

BELARUS CRISIS
Ignoring calls for an end to his 26-year grip on power, President Alexander Lukashenko sworn in for a sixth term
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The Daily Star



REGD. NO. DA 781 | VOL. XXX No. 242 | ASWIN 9, 1427 BS | **Your Right to Know** | SAFAR 6, 1442 HIJRI | 16 PAGES PLUS SHOUT PRICE : Tk12.00

"Steps have been taken to build metro rail and prepare a transport masterplan for Chattogram."
ROAD, TRANSPORT AND BRIDGES MINISTER OBAIDUL QUADER AT A VIRTUAL INAUGURATION CEREMONY PAGE 3



"The world today cannot be reduced to the rivalry between China and the United States, irrespective of the global weight of these great powers."
FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON TELLS THE UN PAGE 6



"The government under the leadership of Muhyiddin Yassin has fallen."
MALAYSIAN OPPOSITION CHIEF ANWAR IBRAHIM CLAIMS MAJORITY DEEPENING POLITICAL CRISIS IN THE COUNTRY PAGE 6



GOVT PROCUREMENT

GIFTS, TRIPS

secure contracts

WB study sees various anomalies

REJAUJ KARIM BYRON and MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Bidders need to give bribes in the form of financial benefits, arrange trips and host dinners for government officials to win public procurement contracts, says a World Bank report.

The public purchase process lacks transparency and some sections in the Public Procurement Act limit scope for competition among bidders. Large bidders are monopolising the procurement market, leaving the small ones marginalised, it points out.

In its recent report titled "Assessment of Bangladesh Public Procurement System", the global lender highlighted the weaknesses and progress in the government procurement process.

The report is based on information of 296,760 e-Government (e-GP) and 12,000 traditional paper-based purchases by the government between fiscal year 2012 and 2019.

Besides, it incorporated interviews and focus group discussions with key implementing agencies and surveys of bidders conducted in five districts.

"About 31 percent of the surveyed bidders admitted that they had offered gifts of more than \$300 [each] to PE [Procuring Entity] officials or other persons for taking the procurement decisions in their favour," it said.

Of the bidders, 62 percent gave gifts worth above Tk 25,000 each, about 17 percent gave gifts worth below Tk 25,000 each, 17 percent paid for dinners for government officials and 4 percent invited officials to trips, the study said.

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PROCUREMENT DEALS

31% bidders provided gifts to govt officials. 62% of them gave gifts worth above Tk 25,000.

17% bidders paid for dinner for govt officials while 4% invited the officials to trips.

Government purchase was estimated around \$ 24.1 billion in FY2019 -- around 85% of ADP.

Large bidders are monopolising the procurement market, leaving the small ones marginalised.

Despite introduction of e-GP, public procurement yet to achieve expected level of transparency.

Some bidders unlawfully obtained official cost estimates, which are strictly confidential.

Hope rekindled for Saudi returnees

Kingdom extends their visas until Oct 17; Biman to start 4 weekly flights to KSA from Sept 26, Covid-19 certificate mandatory

RASHIDUL HASAN

The Saudi government has agreed to extend visas for the Bangladeshis who returned home on holiday but could not go back to the kingdom due to the pandemic.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told The Daily Star that all the migrants stranded here would be allowed to go to Saudi Arabia.

They can travel on Biman and Saudia airlines, he said.

The minister said the migrants could get their expired visas renewed at the Saudi embassy in Bangladesh

from Sunday and that their work permits (aqama) would remain valid until October 17.

The validity of the permits could be extended further if need be.

Momen also said the Saudi government had given landing permissions to Biman, which would help the return of the Bangladeshi migrants.

The government of Bangladesh has also given permission to all Saudi airlines to land here and take Bangladeshis back, he added.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam in a Facebook post said

the Saudi government has permitted Biman Bangladesh Airlines to operate weekly two flights each to Riyadh and Jeddah.

Around 34,000 Bangladeshi migrants were worried that they would lose their jobs if they could not return to Saudi Arabia by September 30, when their visas and work permits were to expire.

Worried about losing their jobs, many had thronged the office of Saudia to get air tickets. A group of Bangladeshi workers demonstrated at Karwan Bazar for the third

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People desperate to return to work in Saudi Arabia demonstrating yesterday in front of the Probashi Kalyan Bhaban in the capital's Eskaton. They demanded government help to reach the kingdom by September 30 when their visas and work permits were to expire. Saudi Arabia later extended the validity of their visas until October 17.

Govt ready to tackle second wave of Covid

Says health minister; govt in touch with 5 firms to get vaccine

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Days after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina cautioned against a second wave of the Covid-19 outbreak in the country, Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said the government was ready to tackle the probable second wave of the disease.

"The probability of the second wave cannot be ruled out in our country. All preparations to deal with the situation in case of the second wave are being taken from now on," the minister said, pointing to the second wave in Europe and America while addressing an event during his visit to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

About the progress in the collection of the Covid-19 vaccine, he said, "Nine companies are at the final stage of their trial of [Covid-19 vaccine candidate]. The government is in touch with at least five of them. We want to get the right vaccine at the right time."

On Sunday, the prime minister warned that the Covid-19 situation will likely deteriorate in the upcoming winter, and urged all involved to prepare for another outbreak in wintertime.

During an unscheduled discussion over Covid-19 at the weekly cabinet

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GOVT ALLOWANCES

Ministers to get more for travel

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

When nations around the globe are taking cost-saving measures to tackle the economic fallout of Covid-19 pandemic, Bangladesh has increased travel expenses for ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers by Tk 93 lakh.

The Cabinet Division sent a letter to all the ministries and divisions on August 25, mentioning the allocation for travel expenses for this fiscal year.

The letter signed by Syedur Rahman, deputy secretary at the Cabinet Division, stated a total of Tk 6.90 crore was allocated as travel allowances for the ministries, and a breakdown for each ministry was given.

In 2019-20, the allocation was around Tk 5.97 crore.

The rise may look insignificant but experts think the government should be more careful about how to spend funds as the economy has just started getting back on the road to recovery.

Even neighbouring India last week passed a bill to cut

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BUSINESS

Biggest ever IPO for bourses

Robi has come up with the country's biggest-ever initial public offering as the mobile phone operator intends to raise Tk 523.7 crore from the stock market. The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission approved the IPO plan at a meeting yesterday.

STORY ON B1

Europe grapples with second wave of Covid

Cases surge past 5m mark; Paris, Madrid follow London in imposing new curbs

AGENCIES

Europe surged past five million cases of the new coronavirus yesterday as France and Spain prepared tighter restrictions in an attempt to curb rising levels of infections in their capital cities.

Worldwide nearly 32 million people have been infected and more than 971,000 have died since the virus emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019 and spread across the globe.

After appearing to bring cases mostly under control with economically devastating lockdowns, Europe now faces

a resurgence, forcing governments to consider reintroducing tough measures.

More than half of Europe's infections have been recorded in Russia, followed by Spain, France and the United Kingdom.

The 380,000 cases reported in the past week represent the highest number in the region since the start of the pandemic.

The French government was preparing yesterday to announce stricter anti-virus measures for Paris, sources told AFP, as national infections have rocketed since lockdown was lifted -- sometimes surging past 10,000 a day.

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HOLDING O, A LEVEL EXAMS

British Council gets govt nod

Health safety protocol, social distancing must be followed at exam halls amid Covid

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The government gave approval to British Council to administer Ordinary and Advanced Level examinations in October and November while students continue protests demanding the cancellation of exams amid the coronavirus pandemic.

But education ministry officials said the approval was contingent upon several conditions, including holding those who were staging the exams responsible for any Covid-19 transmission among the students.

"With the approval from the government of Bangladesh, the British Council is pleased to confirm that we are going ahead with the October-November 2020 exams series for the International GCSE, IGCSE, O Level and International A Level examinations as per schedule," British Council Bangladesh, which sought the approval on Sunday, said in a statement last night.

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DIGITAL COOPERATION

PM calls for strong global partnership

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed the need for a "strong global partnership" on digital cooperation for the future generation to achieve common goals.

"We look forward to forging a strong global partnership on digital cooperation to achieve our common goals," she told a high-level virtual event on the sidelines of the 75th United Nations General Assembly at the UN headquarters in New York.

While delivering her pre-recorded statement at the event titled "Digital Cooperation: Action Today for Future Generations", the PM said Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the strength of

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