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India actively 'exporting' polio to Bangladesh Says WHO

AFP, New Delhi

India, which has suffered a resurgence in polio this year with 283 new cases, is "actively exporting" the virus to Bangladesh, Nepal and Africa, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said yesterday.

"It is currently the only area of the world that is actively exporting the polio virus to other countries," the WHO said on its website.

"The polio virus originating from this area recently has been detected in Namibia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bangladesh, Nepal, Angola as well as previously polio-free areas within India," it said.

More than 250 of the new Indian cases were from the impoverished

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Coalmine made nation's liability

Barapukuria project goes through manipulations, plunder for years only to serve a few influentials

SHARIER KHAN

Government officials under instructions from some of the policymakers during the BNP rule in early nineties had deliberately tampered with the economic basis of Barapukuria Coal Mine project showing it as a profitable one, what it never was.

According to one of the architects of this project, Internal Rate of Return (IRR) for such an enormous scheme was only 13 percent. But they showed it to be 39 percent with fictitious projections and investments that never took place.

This was done mainly to help a businessman and a policymaker of the BNP to cash in on the coal mine and coal power projects, which charged a staggering Tk 3,000

crore from the national exchequer in the form of "Supplier's Credit" from China. "The truth is, national interest was severely undermined," the source said.

From the very beginning, the shaft-mine project was destined to be doomed. And the Supplier's Credit deal with China only imposed a huge economic liability, the source said requesting anonymity.

Instead of making profit, Bangladesh has been forced to accept 100 percent project cost escalation to Tk 1,600 crore from Tk 887 crore and reduction of coal production capacity to only 5,00, 000 tonnes a year unofficially and 7,00,000 tonnes officially from one million tonnes.

Initially, cost of production of

coal was estimated at \$35 per tonne, which has now almost doubled exceeding the global market price of coal, making its production unprofitable.

Some architects of the original project noted that if calculated now, the IRR of this project might show negative figures. The project has been handed over to Bangladesh but till now it could not start full production while it was supposed to do so in 2001.

Side by side with such a huge cost escalation with reduced production, the government in July 2001 awarded yet another Chinese Suppliers' Credit contract worth \$260 million to a Chinese consortium of companies comprising CMC, SEC and SEEC to build a 250 MW coal-fired power plant.

The cost is at least \$70 million more than that of plants of similar size. Only \$170 million was spent for the 450 MW Meghnaghat AES power plant (minus land development).

Besides, officials are cynical about seeing this poorly built Chinese power plant ever go for full production. The plant started partial power generation early this year and has tripped several times.

But the project's flawed design helped a certain businessman and a former policymaker -- both belonging to the BNP -- pocket hundreds of crores of taka, said an official of the energy ministry.

The businessman, who is the brother of a former and also incumbent BNP lawmaker, has

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PHOTO: STAR

The members of European Union Election Observation Exploratory Mission meet Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz at his office yesterday.

Mannan Bhuiyan hospitalised for chest pain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan was admitted to the National Heart Institute yesterday following a chest pain.

Bhuiyan, also the BNP secretary general, felt pain in his chest in the morning and was rushed to the hospital for check up and got admitted to the Coronary Care Unit (CCU).

The on-duty doctors were conducting further check-ups on him last evening.

A press release from BNP stated that a medical board led by Professor Sufia Rahman, director of National Heart Institute, acknowledged that his condition has been improving.

The family of Bhuiyan requested all to pray for him.



PHOTO: STAR

A lidless manhole at Mouchak intersection in the capital. Locals said cars, autorickshaws and rickshaws stumble on the manhole almost every day.

Present political situation very frustrating

Says US envoy at launch of business forum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Termining the present political situation in the country very frustrating, US Ambassador in Dhaka Patricia A Butenis yesterday said the people are suffering a lot from the deadlock over the next general election.

She, however, appreciated the business leaders' move to have the ruling and opposition parties at the negotiating table to settle the dispute.

She said, "I would like to congratulate the business community for their leadership in reaching governing and opposition parties to engage them in sincere and constructive discussion to resolve

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EC gloats about talk, EU mission tight-lipped

AL again objects to the team about KM Hasan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday claimed that the visiting European Union (EU) mission has expressed satisfaction with its preparation for the next election.

However, the EC secretary admitted that the mission has raised objection to the 'inclusion of Rohingya refugees' in the voter list.

After meeting the EU exploratory mission, EC Secretary Abdur Rashid told reporters that they (EU delegation) are satisfied with the way the commission is gearing up for the upcoming election.

He said they did not voice any disapproval regarding activities of the EC. They also did not question

the competence and neutrality of the chief election commissioner (CEC), he added.

CEC MA Aziz however declined to speak to the journalists about the meeting.

The EU delegation told the reporters, "We won't give out any detail of what we have discussed with the Election Commission authorities."

On the allegation of preparing a fake voter list, the mission head Andrew Bruce avoided giving a direct answer. He said, "We have had discussion on a wide range of issues and we won't elaborate on that."

Asked whether he was satisfied with the EC's preparation for the

polls, Bruce said, "The meetings held so far have been fruitful. We are gathering useful information in a professional and responsible manner."

He said, "When we asked the Election Commission authorities if it would be useful, feasible and advisable to send an EU election observation team to Bangladesh, they said we are welcome to do so."

Briefing the media, the EC secretary said, "We have briefed them about the election process, voter list, election observation, and so on. They seemed satisfied with our explanations."

About the inclusion of Rohingya refugees in the voter list, he

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Dhaka proposes to form 3 Nam expert groups

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh proposed that the Non-Aligned Movement should constitute three expert groups -- each comprising no more than twelve members -- on political and security issues, economic issues and human rights and social issues for the much needed reinvigoration of the Movement.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan made the proposal while speaking at the interactive session of the Nam Ministerial segment of the 14th Summit that began in Havana on Wednesday, according to a message received here in Dhaka yesterday.

The Bangladesh foreign minister emphasised Nam's readiness to address the new and emerging

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Sangsad sees debate on reforms, Phulbari deal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP and the opposition Awami League (AL) lawmakers yesterday became involved in a heated debate over the proposed electoral reforms and the agreement on open-pit coal mining signed with Asia Energy.

The opposition members criticised the prime minister (PM) for her speech where she said the election will be held as per the constitution and without any reforms.

They alleged that she has ruined the possibility of any dialogue to break the current political impasse.

But the ruling party lawmakers said what the prime minister said in her speech was right and she did not rule out the chance of a dialogue.

They said political background of a caretaker government chief should not be a bar for him to discharging the duties properly.

Standing on a point of order, senior AL leader Abdur Razzak raised the issue as Deputy Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddique took the chair after Maghrib prayer.

Referring to Khaleda's recent speech, Razzak said people will not accept any election without reforms.

"Khaleda Zia has repeatedly rejected the dialogue in her recent speeches," he said adding that the ruling BNP-Jamaat is out to hold a blueprint election.

Protesting Razzak's comments, Communications Minister Nazmul Huda said the prime minister's speech was made in reference to

the constitutional provisions and in no way did she eliminate the potential for a dialogue.

"The chief adviser of the caretaker government and the CEC should be able to carry out their duties properly despite their political backgrounds," Huda said adding that the argument that a person could be biased for having involvement in politics in the past cannot be acceptable.

Rejecting the minister's view, AL lawmaker Sheikh Selim said, "Justice MA Hasan was an international affairs secretary of BNP and the government has extended the age

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Gang runs amok at apartment car park for tolls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Armed criminals yesterday stormed into the car park of a high-rise residential apartment building on New Eskaton Road in the city and fired indiscriminately wounding one person.

Atiar Rahman, 42, received a bullet in the chest and is undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). He is the driver of the editor of the daily The Independent.

The residents suspect that the goons are members of a gang led by Jisan of Maghbazar. The attack might be an attempt to kill an engineer of Roads and Highways Department Khandaker Nurul Arefin, who has been refusing to pay the gang Tk 3 crore extortion money.

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Fundamentalist groups within govt responsible

Blames Proshika for crackdown

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Proshika officials yesterday accused the coalition government of unleashing torture and repression on the organisation to implement the blueprint of the fundamentalist groups within the ruling coalition.

In the wake of the government's recent crackdown on Proshika, one of the largest non-government organisations (NGO) in the country, its top officials said in a press conference yesterday that the alliance government has been desperately trying to destroy the organisation since their assuming power.

"Especially the fundamentalist groups within the government have been very active regarding the matter," the Proshika officials said,

indicating Jamaat-e-Islami and Mufti Fazlul Huq Amini-led Islami Oikya Jote.

Jamaat-e-Islami, especially two ministers of the party, spread venom against the NGOs and civil society on several occasions. Senior Vice-president of Proshika Mahbub-Ul Karim said, adding that Islami Oikya Jote leader and lawmaker Mufti Fazlul Huq Amini threatened to kill Proshika chief Qazi Faruque Ahmed.

The crackdown on Proshika staff was launched on Saturday allegedly on suspicion of the organisation's preparation to send a large number

of people to Dhaka

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Amini questioned for threatening Proshika chief

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday questioned lawmaker Fazlul Haque Amini, chairman of a faction of Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), in a case filed in connection with threatening Proshika President Qazi Faruque Ahmed.

Amini pleaded not guilty and demanded justice after Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Shafique Anwar read out the charges brought against him from the statements of eight prosecution witnesses.

The court fixed October 11 for recording statements of defence witnesses, produced before the court on behalf of the accused Amini.

Earlier, the court had recorded statements of eight witnesses since

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RMG wage structure influenced by politics

Claim exporters, term it one-sided, inconsistent

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leading trade bodies in the readymade garment sector yesterday blamed the government and National Wage Board for announcing an "incomplete, one-sided and inconsistent" pay structure giving priority to political goals without considering its possible impacts on the industry.

"We think the board gave priority to political consideration and did not take into account implications of the proposed pay structure on the garment industry," Fazlul Hoque, president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), said at a press briefing at its office in Dhaka.

"It is not possible to implement the basic economic policies if it is influenced by politics," he added.

Termining the inconsistency of salary increase in the seventh grade

with other grades "impractical", the leaders said it was very unfortunate that the proposed pay structure was placed for discussion only one hour before signing.

An analysis is necessary before implementing a pay structure in phases when safeguard measures will be withdrawn against Chinese exports to the European Union in 2007 and to the US market in 2008, they said.

Tipu Munshi, former president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said the proposed pay structure was imposed on the garment owners and there is a political ambition behind announcing it.

"It is better to close those factories now which would be forced to face the same fate just after implementing the proposed salary hike,"

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Mahasthangarh land gobbled up

Family graveyards, religious outfits, farmland now represent historic site

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

Land at historic Mahasthangarh is being occupied illegally in the name of family graveyards and religious institutions while locals have been building houses and cultivating vegetables on the site, violating the Antiquities Act 1968.

Archaeological Department Regional Director Abdul Khaleque said, "According to the Antiquities Act, none can build any construction and cultivate crops while nobody is allowed to transfer his/her land property within eight kilometres of the protected area without prior permission of the authority."

A fortified, oblong enclosure measuring 5000ftx4500ft in Mahasthangarh near Paharpur in Bogra was declared "protected site" during the British rule in 1920.

Mahasthangarh, the capital of the Mourya Kingdom founded around

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Locals built dwelling houses, a family graveyard and a shrine encroaching on a land at the 4,500-year-old Mahasthangarh archaeological site.



PHOTO: STAR