other similar organisations that can take a dispassionate view of the health needs of the country and the steps that need to be taken to address them. This will also require the emergence of strong leaders who can inspire others in these efforts. Making government expenditures transparent and holding the government accountable for how it uses its money will be critical.

The 1978 Declaration of Alma-Ata, affirmed by representatives of 134 countries including Bangladesh, called for the achievement of “Health for All” – “a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life.” The declaration also reminds us that “[t]he people have the right and duty to participate individually and collectively in the planning and implementation of their healthcare.”

Over the past five decades, Bangladesh has inspired the rest of the world because of its achievements in the implementation of health programmes, saving lives, and overcoming poverty, thereby bringing dignity and hope to millions of people. The closing remarks of *50 Years of Bangladesh: Advances in Health* proclaims, “The government must play a bold role and lend a hand towards the transformation of the health system. That is, the government needs to have courage and full commitment.” Only through this, but within a pluralistic health system that incorporates the full spirit and participation of civil society and local communities, will such efforts succeed in providing “Health for All.”

This is an abridged version of the author’s keynote address at the launch of the book, ‘Bangladesh at 50: Advances in Health,’ held in Dhaka in May 2023.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Power unit

5 Openings

9 Sore spots

11 Choose

13 Publicity act

14 Caruso, for one

15 Sewing aid

16 Tutor

18 Fizzy quaff

20 Tell tales

22 Cockpit guesses

23 Tatter

24 Broker’s advice

25 Lateral, e.g.

27 Pop

29 Busy worker

30 Signified

32 Emaciated

34 “Noma–”

35 Yonder items

36 Happened

38 Rube

39 Au naturel

40 Authentic

41 Citi Field team

DOWN

1 Some stingers

2 Director’s cry

3 Storm flash

4 Toe count

5 Costume

6 Guinness of film

7 Result of hitting into a

8 Nova –

10 Increase

12 Grove makeup

17 Twice uno

19 Line of symmetry

22 Continental coin

24 Legendary Paul

25 Ashen

26 News star

27 Golfer Hogan

28 Social service

30 Reside

31 Monopoly cards

33 Cruising

37 Flock father

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8-5

MONDAY’S ANSWERS

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

TRIBUTE

Au Revoir, Milan Kundera

“Kundera’s texts, through this intermingling of fiction with philosophy, feel at once personal and yet unattainable. Reading a Milan Kundera text is not a simple feat, but rather, the readers are forced to question their own life and existence alongside the characters themselves.”

TASNIM NAZ

On July 11, 2023, the world said goodbye to Czech born French novelist, Milan Kundera. The renowned author has left an indelible mark on the literary world with his insightful and thought-provoking works. Celebrated for his unique blend of philosophy, psychology, and fiction, Kundera’s writings delve into the intricacies of human existence, exploring themes of love, identity, memory, and the challenges of living in a complex and absurd world.

Born on April 1, 1929, in Brno, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic), Kundera’s early years were shaped by the political and social turmoil of his time. He witnessed the rise of communism in his homeland, a period marked by censorship, restrictions on artistic expression, and the suppression of individual freedoms. These experiences deeply influenced his writing and fueled his exploration of the human condition under oppressive regimes. And being born out of the depths of such oppression, Kundera places special importance on the idea of freedom. He believes that writing can liberate oneself. He creates a sophisticated cluster of people in fictional settings so that the readers may pose questions onto their own lives, through voyaging on the journey of the characters. Milan Kundera’s stories are much more than plot progressions—rather, they are a philosophical journey inward.

His most famous text, a novel which has become synonymous with him, is *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (first published in 1984). Kundera never expressed any interest in dictating the external appearances of the characters; he felt they were unnecessary additions in the temperament of human existence. Instead, he magnified the inner lives of the characters in the writings he



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

penned. In this formative piece of novel, he divided human existence into two philosophical concepts—lightness and heaviness. He argues that the “lightness of being” refers to a sense of freedom, spontaneity, and detachment from moral or societal expectations, while the “heaviness of being” represents commitment, responsibility, and the burden of choices. Human beings are plagued by both, and have to regulate between the lightness and the heaviness of being. Sustaining this philosophical concept, Kundera introduces an assortment of characters, all experiencing the throes of life in the backdrop of 1968 Prague Spring, which was a period of political liberalisation in Czechoslovakia.

In the novel, Kundera brilliantly employs his characters to embody

different perspectives on the lightness of being. Tomas, a successful surgeon, embraces a philosophy of lightness, indulging in relationships without emotional attachments and pursuing a life free from commitments. His pursuit of lightness grants him a certain freedom but also leads to a sense of emptiness. In contrast, Tereza, Tomas’s wife, represents the heaviness of being. She seeks stability and longs for a deep connection, finding comfort in the permanence of love. Tereza’s struggles with the complexities of relationships highlight the burdens and responsibilities that come with emotional attachments. Her perspective challenges the notion of lightness, showing the depth and significance of human connection. Sabina, an artist and one of Tomas’s lovers, embodies a different approach to lightness. She

embraces her sexuality and rejects traditional notions of morality, believing that embracing the transient nature of existence is liberating. Sabina’s perspective emphasises the individual’s freedom to define their own values, unbound by societal expectations.

In an interview with Jordan Elgrably, Kundera talks about the ambiguity of the characters in his novel. According to the author, the purpose of the novel is to understand the individual truths of a kaleidoscope of characters. He encourages the readers to dive into the ambiguity of the characters, rather than trying to simplify their lives. Kundera believes that as readers, we would be encouraged to tackle the ambiguities and complexities of life, without extracting them from our existence. Kundera’s texts, through

this intermingling of fiction with philosophy, feel at once personal and yet unattainable. Reading a Milan Kundera text is not a simple feat, but rather, the readers are forced to question their own life and existence alongside the characters themselves. There is no moral superiority in his texts, which gives a refreshing insight into heavy topics such as sexuality and extra-marital affairs. Kundera’s exploration of the lightness of being raises profound existential questions about the nature of human existence. He challenges traditional views that associate heaviness with meaning and permanence. Instead, Kundera suggests that lightness grants life its richness and vitality. Moreover, Kundera questions the impact of choice in our lives. He argues that the lightness of being emerges from the freedom to make choices without being weighed down by the consequences. This philosophical perspective resonates with the readers, prompting introspection and contemplation about the choices we make in our own lives. Kundera urges his readers to never be bogged down by choices, but rather exercise one’s own rhetoric to make conscious decisions that help take control of one’s life.

Indeed, losing Milan Kundera is a substantial loss to the literary world. Here was a writer who made you think as well as feel. But at least, his readers can be comforted to find his brilliant musings in the nooks and crannies of every word and punctuation which he very generously left in the palm of his reader’s hands.

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FEATURE

The thing about popular and overhyped books

SALWAH CHOWDHURY

“Overhyped books are the empty calories of the literary world.”

Kevin Ansbro, Author (Goodreads)

Overhyped books are one of the big players in the publishing industry. They are books that are heavily promoted and marketed on social media by book bloggers and reviewers, often with large budgets, to generate buzz and anticipation among readers. However, when the book is finally released, sometimes it fails to live up to the hype.

In some cases, the book may be genuinely good, but the wait for it has set expectations too high, leading to disappointment among readers. For instance, the *Harry Potter* series. How many of us read it and didn’t enjoy it? The series and its author JK Rowling has been a tale of inspiration for many aspiring writers across the world. All she had to do was get her first novel, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* published, which was a great struggle. The commercial success and the genuine, positive reviews gave it all the fame it deserved. But the other titles of the series were anticipated by readers, and



DESIGN: AMREETA LETHE

The admission made me realise the fact that people don’t always quite enjoy reading popular books (or books written by famous artists). Most importantly, the taste in genres differs from person to person depending on their choice, mood, or current circumstances.

they were already successful and bestsellers even before they were written (particularly the last ones). Although the whole series is a success, the readers’ opinions and emotions vary. Most readers loved it, but a lot of people do consider them overrated. However, years later, when Rowling is a billionaire, this much loved series is now under scrutiny for its author’s personal views. As more people are reading and rereading them, the lack of diversity and inclusion, the stereotypical attributes of the characters who aren’t white is very evident. In other words, though the Potterverse is loved and well established, it is

now a matter of great debate if these books are worth the hype or not, considering this book has been made famous by fans themselves.

Professor Kaiser Haq, PhD, a Bangladeshi translator, critic, poet, and the Dean, School of Arts and Humanities at University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) deconstructed the phenomenon of hype, stating, “Hype depends on all the factors that are at play in the public sphere geopolitics, local concerns and obsessions, the hunger for sensationalism, and what have you. It will be a mistake to regard hype as the major determinant of literary and artistic reputation. More often than not hype will produce a nine days’ wonder. A great writer or artist (Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Picasso) is assured a secure position in the estimation of critics as well as the discerning public while many a hyped producer of printed or visual matter quietly fades into oblivion.”

Thinking back, I recall my friends and classmates from undergraduate days quoting excerpts from Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist* (1988), which I felt they were doing just to look cool. Months later, when I started reading it for myself, my mind was blown. I was fascinated by the way the novel portrayed how we manifest our dreams into reality. I was going through a bad breakup and reading that novel was a

reassurance of all the positive things I would embrace in my life, because that’s what the power of destiny is. Later, I embarked upon a journey of recommending Coelho’s books, *The Alchemist* (1988), and *Veronica Decides to Die* (1998) to everyone. It was a shock when I realised that there are people who hated his books! During a casual discussion at work, my supervisor, an avid reader and mother of a budding avid reader, mentioned how she didn’t quite like *The Alchemist*, because she felt the narrative was pretentious and not lyrical. To her, the philosophical ideas that the book held felt forced and unspontaneous. The admission made me realise the fact that people don’t always quite enjoy reading popular books (or books written by famous artists). Most importantly, the taste in genres differs from person to person depending on their choice, mood, or current circumstances.

There are several reasons why a book may be overhyped. It could be due to the popularity of the author, the subject matter, the publishers’ or bookstores’ desire to make a profit, especially when they see its potential to turn into a cultural phenomenon, or when a movie or TV series is adapted from a book. Amina Rahman, Managing Director of Bookworm Bangladesh stated, “From a book seller’s perspective, sometimes we purchase and buy books we personally read

and loved. Through sheer passion—at times self-belief—we may bring a lot of copies of that book and publicise it or “hype” it more so that people get the opportunity to read an excellent piece of literature. The whole phenomenon is partly passion and partly measuring the new trends and capturing that ride, not wanting to miss out.”

When Iflat Nawaz was asked regarding her debut novel, *Shurjo’s Clan*, which gained a lot of attention and positive reviews during the Dhaka Lit Fest held this year, she said, “*Shurjo’s Clan* came out in November 2022 and some time before that Penguin (my publishers) had sent out early copies to selected folks—fellow writers, reviewers etc. So a decent number of people had the chance to read and review it for newspapers and magazines both in Bangladesh and in India. By the time DLF happened a month and half had already passed since its release and enough people had read it by then to talk about it to others. So I don’t think the hype came before people read it, (if there is such a hype), I think whatever goodness *Shurjo’s Clan* has received from the readers came from the way people related to it—especially in regards to how we process our inherited pasts—which did not fully belong to us, a subject so relevant for our post ‘71 generation. Perhaps, because of my weekly column ‘Under a Different Sky’, which I had

written for *The Daily Star* for 10 years, I had somewhat of a readership in Bangladesh and I was fortunate enough to get the love of those readers who picked up the book and passed it on to other . . . even though there had been a 10 year hiatus since those column days.”

On one hand, popular books can be a great way to stay up to date with current trends and cultural conversations. They may also offer a sense of community, as many people may be discussing and analysing the same book. Additionally, popular books (both physical and electronic copies) are often widely available, making them easy to access and purchase. On the other hand, popular books may not always be the most high-quality or thought-provoking reads. Some popular books may be formulaic, overly simplistic, or lack depth.

In my opinion, as a passionate reader, the only problem with overhyped books is that they can overshadow other deserving books that receive less promotion and attention. Readers may miss out on great books because they are too focused on the latest overhyped release. Furthermore, overhyped books can also lead to a backlash among readers and critics, who feel that they have been misled. This can damage the reputation of the author, publisher, and even the entire industry.

Ultimately, there are great books who have attained immense popularity and turned out to be great reads. I have truly grasped the meaning of some books much later in life when I reread them, whereas there are books which invoked the same mixture of feelings after 15 years, that too, on my fifth read! For instance, the *Harry Potter* series, *Great Expectations* (1861), *David Copperfield* (1850), a few of Humayun Ahmed’s famous books like *Chayashongi*, to name a few. Similarly, I have bought and read books by authors I have seldom heard of, but they turned out to be gems. And this made me put things into perspective: reading only popular books may limit your exposure to diverse perspectives and genres, and to be a well-rounded reader, you can always explore all sorts of popular and unpopular genres—after all, you can always have new favourites!

Salwah Chowdhury works at an NGO by the day and works for her toddler at night. In between she is trying to be the writer she always wanted to be. Please reach her at salwahchowdhury@gmail.com or [@salwah_chowdhury](https://www.instagram.com/salwah_chowdhury) (IG) for any book recommendations or your thoughts on the article.

Targets over 200 still too steep

SPORTS REPORTER

When India posted 228 for eight after being sent into bat, the target appeared incredibly steep one for the Bangladesh women's cricket team, and it proved to be the case in the end, as the Tigresses were bundled out for 120, slumping to a 108-run loss in the second of the three-match ODI series in Mipur yesterday.

With the thumping win, India bounced back to level the series 1-1.

When Marufa Akter bowled an outstanding inswinger to rattle the stumps of India opener Priya Punia in the morning, the Tigresses would have hoped that they would be able to restrict India to a much lower total.

"If I say about our bowling, we couldn't give our 100 per cent according to our bowling strength. We gave away 30 to 40 runs more than what we had planned. Also, our fielding wasn't as good as the game before. Their total proved big for us," vice-captain Nahida Akter, who finished with 2-37, expressed her discontent in the post-match press conference yesterday.

However, the recent batting efforts pose a far bigger worry for Bangladesh, who only once crossed 220 in ODIs. According to Nahida, 180 was a more



PHOTO:FIROZ AHMED

'achievable target' for the side.

When Fargana Hoque bided time at the crease during a 47-run knock, stitching together a 68 run stand with Ritu Moni for the fourth wicket, it may have occurred that Bangladesh would at

least be able to take the game deep. The last seven wickets, however, fell for 14 runs once that partnership was broken.

"The momentum was shifting to our side when [Fargana Hoque] Pinky and Ritu were batting. But those among

us who batted in the middle-order, including me and Rabeya at the end, couldn't take the responsibility," Nahida said.

Despite the defeat, the Tigresses still have a chance to clinch their maiden ODI series against India when they meet for the final ODI on Saturday at the same venue. "We are mentally strong. We will play for the win in the last match and give our hundred per cent effort," Nahida said.

Jemimah Rodrigues was the star of the show for India with an all-round performance. She scored a career-best 86 off 78 deliveries before registering career-best bowling figures of four wickets for just three runs that swept the Tigresses away.

Jemimah had bowled just 12 deliveries in her 22-match career before this game but she wasn't surprised.

"I'm not surprised, honestly. I've been bowling a lot for my state team back there. Even in the nets, I've been working like this for the last two years. I was very happy that the support staff and our captain came up to me and they said, 'We need you on these tracks' because I get good turn and bounce. So, I was ready for it," she said.

Asia Cup schedule announced

AGENCIES

The Asian Cricket Council (ACC) on Wednesday announced Asia Cup fixtures. The tournament is set to run from August 30 to September 17 in Pakistan, the original hosts, and Sri Lanka.

The hybrid-model tournament, where Pakistan will host four matches across two venues while Sri Lanka stages the remaining ones, will be played in the 50-over format following the T20 format last year. Pakistan, India and Nepal are in Group A while Group B involves Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. The six group-stage matches will be followed by the Super 4s, beginning September 6.

The final will be played by top two teams from the Super 4s on September 17 in Colombo, with reserved day for the final scheduled the next day.

GROUP STAGE FIXTURES

August 30

Pakistan v Nepal, Multan (Pakistan)

August 31

Bangladesh v Sri Lanka, Kandy (Sri Lanka)

September 2

Pakistan v India, Kandy (Sri Lanka)

September 3

Bangladesh v Afghanistan, Lahore (Pakistan)

September 4

India v Nepal, Kandy (Sri Lanka)

September 5

Afghanistan v Sri Lanka, Lahore (Pakistan)

Mahmudullah sweats it out ahead of Asia Cup camp

SPORTS REPORTER

Hours before coming to the BCB Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday to partake in an individual practice session, Mahmudullah Riyad had posted a story on his social media accounts. It was his first session since returning from Hajj, a session which garnered the attention of the media as well.

The batter had been curiously left out of the squad drawn ahead of the Afghanistan series and later it was known that he had applied for vacation and would join the camp after the Hajj. Before that, he had been dropped from the series against Ireland at Chelmsford as the team management wanted to look at some younger stars.

'Challenge your story,' Mahmudullah's social media post read, perhaps a hint that he was aiming for a fightback. The question being pondered by fans and media alike was whether Mahmudullah wanted to get back into the side for the Asia Cup and the World Cup.

Having retired from Tests and having been dropped from the T20I line-up as the management was in favour of preparing the T20I unit with younger players for the future, ODIs remain the veteran's most viable option.

Mahmudullah sweated it out at the training session, undertaking a 25-minute running drill followed by a gym session for 15 minutes. He then batted at the academy nets for at least 20 minutes before going through the grind at the indoor nets for about half-an-hour.

He, however, did not bowl. A crucial aspect of the current selection scenario



is that the team management is looking for a bowling all-rounder at number seven position in the batting order. Whether Mahmudullah would be able to overcome his shoulder issue and contribute as a bowler is exactly what he would need to challenge in his story.

A BCB official, on conditions of anonymity, told The Daily Star that all-rounder has not been written off.

"He [Mahmudullah] can of course return but it depends on the management and the selectors' plan. No one can claim he is out of contention," the official said.

"He is also a contracted player and one would have to understand the scenario before reaching a conclusion," the official added.

Rumours are out there that Soumya

Sarkar could yet land a place in the Asia Cup and World Cup squad if he can pull off performances.

Having struggled immensely to perform with consistency, the left-handed batter struck a ton in the Dhaka Premier League in May this year. He was then included in the Emerging Asia Cup squad in Sri Lanka, where he has bagged five wickets as Bangladesh A confirmed the semifinal berth.

Scores of 42 and 48 also see him now challenge for a spot since Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha already said at a press conference during the Afghanistan series that players that would perform in the Emerging Asia Cup 'definitely' had a chance and if someone scores runs, they are putting those names up for selection. Off-spinning all-rounder Shaikh Mahedi, too, has played a few handy knocks down the order while returning decent figures with the ball in Sri Lanka.

Star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and ODI vice-captain Liton Das have set sail to play in the Global T20 League in Canada with Shakib's NOC being granted till July 29 and Liton's NOC granted till August 10. Shakib is expected to play the Lankan Premier League as well, which begins on July 30. Mushfiqur Rahim and Taskin Ahmed are expected to return home before the Asia Cup camp, and as the players gear up for a return following their franchise commitments, media eyes would be on Mahmudullah and Soumya, and maybe to some extent of Mahedi, and whether they get into contention for that camp.

Titu appointed as head coach of women's team

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) appointed Saiful Bari Titu as the head coach of the women's team till the end of the Asian Games in September-October, women's wing chairman of the board, Mahfuza Akter Kiran, confirmed on Wednesday.

The appointment comes after long-serving coach Golam Rabbani Choton resigned in late May citing personal reasons. His resignation letter was accepted by BFF in July.

"Today, we called Saiful Bari Titu and appointed him as the head coach of the national women's team for the Asian Games," Kiran said.

"We have been going through a bad time without a head coach for a long time. Paul [Smalley] also left his job but we have two important competitions - Asian Games for the senior team and the AFC U-17 Women's Championship for the women's football team in September," she added.

As for the U-17 Women's team heading for the AFC Championship, Mahabubur Rahman Litu will be acting as the head coach, Kiran informed.

Titu, who has previous experience working with the men's national team, also said he sees his new job as a challenge despite never being in charge of a women's team at any level.

AFC A licensed coach Titu expects the details of his contract to be finalised in a couple of days.

Pakistan sense victory at Galle

REUTERS

Pakistan remained on course for victory in the opening Test against Sri Lanka despite a top-order wobble chasing a meagre victory target of 131 at Galle on Wednesday.

Babar Azam's side had been in charge after claiming a handy first-innings lead of 149 in the first match of the two-Test series.

Their spin trio of Noman Ali (3-75), Abrar Ahmed (3-68) and Agha Salman (2-39) further consolidated their position by bowling out Sri Lanka for 279 in their second innings.

For the home side, Dhananjaya de Silva followed his first-innings hundred with 82, Nishan Madushka made 52 and Ramesh Mendis contributed 42 before they were all out. Pakistan finished Day 4 on 48-3 and will need 83 runs when play resumes on Thursday to go 1-0 up in the series.



With the removal of Australia's Travis Head on the opening day of the fourth and penultimate Ashes Test in Manchester yesterday, veteran England pacer Stuart Broad became only the second pacer -- after compatriot James Anderson -- and the fifth bowler in history to scalp 600 Test wickets. Early in the day, the 37-year-old helped England seize the initiative after winning the toss to keep their hopes alive of a remarkable comeback in the series that Australia lead 2-1.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Sabina and Co to follow epoch-making WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

SPORTS REPORTER

The 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup kicks off today with co-hosts New Zealand and Australia in action, with both matches combinedly set to welcome more than 100,000 fans.

The marquee event has gradually grown in stature, as evidenced by the involvement of 32 teams in the ninth edition. The previous instalment featured 24 teams while the inaugural one in China in 1991 saw 12 participants.

According to agencies, the seventh edition of World Cup in 2015 in Canada welcomed a record 1.3 million-plus fans at stadiums but this time the mark is expected to surpass, as nearly 1.4 million tickets have been sold till date.

The fans in Australia had already created a buzz by buying out all tickets for their opening match against Ireland, to be hosted at the 80,000-plus-capacity Stadium Australia.

The craze, however, is a bit less in their neighbour since the tickets of New Zealand's



Australia's defender Charlotte Grant and teammates take a picture during a training session at the Stadium Australia in Sydney yesterday, on the eve of the Women's World Cup opening match between Australia and Ireland.

PHOTO: AFP

campaign opener against Norway at the near 50,000-capacity Eden Park are still available, leading to FIFA president Gianni Infantino urging fans to "seize the moment" and snap up World Cup tickets.

In Bangladesh, the tournament would not match the fan-following

of the men's World Cup. However, the booters of the national women's team are apparently eager to absorb the action in store, with the opportunity to watch those matches in local private channels.

"To be honest, I haven't watched

"Many people who believe that women's football is still not a great game, or it's not so entertaining or it's kind of a bad copy of men's football or some stuff like that -- well when they watch a game for the first time, they will actually see that it's a fantastic game. The level has grown incredibly in the last 10 years and the best are coming here."

FIFA President Gianni Infantino

the matches of the Women's World Cup on that scale, but I will watch the USA, Japan and a few others in action," Bangladesh women's team captain, Sabina Khatun, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"However, other players of the national women's team are more

eager to watch the Women's World Cup than me because they, especially the junior players, always sit in front of television to watch different men's and women's matches as well as see video clips of technical and skill aspects."

Sabina believes the opportunity to watch the Women's World Cup in local channels this time is good news for the enthusiastic local footballer lovers, who turned up in numbers during women's international fixtures.

Replying to a query, she said, "It is really hard to explain why the football fans in Bangladesh are not much interested in the Women's World Cup, but I think when our women's team reach the Asian level, the spectators would also grow their interest to watch the Women's World Cup.

"I think this edition of the World Cup will be more exciting than the last edition," added Sabina, who would wait to predict the names of favourites until the completion of the group-stage matches.



TEAMS

32 nations will compete for the first time. Born as a 12-team tournament in 1991, it was expanded to include 16 countries at USA 1999 and 24 at Canada 2015.

GROUPS

Group A: New Zealand (Co-host), Norway, Philippines, Switzerland
Group B: Australia (Co-host), Canada, Nigeria, Ireland
Group C: Costa Rica, Japan, Spain, Zambia
Group D: China, Denmark, England, Haiti
Group E: Netherlands, Portugal, United States, Vietnam
Group F: Brazil, France, Jamaica, Panama
Group G: Argentina, Italy, South Africa, Sweden
Group H: Colombia, Germany, South Korea, Morocco

FORMAT

Teams will play a round-robin format in the group stage. The top two in each group will advance to the round of 16. The knockout rounds will begin on August 5. The final will take place on August 20 at Stadium Australia in Sydney.

TITLES

USA (4), Germany (2), Norway (1), Japan (1)



DHAKA-CTG RAIL LINK

Double-lined all along now

PM opens Akhaura-Laksham part today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rail communications between Dhaka and Chattogram will get a significant boost as the entire corridor will be double lined from today.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the 72km Akhaura-Laksham section, where dual-gauge double lines were installed under a Tk 6,504.54 crore project.

The inauguration will take place virtually from the Gono Bhaban at 11:00am, while Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan will preside over the programme.

The rest of the 321km track between the capital and the port city has already been converted into a double line.

The Dhaka-Chattogram railway is the first rail corridor in the country to be fully double-lined.

According to Bangladesh Railway officials, the travel time between the two cities will become an hour shorter once the section is opened.

Train journeys on this route took longer time when the Akhaura-Laksham section was the only one in the entire corridor to not be double-lined.

In this given situation, a project, jointly funded by

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



PHOTO: STAR

Construction of the 72km Akhaura-Laksham dual gauge double line has been completed. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate this section of the Dhaka-Chattogram rail line today. From today, the travel time on the Dhaka-Chattogram route will be reduced by an hour on average. The photo was taken near Cumilla Railway Station yesterday.

PM calls for accountability in govt offices

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the government officials to ensure accountability up to the grassroots level for the advancement of the country.

"We can overcome any tough situation or make the impossible possible if we go forward showing sincerity towards work, having a sense of self-esteem, ensuring accountability, and staying away from corruption. Today Bangladesh has proved it," she said.

The premier was addressing the signing ceremony of Annual Performance Agreements (APAs) for the FY2023-24 at her office in the capital.

Different ministries and divisions signed the APAs with the Cabinet Division. The PM received the agreements from secretaries of the ministries and divisions concerned.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6



ASSAULT ON HERO ALOM

All 7 arrestees from ruling party

13 foreign missions condemn attack during Dhaka-17 by-polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The suspects who were arrested for attacking Ashraf Hossain Alom alias Hero Alom, an independent candidate in Dhaka-17 by-polls, are activists of the ruling party.

Mostafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Banani Police Station, told The Daily Star yesterday that no fresh arrest was made yesterday. Apart from the seven arrestees, they have identified at least 10 more people and drives are underway to catch them, he added.

Five of the seven arrestees hail from Gopalganj. They are Sanwar Kazi, 28; Sohel Mollah, 25; Biplob Hossain, 31; Mahmudul Hasan Mehedi, 27; and Mozahid Khan, 27.

The other two – Ashique Sarker, 24, and Md Ridoy Sheikh, 24 – are originally from Cumilla and Shariatpur respectively.

Of them, Mahmudul, Mozahid, Ashik and Ridoy were former members of Chhatra League, said Sheikh Mehedi Hasan, former general secretary of Banani Thana Chhatra League.

Talking to this correspondent yesterday, however, Mehedi said those four were not involved in the attack.

According to Mehedi, he went to the Banani Biddya Niketan polling centre to cast his vote around noon when he saw a scuffle. In the afternoon, Hero Alom was assaulted near the polling centre. After that, Mehedi was summoned by the police to identify the attackers. But four of his party colleagues – Mahmudul, Mozahid, Ashik and Ridoy – who accompanied him to the DC's office were also arrested.

At the Banani Thana Chhatra League, Mahmudul was

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



Momen irked by foreign missions' jt statement

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday expressed displeasure over the joint statement by some foreign missions in Dhaka regarding the assault on Hero Alom.

"That's not acceptable. They create noise when something happens in Bangladesh only. But they don't do the same as a group when similar incidents happen in the US, the UK, France or other countries," the minister said when a reporter asked for his comments on the issue.

Momen wanted to know from reporters whether these countries say anything about the progress in investigations when Bangladeshis are killed abroad.

"Why don't you ask them [foreign diplomats]? Why don't they give statements then?"

He said the perpetrators who assaulted Alom, who ran in the Dhaka-17 by-election on Monday as an independent, need to be identified as this could have been done to create uncertainty ahead of the

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5

CLASHES WITH COPS, AL

About 11,000 BNP men sued in eight districts

STAR REPORT

About 11,000 leaders and activists of the BNP and its front organisations were sued yesterday in 16 cases filed in Dhaka and seven other districts over clashes between supporters of the opposition party and Awami League and police personnel.

The clashes took place during the BNP's road march on Tuesday demanding resignation of the government and general election under a non-party government.

A Krishak Dal activist was killed and over 350 activists of the BNP and its front bodies were injured in the clashes in Laxmipur, Dhaka's Mirpur, Bogura, Kishoreganj, Khagrachhari, Pirojpur, Feni and Joypurhat. Around 70 police personnel and 40 AL activists were also wounded.

Sajeeb Hossain, who was hacked to death during a clash between BNP supporters and police in Laxmipur, was buried at his family graveyard in Chandraganj of Laxmipur.

Before that, a gayebana janaza (funeral in absentia) of the deceased was held at the home of BNP leader Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Annie in Laxmipur town. BNP leaders alleged that they wanted to hold a namaz-e-janaza of Sajeeb, but police didn't allow them and sent the body to his

home in Nurullapur village.

Sajeeb's grandfather Hanif Mia, a member of ward-8 BNP at Chandraganj union of Laxmipur Sadar upazila, said his grandson joined the road march with him in Laxmipur town.

"Chhatra League activists attacked Sajeeb and hacked him to death. I want justice for my grandson," he told The Daily Star.

Sajeeb's elder brother Sujan filed a case last night accusing some unnamed people of the murder.

The clashes took place during the BNP's road march on Tuesday demanding resignation of the government and general election under a non-party government.

Family members said Sajeeb, 30, was scheduled to go abroad within a few days. His elder brother Mizanur Rahman, an expatriate in Saudi Arabia, had made all arrangements for his sibling's trip.

His family is torn by grief.

Laxmipur Superintendent of Police Mahfuzzaman Ashraf said, "Before dying, Sajeeb spoke to a man who told the police that he didn't join the BNP's programme. Four to five people, who lent him some money, hacked him."

Three cases were filed with Laxmipur Sadar Model Police Stations last night over Tuesday's clashes.

Sub-Inspector (SI) Anisuzzaman of Laxmipur Sadar Model Police Station filed one of the cases accusing 30 named and 2,000 unnamed persons on charges of carrying out subversive

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

KIDNEY TRANSPLANT

BSMMU to probe allegations over donor's identity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) authorities have formed a committee to probe a recent kidney transplant, suspected to involve falsification of the relationship between the donor and the recipient, at their super specialised hospital.

Organ donations beyond family members are strictly prohibited by the country's law.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Prof Habibur Rahman Dulal, proctor of BSMMU, said, "The committee has been asked to submit its report within seven days."

Habibur led the 15-member team that performed the kidney transplant on July 17 (Monday).

Earlier, the BSMMU authorities in a press release said it was the first kidney transplant done at the newly introduced BSMMU Super Specialized Hospital.

According to documents, Suzon Roy, 42, received the kidney from his sibling Susen Roy, 31, and both were from Jhalakathi.

However, it was later revealed that the donor's real name is Sumit Hawlader and he is not the recipient's brother.

When local news channels reported on the transplantation, Sumit's twin Amit Hawlader rushed to the hospital in Dhaka from Jhalakathi.

"My brother was cheated. We heard that he was supposed to be sent to Greece for a job there," he told The Daily Star at the hospital while Sumit undergoing treatment after the surgery.

Sumit Hawlader worked at a diagnostic center in Dhaka's Banani area, according to his wife Sima Joy Dhar, who lives with him in the capital's Indira Road.

On July 1, Sumit quit his job and told his wife he would join a 10-day training programme in Barishal as part of his Greece migration process.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

FY23 GROWTH

ADB upgrades estimate to 6 percent

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh economy is estimated to have grown at 6 percent in fiscal 2022-23 – which is higher than the Asian Development Bank's April forecast – on the back of a spirited showing by the export sector, the lender said yesterday.

In April, ADB had downgraded the growth forecast to 5.3 percent from 6.6 percent. The 6.6 percent growth projection, which was made in September last year, was itself a downgrade from an earlier forecast of 7.1 percent made in April last year for fiscal 2022-23.

ADB's estimate is in line with the provisional growth estimate of 6.03 percent made by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in May.

"The higher estimate reflects strong net exports as imports fell more sharply than expected and export growth slowed less than expected," the lender

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3



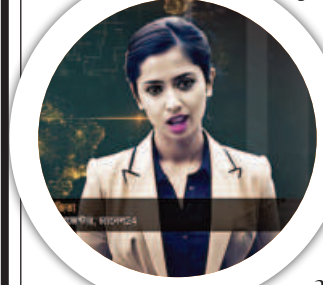
PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Women of Haat-panchil village in Sirajganj's Shahzadpur upazila standing on the banks of the Jamuna. Continuous erosion since the beginning of monsoon this year has already destroyed over 2,000 homes there. The photo was taken on Tuesday.

Channel 24 presents country's first 'AI' news presenter

STAR REPORT

Channel 24, a private TV network based in Dhaka, yesterday unveiled the country's first-ever 'artificial intelligence' news presenter named 'Aparajita.'



Aparajita debuted during the 7:00pm bulletin yesterday. Channel 24 did not disclose the details behind the technology used in making the 'artificial intelligence' or 'AI' presenter.

The utilisation of artificial intelligence for news presentation has been observed globally, with Kuwait News introducing the AI news reader 'Feda' in April. Similarly, Odisha Television Limited (OTV), a private television station in India, introduced an artificial intelligence presenter for news delivery on July 9.

Abdul Kaium Tuhin, Senior News Editor of Channel 24, told The Daily Star, "On Wednesday, we had a demo run with an 'artificial intelligence' news presenter named 'Aparajita' in our prime-time news bulletin. She will present our tech-based programme 'Ctrl A'. We have a lot of plans for this. Till now, we have received very good response from our visitors."