

## Japan PM's hospital trip sparks health speculation

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose first term in office ended in part for health reasons, sparked fresh speculation yesterday about his well-being with an unexpected, hours-long hospital visit.

Abe emerged from the Tokyo hospital where he was previously treated for ulcerative colitis more than seven hours after he entered, and left by car without saying anything, according to TV footage of local media.

His previously unannounced arrival yesterday morning prompted a local media frenzy and comes after weeks of speculation about his health.

A weekly magazine report in July claimed Abe had been vomiting blood, but government spokesman Yoshihide Suga insisted the prime minister was healthy.

## 'Lucky' phone

FROM PAGE 12

Phone users in China -- especially companies seeking to impress clients and business partners -- often pay a premium for combinations of digits considered lucky.

Eight is the most sought after digit, and so prized in China that the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing started officially at eight minutes past eight on the eighth day of August, the eighth month.

The number four, which in Mandarin sounds similar to "death", is least favoured.

The winner of Sunday's auction paid 400 yuan to join the action and has ten days to come up with the remaining sum.

A phone number ending in eight sevens holds the record on the auction platform for fetching 3.91 million yuan at a 2017 auction.

Seven sounds like "arise" or "life essence" and is considered a good number for relationships.

## BSF shoots

FROM PAGE 12

They then left the body in Chhoy Roshia area and fled.

Lt Col Suraj Mia, commanding officer of 53 BGB Battalion, said they found the body in Chhoy Roshia area around 10:30pm, some 3km inside the Bangladesh territory from zero line.

Sumon's family said he went outside home in the afternoon, the BGB official added.

The BGB is investigating the incident.

The official said they also called a flag meeting with BSF, but it did not respond till filing of this report around 5:30pm yesterday.

Shamsul Alam, officer-in-charge of Shibganj Police Station, said on information, they went to Chhoy Roshia area around 5:45am and sent the body to Chapainawabganj Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Sumon had a bullet wound on the left of his back.

## British PM

FROM PAGE 12

Minister Syed Nazrul Islam in the chair. The meeting is understood to have discussed among other things the food situation in the country. SOVIET UNION TO IMPORT JUTE FROM BANGLADESH

The Soviet Union will import jute worth Tk 2.15 crore from Bangladesh, informs the Soviet ambassador in Bangladesh today. He further informs that a Soviet ship has already reached the Chittagong Port to carry the purchased raw jute. SOURCES: August 19, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Dainik Ittefaq.

## China grants

FROM PAGE 12

of the immune system's attack against foreign invaders, such as viruses.

Results of both trials were released in the medical journal the Lancet.

Reports said that CanSino's Covid vaccine has already received the greenlight to be used by China's military despite not yet undergoing the type of large-scale testing needed to prove its ability to prevent infection.

CanSino's vaccine candidate was the first in China to move into human testing in March but other potential vaccines developed by Sinovac Biotech and a unit of China National Pharmaceutical Group (Sinopharm) have already been approved for Phase III trials overseas. Saudi Arabia said this month it plans to begin Phase III clinical trials for the CanSino vaccine. CanSino has said it is also in talks with Brazil and Chile to launch Phase III trials in those countries.

Saudi Arabia plans to test the vaccine alongside a placebo on 5,000 volunteers and is currently preparing trials in the cities of Riyadh, Dammam and Makkah, Saudi state news agency SPA has reported.



Health staff wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) conduct morning exercises with patients suffering mild symptoms of the Covid-19 at an emergency hospital in Surabaya, Indonesia yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'Please, take us back'

FROM PAGE 12

in Bangladesh and are passing hard times.

Many of them maintain regular contacts with Indian High Commission in Dhaka, which says it is yet to receive any instruction regarding them.

Frustrated, a number of stranded Indian citizens, many of whom are connected through WhatsApp, are planning to stage a demonstration at Benapole on August 24, seeking steps from Indian authorities about their return.

Early this month, India's Ministry of External Affairs sought approval from West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee-led government to take back the state's 2,680 people stranded in Bangladesh since the Covid-19 lockdown began in March.

In a letter dated August 7, it stated that 2,399 people want to return to their villages in West Bengal through the Petrapole-Benapole integrated check post (ICP), while 281 people want to enter through Phulbari-Banglabandha border, reported Indian news portal The Print.

The letter, sent by MEA's Additional Secretary Vikram Doraiswami to West Bengal Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha,

stated that the stranded people are "unskilled or semi-skilled" labourers, and have been living in "extreme distress" under the lockdown, with no financial support.

"They are all from weaker sections of our society. Many are living in extreme distress, including sheltering in school verandas or public parks, and are increasingly desperate to return home. It is not feasible for them to fly home; they can only hope to return if they are allowed to travel by rail or road."

It said Delhi has offered to arrange trains and vehicles for them once the West Bengal government approves.

### THE SUFFERINGS

Seventy-year-old Sheikh Ali Mortuza and his wife came to Dhaka for a visit with their relatives in mid-February but found the Benapole border closed just days before they were due to leave in March.

They are residents of Murshidabad in West Bengal. For them, days pass by slowly in Dhaka -- and even the joy of meeting and spending time with relatives turns tedious on some days since there is no news about when they can return back home.

Partha Paul Chowdhury has also been stuck in Bangladesh for five

months after he, his mother and an aunt arrived on March 8 to attend a programme at his maternal uncle's house in Ullapra of Sirajganj.

"I am in constant touch with the High Commission in Dhaka. Initially, they would say that they were working on it, ushering in hope for our return. But now they say they can't send us back as the West Bengal government is not giving permission," he told The Daily Star on Sunday.

In the meantime, his mother's medicines, brought from India, ran out. She has several health complications including that in heart and liver.

"My mother is now very sick. She is suffering from hypertension. Who will take responsibility if my mother dies here," said Partha, who is from Shiliguri.

He said several special flights operated between Dhaka and Delhi in the last two to three months, but it was not possible for them to afford those.

Partha said they came to know from the media that the Indian government is allowing Bangladeshi people to go to India on emergency grounds taking special permission from the Indian High Commission in Dhaka. The high

commission will take same steps for the standard Indian too, he said.

But when they contacted the high commission, its officials termed it rumour, he said.

"Now our only request to my chief minister [of West Bengal] and the Indian government: please take us back," he said.

Some of them have other problems too.

Prianka said she has multiple visas for six months with permission to stay in Bangladesh for two months at a stretch. But she is now in Bangladesh for the last five months.

"When I talked with one visa official here, he said I have to pay Tk 200 for each of 15 days after the two-month period and Tk 500 each after 75 days. Where will I get the money when I am facing hardship with my daughter?" she said.

This newspaper contacted Indian High Commission in Dhaka earlier this month when Indian news portal The Print published a report on the issue.

An official there said the borders might open soon and they would be sent back then.

Contacted on Sunday, the high commission declined to make any comment in this regard.

## Rivers swell

FROM PAGE 12

region in next 24 to 48 hours," the bulletin said.

Water level of five rivers was flowing above the danger level yesterday, said the FFWC.

Water of many major rivers in the Ganges basin has started rising again yesterday because of the onrush of floodwater from upstream hilly catchment areas caused by heavy downpour, reports BSS.

Local offices of Water Development Board recorded an upward trend of water in the rivers like Mahananda in Chapainawabganj and Ganges at Pankha in Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi, Hardinge Bridge, Talbaria, and Goalanda and other downstream rivers yesterday morning.

Water level in the Ganges river went up by 3cm at Pankha, Hardinge Bridge and Talbaria points, while it increased 2cm at Rajshahi point in the past 24 hours till 9:00am yesterday, WDB Superintending Engineer Mukhlesur Rahman told BSS.

Meanwhile, over 50 lakh people of 162 upazilas in 33 districts have so far been affected by the flood, according to the National Disaster Response Coordination Centre latest report released on Sunday.

Our district correspondents report on the flood situation. In Kurigram and Lalmonirhat, water of major rivers, including the Brahmaputra, Teesta, Dharla, and Dudhkumar, is rising again.

Water level in these rivers has gone

up by 8-10cm, and water is in an increasing trend, said WDB officials, adding that they feared that the flood situation might deteriorate again by the end of this month.

People said their sufferings will know no bounds if the flood hits them again.

Nur Haque Mandal, a boatman of Char Yatrapur in Kurigram Sadar upazila, said water in the Brahmaputra river has been rising for the last two days.

"If it continues, water level of the river may cross the danger level within a few days," he told The Daily Star.

A farmer of the area, Jobar Ali, said they were facing immense sufferings as flood hit their areas twice since June.

"We have recently returned home from flood centres. Our houses and croplands have been damaged. We don't know what we will do, if flood hits us again," said Nazmul Islam, a farmer of Char Gobordhan in Lalmonirhat's Aditmar upazila.

In Nilphamari, the flood situation remained steady till yesterday as the Teesta was still flowing 28cm below the danger level at Dimla point. But the situation may worsen shortly as there is a possibility of rainfall.

Water level of the Jamuna river rose by 5cm at Aricha point in Manikganj, and it may slightly increase further, said WDB officials.

[Our correspondents from Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, and Manikganj contributed to this report]

## Bangladesh has 6th most active cases

FROM PAGE 12

Dhaka division has accounted for the highest number of Covid-19 deaths in the country -- 1,768. HEALTH MINISTER'S MEETING WITH PM POSTPONED

The much-talked-about meeting on the trial of Chinese Covid-19 vaccines between the health minister Zahid Maleque and the prime minister Sheikh Hasina was postponed.

"The meeting will be rescheduled soon," Maudul Islam Prodhhan, public relations officer of the health ministry told The Daily Star.

Last Wednesday, the health minister talked about this meeting during a discussion with Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal during the meeting of the cabinet committee on purchase.

Besides, the health ministry is also yet to take any decision on the collection of the Covid-19 vaccines when it becomes available in the market.

India last week overtook Britain with the world's fourth-highest number of fatalities, behind the United States,

On Sunday, Bangladesh Medical Research Council permitted the icddr,b to conduct the vaccine trial on 4,200 healthcare workers in seven hospitals.

But the trial became uncertain after the health minister and the health service division secretary last month said it would take time for the government to decide.

DR AMINUL HASAN AWARDED NEW POSITION  
Dr Aminul Hasan, the immediate past director of hospitals and clinics at the health directorate before he was removed from his post, has been appointed the principal of the Dhaka Institute of Health Technology.

Sharmin Akter Jahan, deputy secretary of the health service division of the health ministry, confirmed this

to The Daily Star yesterday.

On Sunday, the ministry issued the circular, where Aminul was asked to join his new workplace within three working days.

On July 23, Aminul Hasan was made officer on special duty (OSD) amidst huge criticism over the Regent Hospital scam.

Two days earlier, Prof Abul Kalam Azad -- the then director general of the health directorate -- also resigned from his post because of the same issue.

Last Wednesday, Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) started questioning the former DG and four other DGHS former officials including Aminul over various scams and irregularities in the health sector.

The three others are former deputy directors of the DGHS Yunus Ali, Md Shafiqur Rahman and research officer Md Didarul Islam.

## S Korea battles worst outbreak in months

FROM PAGE 12

resurgence of Covid-19. The disease has killed more than 775,000 people globally, and the death toll tops 50,000 in India, which is still battling its first wave with 2.5 million infections -- the third-highest in the world.

The postponement of New Zealand's election to October 17 came after the shock discovery of Covid-19 in Auckland last week, ending the nation's 102-day streak without community transmission.

"This decision gives all parties time

over the next nine weeks to campaign and the Electoral Commission enough time to ensure an election can go ahead," PM Ardern said. INDIA DEATHS TOP 50,000  
Many Indian experts say the real numbers may be far higher due to low testing rates and because deaths are often not properly recorded in the vast and impoverished nation of 1.3 billion people.

India last week overtook Britain with the world's fourth-highest number of fatalities, behind the United States,

Brazil and Mexico, and as of yesterday had recorded 50,921 deaths, according to the health ministry.

With some of the world's biggest megacities and slums, India is already the third-most infected nation behind the US and Brazil with 2.65 million infections.

Across the Pacific, less than three months out from the American presidential election, the surging caseload in the United States -- the worst in the world at more than 5.4 million with 170,000 deaths -- has forced the convention season online.

After an inter-ministerial meeting held virtually yesterday, Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad said measures would be taken for sending the expatriate Bangladeshis who were sent back from the Abu Dhabi airport after the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh submits a report, said a ministry press release.

The Caab has been asked to submit a report to the civil aviation and tourism ministry within the next five working days after probing the return of the expatriate workers in Biman and Air Arabia flights, he said.

The expatriates will be sent again in flights of the related airlines or under government arrangement, he added.

## HOLY MOSQUES

## Saudi appoints 10 women in senior roles

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia has appointed 10 women in senior roles at Islam's two holiest sites, authorities said Sunday, as the conservative petro-state seeks to boost female employment.

The appointment of women in senior positions at religious institutions is rare in the Islamic kingdom, which is in the midst of a wide-ranging liberalisation drive spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The women were appointed in the two holy mosques in Makkah and Medina across various departments, including administrative and technical, according to statement released by the general presidency for the affairs of the two holy mosques.

The recruitment drive was aimed at "empowering Saudi women with high qualifications and capabilities", the statement said.

The two holy mosques previously recruited 41 women in leadership positions in 2018, according to Saudi media.

Prince Mohammed has sought to boost employment for women as part of his "Vision 2030" plan, which is aimed at diversifying the kingdom's economy and ending its addiction to oil.

The number of working women in Saudi Arabia reached 1.03 million in the third quarter of 2019, 35 percent of the total workforce, compared to 816,000 in 2015, according to official figures.

In other reforms, women in the kingdom are now allowed to drive cars, cinemas have reopened and genders are permitted to mix at events, including concerts, and in public places.

But the reforms have also been accompanied by a crackdown on dissent.

Saudi Arabia has detained and put on trial a dozen women activists who long campaigned for the right to drive, sparking widespread condemnation.

Some of the activists allege they were tortured and sexually harassed by interrogators.

## UAE denies

FROM PAGE 12

he was refused because he travelled to the UAE without his required re-entry permit, said the official.

Another passenger said he wanted to go to Dubai after entering the UAE through the Abu Dhabi airport. But the authorities refused him immigration clearance, he added.

The official said the expatriates were returning to the UAE after their vacation ended.

Sheikh Bahar, a migrant worker from Feni, told The Daily Star that he travelled to Abu Dhabi airport in a Biman flight on Friday. He was refused immigration clearance because he did not have the online re-entry permit that he was supposed to carry with him from Bangladesh.

Bahar, who had been in the UAE for the last 10 years, said he filled out the online form on August 6, but did not get the reply confirming his re-entry permit in time.

On the other hand, he was in a hurry to enter the country as he was supposed to join his work after his vacation ended on August 14, he said, adding that he came to Bangladesh in March this year and was stranded amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Bahar also said as per the requirement, he underwent Covid-19 tests at a government-approved lab in Bangladesh and also at the Abu Dhabi airport.

He urged the authorities concerned to take effective steps to end his plight.

Contacted, Tahera Khandker, deputy general manager (public relations) of Biman, confirmed that some expatriates returned home from the Gulf state yesterday.

The flight carried more than 200 passengers, the Biman official told this newspaper over the phone.

As per a Biman notice issued on July 29, passengers who will travel to Dubai and Abu Dhabi from Bangladesh have to obtain Covid-19 negative certificates from the approved labs valid for 72 hours before their departure.

Biman, the national flag carrier, resumed its scheduled commercial flight operations to Abu Dhabi and Dubai last month after commercial flights on the routes were suspended in March amid the pandemic.

The UAE is home to several lakh Bangladeshi migrant workers. Many of them came home on vacation and later remained stranded due to flight suspensions amid the pandemic.

After an inter-ministerial meeting held virtually yesterday, Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad said measures would be taken for sending the expatriate Bangladeshis who were sent back from the Abu Dhabi airport after the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh submits a report, said a ministry press release.

The Caab has been asked to submit a report to the civil aviation and tourism ministry within the next five working days after probing the return of the expatriate workers in Biman and Air Arabia flights, he said.

The expatriates will be sent again in flights of the related airlines or under government arrangement, he added.