

'Dangerous times' ahead

Says Nobel laureate Ressa after Meta ends US fact-checking programme

AFP, Manila

Philippine Nobel laureate Maria Ressa yesterday warned of "extremely dangerous times ahead" in an interview with AFP after social media giant Meta ended its US fact-checking programme on Facebook and Instagram.

Ressa and the Rappler news site she co-founded have spent years fighting online disinformation while battling court cases filed under former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, whose drug war killed thousands of people.

The veteran journalist and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021 said Meta's decision meant "extremely dangerous times ahead" for journalism, democracy and social media users.

"Mark Zuckerberg says it's a free speech issue - that's completely wrong," Ressa told AFP at Rappler's newsroom in Manila. "Only if you're profit driven can you claim that; only if you want power and money can you claim that. This is about safety."

SCAM CENTRE RAID Philippines arrests 400 foreigners

AFP, Manila

Around 400 foreign nationals were arrested yesterday in a "large-scale" raid on a suspected online scam farm in Manila, the national immigration agency said.

Authorities raided a building and found workers allegedly engaged in online scam operations targeting victims abroad.

International concern has grown in recent years over similar scam operations in Asia.

"Their operations were found to be in violation of immigration laws and posed significant risks to the public," Fortunato Manahan, the Bureau of Immigration intelligence division chief, said.



A firefighter conducts search and rescue operation with a rescue dog at a village following the earthquake that struck Tingri county, in Shigatse, Tibet Autonomous Region, China yesterday. More than 400 people trapped by rubble have been rescued, Chinese officials said yesterday, with an unknown number still unaccounted for in freezing weather a day after a strong tremor rocked the Himalayan foothills.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Wildfires tear through LA area

More than 30,000 people evacuate their homes; emergency declared

REUTERS, Los Angeles

More than 30,000 people evacuated their homes as a wildfire tore through a coastal area of Los Angeles in just a few hours, and a second blaze some 30 miles (50 km) inland was rapidly spreading yesterday.

Numerous buildings were destroyed and nearly 3,000 acres (1,200 hectares) were burned in the upscale Pacific Palisades area between the beach towns of Santa Monica and Malibu, officials said. The area is home to many film and music stars.

Highways were jammed with people fleeing the inferno as plumes of smoke and flames rose in the sky over Los Angeles on Tuesday night. The fire has not been contained by yesterday morning and Governor Gavin Newsom has declared a state of emergency.



Pacific Palisades resident Cindy Festa said that as she evacuated, fires were "this close to the cars," demonstrating with her thumb and forefinger.

People left their cars on Palisades Drive. Burning up the hillside. The palm trees - everything is going," Festa said from her car.

A fire official told local television station KTLA that several people were

injured in the Palisades Fire, some with burns to faces and hands. One female firefighter had suffered a head injury.

Hollywood actor James Woods said on X he was able to evacuate his Pacific Palisades house but added: "I do not know at this moment if our home is still standing."

The second blaze, dubbed the Eaton Fire, broke out some 30 miles (50 km) inland in Altadena, near Pasadena, and increased in size to 1,000 acres (400 hectares) from 200 acres in a few hours, according to Cal Fire.

Almost 100 residents from a nursing home in Pasadena were evacuated, CBS News said. Video showed elderly residents, many in wheelchairs and on gurneys, crowded onto a smoky and windswept parking lot as fire trucks and ambulances attended.



Pro-Yoon protesters take part in a rally to support impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol near his official residence in Seoul, South Korea yesterday. Yoon faces a new and potentially more robust attempt to arrest him for insurrection after a top investigator vowed to do whatever it takes to break a security blockade and take in the embattled leader.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Le Papotin' run by autistic journos hits newsstands

AFP, Paris

A French magazine produced by autistic journalists went on sale on newsstands for the first time yesterday, further raising the profile of a project that has already made waves on television.

'Le Papotin' has an editorial team of around 40 journalists with autism spectrum disorders who produce a yearly magazine that features high-profile celebrity interviews and cultural content.

Normally print editions are sold via its website, but they were distributed to around 3,000 shops and newsstands in France, with a run of 10,000 copies - three times the usual number, owner Prisma Media announced.

Prisma, the biggest magazine publisher in France, said it had "worked with its different partners" to ensure 'Le Papotin' was distributed for free with a cover price of 10 euros. The front page of the 2025 edition features French musician Philippe Katerine who leapt to global fame during the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics in July when he appeared painted blue and almost naked in a controversial scene that was likened to Jesus's "Last Supper".

The idea behind Le Papotin has been adapted for a hit television show that sees the magazine's journalists interview top public figures, with often touching and revealing results.



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

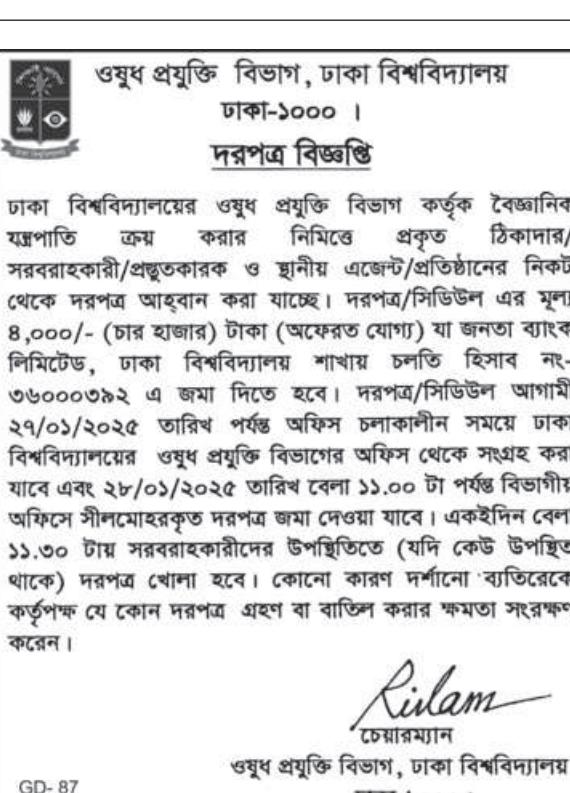
Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance
Support to Sustainable Graduation Project
Building # 08, Planning Commission Complex
Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207

Memo No: 09.00.0000.228.07.129.23.12

Date: 08/01/2025

Request for Expression of Interest (REOI) for Hiring of consultancy services for a study on "WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies: Impact and Way Forward for Bangladesh"

General Information	
1. Ministry / Division	Economic Relations Division (ERD), Ministry of Finance
2. Agency	Development Effectiveness Wing, ERD
3. Name of Procuring Entity	Project Director, Support to Sustainable Graduation Project (SSGP)
4. Procuring Entity package	SD-17-20(4)/24-25
5. Procuring Entity District	Dhaka
6. Expression of Interest for	WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies: Impact and Way Forward for Bangladesh
7. EOI Ref No.	09.00.0000.228.07.129.23.12
8. Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	08/01/2025
Key Information	
9. Procurement method	QCBS (Quality and Cost-Based Selection)
Funding Information	
10. Budget and Source of Funds	Development Budget
11. Development Partners	DRGA-CF, Japan
Particular Information	
12. Project/ Programme Code	223034000
13. Project/ Programme Name	Support to Sustainable Graduation Project (SSGP)
14. EoI Closing Date and Time	29/01/2025 up to 12.00 PM
Information for Applicants	
15. Brief Description of the Assignment	Marine overfishing threatens marine sustainability and food security, worsened by harmful fisheries subsidies and illegal fishing. SDG 14.6 aims to eliminate such subsidies. In 2022, WTO members agreed to ban subsidies linked to IUU fishing and overfished stocks, with exemptions for developing countries. However, no consensus was reached on subsidies. In Ministerial Conference held in 2023, a related draft proposal also failed to reach consensus. Now Support to Sustainable Graduation Project (SSGP) plans a study to assess the WTO agreement's impact and devise strategies. (Details in the ToR)
16. Qualification & Experiences of the Consulting Firm	The shortlisting criteria are: 1. It shall have the legal capacity to enter into the contract with a minimum of 05 (Five) years of general experiences in providing research/study/consulting services. 2. The consulting firm must have experience to successfully complete 04 (Four) research/studies to the Government of Bangladesh/UN bodies/public universities/development partners/multinational companies/INGOs/reputed research organizations in the related field over the last 05 years as specific experience 3. Reputation of an international standing in the delivery of credible analytical report; with minimum 03 years of experience 4. Availability of appropriate experiences and professional qualifications among Applicant's staff and adequate resources to carry out the assignment 5. The required average annual turnover of the consulting firm shall be at least of the amount of Tk. 100 (One Hundred) Lac over the last three years 6. A capacity statement summarizing their facilities and area of expertise (IT equipment, logistics support, transport and office space including technical resources and facilities available for the service). Interested Consultants should provide information demonstrating that they have the required qualifications and relevant experience to perform the Services. Consultants are requested to submit the following supporting documents in support of the above-mentioned criteria: (i) Up to date relevant/restraining papers of the firm(s); (ii) JV agreement/letter of intent (if applicable); (iii) Firm's brochure; (iv) Audited financial reports for last three years; (v) Service experience record of Last five (05) years (including nature, total cost of Contract, total input in terms of man month, employer, location of service etc.); (vi) Updated trade license; (vii) Turnover of the consulting firm; (viii) any other information necessary to substantiate the shortlisting criteria listed above and/or included in the TOR (ix) Undertaking that the firm has not been denied by any government organization or by development partner. (Details in the ToR)
17. Other Details	A copy of the Terms of Reference (ToR) may be obtained from the address below during 09:00 to 17:00 hours or download from the ERD website at: www.erd.gov.bd. EoI shall be submitted on or before 29/01/2025 at 12:00 noon in sealed envelope delivered to the undersigned and be clearly marked "Request for Expressions of Interest for Hiring of consultancy services for a study on "WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies: Impact and Way Forward for Bangladesh"
Procuring Entity Details	
18. Name & Designation of the Official Inviting EoI	A. H. M. Jahangir, Project Director (Additional Secretary)
19. Address of the Official Inviting EoI	Building # 08, Room# 11, Economic Relations Division, Planning Commission Complex, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207
20. Contact Details of the Official Inviting EoI	Tel. No.: 2222216710 e-mail: wingchie10@erd.gov.bd
21. The Procuring Entity reserves the right to accept or reject any/all EoI's without showing reason whatsoever.	



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Taiwan 'hyped' sea cable damage claims: China

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday accused Taiwan's ruling party of having "deliberately hyped" an incident in which a Chinese-owned ship was suspected of damaging a submarine telecoms cable.

Taiwanese authorities this week said they were investigating a Chinese-owned cargo ship suspected of dragging its anchor over an international subsea telecoms cable northeast of the island.

"DPP authorities have... out of thin air deliberately hyped the subsea cable incident as a so-called 'grey zone threat' from the mainland, fully showing they will not let go of unscrupulous 'anti-China' counter China' tricks," state broadcaster CCTV quoted Taiwan Affairs Office spokesman Chen Binhus as saying, referring to the island's ruling Democratic Progressive Party.

Taiwan's top China policy body, the Mainland Affairs Council, hit back yesterday, saying the prosecutors' investigation was "based on relevant evidence" and there was no "anti-China" issue.

The Cameroonian-flagged Shunxing39 was intercepted by Taiwan's coast guard on Friday after Chunghwa Telecom reported damage to a subsea cable that is part of the Trans-Pacific Express Cable System.

Antarctic sea ice rebounds from record lows

AFP, Paris

Antarctic sea ice rebounded in December after a long period of record lows, US scientists said, giving pause to speculation that Earth's frozen continent could be undergoing a permanent change.

The rate of sea ice loss during the warmer spring months of November and December slowed to well below average, the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) said in a statement on Tuesday.

This followed a "prolonged period of record to near record daily lows" in 2023 and 2024 -- the hottest years in the history books for global temperature rises driven by climate change.

By the end of 2024, Antarctic sea ice extent had recovered to 7.3 million square kilometres (2.8 million square miles) -- very close to the 1981 to 2010 average, NSIDC said.

*A. H. M. Jahangir
Project Director (Additional Secretary)*