



Keeping the spirit of 'Ratha Yatra' alive for centuries
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Hamas accepts US proposal on Israeli hostage talks
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Freedom fighters' quota goes against the 1971 spirit
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A tournament too far Ronaldo!
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Matiur thrived on insider trading

The now-removed taxman, his family used stock market to mint tens of millions

ZYMA ISLAM and MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Former NBR official Md Matiur Rahman, who became a subject of controversy thanks to a high profile sacrificial goat, has made much of his wealth by minting pre-public shares, an analysis of his and his family's shareholding in at least 15 publicly listed companies show.

Pre-public shares, or placement shares, are those that are offered privately to individual investors, before a company goes public, or releases shares on the stock market for investment.

By its very nature, placement share trading requires a prior association between the company and the investor.

This becomes problematic when the investor in question is a tax regulator himself, holding various positions at NBR with the last being president of Customs, Excise and VAT Appellate Tribunal.

Millions of these placement shares were not just offered to him, but to a large number of his immediate and extended family members.

Over the last three weeks, The Daily Star tracked the pattern of their buying at least 9.8 crore placement shares across 15 companies before the companies went public.

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» Matiur, family held at least 9.8cr shares across 20 firms

» Their current market value would be Tk 174cr

» He and his family also set up five firms from 2013 to 2018

» The companies have a paid-up capital of Tk 6.82cr



Protesting against the reinstatement of quota system in government jobs, a mammoth crowd of students march from Dhaka University to Shahbagh. They occupied the intersection for an hour before withdrawing for the day yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Iran reformist wins presidency

Congratulations pour in as Masoud Pezeshkian wins run-off

AFP, Tehran

Iran's reformist candidate Masoud Pezeshkian yesterday won a runoff presidential election against ultraconservative Saeed Jalili, the interior ministry said.

Pezeshkian received more than 16 million votes and Jalili more than 13 million out of about 30 million votes cast, electoral authority spokesman Mohsen Eslami said, adding that voter turnout stood at 49.8 percent.

The number of spoiled ballots was reported to be over 600,000.

Pezeshkian said the vote was the start of a "partnership" with the Iranian people.

"The difficult path ahead will not be smooth except with your companionship, empathy, and trust. I extend my hand to you," Pezeshkian said in a post on social media platform X, after on Tuesday saying he would "extend the hand of friendship to everyone" if he won.

The election, called early after the death of ultraconservative president Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash, followed a first round marked by a historically low turnout last week.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who wields ultimate authority, had called for a higher turnout

SEE PAGE 7 COL 1



PROTESTS AGAINST QUOTAS

Students go for 'Bangla Blockade'

STAR REPORT

Students demonstrating against quotas in government jobs are set to block key intersections in the capital and highways next to campuses across the country this afternoon.

As per their announcement, college and university students will go on an indefinite strike from today, demanding reinstatement of a 2018 order that abolished quotas.

Protestors also threatened to enforce hartal.

There were demonstrations in the capital for the fifth straight day yesterday. Students kept the Shahbagh intersection blocked for an hour in the afternoon.

Several other streets were also blocked for a while, causing long tailbacks.

Dhaka University student Nahid Islam, a key organiser, announced that the demonstrations, "Bangla Blockade", will begin at 3:00pm at key intersections in Dhaka and highways.

"We will not return to classrooms until our demands are met," he told a

rally.

In Dhaka, Shahbagh, Science Lab, Chankharpool, Nilkhet, Motijheel and other intersections near educational institutions will be blocked, he said.

College and university students elsewhere will block highways, he added.

In Dhaka, Shahbagh, Science Lab, Chankharpool, Nilkhet, Motijheel and other intersections near educational institutions will be blocked.

"The government is behaving irresponsibly... The executive branch cannot avoid its responsibility. The prime minister in 2018 said there will be no quota," he said.

Nahid urged parents to take to the streets too and alleged that Chhatra League men were trying to keep students away from the demonstrations.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

PATIENT REFERRAL SYSTEM

Three out of 5 still going straight to major hospitals

AHMED DEEPTO

Subarna Akhter, a 31-year-old mother of two from Chuadanga, was diagnosed with gallbladder stones recently.

Doctors were willing to do the surgery, but the family, doubtful of the skills of small town physicians, decided to travel over 200-km to Dhaka for the treatment.

Since the family cannot afford the costs at reputed private hospitals, Subarna and her husband tried tertiary-level public hospitals in the city. But they found out after a few days that they would have to wait for weeks to get the procedure done at such facilities because of the long queue of patients.

"Eventually, we left Dhaka and I got treated in Rajshahi without having to wait for days," Subarna said.

Like the couple, thousands of people go through unnecessary hassles due to what experts say is the absence of a patient referral system.

This also disproportionately increases the number of patients at tertiary-level facilities, they added.

In a proper referral system, a patient first goes to a nearby primary healthcare centre, which, if needed, will send them to more advanced facilities.

This way, advanced hospitals do not have to deal

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

BENAZIR, FAMILY

Illegal assets worth Tk 43.5 crore found by ACC



DIPAN NANDY

The Anti-Corruption Commission has found illegal assets worth Tk 43.5 crore belonging to former inspector general of police Benazir Ahmed, his wife, and two daughters.

ACC investigators have said their initial probe found no authentic sources for these assets.

Among the illegal assets are several flats in Dhaka and substantial amounts of

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

the BUSINESS

Slow progress in setting up hi-tech parks

A project to set up a dozen hi-tech parks at the district level is moving at such a glacial pace that it may hold the government from attaining its vision of building a smart nation and readying the workforce for the digitalised world.

The government initiated the project in April 2017 to construct 12 hi-tech parks in as many districts to create a skilled workforce and job opportunities. But the project has so far achieved 14.34 percent physical progress, according to a report.

STORY ON B1



TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE... To flee the rapidly rising floodwater, a family dismantles their house, loads the salvaged pieces and other belongings onto a boat, and makes a hasty retreat to higher ground. The photo was taken on Friday from Rasulpur Char under Gaibandha's Phulchhari upazila.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

20 lakh people hit by floods in 15 districts

STAR REPORT

Around 20 lakh people in 15 districts across the country have been affected by the ongoing floods caused by torrential rains and the onrush of water from upstream, said State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Md Mohibur Rahman.

The worst-hit districts include Sylhet, Sunamganj, Netrakona, Moulvibazar, Habiganj, Rangpur, Jamalpur, Gaibandha, Feni, Rangamati, Bogura, Kurigram, Sirajganj, Lalmonirhat, and Cox's Bazar, he told reporters at the Secretariat yesterday.

The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) said that the flood situation in Kurigram, Jamalpur, Gaibandha, Bogura, Tangail, and Sirajganj may remain unchanged today (Sunday).

"In the next 24 hours, the overall flood situation in various low-lying areas of the northeastern region may improve slightly," added the FFWC bulletin issued at 9:00am yesterday.

In Gaibandha, over 67,000 families remain waterlogged in 164 char areas under Sundarganj, Sadar, Phulchhari, and Shaghata upazilas since Tuesday night.

The Jamuna River was flowing 83cm above danger level at Phulchhari point at 6:00pm. The strong current of the floodwaters was causing erosion in many char areas.

In Kurigram, the flood situation worsened significantly, leaving an estimated 1.5 lakh people stranded.

According to Saidul Arif, deputy commissioner of Kurigram, all major rivers, including the Brahmaputra, Dharla, and Dudhkumar, were flowing above their danger levels.

At least 37 government primary schools have suspended

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Prepare to reach the moon

PM asks children

UNB, Gopalganj

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked children of the country to aim big in life and prepare themselves for bigger tasks for the country.



"We will go to the moon one day. So, you have to take preparation to achieve that from now on," she said.

The prime minister made the remarks while opening "Bangabandhu Corner" at Gimadanga Tungipara Government Model Primary School.

She also unveiled cover of an album titled "Eso Bangabandhuke Jani" (Let's know Bangabandhu) drawn by specially needed children at the school which was established in 1912.

"Study attentively to become great human beings. We will build Smart Bangladesh. You will be really smart. You will run the state one day. You will be prime minister, minister and scientist and going to greater places and doing researches," she said.

About the album of the pictures on the country's history drawn by the children with special need, she said it will help them know the country's history.



The capital's Dholaikhal, which has been in a sorry state for years, is going to change. Dhaka South City Corporation has taken up a project to build two amphitheatres, walkways, bicycle lanes, and improve the waterbody on five acres. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Holy Ashura to be observed on July 17

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The holy Ashura will be observed on July 17 as the moon marking the month of Muharram was not sighted anywhere in Bangladesh last evening.

Therefore, the month of Muharram will start from tomorrow.

The National Moon Sighting Committee yesterday took the decision at a meeting, presided over by A Awal Howlader, additional secretary to the religious affairs minister, held in the conference room of the Islamic Foundation in Baitul Mukarram National Mosque.

According to the Islamic Foundation's press release, the meeting reviewed the information received from all the district administrations, the foundation's head office, its divisional offices, the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, and Bangladesh Space Research and Remote Sensing Organization regarding the sighting of the moon of the month of Muharram of 1446 Hijri.

As there was no news of the moon sighting last evening, the holy Ashura will be celebrated on July 17, the press release added.

Ashura, a public holiday in Bangladesh, is observed on the 10th day of Muharram.

Muslims across the world recall the sacrifice of Hazrat Imam Hossain (RA), his family members, and 72 followers, who embraced martyrdom in 680 AD in the desert of Karbala on the banks of the Euphrates River in Iraq while fighting for truth and justice against the Yazidi forces.

Matiur thrived on insider trading

FROM PAGE 1

The shareholders include his immediate family: his first wife Laila Kaniz Lucky, his second wife Shammi Akter Shibli, his son and daughter from the first marriage Ahmed Tawfiqur Rahman Arnab and Farjana Rahman Epshta.

The shareholders also include his sister Howa Nur Begum, his brothers MA Kayum Howlader and Md Nurul Huda, his sister-in-law Sharmin Akter Lovely, and his brother-in-law Mohammed Nasar Uddin. The Daily Star also tracked the shares of two of his relatives from his village, Md Rashiduzzaman and Md Mijanur Rahman.

Most of these shares – about 63.5 percent – were bought in their own names, while 36.5 percent of the shares were bought in the name of five companies owned wholly or partially by Matiur and his family members.

With a combined paid-up capital of Tk 6.82 crore, all the five family-owned companies were set up or acquired between 2013-2018 when Matiur held important positions in NBR, according to the company filings at Registrar of Joint Stock Company obtained by The Daily Star.

A significant portion of the placement shares were also bought during this period, although millions of such shares can be traced back to 2011, 2010, 2008, and even 2002.

Between June 24 and July 5, repeated attempts were made to contact Matiur Rahman, Howa Noor Begum, Sharmin Akter Lovely, and Farzana Rahman, but their phones were found switched off. Arnab, Laila Kaniz, and Kayum Howlader did not respond to our phones and text messages.

Service rules do not allow government officials to be involved in speculative trading. Service rules also do not permit any member of his family "to make any investment likely to embarrass or influence him in the discharge of his official duties."

The rules also bar public officials from investing in any stocks about which he would have had information, which Matiur clearly had as a revenue official during these years. In other words, the placement shares he and his family members accepted before the companies released their IPOs were essentially insider trading, a violation of capital market rules.

Matiur and his family's wealth made headlines after, Mushfiqur Rahman Ifat, reportedly his son from his second marriage, posted a photo of a sacrificial goat on social media and claimed to have bought it for Tk 12 lakh. According to the owner of the farm where the goat was raised, Ifat eventually did not take the delivery in the face of the controversy, although he had made an advance of Tk 1 lakh.

Matiur publicly denied that Ifat was his son.

Assuming that the shares were bought at a face value of at least Tk 10, the cumulative purchase value of the shares held by Matiur and his family over the years is at least Tk 101.3 crore, according to our calculation based on publicly available data from the capital market.

The Daily Star cannot confirm if they still hold all the shares or if they hold shares in any other companies.

The five privately owned companies are Global Shoes, Global Max, SK Trims, Anik Trims and Synergy Trading.

Matiur, who joined government service in trade cadre in 1994 and was transferred to customs in 1998 on

retired as an associate professor from Government Titumir College in the capital four years ago. Her yearly pension is Tk 4.63 lakh.

Also chairman of Narsingdi's Raipura upazila, Lucky's tax files submitted to the Election Commission before this year's upazila polls show she is worth Tk 10.31 crore, although a closer look by The Daily Star indicates

and Farjana's Instagram profile.

Matiur's brother MA Kayum Howlader owns or has owned the most shares among his immediate family members – 1.4 crore shares across three companies.

His sister Howa Nur Begum has had 1.15 crore shares in her name, spread across eight companies.

Matiur's daughter Farjana Rahman Epshta, who now lives in Canada, has owned the third highest number of shares – 90.5 lakh across nine companies.

Matiur has owned 86.3 lakh shares across nine companies.

His second wife Shammi Akter (Shibli) has owned 74 lakh shares across five companies while her sister Sharmin Akter Lovely 52.5 lakh shares in one publicly listed company.

Matiur's son Ahmed Tawfiqur Rahman Arnab has had 52.9 lakh shares in these 10 public companies. His first wife Laila Kaniz Lucky has had 9.1 lakh shares, while his second brother Md Nurul Huda 1.5 lakh shares. Matiur's brother-in-law Md Nasar Uddin has had 60,000 shares.

In addition, two other relatives from his village home held 60,000 shares.

The 15 publicly listed companies include garment and garment accessories manufacturers like C&A Textiles Ltd, SK Trims & Industries Ltd, ML Dyeing, Olympic Accessories Ltd, Ring Shine Textiles, Kattali Textiles; chemical and pharmaceutical companies like Associated Oxygen Ltd, Lub-rref (Bangladesh) Ltd, Silva Pharmaceuticals, FAR Chemical Industries Ltd, ACME Pesticides, Advent Pharmaceuticals, Mamun Agro Products and a steel builder named Dominage Steel.

"It is public knowledge that placement shares are given as favour. Why did so many companies favour him?" said former BSEC chairman Faruq Ahmed Siddiqi.

In addition to the stock market shares, this newspaper found 3.5 crore placement shares held by the companies owned by Matiur and his family members.

A shoe company called Global Shoes Ltd whose managing director is Matiur's brother, MA Kayum Howlader, and whose shareholder is his brother-in-law Nasar Uddin was found to have owned placement shares in 10 of the same companies where Matiur and his family members have pre-IPO shares.

Global Shoes has held 1.96 crore shares in Matiur and his families' private companies since long.

Another of their family-owned company named Global Max Packaging Industries Ltd has held 58.5 lakh shares in at least four companies as Matiur's family members for over a decade. The managing director of Global Max was Matiur's sister-in-law

Sharmin Akter Lovely. Its director was his brother-in-law Nasar Uddin, while the chairman is his sister Howa Nur Begum.

Three other such family-owned companies are Arnab Trading Ltd, SK Trims Ltd and Synergy Trading Ltd, which collectively hold 97.4 lakh placement shares in three publicly listed companies where Matiur's family members also hold placement shares.

On more than one occasion, the placement shares were bought by these family-owned companies on the same day or adjacent dates.

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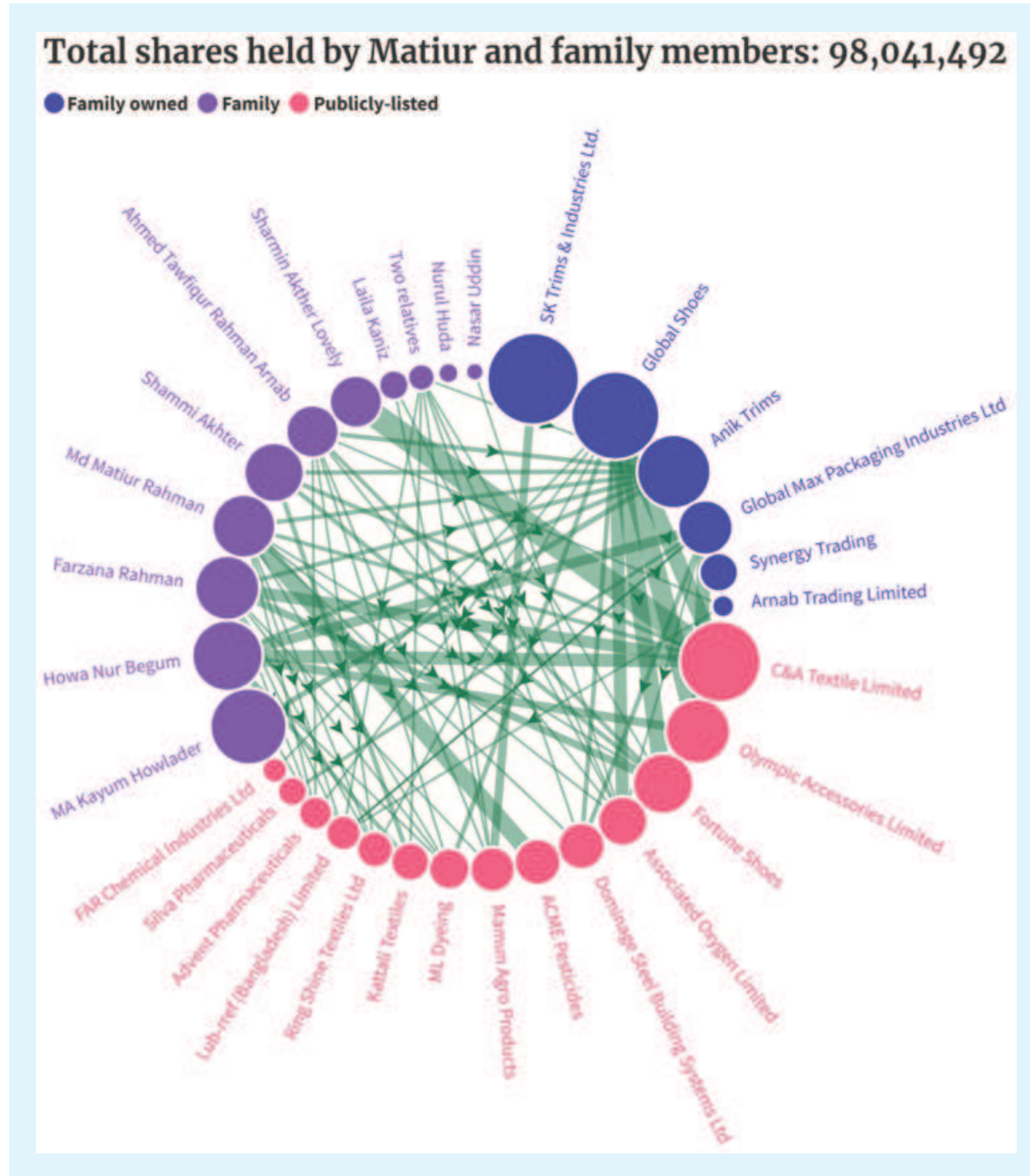
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These shares are spread across 15 publicly listed companies and five non-listed companies where he and his family members have significant ownership.

The current market value of the shares of the publicly listed companies would be about Tk 175 crore, although

deputation, is currently a first-class officer, with a monthly basic salary of Tk 78,000. In the wake of the recent development surrounding his and his family wealth, he has been removed from NBR and attached to the finance ministry.

His first wife, Laila Kaniz Lucky,

she may have understated her wealth by dozens of times.

Their son Arnab is a 2021 graduate from the University of Michigan with a Bachelor in Arts, while his daughter Farjana is a makeup artist and runs a makeover business in Canada, according to the university website

20 lakh people hit by floods in 15 districts

FROM PAGE 1

classes due to flood waters entering the buildings. A total of 20 madrasas and 43 secondary schools have also been forced to close.

The number of people seeking refuge is increasing, with many heading to shelter centres as their homes are submerged in chest-deep water. Others are spending their nights on boats.

The floods have inundated 6,615 hectares of cropland in the district.

"Vegetables on my three bigha land have been damaged by floodwater. Even, our house has been submerged. We've been living on dry food for the last few days as we can't cook," said Shahiul Islam, 60, of Char Madhya Kadamtala area under Kurigram

Sadar upazila.

"We have yet to get any relief," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Maidul Islam, 48, of the same village, said, "We've taken shelter on an embankment as our house has gone under water. We were facing a crisis of food and fresh water. We are passing hard days."

On Friday afternoon, three people, including two sisters, were electrocuted to death while they were riding on rafts in Kurigram's Nageshwari upazila.

Monzu Ali, of Marnea in Rangpur's Gangachara upazila, said, "We have been waterlogged for 10 days. We are yet to get any relief assistance."

Abdus Sattar, 70, of Allajatarir village under the same upazila, said,

"My house and croplands have been devoured by the Teesta. I've become homeless."

A day labourer in Sayedpur village in Sirajganj's Shahzadpur upazila, said, "All of our croplands have gone under water. We don't have any work now. We are struggling to survive."

Mifta Miah, a trader of Fenchuganj market in Sylhet, said, "The market has gone under knee-deep water. Most of us are suffering from skin disease as we stay in the water all day."

For flood-hit districts, the government has so far allocated a total of 8,700 tonnes of rice, Tk 3.10 crore in cash, 58,500 sacks of dry food, Tk 60 lakh for baby food, and Tk 60 lakh for cattle fodder.

Illegal assets worth Tk 43.5 crore found

FROM PAGE 1

money deposited in various banks. The ACC has also obtained documentary evidence of these movable and immovable properties owned by Benazir's family.

The anti-graft body has chosen not to disclose further details at the moment for the sake of investigation.

The investigation team has preliminarily identified assets worth around Tk 9.26 crore in Benazir's name; Tk 2.13 crore in his wife Jissan Mirza's name; Tk 8.11 crore in their elder daughter Farheen Rishta Binte Benazir's name; and around Tk 4.76 crore in their younger daughter Tahseen Raisa Binte Benazir's name.

Based on this information, the

ACC has already issued separate notices to Benazir and his family members requesting details of their assets.

It also issued asset declaration notices to the family members under section 26(1) of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2004 on July 2.

A high official of the ACC said, "Following a court order, almost Tk 1,000 crore worth of Benazir Ahmed's movable and immovable assets have been seized or frozen. Their primary objective was to ensure that these assets were not misappropriated or smuggled."

"Currently, each asset is being verified individually. Many of them are reported in his tax records. For now,

these assets are being considered, and the calculation of illegal assets is ongoing as documentary evidence is required in ACC cases."

The source added, "Although the assets appear to be worth crores, only official documents will be considered for case purposes. Accordingly, the ACC team has so far proven that Tk 43.5 crore worth of movable and immovable assets are beyond known income sources."

On April 22, the ACC began investigating allegations of illegal asset acquisition against Benazir and his family members. A three-member team, led by Deputy Director Hafizul Islam from the ACC headquarters, is conducting the probe.

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Take stance against propagandists

Arafat tells event

BSS, Dhaka

State Minister for Information and Broadcasting Mohammad Ali Arafat yesterday urged all to take stance against those who are spreading "falsehood and misinformation" against the government.

"If the government makes any mistake and it has any failure, you may highlight, criticise and oppose it... but you should unmask and protest against those who mislead people by telling lies and half-truths," he said.

The state minister made the remarks while distributing government grants for making films at the Tathya Bhaban.

Arafat said there are some vested quarters in

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

'Lots of noise, no real penalties'

GM Quader says the corrupt will get away with crimes

UNB, Dhaka

Jatiya Party Chairman and leader of the opposition GM Quader yesterday alleged that the corrupt people currently under scrutiny would get away with their crimes, saying that none of them will face any punishment.

"We've seen this before with the casino cases - lots of noise, but no real penalties. It's all just a show, a drama. Some individuals have even been allowed to legalise their illicit money under the guise of amnesty," he said.

The opposition leader came up with the remarks while addressing the biennial conference of Gazipur district unit of the party as chief guest.

Criticising the current state of the country, GM

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

'They mostly targeted madrasa teachers, students'

Ansar Al Islam tried to form new platform led by Indian national to avoid surveillance, says Rab after arresting six members

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

Ansar Al Islam, under scrutiny by law enforcers, tried to form a new platform, "As Shahadat," led by an Indian national named Muhammed Habibullah, according to Rab.

Rab said the supposed ameer of the outfit is one Salahuddin.

From India, the outfit leaders were recruiting members, collecting funds, and providing training - mainly targeting the madrasa students and teachers in Bangladesh.

The majority of the students, who were targeted by the outfit's new platform, are aged between 19 and 20.

The outfit maintains communication through encrypted applications.

The information came to light after Rab-3, Rab-7, and Rab-15 in separate drives arrested six outfit members from Dhaka and Cox's Bazar in May and June.

According to the case statement filed with the Paltan Police Station in May, and the police investigation progress report, the group has been recruiting members in different districts of Bangladesh for a long time.

Commander Arafat Islam, director of the legal and media wing of the Rapid Action Battalion told

The Daily Star yesterday, "The outfit has at least 80 to 100 members."

"But we have successfully been able to detect the outfit's activities at the beginning, and one of their top leaders in Bangladesh is now under surveillance," he said.

Asked about whether they have reports of missing madrasa students,

AT A GLANCE

The new platform has at least 80 to 100 members

Formed by an Indian national Habibullah, who was arrested by West Bengal STF

Ansar Al Islam has link with new outfit Sharqiya

No trace of two Ansar Al Islam members who were snatched from court

he replied in the negative.

"Three students, who did not return to a madrasa after spending Eid vacation, were arrested in Cox's Bazar in connection with the outfit," he added.

In another development, the West Bengal Special Task Force on June

22 arrested Muhammed Habibullah, at his residence in Paschim Bardhaman, according to a report of India Today.

Within a week after the arrest, the STF also arrested two other operatives - Anwar Sheikh, and Harej Sheikh, from Chennai and Howrah, reports Times of India.

This is not the first time that Ansar Al Islam has tried to form a new platform.

Ansar Al Islam was linked to the financial support and recruitment of Jamatul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya, a new outfit.

Mainul Islam, an Ansar Al Islam member, participated in Sharqiya's formation meeting in jail, according to counterterrorism officials.

Due to its cut-out strategy, Ansar Al Islam members remain out of law enforcers' radar and continue their activities on offline and online platforms.

For the past one and a half years, law enforcers have failed to trace two top Ansar Al Islam leaders, Moinul Hasan Shamim and Abu Siddiq Sohel, who were snatched from police custody while returning to jail after a hearing in a Dhaka court on November 20, 2022.

Md Asaduzzaman, chief of the CTC unit, said the two are hiding in Bangladesh, and efforts to arrest them are ongoing.

India a political friend, China dev partner: Quader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader has described India as Bangladesh's political friend and China as its development partner.

"China has contributed significantly to the development of many sectors in our country. Why will we not accept support from China for the sake of the country's overall progress?" Quader said yesterday.

He made the remarks after inaugurating a seven-day "Hilly Fruits Fair-2024" at the Sheikh Hasina Chittagong Hill Tracts Historic Protection and Research Centre in the city's Bailey Road area.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

BNP supports protests of teachers, students

Says Fakhrul

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said their party morally supports the ongoing movements by public university teachers and students based on "justified" demands.

Speaking at a press conference, he dismissed allegations of the ruling party leaders that BNP is inciting the teachers' protest against the new universal pension scheme "Protoy" and the students' agitation protesting the reinstatement of the quota system in government jobs.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7



A team of Narayanganj district administration officials and ACC sealed off a duplex bungalow belonging to former IGP Benazir Ahmed at Purbachal in Narayanganj yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Benazir's Purbachal resort now under N'ganj admin

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Narayanganj district administration has taken control of a resort belonging to former IGP Benazir Ahmed at Purbachal in Narayanganj's Rupganj upazila.

The development comes after Dhaka court earlier ordered appointment of administrators to look after the confiscated properties of Benazir and his family members.

A team of Narayanganj district administration officials, led by ADC (Revenue) Shafikur Alam, sealed off the resort by attaching a notice at the front gate yesterday.

A team of the Anti-Corruption Commission was also present during the drive.

ADC Shafikur told reporters that the district administration sealed off the property - Savanna Eco Resort Private Ltd - and took it under control following the court order.

"We found some birds and animals inside the property but couldn't enter into the duplex house as it was locked with a digital lock system. We will take a decision about the property later," the ADC said.

According to the notice, Benazir's daughter Farheen Rishda Bint-e-Benazir is mentioned as the owner of the resort.

'Party feud behind my father's killing'

Claims MP Azim's daughter

UNB, Dhaka

Daughter of slain Jhenaidah-4 MP Anwarul Azim Anar yesterday said her father was killed for political reasons.

Anar's daughter Muntarin Ferdous Dorin said this while talking to reporters in front of Jatiya Press Club.

She said, "Of course, there must be internal party feuds [within Awami League] behind my father's killing. Otherwise, why would they [arrested suspects belonging to the ruling party] be involved in the brutal murder? They knew everything. They even came to comfort me!"

Two top leaders of Jhenaidah Awami League, Saidul Karim

Mintu, the general secretary, and Kamal Ahmed Babu, the welfare affairs secretary, are currently in jail in connection with the murder.

Babu initially gave a confessional statement, but has recently applied to recant it alleging that he was coerced.

The two local Awami League leaders were arrested based on enough information, Doreen claimed.

Azim went to Kolkata on May 12 and stayed at a friend's house overnight. He left the house the next day saying he would visit a doctor.

On May 22, police from India and Bangladesh said Azim was killed in a Kolkata flat.



MP AZIM MURDER

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Application Deadline: July 31, 2024

Six killed in road crashes

STAR REPORT

At least six people were killed in road accidents in four districts yesterday.

In Bagerhat, a motorcyclist was killed as an unidentified vehicle hit him in Mollahat upazila.

The deceased is Asad Sheikh, 40, from Jugihati in Khulna.

The accident occurred around 7:30am on Khulna-Mawa highway in Kalulpur.

Hours later, Md Anwar, 35, from Gangni in Mollahat, was killed when a bus hit a rickshaw-van carrying him in front of Sagar Filling Station, said Mollahat Highway Police Station Officer-in-Charge Sheikh Nuruzzaman.

In Rajbari, two helpers of a driver were killed as a truck hit another parked truck at Kalibari.

The deceased are Anisur Rahman, 35, and Md Liton Sheikh, 35.

In Dinajpur, Hosen Ali, 70, died as a pickup ran him over while he was crossing the Dinajpur-Gobindaganj road at Tatakpur intersection.

In Joypurhat, Rabeya Begum, 60, was killed when a truck hit her in Sadar upazila.

Construction

FROM PAGE 5

At another programme of cardiologists at a city hotel on Friday evening, the minister said a Health Safety Act would be placed in the parliament soon.

He said no one has the right to say "wrong treatment" except the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC).

If anyone wants to lodge any complaint over wrong treatment, he will have to apply to BMDC, he added.

Samanta said whenever a doctor is posted to an upazila health complex, she or he starts lobbying to cancel the order. "The doctors will have to work in rural and suburban areas," he said.

"We are taking initiatives to improve the residence facilities of doctors there," he added.

Lots of noise

FROM PAGE 3

Quader said everyone except for Awami League supporters agrees that the current situation of the country is not good.

Ordinary people are struggling; many can't even afford an egg. It is happening due to the government's flawed policies and corruption.

Regarding the anti-quota movement, he said, "University students are now protesting against the quota system. This quota system is unconstitutional. There is no way to legalise it according to the constitution. So why does the current government need this quota?"



The shed of this bus stop in the capital's Motijheel area got damaged around a month back during a storm. Ever since, it has been leaning forward precariously, held back from collapsing by the damaged welding at its foundation and cables tied to an electric pole. At any moment, it could collapse and lead to a disaster. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Bitumen that lasts 10 days!

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Within merely 10 days after renovation, the bitumen cover of a road in Nizampur area of Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila is coming off.

The Local Government Engineering Department recently renovated the 3.3-kilometre-long and 3-metre-wide road from Sagar Cinema Hall to Nizampur Kheyaghat area in the upazila at a cost of Tk 1.33 crore, and opened it to traffic 10 days back.

However, soon after vehicular movement resumed on the road, the bitumen cover started getting removed at numerous places, alleged locals.

Visiting the road yesterday, this correspondent observed that the bitumen is coming off even if scraped by hand, or rubbed by feet.

Locals said 25mm thick bitumen cover was supposed to be made throughout the road, but most places got only 15-20mm cover.

According to sources at Kalapara upazila LGED office, the road was renovated recently after it got damaged in Cyclone Amphan-induced flood.

A contractor named Shahidul Enterprises got the Tk 1.33 crore renovation work and has been paid Tk 90 lakh already. However, within 10 days the road returned to a dilapidated state.



"Poor-quality materials were used to renovate the road. We demand exemplary punishment of the officials concerned and the contractor for irregularities, and proper renovation of the road," said Nasir Mia, a local resident.

Solaiman Munshi, another local, echoed him.

Refusing to provide details, Mohammad Sadekur Rahman, Kalapara upazila engineer of LGED, said the final bill will be withheld until the road is reconstructed.

Contacted, Rabiul Islam, UNO of Kalapara upazila, said he inspected the renovated road and found it to be of sub-standard work.

"Instructions have been given not to pay the final bill until the road is rebuilt. The contractor's security money has also been asked to be forfeited," he added.

Motaleb Talukder, chairman of Kalapara upazila parishad, said the supervising official has been directed to rebuild the road at the earliest.

Take stance against propagandists

FROM PAGE 3

the country, who mislead people by spreading misinformation against the government.

"Anyone can oppose the government's decisions and can give different opinions, but, if anyone misleads people by spreading falsehoods and misinformation, artistes and creative industry members have a responsibility to stand against the propagandists."

In this connection, he referred to a number of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) signed during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's recent India visit saying "a vested quarter are carrying out misinformation campaigns to mislead the

people over the contents of the MoUs".

Responding to the criticism over Bangladesh-India MoU on regional connectivity, he said, the propagators are saying that Indian trains will run through Bangladesh carrying arms, ammunition and explosive posing a security risk here, which is an absolute lie.

The state minister said the MoU clearly stated about establishing a regional connectivity since Bangladesh has a business with Nepal and Bhutan worth of US \$50 million.

"We export our products to those countries. Now these products are being exported through transshipment process via

India to Nepal and Bhutan," he said, adding, if a straight train line is established, it will help Bangladesh expand its business and export.

Arafat said, "We also inserted a provision in the MoU that we will go to Nepal and Bhutan through India."

He said another important aspect of this MoU is that Bangladesh under the agreement will import 40MW electricity from Nepal using India's national gridline. At present, Nepal is producing electricity considering its domestic demand although it has the potential of generating 72,000 MW of electricity.

"We can reduce our dependency on fossil fuels if we import clean energy

from Nepal that will be good for Bangladesh, India, Nepal and the entire world," Arafat said. So, how does it go against the country's interest? he questioned.

On government grants for film production, he said the government wants to ensure transparency and accountability in the selection process of the scripts for getting the grant.

"We want to focus on quality rather than quantity to this end. So, international standards will be followed in the selection process next time," Arafat said.

The government has selected 26 films, including 20 feature-length and six short films, to provide Tk 15.20 crore as grants in 2023-24 fiscal.

A teacher

FROM PAGE 5

behind in studies due to the flood-induced school closure. Thanks to Bidhan Das, they are not only able to continue their studies, but also get necessary school supplies and a nurturing environment," she said.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Mohammad Ali, a seventh grader sheltered at the school.

"Our house got damaged in the flood, so we took shelter here. I did not expect to be able to study in the present situation, but here we are receiving enough support to make sure our studies are not disrupted."

Bidhan's commitment resonates deeply with his purpose as an educator.

"As a teacher, I have a commitment to do everything possible to make sure that education remains uninterrupted for the students, even during a natural disaster," he told this correspondent.

India a political

FROM PAGE 3

"Our foreign policy is friendship with everyone, malice to none. India has been our faithful friend since 1971. We cannot forget our friends in times of trouble," Obaidul Quader said, asking "what did the post-75 governments achieve by having hostile relations with India for 21 years?"

He also said the friendly relations with India contributed to resolving

the border and chhitmahal problems.

Speaking of the BNP's demand for UN intervention on Khaleda Zia's proper treatment, he said, "There is no point in doing that, it is a matter of law. BNP is playing politics over Khaleda Zia's treatment."

Quader said that the BNP has resorted to the quota and teachers' protests after failing to wage their own movement.

BNP supports

FROM PAGE 3

"What they [AL leaders] are saying is illogical," Fakhru said.

However, he said BNP, as a responsible party, must react to incidents happening within the country.

"They [teachers and students] are carrying out their movements, and we have moral support for

them now and will continue to do so. Can't we support a justified movement?" the BNP leader said.

Fakhru urged the government to meet the protesters' demands by rescinding the "Prottoy" pension scheme for teachers and reducing the current quota in government jobs to a reasonable level.

জমি বিক্রয়
ঢাকার সন্নিকটে উত্তর উত্তর মেট্রোপলিটেনের পশ্চিম পাশে সাভারের উত্তর দপাড়া ও বাগান মৌজায় আমিন মোহাম্মদের আত্মসিদ্ধা মডেল টাউনে তিনদিকে ৫০ ফুট/৩০ ফুট/২৫ ফুট রাস্তাসহ এখনই বাড়ী করার উপযোগী ৪৫.৬৯ শতাংশ জমি বিক্রয় হবে।
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SPRING - 2024 Semester

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M.Sc. Engg./M. Engg. in Civil Engg.		
M.Sc. Engg./M. Engg. in EEE	1 to 2 years	Bachelor Degree in Math/ Statistics/ Physics/ Engineering or equivalent degree
M.S. in Mathematics		

Online Application opens on 07/07/2024. The address for online application is "https://iims.aust.edu/pg-admission". Please contact the respective Department Office or the Registrar Office for further information. The last date of submission of applications/online application is 14/08/2024.

INNOVATION :: CREATION :: LEADERSHIP

Office of the Executive Engineer
Department of Public Health Engineering
Mymensingh Division, Mymensingh.

Invitation for e-Tender Notice No: 46.203.8900.061.07.045-24-275; dt. 04.07.2024

1	Ministry/Division	Local Government Division.
2	Implementing Agency	Department of Public Health Engineering.
3	Project/Program Name	Revenue Budget.
4	e-Tender IDs	1002433
5	Description of Works:	Construction of 1 No. Community Toilet Mymensingh Zila School in Mymensingh District under Revenue Budget.
6	Name, Designation & Address of Official Inviting Tender	Muhammad Jamal Hussain, Executive Engineer DPHE, Mymensingh Division, Mymensingh. Tel. No: 091-67636.
7	This is online Tender, where only e-Tenders will accept in the National e-GP Portal and no off-line/hard copies will be accepted. Interested persons/firms can see details in the website: www.eprocure.gov.bd	

(Muhammad Jamal Hussain)
Executive Engineer, DPHE
Mymensingh Division, Mymensingh.

GD-17

CMCH BURN UNIT
Construction
work to start
in September
Says health minister

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Health Minister Dr Samanta Lal Sen yesterday said the construction works of a 150-bed specialised Burn and Plastic Surgery Unit at Chittagong Medical College Hospital will start from September.

The prime minister is likely to lay the foundation stone of the project after returning from her visit to China, he said while briefing reporters.

Of the Tk 284.76 crore project, the Chinese government will fund Tk 179.83 crore as grants and the Bangladesh government will fund the rest.

Later, the health minister held a views-exchange with doctors and officials of CMCH.

The minister said, "I feel bad knowing that the MRI machine in the hospital is out of order. Chattogram is the second largest city after Dhaka. I will do whatever is necessary to fix the problem."

The minister said despite the availability of quality medical services in the country, people go abroad for treatment.

"Our prime minister receives treatment in the country... If the members of parliament use local hospitals for checkups, then the quality of treatment in the hospitals will improve and people's confidence in our treatment will return," he added.

The minister arrived in the port city on Friday and made unscheduled visits to a number of hospitals. He expressed dissatisfaction over different irregularities in some of those and asked DGHS officials to take action.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

PRAYER TIMING
JULY 7

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4-10	12-45	5-00	6-55	8-17
JAMAAT 4-45	1-15	5-15	7-00	8-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Teaching suspended at 37 Kurigram schools

Chilmari-Roumari ferry service halted; flood situation may worsen

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

At least 37 government primary schools across Kurigram have suspended their academic activities after being submerged under floodwater.

Visiting Uttar Majherchar Government Primary School in Krishnapur village under Kurigram Sadar upazila, this correspondent saw floodwater flowing over the roof of its one-storey building.

"There are 80 students in this school. Classes have been suspended as the school is completely submerged. The school building has to be repaired once the water recedes, before classes can resume," said Sabina Yasmin, headteacher of the school.

Around 36 other schools are also going through a similar situation.

Nabez Uddin Sarkar, district primary education officer in Kurigram, said, "There are 280 government primary schools in the shoals and riverbank areas in the district. Of those, 37 have been inundated by floodwater and had to suspend academic activities."

"With the water level of the Brahmaputra continuing to rise, more schools in these areas may have to suspend classes," he added.



This tin roof belongs to Uttar Majherchar Govt Primary School in Krishnapur village under Kurigram Sadar upazila. The entire school is now submerged due to flood. PHOTO: STAR

Meanwhile, the ferry service on Chilmari-Roumari route in Kurigram has stopped as the connecting roads at the ghats are submerged, putting commuters at risk.

Prafulla Chauhan, manager at Chilmari Ferry Ghat of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation, said the ferry service will resume once the water recedes.

"The Brahmaputra was flowing 78cm

above danger level at Chilmari point on Friday morning, with its water level having risen by 19cm in 12 hours since 6:00pm on Thursday," said Rakibul Hasan, executive engineer of Bangladesh Water Development Board in Kurigram.

"The water level is expected to rise further as onrush of water from upstream in India continues," he added.

A teacher dedicated to the cause

Schools remain closed but Bidhan makes sure children don't fall behind

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The relentless floods ravaging Sylhet have forced a harsh reality -- the closure of many educational institutions.

In Barlekha upazila of Moulvibazar district alone, over 252 villages have been submerged in the past 20 days.

At least 500 families sought refuge in 30 designated locations, many of which are schools repurposed as shelters.

According to official data till July 4, as many as 889 primary schools have been closed across Sylhet division either due to flood waters breaching its premises or for being converted into shelters.

For students, guardians, and teachers, learning gaps caused by forced closures of educational institutions is nothing new. This is a recurring event every monsoon, although it keeps getting worse every year.

Besides, the scars left by prolonged school closures during the pandemic are still fresh in everyone's minds.

However, one teacher has decided to take matters into his own hands.

Bidhan Chandra Das, headteacher of

schools and madrasas in the area.

But the little ones have one thing in common -- the shared need for education.

Bidhan has refused to let the flood drown their learning spirit.

He has dedicated himself to the students' well-being, remaining at the shelter throughout the day.

Bidhan's makeshift classroom offers a shred of normalcy when everything around these children are under water.

He offers Bengali, English, Mathematics, and Science lessons throughout the day, alongside holding cultural events.

Bidhan's efforts ensure these children, displaced by the floods, continue to receive the education they deserve.

Khaleda Begum, a homemaker from Murshibadkura village who took shelter at the school with her family, expressed her relief.

"I was worried that my children would lag

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



Hakaluki High School, has been holding classes for 25 students from 32 families currently sheltered at the flood-stricken school.

The students come not only from Hakaluki High School but also from other

Damaged by Remal, 133 Barishal schools yet to be repaired

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

At least 133 educational institutions -- including seven colleges, 70 schools and 56 madrasas -- in the Barishal district sustained damages from Cyclone Remal that lashed the country on May 26, according to sources at Education Engineering Department (EED) in Barishal. However, the authorities concerned are yet to come up with any steps to repair the educational institutions.

As such, academic activities at these institutions are being severely disrupted.

At many of these institutions, doors, windows and furniture were damaged, while some tin-shed roofs were even blown away.

Currently, these institutions are unable to conduct classes.

Despite urging authorities for necessary repairs to resume academic activities, there has been no response yet, said teachers and guardians.



PHOTO: TITU DAS

Education will be severely disrupted for around 50,000 students from these 133 institutions unless urgent repairs are made.

SUNIL BARAN HALDER

President of Teachers Association, Barishal

Amirul Islam, president of the governing body of Chandradwip College in Bakerganj upazila, said, "The tin-shed roof was blown away in the cyclone. We applied to EED and local UNO several times for repairs, but to no end. It is not possible to conduct classes amid monsoon without any roof."

According to EED sources, Bakerganj has been the most affected area, with 38 of its schools sustaining damages.

The repairs at each institution will require between Tk 50,000 and Tk 10 lakh, sources said, adding that further delay will only raise repair costs.

Sunil Baran Halder, president of Bangladesh Teachers Association's Barishal regional branch, said education will be severely disrupted for around 50,000 students from these 133 institutions unless urgent repairs are made.

Mujibur Rahman, parent of a seventh-grader from Baherchar Lakshipur Secondary School in Hijla upazila, urged authorities for urgent repairs.

Ashikur Rahman, deputy assistant engineer of EED, Barishal, informed that while Tk 5 crore was demanded for emergency repairs, no allocation has been made yet.

Md Shahidul Islam, executive engineer of EED, Barishal, said, "The cyclone-hit educational institutions will be repaired urgently once allocation is received."

HANDIAL JAGANNATH TEMPLE

Upholding the spirit of 'Ratha Yatra' for 6 centuries



OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

For over six centuries, the Handial Jagannath Temple, located in Handial village under Chatmohar upazila of Pabna, has been celebrating the vibrant Ratha Yatra festival.

The Ratha Yatra, or chariot procession of Jagannath Dev, became popular in the subcontinent during the Ganga dynasty in the 11th century.

Historical records from the Calcutta Gazette suggest the Handial temple itself was established between 1300 and 1400 AD, on a vast 1.19-acre plot within the Chalan Beel region.

It was later renovated by one Bhawani Prashad in 1590 AD, according to a terracotta plaque on the temple's wall.

The temple's rich history, however, is not without its scars.

Its structures were damaged significantly during the 1971

Liberation War. Then it was renovated with modern designs with funding from devotees.

Yet, a single-door structure from the ancient temple remains, a symbol of its enduring heritage.

Today, the Handial Jagannath Temple continues to be a centre of cultural and spiritual significance.

The annual Ratha Yatra festival draws devotees from far and wide, celebrating the timeless traditions that have bound this community for generations.

At present, the temple is an archaeological site while being maintained by devotees, said Md Abu Sayeed, an official of archaeology department.

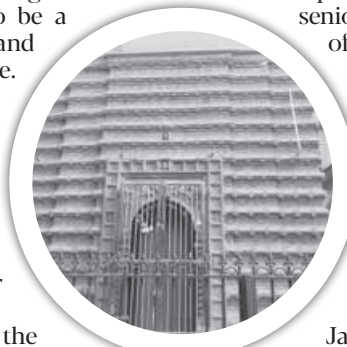
The temple was last renovated by the archaeology department in

2009-10, he added.

The temple's eye-catching architecture and intricate terracotta motifs attract tourists and visitors from across the country and beyond, Abu Sayeed added.

Dilip Kumar Brahmacharya, senior sebayet (manager) of the temple, said it is one of the three ancient temples in the subcontinent with Jagannath Dev's idol, and has been celebrating Ratha Yatra over the past 600 years.

"The temple consists of Jagannath Dev's temple, Mahaprabhu temple, Lakshmi Vishnu temple, Durga temple and Ratha temple. Religious festivities are held for each of the temples every year," he added.



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project 1:
National Single Window Implementation and Strengthening Customs Modernization
National Board of Revenue (NBR)
IDEB Bhaban (10th Floor), 160/A, Kakrail, Dhaka - 1000, Bangladesh.

Memo No. 1(192)/Active Items/Hardware/NSW/2024/2134

Date: 04.07.2024

Subject: Addendum to Bidding Document for Supply and installation of Hardware and infrastructure (network, communication, cabling, etc.) and standard software for NSW solution; other network, communication equipment, structure, hardware and cabling: Server & Storage and Network & Security components for NSW Server Room & DR. Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project 1. Request for Bids (RFB) No. NBR-GD2A.1.

Addendum No. 1

This is for the information of all Bidders concerned that the following amendments have been made for the procurement mentioned in the subject above:

Ref.	Existing entry	Amended entry
Sl. No. of 06, SPN.	The deadline for Bid submission is: Date: July 08, 2024; Time: 14.00 hours.	The deadline for Bid submission is: Date: July 23, 2024; Time: 14.00 hours.
ITP- 23.1 & 26.1	Date & time for bid opening July 08, 2024; Time: 14.30 hours.	Date & time for bid opening July 23, 2024; Time: 14.30 hours.

All other terms and conditions of Bidding Document (RFB) No. NBR-GD2A.1 shall remain unchanged. This Addendum No. 1 shall be considered an integral part of the Bidding Document and shall be binding on all Bidders who have obtained or will obtain the Bidding Document from the Purchaser.

4-7-2024

(Abul Bashar Md Shafiqur Rahman)

Project Director

Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project-1:

National Single Window Implementation & Strengthening Customs Modernization

Email: pdnsw.nbr@gmail.com

DHVANI IN DHAKA

Indian YouTube sensation eager for Bangladeshi concert



RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

It felt surreal seeing Dhvani Bhanushali in person, as I was used to seeing her on YouTube in a 16:9 ratio. While on the sofa, I noticed how refreshing she looked in her white top and blue jeans. She didn't have any makeup on, nor did she need it. The vibrant singer was recently in Dhaka for a two-day trip, during which she spoke exclusively with The Daily Star about her music and her strong desire to perform a concert in Dhaka.

Dhvani's path to stardom has been swift. Her 2019 hit *Vaaste* brought her immense popularity, with the music video crossing 1.5 billion views on YouTube, making her the youngest and fastest Indian pop star to hit 1 billion views on the platform. However, people in Bangladesh mostly remember her for her girl-next-door vibe in her sweet rendition of *Leja Leja Re*.

Her latest hit track, *Thank You God*, is also trending on YouTube, garnering 14 million views within three months. Besides singing in music videos, she has also voiced numerous Bollywood tracks, including *Psycho Saiyaan* from *Saaho*, *Duniya* from *Luka Chuppi*, and *Kinna Sona* from *Marjaavaan*, among others.

She enjoys massive followings on social media, with 7.5 million on Instagram and 4.7 million on Facebook. With a large number of Indian

youths being inspired by her music, she feels it's her responsibility to reflect the ideas of tradition, love, and culture through her songs.

"While growing up, we all have ideals we want to follow as adults. Now that I am an adult and making my own music, I try to ensure that my music videos are suitable for families to watch together. I have this wholesome, good-girl vibe, and I make sure it is reflected in my music videos as well. It's nice to see that youths, particularly little girls, are inspired by my work. As an artiste, I want to positively influence them," said the singer.

Dhvani's sudden trip to Dhaka was mostly kept under wraps; she came for a private event. However, she would love to do a ticketed event, hopefully within the next year.

The singer was surprised when I told her that she also enjoys a fan base in Bangladesh. She shared an interesting story when asked if she had interacted with fans in our country.

"I did meet some of my fans at the Bangladeshi airport, and when I came to the hotel, they were playing my songs. This is my first time coming to Bangladesh, and I really respect its culture. Although I haven't listened to any Bangladeshi songs yet, as soon as you leave, I will look them up on Spotify and listen to a few Bangladeshi artistes," revealed the singer.

Whenever a song has a catchy tune and hook, you can be sure it will trend on Instagram Reels. When I first heard *Thank You God*, I thought an American artiste might have voiced it. Later on, when I searched for the song on YouTube, I found that many people felt the same and were surprised to discover it was an Indian song.

"One day during the writing process of 'Thank You God,' I went to the washroom. While looking in the mirror, I noticed this one ab line and thought, 'Oh my God, this is amazing! I look so good today.' I went back to my writing room and shared it with my fellow writers. They were like, 'Oh my God! This

is great! Let's make a song out of it.' And that's how I came up with the line 'Every time I look into the mirror, I say thank you God.' At first, I had no idea people would think it wasn't Indian, but when I went back and listened to it, I realised the hook line might sound accented," laughed the singer.

Nowadays, Instagram and TikTok really play a crucial role in opening doors for newcomers who want to expand their careers in music. When asked if this was true for her as well, the singer agreed.

"Fortunately or unfortunately, we all discover music on Instagram or TikTok. Regardless of what we say, I think it is an integral part of marketing, and that's really important. Otherwise, you might as well play your music in your living room.

As musicians, I believe there needs to be a full-term creative effort in terms of visuals and music, and they need to be connected to the whole product. I think a sample fit can be tested on Instagram, and if a person likes the song, they can go to YouTube and listen to it," stated Dhvani.

My personal favourite song by Dhvani is *Mera Yaar*. While talking about it, she revealed that this song is really special to her as she wrote it for a boy whom she had a crush on. "I felt like this song was the cleanest way to describe my feelings to someone you don't know well or would love to know," said the singer, blushing.

When asked whether she sees herself on the silver screen, she replied, "Of course, I see myself working on films. However, I would like to add that it's quite different from acting in music videos. Playing a full-length character is really difficult. I am looking forward to an exciting project that might hit theatres this year," said the singer.

Later on, the doorbell rang, and her crew members arrived. Dhvani's face lit up as she saw them. I bid her goodbye, feeling a little giddy and happy with the whole experience. I hugged her wishing with all my heart that I would be able to see her perform soon.



NEWS

Transport sector projects fare poorly

FROM PAGE 12
Tk 34,989 crore. The project was supposed to be completed within June 2022.

But the loan agreement with China was delayed. In April 2018, the ERD inked a Tk 21,036 crore loan agreement with Exim Bank of China, and the physical work of the project finally started in October 2018.

As the project deadline was deferred to June 2025, the cost went up to Tk 39,246 crore.

The Dhaka Bhangra section of the line was opened in October last year while the Bhangra-Jashore section is expected to be inaugurated within a month or two.

The Joydebpur-Ishwardi double line project, taken up in November 2018, was supposed to be implemented within December 2024.

But China in March 2021 refused to finance the Tk 14,250.61 crore project citing "a lack of in-depth preliminary work and insufficient feasibility study".

China's decision came four months after the Prime Minister's Office in November 2020 directed the BR to cut the negotiation price of three projects, including the Joydebpur-Ishwardi double line scheme, as the cost review committee found that the costs were relatively high.

The two other projects involve converting the Akhaura to Sylhet and Joydebpur-Mymensingh-Jamalpur

sections into dual gauge from metre-gauge.

The government decided to implement the Joydebpur-Ishwardi double line project with Japanese loan and the PMO directed the railway authorities to look for other financiers for the Tk 16,780.95 crore Akhaura-Sylhet project.

The Joydebpur-Mymensingh-Jamalpur project has not been approved by Ecneq yet and the railways authorities are continuing negotiation with the selected Chinese contractor for the last three years without any visible progress, officials said.

TUNNEL, ROAD, FLYOVER PROJECTS

Construction of the Bangabandhu Tunnel under the Karnaphuli river in Chattogram is the only transport sector project completed so far under the Chinese loan facility.

The tunnel was opened to traffic in October last year after the Tk 10,690 crore project was implemented by Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA).

The BBA is now implementing the Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway Project with Chinese loan.

The project, which was supposed to be completed within June 2022 at a cost of Tk 16,901 crore, was delayed as the Chinese authorities took time to approve the loan. The project cost has now gone up to Tk 17,553 crore and deadline has been deferred to June 2026.

Another project, which was supposed to be implemented with Chinese loan, was to convert the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway into four-lane one.

A Chinese contractor was selected for the work and the government signed a primary deal in this regard.

But the Chinese firm then allegedly offered bribes to then newly appointed secretary of the Road Transport and Highways Division to give the go-ahead to the work at an inflated cost.

Speaking at a programme in January 2018, then finance minister AMA Muhih said the company was blacklisted for trying to bribe the government official.

Roads and Highways Department is now implementing the project with the Asian Development Bank's loan.

MONGLA PORT PROJECT
Another transport project was supposed to be implemented for expansion and modernisation of the Mongla port facilities with Chinese loan.

The Mongla Port Authority submitted a Development Project Proposal (DPP) long ago but and Planning Commission in November last year sent back the DPP, involving around Tk 4,500 crore, recommending more scrutiny, a port authority official said.

"We have already sent back the DPP to the shipping ministry after scrutiny," the official said wishing not to be named.

Students go

FROM PAGE 1
The protests intensified on Thursday after the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court decided to uphold until further orders the June 5 High Court verdict that reinstated the 30 percent quotas for freedom fighters' children and grandchildren.

University students demand formation of a commission to remove "irrational and discriminatory" quotas; some quotas for underprivileged communities; and regular recruitment when there is no job seeker from such communities.

They also demand an individual be allowed to use the quota privilege only once in recruitment tests.

In 2018, the government abolished quotas amid widespread student protests.

Before that, there were 30 percent quotas for children and grandchildren of freedom fighters; 10 percent for women; 10 for underdeveloped

districts; five percent for indigenous communities; and one percent for people with disabilities.

Thousands marched on DU, BUET, and Eden College campuses around 3:00pm yesterday while Jagannath University students blocked Tanti Bazar intersection.

At a rally there, Rakibul Hasan, a student, said, "The government forced us to take to the streets."

There were also demonstrations on campuses of Chitragong University, Rajshahi University, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University and Begum Rokeya University.

Chattogram Khagrachhari, Dhaka-Rajshahi, Dhaka-Tangail, and Dhaka-Rangpur highways were blocked for a while.

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday announced his party's support for the protesters.

England into Euro semis

FROM PAGE 12
A dreary encounter for the first 75 minutes came to life after Breel Embolo put Switzerland in front.

Saka's fine strike from outside the box levelled with England's first shot on target five minutes later.

Manchester City defender Akanji was then the unfortunate penalty villain as Switzerland's horrible record in major tournament quarter-finals goes on.

They have now lost five without ever reaching a semi-final.

By contrast, England march on despite another in a string of underwhelming performances from Gareth Southgate's men.

In his 100th match in charge of his country, Southgate again resisted calls for mass changes in personnel but did alter his system.

Zia was devoted to chess till his last day

FROM PAGE 12
much greater than mine. He had a degree in anthropology from Dhaka University but his true love had always been chess. He trained his son as a chess player as well.

Zia took chess as a profession, which is a really challenging thing to do. I was never a fully professional chess player. I dabbled in many things but Zia was completely devoted to chess till his last day.

People remember me, because I was the first to get GM norm in South Asia, but in terms of quality, Zia was better than me.

No player from Bangladesh has ever made it to the Super GM level in chess. But the only one who came close to doing it was Zia. He was on path to reaching that level when he peaked in 2007-8, but eventually couldn't break through.

He coached professionally in India. He also taught chess to players from other countries as well through online coaching.

I wasn't there at the Chess

Federation hall room when he fell down. I had left at around 5:00 pm. I had spoken to him the day before yesterday. We spoke for a long time about many things in good humour.

To me, he looked very tired. His hair was scuffed up and looked dishevelled. I asked him why he was wearing a muffler in the heat. He said he was feeling cold. I found that a bit strange. He didn't look too well. But he was speaking normally.

I had told him to go to a doctor many times before, but he never listened. In the Chennai Olympiad in 2022, he fell sick after the opening ceremony. He vomited a few times, I told him it could be a cardiac issue. But he said it was nothing like that, it was just some indigestion. He couldn't get it checked for free over there, but he didn't do it. He always ignored his health, he thought his condition wasn't that serious. But he couldn't play for three days in that Olympiad.

He led the life of a school headmaster. He was dedicated to chess like how a headmaster looks

after a school. He lived a simple life. Whenever we would approach him saying, 'Zia, let's go to this place,' he would say, 'No, Niaz bhai, I don't want to go'. He wasn't outgoing, only obsessing over chess.

Zia hardly got anything in return for his dedication to chess. We need to ensure that his family doesn't suffer and that his wife and son are fine. The federation needs to take that initiative and the government also needs to take some steps.

I still can't believe that I won't get to hear Zia's deep voice, his jokes and laughter anymore. His death has left a huge gap. He had become an inseparable part of our chess community. Whether it was the World Cup or the Olympiad or the National Championship, he was everywhere. He was the heart and soul of our chess, and now, he will no longer be here, this realisation is hurting me the most.

The writer Niaz Murshed is Bangladesh's first chess Grandmaster

Three out of 5 still going straight to tertiary hospitals

FROM PAGE 1
with patients with minor problems. They will treat only patients referred by the smaller facilities.

The system creates a link between the primary, secondary and tertiary hospitals.

A recent study published in the peer-reviewed journal BMC Health Services Research said three out of five patients in the country go to tertiary-level hospitals without being referred there.

It also found that 58 percent of the 822 respondents were unaware of the referral system.

The study was conducted at two tertiary hospitals' outpatient and inpatient sections.

It found that only 41 percent of the patients were referred by other facilities.

In 2014, then health minister Mohammad Nasim introduced a patient referral system in Rangpur.

But it did not work because of a lack of facilities, expert physicians,

and staff at primary healthcare centres, officials said.

In 2016, National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine (NIPSOM), conducted a feasibility study in Rangpur, Kurigram, Panchagarh and Nilphamari for a referral system.

Prof Samiul Islam, director of the institute, said, "An effective referral system guideline should be formulated.

"Doctors have to be motivated and trained. People's trust has to be earned for the system to work."

He added that decentralising specialised health services will also reduce the pressure of patients in secondary- and tertiary-level hospitals.

Unless primary healthcare facilities are improved and there are more specialists, a referral system will frustrate people, he said.

The health directorate took an initiative to introduce a system in Manikganj and Chapainawabganj in

2019. But that too failed.

Syed Abdul Hamid, professor at the Institute of Health Economics (IHE) at Dhaka University, said that the lack of a proper referral system leads patients to often bypass primary care and head straight to specialists, creating a long queue.

Dr Supriya Sarkar, deputy programme manager (hospital) at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said a directive for the community clinics was made in 2019, but it was not fully implemented.

The health directorate will soon introduce a guideline, he said.

Prof Ahmedul Kabir, additional director general (administration) at DGHS, said, "We are working on creating an effective referral system. The work on digitising patient data is underway."

Ahmedul said poor services in primary facilities were major barriers to the referral system.

MYANMAR CRISIS

Ethnic fighters battling way into key town

AFP, Mandalay

Myanmar ethnic minority fighters were battling their way into a town housing a regional military command, one of their leaders yesterday.

Soldiers were "surrounding" the northern Shan state town of Lashio, home to the junta's northeastern command, General Tar Bhone Kyaw of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) told AFP.

Clashes first broke out on Wednesday as the ethnic fighters moved into the area.

A member of a local group of volunteers helping to treat the injured and bury the dead told AFP yesterday that at least 16 civilians had been killed since fighting broke out in Lashio.

"There has been very strong fighting around the town," the rescuer said.

SOUTH CHINA SEA

China anchors 'monster ship'

Says Philippine coast guard

REUTERS, Manila

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said yesterday that China's largest coast guard vessel has anchored in Manila's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea, and is meant to intimidate its smaller Asian neighbour.

The China coastguard's 165-metre 'monster ship' entered Manila's 200-nautical mile EEZ on July 2, spokesperson for the PCG Jay Tarruela told a news forum.

The PCG warned the Chinese vessel it was in the Philippine's EEZ and asked about their intentions, he said.

"It's an intimidation on the part of the China Coast Guard," Tarruela said. "We're not going to pull out and we're not going to be intimidated."

The Chinese ship, which has also deployed a small boat, was anchored 800 yards away from the PCG's vessel, Tarruela said.

China's embassy in Manila and the Chinese foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. China's coast guard has no publicly available contact information.



Palestinians assess the damage following an Israeli strike in the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip yesterday. The health ministry in Gaza said yesterday that at least 38,098 people have been killed in Gaza since Oct 7.

PHOTO: AFP

GAZA OFFENSIVE

Strikes in Gaza as Israel commits to talks

AFP, Palestinian Territories

Israel carried out deadly airstrikes in Gaza yesterday and engaged in combat with Hamas fighters, while to the north it exchanged fire with Hezbollah fighters across the Lebanese border.

The fighting raged as diplomatic efforts to halt the war, which will enter its tenth month today, continued with Israel saying on Friday it would send a delegation next week to continue talks with Qatari mediators.

There has been no truce since a one-week pause in November during which 80 Israeli hostages were freed in return for 240 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons. The war continued unabated yesterday, with Israel's military saying it had conducted operations across much of the Gaza Strip, including Shujaiya in the north, Deir al-Balah in central Gaza and Rafah in the south.

Shujaiya is among the areas the military had previously declared to be cleared of Hamas, but where fighting is again taking place.

Israel has carried out a military offensive that has killed at least 38,098 people in Gaza, also mostly civilians, since Oct 7 according to the health ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory.

The health ministry in the Hamas-run territory said at least 87 people had been killed in the past

48 hours, and paramedics yesterday reported 10 deaths in an air strike on a house in Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza.

The Hamas press office and paramedics said four journalists working for local media outlets were killed in strikes overnight, and the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said two of its employees had been killed.

According to UNRWA, which coordinated much of the aid delivered to Gaza, 194 of its employees have been killed in the war.

The United States, which has mediated talks alongside Qatar and Egypt, has talked up the prospects of a deal saying there is a "pretty significant opening" for both sides.

US President Joe Biden announced a pathway to a truce deal in May that he said had been proposed by Israel.

This included an initial six-week truce, Israeli withdrawal from Gaza population centres and the freeing of hostages by Palestinian fighters.

Talks subsequently stalled, but a US official said on Thursday that a new proposal from Hamas "moves the process forward and may provide the basis for closing the deal".

Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan told AFP that new ideas from the group had been "conveyed by the mediators to the American side, which welcomed them and

passed them on to the Israeli side. Now the ball is in the Israeli court."

The war has uprooted 90 percent of Gaza's population, destroyed much of its housing and other infrastructure, and left almost 500,000 people enduring "catastrophic" hunger, UN agencies say.

Netanyahu demands the release of the hostages but also insists the war will not end until Israel has destroyed Hamas's ability to make war or govern.

Cross-border fire between Israel and Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah movement has occurred almost daily since the Gaza war began, but has escalated notably over the past month.

That has raised fears of a major conflagration between the staunch enemies which could draw in Iran and other powers.

Yesterday morning, sirens blared over northern Israel and the military said it had downed a "suspicious aerial target" and two "hostile aircraft" launched from Lebanon fell in open ground.

The military said earlier it had attacked "a number of Hezbollah terror targets in southern Lebanon" overnight, all near the border.

US officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, have voiced hope that a ceasefire in Gaza could also lead to an easing of violence on the Israel-Lebanon border.

8 arrested after murder of Indian politician

AFP, New Delhi

Eight people were arrested in India yesterday for the murder of a politician who championed the rights of lower-caste Indians, police said.

K Armstrong, the state boss of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), was hacked to death with machetes and sickles near his home in the southern city of Chennai on Friday night.

Six men travelling on motorbikes attacked Armstrong while he was "chatting with friends and supporters" near his home in the Tamil Nadu state capital, the Indian Express newspaper reported.

The men reportedly escaped before anyone could intervene.

Several of Armstrong's supporters took to the streets later in the evening to protest his assassination and demand justice.

Senior Chennai police officer Asra Garg said eight suspects were being interrogated after a "preliminary investigation".

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin urged police to speedily conclude the investigation.

Biden defiant, but critics are circling

AFP, Washington DC

Joe Biden's presidential reelection bid hung in the balance yesterday, after efforts to put a disastrous debate showing behind him failed to silence voices urging that he quit the White House race.

In what had been billed as a make-or-break TV interview on Friday, Biden's strategy was to flatly deny the falling poll numbers and concerns over his mental and physical fitness triggered by his dismal performance against rival Donald Trump.

He blamed a severe cold for the debate debacle and insisted it was just a "bad night" rather than evidence of increasing frailty and cognitive decline.

And the 81-year-old was adamant that he would not be pressured to end his campaign.

Murmurs of dissent within his own Democratic party have, in the case of five individual House representatives, morphed into direct calls to quit, and a number of key donors have threatened to cut off funding if Biden insists on staying the course.

Biden's campaign team is pushing ahead regardless, with an event planned in Pennsylvania today and visits to other battleground states later in the month.

For Biden and his campaign team, the strategy seems to be to ride it out.



Russia says captured village in east Ukraine

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday said its forces had captured a village in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, as Moscow continues to advance slowly across the battlefield.

The defence ministry said its troops "liberated the village of Sokil", around 30 kilometres northwest of Donetsk city, the capital of the region by the same name that Moscow claimed to have annexed in 2022.

Kyiv says the fiercest fighting across the entire front line is taking place in the Donetsk region, where Russian troops are trying to eject Ukraine's forces.

Elsewhere, Kyiv, EU officials, the United States and NATO hit out at Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán, Russia's closest EU ally, on Friday after Russian President Vladimir Putin hosted him in Moscow for talks on the Ukraine conflict.

Speaking to Orbán, Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday repeated his demand for Ukraine to totally withdraw from the region, along with three others in the south and east of the country, if it wants peace.

Orbán has not received any mandate from the EU Council to visit Moscow, officials have said.

Iran reformist wins presidency

FROM PAGE 1

in the runoff, emphasising the importance of the election.

He said the first round turnout was lower than expected, but added that it was not an act "against the system".

The ballot comes against a backdrop of heightened regional tensions over the Gaza war, a dispute with the West over Iran's nuclear programme, and domestic discontent over the state of Iran's sanctions-hit economy.

In last week's first round, Pezeshkian, who was the only reformist allowed to stand, won the largest number of votes, around 42 percent, while Jalili came second with around 39 percent, according to figures from Iran's elections authority.

Only 40 percent of Iran's 61 million eligible voters took part in the first round, the lowest turnout in any presidential election since the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

The candidacy of Pezeshkian, a relative unknown until recently, has raised the hopes of

Iran's reformists after years of dominance by the conservative and ultraconservative camps.

Iran's main reformist coalition supported Pezeshkian, with endorsements by former presidents Mohammad Khatami and Hassan Rouhani, a moderate.

Pezeshkian, a 69-year-old heart surgeon, has called for "constructive relations" with Western countries to revive the nuclear deal in order to "get Iran out of its isolation".

Pezeshkian vowed to ease long-standing internet restrictions and to "fully" oppose police patrols enforcing the mandatory headscarf for women, a high-profile issue since the death in police custody in 2022 of Mahsa Amini which sparked months of nationwide unrest.

Meanwhile, Pezeshkian received congratulations for his victory from around the world, most notably from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Saudi

Arabian King Salman, United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and the emirs of Qatar and Kuwait, according to news agencies.

"Looking forward to working closely with you to further strengthen our warm and long-standing bilateral relationship for the benefit of our peoples and the region," Modi wrote on social media platform X.

"I hope that your tenure as president will contribute to a reinforcement of constructive bilateral cooperation between our friendly peoples," Putin said in a message to Pezeshkian.

The two countries, the target of stiff Western sanctions, can "coordinate efforts to resolve international issues in a constructive manner," he said.

"I attach great importance to the development of China-Iran relations and am willing to work with the President to lead the China-Iran comprehensive strategic partnership towards

deeper advancement," state news agency Xinhua reported Xi as saying.

The two countries "have a long history of friendly exchanges, and bilateral relations have maintained healthy and stable development... for over half a century," Xi said, according to Xinhua.

"Faced with complex regional and international situations, China and Iran have always supported each other, worked together and continued to consolidate strategic mutual trust," he added.

"(This) has not only brought benefits to our two countries' peoples, but has also made active contributions to promoting regional and world peace and stability," he said.

In a message published on the Syrian presidency's social media accounts, Assad said: "We are keen to ensure that our relationship remains at its peak".

He added that he wants to work with Pezeshkian "to strengthen the Syrian-Iranian strategic relationship" and that "resistance will remain

the common approach we follow."

King Salman, in a message to Pezeshkian, expressed hope for the "continued development of relations which link our two countries and our two brotherly peoples," according to the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

He also expressed his wish for further "coordination and dialogue to strengthen regional and international peace and security," SPA said.

The president of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, wished success to Pezeshkian and said he looks "forward to working together to further strengthen ties between the UAE and Iran for the benefit of our two nations and peoples."

The emirs of Qatar and Kuwait sent cables of congratulations to Pezeshkian, official media reported.

Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad Al-Sabah wished "more prosperity and development" for the Islamic republic, the official KUNA news agency said.

Top Myanmar general in China for official visit

Says junta

AFP, Yangon

The Myanmar junta's second-in-command arrived in China yesterday for an official visit, the junta's information team said, as clashes with ethnic minority fighters raged in the north of the country despite a Beijing brokered ceasefire.

Vice senior General Soe Win arrived in Qingdao in Shandong province where he will attend a "Green Development Forum" hosted by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the junta's information office said in a statement.

Ties between the junta and Beijing, a major ally and arms supplier, frayed last year over the junta's failure to crack down on online scam compounds in Myanmar's borderlands.

The compounds were staffed by citizens of China and other countries who were often trafficked and forced to work swindling their compatriots in an industry analysts say is worth billions.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has not visited China since the 2021 coup that plunged the country into turmoil.

The Southeast Asian nation has seen widespread fighting since the military coup ended democratic rule. Soe Win's visit comes following more than a week of fighting in northern Shan state between the military and an ethnic minority armed group that has shattered a ceasefire brokered by China in January. Yesterday the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) told AFP its fighters were "surrounding" the town of Lashio, home to a regional military command. Lashio sits on a major highway that runs from Myanmar's second city of Mandalay to China's Yunnan province.

Sahel junta chiefs divorce from West African bloc

AFP, Niamey

The military regimes of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso marked their divorce from the rest of West Africa yesterday, with Niger's ruling general saying the junta-led countries have "turned their backs on" the regional bloc.

The three country's leaders are taking part in the first summit of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), set up after pulling out of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) earlier this year.

"Our people have irrevocably turned their backs on ECOWAS," Niger's ruling General Abdourahmane Tiani told his fellow Sahel strongmen at the gathering's opening in the Nigerien capital Niamey.

Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger set up the mutual defence pact in September, leaving the wider Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) bloc in January.

A shocking revelation of data inaccuracy BB's discovery of export data miscalculations is alarming

Bangladesh Bank has unearthed a shocking revelation about our export data—a \$14 billion dollar discrepancy in the calculation. This was revealed through a regular update on the balance of payments by the central bank, creating shockwaves for economists and business leaders. Such a mind-boggling understatement of the export data has disturbing implications on the country's economic performance, specifically its growth rate, based on which policies are formulated. The question is, how could such massive miscalculations occur in the first place? Who is responsible? And how long have these been going on?

According to a report in this paper, Bangladesh Bank discovered six ways in which the data miscalculations caused the export figure to become so inflated. The anomalies include errors in customs data, miscalculations of the value of fabrics, samples for buyers being included as final products with export value, double-counting of sales by EPZ-based firms, not adjusting the difference between the LC (Letter of Credit) value and actual export proceeds, and not adjusting losses from stock-lot sales, discounts and commissions. Such mistakes in the dataset are deeply worrying, to say the least.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) and Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) should be held accountable for the mistakes. We expect the government to conduct a thorough investigation into why the relevant officials made these errors. Is it because of incompetence? Or, were the miscalculations deliberate? Either way, they must face the consequences of mishandling such important data. We also must ask: how far back do these errors go? The current mismatch is for the July-April period of the 2023-2024 fiscal year, and the correction reveals that exports have fallen by 6.8 percent instead of the stated growth of 3.93 percent. How far back should we go to recalculate the data for previous years' performance? A BB official has said there is nothing wrong with past data. Should we take their optimism at face value?

While the correction will lead to a revaluation of the growth rate, an economist has said it would be down by 1 percent. That said, that Bangladesh Bank has discovered the anomalies through its own recalculations is a positive move. We appreciate the effort to set the records straight, and hope that such diligence and transparency will be applied to other areas of data calculation. Policies are based on the official data available, and can only work if the numbers are correct. We, therefore, expect the government to revisit all the data generated by its bodies in various areas, no matter how tedious the task is. Because, ultimately, correct and regularly updated data is vital not only for the government to make appropriate policies but also for independent experts and citizens to understand the nation's economic realities.

Is it a tree fair, or a commercial one?

Attitude of state officials questions our environmental commitments

Officially, the government remains committed to preserving our natural resources including forests, rivers, and hills. However, the corruption, mismanagement, and questionable policymaking that routinely stymie its efforts—thereby contributing to further environmental degradation—can be understood from a recent example. It involves, as per a report, the organisation of a so-called "tree fair" in Gosairhat, Shariatpur. Despite its name, the 15-day event features a variety of vendors selling snacks, cosmetics, toys, and rides, with only one stall, out of the 39, selling tree saplings. Even though the fair is being organised under the banner of the Gosairhat forest department and upazila administration, the former disclaimed any involvement, while the latter said it is assisting the department, highlighting a lack of coordination and seriousness among them.

One may write this off as trivial but it is not. It symbolises the broader trend of systemic neglect and mismanagement that has long jeopardised our environmental commitments. Much like the ill-distribution of stalls turning the fair into a commercial one, the perfunctory attitude and profit-first mentality of responsible government departments have severely affected various decisions and projects related to our environmental causes. A report published on the same day takes a look into some of those projects where—far from preserving our forests, hills, and rivers—officials prioritised their commercialisation by permitting or engaging in environmental degradation themselves.

A notable example is the planned safari park at the Lathitila reserved forest in Moulvibazar. Despite laws prohibiting construction and even unauthorised entry into protected forests, the forest department is reportedly cutting trees and hills there to build the park, betraying its misplaced priorities. Similarly, various government institutions have been implicated in the destruction of wetlands, forests, and hills. As per a study by the River and Delta Research Centre (RDRC), between March 2023 and April 2024, 25 government institutions cut down upwards of 11 lakh trees across the country—over seven lakhs of them within protected forests. Even more shockingly, the forest department alone accounted for over 417,000 of all felled trees. Such large-scale deforestation in the name of development not only degrades the environment but also sets a precedent for private entities to follow suit.

One doesn't need to be reminded of the devastating effects of such activities, public or private. People are paying the price even as we write this. It is, therefore, imperative that the government reassesses its priorities and ensures that state officials, who are at the centre of any drive to uphold its environmental commitments, are properly attuned to them. The authorities also must ensure strict compliance with all environmental laws to prevent the depletion and degradation of natural resources.

Freedom fighters' quota goes against the 1971 spirit



Tanim Ahmed is a journalist at The Daily Star.

TANIM AHMED

Any argument about the freedom fighters' quota, especially one that opposes it in its current form, has turned so contentious that the discussion tends to revolve around the advocate more than whatever merit the argument itself might have. It would then, perhaps, be appropriate to first establish that I have skin in the game, that this is not merely an exercise in theory. It affects me directly.

Both my parents were freedom fighters. My father was an army doctor and among the founders of Bangladesh Hospital in Tripura under Sector 2. My mother was a nurse at that hospital. My uncle was among the first batch of officers to be inducted into the Bangladesh army. He was among the 61 officers of the First War Course (also called the Murti Commission) during the 1971 Liberation War. Both my father and my uncle were awarded the Bir Protik gallantry award.

They chose to join the war knowing full well they may not return at all. They had close encounters with danger and death. Many of their comrades fell in battle. Many were caught and never returned. But that is the nature of wars. Some return home to glory, some don't. But this was a war for the liberation of a nation, which meant that unless they were victorious, they would go down as seditious rebels and their families would live in ignominy forever. Merely surviving the war was not going to be enough. They had to win it, and win it they did. It is only fitting that we honour the freedom fighters in whatever way we can. Theirs is a debt that we can never repay. Thus, instituting a special quota for freedom fighters, who had risked their life and limb for the country, would be quite justified in an independent Bangladesh.

Furthermore, considering the disparities in Bangladesh, there should be special quotas not just in government service, but also in universities, for certain groups that remain marginalised and disadvantaged—for instance, women,



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN/STAR

Students have blocked Shahbagh intersection for much of last week in protest of the quota system.

ethnic minorities, people from remote areas, people with disabilities and differences. There should be conditions too—specifying how many children of the same family can avail it or that it will only apply to first generation university aspirants for they have not had the same opportunities as those whose parents did go to university. People from remote districts like Panchagarh or Khagrachhari, those from ethnic minorities, those with differences like transgender people, and women too, should, by all means, be prioritised.

However, extending the special quota of freedom fighters as a privilege to their children, and their grandchildren, would be unfair to deserving candidates. It might have been acceptable if 30 percent quotas were reserved for a group of people who constitute less than one percent of the population if it were the freedom fighters themselves. But we,

the children of freedom fighters, or our children, had nothing to do with their choices or their sacrifices and we do not deserve any of the credit due to our parents. Surely, many freedom fighters' families are in distress and have suffered but so have millions of others. Now, more than 50 years after the war, to continue that privilege for the grandchildren of freedom fighters

fighters' children that claim to "fight" for this quota saying that abolishing it would be an insult to the spirit of the Liberation War, and would belittle the contribution of freedom fighters. It would not. It is embarrassing, to say the least. It shames me that freedom fighters' children would be so callous to their peers and fellow citizens as to not see the injustice in what

is almost like installing a regime of hereditary entitlement. Freedom fighters' families do not constitute a disadvantaged or marginalised class. Those who still languish in poverty do so because the state has failed them, just as it has failed millions of others. There should be programmes to lift them up, as there are social safety net and other assistance programmes that the government runs. One might point out that those are largely insufficient and ineffective in improving lives meaningfully. After all, cash assistance of a few thousand takas is not going to change lives in this day and age. But that is all the more reason to reinvigorate efforts to make these programmes better so that every citizen of Bangladesh has enough opportunities to live a better life. It does not call for a special provision for a specific group of people. Yet, there are platforms of freedom

they advocate. And to brand those demanding annulment of the freedom fighters' quota as collaborators or traitors is a cheap way of stigmatising the people demanding a fair system.

Surely, the principle of any special provisions of the government should be that the poorest and most marginalised benefit from them. These provisions should seek to help those in most need of assistance to lift themselves out of the vicious cycle of poverty and deprivation. These should strive towards a more just and equal society, and for that to happen we need capable officials running the government. The very spirit of the Liberation War was in protest of the unjust, unequal system of erstwhile Pakistan. The freedom fighters' quota that seeks to create a privileged section of people hereditarily is exactly what they had fought against. I don't want it. Not for me. And certainly not for my children.

Mission to China

Is the PM ready to take a bold position on RCEP?

Farid Erkiizia Bakht is a political analyst.

FARID ERKIZIA BAKHT

Bangladesh is not a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Nor is it a member of BRICS+. It is not ensclosed within ASEAN either. By extension, Dhaka feels it can remain outside the planet's largest trading area, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). I have lost count of the times I mentioned RCEP in conversations in Dhaka, only to be met with a blank stare. The RCEP does not elicit curiosity.

The fault lies with the strategic community in Dhaka. They have failed (perhaps even wilfully) to argue for a coherent strategy towards China and Southeast Asia. The result of apathy and opaque concepts is that Bangladesh has "Brexit" itself away from the new core of the world economy on our doorstep. Metaphorically, it has plumped for the slow train, drifting around in South Asia, rather than hitch a ride on the high-speed trains of China, Japan, Korea and ASEAN. We could have both. Geography and history demand it.

Are we aiming low, missing RCEP? So, what can we hope for from the PM's flight to Beijing? I am worried that no one seems to be worried.

Over two days on July 9 and 10, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to have intense talks with Prime Minister Li Qiang, and a broader discussion about a deeper relationship with President Xi Jinping. Are her advisors failing to grasp what is at stake and not feeding

talking points for a much more ambitious undertaking?

The current batch of "goodies" look like a string of projects at best, where the parts outweigh the sum. At worst, to cynics, it looks like a shopping trip of cash and projects. Even working on a free trade area with China is insufficient.

Fundamentally, we need to move on from merely pleading for more infrastructure, funded by foreign loans but not by themselves earning foreign currency. The vulnerable economy is crying out for foreign (Chinese) investment into export-producing industrial platforms, to earn the dollars and Yuan to pay back ever higher foreign debt, which is mostly non-Chinese. Instead of acting as a supplicant for aid, we should be negotiating terms of a partnership where both China and Bangladesh gain something (a win-win, as Chinese diplomats like to say).

Contrast this with the trip by the Sri Lankan president in mid-2023 and how, before and after his visit to Beijing, he made joining RCEP the centrepiece of a new strategy towards the East and Southeast Asia. Colombo understands that RCEP offers a priceless opportunity to leapfrog the most industrialised state in India, neighbouring Tamil Nadu, by entering the Chinese-led trading area.

New nodes of supply chains will appear on that island, if admitted. In other words, selected sections of manufacturing processes will decamp from, say, China or Malaysia, and seek low-cost destinations within the trade area. The latter point is important because RCEP is not merely

about lowering tariffs but adhering to new technical standards and industrial practices. Diversification, better quality, and higher technology are the prizes.

The oft-stated visions of a Digital Bangladesh and its offspring, Smart Bangladesh, require plugging into the world of Huawei, Xinyi Solar and BYD. That undertaking can quite easily function in parallel to Indian connectivity links through Bangladeshi territory (another win-win).

From strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity

Too often, Dhaka has followed the Indian posture of strategic ambiguity. Others might consider this ever-so-clever "balancing" as strategic dithering, founded on short-term opportunities, laced within an ambience of fear of offending any or all of the Big Three (India, US, and China, in that order).

The PM, with her political instincts, understands the downsides of committing too much to Delhi's demands. Wiser heads know that Delhi has its own fears and interests. They recognise that cooperation, not confrontation, is the *sine qua non* of Delhi-Dhaka ties. Yet, this cannot be to the detriment of Bangladeshi economic imperatives. Dhaka has given much more than would have been possible two decades ago—ending separatist bases for Northeast Indian guerillas forces, allowing transport corridors from Kolkata through Bangladesh to Tripura and Assam, and deferring to Indian pressure to "go slow" on Chinese projects. The last point is now no longer acceptable to the sovereign and

economic interests of Bangladesh, nor its restive population.

Delhi has been heavily criticised within opposition quarters in Bangladesh for its support to the Awami League during the one-sided elections in January. Now, Delhi has nowhere else to go. It can hardly try to not back the Awami League since the alternative forces are viscerally against Delhi. Moreover, with Modi electorally weakened, he has other agendas to attend to.

Were Dhaka to take bold steps in its approach to Beijing and the wider region, Delhi would be as passive as Washington was in January.

Acting firmly but fairly by retaining commitments to India alongside pursuing a new, enhanced economic partnership with China would extinguish some domestic fires. This reminds me of the PM's rather strange journey to the Munich Security Conference a few months ago. The PM acquiesced with her foreign policy wonks and Western personages to hobnob with Western military officials, primarily focused with war in Eastern Europe and forthcoming adventures on the South China Sea. Not only did Sheikh Hasina skilfully avoid antagonising Russia as well as her Western hosts by stating the position of neutrality (as per the Global South position), but she also made some brave remarks, strongly condemning the slaughter in Gaza.

The mission to Beijing offers her another opportunity to act on her instincts. She can make her move, telling her Chinese hosts that Bangladesh wants an early entry into RCEP. Missing this boat now will mean facing the music soon enough.



The expectations among people from the Labour government will be high and if not delivered, the frustration may set in early. PHOTO: REUTERS

UK ELECTION

Labour's challenge after landslide win



Dr Selim Jahan is the former director of UNDP's Human Development Report Office at UNDP in New York.

SELIM JAHAN

The British election is now over, and the results are in. According to latest reports, the Labour Party has won a landslide victory with 412 seats in the 650-seat House of Commons. The Tories have lost 251 seats, and they are now left with 121 members in the new parliament. But beyond the numbers, there are some trends worth taking into account.

The voter turnout was about 60 percent, the lowest in 20 years. The apathy among the voters about the political process is clear. The theme of "change" of the Labour Party has resonated with the voters, who seemed to be sick and fed up with the Tories and their policies. Smaller parties like the Green Party or Reform UK have remained, as usual, marginal. The expectations among people from the Labour government will be high and if not delivered, the frustration may set in early. Finally, what can be done will depend not only on domestic dynamics, but also on international events. As the Labour government sets to tasks, there are a few formidable challenges they will have to tackle.

To start off, apart from socio-economic divisions, the British society has become highly divisive along ethnic, religious, regional, immigrant, and non-immigrant lines. Britishness, in terms of value and tradition, has decayed a lot. If the new government wants to succeed, it has to restore the social cohesion among various groups. Diversity, if managed well, can be a strength. But mismanaged, it can lead to divisions.

Despite having always boasted about being a welfare state, Britain's social services are decaying. The National Health Services (NHS) is a prime example. There is a dearth of

doctors and nurses, hospital beds have become a scarce commodity, patients have been on the waiting list for necessary surgery, and there are shortfalls in resources. But the problem is not only in terms of resource shortage, but also of the abuse of the system. Abuses are prominent in all kinds of social assistance systems. However, privatisation of the social services is not the solution. Rather, the British social service system requires fundamental structural reforms.

There is no doubt that the inflation rate has come down significantly, but that has not solved the economic challenges that common people face in their day-to-day life. Joblessness is a problem, energy prices are still high, the housing market is not friendly to common people. At the macro level, economic growth is sluggish and with Brexit, Britain has become isolated and deprived of the benefits and the privileges of the European Common Market.

Beyond all of this, immigration remains a hotly debated issue in the British society. It is now recognised that it is not always illegal immigration which is the problem; it is also legal immigration. Through the loopholes in immigration laws and the lenient policies of the British government, it is not only people needed by society who have entered the country, but also people who are dependent on the social assistance system, which has put a heavy burden on it. But the more important problem is the perception that this has opened a door to fundamentalism and terrorism.

The effectiveness and the success of the Labour government will depend, to a large extent, on the

international scenario. One of the defining issues in this regard will be the American presidential election later this year. If Donald Trump becomes the US President in November, the US-UK relationship under a Labour government cannot be expected to be warm and cordial and the environment may be tense. In addition, war in Ukraine and the Palestine crisis would have a lingering impact on the British economy. The past UK government had doled out huge amounts of resources to Ukraine, which has put pressure on the British exchequer. On the Palestine issue, the position of the Labour Party is rather hazy and unclear. The Labour government has to bring clarity to it.

Some of the election results indicate certain challenges as well. For example, the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) has got only nine seats in the new parliament, down 38 seats from the last parliament. It raises question on the standing of the Scottish independence. Have the Scottish voters lost appetite for this issue? Or do they think that the British parliament is not the appropriate platform for the concerns of Scotland? Similarly, Liberal Democrats have achieved the best results in 100 years, and have gained 60 new seats to become the third largest party in the Parliament. It is well-known that this party is strongly supported by the younger generation. Even though the Labour Party has absolute majority in the parliament, one challenge the party will have is how it interacts with Liberal Democrats in the broader policy contexts. People have not forgotten as to how in the coalition of Labour and the Liberal Democrats, the latter was marginalised by Labour.

In the coming days, the British people will observe with high expectations how the new government tackles all these challenges and steers the country forward. The honeymoon period will not be long. The theme of "change" is a healer, but if change is not delivered, it could be a "killer" too.

How to reduce dengue and related out-of-pocket costs

Abdur Razzaque Sarker and Md Mohin Uddin Mizan are health economist and publication and communications professionals, respectively, at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).

ABDUR RAZZAQUE SARKER and MD MOHIN UDDIN MIZAN

Despite efforts by the two Dhaka city corporations to control dengue over the past few years, the number of cases and deaths has risen significantly. In 2019, there were 101,354 cases and 179 deaths. By 2023, these numbers had surged to 321,179 cases and 1,705 deaths. This increase indicates that the measures taken have been inadequate, and more needs to be done to address the issue effectively.

One study estimates that globally about 96 million dengue cases are clinically manifested per year, mostly found in urban and semi-urban areas in tropical and subtropical climates. Also, the burden of dengue infections has dramatically increased over the past decades, with the number of symptomatic dengue infection reports doubling every 10 years between 1990 and 2013.

Bangladesh is situated in the tropical and subtropical regions, and like other Southeast Asian countries, it has become a suitable habitat for the dengue vector and has experienced increased transmission in recent years. The disease is

records. A large number of dengue cases are treated at the community level. Therefore, the actual number of cases and deaths is still unknown and even under-reported in Bangladesh. Experts estimate that about 2.4 million people suffers dengue infections annually, with most cases belonging to major cities like Dhaka and Chattogram.

Dhaka is often recognised as one of the poorest megacities, grappling with many problems such as pollution, horrendous traffic jams, unregulated construction work, brick kilns, and vehicles running on fuel containing higher levels of sulfur and other detrimental substances that pose grave threats to public health. Further, migration to urban megacities may impact individuals' hygiene, working, and living conditions, directly affecting city dwellers' health status. Thus, dengue infection is an emerging public health concern in urban Dhaka, and the cost of dengue infection is higher in metropolitan Dhaka than in other parts of the country due to livelihood costs.

A growing body of literature

resources from their regular income (62.3 percent), borrow from others (47.7 percent), use savings (41.7 percent), rely on family donations (18.9 percent), and even sell permanent assets (1 percent).

There is an urgent need for an effective national prevention strategy to achieve considerable cost savings and reduce morbidity from dengue. Policymakers should consider the OOP cost of dengue infections, particularly among low-income people, while balancing the benefits of introducing potentially effective dengue preventive programmes in dengue hotspots like urban Dhaka.

Different preventive measures such as water and waste management strategies and community education campaigns focusing on these risk factors should be taken to tackle dengue infections in metropolitan cities including Dhaka. The measures at household levels may include eliminating mosquito breeding grounds, effective solid waste disposal, using mosquito coils, aerosols, mosquito nets, cleaning larval habitats weekly (overhead tanks, groundwater storage tanks, air coolers, refrigerators, flower vases, earthen jars, cement tanks, plastic drums), applying insecticides, and using window screens, coils, and vapourisers. A joint effort involving public, private, and non-



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Policymakers should consider the OOP cost of dengue infections, particularly among low-income people.

expected to expand its geographical range due to favourable conditions provided by rapidly growing high-density urban areas along with socio-economic changes, increased worldwide travel and trade, and climate change. A risk factor study on dengue infections in urban Dhaka found that nearly 82 percent of identified immature mosquitoes were *Aedes aegypti*, responsible for dengue. Dengue fever is painful and affects people of all ages, including infants, young children, and adults and data indicates that Dhaka city is at most risk and requires urgent preventive intervention measures.

Dengue cases were highly prevalent in Dhaka division in 2023 and more than half of the total cases and most dengue-related deaths occurred in Dhaka city alone, indicating a health hazard for city dwellers. It should be noted that these numbers come from hospital

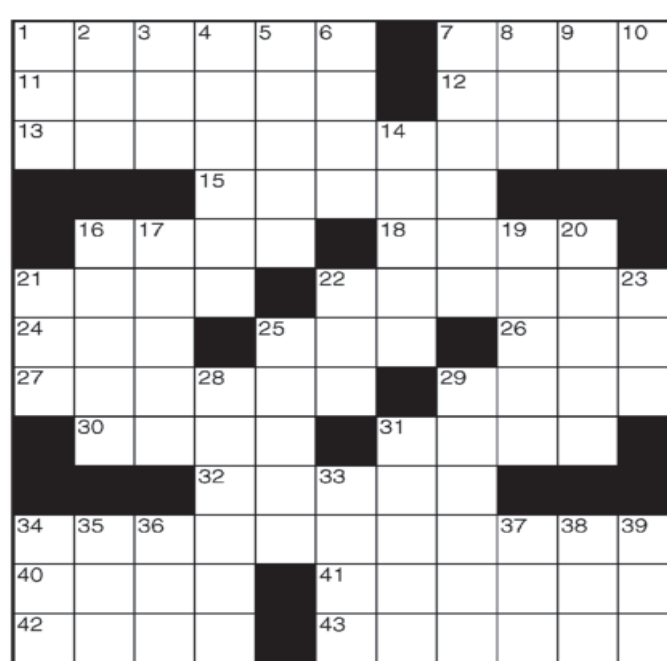
shows that dengue imposes an enormous socio-economic burden on households, healthcare systems, and government health expenditures in endemic countries, particularly during outbreaks. A recent BIDS study titled, "Economic Burden of Dengue in Urban Bangladesh: A Societal Perspective," published in 2023 in the *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, provides a detailed analysis of this economic burden. The average out-of-pocket (OOP) cost of dengue was about \$316.51, representing 56 percent of total monthly household income. For the poorest quintile, this cost exceeded 139 percent of their total household income, while the wealthiest quintile spent only 36 percent of their household income, highlighting a severe financial disparity among city dwellers. To mitigate the OOP cost of dengue, urban dwellers need to exhaust

governmental organisations is necessary to tackle the burden of dengue.

Another potential short-term solution is introducing a vaccine against the dengue virus in dengue hotspots. Vaccines are often considered the "best-buy" as they reduce disease incidence and case fatalities, saves OOP expenditure, avoids productivity losses, mitigates excessive pressure on the health system, and ensures equity. While the dengue vaccination programme is yet to be conducted in Bangladesh, such a preventive programme has proven cost-effective in many countries like Indonesia, Brazil, and Thailand. As dengue is emerging in Bangladesh, various preventive strategies should be considered year-round and not just at the beginning of the monsoon season to halt dengue infections and improve health outcomes.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
1 Phone button
7 Track event
11 Meeting slate
12 Mideast sultanate
13 Flying copycat
15 Foster of film
16 Conks out
18 St. Louis sight
21 Small change
22 Patriotic song
24 Switch setting
25 Drill part
26 Mine yield
27 Beyond what's acceptable
29 Expand
30 Screws up
31 Mires
- 32 Region of northern India
34 Wee hoverer
40 "Got it"
41 Aviator Earhart
42 Household critters
43 Milk buy
- DOWN**
1 Flock father
2 Sense of self
3 Winter mo.
4 Printer type
5 "Bye!" in Baja
6 Touch down
7 Poet Frost
8 French friend
9 Sedan or SUV
10 Purpose
14 Ferber novel
- 16 "Robinson Crusoe" writer
17 Due to get
19 Guitarist's concern
20 Long sandwiches
21 Barracks bed
22 Melody
23 Kitten cry
25 Deep singers
28 Picture holders
29 TV's Bryant
31 Molten rock
33 Unexpected problem
34 Stylish
35 Try out
36 Got together
37 Unwell
38 Carnival city
39 Dapper fellow



THURSDAY'S ANSWERS

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

Dengue linked to heightened risk of depression

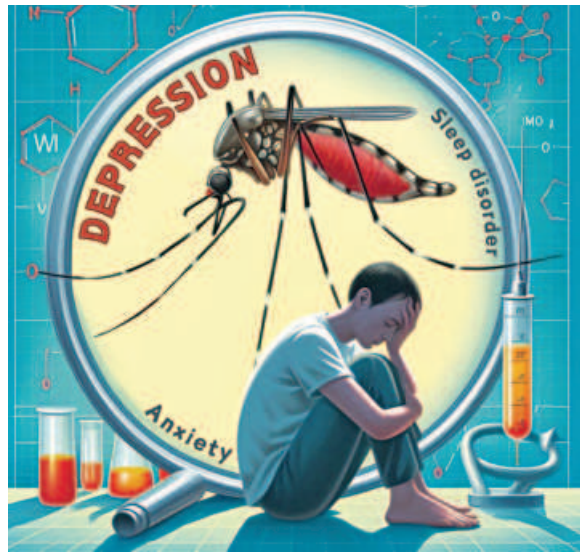
Research from Taiwan suggests that dengue fever may increase the risk of depression in both the short and long term. Hsin-I Shih and colleagues from the National Cheng Kung University and National Health Research Institutes analysed the medical records of nearly 50,000 people who had dengue fever and compared them with 226,670 people who did not have the disease. Their findings were published in the journal PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases.

Dengue fever is caused by a mosquito-borne virus and can range from mild to severe, with some people experiencing long-term health effects. While previous research has linked dengue fever with psychiatric disorders like depression and anxiety, few studies have looked at the long-term risks.

To fill this gap, Shih and colleagues studied medical records from 2002 to 2015, focusing on whether dengue patients developed anxiety, depression, or sleep disorders after infection. They found that dengue patients were more likely to develop depression at all time points studied: less than three months, three to 12 months, and more than 12 months after infection. Sleep disorders were more common within three to 12 months post-infection, but there was no increased risk of anxiety overall.

For patients whose dengue was severe enough to require hospitalisation, there was a higher risk of anxiety within the first three months and sleep disorders within the first year. This group also had a higher risk of depression across all time frames.

These findings suggest a link between dengue fever and depression. However, more research is needed to understand whether dengue directly causes depression or if other factors are involved. The authors emphasise the importance of studying the mental health impacts of dengue infection further.



Over 3 million annual deaths due to alcohol and drug use, the majority among men

A new report from the World Health Organisation (WHO) underscores the profound impact of alcohol and drug consumption worldwide. In 2019, alcohol alone contributed to 2.6 million deaths annually, representing 4.7% of all deaths, with an additional 0.6 million deaths attributed to psychoactive drug use. Notably, the majority of these deaths—2 million from alcohol and 0.4 million from drugs—affected men.

WHO's Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health highlights that an estimated 400 million people globally live with alcohol use disorders, including 209 million with alcohol dependence. These disorders significantly increase the risk of chronic diseases and mental health conditions and contribute to preventable deaths and societal burdens.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, emphasises the urgent need for comprehensive actions to mitigate these impacts and ensure accessible treatment for substance use disorders. The report calls for global commitment to achieve Sustainable Development

Goal (SDG) target 3.5 by 2030, focusing on reducing substance use and improving treatment accessibility.

Despite a slight decline in alcohol-related death rates since 2010, the overall number remains alarmingly high, particularly in the WHO European and African Regions. The report identifies alcohol's role in various diseases, with 1.6 million deaths linked to noncommunicable diseases, 724,000 to injuries, and 284,000 to communicable diseases like HIV and tuberculosis.

Global per capita alcohol consumption decreased marginally, from 5.7 litres in 2010 to 5.5 litres in 2019. However, heavy episodic drinking—defined as consuming at least 60 g of pure alcohol on one or more occasions—remains prevalent, particularly among men, contributing to associated health risks and disabilities.

The report also highlights disparities in treatment accessibility, with significant gaps in coverage despite effective treatment options. Only a fraction of those in need receive treatment services, ranging from less than 1% to 35% across

reporting countries. Stigma, discrimination, and misconceptions about treatment efficacy further hinder access to and prioritisation of substance use disorders in health agendas.

To address these challenges, WHO calls for intensified efforts across eight strategic areas, including advocacy campaigns, strengthening prevention and treatment capacities, and enhancing training for health professionals. The implementation of the Global Alcohol Action Plan 2022-2030, focusing on the SAFER package, is emphasised alongside increased resource mobilisation and innovative funding mechanisms.

In conclusion, the WHO report underscores the global health and social impact of alcohol and drug use, advocating for coordinated international actions to reduce substance use and improve treatment accessibility. By prioritising these efforts, governments and partners can work towards mitigating the devastating consequences of substance use disorders and achieving global health goals by 2030.

Source: World Health Organisation

HAVE A NICE DAY Knowing more about 'morality'

DR RUBAUL MURSHED

Since the millennium, global unrest has surged, heightening the risk of social upheaval. Today, corruption remains a critical issue. While good governance and well-functioning institutions are vital in combating corruption, they are insufficient without a moral upliftment among the populace. Achieving a sustainable, corruption-free society hinges on fostering moral values. Moreover, as scholars delve into measuring happiness, they find that kindness—a key pillar of morality—significantly impacts not only individual happiness but also broader societal well-being.

Mental health promotion and wellness activities are gaining traction today, influenced by science and culture, which shape our "social ethos," including morality and lifestyle. Sadly, our education system often neglects moral education, leaving us uninformed about the importance of aiding the hugely impoverished community.

Studies show that unethical behaviour diminishes happiness, highlighting that moral education and health are essential social assets. Schools play a crucial role in nurturing young minds and enhancing their mental well-being. Introducing a science-based approach to morality could significantly boost our internal health and help us live in harmony with nature.

Japan's emphasis on moral education has gained recognition, particularly through the concept of "morality," developed by Japanese philosopher Dr Hiroike Chikuro. Founder of Reitaku University and the Morality Institute. He aimed to create a method for perfecting individual character by studying and practicing both traditional and contemporary moral values. His work underscores the impact of moral culture on mental health, especially among youth. Kindivists are going to honour the 100th anniversary of 'Morality' this year.

By integrating moral values at schools and religious centres, we can transform our society, fostering virtues such as kindness, forgiveness, and generosity.

E-mail: rubaيلمurshed@shomman.org



RETHINKING OBESITY A new approach to diagnosis and treatment

STAR HEALTH DESK

A groundbreaking framework for diagnosing and managing obesity in adults, launched by the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO) and published in Nature Medicine, challenges the traditional reliance on the Body Mass Index (BMI) alone. The framework aims to modernise obesity care by integrating the latest scientific insights, including advancements in medications targeting obesity.

Obesity is widely recognised as a complex, chronic condition characterised by abnormal or excessive accumulation of body fat, linked to various health risks. Despite this understanding, many current diagnostic practices primarily use BMI cut-off values, which may overlook individuals who would benefit from treatment due to factors like adipose tissue distribution and function.

The EASO Steering Group, composed of leading experts in the field, emphasises the need for a more nuanced approach. They highlight that BMI alone is inadequate as a diagnostic tool, advocating instead for considering body fat distribution, particularly abdominal fat, which significantly impacts health outcomes. Even individuals with a BMI below the conventional obesity threshold (BMI of 30) may experience health complications due to abdominal fat accumulation.

The new framework broadens the definition of obesity to include individuals with lower BMIs (>25-30 kg/m²) but elevated abdominal fat and associated medical, functional, or psychological impairments. This shift aims to prevent undertreatment of individuals who may not meet traditional BMI criteria but still face significant health risks.

Treatment recommendations outlined in the framework align with current guidelines, focusing on behavioural modifications such as nutrition therapy, physical activity, stress management, and improved sleep patterns as foundational strategies. Additionally, psychological therapy, obesity medications, and metabolic or bariatric procedures are recommended options, tailored to individual needs and preferences.

However, the committee notes a gap in current clinical guidelines, which often exclude individuals with lower BMIs from accessing medications or procedures



intended for obesity management. They propose revising inclusion criteria for clinical trials to better reflect the diverse clinical presentations of obesity, advocating for the consideration of waist-to-height ratio and the presence of associated health complications, regardless of BMI.

In particular, the framework suggests that obesity medications should be considered for individuals with a BMI of 25 kg/m² or higher, coupled with an elevated waist-to-height ratio and associated impairments. This recommendation serves as a call to pharmaceutical companies and regulatory bodies to adopt more inclusive criteria in future research on obesity medications.

Ultimately, the goal of this new approach is to align obesity management with practices for other chronic diseases, focusing on long-term health outcomes rather than short-term weight reduction. It underscores the importance of personalised treatment plans that consider disease severity, therapeutic options, potential risks, patient preferences, and barriers to treatment.

In conclusion, the framework represents a significant step towards a comprehensive, lifelong approach to managing obesity, aiming to improve overall health and quality of life for individuals affected by this complex condition.

Does coffee affect blood pressure?

Caffeine can temporarily raise blood pressure (BP), but the long-term effects of regular coffee drinking are less clear. In a study from Italy, published in the Journal of Hypertension, researchers looked at BP in 1,400 participants based on their daily coffee consumption: none, moderate (1-2 cups), or heavy (3 or more cups). They measured BP in the office, at home, and with a 24-hour monitor at the start of the study and after 10 years. Most participants kept the same coffee habits throughout the study.

The three groups had some differences at the beginning: heavy coffee drinkers were generally younger, more likely to smoke, and less likely to be on blood pressure medications. After adjusting for these differences, the only notable finding was



that heavy coffee drinkers had a slightly lower average office systolic BP compared to moderate and non-drinkers, both at the beginning and after 10 years. At either time point, there were no differences in BP readings taken at home or with the 24-hour monitor between the groups. Additionally, there were no differences in BP variability over 24 hours or in the development of new hypertension among the groups.

These results suggest that regular coffee consumption does not lead to clinically meaningful differences in BP or the incidence of hypertension. Patients can be reassured that a daily coffee habit is not likely to affect their BP.



The impact of heatwaves on children

RABEYA FERDOUS

A heatwave is an extended period of hot weather relative to the expected conditions of the area at that time of year, which may be accompanied by high humidity. Children face more vulnerable situations at this time. A few days ago we faced a heatwave. The Bangladesh government took different steps to overcome this situation. That time, the government closed the school and created different types of awareness among people.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said about 460 million children are exposed to extreme heat in South Asia, or 76 percent of children, compared to a third of children globally. The UN warns children in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, and Pakistan are at "extremely high risk" of the impacts of climate change, defining extreme high temperatures as 83 or more days in a year over 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit). Children cannot adapt as quickly to temperature changes and are not able to remove excess heat from their bodies.

According to UNICEF, 1 in 3 children in Bangladesh, or about 20 million children, are affected by climate change every day. Children are also exposed to adverse weather conditions such as heat waves, floods, river erosion, sea level rise, and other environmental shocks caused by climate change.

Heat waves have a bad impact on anyone's health, especially newborns, infants, young children, and adult children's health. Children cannot share their feelings with others like adults, and that's why they feel irritated over time.

A heat wave is simply a period of unusually hot weather that typically lasts two or more days. The temperatures have to be outside the historical averages for a given area.

According to UNICEF's 2021 Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI), children in Bangladesh are at extremely high risk of the

impact of climate change.

Symptoms of a heatwave include:

- Heavy sweating
- Weakness
- Increased thirst
- Dizziness or fainting
- Muscle cramps
- Nausea or vomiting
- Irritability
- Headache

What steps should be taken?

- When a child faces heatstroke, you need to take the child to a cool place, give fluid with salt, and take out heavy clothing. Prevention is most necessary to avoid this situation.

- **Stay hydrated:** Give the child plenty of water, juice, or fruits.

- **Block direct sunlight:** Use curtains to reduce direct sunlight in your home.

- **Stay covered:** When children go outside, put on a light-colored dress; use sunglasses, a cap, a fan and an umbrella. breastfeeding babies more. Lactating mothers should drink plenty of water.

- **Remain indoors:** During 12:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m., stay inside the home.

- Indoor games like carrom and ludo are more suitable than outdoor games like football or cricket.

What steps should not be taken?

- Avoid vigorous activities in the sun.
- Avoid a journey in a local, crowded vehicle.
- Avoid tea, coffee, high-sugar drinks, and fizzy drinks.

- Avoid cooking between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. It may increase the temperature at home. Don't walk barefoot.

- Avoid excessive energy loss.
- Avoid long-distance travel with the child.

The writer is an occupational therapist at the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the National Institute of Neurosciences and Hospitals (NINS & H). Email: rabeya1988@gmail.com

Teary-eyed Nagelsmann lauds returned belief

AFP, Herzogenaurach

An emotional Germany manager Julian Nagelsmann said Saturday the team's "belief in ourselves has returned" despite a 2-1 extra-time elimination by Spain in the Euro 2024 quarter-finals.

Germany pushed Spain all the way in Stuttgart on Friday, coming from a goal down to send the game into extra time when Florian Wirtz scored an 89th minute equaliser.

The host nation had a penalty claim denied late before conceding a Mikel Merino goal in the 119th minute.

The tearful coach praised the team after almost a decade of failures at major tournaments and said the performances, built on passionate home support, had bridged gaps between fans and the national team.

"The faith has grown, (the fans) believe in us again," Nagelsmann told reporters at Germany's base camp in the Bavarian village of Herzogenaurach.

"A few months ago it would have been unthinkable for us to come back from a goal down.



"You can tell I'm fighting back tears because it was very emotional. I've always said we need the fans behind us across the country.

"From March onwards, it was clear that the fans felt something. When we see the videos of fans, it's emotional. We would have liked to have given the supporters even more."

Nagelsmann took over in September after Hansi Flick became the first coach in Germany history to be sacked.

After two successive World Cup group stage eliminations and a last 16 loss to England at the Euros in 2021, Germany won just three of 11 games in 2023, giving rise to fears of a disastrous showing on home soil.

The 36-year-old coach however steadied the ship, bringing in a host of new players and dropping several big names from the squad.

Friday's loss was Germany's first defeat in 2024 after an eight-game run which included wins over France, the Netherlands and Denmark.

Asked if he had successfully reset the nation's hopes, Nagelsmann said: "I think we all saw that the hard drive has been cleaned.

"I don't know if it has definitely been completely erased, but it definitely has been cleaned.

"We are much more solid and our belief in ourselves has grown."



PHOTO: AFP

A tournament too far for Ronaldo!

NABID YEASIN

Portugal will remember the Euro 2024 as another golden opportunity squandered to get silverware with arguably one of the most talented bunch of footballers, but for their captain, Cristiano Ronaldo, the tournament will remain as a case of whether the 39-year-old forward has stretched his international career one tournament too long.

Portugal -- boasting an enviable midfield of Bruno Fernandes, Bernardo Silva, Vitorinha, and Joao Palhinha -- exited Euro 2024 in a lacklustre way, playing out a largely dull 120 minutes in the quarterfinal in Hamburg on Friday night against France, only to lose 5-3 on penalties.

Ronaldo did step up and convert the first spot-kick during the shootout, but the five-time Ballon d'Or winner was largely amiss throughout the game -- like he had been the entire tournament.

Ronaldo skying a Francisco Conceicao cut-back from close range in extra-time -- Portugal's best chance from open play on the night -- or his failure in sprinting past France's William Saliba in the right flank showed that he is neither a threatening presence inside the box nor is he the one to pose threats with his blistering pace like he once used to.

In fact, if anything, Ronaldo looked like he was the one holding a talented Portugal side back -- hogging the free-kicks despite his abysmal record of converting only once from 61 free-kicks in major tournaments -- and shunting

the likes of far more pacy Diogo Jota and Goncalo Ramos in the sidelines.

Did Ronaldo push it one tournament too far this time? If this question was a point to ponder at the beginning of the tournament for which Portugal qualified as the only unbeaten side with Ronaldo top-scoring for his side with 10 in the qualifiers, the Al-Nassr forward has only validated those doubts with his underwhelming performances in Germany.

The former Real Madrid forward is still the record goalscorer in Euros, with 14 goals in 30 matches, but he failed to become the oldest player to score in the tournament. Apart from scoring in shootouts, he has failed to net a single goal in five matches.

It seemed like Ronaldo was about to pip his former Real Madrid teammate Luka Modric, whose goal against Italy in the group stage this tournament saw him become the oldest goalscorer in the history of the Euros at 38 years and 294 days, to the milestone when he stepped up to take a penalty in extra time in their Round of 16 game against Slovenia.

However, Jan Oblak denied Ronaldo with a brilliant save, reducing the mighty footballing figure into tears -- a sight for which the legions of fans of the ever-so-proud Ronaldo and even the entire world were not ready.

While Ronaldo somewhat redeemed himself when he converted the first penalty from shootout in the Slovenia game before Diogo Costa heroics -- the

Portuguese goalkeeper thwarted three successive penalties -- propelled Portugal to the quarters, that moment of weakness might just have shown that even Ronaldo started doubting himself.

If Ronaldo had made himself known for anything in his illustrious career spanning over two decades is that he always backs himself to get back up and shut the critics with goals and more. But that moment of him breaking down in tears and later apologising to fans for his mistake showed the world a different Ronaldo, who perhaps knows that age has eventually caught up to him but is yet not fully ready to accept the fact.

Ronaldo mentioned that this was his last dance in the Euros, but has not said anything about drawing curtains on his international career yet. "It's too soon and raw after the match to talk about that and there have been no individual decisions made," Portugal coach Roberto Martinez, who has been his biggest supporter in this tumultuous time, said when asked if it was Ronaldo's last game in a Portugal jersey.

Ronaldo's dedication and fitness will most likely allow him to go on for at least a few more years outside of Europe, a route that he had already chosen as he now plies his trade for Saudi Pro League team Al-Nassr. But maybe the time has come for the all-time top international goalscorer to realise that he is only tarnishing the grand reputation that holds him alongside the best footballers in history by overstaying his welcome at the international level.

Raducanu rediscovers Wimbledon 'fun' factor

AFP, London

Emma Raducanu is finally all smiles again at Wimbledon after the former US Open champion rediscovers the fun factor that made her the golden girl of British tennis before a stunning fall from grace.

Raducanu routed ninth seed Maria Sakkari 6-2, 6-3 in the Wimbledon third round on Friday to reach the last 16 at a Grand slam for the first time in three years.

The 21-year-old admitted she is in love with tennis again after struggling to deal with the aftermath of her incredible rise to fame.

She went from an unknown schoolgirl to the talk of tennis in two transformative weeks in New York in 2021.

Aged just 18 at the time, Raducanu's fairytale US Open triumph made her the first British woman to lift a Grand Slam singles trophy since Virginia Wade at Wimbledon in 1977.

She was also the first qualifier in the Open Era to win a major singles title.

She left Manhattan with the world at her feet, but the problems that have dogged her since provide a cautionary tale about the pitfalls of sudden celebrity.

She has matched her best run at Wimbledon from three years ago and tellingly described the victory against Sakkari as "up there with the most fun I've had on a tennis court"

"Winning that match, it's a beautiful feeling and one that I really want to savour."



Djokovic eyes sweet 16

AFP, London

Novak Djokovic will target the Wimbledon fourth round for the 16th time on Saturday as old rival Andy Murray's All England Club career ended on a low note when Emma Raducanu pulled the plug on their mixed doubles plans.

Djokovic is looking to equal Roger Federer's record of eight Wimbledon triumphs and claim a 25th Grand Slam title in total.

He barely broke sweat in his opening match but was pushed to four sets in his second encounter by British rookie Jacob Fearnley, who was still playing college tennis in the United States last month.

Just weeks after a right knee operation, Djokovic feels he is not yet fully up to speed.

"It's not where I want it to be," he said. "The longer I stay in the tournament, I think the better the chances that my movement will improve."

On Saturday, he tackles Alexei Popyrin, whom he beat in four sets at the Australian Open earlier this year.

With defending champion Carlos Alcaraz and top-ranked Jannik Sinner on the other side of the draw, and safely into the fourth round, Djokovic can see a clear path to a sixth straight final at the All England Club.

Popyrin, the world number 47, has never made the second week of a Slam.

Jessy's moment to shine

SPORTS REPORTER

It's a dream come true moment for Bangladesh's Shathira Jakir Jessy as she is all set to officiate in the upcoming ICC Women's T20 Asia Cup, scheduled to be held in Sri Lanka from July 18-28.

Jessy had previously officiated matches in the ACC Women's Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Hong Kong last year.

Apart from conducting regular domestic and international matches, Jessy also conducted a high-stake match between Mohammedan SC and Prime Bank during the Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League (DPL) 2023-24.

However, the upcoming Women's Asia Cup will be the biggest international break for the former national cricketer as she will be the first Bangladeshi women's umpire to officiate at any senior level of a regional or global tournament.

"It's obviously a great feeling," Shathira told The Daily Star yesterday.

"After conducting matches during the last Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Hong Kong, I set myself a target to officiate in the Asia Cup. In between, I also officiated matches during the Premier Cup in Malaysia this year along with other international matches and DPL. But the Asia Cup will be the biggest tournament

so far in my career.

"Actually, this is the biggest tournament after the World Cup. I have really worked hard in the last two years for this and finally, my target has been fulfilled," she added.

Shathira feels that the door of opportunities has been opened in this women's umpiring profession after she got exposure, both at the domestic and international level, on a regular basis. Jessy has already conducted 13 WT20Is -- 10 as on-field umpire and three as TV umpire -- and the 33-year-old former cricketer targets to officiate matches in tournaments like the World Cup.

"People all over the world now know about Bangladesh's women's umpiring. I think the acceptance level has increased globally.

"As a women's cricketer, I couldn't go to such a level but after starting umpiring, I think I have achieved something in this profession.

"Now many girls have started taking this profession seriously. The World Cup is knocking at the door and I really hope to officiate matches in that tournament as well," said Jessy, adding that umpires from Bangladesh have the calibre to be among the world's best in the coming days.



'These Canadians' set for rematch with Messi & Co

AGENCIES

Canada reached the semifinals of the Copa America after beating Venezuela 4-3 on penalties after the 90-minute game finished 1-1 yesterday.

Canada will face defending champions Argentina in the semifinal in New Jersey on Wednesday at 6am, Bangladesh Time.

Jacob Shaffelburg fired Canada into the lead in the 13th minute but Salomon Rondon equalised in the 64th, before Canada triumphed in the shoot-out to set up a last-four meeting with world champions Argentina.

The Canadians, under American coach Jesse Marsch, who only took over the team in mid-May, are playing in the Copa America for the first time and produced a relentless display of pressing in what was a frantic game.

Both teams failed to score from the spot twice in the shoot-out, leaving it at 3-3 after five penalties each and sending the contest into sudden death.

Canada keeper Max Crepeau,



Canada captain Alphonso Davies banished memories of his penalty miss at the 2022 World Cup by confidently converting a spot-kick in a shootout victory over Venezuela. In Canada's 1-0 group stage defeat to Belgium at the World Cup in Qatar, Davies had a tame penalty saved by goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, and the North American side eventually exited the tournament with three losses.

who made a major error for Venezuela's equaliser, made amends as he saved Wilker Mangel's kick.

"Everybody needs to realize the respect this country deserves and these footballers deserve," Crepeau told Fox Sports.

"Everybody says 'these Canadians', well these Canadians are in the semi-finals of Copa America".


Canada face a stern test in the semifinals, coming up against World Champions Argentina side.

But after a performance of remarkable energy and determination against a Venezuela team that won all three of their group stage games, Marsch will believe his team could pull off another upset and reach the final in Miami on July 14.


Canada played Argentina in the opening game of the group stage, losing 2-0 to the defending champions and will start as huge underdogs again in the semi-final.

"It's going to take everything. We played them in the group stage, we played well but didn't get the win we wanted," Canada captain Alphonso Davies said.

"Going into this game, we know what's on the line. We win and go forward, we lose and go home. They're going to come out with everything. We're hungrier than ever, we expect a battle as they should."



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A TRIBUTE TO GRANDMASTER Zia was devoted to chess till his last day



NAZ MURSHED

Ziaur Rahman was my first real competitor in chess in Bangladesh. From 1979 to 1996, I was at the top. In 1996, Zia overtook me in the ratings and became the country's best chess player, a position he held longer than anyone else.

Personally, I used to struggle a lot whenever I played against him, he was excellent. I took a sabbatical from the game in 1996 and after my return, he always gave me a really tough time and I admired him for it.

His dedication towards the game was unparalleled in Bangladesh. No one has played in more chess World Cups than him or won more national championships. He also represented Bangladesh in 17 Chess Olympiads, more than anyone else. His devotion towards chess was

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



Seasonal fruits, mostly mangoes, grown on the hills are being sold on boats in Banarupa area of Rangamati. In several districts in the region, there is a niche market for fruits and vegetables that indigenous communities of the hills grow. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

UP chairman shot dead in Dumuria

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Khulna

Armed criminals shot and killed the chairman of Shorapur union parishad in Khulna's Dumuria upazila last night.

Sheikh Rabiul Islam Rabi, 45, the union's three-time chairman, was also a member of the Khulna district unit Awami League.

This incident took place in the Gutudia area of the upazila around 10:00pm, said his brother-in-law Badruzzaman Bablu.

Armed criminals shot Rabiul from the back near the Brac Hatchery in Gutudia as he was returning to his Khulna residence on a motorcycle after attending a meeting at Zobaid Ali Auditorium.

He was declared dead after being taken to Khulna Medical College Hospital.

Dumuria police OC Sukant Kumar, said, "I've heard about the incident. But, I don't know the details."



Starmer 'restless for change' after win

AFP, London

Newly elected UK prime minister Keir Starmer yesterday began his first full day in charge declaring himself "restless for change" and pledging that growth would be his Labour government's "number one mission".

Starmer also confirmed his previously declared intention to end the outgoing Conservative government's flagship scheme to deport migrants to Rwanda.

"The Rwanda scheme was dead and buried before it started... I'm not prepared to continue with gimmicks that don't act as a deterrent," he told reporters following his first cabinet meeting.

The party on Friday won a landslide election victory, bringing to a close 14 years of Conservative rule.

The Labour leader told his top team, including Britain's first woman finance minister Rachel Reeves and new foreign minister David Lammy, it had been "the honour and the privilege of my life" to be invited by King Charles III to form the government.

"We have a huge amount of work to do, so now we get on with our work," he said to applause and smiles around the cabinet table.

Starmer spent his first hours in Downing Street on Friday appointing his ministerial team, hours after securing his centre-left party's return to power with a whopping 174-seat majority in the UK parliament.

Notable lower-ranking appointments included Patrick Vallance, chief scientific government adviser during the Covid-19 pandemic, who has been made a science minister.

James Timpson, whose shoe repair company employs ex-offenders, was also made a prisons minister.



"We have a huge amount of work to do, so now we get on with our work."

KEIR STARMER
UK prime minister

PROMISED CHINESE LOANS Transport sector projects fare poorly

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

China promised to provide loans for eight transport sector projects eight years ago, but only one of those has been completed so far.

Two other projects are currently underway, but those are running behind schedule, documents show.

Two more projects have been taken off the list while the implementation of the three others has not started due to multiple reasons.

The delay in implementation means Bangladesh will struggle to enhance the capacity of its rail lines, highways and sea ports with a view to serve the steadily growing economy, officials said.

Amid such a situation, Bangladesh is expected to seek more Chinese loans for several transport projects during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's China visit from July 8 to 10. The projects may include construction of Bhanga-Payra rail line and Mass Rapid Transit Line 2.

During his visit to Bangladesh in October 2016, Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged to provide about \$20 billion loan — the largest amount committed by a bilateral partner of Bangladesh — over the following four years to implement 27 projects.

But as of January this year, the two sides managed to sign agreements on only nine projects involving \$8.08 billion, figures from the Economic Relations Division (ERD) show.

Of the \$8.08 billion, Bangladesh could utilise only \$4.91 billion, less than a quarter of

the amount promised by China. Red tapism on both sides is largely to blame for the slow disbursement of loans, said officials.

Of the 27 projects, eight were for the transport sector, including four under the railways ministry, three under the road transport and bridges ministry, and one under the shipping ministry.

The delay in implementation of projects means Bangladesh will struggle to enhance the capacity of its rail lines, highways and sea ports.

RAIL PROJECTS

Four railway projects were supposed to be implemented with the Chinese loans to build new a rail line and expand three existing ones.

The Padma Bridge Rail Link Project is the only railway project being implemented now with the Chinese loan.

The Ecneec in May 2016 approved the project to connect the capital with Jashore with a 169km line via the Padma Bridge at a cost of

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

France kicks off 2nd round of polls

AFP, Paris

France yesterday prepared for its most consequential legislative election of recent times, with residents of overseas territories opening voting for a poll expected to give the far right its biggest ever presence in parliament.

A traditional final day pause was observed yesterday ahead of today's second round runoff after a frenetic campaign that saw tensions rise across the country and dozens of attacks on candidates.

Underlining France's global footprint that spans the oceans of the world, the first French region to vote was Saint Pierre and Miquelon, a small French archipelago off the coast of Canada where citizens began voting from 1000 GMT.

They were to be followed yesterday by residents of French Caribbean territories including Martinique and Guadeloupe as well as Guiana in South America.

French Pacific territories come next before people in mainland France cast their ballots from 0600 GMT today.

Polls will close by 1800 GMT today when projections of seat numbers, regarded in France as a firm indicator of the final outcome, are published.

Final opinion polls on Friday suggested that far-right leader Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) would fall short of winning an outright 289 seat majority in the 577-member National Assembly while being the largest party ahead of the New Popular Front (NFP) left-wing coalition.



England into Euro semis after shootout win over Switzerland

AFP, Duesseldorf

England's quest for a first major tournament win in 58 years remained alive after another late fightback before beating Switzerland 5-3 on penalties to book their place in the Euro 2024 semi-finals.

After the 120 minutes finished level at 1-1, goalkeeper Jordan Pickford was the 'Three Lions' hero in the shootout as he saved Switzerland's first spot-kick from Manuel Akanji.

Cole Palmer, Jude Bellingham, Bukayo Saka, Ivan Toney and Trent Alexander-Arnold converted their penalties to send England into a semi-final meeting with Turkey or the Netherlands in Dortmund on Wednesday.

After needing Bellingham's 95th-minute equaliser before going on to beat Slovakia in extra time in the last 16, England were again staring at defeat with 10 minutes to go.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3



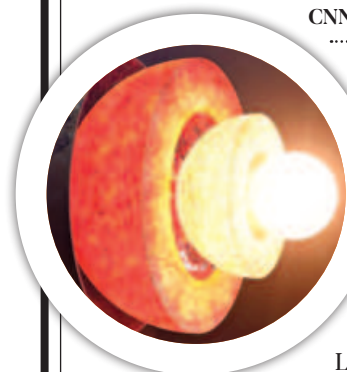
England players celebrate after beating Switzerland 5-3 on penalties to book their place in the semifinals of the Euro 2024 at the Duesseldorf Arena yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Earth's core so slow, it is now backwards!

Scientists confirm

CNN ONLINE



Deep inside Earth is a solid metal ball that rotates independently of our spinning planet, like a top whirling around inside a bigger top, shrouded in mystery.

This inner core has intrigued researchers since its discovery by Danish seismologist Inge Lehmann in 1936, and how it moves — its rotation speed and

direction — has been at the center of a decades-long debate. A growing body of evidence suggests the core's spin has changed dramatically in recent years, but scientists have remained divided over what exactly is happening — and what it means.

Part of the trouble is that Earth's deep interior is impossible to observe or sample directly. Seismologists have gleaned information about the inner core's motion by examining how waves from large earthquakes that ping this area behave. Variations between waves of similar strengths that passed through the core at different times enabled scientists to measure changes in the inner core's position and calculate its spin.