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Belgian king's hidden daughter wins fight to be a royal
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"We have proof. They are using drones and Turkish F-16 (fighter jets) to bomb civilian areas in Nagorny Karabakh."
ARMENIAN PM NIKOL PASHINYAN CLAIMS EVIDENCE OF TURKISH SUPPORT FOR AZERBAIJAN



"Everywhere, women's rights are under attack, as are human rights, from which they are inseparable."
FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON LAMENTS THE SLOW PROGRESS ON THE ISSUE



"I am certain that your inherent vitality, good spirits and optimism will help you cope with this dangerous virus."
PUTIN WISHES TRUMP A SPEEDY RECOVERY FROM COVID-19

Giving away greenery

Move on to lease out heart of Harargoj Reserve Forest for tea plantation; faulty land survey, wrong classification put the forestland at risk of destruction

"If they strip off the middle part of the forest by leasing out for tea plantations or any other purpose, it will eventually destroy the whole reserve forest and the surrounding forest areas."

SM SAJJAD HOSSAIN, DEPUTY CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS AND DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER, SYLHET



DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

The heartland of a reserve forest in Moulvibazar is in the process of being leased out to a private company for tea plantation.

Several companies were vying for a lease of the 2,174.35 acres of land, disputed between the local Forest Department and administration following a controversial survey decision and subsequent filing of a case with the Land Survey Tribunal.

But one leading tea producer managed to get a green signal from the PMO with the condition of case disposal.

Forest officials and green activists

squarely put the blame on local offices concerned for misleading the highest office, warning that such a lease would lead to the destruction of the whole reserve forest.

"If they strip off the middle part of the forest by leasing out for tea plantations or any other purpose, it will eventually destroy the whole reserve forest and the surrounding forest areas," SM Sajjad Hossain, deputy conservator of forests and divisional forest officer in Sylhet, told The Daily Star.

It was on October 24, 1921 when 12,019 acres of unsurveyed forestland in Sylhet district of Colonial Assam was declared the "Harargoj Reserve Forest".

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Showing a shocking disregard for safety, a man rides a motorbike along with his wife and three children in the capital's Shyamoli area. The family was on the way to its Tejgaon home in the city from Manikganj. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Trump, Melania catch Covid-19

Showing 'mild' symptoms; Biden, world leaders wish them speedy recovery

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump yesterday said he had tested positive for Covid-19 and would quarantine inside the White House during his recovery, cancelling upcoming appearances on the campaign trail ahead of a bitterly fought election.

The 74-year-old Trump -- who has continued to cast doubt on the seriousness of the pandemic, even as the US death toll topped 200,000 -- announced in an overnight tweet that he and First Lady Melania Trump, 50, had tested positive and were going into quarantine.

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CHINESE VACCINE TRIAL IN BANGLADESH

Sinovac now wants co-financing

Dhaka yet to reply to its proposal

MOUDUJ AHMED SUJAN

The much-talked-about mass trial of a Chinese coronavirus vaccine in Bangladesh has become uncertain after drugmaker Sinovac Biotech Ltd asked the government to co-finance the initiative.

Sinovac Biotech Ltd in a letter on September 24 said the trial would be delayed unless the government provided funds, although the company was supposed to bear the costs as per an agreement.

The Beijing-based vaccine giant sent the letter to the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b), which was to conduct the trial.

The icddr,b forwarded it to the health ministry.

"They [Sinovac] informed us that they would be able to start the trial soon if we co-fund the initiative. We will make a decision after talking to the prime minister," Abdul Mannan, secretary of the health services division at the health ministry, told The Daily Star on Thursday.

"We are not dependent on Sinovac. The government is looking for other avenues to get the vaccine right after it is developed," he said.

The Sinovac letter did not mention how much fund it would need and why it was seeking funds at the last moment.

The officials concerned refused to comment on the issue.

Experts said Sinovac's demand was "not fair" and speculated that the company might have run the required number of trials in other countries.

"They probably fulfilled their enrollment criteria for the approval. Now

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COMPARING VACCINES

Icddr,b chosen as one of six global labs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The icddr,b has been selected as one of the six laboratories across the globe to work together to reliably assess and compare immunological responses generated by Covid-19 vaccine candidates, read a press release yesterday.

The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), a major non-profit group, has set up the network of global laboratories to assess data for potential Covid-19 vaccines, allowing scientists and drug makers to compare them and speed up selection of the most effective shots.

"We commend CEPI's efforts to establish a centralised laboratory network, and, as an organisation with decades of experience in evaluating vaccines, we are keen to contribute to the network," Professor John D Clemens, MD, executive director at icddr,b, said in a press release from the CEPI forwarded by the icddr,b.

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EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

No hearing on HC rules yet

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The High Court could not issue any directive, guideline or observation on extrajudicial killings in law enforcers' custody as no final hearings were held on two separate petitions and three rules over the last 14 years.

Had those petitions and rules been heard and disposed of, the HC would have been enabled to give directives to the authorities on ensuring protection and security of the accused in custody, legal experts say.

The HC issued three separate rules including a suo motu (voluntary) one at different times, questioning the legality of extrajudicial killings in the custody of law enforcers.

But no progress has so far been made since then as the authorities concerned are yet to reply to those rules.

No date was fixed for the final hearing either, court sources said.

The first HC rule was issued on August 6, 2006 following a writ petition filed by the Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB), asking police and Rab to explain in three weeks why they should not be directed to ensure protection of people held in custody.

Justice Syed Muhammad Dastagir Husain, one of the two judges of that HC bench, has now retired.

The second rule was issued on June 28, 2009, following a joint petition of three human right organisations, asking the government to explain within four weeks why extrajudicial killings in the name of "crossfire"

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33 deaths recorded in a day

1,396 more infected with Covid-19

UNB, Dhaka

Thirty-three people were reported dead from Covid-19 yesterday, as the death toll from the virus reached 5,305.

With 1,396 new cases, the number of infections was 366,383, according to a handout issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) yesterday morning.

A total of 1,549 patients recovered in 24 hours on Thursday, taking the number of recoveries to 278,627, it said, adding that there are 82,451 active cases in the country.

Yesterday's positive cases were detected after testing 11,176 samples. The positivity rate was 18.6 percent.

Of the 33 reported dead yesterday, 30 were above 50 years old.

So far, 2,663 people in Dhaka, 1,084 in Chattogram, 353 in Rajshahi, 436 in Khulna,

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The Atrai devours houses along its bank as erosion by the river has taken a serious turn in Solakura area of Natore's Singra upazila. The river was flowing 51cm above the danger level at Singra point yesterday, three days after the upazila was hit by floods. About 1.55 lakh people have been affected by flooding in Singra and Naldanga upazilas of the district.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Biman, Saudia to operate 17 flights a week

Stranded Saudi Arabia-bound workers see new hope

RASHIDUL HASAN

Biman has started operating flights to Saudi Arabia while Saudia has increased the number of its weekly flights from Dhaka, offering some relief to around 55,000 stranded Bangladeshi migrants seeking to go back to work in the Gulf country.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines got permission from the Saudi authorities to operate nine (chartered) flights to Dammam, Jeddah and Riyadh every week from Thursday, Group Captain Chy M Zia Ul Kabir, member (flight standard and regulations) of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab), told The Daily Star yesterday.

Around 3,000 migrant workers, stranded in Bangladesh due to the coronavirus restrictions, will be able to reach Saudi Arabia every week in those nine flights, said sources at the airlines.

Zia Ul Kabir said initially Biman would operate nine flights a week from October 1 to 24.

".... We can consider these flights as some sort of regular flights as the Saudi authorities have already given Biman the landing permission in advance," he said.

In another development, Caab has allowed Saudia, formally known as Saudi Arabian Airlines, to operate four more flights from Dhaka every week, Caab Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidir Rahman told this correspondent.

At present, the national flag carrier of Saudi Arabia operates four flights from Dhaka a week.

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