



Bangla Blockade: Sufferings all around

P3



Rain increases flood woes in the north

P5



Ready to help restore peace in Ukraine: Modi

P7



'Spirit of sacrifice' and 'genius' Yamal pave way for Spain

P11

Hasina, Xi pledge to boost strategic ties

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

China has promised to provide economic support to Bangladesh in the form of grants and three types of loans including interest-free ones.

The pledge came yesterday as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina wrapped up her China visit, holding talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

China also offered Bangladesh one billion Yuan (about \$140 million) as economic assistance, Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud said at a press briefing in Beijing prior to Hasina's departure for Dhaka last night.

Beijing said it attaches utmost importance to its relationship with Dhaka and assured Bangladesh of continued support for its journey of development.

At the meeting with Hasina, Xi said China wants to invest more in Bangladesh and work with it on the international stage.

"China and Bangladesh will work together to establish global peace and prosperity," Hasan Mahmud said.

Xi brought up the Rohingya issue, the foreign minister said.

- » Bangladesh, China sign 22 instruments, make 7 announcements
- » China assures of grants, soft loans and commercial loans
- » Relations elevated to "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership"
- » China will provide highest cooperation in solving Rohingya crisis

"I know that you have sheltered millions of Rohingyas who were displaced from Myanmar. This is a burning issue for you. We will do our best to help you resolve it," Hasan Mahmud quoted Xi.

China will play an important role towards solving the Rohingya crisis by holding talks with the Myanmar government, and even with the Arakan army if necessary, he mentioned.

Technical committees from both the countries will sit together to decide how

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina meets Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday, the last day of her tour of China. The two leaders discussed bilateral issues of mutual interest.

PHOTO: PTD

QUOTAS IN GOVT JOBS

Protesters won't back down despite SC status quo

STAR REPORT

Amid the apex court order for a status quo on the issue of quotas in government jobs, students yesterday vowed to continue their protests against the quota system.

Around 12 noon, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court ordered the status quo for four weeks.

This means the recent High Court verdict that reinstated the quota system in government jobs will not be in force for a month, and the 2018 government circular abolishing the quotas will stand for the said period.

The protesting students, however, announced they will press on with their demonstrations until the government forms a commission to reform the quota system and the parliament passes a law to this effect.

Sargis Alam, an organiser of the anti-quota campaign, said, "We'll relent only if we get word from the highest executive position that the quota system will be reformed through a commission.

"We want the parliament to enact a law reforming the quotas," he told protesters at the Shahbagh intersection last evening.

Asif Mahmud, another organiser, announced that today's blockade will begin at 3:30pm.

"Students from universities and colleges across the country will block major intersections in Dhaka along with highways and railways adjacent to their areas."

After a day's break, the protesters yesterday resumed the "Bangla Blockade" around 10:30am, occupying key intersections, major highways and rail lines in Dhaka and other parts of the country.

Road and rail communications were snapped, leaving commuters in utter distress. The traffic in Dhaka stood still for long hours, while around 30 trains from the capital ran behind schedule.

'ENOUGH IS ENOUGH'

A five-member bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan, passed the status quo order following two separate petitions, filed by the government and two Dhaka University students, challenging the HC verdict.

The bench also includes Justice Md Ashfaque Islam, Justice Md Abu Zafar Siddique, Justice Md Shahinur Islam and

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Eight jailed for 7yrs over Ctg girder collapse

All staffers of construction firm; 13 people were killed in the 2012 incident



STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chattogram court yesterday sentenced eight employees of a construction firm to seven years in jail in a case filed over the collapse of Bahaddarhat Flyover girders that killed 13 people and injured 27 others.

The court of Chattogram Fourth Metropolitan Additional Sessions Judge, Shariful Alam Bhuiyan, delivered the verdict of the case lodged with Chandgaon Police Station in 2012.

The court in its observation said the horrible incident took place due to negligence of the construction company and its staffers.

The convicts are construction firm Mir Akhtar-

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

QUESTION LEAK AT PSC

The malady runs deeper than feared

Names of some mid-rank officials come up in probe

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MUNTAKIM SAAD

Some more current and former officials of the Public Service Commission are involved in leaking questions for government recruitment tests, police and intelligence officials said.

The Daily Star has details about the involvement of a top PSC official and a mid-ranking official in leaking questions, but it is withholding their names as it could not independently verify the information.

Sources said that the top official was served with a show cause notice at a government office over a corruption allegation. He was later transferred to the PSC.

At least two officials secured Bangladesh Civil Service jobs in collusion with the mid-ranking PSC official. One of them is the son-in-law of the mid-ranking PSC official. He had served as a sub-inspector of police before joining



the force as a BCS cadre, sources said.

"It's not possible for one or two people to leak exam questions. A group of people worked like a syndicate. We are hopeful of getting the details during the investigation," a top PSC official told The Daily Star requesting anonymity.

The group, involving PSC officials and employees, leaked at least 30 question papers of government recruitment tests, including BCS exams, over the last 12 years. This came to light after the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police picked up 17 people, including five PSC officials and employees, from the capital on Sunday and Monday.

The arrests were made after CID got information that the questions for a railway recruitment exam held on July 5 were leaked. A case was filed with Paltan Police Station on Monday night accusing

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

BUSINESS

Actual export, NPL data to be available now: BB governor

The actual data on exports and non-performing loans (NPLs) would be available from now onwards as the central bank emphasises releasing of actual figures, Bangladesh Bank governor said yesterday.

"The export data has been corrected. Now the release of accurate export figures will continue," Abdur Rouf Talukder said.

About NPLs, he said there was window dressing on the part of banks, which made attempts to hide the actual bad loans.

STORY ON B1



Students block the capital's Shahbagh intersection yesterday during a demonstration as part of their "Bangla Blockade" demanding reform of the quota system in government jobs. Students from different public universities and colleges have been staging protests across the country for the last 10 days to press home their demand.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Israeli strikes hit UN agency building in Gaza

29 killed at camp for displaced Palestinians in Khan Yunis

AGENCIES

Israeli forces launched more deadly strikes across Gaza yesterday, according to medical sources and the military, which said it targeted Hamas members operating from inside a UN agency building.

The Israeli army also said it was reviewing an attack on Tuesday night in which hospital sources said at least 29 people were killed in a nearby school in the southern Khan Yunis area – the fourth attack on a school building in four days.

Early yesterday, four people were killed and one critically wounded in the bombing of a house in the central town of Nuseirat, a hospital source said.

And two people were killed and six injured in another strike on a home in Bani Suhaila, near Khan Yunis, according to another hospital source.

Israel has stepped up air and ground attacks in Gaza City and southern Gaza since issuing evacuation orders for tens of thousands of people in the Palestinian territory.

The army yesterday dropped leaflets on Gaza City urging all residents to leave for safe zones.

The thousands of leaflets, addressed to "everyone in Gaza City", set out routes out of the city to the south and

SEE PAGE 6 COL 2

Russia outlaws The Moscow Times news outlet

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday named The Moscow Times news outlet an “undesirable organisation”, outlawing its activities inside Russia and leaving anybody who cooperates with them open to criminal prosecution.

Moscow has escalated a campaign against independent media and reporting since it launched its full-scale military offensive on Ukraine in February 2022.

Correction

In our story headlined “Chinese firms to invest in textile, fintech and EVs” on the front page of yesterday’s issue, the word “Chinese” was printed as “Chinse”. We regret the inadvertent typo.



Palestinians mourn over the body of a child following Israeli bombardment in Deir el-Balah in the central Gaza Strip yesterday.

Militant leader who fled N’ganj raid arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti Terrorism Unit (ATU) of police has arrested a leader of banned militant outfit Ansar al Islam who fled before the officials carried out a raid at a militant hideout in Narayanganj’s Rugganj upazila on July 2.

A team of ATU arrested Javed alias Abir alias Enamul from Tongi area around 10:30pm on Tuesday, Mahfuzul Alam Rasel, superintendent (media) of ATU, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He fled from the Narayanganj den just before ATU officials carried out the drive, he said.

Parts of South Sudan ‘on brink of famine’: charity

AFP, Nairobi

Parts of South Sudan are on the “brink of famine” as the nation braces for a “horror scenario” ahead of the worst floods in decades, a British charity warned yesterday. Since it gained independence in 2011, the world’s newest nation has remained plagued by instability and violence, despite rich oil reserves.

South Sudan is expected to “suffer its worst floods in 60 years that will drive parts of the country to the brink of famine,” Save the Children said.

Hasina, Xi pledge to boost strategic ties

FROM PAGE 1

the four types of financial assistance will be given to Bangladesh. A technical committee from China will soon visit Bangladesh, BSS quoted Hasan Mahmud as saying.

Hasina left for China on July 8 following a state visit to India just two weeks before. She returned home from Beijing early today.

Experts say the back-to-back visits are a way of balancing the relationship with the Asian powers that are vying for influence in the Indian Ocean region.

Hasina last visited China in 2019. Back in 2016, Xi visited Dhaka when Bangladesh joined the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and elevated the relationship to “strategic partnership of cooperation”.

Yesterday, the two leaders elevated the relationship to “comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership”.

Xi said, “We, the two countries, are going to celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations next year. Marking the celebration, we want to take the existing strategic relations to the second step.”

Hasina invited the Chinese president, the prime minister and others to visit Bangladesh next year to celebrate the 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

“You stood firm against foreign interference. This not only demonstrates your conviction to stand upright against the pressure, but also the courage of the Bangladeshi people as an independent people,” Xi told Hasina according to a pool report made available to this newspaper.

He said China consistently opposes interference in other countries’ internal affairs under any pretext, and firmly supports Bangladesh in its pursuit for a development path that suits it.

Xi expressed his readiness to work with Hasina to improve bilateral relations based on a strategic and long-term perspectives, deepen political trust, and carry forward the traditional friendship.

He called for joining hands to boost Belt and Road cooperation, collaboration in various fields, and establish the “comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership” between the two countries.

Xi also expressed his desire to contribute to the development of South Asia and the Global South, according to the pool report.

Hasina reassured Xi about Taiwan -- Beijing’s most sensitive issue -- saying “Bangladesh firmly adheres to the one-China principle, supports China’s position on the Taiwan issue, and resolutely opposes external forces interfering in China’s internal affairs”, reported South China Morning Post.

Hasina said she faced many problems in holding elections and that there were some quarters who always try to disrupt the polls.

“...I always enjoy the people’s support and with the people’s support, we won the election. This is my fourth consecutive term. So, I feel that I have big responsibility for my people,” she said thanking Xi for always supporting her.

“And after the elections, your message gives us more enthusiasm,” she said.

Hasina thanked the Chinese president for helping Bangladesh build some iconic structures, including the Padma Bridge and Bangabandhu Tunnel.

Xi assured Bangladesh of providing assistance in the development of its southern part as Hasina sought support towards this end.

She raised the issue of trade imbalance between the two countries and called upon China to mitigate the gap. In 2022-23, the bilateral trade was \$24 billion, but Bangladesh exported to China goods worth less than \$700 million.

In response, Xi said China will import more goods, including mangoes, from Bangladesh.

In response to Hasina’s request for Chinese assistance in developing Bangladesh’s agriculture sector, Xi assured her of providing technical support and necessary training.

Xi stressed the need for more cultural exchanges and people-to-people contact.

Noting the deepening relations between the Awami League and the Chinese Communist Party, he said, “Good governance needs good party.”

Earlier in the day, Hasina had a delegation-level meeting with Chinese Premier Li Qiang.

She requested her Chinese counterpart to import leather products, jute products, pharmaceutical goods, and ceramic products from Bangladesh.

Hasina invited more Chinese investments in 100 special economic zones and Bangabandhu Industrial

Park, mentioning that Bangladesh has allotted one export processing zone for Chinese investors.

She stressed the need for Bangladesh’s inclusion in BRICS in any form. In response, Li Qiang assured her of Chinese support.

Hasina also sought Chinese cooperation so that Bangladesh could enjoy the LDC facilities at least for three more years after it graduates to a middle-income country in 2026. The Chinese prime minister gave a positive response.

Both the leaders put emphasis on celebrating the Golden Jubilee of their diplomatic relationship in a befitting manner.

Bangladesh and China also signed 22 instruments and made seven announcements.

The instruments involve the banking sector, trade and investment, digital economy, infrastructure, disaster management, export of agricultural products from Bangladesh, and people-to-people connectivity.

On Tuesday, Hasina attended a trade and investment summit participated by businesses from both countries.

Bangladeshi and Chinese companies signed 16 MoUs to boost collaboration in textiles, electric vehicles, solar power, financial technology, and other technology.

Four of these MoUs will bring in nearly \$500 million in investments.

Hasina also met Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) President Jin Lique and requested him to cut the interest rates on its loans for Bangladesh and finance infrastructure, river dredging, and climate-resilient houses.

According to former ambassador to China Munshi Faiz Ahmad, elevating the relationship to “comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership” means the two countries will now cooperate in all sectors and further deepen their bilateral relationship.

People often think there are military components when the word “strategic” is used, which is not correct.

Bangladesh was seeking a loan of \$5 billion in Yuan amid foreign currency shortage but the terms and conditions were not agreed upon.

Faiz said China has pledged 1 billion Yuan and more will follow as evident in Xi’s words.

INSTRUMENTS

» MoU on strengthening investment cooperation in digital economy

» Chinese NFRA and Bangladesh Bank signed an MoU on banking, insurance regulation

» An MoU on a protocol for exporting Bangladeshi mangoes to China

» A deal on exchange, cooperation on economic development policy

» An MoU on trade, investment cooperation

» A deal on strengthening cooperation on digital economy

» Signing of minutes on discussions on the feasibility study for China-aid National Emergency Operation Centre in Bangladesh project

» An MoU on strengthening cooperation in medical care, public health

» A deal on bolstering infrastructure cooperation

» An MoU on cooperation on green, low-carbon energy development

» Renewal of a deal on hydrological information of Yaluzangbu/Brahmaputra river

» An MoU between Chinese National Radio and Television Administration and Bangladesh information ministry

» A deal between China Media Group and Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha

» Another MoU between China Media Group and BTV

» A deal between Xinhua News and BSS

» Another MoU between Xinhua and BTV

» Renewal of an MoU between the two education ministries

» An MoU signed for public-private partnership in sustainable infrastructure development

» The two nations exchanged letters on the renovation of sixth Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge

» Another set of letters exchanged for the 9th Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge Project

» Dhaka, Beijing exchanged letters on a feasibility study for building Nateshwar archaeological site park

ANNOUNCEMENTS

» Conclusion of a joint feasibility study on China-Bangladesh free trade agreement

» Beginning of negotiations on optimising China-Bangladesh bilateral investment treaty

» Completion of modernisation of telecommunication network for digital connectivity

» Completion of trial runs of single point mooring with double pipeline project

» Start of the Rajshahi Wasa surface water treatment plant

» Construction of Luban Workshop in Bangladesh

» The signing of an MoU between Shandong Agricultural University and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University

Protesters won’t back down despite SC status quo

FROM PAGE 1

Justice Kashefa Hussain.

The apex court asked the petitioners to file separate leave-to-appeal petitions and fixed August 7 for a hearing on those.

The chief justice asked the agitators to go back to class and focus on studies.

He expressed hope that all vice-chancellors and heads of the educational institutions will take their students back.

“They [protesting students] took to the streets and raised slogans ... What they’ve done can’t be appreciated but I think they’ve done it out of a misunderstanding. They’re our children. On the first day, I said a judgement can’t be made based on slogans,” he said while passing the order.

“Considering what has happened so far, enough is enough. ... We’ll evaluate the High Court judgment properly if it’s placed before us.

“Only the Appellate Division has the right to examine whether the High Court verdict is correct or not. Why isn’t anyone explaining this to the children? University teachers, who are in prominent positions, [you] tell them [the students] – ‘this is not the way, you must go to the court. If you go to court, the court will see to it ... But we can’t do anything until the [HC]

verdict is placed before us.”

He thanked the DU students’ lawyer Shah Monjurul Hoque for moving a petition before the Appellate Division against the HC verdict.

Attorney General AM Amin Uddin, after the order was passed, told reporters that the HC verdict, which declared illegal the cancellation of quotas in first and second-class government jobs, will not remain effective.

Writ petitioners’ lawyer Md Munsurul Hoque Chowdhury told The Daily Star that the government now cannot implement a quota system as per the SC order.

Following a writ petition challenging the legality of quota cancellation, the HC on June 5 declared illegal the 2018 government circular that scrapped the 30 percent quota for the freedom fighters’ children and grandchildren in government jobs.

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader also requested protesters to go back to their respective institutions following the status quo and to not cause public sufferings.

BLOCKADE CONTINUED

Several hundred Dhaka University students and jobseekers blocked the

Shahbagh intersection around 11:50am. They came to the intersection in a procession from in front of the DU central library and barricaded all nearby roads.

Another group of DU students blocked the Chankharpu intersection around the same time.

Around 11:35, several hundred students of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University blocked the Agargaon intersection and were seen taking position near metro rail station there.

All vehicular movement from Farmgate to Mirpur and Agargaon to Mohakhali remained halted for hours.

The capital’s Science Lab area remained blocked for at least seven hours by students of Dhaka College and nearby institutions. They started their march from the college campus and took position at the intersection around 10:30am.

They were seen barring buses, private cars and rickshaws from moving on the road and allowed only ambulances to pass through.

Most of the blockades were lifted around 7:00-7:30pm.

Outside the capital, the Dhaka-Aricha Highway was blocked for nearly six hours

by a group of Jahangirnagar University students, while Comilla University students blocked the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway for four hours in Cumilla’s Kotbari area.

A group of Patuakhali Science and Technology University students blocked the Dhaka-Kuakata Highway at the Payra Bridge point for three hours.

RAIL LINES

Schedules of trains to different destinations from Dhaka were hampered as rail operations remained suspended for five hours due to a blockade at the Karwan Bazar level crossing.

Ferdous Ahmed Biswas, officer-in-charge of Dhaka Railway Police Station, said rail services were snapped after some students blocked the crossing at 12:00pm. They left around 5:05pm.

The line that goes through Karwan Bazar connects Dhaka with the east, west and even southern parts of the country.

In Chattogram, CU students kept the Dhaka-Chattogram rail line in the Dewanhat area blocked from 11:30am, resulting in at least five trains being stuck at different stations for almost eight hours, the Railways Control Office confirmed.

The Parjatak Express and Cox’s Bazar Express, which left for Dhaka from Cox’s Bazar, were stranded at the Sholoshohor Station, while the Shonar Bangla Express, Mohanagar Probhati Express and a container-loaded freight train could not commence their journey from the Chattogram Station. CU’s shuttle train service was also closed.

The blockades were lifted around 7:00pm.

The protesters later blocked a road in the Tigerpass area, the main thoroughfare of the port city, around 1:00pm.

Meanwhile, students of Dhaka University of Engineering and Technology (Duet) staged a sit-in and blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh rail tracks in Gazipur’s Joydebpur.

The protest began in front of the Duet Central Shaheed Minar and later moved to the Joydebpur Junction Railway Station.

PRO QUOTA

Meanwhile, leaders and activists of the Mukti Joddha Sangsad Santan Command staged a brief sit-in around 9:30am in front of the National Museum in the capital’s Shahbagh, demanding the reinstatement of the quota system.

The malady runs

FROM PAGE 1

31 named people, including a former assistant director of PSC, and 50 to 60 others unnamed.

The five arrested officials and employees were suspended by the PSC on Tuesday.

“At least 50 people were involved in the question leak of the recruitment test of the railway. Among them are several current and former PSC officials,” a high official of the CID told The Daily Star yesterday requesting anonymity.

According to investigators, many people have passed PSC exams after having leaked questions, and they are now working as BCS cadre civil servants.

Those who passed the PSC exams after paying for leaked questions are now in fear of actions against them, sources said.

CID officials said the syndicate leaked questions to at least 10 candidates of the 33rd BCS exam and three of them are currently serving in different cadres of the civil service. Besides, the names of several other cadre officials, including those selected in the 28th and 35th BCS exams, came up during the investigation.

Of the 17 arrestees, six made confessional statements before a Dhaka court on Tuesday.

In his statement, PSC dispatch rider Khalilur Rahman said that he leaked questions to 10 candidates of the 33rd BCS examination. Six of them passed the written test, but three could not pass the viva voce exam, said court sources.

Khalilur also said that he used to introduce the jobseekers to a former top PSC official.

If he was given the go-ahead by that official, the final decision regarding how much the jobseeker would have to pay for getting selected for government jobs.

Khalilur also played a role in the recruitments of some assistant upazila education officers and railway employees, said investigators.

During the 33rd BCS exam in 2012, a case was filed against Khalilur with Shahbagh Police Station over question leak. A departmental case was also filed against him.

At that time, the Rab arrested him. He got out on bail. He was also suspended from the job.

In March 2022, the charges brought against him were withdrawn due to lack of evidence. Since then, Khalilur has been working as a dispatch rider of the PSC.

Investigators said Khalilur was able to get involved in leaking questions due to the backing from the PSC top official.

Touhidul Islam, special superintendent of the CID’s cyber investigation and operations, told The Daily Star yesterday, “Legal action will be taken against those found involved in leaking questions.”

Meanwhile, the PSC yesterday wrote to the Anti-Corruption Commission asking it to investigate the five arrested PSC officials and employees in connection with amassing illegal wealth.

The five are deputy directors Abu Zafar and Jahangir Alam, assistant director Alamgir Kabir, dispatch rider Khalilur, and office assistant Sajedul Islam.

The PSC also asked the ACC to inform it about their wealth.

Meanwhile, sacked PSC driver Syed Abed Ali and several other accused told investigators during interrogation that jobseekers were brought to the “reading booth” two nights before the July 5 recruitment test.

The jobseekers were kept in a rented house in Savar and a warehouse in the capital’s Paltan so that they could memorise the answers to the leaked questions.

Abed rented the house for Tk 40,000 a month in Radio Colony of Savar. He took the leaked questions and answers from Sajedul.

Around 50 jobseekers memorised the answers in the house. Abed took Tk 7 to 8 lakh from each of them, said CID sources.

Before another recruitment test held several months ago, Abed rented another house in the capital’s Mirpur and took 44 jobseekers there. The syndicate collected Tk 4 lakh from each of the candidates.

According to investigation sources, Sajedul in his confessional statement before a court said that he got the question papers for the railway recruitment test from a chest of a PSC member. He said he sold the question paper to Abed and Khalilur for Tk 75 lakh.

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SUFFERINGS ALL AROUND

People, especially patients and the elderly, bear the brunt of nationwide blockades

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The ongoing student protest against the quota system in government jobs caused severe disruptions in Dhaka and other parts of the country, leaving people in severe misery.

Students have taken to the streets in at least eight districts, blocking roads and train routes.

DHAKA

With public transport at a standstill in many areas in the capital, people resorted to walking long distances. Commuters and office-goers faced challenges at key intersections, as buses could not ply through them.

Key intersections, such as Gulistan, Shahbagh, Banglamotor, Karwan Bazar, Farmgate, Science Lab, Agargaon, and Mohakhali, were blocked, which particularly affected the elderly and patients.

Jahanara Begum, who had just received treatment at a government hospital in Tejgaon, was returning with her mother when they got stuck at the Karwan Bazar rail gate area and had to walk to the intersection.

Nusrat Jahan, stuck at Panthapath intersection, said, "I had urgent work. But the jam has extended to Dhanmondi. People are suffering a lot. I've been sitting on the road since 11:00am, and it's now 2:00pm."

Bus driver Salam Hossain said he got stuck around 11:30am at Farmgate. "All the passengers got off. There's no way to turn the bus around. My day's earnings are lost."

At Kalshi intersection in Mirpur, Soniya Akhter waited over an hour for a bus but couldn't find any public transport. "Even when a bus came after a long time, there were so many passengers that I couldn't get on. I don't know how I'll get to the office," she added.

Nusrat Jahan, stuck at Panthapath intersection, said, "I had urgent work. But the jam has extended to Dhanmondi. People are suffering a lot. I've been sitting on the road since 11:00am, and it's now 2:00pm."

Students of Dhaka College blocked the Science Lab intersection, affecting patients and people on their way to various hospitals at Green Road and Dhanmondi.

Mehedi Hasan was caught in the blockade while taking his mother to Labaid Hospital in Dhanmondi from Old Dhaka. "I was taking my mother to the hospital for her chemotherapy," Mehedi told The Daily Star.

"No one let us through, even though I showed the students the medical papers," he said, adding, "I don't have any problem with the students' protest. However,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN, ANISUR RAHMAN, PALASH KHAN

People, especially patients and the elderly, suffered immensely as students continued their nationwide "Bangla Blockade" yesterday, protesting quota system in government jobs. Since morning, they blocked major intersections, highways and expressways in the capital, forcing many to walk to their destinations. Protesters also blocked rail lines, mounting sufferings for many who had to wait hours for trains.



Govt taking country towards destruction

Says Fakhrul

UNB, Dhaka



BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday alleged that the government is "taking the country to destruction with its misrule".

Speaking at a milad mahfil at the Maulana Bhasani Auditorium in the capital, he called upon the country's people to unite and intensify the anti-

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Don't change CHT regulations

Speakers tell human chain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Students from the country's indigenous communities and civil society members yesterday formed a human chain demanding an end to conspiracy against the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulations, 1900, also known as CHT manual.

The regulation ensures traditional indigenous

institutions and upholds customary laws, conventions and practices relating to lands, territories, resources and the family laws of the indigenous communities.

The programme was held at Raju Memorial sculpture on the Dhaka University campus in the capital.

There are separate systems and development arrangements

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

HC starts hearing on Yunus' petition

Cases may represent misuse of labour laws, says US

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday started hearing on a petition filed by Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus and six others of Grameen Telecom, challenging a Dhaka court's order that framed charges against them.

After concluding yesterday's hearing, the bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Kazi Ebadoth Hossain also fixed today for resuming the hearing.

During the hearing, petitioners' lawyer Abdul Haq Al-Mamun told the court that there was no question of embezzlement in running Grameen Telecom, which has been established as a non-profitable and charitable organisation under Section 28 of the Companies Act, 1994.

All the transactions of the organisation have been done properly under the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

**PRAYER
TIMING**

JULY 11

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

EVICION IN DSCC

16 hurt as councillor's men, harijans clash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 16 people were injured as supporters of the local ward councillor clashed with harijans in Dhaka's Bangshal area yesterday afternoon.

The people of Miranzilla Harijan Colony alleged that Md Awal Hossain, councillor of Dhaka South City Corporation's ward-33, and his supporters went there to evict them violating a court order.

As they were prevented from entering the colony, they threw brick chunks at the colony people, who then retaliated, triggering the clash, said locals.

Sima Datta, president of rights body Nari Mukti Kendra, who was

present during the incident, said when the DSCC magistrate entered the colony, the councillor and his supporters tried to get it, but they faced obstruction.

The injured took first aid at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said Bacchu Miah, an inspector of the hospital's police outpost.

On June 10, the DSCC tried to evict the harijans from the colony saying that many of them are living there illegally. But the DSCC retreated in the face of protest by the harijan people.

The harijans have been living in the colony for generations, a refuge built by their ancestors during the British era.

The DSCC wants to expand its existing kitchen market in the

place.

Community leaders claimed that DSCC Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh assured them that only 20 families would be evicted. However, they later learnt from DSCC officials that over 87 families would be evicted.

DSCC Executive Magistrate Md Moniruzzaman told The Daily Star on the spot that they did not have any eviction drive yesterday and they did not inform anybody about it.

He along with contractors and engineers of newly constructed buildings in the colony went there to learn about the problem of utility services of the buildings and solve those.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

38 EASTLAND INSURANCE
The name you have learnt to Trust

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[illegible]



PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

After their home in Phulchhai upazila of Gaibandha got inundated in the ongoing flood, Rafiq and his wife Rabeya had no other option but move to a higher ground. They were seen waiting for a boat to rescue them yesterday.

Rain increases flood woes in the north

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

With the ongoing flood already making the lives of Kurigram residents miserable, more downpour further added to their woes.

"As floodwater inundated our house, five of us in the family left for the embankment on Tuesday with our belongings, two cattle, three goats and some hens to seek shelter there. Since then, we have been living under this polythene wrapped shanty. The rains make it very hard for us to live in this condition," said Amena Bewa, 68, of Rajarvita village on Brahmaputra's shoal in Kurigram's Chilmari upazila.

"The floodwater is not receding, so we cannot return to our house. We have to struggle to find pure water for drinking, sometimes treading the floodwater for miles to find a source. We have no food. There is no work in the area. No one has come to

us with any assistance or relief yet. Who knows how long our miseries will continue," she added.

Amena's neighbour Kohinoor Bewa, 70, echoed her.

Amena and Kohinoor are not alone. Several hundred families had to take shelter on BWDB dam in Chilmari upazila and are going through a similar ordeal.

Amid the flood and rains, there is an acute lack of work for labourers, leaving many of them unemployed and struggling to remain afloat with their families.

"Our house is submerged under four feet of water. There is no work in the area, no food in our house, and no assistance came from government or private initiatives. We are in dire straits," said Ayub Ali, 60, a day-labourer from Putimari village of Raniganj union.

"I took a loan of Tk 3,000 from a local, but how long can we survive with such a meagre amount?" he

added.

Golam Ashek, chairman of Ramna Union Parishad, informed that of the 4,000 flood-affected families in his union, only 600 got relief assistance of 10kg rice from the government.

Manjurul Islam, chairman of Raniganj union parishad, said only 300 of the 5,500 flood-hit families in his union received government relief.

Contacted, Minhazul Islam, UNO of Chilmari, said they are trying to tackle the flood situation with the government's relief allocation.

Vast stretches of croplands, along with houses and educational institutions remain submerged in the district, affecting at least 1,35,939 people in nine upazilas.

So far, 397 tonnes of rice, Tk 21,85,000 cash, and 21,330 packets of dry food have been distributed among flood victims in the district, according to officials.



Joydeb, 40, carries a variety of summer fruits and vegetables on this small boat along a canal. He paddles towards the market, hoping to sell all his produce and earn enough to support his family. The photo was taken in the Bhimruli area of Jhalakathi district recently.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

TK 115CR GRAFT
Execute arrest
warrant against
UZ chairman
Jasim: court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
Ctg

A Chattogram court yesterday ordered the deputy inspector general of police, superintendent of police and local police station to execute arrest warrant against Chattogram's Chandanaish Upazila Parishad chairman Jasim Uddin Ahmed.

On April 30 this year, the court issued the warrant against Jasim for embezzling Tk 115 crore from Padma Bank.

Raihanul Wazed
SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Dhaleshwari erodes bridge approach road

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

The erosion by Dhaleshwari river caused the approach road of Charabari Bridge in Tangail Sadar upazila to collapse on one side, snapping the road link between five unions in the shoal areas and the upazila headquarters.

As such, thousands of people from the shoal areas are suffering with their commute.

According to locals, around 50 metres of the approach road collapsed within a short time due to erosion early on Tuesday, halting movement of all vehicles through the bridge.

The Local Government Engineering Department constructed the 170.64-metre-long bridge in 2006 connecting Tangail-Torabganj road.

The road is the only route for about one lakh people from five unions in shoal areas – Katuli, Hugra, Kakua,

and Mahmud Nagar unions in Sadar upazila and Bharra union in Nagarpur upazila – to reach the district town, said Tofazzal Hossain Tofa, chairman of Tangail Sadar upazila parishad.

Many students of Mawlana Bhashani University of Science and Technology in Santosh area also use the route to reach their campus, he said, adding that agricultural products, raw materials of textile industry, and daily necessities are also transported using the route.

Contacted, Rafiqul Islam, executive engineer of LGED in Tangail, said the bridge and the connecting road became vulnerable as the river's course had changed due to illegal sand extraction and its flow through Charabari area became stronger over time.

Preparations are underway to address the issue, he added.

Fodder crisis hits cattle farmers

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, back from Sirajganj

Cattle farmers in Sirajganj are in dire straits due to an acute crisis of fodder for around 40,000 animals amid the ongoing flood in the district.

While people are finding it tough to find shelter in the flood-hit areas, the situation is worse for the animals.

"When flood water entered my house 10 days ago, I took my family members along with my two cows and three goats to a nearby mosque for shelter. Since then, we have been struggling to manage feed for my animals," said Mazeda Begum of Dogasi Kwakola area under Sirajganj Sadar upazila.

"With all pasture lands being inundated by floodwaters, I am compelled to feed them catkin and banana leaves," she added.

Md Sharif Hossain of Choto Koyra village echoed her.

"The floodwater washed away the straws I had kept at my house to feed my cattle. Now I am finding it difficult to feed my cattle, which

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

AL leader held in loan default case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakali

Police yesterday arrested a local Awami League leader in a loan default case filed by Sonali Bank in Patuakali.

Zakia Sultana Baby, general secretary of the district unit of Mahila Awami League, was held in the town's Fire Service area around noon.

Patuakali Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge (Investigation) Md Asad said earlier a court issued an arrest warrant against Zakia who owes Tk 9 crore to the bank's Patuakali branch, according to the case.

The branch Manager, Md Zillur Rahman, said in the name of Patuakali Textile Mill jointly owned by Zakia and her now deceased husband Sirajul Islam Khan, the couple took a loan of Tk 2.23 crore in 1985 from the bank.

Although the bank approved 100 percent interest waiver, the couple did not repay the loan.

Now the recoverable amount of that money stands at Tk 88.89 crore, bank sources said.

The bank authorities declared Zakia and Sirajul as defaulter and filed a loan default case with a Patuakali court in 2004.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Office of the Additional Chief Engineer, RHD Sarak Bhaban, Boyra, Khulna & Project Director Land Acquisition and Utility Shifting for Improvement of Bhanga-Jashore-Benapole Highway to 4-Lane project Phone: 02477701378 Email: acerhdkhulna@gmail.com		Date: 10-07-2024
Memo No. 35.01.4751.014.01.038.24-176		
Request for Expression of Interest (FIRM)		
1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges/Road Transport and Highways Division
2	Agency	Roads and Highways Department
3	Procuring Entity Name	Additional Chief Engineer, RHD, Khulna Zone, Khulna & Project Director, Land Acquisition and Utility Shifting for Improvement of Bhanga-Jashore-Benapole Highway to 4-Lane project.
4	Procuring Entity Code	khuz001
5	Procuring Entity District	Khulna
6	Expression of Interest (EOI) for Selection of	Land acquisition and utility relocation related services
7	EOI Reference No.	01/EOI/NGO/ACE Khn/2024-2025.
8	Date	11 July 2024
KEY INFORMATION		
9	Procurement Sub-Method	Quality and Cost-Based Selection (QCBS)
FUNDING INFORMATION		
10	Budget and Source of Funds	Development Budget (GoB)
11	Development Partner (if applicable)	N/A
PARTICULAR INFORMATION		
12	Project/Program Code (if applicable)	224398500
13	Project/Program Name (if applicable)	Land Acquisition and Utility Shifting for Improvement of Bhanga-Jashore-Benapole Highway to 4-Lane project.
14	EOI Closing Date and Time	12 August 2024
INFORMATION FOR APPLICANT		
15	Brief Description of the Assignment The Non-Government Organization (NGO) shall primarily assist the PIU of Roads and Highways Department (RHD) in land acquisition. The general scope of work and key tasks of the NGO shall include but not limited to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a full census survey in project area (according to Feasibility Study the amount of Land Acquisition is estimated about 392.45 hectares which may vary as per final design) to collect data on land acquisition, to assist in Utility Shifting Process, Land Acquisition Consultation and Participation activities, Data Management and Monitoring process. Assist in revising of LAPs and preparing necessary numbers of new LAPs in consultation with the project Director, if required. Hire surveyors and all other support staffs. Assist in collecting latest Mouza Maps, Parcha/Khatian. Provide logistic support during the survey/ field verification conducted by DC, UNO, AC Land, PWD, Forest Department, Water Development Board and RHD etc. Close Liaison with Deputy Commissioner (DC) and PD, RHD to expedite the land acquisition and compensation process and assisting in demarking the Right of Way. If necessary, they will revise the LA Plan as per actual requirement. Arrange monthly and periodic co-ordination meeting through RHD involving the Representatives of the Executing Agencies/Departments and others concerned on a regular basis. Arrange Transport, Transport Fuel and provide other relevant support for the Joint Verification Survey Assist and provide all other logistic support in Utility Shifting Process also assist RHD in making correspondence with the concern utility agencies. Conduct information and communication campaigns regarding land acquisition, required legal documentation and procedures also establish A2I. Assist RHD in maintaining record of land acquisition and keeping compensation and payment related records, Design and develop a Computerized Management Information System (CMIS) to manage data and generate reports as instructed by the Project Director. Prepare a LA schedule, Utility Shifting Schedule and Monitor all land acquisition and utility shifting related activities also prepare monthly and periodic progress report. Assist in publishing Gazette for acquired land and provide necessary support in settling litigations, if any. Monitor all acquisition related activities and prepare progress reports on behalf of RHD highlighting monthly progress in all areas as well as implementation issues/constraints that require decisions by RHD, and other agencies involved. Assist RHD in Land Acquisition and Land Taking-over from Deputy Commissioners and handing over of land to the Contractor. 	
16	Experience, Resources & Delivery Capacity Required The NGO must have experience in land related survey, Land Acquisition, Utility shifting and implementation of resettlement action plan in large-scale completed development projects. The sole applicant NGO or the lead firm of a JV applicant NGO must be registered in Bangladesh under the NGO Affairs Bureau and the Department of Social Welfare. The NGO shall have the experience in implementing preferably 02 (two) Land acquisition and Utility shifting programs in Bridge/Highway/Railway development Projects in the last 10 (ten) years in Bangladesh. Experience of working in Land Acquisition and Utility Shifting under Roads and Highways Department or in any other government agency will get preference.	
17	Other Details The EOI shall include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Profile of the NGO (e.g., representatives, address, number of staff, history, and other information to introduce itself). General experience of the NGO in brief. Copy of updated/renewed registration certificate with NGO Affairs Bureau and Department of Social Welfare. Also copy of updated trade license. Copy of audited financial reports of NGO for last three years. Provide information on each assignment completed for which the firm and each associate (JV member only) for this assignment, was legally contracted either individually as a corporate entity or as one of the major companies within an association for carrying out consulting services (i.e. land survey, land acquisition, resettlement plan and monitoring) similar to the ones requested under this assignment. The EOI will include such similar experience information which has been completed within the last 10 (Ten) years. The information shall be supported by the copy of experience certificate (Completion Certificate) issued by the respective client and contract document (with salient features for identification only). Summary of permanent professional and technical employees with key qualifications (in tabular form). Interested NGO may obtain additional information from the office of the undersigned. EOI with all supporting documents must be submitted at or before 4:00 pm by 12 August, 2024 in sealed envelope, marked with "NGO Services for Land Acquisition and Utility Shifting for Improvement of Bhanga-Jashore-Benapole Highway to 4-Lane project and delivered to the address of the undersigned. The EOI shall be submitted in one (1) original, two (2) copies, and one soft copy in USB in a sealed envelope. The final selection of NGO shall follow Quality and Cost-Based Selection (QCBS) procedure in accordance with the Public Procurement Rules 2008. Interested applicants/firms are advised to visit the site at their own cost before submitting the EOI. 	
18	Association with foreign firm (s)	N/A
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS		
19	Name of the Official Inviting EOI	Syed Aslam Ali
20	Designation of the Official Inviting EOI	Additional Chief Engineer, RHD, Khulna Zone, Khulna & Project Director, Land Acquisition and Utility Shifting for Improvement of Bhanga-Jashore-Benapole Highway to 4-Lane project.
21	Address of the Official Inviting EOI	Office of the Additional Chief Engineer, RHD, Khulna Zone, Khulna & Project Director, Land Acquisition and Utility Shifting for Improvement of Bhanga-Jashore-Benapole Highway to 4-Lane project. Sarak Bhaban, Boyra, Khulna
22	Contact Details of the Official Inviting EOI	Phone: 02477701378 E-mail: acerhdkhulna@gmail.com
23	The PE reserves the right to shortlist or not to shortlist any or all the applicant(s) without mentioning any reason whatsoever.	
The costs and expenses incurred by the NGO in connection with the preparation and delivery of the EOI shall be borne solely by the NGO and will not be recovered from the Procuring Entity whatever the outcome of the procurement process of NGO selection. The procuring entity reserves the right to accept any or all EOIs without assigning any reason whatsoever.		
(Syed Aslam Ali) Project Director & Additional Chief Engineer, RHD Khulna Zone, Khulna		
G/D-36		

SY HUQ

Bangladeshi origin producer making it big in Japan

Sy Huq, despite his films earning critical acclaim and festival awards, encountered challenges while directing his debut film *‘Things That Fall’*. The project faced setbacks twice before coming to fruition.

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

Sy Huq, a young filmmaker, has become the first Bangladeshi-American creative executive in Japan's anime industry. He secured a prestigious role at D'ART Shtajio, Japan's first Black-owned anime studio, and boasts a reputation as a four-time Oscar-qualified director and producer. Intrigued by his backstory and what inspired him to pursue filmmaking, I wanted to learn more about his journey.

A traveler at heart and filmmaker by passion, he discovered his love for Japanese films at a young age. He frequented public libraries to watch VHS tapes, drawing inspiration from Kurosawa's live-action movies and Hayao Miyazaki's animations. His imagination and creativity were further fueled by writing and drawing comics.

"Production was never something I thought was within reach for someone like me, especially at the Hollywood level. While backpacking overseas, I realised the profound impact and community-building power of bringing people



together through storytelling. After completing my first few screenplays during my travels and receiving positive feedback from those around me, I sensed it was time to take a leap forward. I decided to immerse myself in Hollywood, learn the film business through UCLA's Professionals Program in Producing, and approach production with dedication," said Sy.

Recently, Animation Magazine announced Sy Huq's new role at D'ART Shtajio, known for their



work on notable animated projects such as *Star Wars: Visions – The Pit*, *The Boys Presents: Diabolical*, and *The Weeknd-Snowchild* (Animated video).

Their collaboration was destined. While immersed in various creative anime projects in Tokyo, Sy began collaborating with D'ART Shtajio on several ventures.

"It was during these collaborations, especially with D'ART Shtajio's incredibly talented CEO, Arthell Isom, that we realised not only our natural inclination to collaborate and enjoy the process of developing and structuring stories that innovate and challenge the anime industry, but it was also our potential to create something truly remarkable. It was this realisation that led to discussions with D'ART about joining as lead



executive producer. At D'ART Shtajio, I will focus on developing, creating, and writing large-scale anime projects, expanding their portfolio to impact animation enthusiasts worldwide with our unique storytelling style that blends Eastern and Western influences," shared the young producer.

While he has roots in Bangladesh, he has not had much exposure to the Bangladeshi animation industry. He is eager to learn more about it from industry professionals in the country to deepen his understanding of its production.

"There is a project I've been creating and developing since I filmed the primary story in documentary form in Bangladesh in 2022, based on my father's experiences during the Liberation War as a child in 1971, in the countryside. It's been an exciting journey, gaining attention within my trusted circles. We're taking our time to ensure the project is as impactful as possible while allowing it to creatively evolve. I look forward to seeing it come to life to represent the beauty of Bangladesh, frame by frame, in the future," said Sy.

An anime enthusiast, he is also a four-time Oscar-qualified director and producer. His debut as a director, *Things That Fall*, was eligible for the 92nd Academy Awards for Best Live Action Short Film. He served as executive producer for *The Boys:Diabolical*, which qualified for the 94th Academy Awards in the same category. Sy also produced two short films, *The Stranger* and

Panorama, both qualifying for the 95th Academy Awards for Best Live Action Short Film.

Sy Huq, despite his films earning critical acclaim and festival awards, encountered challenges while directing his debut film *Things That Fall*. The project faced setbacks twice before coming to fruition.

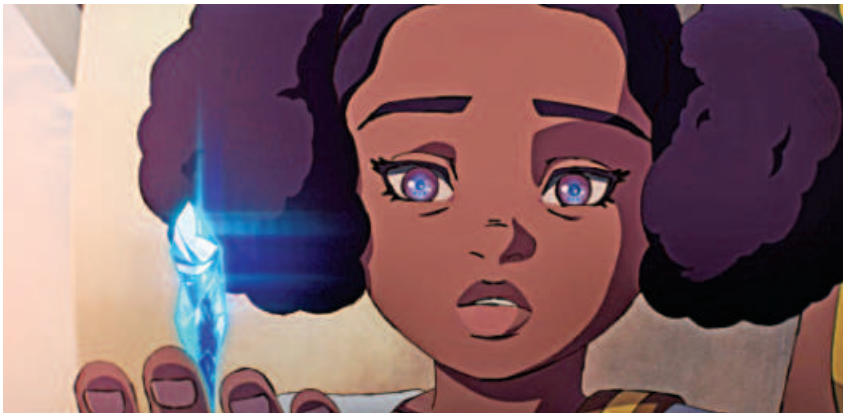
"Through that film, I learned the power of empathy and the importance of championing meaningful causes, such as hiring with authenticity and representation in mind. We incorporated sign language, cast deaf talent for deaf roles, collaborated with mental health organisations for authentic portrayal, and experimented with new sound technology. It was a bold approach that underscored the impact of innovative storytelling and dedication, particularly as we navigated the journey from festivals to the Oscars," explained the director.

After *Things That Fall* qualified for the Academy Awards, Sy Huq realised his responsibility to address real issues through his narratives. He aimed to create films that would impact audiences and provoke reflection.

"My goal was to contribute to improving lives in some way. After four qualifications, I realised that the next step in my career was to scale up and significantly increase the impact I could make in my community," shared the filmmaker.

"My short films, like *Things That Fall*, draw inspiration from animated shorts such as *Paperman*. They utilise silent film principles to resonate with audiences, focusing on actions over dialogue and the power of non-verbal storytelling. Short films provided a rich education in bringing stories to life, and animation allows imagination to flourish with fewer limitations," Sy explained.

Currently, he's involved in undisclosed larger projects. However, he mentioned collaborating with Arthell Isom on D'ART's first Congolese anime feature, *MFINDA*.



PHOTOS: COURTESY

NEWS

Pakistan's ISI

FROM PAGE 12
Omar Ayub Khan, said the agency would wield its powers even against government lawmakers, and vowed that his party would mount a court challenge.

The army's Inter-Services Public Relations Wing (ISPR) did not respond to a request for comment from Reuters.

"Is what is 'legal' also constitutional or right?" Farieha Aziz of rights advocacy group Bolo Bhi asked on X.

Scaloni hails grit of Messi & Co

FROM PAGE 12
This edition of the Copa America is likely to represent the last chance for many senior squad members to add to their trophy collection with the national team.

Angel di Maria, 36, said last year he would retire from international football after the Copa America, while Messi, 37, and Nicolas Otamendi, 36, are both nearing the end of their careers.

"You know how I feel about Angel. We don't want to retire him earlier than needed," Scaloni said.

"We don't want to feel melancholy. We have to let him play, and then we'll see if we can convince him or not to stay with us. But so far, he's here, and he has to be allowed to enjoy this moment.

"For Leo (Messi), it's similar to Angel. We have to let him be and we will never be the ones to close the door. He can be with our team for as long as he wants to be. And if he wants to retire but still come and hang around, it would be great."

In Sunday's final, Argentina could face either Uruguay, who beat them in a World Cup qualifier in November, or Colombia, who are on a 27-match unbeaten run under coach Nestor Lorenzo.

"These two potential opponents are top-notch national teams, but it would be reckless to say that I prefer one or the other," Scaloni said.

"One of them already beat us. It was a very tough match. We have not played against Colombia with this coach, but we know it could be very difficult as well."

Govt stock nearing exhaustion

FROM PAGE 12
DGFP Director General ANM Al Firoz declined to make any comment on the issue.

"We have taken initiatives to procure contraception so that a crisis does not arise," Health Minister Samanta Lal Sen told The Daily Star.

Of the total population of 16.98 crore, the number of eligible couples is 2.81 crore, according to DGFP data.

At present, 37 percent of eligible couples receive contraceptives from the government and 3 percent from non-governmental organisations, according to government data. The remaining 60 percent get their contraception from the private sector.

Since there is a shortage of contraceptives, poor couples will find it difficult to take service from the private sector because of their high price, said Mohammad Mainul Islam, a professor and former chairman of the Dhaka University's population sciences department.

"Unintended pregnancies will also go up, which will scale up the mother and infant mortality rates. Pregnancy termination will also

increase. Therefore, there is a risk to reproductive health."

At present, the rate of unmet need for family planning is 10 percent and the government wants to bring it down to zero by 2030.

Unmet need for family planning is defined as the percentage of women of reproductive age, either married or in a union, who want to stop or delay childbearing but are not using any method of contraception.

If the supply is not uninterrupted, it will be difficult to meet that target, Mainul said.

"If unmet needs increase, unwanted pregnancies, abortions, maternal deaths -- all will rise."

Besides, achieving the total fertility rate of 2.1 will be difficult too, Mainul added.

Assuming there are no migration flows and that mortality rates remain unchanged, a total fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman generates broad stability of the population. It is also referred to as the "replacement fertility rate" as it ensures replacement of the woman and her partner with another 0.1 children per woman to counteract infant mortality.

Israeli strikes hit UN agency building in Gaza

FROM PAGE 1
warned it would "remain a dangerous combat zone", an AFP journalist said.

The heightened military strikes come as Israeli officials started talks in Qatar yesterday on reaching a truce.

The Israeli military said that one overnight attack in Gaza City targeted Hamas and Islamic Jihad targets operating from inside the headquarters of the UN agency for Palestinians UNRWA.

UNRWA had no immediate comment on the attack, but has said it has "no way to verify" claims that its facilities are being used by Hamas and its allies.

Meanwhile Tuesday's deadly strike near the Al-Awda school in Abasan, near Khan Yunis, brought new condemnation from Hamas over the Israeli military tactics.

The Hamas government said a "majority" of the dead were women

and children.

At least 38,295 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's military offensive in the enclave since October 7, and 88,241 have been wounded, the Palestinian enclave's health ministry said yesterday. A total of 52 Palestinians were killed in the past 24 hours, the ministry said in a statement.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said it had received dozens of desperate calls from residents in Gaza City trapped in their homes but their teams were unable to reach them because of the intensity of the bombing, reports Reuters.

"The information coming from Gaza City shows residents are living through tragic conditions. (Israeli) occupation forces continue to hit residential districts, and displace people from their homes and refugee shelters," it said in a statement.



Rescue workers search for missing persons after a landslide occurred due to heavy rain in Geumsan, South Korea yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Eight jailed for 7yrs over Ctg girder collapse

FROM PAGE 1
Parisa's Project Manager Gias Uddin, engineer Abdul Jalil, Quality Control Engineer Aminur Rahman, and employees Abdul Hai, Mosharrar Hossain, Manjurul Islam, Shahjahan Ali, and Rafiqul Islam.

The court sentenced the eight to five years' imprisonment and fined Tk 3 lakh each, in default, they have to suffer six months more in jail under section 304 (A) of the Penal Code. They were jailed for another two years under section 338/34 of the Penal Code.

The sentences will be executed one after another, and the money will be distributed to the victims' families who were killed and injured in the incident, said Public Prosecutor Abdur Rashid.

"The eight were present in the courtroom during the verdict

delivery, and all were sent to jail after cancellation of their bail," said Omar Fuad, bench assistant of the court.

Twenty-two out of 28 prosecution witnesses testified before the court during the trial, he added.

Convict Rafiqul's lawyer SUM Nurul Islam said, "We expressed our dissatisfaction over the judgment and will appeal to the higher court."

Omar Faruk, son of Elias who was killed in the incident, said they were not satisfied as the accused did not get the punishment they deserve.

In its observations, the court stated that the Chattogram Development Authority gave the victims Tk 50,000 each as compensation, which the court considers inadequate. By paying the compensation, the CDA indirectly accepted its responsibility for the incident.

The judge said the accused told the court that the names of high officials of the CDA and consultancy agencies were in the FIR, but those were not included in the charge sheet.

But neither the prosecution nor any victim lodged a no-confidence petition with the magistrate court at that time.

The court added that the prosecution witnesses did not mention anything about the dropped names.

If the court sent back the case for further investigation to include their names in the case, it would delay disposal of the case.

On November 24, 2012, three girders of under-construction Bahaddarhat flyover collapsed and fell on an adjacent kitchen market, leaving 13 people dead and over 27 others injured.

UNHRC adopts resolution

FROM PAGE 12
She emphasised on the start of sustainable and voluntary repatriation of the Rohingyas by creating a congenial environment in Rakhine

The UN in the resolution expressed deep concern over recent violence

against the Rohingyas in Rakhine, their displacements, and forceful inclusion in Myanmar's armed forces, says the statement.

It also called on all parties in conflict in Myanmar to ensure protection and safety of Rohingyas.

It further expressed concern over the damage to property and people in neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh, due to ongoing conflict in Myanmar, and called on Myanmar to take necessary steps to maintain stability along its borders.

Nato begins sending F-16 jets to Ukraine

Says US top diplomat

AGENCIES

Nato allies have begun the promised transfer of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine to bolster defenses against Russia, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday.

“As we speak, the transfer of F-16 jets is underway, coming from Denmark, coming from the Netherlands,” Blinken said at a Nato 75th anniversary summit in Washington.

Meanwhile, Nato allies have reached agreement on the summit declaration that includes a pledge by the alliance to continue to support Ukraine “on its irreversible path to full Euro-atlantic integration, including Nato membership”, a source told Reuters yesterday.

The declaration goes on to reaffirm that Nato will “be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the alliance when allies agree and conditions are met”, according to the source in the alliance.

On the eve of the summit, Russia fired a barrage of missiles on Ukraine, killing dozens.



US President Joe Biden, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, Polish President Andrzej Duda, Estonia's Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Czech Republic's President Petr Pavel, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and other officials pose for a photo as they attend a Nato event to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the alliance, in Washington DC, US on Tuesday evening.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Ready to help restore peace in Ukraine

Modi tells Austrian Chancellor Nehammer

AFP, Vienna

India stands ready to give all possible support to restoring peace to war-torn Ukraine, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday in Vienna after a Kremlin visit criticised by Kyiv.

Modi arrived in Vienna late Tuesday after talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, where the Indian leader urged “peace through dialogue”, saying that “war cannot solve problems”.

“This is not an age of war. Problems cannot be solved on the battlefield,” Modi told reporters in Vienna alongside Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer.

Modi said India and Austria stand “ready to provide all possible support” to “rapidly restore peace and stability”. Nehammer said both countries shared “common goal” to achieve a “comprehensive and lasting peace, in accordance with UN Charter”.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH STATE

India has no right to develop contested region: China

REUTERS, Beijing

India has no right to carry out development in the area China calls South Tibet, China's Foreign Ministry said yesterday in response to a Reuters report on New Delhi's plans to speed up hydropower projects in the border state.

“South Tibet is China's territory,” a foreign ministry spokesman said in a statement. It said India had no right to carry out development there and the establishment of what India calls Arunachal Pradesh on Chinese territory is “illegal and invalid”.

Reuters reported on Tuesday that India plans to spend \$1 billion to expedite the construction of 12 hydropower stations in the northeastern Himalayan state.

India's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on China's statement.

India says its remote state of



Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of the country, but China says it is a part of southern Tibet, and has objected to Indian infrastructure projects there.

Last week, India Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Kazakhstan where the two agreed to intensify efforts to resolve issues along their border.

India plans to spend \$1 billion to expedite the construction of 12 hydropower stations in Arunachal Pradesh, two government sources said.

The federal finance ministry under Nirmala Sitharaman recently approved up to 7.5 billion rupees (\$89.85 million) in financial assistance to each hydropower project in the northeastern region, the sources said.

Under the scheme, about 90 billion rupees will likely be allotted for the 12 hydropower projects in Arunachal Pradesh, said the sources, who have direct knowledge of the matter.

The scheme is likely to support northeastern states and help them finance equity holdings in the projects they host. Having state governments on board generally helps in expediting regulatory clearances, locals rehabilitation and negotiations on sharing electricity with the host state.

The plans for the hydropower stations are expected to be announced in the 2024/2025 federal budget that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government will unveil on July 23, the sources said.

Macron urges MPs to agree broad coalition

AFP, Paris

President Emmanuel Macron put the onus on the French parliament yesterday to negotiate a broad-based coalition, after snap elections failed to give a majority to any one party.

Macron said he would name a new prime minister after MPs have had “a little time” to negotiate a governing programme, and that the current government would remain in place for the meantime.

French centrists were looking for an alliance with the right yesterday.

French leftists, however, believe that as the largest bloc in the new National Assembly with some 190 seats they are entitled to suggest a new prime minister.

But many in Macron's centrist camp, which holds around 160 seats, would refuse to support a new government that includes figures from the hard left.

The president's Renaissance outfit yesterday sought to find allies in the lower chamber, but appeared divided, with some seeking to include forces ranging from the centre left to the right in a broad coalition, and others only wishing to join forces with conservatives.

Time short for Biden decision on 2024 bid: Pelosi

AFP, Washington

Democratic Party heavyweight Nancy Pelosi said yesterday that time is running out for US President Joe Biden to make a final decision on his reelection bid, but stressed the call was his to make.

Despite Biden insisting he is staying in the race, Pelosi -- the former speaker of the House of Representatives and an influential voice in the party -- suggested the president still could step aside amid a Democratic divide over his candidacy.

“It's up to the president to decide if he is going to run,” she told MSNBC. “We're all encouraging him to make that decision because the time is running short.”

Pelosi stopped short of advocating either way on the Biden question. “I want him to do whatever he decides to do, and that's the way it is,” she said. “Whatever he decides, we go with.”

Biden, 81, has corralled much-needed support from some top Democrats, but several lawmakers in the party have publicly expressed concerns about his mental fitness after his disastrous debate performance last month against White House challenger Donald Trump.



A Palestinian woman holds her daughter as she walks past the rubble of houses destroyed during the Israeli military offensive in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

37 Chinese aircraft skirt Taiwan on way to drill

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's defence ministry said 37 Chinese aircraft were detected around the self-ruled island yesterday as they headed to exercises with an aircraft carrier in the western Pacific.

China claims democratic Taiwan as part of its territory and maintains a near-daily presence of fighter jets, drones and warships around the island, which is 180 kilometres (110 miles) from the southern Chinese coast.

Taiwan is also a crucial part of a chain of islands that military strategists say serve as a gateway from the South China Sea -- which China claims in nearly its entirety -- to the Pacific Ocean.

At around 9:30 am (0130 GMT) yesterday, Taipei said that “since 0520 today, the Ministry of National Defence detected a total of 37 Chinese aircraft”, including fighter jets, bombers and drones.

Thirty-six of the aircraft crossed the sensitive median line of the Taiwan Strait -- which bisects the narrow waterway separating the island from China.

“(The aircraft) headed to the Western Pacific via our southern and southeastern airspace to cooperate with the aircraft carrier the Shandong in conducting ‘joint sea and air training’,” the defence ministry said in a statement.

Defence Minister Wellington Koo told reporters the Shandong “did not pass through the Bashi Channel”, the area off Taiwan's southern tip where Chinese ships typically transit en route to the Pacific Ocean.

Instead, it “went further south through the Balingtang Channel towards the Western Pacific,” he said, referring to a waterway just north of the Philippines' Babuyan Island -- about 250 kilometres south of Bashi.

12 children killed in South Africa blaze

AFP, Johannesburg

Twelve children were killed in South Africa yesterday when a minibus taking them to school near Johannesburg overturned and burst into flames after being hit by another vehicle, authorities said.

The driver of the minibus was also killed and seven other children were rushed to hospital, according to officials in Johannesburg's Gauteng province.

Television images showed that the minibus was totally destroyed by the fire in the early morning crash in Merafong, more than 70 kilometres (45 miles) west of the city.

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INVITATION FOR TENDER – OTM (International Competition)

1. Ministry/Division	Ministry of Science and Technology	
2. Agency	Bangladesh Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (BCSIR)	
3. Procuring entity name	Bangladesh Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (BCSIR), Dr. Quadrat-I-Khuda Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205, Bangladesh.	
4. Procuring entity district	Dhaka	
5. Invitation for	Supply, Installation, and Commissioning of Scientific Equipments.[Name of equipments: Item no.(01)Simultaneous TG-DTA-DSC, (02) Simultaneous ICP-OES spectrometer, Item no.(03) FT-IR Spectrometer with Universal Sampling Module & Item no.(04) Surface area analyzer / physical adsorption analyzer (Details will be found in the Tender Document)].	
6. Invitation ref. no.	39.02.0000.022.35.319.24	
7. Date	10.07.2024	
KEY INFORMATION		
8. Procuring method	Open Tendering Method (International Competition)	
9. Budget and source of fund	GoB	
PARTICULAR INFORMATION		
10. Tender last selling date	27.08.2024 during office hour	
11. Tender closing date & time	28.08.2024 at 1.00 PM.	
12. Tender opening date and time	28.08.2024 at 2.00 PM.	
13. Name & address of the office(s) selling tender document	Cashier, BCSIR, Secretariat building (3 rd floor), Dr. Quadrat-I-Khuda Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205.	
14. Name & address of the office(s) receiving tender document	Office of the Secretary, Secretariat building (4 th floor) BCSIR, Dr.Quadrat- I-Khuda Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205.	
15. Name & address of the office(s) Opening tender document	Office of the Secretary, Secretariat building (4 th floor) BCSIR, Dr.Quadrat-i-Khuda Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205.	
INFORMATION ON AWARD		
16. Ministry/Division	Ministry of Science and Technology.	
17. Eligibility of tenderer	* The tenderer shall have a minimum of 5 (five) years of overall experience in the supply of similar type of goods. * The satisfactory completion of supply of similar scientific equipments/ instruments of minimum 100% (Hundred percent) of the total value of the item(s) quoted by the Tenderer under maximum 5 (five) contracts in the last 5 (five) years. * Details will be found in the Tender Data Sheet (TDS) of the Tender Document.	
18. Brief description of goods	As per attached specification in the tender document.	
19. Brief description of related services		
20. Price of tender document	Tk. 2,000.00 (Two Thousand) (Non –refundable)	
21. Evaluation will be done “Item by Item” basis.		
22. Description of goods	Tender security (Tk.)	Completion time in months/days
Scientific Equipment (As per attached specification in the tender document)	The amount of Tender Security shall be at least 2.0% (Two percent) of the total value of the item(s) quoted by the Tenderer in favour of secretary, BCSIR by a tender security.	140 (One hundred forty) days from the date of contract signing.
PROCUREMENT ENTITY DETAILS		
23. Name of official inviting tender	Most. Sultana Parvin	
24. Designation of Official Inviting Tender	Secretary (Addl. Charge), BCSIR, Dhaka.	
25. Contract details of official inviting Tender	Secretary, Secretariat building (4 th Floor), BCSIR, Dr. Quadrat-i-Khuda Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205, Tel: 58610717	
26. The Procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.		

GD- 37

(Most. Sultana Parvin)
Secretary(Addl. Charge)

Develop a patient referral system

Ease pressure on tertiary facilities, re-imagine healthcare system

It is unfortunate that 53 years since independence, we have failed to develop a functional referral system, with a staggering three out of five patients directly referring themselves to specialists and tertiary hospitals, according to a recent study. This inevitably overwhelms tertiary facilities, leads to long waits, and deprives critically-ill patients of due attention and care. Unlike in countries such as the UK, where patients are required to see a general practitioner before being referred to a specialist, it is common practice in Bangladesh for patients to directly visit specialists even for minor ailments. This has created a lop-sided system, where the tertiary hospitals bear an overwhelming brunt of the pressure, while primary and secondary facilities remain underutilised and underdeveloped.

A well-designed referral system can help streamline the healthcare network, and create an effective linkage among three tiers of healthcare services. Primary healthcare facilities, which should be the first point of contact for any patient, should be fully equipped to take care of basic cases, referring only the complex cases to specialists. A 2023 study found that a referral system can filter as many as 65 percent of patients at primary and secondary healthcare facilities at upazila and district levels, freeing up tertiary facilities to focus on their core functions. Given the obvious advantages of such a system, the question is: why have we not implemented this system so far?

There have been various discussions over the decades about instituting such a system, but previous attempts to implement it have stumbled for various reasons. A referral system for Rangpur was announced in 2014 by the then health minister Mohammad Nasim, but it failed as a result of inadequate logistical support and unavailability of qualified physicians and auxiliary workforce at primary healthcare centres. Attempts to get the system going in 2016 and 2019 also fizzled out in the end. What is obvious is that ad hoc attempts at implementation will not work without a radical reimagining of the healthcare system and appropriate investments and capacity-building to ensure a successful transition.

The good news is that Bangladesh already has primary healthcare infrastructure in rural areas, with community hospitals and community clinics, but their systemic issues—shortage of staff, equipment and inefficiencies in operations—need to be addressed if they are to play their due role within the referral system. Meanwhile, tertiary facilities have mushroomed in urban areas at the cost of primary and secondary facilities—an imbalance that must first be addressed.

If we are to move forward, we need political will and a well-defined policy about how to implement a well-designed referral system. The system must be built on a strong foundation of well-equipped primary healthcare facilities, a sufficient number of trained specialists at all levels, and a public that trusts and understands the system.

Punish kidney racket mastermind

Arrest of Bangladeshis involved in illegal transplants a wake-up call

We are horrified to learn of a cross-border racket of illegal kidney transplant in India that has been sourcing the organ from Bangladesh for years. According to a report by *The Indian Express*, police recently arrested seven individuals in Delhi, including three Bangladeshis and an Indian doctor, in connection with this racket. Delhi Police also said the mastermind of the racket is a Bangladeshi national, and those involved with this illegal operation are all suspected to have links with Bangladesh. This racket is a part of a larger interstate network in India involving Bangladeshi patients in Rajasthan and Haryana, sources at Delhi Police say.

The racket, according to Delhi Police, targeted kidney patients by visiting dialysis centres in Bangladesh. They found donors from poor and marginalised backgrounds, luring them to India under the pretence of employment. It also arranged to falsify documents under the name of Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi to show that the donors and recipients were related by blood—a requirement for kidney transplant per the Indian law. Dr Vijaya Kumari, who was employed at the Delhi-based Indraprastha Apollo Hospital (IHS), facilitated the transplants even when she knew about the donors and recipients not being blood-related. The now suspended doctor performed 15-16 such illegal transplants between 2021 and 2023 at the Noida-based Yatharth Hospital.

Police also found documents carrying records of transactions that took place for the transplants from one of the Bangladeshi accused. Donors were paid four to five lakh rupees for their kidneys, while recipients were charged 25-30 lakh rupees.

While we are glad that police nabbed the culprits, we are disturbed that so many illegal transplants took place with no one being the wiser. The Bangladeshi trio who were arrested in Delhi had been arrested on the same charges last month. How did they get out and continue their nefarious activities? We urge both the Bangladesh and Indian authorities to coordinate and delve deeper into the matter and uproot the entire network. On the Bangladesh side, a thorough investigation must be conducted to find the mastermind of the racket and all its members, and bring them all to book.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



2010 FIFA World Cup Final

On this day, The Netherlands and Spain fought for the prestigious football trophy in Johannesburg, South Africa. Spain won the match 1-0 and the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Has poverty-alleviation spending made any difference?



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

SELIM JAHAN

One critical question raised in the context of poverty alleviation in Bangladesh is whether poverty reduction spendings have made any dent on poverty in the country. Sometimes, we generalise the responses to this question. Sometimes, the responses are based more on rhetoric, rather than hard facts. And sometimes, the responses are partial, rather than comprehensive. But an objective response to the question requires an understanding of the dynamics of poverty in Bangladesh, the nature of poverty alleviation spendings. It requires familiarity with poverty and inequality data, and a sense of the magnitude of the poverty alleviation expenditures.

Poverty in Bangladesh has many dimensions. At one level, it can be structural, rooted in the structure of the economy. It can also be transient, which has more of a seasonal nature. Thus, people can be permanently trapped in poverty, or they can

Even though a correlation is not easy to establish between the huge amounts of resources going to poverty reduction in Bangladesh and its impressive achievements in poverty reduction, a possibility of a strong association between the two cannot be overruled.

get in and out of the poverty trap, depending on the seasonality of the economic outcome. The sources of impoverishment may also vary, ranging from socio-economic shocks (for example, recession or Covid-19) to environmental degradation, giving rise to the environmental poor. Poverty can be absolute, or relative, which is nothing other than inequality. And inequalities occur not only in income, but also in non-income dimensions. Furthermore, inequalities are not always explained in terms of outcomes



FILE PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Protection of the ultra-poor and the marginalised groups require increasing resources for direct expenditures for poverty reduction.

like educational achievements, but also in opportunities such as access to health services.

Looking at the poverty alleviating expenditures, there are two dimensions to them—poverty impacting expenditures and targeted expenditures for poverty alleviation. The first set of expenditures are not exclusively directed to poverty alleviation, rather they impact poverty through various channels. Thus, expenditures on social services like health, education, and access to clean drinking water help reduce impoverishment. In societies where poverty is significantly widespread, poverty reducing strategies at the macro and sectoral levels are essential. In fact, in such instances, macroeconomic policies must be geared towards poverty reducing measures—expenditures which indirectly impact poverty work through channels like economic growth, employment generation, and expansion of social services, etc. Yet, even with such policies, a significant number of people will remain outside of the macroeconomic policy net. And those people will need direct targeted poverty reducing interventions. Extreme poor, people with disabilities,

the income poverty rate in Bangladesh at 19 percent, down from 58 percent in 1990—down by more than two-thirds. The extreme poverty in the country stands at about 6 percent. There is no doubt that these are impressive achievements.

But the same thing cannot be said about relative poverty, or inequality. In fact, the income Gini-coefficient (the economic measure of inequality) of Bangladesh is alarmingly high—it was 0.50 in 2022. In theory, the value of the Gini-coefficient ranges between 0 to 1. Higher values within the range indicate higher inequality. A Gini-coefficient value close to 0.5 would mean high inequality. Inequality is also manifested in Bangladesh in other non-income dimensions. For example, in the area of child malnutrition, while 38 percent of the children in the poorest households are stunted, the comparable figure for the richest households is 20 percent.

Over the years, more than half of the public expenditures in Bangladesh was directed towards poverty alleviation. For example, in the fiscal year of 2020-21, 55 percent of the public expenditures were allocated for poverty alleviation. The figure has gone up to 58 percent in the fiscal year of 2024-25. In the

Was Iran's election a smokescreen?



Noora Shamsi Bahar is senior lecturer at the Department of English and Modern Languages, North South University (NSU), and a published researcher and translator.

NOORA SHAMSI BAHAR

During Iran's latest presidential elections, the hashtag #electioncircus was trending among the Iranian community on X. This may be due to the illusion of a political competition that is encouraged by the Velayat-e faqih, or Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in an established theocratic system, where presidential elections are mostly a facade because ultimately, the decision-making power rests with the Supreme Leader.

So, how do presidential elections work in Iran? The Shourā-ye Negahban (Guardian Council) handpicks the most suitable candidates from a pool of presidential candidates, who then compete against one another. To secure victory, a candidate needs more than 50 percent of the people's vote. If no candidate achieves this majority, a run-off ensues a week later between the two candidates who received the highest number of votes in the initial round.

And what is the Guardian Council? It constitutes 12 members who are directly/indirectly appointed by the Supreme Leader, who hold power to vet/veto legislation, and oversee elections. The Guardian Council can bar candidates from standing in elections to parliament, the presidency and the Majles-e Xobregān-e Rahbari

(Assembly of Experts). For example, Ali Larijani, an ex-parliamentary speaker and former Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was disqualified during the 2021 presidential elections by the Guardian Council, possibly owing to his center-right ideology. Noteworthy to mention, disqualified candidates are disallowed from protesting the council's rejection.

Among the seven candidates who were selected by the Guardian Council for the 2021 presidential elections was the to-be president, Ebrahim Raisi, a far-right hardliner, known as the "Butcher of Tehran" for his role in allegedly carrying out mass executions of up to as many as 30,000 political prisoners in 1988, as the then Deputy Prosecutor General of Tehran. Following Raisi's death after a helicopter crash on May 19, 2024, new presidential elections took place shortly after, which culminated on July 5, 2024.

This time, out of 80 candidates, 74 were disqualified by the Guardian Council, which included four female candidates, as has been the case for all presidential elections since the Islamic revolution—a testament to the accusation that Iran is a gender apartheid state. According to Iran's Ministry of Interior, there was a record-

low turnout since the inception of the Islamic Republic, where only 40 percent of the more than 61 million eligible Iranians voted during the first round, which evidences that most do not support clerical rule. I will skip any comment on the speculation that even these embarrassing numbers are fabricated, as has been the claim, given the staggering majority's decision to abstain from voting.

Among the six selected candidates this time around, Dr Masoud Pezeshkian was the only so-called "reformist"—a widely circulated theory that has thrown dust in the eyes of many non-Iranians. It won't be too absurd to assume that Pezeshkian's approved candidacy by the Khamenei-controlled Guardian Council was a ploy to increase political participation. Pezeshkian won against ultra-conservative Saeed Jalili, but one wonders what moderate reforms he will bring about without challenging the state's theocratic system, especially when he himself has given a public statement declaring that confronting Iran's power elite of clerics will never be part of his agenda.

Anyone who understands Farsi can easily find Pezeshkian's stance on women's rights. In an interview, an elderly Pezeshkian proudly states that even before the first Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, established the mandatory hijab law in 1979, Pezeshkian enforced women to wear long trousers, the long-sleeved manteau (a long overcoat), and the hijab at the Tabriz University of Medical Sciences (where he was pursuing an MBBS) as well as at the hospital across the medical college. One alumna of the university recounts incidents from 1979, when Pezeshkian

intermittent years, the figure stood at more than 55 percent. However, direct expenditures for poverty alleviation show a declining trend—in the fiscal year of 2020-21, more than four-fifths of the public expenditures on poverty alleviation were allocated towards directly fighting poverty. In the fiscal year of 2024-25, the relevant share has come down to two-thirds.

In the context of all these figures, the two relevant observations are that firstly, even though a correlation is not easy to establish between the huge amounts of resources going to poverty reduction in Bangladesh and its impressive achievements in poverty reduction, a possibility of a strong association between the two cannot be overruled. In fact, a significant part of the poverty reduction has to be accounted for by the public expenditures on poverty alleviation. However, the issue is how the allocated public resources to poverty reduction can be made more efficient and effective. Secondly, a declining share of direct expenditures on poverty reduction makes the poorest and the most marginalised people more vulnerable. What can be done about it?

In order to make public expenditures on poverty reduction more efficient, macroeconomic and sectoral poverty reduction programmes and projects should be formulated with a concrete focus. A sensible implementation plan with an achievable timeline will safeguard against resource leakages. The effectiveness of such programmes and projects in alleviating poverty can also be enhanced if they are solidly anchored in Bangladesh's overall development plans aligned with its overall goals and objectives, and if the macroeconomic framework and sectoral policies are poverty-sensitive. Linking poverty alleviating measures with employment generation, social services, and pro-poor economic growth would make public resources for poverty reduction more effective.

Protection of the ultra-poor and the marginalised groups require increasing resources for direct expenditures for poverty reduction, not reducing them. It would require intensifying various existing social protection measures and exploring new innovative mechanisms. The need for all these measures has become even more important given that Bangladesh faces high inflation and there can be more external and internal shocks. The second phase of the National Social Security Strategy can be solidified. The Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets Programme (REOPA) can also be an effective instrument for poverty reduction among the poorest and the marginalised groups.

and his comrades, whom she dubs as "terrorists," attacked and harassed women who didn't comply, and even carried weapons, such as knives and chains, as scare tactics.

Should a reasonable skeptic, who relies on the independent investigation of the truth, believe that the same man who didn't believe in women's right to freedom of choice is now a changed "reformist" under the same regime that has committed human rights violations in relation to the Zan, Zendegi, Azadi (Woman, Life, Freedom) movement in Iran? Should I, a Bangladeshi citizen belonging to the Iranian diaspora, believe that Pezeshkian will, for instance, make any legislative amendments to dismantle gender apartheid? Or will he be able to ensure a stop to persecutions against non-Shiite religious minorities such as the Baha'is, who are barred from having tertiary education and government jobs, whose properties are confiscated, whose dead are denied the right to dignified burials?

Even if Pezeshkian is given the benefit of the doubt, what power does he hold at the end of the day? None, really. It is therefore disappointing to see every international news portal misleadingly labeling the new president as "reformist" or "moderate" or to see clickbait titles such as the BBC's "Iran's new president gives hope to some women and younger voters," when the content of the article itself goes on to say: "...with Ayatollah Khamenei having final say over government policy - there is little chance of real change," and "...regardless of Dr Pezeshkian's win, the supreme leader remains the 'puppeteer' in Iran."

WORLD POPULATION DAY

Bangladesh needs inclusive data for an equitable future



Dr Mohammad Mainul Islam
is professor & former chairman of the Department of
Population Sciences at the University of Dhaka.

DR MOHAMMAD MAINUL ISLAM

Today is World Population Day (WPD), and this year's theme is "Embracing the power of inclusive data towards a resilient and equitable future for all." Inclusive data means collecting data for all people, regardless of location, ethnicity, gender, or age. It involves representation, disaggregation, intersectionality of identities, multiple sources, privacy, and support of human resources and technical capacity. It is about closing the data gaps required for a fair and equitable society, and it is more than numbers where every person is seen, heard, and counted.

The key messages for the WPD 2024 as circulated by the United Nations are: (i) in a world of uncertainty and upheaval, we can achieve a peaceful and prosperous future by building resilient systems and societies using evidence-based solutions and reliable, inclusive data; (ii) data collection and analysis tools have vastly improved; yet these changes have also exposed significant information gaps and potential risks, including the misrepresentation or misuse of data; and (iii) countries and societies must champion data collection that counts people as they are, in all their complexity.

This year the world will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). Since adopting the ICPD Programme of Actions (PoA) in 1994 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, countries worldwide have been developing the necessary statistical data to track the goals and indicators developed by the United Nations. To measure progress of SDGs, inclusive data is crucial to enables us to see where change is required, allowing us to reach everyone and support them in realising their rights. The SDG progress report demonstrates where a country currently stands on inclusive data collection.

The SDG tracker of Bangladesh shows that almost two-third of all indicators used to monitor the 17 SDGs currently should be made available, but only one-third are updated or readily available. It will take less than six years to reach the SDGs benchmark, but more data will be needed—especially disaggregated data for development. More than half of the data are unavailable for specific goals like SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and SDG 14 (life below water). The number of updated data was reduced in 2023 but increased in 2024, which needs a causal explanation from the government. The Bangladesh government is implementing the SDGs at the district and upazila levels. The cabinet approved 39+1 priority indicators in 2018 to localise the SDGs because 39 were deemed necessary at the local level in the nation and had reinforcing effects on other targets. Another priority indicator was left in place to ensure that "no one is left behind," aligning with the requirements of a particular district or upazila and considering the specific circumstances of that geographic area. About five of these 39 priority indicators still need to be updated in the tracker. Another issue with this online tracker is that reviewing the data availability status of each goal's indicator can be confusing because the information is not synchronised. Many of the indicators are only partially mentioned. All these problems must be addressed and resolved immediately for this SDG tracker to function correctly.

While improvements in data collection have been made, data gaps have also been exposed. Significant gaps persist in the availability, quality, accessibility, and use of data in Bangladesh. For example, marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities, are not counted accurately in the latest population and housing census in 2022 leading to the possibility that more people will remain invisible to decision-makers. Inclusive data on disability means collecting data primarily on disability, sex, and age and incorporating other dimensions, such as income, ethnicity, location, and other factors. We need to analyse and critically use the data to develop policies to reach those who are most marginalised or are being left behind. The urgency of addressing these data gaps cannot be overstated, as it is crucial for the future of our society.

Another example can be given regarding the accuracy of the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in Bangladesh, an essential indicator of SDG 3 (good health and well-being). There has been no large-scale maternal mortality and health care survey after 2016. The MMR data, reported from Bangladesh Bureau of

our common agenda, keeping the population and its sub groups at the development centre. For example, Bangladesh should prioritise data on the most vulnerable communities, like adolescent mothers (ages 15-19), as adolescent childbirth is common in practice (24 percent, Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey, BDHS 2022).

More robust data systems drive diverse benefits, improving quality of life and livelihoods and leading to greater efficiencies in social programmes. An analysis published in September 2022 by the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data states that every dollar invested in strengthening data systems generates \$32 in economic benefits. This underscores the potential for significant positive change achieved through strategic investment in data systems. Thus, the United Nations (UN) recommends increasing domestic funding for data and statistics by 50 percent by 2030, along with urging donor agencies to raise the share of official development assistance for data to at least 0.7 percent by 2030.

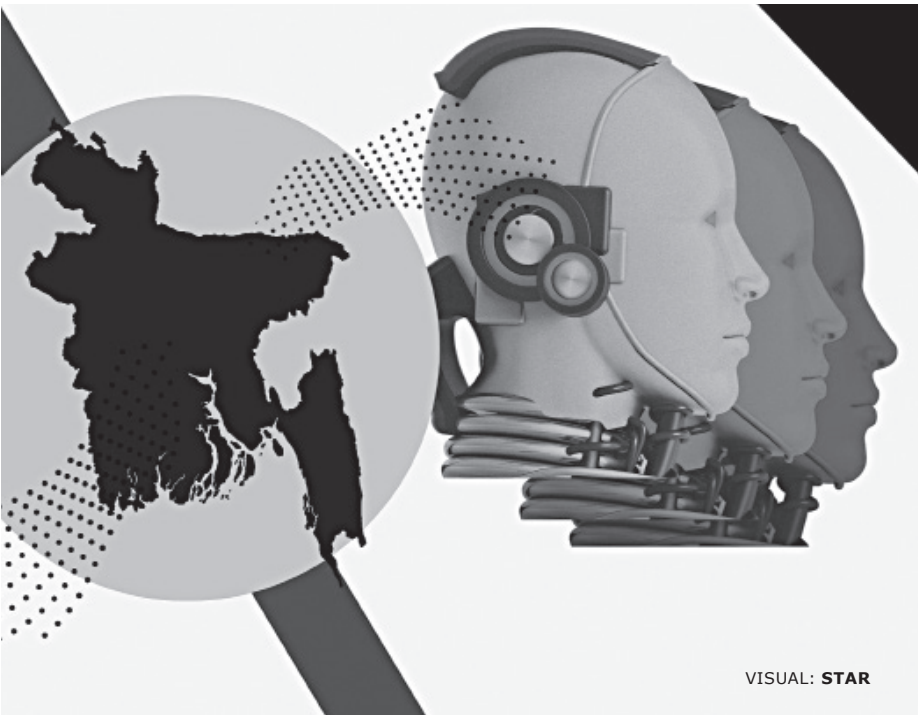
Although several SDG targets have been partially met, achieving full realisation is essential for expediting overall progress in Bangladesh. A few significant challenges to achieving the SDGs in Bangladesh are the unavailability of baseline data, lack of monitoring, and lack of coordination among the national targets stated in the national policies and the SDG target. Thus, establishing a national data repository or information bank that consolidates relevant data from each concerned organisation is necessary, and it can be linked with the SDGs tracker.



VISUAL: TEENI AND TUNI

Statistics' (BBS) Sample Vital Registration System (SVRS) that records vital events such as births, deaths, and causes of death, does not truly reflect the figure due to a shortage of the required sample size. As a result, reporting the MMR and its disaggregated figure from there for policy design and interventions is not appropriate. Thus, urgent efforts must be made to make quality data for all indicators available through effective multisectoral partnerships, coordination, and integration among stakeholders to strengthen and improve the country's data capacity. Decision-making depends heavily on data; obtaining high quality data is crucial for reaching the SDGs. Bangladesh needs more investment in inclusive data for a resilient and equitable future. Our country faces enormous challenges, but we can tackle them. Strong political commitment and the effective and timely implementation of such commitment are essential. Significant policies related to population and development need to be reformed and updated using the SDGs framework. We should pursue the SDGs and

Bangladesh has a population of more than 173 million (SVRS, 2023, BBS). This is a big number with big opportunities, and big challenges. A population of 173 million means there are over 173 million opportunities for a healthier Bangladesh empowered by rights and choices. Adequate and updated population data based on gender, ethnicity, class, religion, disability, etc., are necessary for inclusive development. There is evidence of adopting an inclusive approach to data collection in Bangladesh—data on transgender or Hijra were included in the 2022 Population and Housing Census. The key is to ensure equal access to opportunities and removing barriers to opportunities to harness the potential of all Bangladeshis, including marginalised or disadvantaged populations like women, young people, older people, people with disabilities, and migrants. The best way to cultivate demographic resilience is to support human rights, including individuals' rights and choices—that is the ultimate development.



VISUAL: STAR

Vision for an AI law in Bangladesh

Warda Ruheen Bristi and Shafin Haque Omlan
are research associates at Bangladesh Institute of
Governance and Management (BIGM).

WARDA RUHEEN BRISTI AND
SHAFIN HAQUE OMLAN

We may not notice it at first glance, but the world is going through a technological renaissance in the form of Artificial Intelligence. In the bustling heart of South Asia, Bangladesh also stands on the cusp of this technological renaissance. As artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming industries worldwide, the nation is facing an urgent call to draft forward-thinking AI policy guidelines. Imagine a future where Dhaka's traffic is managed by smart systems, farmers use AI to boost crop yields, and healthcare is revolutionised by predictive analytics. In the current situation, this thought might be farfetched, but this promising horizon can come sooner rather than later if Bangladesh can establish a policy guideline that can navigate its set of challenges and responsibilities. Bangladesh must utilise the AI wave with a blend of ambition and caution, ensuring that innovation does not eclipse ethics and inclusivity.

Crafting Bangladesh's AI policy is a bit like preparing the perfect biriyani: it requires just the right mix of ingredients to create something truly remarkable. The focus should be on blending robust international cooperation to ensure trustworthy AI, with a generous helping of digital infrastructure to provide the computing power needed for innovation. Stir in public awareness and civic engagement to keep society informed and involved, sprinkle generously with investments in public research capabilities, and don't forget to season with education and skill development to prepare the workforce for future challenges. Finally, top it off with initiatives to boost connectivity and digitalisation, and a strategic vision aligned with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) to ensure sustainable growth. When these elements come together, Bangladesh can set up a tech policy that's not only cutting-edge, but also inclusive and forward-thinking. So, what elements should be on the radar of policymakers when crafting this pivotal piece of legislation?

First of all, AI's transformative potential can only be fully realised if there's a skilled workforce to harness it. Thus, the AI Act must prioritise comprehensive education and training programmes. Integrating AI into school curriculum, establishing vocational training programmes, and offering scholarships for AI-related fields are essential steps. This not only prepares the next generation for AI-driven jobs but also ensures that the current workforce is not left behind.

To position Bangladesh as a leader in AI innovation, substantial investments in AI research and development (R&D) are crucial. This involves funding interdisciplinary research collaborations between universities, research institutions, and private industries. The goal should be to advance AI capabilities in key sectors like healthcare, agriculture, and manufacturing. Think about AI research centres and innovation hubs sprouting across the country, nurturing a vibrant ecosystem of startups and entrepreneurs. We need to build a digital infrastructure. For example, we can talk about the recent policy on AI that was adopted by Vietnam. Within 2030, they want to build an "AI ecosystem." It means a fluid incorporation of AI in the commercial and research sectors. This ecosystem may include various components that work together to foster innovation, ensure ethical standards, and drive the economic and societal benefits in the country. Most importantly, to foster AI innovation in Vietnam, the government is taking a comprehensive strategy focusing on human resource development, organisational construction, research and development, and investment in AI

enterprises. This includes deploying basic AI and data science skills through short and medium-term training courses for students and career-changing workers, attracting both domestic and foreign resources to build training centres, and establishing key research hubs at leading universities. Ultimately, the Vietnamese government wants to promote and attract investment capital for the growth of AI enterprises and brands in Vietnam.

Similarly, for AI to flourish, Bangladesh needs to prioritise investment in high-speed internet connectivity, cloud computing services, and data centres. This infrastructure will provide the necessary computing power and data storage capabilities for AI applications across various sectors. Building this infrastructure is another difficult but manageable task with the right collaborative efforts. If the government can encourage collaborations between itself, the private sector, and academia then Bangladesh can create a fertile ground for AI advancements tailored to local needs. And not only through local collaboration, but Bangladesh should also establish partnerships with other countries, international organisations, and tech companies to develop shared principles and standards for trustworthy AI. This can also position the country as a trustworthy player in the global AI landscape, attracting international investments and collaborations.

We have to remember that, in the current AI-driven world, data is the new oil. However, with great data comes great responsibility. Ensuring a robust data security infrastructure is paramount. The AI Act should mandate the use of cutting-edge encryption technologies, continuous monitoring systems, and regular security audits to protect sensitive information from cyber threats. This is not just about safeguarding individual privacy but also about building trust in AI systems. A data breach in a healthcare system powered by AI could have catastrophic consequences, undermining public confidence. Therefore, a comprehensive focus on data security is non-negotiable.

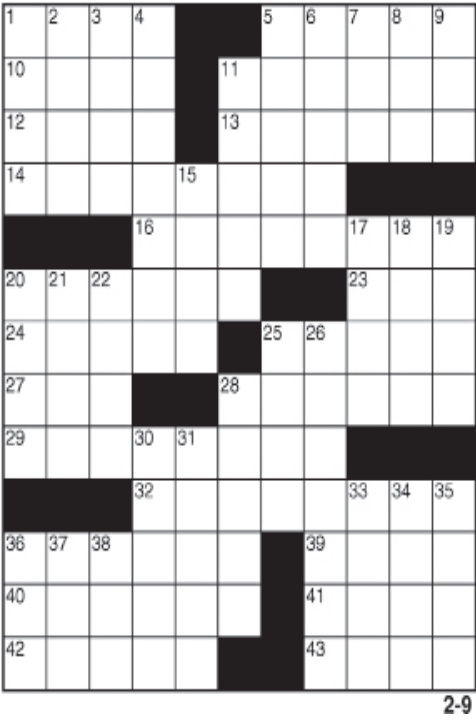
Another thing to note is that AI is a double-edged sword. While it has the potential to drive unprecedented progress, it also poses significant ethical challenges. The AI Act should establish clear guidelines for ethical AI deployment, ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness. It is very easy to misuse AI and promote misinformation or biases. Nowadays, AI can create realistic but fake images, videos, and audio (deepfakes), which can be used to spread misinformation, manipulate public opinion, or damage reputations. It also increases fraud and scams because there are no established guidelines to use of AI systems. AI can perpetuate and amplify biases present in their training data, leading to discriminatory practices in hiring, lending, law enforcement, and more. So, establishing data protection laws to safeguard personal information and fostering transparency in AI decision-making processes are critical steps toward ethical AI.

All in all, crafting an AI Act for Bangladesh goes beyond technicalities, it centres on people and public engagement. Essential initiatives include public awareness campaigns to educate citizens on AI's benefits and risks, and involving diverse stakeholders—civil society, academia, and industry—in policymaking to ensure transparency and accountability. The Act should also align with Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) principles which emphasises innovation, digitalisation, and interconnectedness. By balancing innovation with regulation and addressing local needs while adhering to global standards, Bangladesh can harness AI's transformative power for an inclusive, ethical, and sustainable digital future.

This is Part II of a two-part series. The first part was published in page 9 of The Daily Star on June 23, 2024.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
- 1 Guinness of film
5 Get naked
10 Costa —
11 Option
12 Love, Latin-style
13 Forest worker
14 Genuine
16 Something for nothing
20 Benders
23 Knight's title
24 Seaport setting
25 Hue
27 IRS employee
28 Dead ducks
29 Site of some diners
32 Christmas season
36 Wan
39 Concept
40 German subs
41 Castle circler
42 Chili need
43 Building wings
- DOWN
- 1 Swift horse
2 Long ride
3 Bus. sch. course
4 Wine bottles
5 Hue
6 Copier need
7 Equip
8 Water cooler
9 Pricing word
11 Calls out
15 Stew
17 Cruise stop
18 Designer Christian
19 Goes astray
20 Wound reminder
21 Possum of the comics
22 Pro —
25 Write an app
26 Former
28 Adorns, in a way
30 Singer Bob
31 Legal actions
33 Pop star
34 Start a hand
35 Puts away
36 Place for a pint
37 Penny prez
38 Mauna —



TUESDAY'S ANSWERS



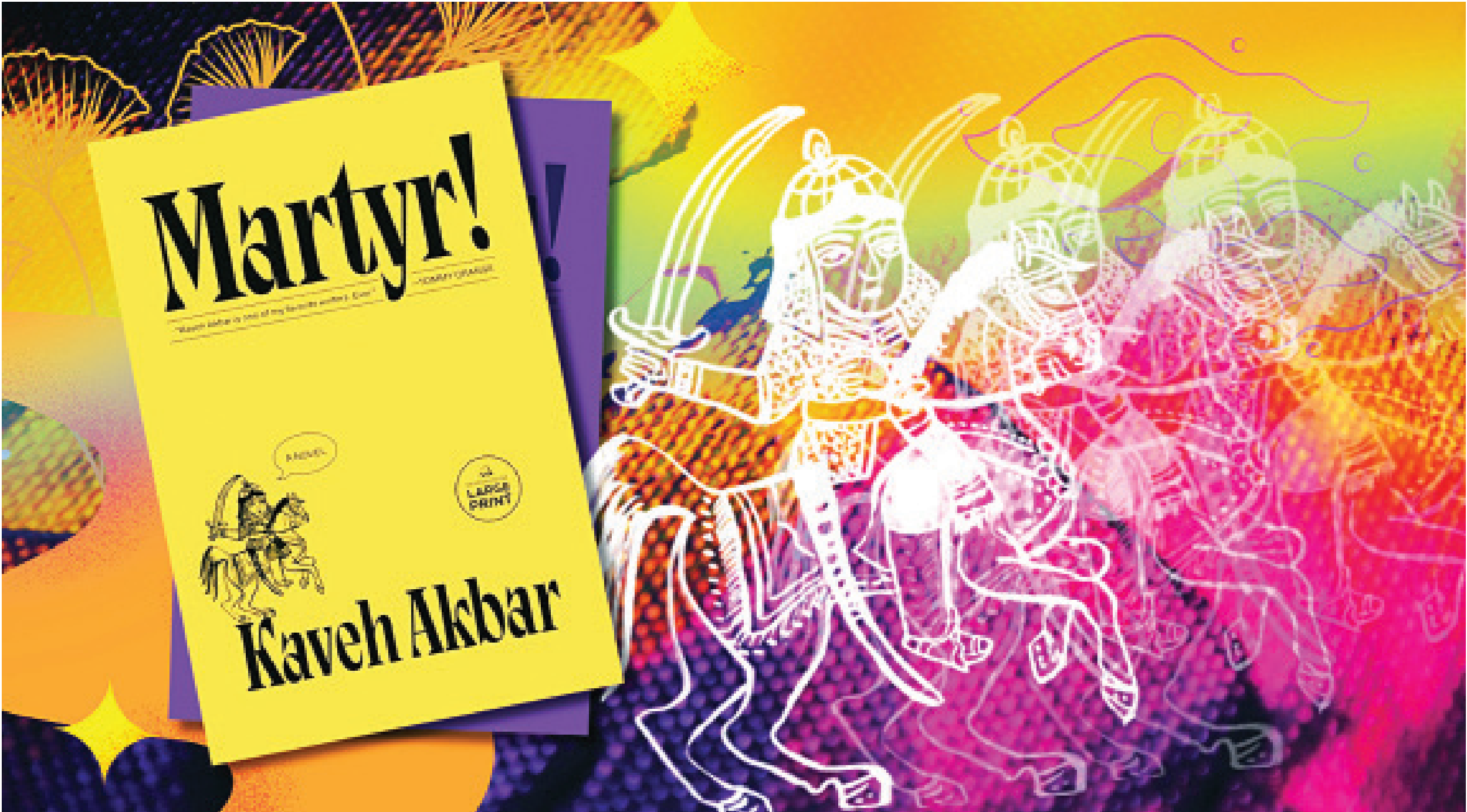


ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

BOOK REVIEW: FICTION

When death is a performance

A review of Kaveh Akbar’s ‘Martyr!’ (Knopf, 2024)

The reader realises soon that ‘Martyr!’ becomes vibrant and unforgettable only when the story rewinds to Tehran and Arash.

SHAHRIAR SHAAMS

Kaveh Akbar’s *Martyr!* is unruly and endearing. Akbar’s years as a poet has given his debut novel an honesty that shines through the book’s arduous structure. And for all of *Martyr!*’s exhilarating tone and emotional trek, the difficulties of writing a novel on addiction, martyrdom, death, and meaning is evident when one reads it. Cyrus Shams, the main character of *Martyr!*, is not a complete stand-in for Akbar, but the author lends much of his personality to his creation. They both have moved to the USA from Iran as a toddler, both have suffered from addiction and subsequently found in poetry a strength that aids their recovery.

Yet the strongest moments of

Martyr! are those set in an Iran Cyrus would have no recollection of, where his uncle Arash, a soldier during the Iran-Iraq war, rode a horse through the battlefield with a flashlight at night. “He was meant to look like an angel. He was meant to inspire the dying men to die with dignity, conviction. To keep them from suicide.” By comparison, the America where Cyrus is raised and goes to university is unremarkable. Here Cyrus dreams of a suicide that would be meaningful. He plans to write a book of martyrs (snatches of poetry from this work-in-progress pepper throughout *Martyr!* and often tend to outshine the novel proper). Akbar spends pages to paint Cyrus’s university life as one of jolly bohemia full of open-

mics at college-town cafes and casual experimentation of drugs and literary styles, yet it is those images of Arash before, comforting soldiers as an angel of death that I could not shake away long after finishing the book. Briefly after Cyrus is born in Tehran, the Americans missile down an Iranian passenger flight, killing 290 people on board. Cyrus loses his mother Roya, who was to visit Arash in Dubai. Cyrus’s father, overwhelmed with grief, soon immigrates to the very country that has killed his wife—an America where the father works at a chicken farm day in and out, where the library launches Cyrus into a world of imagination and creativity. “You’re the most American kid I know,” his sponsor, Gabe, tells him after an AA meeting. His only connection to Iran

now being an annual birthday phone-call to his uncle back home. The reader realises soon that *Martyr!* becomes vibrant and unforgettable only when the story rewinds to Tehran and Arash. Much of *Martyr!* however takes place over four days in Brooklyn, New York, where Cyrus is enamoured with an Iranian performance artist documenting herself dying from cancer in the form of an art exhibition. Cyrus believes she holds some needed insight into his obsession with martyrs, one that would surely benefit his book. Though in my experience, poets often tend to write mediocre novels, Kaveh Akbar’s *Martyr!* is too heartfelt to be brushed aside. His prose reminds one of Turgenev, where absences of a tighter plot cannot subdue the

intelligence and magnanimity of the all too real characters. As Cyrus and Orkideh, the dying artist, confer on the nature of a meaningful death, Kaveh Akbar cites Hamlet, the ambassador of death himself. “He felt like Hamlet,” Cyrus thinks, “just moping around waiting for the world to assuage his grief...” but as Orkideh prepares to die after shocking Cyrus to his core, one sees that Cyrus may feel like Hamlet, but as he eagerly and passively witnesses the performance of dying, he really is Horatio. He lives to tell the tale. Shahriar Shaams has written for Dhaka Tribune, The Business Standard, and The Daily Star. Find him on instagram: @shahriar.shaams.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Every Trump voter is certainly not a white supremacist, just as every white person in the Jim Crow South was not a white supremacist. But every Trump voter felt it was acceptable to hand the fate of the country over to one.”

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*

BOOK REVIEW: FICTION

When fiction and nonfiction create a literary supernova

Review of ‘The House of Doors’ (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023) by Tan Twan Eng

ZERTAB QUADERI

When a book mentions one of my favourite authors, W. Somerset Maugham, and the short description suggests betrayal, intrigue, secret affairs, political uprisings, failed marriages, and a whodunnit, there’s little I can do but take it. Longlisted for The Booker Prize 2023, *The House of Doors* by the Malaysian author, Tan Twan Eng, is a masterfully crafted literary work of fictional and nonfictional characters in a smudged sphere of fact and fiction. It shows Eng’s length and depth of research and his imaginative prowess. Besides having Maugham somewhat in the centre stage, the author uses other real characters, real events, and characters from Maugham’s novels and plays to create a story that spans over 30-odd years. Flashbacks of flashbacks with parallel plots, sprinkled with suspense and thrill are the ingredients for this unputdownable read. Immaculately structured with neat chapter divisions that mention the character from whose point of view the story is told, the year, and the location, the book ensures we don’t get lost in the temporal and spatial maze.

Maugham, in the book, is the catalyst that leads the main character, Lesley Hamlyn, to spill the beans from her past and present, forming the bulk of the novel. The story begins and ends with Lesley in two different countries and continents. Maugham plays second fiddle and shares glimpses of his life—his sexual orientation, financial and marital straits, emotional dependence on an exploitative “secretary” who travels the world with him, and his special knack for sniffing out dark secrets and scandals which he turns into popular novels, short stories, and plays that keep him from falling into financial ruin. Reeking of British colonialism, we see the white society in Malaya in the earlier decades of the 20th century living in the lap of luxury. Lesley and her lawyer husband, Robert, live in a mansion and are waited upon hand and foot by the natives. The short but powerful sketches of the nanny, rickshaw pullers, gardeners, and other house staff and those working in Penang sharply contrast their white masters and shed light on the vivid difference between the coloniser and the colonised. However, there is an undercurrent of rising

consciousness against imperialism when Chinese revolutionary, Sun Yat Sen, is introduced. Lesley joins a clandestine group and lends help to the cause of breaking free from the current dynasty, signalling a desire to minimise class differences. During these meetings, she falls for Arthur, a fellow member and a Chinese, and carries on her affair in the eponymous house. The doors in *The House of Doors* lead Lesley to find peace, love, and refuge from her farcical marriage. The theme of masks is explored through the characters and objects, most notably the doors. A door

is synonymous with a mask and shows the outside world something that may be the opposite of what is concealed beyond it. In *The House of Doors*, we see it in the failed marriages of both Maugham and Robert. Both men are homosexuals, yet, they and their wives wear masks and are forced to pretend everything is fine to avoid societal judgments and ostracisation. Similarly, under the cover of The Philomatic Society, Sun Yat Sen carried on his revolutionary meetings and activities at a place with nondescript doors. And, finally, the slightly modified Chinese ideogram of a door

inscribed on a Maugham book cover comes to Lesley in the guise of a letter and sets her on her path to reuniting with Arthur in Penang after 40 long years. Letters also play a big role in *The House of Doors*. Through Lesley, Maugham gets the fodder and inspiration to write ‘The Letter’, a short story and play based on the true events of a murder case against Ethel Proudlock in 1911. Among other things, the book explores the fragility and strength of relationships, human resilience and frailties, and the duality within us and the larger society. The atmospheric novel depicts the multicultural heritage of Malaya and its tropical and coastal landscape. It’s loaded with Eastern symbolism and social, cultural, political, historical, and personal events, making it a fascinating read. A cerebral exercise in connecting the dots, I immensely enjoyed straddling the blurred boundaries of fact and fiction. Zertab Quaderi is an SEO English content writer and social media marketing consultant by day and a reader of fiction and nonfiction books by night. In between, she travels and dabbles in watercolour painting.

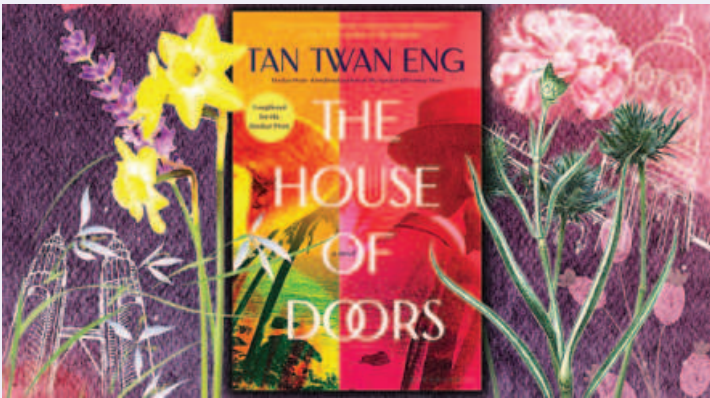


ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

‘Spirit of sacrifice’ & ‘genius’ Yamal pave way for Spain

At the age of 16 years and 362 days, Spain's Lamine Yamal became the youngest goalscorer at a major tournament (World Cup/Euros), a record previously held by Brazil's Pele against Wales at the 1958 World Cup (17y 239d).

Spain are the first side to win six games at a single edition of the

UEFA European Championship finals.

This is the first time France have been eliminated at the semifinal stage of a major tournament (World Cup/Euros) since Euro 1996.

Spain are only the second side to reach as many as five

finals of the UEFA European Championship after Germany (6).

Randal Kolo Muani's opening goal in the eighth minute of the game was France's first goal from open play at Euro 2024, while it was their 87th non-penalty attempt of the tournament.



AGENCIES

A touch of ‘genius’ from wunderkind Lamine Yamal and a testament to what can be done by improvising on a proven style of play – both of these were on display when Spain dispatched France 2-1 in the Euro 2024 semifinal in Munich on Tuesday night.

Keeping a majority of possession and frustrating opponents by denying them opportunities to be creative – this had been the style of play for Spain for over a decade, during which they won the 2010 World Cup and triumphed in the 2008 and 2012 editions of the Euros.

However, since their last Euro success 12 years ago, that typical Spanish style of play had somewhat been neutralised with their national team unable to win any major silverware after that.

But Spain coach Luis de la Fuente developed on that possession-based football, nurturing a

team of youngsters he had overseen from the age level, and the 63-year-old coach is now enjoying the fruits of it as his team is just one step away from winning the Euro 2024.

De la Fuente hailed his team's quality and cohesion in coming from a goal down to beat France and reach the Euro 2024 final, a feat he took no credit for and said was all about his players' insatiable hunger for success.

De la Fuente said his team had versatility and outstanding individual qualities, which when put together created a special brand of football that would be on show in Sunday's final, regardless of whether the opponent is England or Netherlands.

De la Fuente also hailed his young side who, according to the coach, has not been afraid of sacrificing their dominance over the ball in return for being more aggressive, especially offensively.

“They are very generous in their efforts and work rate. This is just one more sign that this is an insatiable team, that they want to keep improving with the spirit of

sacrifice,” he said.

Spain went behind to an early goal from France's Randal Kolo Muani before teenager Yamal levelled with a brilliant strike in the 21st minute, then Dani Olmo added a second just a few minutes after.

De la Fuente said seeing 16-year-old winger Yamal's performance against France was like watching “a genius”.

Named player of the match, Yamal became the youngest-ever male Euros goalscorer.

“We have seen a genius, the product of a genius,” De la Fuente told reporters.

“He's a player we have to take care of – I have to give him the advice to keep working with the same humility and keep his feet on the floor.

“He would keep growing but this maturity and attitude at such a young age is like that of a more experienced player.

“We are lucky he is Spanish and we can enjoy him for many more years.”

Yamal became the competition's youngest player in Spain's first match

and also three on his run to the final. De la Fuente reserved the rest of including “We've been about Lamine I have 26 great continued the “I know (Olmo) and the potential am grateful to him This new look of De la Fuente has already garnered a lot of praise from experts and fans alike, but for the Spanish coach, the circle will only be completed if he can inspire his team to land the elusive major tournament silverware come Sunday night in Berlin against either England or the Netherlands.

against Croatia provided assists team's final. F u e n t e praise for his team, Olmo, talking b u t players,” coach. very well he has...I too.” S p a i n already

HP squad formed with eye on future Australia Tests

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday named a few Test cricketers in their four-day High Performance (HP) squad for the upcoming tour in Australia, keeping in mind their 2027 Future Tours Programme (FTP) schedule.

Shadman Islam, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, and Shahadat Hossain Dipu, all part of the current Test setup, are set to tour Australia for their maiden outing in the Oceania region.

The national team is not accustomed to touring Australia regularly, with their last and only Test tour occurring in 2003 which featured two Tests and three ODIs. In 2008, Bangladesh toured Australia again, but only for a three-match ODI series. Since then, the Tigers have fared in Australia for two global tournaments: 2015 ODI World Cup and 2022 T20 World Cup.

As HP team are also scheduled to play a 50-over series and a T20 tournament involving Big Bash teams and a Pakistani side, the selectors included several white-ball cricketers in their squads: Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Afif Hossain, and Shamim Hossain, alongside some budding cricketers fit for the formats.

Although BCB's plan to send some of their Test cricketers to gain experience on Australian soil is receiving applause from different corners,



questions remain on whether their selection for the white-ball matches is justified. Afif, who was a traveling reserve during Bangladesh's recent T20 World Cup campaign, hasn't played a game for Bangladesh since December last year, while Shamim's last outing in national colours came during last year's New Zealand tour.

A 28-year-old pacer, Abu Hider Rony, also found his place in both white-ball squads despite his last international match for Bangladesh being in 2018. National selector Hannan Sarkar claimed they formed the squads prioritising players for specific formats and picking some players who could go on to represent them at top level.

“We have a few Test cricketers in our four-day team. As we are scheduled to play Tests in Australia in 2027 according to our FTP schedule, we want to prioritise these players,” Hannan was quoted in a BCB video released yesterday.

“Similar goes for one-day and T20 teams. I think it's a very good stage where the players can express themselves and gather experience,” he added.

HP chairman Naimur Rahman Durjoy earlier insisted that they have arranged the tour for pipeline cricketers' betterment to “give game-time opportunities”, and now it's up to them to “utilise the opportunity and take themselves to next level”.

“We want to continue the process and increase the facilities from the board,” he added.

Whether the series will have a significant impact on Bangladesh cricket in the future remains to be seen.



MESSI ENJOYING ‘last battles’ for Argentina

AFP, East Rutherford

Lionel Messi said he was enjoying his “last battles” with Argentina after the 37-year-old found the net in a 2-0 win over Canada on Tuesday to book a place in the Copa America final.

After a lacklustre display against Ecuador in the quarterfinals, Messi looked back to himself again, connecting with Angel Di Maria and strike partner Julian Alvarez, who also scored.

“I'm living it like I lived it in the last Copa America, in the last World Cup...these are the last battles and I'm enjoying them to the maximum,” he told TyC Sports after the win set up a meeting with

Uruguay or Colombia in the final.

Messi, now playing with Inter Miami in Major League Soccer, has yet to indicate whether he will continue to play with Argentina in the 2026 World Cup.

But asked about Messi's “last battles” comment, Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni asked for calm.

“We have to leave him alone, he knows that we will not be the ones to close the door on him. He can stay with us as long as he wants, even when he retires...Let him decide what he wants,” he said.

Messi has chance to win a third straight major title with his national side following their 2022 World Cup triumph and their 2021 Copa America win.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner

referenced veteran team-mates Di Maria and Nicolas Otamendi and said that the success was validation for the difficult barren years the team had suffered.

“The truth is that it's crazy what this group has done, what the Argentina national team has been doing,” Messi said on TyC Sports.

“It's not easy for us to be in a final again, for us to compete again to be champions,” he added.

Messi also added that it has been a difficult tournament for Argentina.

“It's a difficult Copa, evenly matched, with very bad pitches, with high temperatures, very tough teams, and for us to be in a final again is something to enjoy,” he said.

Krejciikova sets up Rybakina clash

REUTERS, London

Barbora Krejciikova reached her first Wimbledon semifinal on Wednesday with a 6-4, 7-6(4) win over Latvian 13th seed Jelena Ostapenko in the battle of former French Open champions.

The Czech 31st seed kept her composure from the back of the court to force her opponent into 35 unforced errors across the match as Ostapenko's bid for a second Grand Slam title since her first in 2017 unravelled on Court One.

The 27-year-old Ostapenko had power in her serve but struggled to place it, landing less than 50% of her first serve during the opening set. Krejciikova, French Open champion in 2021, broke in the third game and went on to clinch the opener.

Ostapenko rallied to break her opponent in the second set and open a 4-1 lead. However, mistakes once again dogged her game and Krejciikova put together a run of four winning games to go 5-4 up.

The match went to a tiebreak and a brilliant

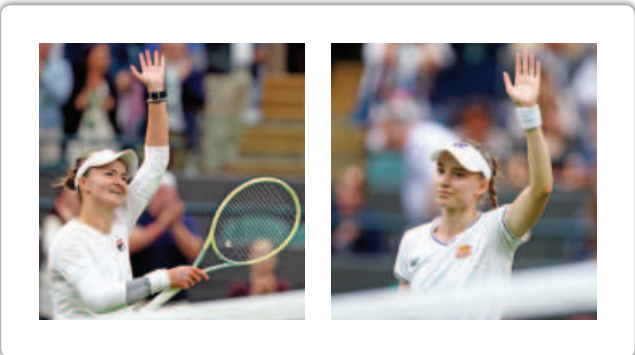
crosscourt forehand from Krejciikova found the far line to give her a mini-break from which she went on to close out the match, sealing her first win over the Latvian in their four most recent encounters.

The Czech will face 2022 Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina, who beat Elina Svitolina 6-3, 6-2, in the other quarterfinal.

Over the course of the last five days, the grasscourt major had started to resemble an indoor tournament with matches on the two main showcourts taking place under cover.

The retractable roof on Centre Court was finally open under a clear blue sky on Wednesday as Rybakina produced a majestic performance in front of Britain's Queen Camilla to reach the last four for the second time in three years.

The Russian-born Kazakh, the only women's champion left in the draw, sealed the first set with a 115mph thunderbolt and fired down another ace – her seventh of the match – to complete the one-sided victory.



England pacer Gus Atkinson celebrates after casting West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite on Day 1 of the first Test at Lord's yesterday. On his debut, the 26-year-old right-arm pacer was the destroyer-in-chief for his side as he returned seven wickets for 45 to help bundle out the visitors for 121.





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UNHRC adopts resolution for Rohingya return

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations Human Rights Council yesterday unanimously adopted a resolution emphasising on sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis through their repatriation by creating a congenial environment in Myanmar's Rakhine and ensuring justice and accountability for them.

The resolution was adopted during the ongoing 56th session of the council in Geneva, according to a statement issued by the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN Office and other international organisations in Geneva.

The statement says Bangladesh took the initiative for the resolution titled "The situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar" and it was placed on behalf of all member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

The resolution was adopted following intense and long discussion.

Shanchita Haque, acting permanent representative of the Bangladesh mission, said with limited resources and different challenges, it is not possible for Bangladesh to give shelter to the huge number of Rohingyas for an indefinite period.

"The international community should support Bangladesh in the repatriation by realising the importance of the causes of Bangladesh's concerns," she added.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



A side of the approach road of the Charabari bridge in Tangail Sadar has been devoured by the Dhaleshwari due to strong currents. Road communications between the district town and five unions have been disrupted, causing sufferings to thousands in the char areas. The photo was taken yesterday. Story on Page 5.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

Pakistan's ISI gets power to intercept calls

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's ISI has been given the power to track criminal and terrorist activities and the government would ensure it did not infringe people's lives and privacy.

"The federal government in the interest of national security and in the apprehension of any offence, is pleased to authorise officers ... to intercept calls and messages or to trace calls through any telecoms system," said the notice, seen by Reuters.

The move was opposed in parliament by the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan.

Khan had previously backed the ISI's surveillance of politicians' telephone calls, or even his own, in the absence of legal authorisation.

A leader of the party, SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

BIRTH CONTROL ITEMS

Govt stock nearing exhaustion

RASHIDUL HASAN

The government's family planning efforts are likely to be seriously hindered as supplies of contraceptives at the field-level offices are running dangerously low.

At present, there is no injectable contraceptive in any upazila and the stock of birth control pills will run out in a few months, according to officials of the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP). The stock of implants has also run out.

The reason for the supply running low is a halt in procurement for months due to a legal battle at the High Court.

Although the legal battle has ended recently and the procurement process has resumed, the DGFP officials cannot give a timeline for when the birth prevention materials, which are distributed for free, will be available at the field level.

Subsequently, the DGFP has started rationing and redistributing the current stock, they added.

The eligible couples in Bangladesh are provided seven options for contraception:

WORLD POPULATION DAY

STATE OF FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMME

- 2.81 eligible couples
- No injections at any upazila
- DGFP started rationing contraceptive materials
- 37pc of eligible couples receive contraceptives from govt
- Shortage likely to increase mother and child mortality

permanent system for male and female, intrauterine devices, implants, oral pills, condoms and injectables.

At the end of May, there is no stock of the oral contraceptive pill Sukhi (3rd gen) in 287 upazilas, according to the DGFP stock status report. There is no stock of Sukhi (2nd Gen) in 414 upazilas.

The stock of the other oral contraceptive pill Apon is 13.33 million cycles and was projected to run out in June, according to the report.

While procurement of 45 million cycles of Sukhi (3rd gen) is under process, it will take several months to get the supplies in hand, according to DGFP officials.

There are no injectables in 462 upazilas. The stock of 0.151 million vials was supposed to run out soon, too.

The current stock of condoms is 20.32 million, and this stock can be used up to November.

Population experts fear that the scarcity of birth control materials will increase mother and child mortality rates as eligible couples might go for an unintended pregnancy causing abortion.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 2

MYANMAR CONFLICT

Armed group claims control of town in Shan state

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar ethnic minority fighters said yesterday they have seized a town along a key trade highway to China following days of clashes with junta troops.

The town of Naungcho "is totally ours," General Tar Bhone Kyaw of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) told AFP.

Earlier yesterday a military source told AFP that ethnic minority fighters were in control of "most" of Naungcho.

Myanmar's northern Shan state has been rocked by clashes since late last month when an alliance of ethnic armed groups renewed an offensive along the highway that runs from second city Mandalay to China's Yunnan province.

Naungcho is around 50 kilometres (30 miles) along the highway from the former British hill station of Pyin Oo Lwin, home to the military's elite officer training academy.

Another road from the town leads to Taunggyi, the capital of Shan state. AFP was unable to reach a junta spokesman for comment.

Myanmar's borderlands are home to myriad ethnic armed groups who have battled the military since independence from Britain in 1948 for autonomy and control of lucrative resources.

Ukraine will stop Putin

Biden tells Nato in forceful speech, promises new air defences for Kyiv

REUTERS, Washington

US President Joe Biden pledged to forcefully defend Ukraine against Russia's invasion at the Nato summit in Washington on Tuesday evening, using the global stage to try to show allies at home and abroad that he can still lead.

Biden, 81, has endured 12 days of withering questions about his fitness for office as some of his fellow Democrats on Capitol Hill and campaign donors fear that he will lose the November 5 election after a halting debate performance on June 27.

"(Vladimir) Putin wants nothing less, nothing less, than Ukraine's total subjugation ... and to wipe Ukraine off the map," Biden said in his welcome to Nato member states to the summit, referring to the Russian president. "Ukraine can and will stop Putin."

Biden spoke off of a teleprompter with a strong and confident voice and largely avoided the verbal flubs and signs of confusion that marked his debate performance.

"Today Nato is stronger than it's ever been in its history," he said. Biden also announced a major package of air defences for Ukraine.

The air defences "will help to protect Ukrainian cities, civilians, and soldiers," Biden said in a joint statement with other leaders, adding that they would look to

send dozens more shorter range systems in the coming months.

The US pledge comes on top of two new Patriot systems already being given by Germany and Romania, and one the Netherlands has said it is putting together with parts from other allies, reports Reuters.

The centrepiece of the Nato summit is set to be new commitments of military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the summit would "further strengthen" the war-torn country's path to Nato membership.

Zelensky, who arrived in Washington on Tuesday and is due to meet with Biden today, has said Ukraine needs a minimum of seven Patriot systems.

"We are fighting for additional security guarantees for Ukraine - and these are weapons and finances, political support," he said on social media.

Ukraine ultimately wants to join Nato to ward against further future attacks by Russia but candidates have to be approved by all of the alliance's members, some of which are wary of provoking a direct conflict with Russia.

Some members want the alliance to make clear Ukraine is moving toward Nato "irreversibly" and are keen for language in a summit statement beyond the alliance's pledge last year that "Ukraine's future is in Nato."



Scaloni hails grit of Messi & Co

REUTERS, East Rutherford

Argentina's path to the Copa America final has been no bed of roses, coach Lionel Scaloni said, as he lauded his players for their performance in Tuesday's 2-0 semifinal win over Canada.

Canada, ranked 48th in the world, played high-energy football and looked to turn the match into a physical battle but Argentina's quality shone through in the end.

Julian Alvarez and Lionel Messi scored to secure Argentina's spot in the final of a third straight major tournament after their victories at the 2022 World Cup and Copa America in 2021.

"It is extremely tough to reach another final. It is tough because we know how hard it is to get there," Scaloni told reporters.

"The bar has been set very high. Everyone thought it was going to be a bed of roses and it wasn't like that at all. Canada proved it today by being a very difficult opponent."

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



Argentina superstar Lionel Messi celebrates scoring his team's second goal as the first goal-scorer Julian Alvarez chases him during their 2-0 win against Canada in the first semifinal of Copa America at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Mummified climber found in Peru 22 yrs later



REUTERS, Santiago

Peruvian police and mountain rescue workers recovered the body of an American climber who went missing in 2002 as glaciers in Peru's highest mountain and surrounding area continue to retreat.

The mummified, skeletal corpse still had well-preserved climbing boots, crampons and clothing, as well as a driver's license and passport belonging to William Stampfl.

Stampfl is suspected to have died in an avalanche more than 20 years ago.

In a statement, police said they recovered his body on July 5 at an altitude of 5,200 metres (17,060.37 ft), well below Huascaran's 6,768-metre summit.