



POLITICAL CRISIS IN BELARUS
Russian President Putin lashes out at 'unprecedented external pressure'
PAGE 6

The Daily Star

www.thedailystar.net

Your Right to Know

REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XXX No. 248

ASHWIN 15, 1427 BS

SAFAR 12, 1442 HJIRI

16 PAGES PRICE : Tk12.00



"Covid-19 has shown that no country or business can survive alone. Only together can we tackle global crises."
PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA WRITES
IN FINANCIAL TIMES PAGE 2



"This is unfortunate that number of applications seeking information (under RTI Act) is decreasing."
EX-CHIEF INFORMATION COMMISSIONER
PROF GOLAM RAHMAN



"It's a mind-numbing figure. Yet we must never lose sight of each and every individual life ..."
WHO CHIEF ANTONIO GUTERRES AFTER GLOBAL COVID-19 DEATHS PASSED 1M

No better than A JAIL

Child development centres anything but safe for children; rehabilitation homes they were set out to be

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN and
ABU BAKAR SIDDIQUE

"It is a jail, isn't it? Have you ever heard that a person lived happily in a jail?"

This was how Sifat (not his real name) retorted while sharing the experience of his stay at one of the three child development centres in the country.

The 15-year-old was one of several teenagers. The Daily Star talked to, with the permission of their parents, in the aftermath of the August 13 killing of three boys following torture by staff and senior inmates at the Child Development Centre in Jashore.

The Children Act, 1974 (and the subsequent Children Act, 2013) called for child development centres to be set up for those under the age of 18 who are under trial or ordered to be detained in the judicial proceedings or sent by the guardians.

It is not just torture which came to the limelight last month but also the poor living conditions and unchecked abusive

behaviour.

Overcrowding is a major issue in the two centres for boys -- the capacity of the Tongi centre is 300 but at present it has 545 inmates. There is one psychiatric case worker and one social case worker to provide counselling services for these 545 children.

The Jashore centre houses around 300 boys against the capacity of 150.

"Our senior inmates were our leaders and we had to obey them strictly. The slightest mistake -- for example, failing to greet them would result in punishments like 100-200 sit-ups or standing on one leg for an hour," said Sifat, who was in the Tongi centre for four months last year.

"Once, I had to do 200 sit-ups for a mistake. My leg got swollen and I could not walk properly for several days," said the boy, whose parents said he was wrongly implicated in a murder.

Sifat added the children at the centre were allowed to go outside only for

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Labourers carrying a huge log across Beribadh road along the Buriganga in Kamrangirchar's Nizambagh area. They unload such logs from cargo boats in the river and carry those to sawmills nearby with backbreaking labour. They earn Tk 700-800 for carrying each tonne of log. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO:
ANISUR RAHMAN

20,000 fake N95 masks supplied to 10 hospitals

Several health officials behind it, finds ACC

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

In a bid to make a quick buck cashing in on the pandemic, several health officials purchased more than 20,000 fake N95 masks and supplied those to 10 hospitals for staffers treating Covid-19 patients.

But their scam came to light, thanks to some doctors at the hospitals, who questioned the authenticity of the masks and refused to use them.

These officials of the state-run Central Medical Stores Depot (CMSD) didn't bother to follow any of the procedures for checking the quality of the products, their specifications and fixing their prices, found investigators.

Yesterday, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed a graft case against Abdur Razzaq, chairman of medical equipment supplier JMI Hospital Requisite MFG Ltd, and six health officials, including Dr Md Jakir Hossain Khan, the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

ANTIGEN TEST INTRODUCTION

DGHS keeps on dragging its feet

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

The introduction of antigen tests for suspected Covid-19 patients still remains uncertain, as health officials are yet to start the process of procuring the kits, despite getting the nod from the government over a week ago.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) is supposed to invite prospective antigen kit producers or suppliers capable of meeting the desired standard. But as of yesterday, there was no notable progress in this regard.

"Two kits [supplied by two developers] are being tested at IEDCR. We have tested another one previously and are getting another one soon. Once the process ends, we will introduce the [antigen] tests [at public hospital settings]. No specific time can be given right now," Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, additional director general of the DGHS, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The delay left some healthcare experts sceptical about the government's intent to launch the rapid testing kit. They said it has been delayed from fears that it might bruise the government's pride in handling the contagion with limited testing through RT-PCR.

The health services division of the health ministry on September 17 approved the antigen rapid testing at public healthcare centres after months of bureaucratic exercises.

The decision came soon after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's recent public statement that the coronavirus pandemic might accelerate during the upcoming winter.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Poorer nations to get 120m \$5 testing kits

Says WHO; Gavi also promises extra 100m Covid-19 vaccine doses

AGENCIES

Some 120 million rapid diagnostic tests for coronavirus will be made available to low- and middle-income countries at a maximum of \$5 each, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Monday.

The wider availability of quick, reliable and inexpensive testing will help 133 countries to track infections and contain the spread, closing the gap with wealthy ones, it said.

WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the manufacturers Abbott and SD Biosensor had agreed with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to "make 120 million of these new, highly portable and easy-to-use rapid Covid-19 diagnostic tests available over a period of six months".

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

WATER-SHARING ISSUES

Delhi to work for prompt resolution

Says Momen after meeting with Jaishankar

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

India has agreed to hold the Joint River Commission (JRC) meeting on solving outstanding issues relating to water sharing, especially the Teesta deal, with Bangladesh soon.

"Next JRC meeting will be held soon. Previously, the meeting was not held as data was not ready. We agreed in principle to hold the meeting soon," Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told reporters yesterday, after a Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) meeting was held virtually.

Momen and his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar led the delegations from their respective sides at the sixth JCC.

Momen said both Bangladesh and India were very serious about solving the outstanding issues concerning water sharing of common rivers. The neighbouring countries have 54 rivers in common. So far, only one treaty has been signed on the Ganges.

The Teesta water-sharing deal was finalised in 2011, but could not be signed due to opposition from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Last year, both the countries began talks on water-sharing deals on six small rivers -- Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudhkumar.

Regarding the Teesta water sharing, Jaishankar, the Indian external affairs minister, said, "We remain committed to Teesta water-sharing and,

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

Amnesty Int'l halts India operations

Says facing govt 'witch-hunt' over unfounded, motivated allegations

REUTERS, New Delhi

Human rights group Amnesty International stopped its work in India yesterday saying the government had frozen its bank accounts in the latest action against it for speaking out about rights violations.

The group said it had laid off staff after facing a crackdown over the past two years over allegations of financial wrongdoing that it said were baseless.

"This is latest in the incessant witch-hunt of human rights organizations by the government of India over unfounded and motivated allegations," Amnesty said in a statement.

Its bank accounts were frozen on September 10, it said.

Amnesty had highlighted rights violations in recent months in the disputed Jammu

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



A bus and a truck, inset, seized by police, are left in the middle of a road adjacent to Ultra East Police Station in the capital. Such placement of seized vehicles by law enforcers obstructs traffic and also ruins the vehicles. The photo was taken on Friday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

AKHAURA-SYLHET RAIL LINE PROJECT

What's the point?

PMO sits today to decide its fate as questions raised over high cost, rationale

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

A project undertaken more than five years ago to convert the metre gauge railway line into dual gauge from Akhaura to Sylhet is likely to see further delay as questions have been raised over its rationale and high cost.

All necessary procedures -- Ecneq approval, managing Chinese concurrence for funding and selection of contractor -- have already been completed over the years, but the "huge cost" of the China-funded project now appears to be another obstacle.

Against the backdrop, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is going to hold a high-profile meeting today to determine the fate of the project aimed at ensuring better rail communications between Dhaka and Sylhet, officials of Bangladesh Railway said.

In September 2015, the rail authorities signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with a Chinese company for the project.

The Planning Commission approved the preliminary development project proposal in March 2016 and the Economic Relations Division in November that year sent a proposal to the Chinese government for funding the project on a government to government basis.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs the same year gave the go ahead for implementing it under direct procurement method.

Two committees were formed -- one for negotiation with the state-run Chinese company for signing commercial contracts, and another for determining technical aspects.

Dozens of meetings were held and the Chinese government agreed to fund the project. The Ecneq finally approved it in April last year at the cost of Tk 16,104.45 crore.

After the Ecneq approval, four ministers from Sylhet region wrote to the railways ministry, suggesting establishment of double line instead of

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1