

THAI DEMOCRACY PROTESTS
Court suspends TV station over coverage of escalating unrest
SEE PAGE 6

The Daily Star



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"We want to see who has occupied these forest land. We want to see that even an inch amount of forest land cannot be occupied illegally by anyone."
CHAIRMAN OF PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT SABER HOSSAIN CHOWDHURY

"I am concerned that vaguely defined laws are increasingly being used to stifle these [civil society] voices."
LUN RIGHTS CHIEF MICHELLE BACHELET ON ARREST OF ACTIVISTS IN INDIA

"How can we talk about Rohingya refugees returning to Rakhine State when that area remains an active war zone?"
MALAYSIAN MP CHARLES SANTIAGO WHO CHAIRS ASEAN PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Breathing in poison

1,73,500 died in Bangladesh last year as air pollution turns deadly

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Air pollution led to 1,73,500 deaths in Bangladesh last year, says a global report as experts find the country's air becoming increasingly poisonous in the absence of effective measures to control the release of pollutants.

The report titled "State of Global Air 2020" also places air pollution at fourth among all major mortality risk factors worldwide, surpassed by high blood pressure, tobacco use, and poor diet.

And it caused 6.7 million deaths across the globe last year.

The report, due to be released today by the US-based Health Effects Institute and Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, found South Asia to be the most polluted region in the world in terms of air.

It put Bangladesh among the top 10 countries with the highest outdoor PM2.5 levels in 2019, according to a researcher involved with the study.

The previous report, released in 2017, said air pollution led to 1,23,000 deaths in Bangladesh that year.

It mentioned that life expectancy in Bangladesh would have seen the highest expected gain of nearly 1.3 years if the air pollution level met the World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines.

According to the latest study, more than 2.1 million people died due to air pollution in South Asia last year -- including 16,70,000 in India, 2,35,700 in Pakistan and 42,100 in Nepal.

India, Pakistan and Nepal are among the ten countries with the highest outdoor PM2.5 levels.

PM2.5 -- or particulate matter 2.5 -- refers to the pollutants, which are tiny particles that reduce visibility and cause the air to appear hazy when levels are elevated. These include both organic and inorganic particles,

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



With stocks fast depleting, potato traders at a wholesale store in Karwan Bazar stop selling yesterday. Another one decides to take a nap, inset, as he has only a few kgs left. The few stores that were selling potatoes, sold them for at least Tk 44 a kg yesterday, more than double the price of a month ago.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

TRADERS' PRESSURE Govt raises potato price to Tk 35 a kg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Caving in to the pressure from businesspeople, the government yesterday raised the price ceiling for potato by Tk 5 to Tk 35 per kg at retail markets.

The move came at a time when per kg potato was already selling at Tk 45 and above.

Consumers fear this will give the traders the scope to hike the price further.

Mohammad Yusuf, director general of Department of Agriculture Marketing (DAM), held a meeting with businessmen at his office in Khamarbari, where the price of potato was fixed at Tk 30 a kg at the wholesale level and Tk 27 at the cold storage.

On October 7, the DAM fixed the price ceiling at Tk 30 for retailers and Tk 25 for wholesalers. It also set the price at Tk 23 for businessmen who had kept potatoes in cold storages for future sales.

However, the potato SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

JS body to make list of 90k forest grabbers public

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The parliamentary standing committee on environment has decided to make the list of 90,000 individuals and organisations public who have grabbed around 2.87 lakh acres of forestland across the country.

The parliamentary watchdog came up with the decision at its meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban on Monday.

The environment, forest and climate change ministry informed the Jatiya Sangsad committee that 90,000 individuals and organisations illegally occupying the country's 2.87 lakh acres of forestland of the forest department.

Cox's Bazar district has the highest 59,471 thousand acres of forestland illegally grabbed by different individuals and organisations, the committee was informed.

Ruling Awami League MP and chief of the parliamentary watchdog, Saber Hossain Chowdhury said they would make the names of individuals and organisations public who have the government's forest land.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

ADMISSION FOR 2020-21

DU to hold tests in divisional cities

No online exams; marks halved

DU CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka University authorities yesterday decided to hold admission tests in divisional cities.

They also decided not to hold any online admission exams for academic year 2020-21. And the test marks have been slashed to 100 from 200.

The decisions came at a Deans' Committee meeting, presided over by DU Vice-chancellor Prof Md Akhtaruzzaman.

Speaking to The Daily Star, DU Pro-VC (education) Prof ASM Maksud Kamal said, "We have decided not to go for online admission tests and to take hold division-wise tests. In this case, we will set up the exam centres and conduct the tests after talking to the university authorities concerned in divisions across the country."

He further said the minimum criteria for applying in different units will remain the same and they will fix the dates after Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exam results are published.

Usually, the university takes the Secondary School Certificate and HSC grade point averages into account alongside admission tests.

Of the 100, 20 marks will come from SSC and HSC results, and the remaining 80 will be based on the admission test itself.

The decisions will be finalised after approval from the university's academic council.

Prof Sadeka Halim, dean of the social sciences faculty, told The Daily SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

MISAPPROPRIATING Tk 585CR

ACC sues BIFFL ex-CEO, official

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Attaching importance to infrastructural investment, the government set up Bangladesh Infrastructure Finance Fund Limited (BIFFL) in 2011 with Tk 1,600 crore in paid-up capital.

It all went well until 2015 when BIFFL had Tk 1428.94 crore investment as Fixed Deposit Receipt (FDR) in public banks and another Tk 546.41 crore in private banks.

But things started going south when SM Farmanul Islam assumed office as the government-owned financial institution's executive director and CEO in June that year.

Violating directives of the Finance Division, Farmanul invested hefty amounts in Non-Banking Financial Institutions (NBFIs) and pushed the BIFFL into danger, ACC sources said.

"Without approval from the [BIFFL] board of directors, he invested Tk 643.03 crore as FDR, going beyond the investment limit, in two troublesome private banks and 12 NBFIs that do not have the capability to return the money," the sources said, adding that there was no possibility of getting back SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



POLLUTION RELATED DEATHS IN 2019

- » 6.7m worldwide
- » 2.1m in South Asia
- » India 16,70,000
- » Pakistan 2,35,700
- » Bangladesh 1,73,500
- » Nepal 42,100

Bangladesh among top 10 countries with the highest outdoor PM2.5 levels

South Asia is the most polluted region in the world

MAJOR SOURCES OF POLLUTION

- » Household solid fuels
- » Dust from construction sites
- » Coal power plants
- » Brick production
- » Transportation
- » Diesel-powered equipment

SOURCE: STATE OF GLOBAL AIR 2020; HEALTH EFFECTS INSTITUTE AND INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH METRICS AND EVALUATION

AIR TRAVELLERS Ten pvt labs can give them Covid reports

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health ministry yesterday nominated 10 private RT-PCR labs in the capital for issuing air passengers Covid-19 test reports.

A circular signed by the ministry's Deputy Secretary (health services division) Bilkis Begum read that passengers would be permitted to go to foreign destinations with Covid-19 negative reports from these labs.

The circular, dated on October 18, was published on the health service division's website yesterday.

The nominated labs are icddr, Universal Medical College Hospital and ideSHi in Mohakhali; the DMFR Molecular Lab and Diagnostics, Lab Aid Ltd, and Popular Diagnostic Center in Dhanmondi; Square Hospital in Panthapath; Evercare Hospital in Bashundhara; Prava Diagnostic in Banani; and the United Hospital in Gulshan.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



A trailer carries a reactor pressure vessel, to be installed at Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, out of a factory in Russia in August. The equipment reached Mongla Sea Port in Khulna yesterday. The government is implementing the power plant project in Pabna to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Dream coming true bit by bit

Key machines for long cherished Rooppur power plant arrive in Mongla

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and WASIM BIN HABIB

A nuclear reactor and a steam generator, the key components of the first unit of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, arrived in Bangladesh yesterday, paving the way for completing the main phase of the mega project.

Traversing 14,000km, a ship carrying the equipment reached Mongla Sea Port in Khulna from Russia around 4:00pm yesterday. The components weigh 673.6 tonnes, said project officials.

"The arrival marks a major milestone in the construction of our dream project with a total capacity of 2,400MW," Md Shawkat Akbar, project director of the nuclear power plant construction project, told The Daily Star.

The ship carrying the VVER-1200 reactor pressure vessel and the steam generator left for Bangladesh on August 20. The components were manufactured at the "Atomash" plant in Volgogradsk, the largest nuclear engineering production site in Russia. The reactor vessel weighs 333.6 tonnes and the steam generator 340 tonnes.

Now, these will be first shifted to a special barge for transportation to the Rooppur construction site in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila, about 160 kilometres northwest of the capital.

Those will then be sent through rivers from Mongla via Kawkhali, Barisal, Chandpur, Mawa and Rajbari to the newly constructed Rooppur river port near the power plant site.

The special barge carrying the components is expected SEE PAGE 2 COL 3