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Exhausted, Muhammad Ali resting his face on his palms after waiting for over three hours to get tested for coronavirus at Mugda Medical College and Hospital yesterday. The 55-year-old has been suffering from a cold and fever for a month and travelled to the capital from his village in Rajshahi for treatment.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Govt plans to import 10 lakh tonnes of rice

Proposal for importing 50,000 tonnes from Indian firm okayed

REJAUU KARIM BYRON and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government will import at least 10 lakh tonnes of rice from different countries to boost the food grain reserve amid growing concerns over the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The decision came at a time when prices of the staple keep soaring in both retail and wholesale markets and the food grain reserve has dwindled to seven lakh tonnes, almost half of the reserve in the same time last year.

Food Secretary Nazmanara Khanum said the country does not have much shortage of rice against demand.

"But we have decided to increase rice import at government level,

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Graft rules forest dept

61pc of project funds misappropriated: TIB report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As much as 61 percent of the funds for different forest department projects gets embezzled, according to a Transparency International Bangladesh report.

Besides, at least Tk 3 crore changed hands in 60 offices of the department for appointment, promotion, and transfer of officials, the report said.

TIB released "Forest Department:

Governance Challenges and Way Forward" at a virtual press conference yesterday.

While disbursing project funds to the range office, divisional forest offices illegally kept 20 to 25 percent of the money. The embezzled money was divided among forest survey team members, conservators of forests and their assistants, auditors, grievance redress team members, and a section of local journalists, it said.

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COVID VACCINATION Stay alert to anomalies

Health watchdog asks govt as it sits after 9 months

RASHIDUL HASAN

A parliamentary body yesterday directed the health ministry to ensure that no irregularities and corruption take place centring the Covid-19, like those of Regent Hospital and JKG healthcare over testing.

This was for the first time that the parliamentary standing committee on the health ministry sat in a meeting since March.

It also asked the ministry to coordinate with the civil aviation ministry and take measures to temporarily suspend air communication with the UK following the outbreak of a new strain of Covid-19 there.

Ruling Awami League MP Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, who is the chairman of the parliamentary watchdog, presided over the meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

"In our last meeting held in March, we discussed many things on the preparation of Covid-19, procurement of masks and other health equipment for healthcare workers. But after the pandemic began, we

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2020: THE YEAR OF PANDEMIC

HEALTHCARE DURING OUTBREAK

Vulnerability EXPOSED

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

"Today we are unable to say what we had been saying until now. We have found three patients..."

These were the words of the then IEDCR director Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora on March 8 after the first detection of coronavirus cases in Bangladesh, which changed everything, most probably forever.

Since then, Covid-19 infections multiplied, the number of deaths increased with every passing day and more importantly, the pandemic laid bare the vulnerability of the country's healthcare system.

Uncertainty, lax coordination, disparity in providing health services, corruption and a dearth of logistics and manpower spoke volumes of a weak health sector and its weaker institutions in tackling an unprecedented health emergency that marked the year 2020.

"The main feature of the Covid-19 emergency is that it has exposed the faulty healthcare system of the country," Prof Ridwanur Rahman, a medicine and infectious disease specialist, told The Daily Star.

First detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan late in December 2019, Covid-19 has so far claimed around 18 million lives globally, including 7,531 in Bangladesh.

A year after its emergence, the pandemic, which has devastated lives and livelihoods across the globe and forced countries to pour billions of

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Britain first to approve Oxford vaccine

Nod in India expected by next week

AGENCIES

Britain yesterday became the first country in the world to approve a coronavirus vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca, hoping that rapid action would help it stem a surge of infections driven by a highly contagious variant of the virus.

Boris Johnson's government, which has already ordered 100 million doses of the vaccine, said it had accepted a recommendation from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to grant emergency authorisation.

The approval is a vindication for a shot

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