

Oil crosses \$55 a barrel

REUTERS, London

Oil scaled a new high above \$55 a barrel Monday as a threat by Norwegian oil and gas employers to halt production from the world's third biggest exporter stoked fears of a winter supply crunch.

US light crude set a fresh peak of \$55.67 a barrel before easing to \$55.09 a barrel, down 8 cents. London Brent posted a record \$51.90 a barrel before slipping to \$51.18, down 4 cents. Prices are up 70 percent since the start of the year.

Employers group the Norwegian Shipowners Association threatened to expand a lockout of oil rig workers to shut Norway's three million barrels per day of oil output in a bid to force an end to a four-month-old labor dispute.

"The expansion, which will start from midnight Monday Nov. 8, will have immediate effect and will halt all oil and gas production on the Norwegian continental shelf within a week," the association said.

The Norwegian government responded by calling striking workers' union OFS for talks at 1500 GMT, a meeting interpreted by union leader Terje Nustad as likely to bring a request to return to work.

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Respiratory infection peaks in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As winter approaches, acute respiratory infection (ARI), mostly among the elderly and infants, assumes enormous proportions.

Doctors diagnosing patients at the public and private hospitals and private chambers attribute the sickness to seasonal weather change, which commonly causes viral and bacterial infections.

Respiratory (syncytial) viral infection is one of the very common complaints of sickness among the children. This infection triggers high fever with joint pain and inflammation of the lungs that also stimulates frequent difficult coughs.

"Hundreds of patients, many of them elderly people, turned up in the last three weeks. They had breath-

ing difficulties and frequent coughs that are common symptoms of respiratory viral infection," said a senior physician of Shaheed Suhrawardi Hospital.

"Immune or defence mechanism of the body becomes weaker due to viral infection that also allows invasion by bacteria. We call it secondary bacterial infection that often turns grave if not diagnosed early," said Prof Khan Abdul Kalam Azad of Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital in Bogra.

Pneumonia, which results from infection of the air passages in lungs and is closely linked to ARI, is also affecting people at an alarming rate.

Hundreds of children suffering from pneumonia have already been hospitalised. The situation has turned quite serious in the last two weeks.

Pneumonia makes properly breathing difficult for the patients, who often require artificial mechanism of ventilation to enable breathing. If not treated, the disease may cause death within three to four days. It attacks mostly children under five, but adults may also suffer if they do not protect themselves from cold.

At least 100 cases of pneumonia were diagnosed in September and early October at the country's biggest children's hospital - Dhaka Shishu Hospital.

"There's no denying the fact that there is a rush of pneumonia patients before the onset of winter every year. But we can't accommodate all of them. In such a situation

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14 killed in Israeli raid on Gaza

AFP, Gaza City

Fourteen Palestinians have been killed during a major Israeli offensive on the southern Gaza Strip, Palestinian medical and security sources said yesterday.

Another 70 Palestinians were injured and two Israeli soldiers badly wounded in the raid that started late Sunday, sources on both sides said.

The bloody operation, which the army said was aimed at halting mortar fire at Gaza settlements and

military positions, came just hours before the Israeli parliament was to debate a controversial pullout from the Palestinian territory next year.

The victims, among them an eight-year-old boy, died in either air strikes or from gunfire and tank shelling the town of Khan Yunis.

It was not immediately clear if most of the dead were civilians or armed militants in the incursion, which saw around 30 Israeli

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American Club receptionist killed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man allegedly killed his wife, an employee of American Club in the city, and later hanged her at his Gulshan residence in the early hours yesterday.

Police recovered the body of 22-year-old Maifurnahar Runa, receptionist of the club, hanging from the ceiling at around 1:30am.

Runa's father Maksud Khan filed an unnatural death case with Gulshan Police Station accusing her husband Akhter Hossain, an



TACKLE RAFIQUE TO TACKLE VETTORI...Spinner Mohammad Rafique bowls to teammate Nafees Iqbal during Bangladesh's final net practice session at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

RMCH director faces contempt charge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A Rajshahi court has charged the director of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) with contempt of court for continuing recruitment of employees ignoring an injunction.

On August 30, the Senior Assistant Judge's Court issued a show cause notice asking the director to explain in 10 days why it would not issue injunction on the recruitment. As the RMCH authorities did not respond to the notice, the court issued the injunction.

But the RMCH authorities made the recruitment.

Earlier on August 3, the authorities advertised for recruitment, which the 81 employees already serving for nearly a decade on temporary basis grudged.

The employees demanded regularisation of their jobs before fresh recruitment to their posts. As the authorities ignored their demand, an employee filed a case with the court on August 30.

UNO beaten up BSS, Kurigram

Miscreants attacked upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Bhurungamari at his office yesterday and injured him seriously.

Police said a gang of 15 came to the UNO office from Kurigram by motorbikes at around 1:30pm. They beat UNO Mir Mohammad Nazrul Islam and stabbed him.

He was rushed to Bhurungamari Upazila Health Complex and later shifted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH) as his condition deteriorated.

Police said a clerk of the UNO office, Sekendar Ali, was transferred to Kurigram a week ago. The clerk

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Discontent brews in admin over politicisation

REZAUL KARIM

Discontent is brewing in the civil administration due to politicisation, wrongful punishment of many officials, denial of promotion to deserving ones and growing contractual appointments during the last three years of the alliance government, sources in the administration said.

Termination of jobs, forced retirement, violation of seniority and denial of promotion to qualified

officials, making of officers on special duty (OSD) which is considered a punishment and such other steps on political considerations during the tenure of this government have led to widespread resentment in the civil bureaucracy that might take a serious turn if not addressed urgently, the sources pointed out.

Although the government has promoted hundreds of officials in the last three years to remove promotion backlog, a large section of the civil servants are not happy with the

government moves as, they think, the steps are part of politicisation process, and not aimed at building an efficient and neutral administration.

Many of the aggrieved officials said they had hoped to get rid of political victimisation by the previous government as the ruling coalition in its pols pledges had committed to free the administration from political influence but the commitment is now largely ignored.

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