### US mulling sanctions on Venezuela oil

Says Tillerson

AFP, Buenos Aires

The United States said Sunday it has not ruled out sanctions on Venezuelan oil as it turns the screw on President Nicolas Maduro, but is wary of hurting the country's people. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is

in Argentina during a tour of Latin America to bolster a common front against Venezuela's bid to hold a presidential election that opponents deem illegitimate.

The top US diplomat has received support from other governments in the Americas, including on Sunday from his Argentine counterpart Foreign Minister Jorge Faurie, but some are cautious about sanctions.

At a joint news conference,

Tillerson -- a former chief of oil giant ExxonMobil -- confirmed the ultimate option of sanctioning Venezuela's key oil sector is under consideration, but that Washington shares its allies' concerns.

Oil-rich and once one of the wealthiest countries in Latin America. Venezuela under Maduro faces economic collapse and widespread popular protest. The US, Canada and the European Union have imposed economic sanctions targeting Maduro loyalists seen as profiteers or human rights abusers.

Tillerson did not push back against the suggestion that sanctions on oil might also hurt US companies that have built refineries in the southern United States geared to accept Venezuelan crude.

"Obviously sanctioning oil or prohibiting the oil to be sold in the United States ... is something we continue to consider," Tillerson said, while acknowledging Faurie's concerns.

"As the foreign minister indicated, our disagreements are with the Venezuelan regime not with the people, the Venezuelan people are suffering mightily in the current circumstances. Tillerson said oil sanctions could

be deployed if it is decided that this would bring the crisis to a more rapid end "because not doing anything to bring this to an end is also asking the Venezuelan people to suffer for a much longer time."

But he added that Washington was also looking at how to "mitigate the impact on US business interests."

Faurie agreed with Tillerson that Maduro's attempt to call an election on terms set by Venezuela's non-elected Constituent Assembly was illegitimate and would be rejected by Argentina.

"As for the sales of oil and trade in oil that exist, that is particularly important, we should closely follow up on this to ensure appropriate balance between what the Venezuelan nation needs and what is being used by the leaders of the Venezuelan government," he said.

#### Samples of 15 FROM PAGE 1

the city with the representatives of the companies that import and market milk powder.

Early last month, the BFSA had milk powder of 15 local and foreign brands tested in three laboratories of Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR), the Atomic Energy Centre and the Institute of Public Health (IPH).

The laboratory tests found excessive level of lead in products of six local brands that import milk powder in bulk quantities and repack those locally.

Scientists say if children consume excessive level of lead, they may become stunted. This can even result in growth failure, learning difficulties and also behavioural problems.

The permissible level of lead in milk powder is 0.02 milligram a kilogram. But the milk products of six of the seven local brands contained lead between 0.2 and 0.3 milligram (10 to 16 times the permissible level) The eight other brands of milk powder contained lead within permissible

level, BFSA officials said. Following that, the BFSA on January 25 asked the customs authorities in Bangladesh to ensure that all milk powder importers stock products in their own warehouses and have those tested at the three desig-

nated laboratories before marketing the products. However, the brands made objections, saying they want the tests con-

ducted at the internationallyrecognised laboratories abroad, said Mahfuzul Hoque.

"So, we decided that the milk powder will be tested in the three

designated laboratories as well as in two internationally recognised laboratories outside the country," he told The Daily Star.

The meeting, chaired by Mahfuzul Hoque, formed a nine-member committee comprised of three members of the BFSA, three scientists of the three designated labs and three representa-

tives of the milk powder companies. The committee headed by BFSA

Member Mahbub Kabir would select

powder, he said.

# Trump attacks Britain's public healthcare system

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday attacked Britain's public healthcare system in comments that are likely to call his much-delayed visit to the country further into doubt.

"The Democrats are pushing for Universal HealthCare while thousands of people are marching in the UK because their U system is going broke and not working," he wrote in an early morning tweet.

"Dems want to greatly raise taxes for really bad and non-personal medical care. No thanks!" The tweet came after thousands of

people marched through central London on Saturday in support of the National Health Service, which is straining under the weight of winter demand. NHS staffing levels have been in

crisis for months, an issue made worse by a winter flu outbreak. Despite its current woes, the public

health service, which was created after

World War II, is a revered institution and Trump's comments are likely to stoke resentment. The "special relationship" between Britain and the United States has

shown some signs of strain since Trump came to office a year ago. British Prime Minister Theresa May

was the first foreign leader to visit

Trump following his inauguration in

January last year, when she invited him to make a state visit to Britain, hosted by Queen Elizabeth II. The trip has been delayed, however, and Trump recently pulled out of a

plan to open the new US embassy in London, a move British officials blamed on threats of mass protests. Trump has also angered the British with previous controversial tweets,

including retweeting a British extremist group's anti-Muslim propaganda and sparring with London mayor Sadiq Khan following a terror attack in the British capital. It is not certain why Trump chose to

attack the NHS two days after the London protests.

Trump's own attempts to reverse his predecessor's healthcare reform, known as Obamacare, twice ended in failure, before his party succeeded in eliminating a key element -- the socalled "individual mandate" as part of tax reform.

VIP lane

also need it, he observed.

experts find it "unrealistic".

FROM PAGE 16

mented.

themselves.

hours.

The measure required individuals

vehicles carrying VIPs take the wrong

rate lanes as patients sometimes die in

the ambulances. Fire service and police

Transport Coordination Authority

(DTCA) for its opinion, transport

on the city roads compared to their

actual capacity. In this context, there is

no scope of implementing such a pro-

posal," Prof Shamsul Haque, an urban

"It is totally unrealistic," he com-

Commuters have meanwhile said

The proposal comes at a time when

the city's traffic congestion made the

lives of Dhaka city residents miserable

as they remain stuck on the road for

measures to control traffic jam in last

few years, but no significant progress

was seen due mainly to the increasing

metro rail, are now underway as part of

private, hit the city streets every year,

but the space in roads remains almost

the same, creating huge pressure on the

capital have been registered with

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority

(BRTA) as of 2010. The number has

Some 114,271 vehicles were regis-

In the last 10 years, average traffic

tered in the first 10 months of last year,

while the number was 110,520 in 2016,

speed in Dhaka dropped from 21

kmph to 7 kmph, which is slightly

above the average walking speed, says a

World Bank analysis. The speed may

drop to 4 kmph by 2035, slower than

million work hours per day. This costs

the economy billions of dollars every

year," says the analysis shared at a high-

level international conference in

VIPs, are seen taking the wrong side of

the roads, prompting law enforcers to

Most often people, including the

"Congestion in Dhaka eats up 3.2

As many as 593,077 vehicles in the

Some major projects, including the

More than 1 lakh vehicles, mostly

number of people and vehicles.

those government measures.

existing roads, experts observe.

doubled in just seven years.

according to BRTA.

walking speed, it adds.

Dhaka in July last year.

take action against them.

The government has taken some

this move is a glaring example that the

government high-ups only think of

transport expert, told The Daily Star.

Emergency services also need sepa-

With the proposal now at Dhaka

"Currently, more vehicles are plying

sides of the road, creating traffic chaos.

to buy health insurance as a way to lower costs by ensuring that healthy people were part of the insurance pool.

One possible explanation for Trump's criticism was an appearance by Brexit champion Nigel Farage, a former leader of the UK Independence Party and a personal friend of Trump, on Fox News yesterday when he talked about the protests.

## Two crew feared dead in Japan army helicopter

AFP, Tokyo

Two crew were feared dead yesterday after a Japanese military helicopter crashed in a residential area in the southwest of the country, setting a home on fire.

confirmed the crash in the town of Kanzaki and said the two crew on board were retrieved "in a state of cardiac and respiratory arrest," Jiji news agency reported.

Japanese officials before deaths are officially confirmed.

thick plume of grey smoke rising from the site of the crash in between Local firefighters could be seen

firehoses as people were evacuated from the area. "I heard something like a rum-

near the crash site told NHK. "I rushed out there and saw a blaze and black smoke. It's impossible that

this happens in such a place." Onodera earlier told reporters the AH-64 Apache attack helicopter had

Local officials confirmed the crash site was a residential area, adding one home had caught fire. The local fire authority said it had dispatched 14 fire engines and three ambulances to

was inside the home at the time of

the concluding day of their arguthem, he said.

# crash

Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera

The language is often used by

Japan's NHK television showed a

the rooftops of local houses. running through the streets with red

bling of the earth," a woman living

gone down in Japan's Saga region and "burst into flames."

the site. Local media reported that no one

the crash.

Road Transport and Highway Division

densely populated cities in the devel-

oped countries have separate lanes for

the vehicles carrying service providers,

law enforcers and important persons.

in Dhaka, movement of the service

providers and important persons

The proposal also says the govern-

ment has taken different measures to

reduce traffic jam, but an immediate

solution is difficult because of the huge

population, increased number of

vehicles and shortage of required road

the Cabinet Division proposal to the

Dhaka Transport Coordination

January 11 and held a discussion on it

with the officials of Dhaka city corpo-

rations, Dhaka Metropolitan Police

Director Syed Ahmed said they have yet

of the meeting said it [separate lane for

VIPs and emergency services is not

possible in the present condition of the

roads [in Dhaka city]," he told The

ble without widening the roads, he

said, adding, removal of many struc-

RTHD]. A further study can be done if

required. This [proposal for further

study| may be incorporated in our

about such a huge proposal in two or

three lines," Syed Ahmed said, adding

that many things including the present

condition of Dhaka roads and what

has to be done must be taken into

neering at Buet said the Strategic

Transport Plan (STP) and the revised

STP recommends dedicated lane for

and fire service vehicles can co-ply

through the dedicated lane, he added.

public transports like metro rail and

Emergency services like ambulance

After construction of the lanes for

public transport, there would be no

space left in the roads for another

dedicated lane. So, the proposal for a

dedicated lane for VIPs and emergency

services is "unrealistic" and "there is no

"It is not possible to give opinions

Making a separate lane is not possi-

"We will send our opinion [to the

Contacted, DTCA Executive

"However, most of the participants

Authority (DTCA) for opinions.

and Rajuk on January 30.

to finalise their opinions.

Daily Star yesterday.

tures is required for that.

opinion," he said.

consideration.

bus rapid transit.

scope for it," he added.

An RTHD official said they have sent

The DTCA received the proposal on

If a similar lane could be introduced

According to the proposal, many

(RTHD) of the ministry.

would be easier, it adds.

FROM PAGE 16 of all the accused in the case, said advocate Ataur Rahman Azad, Tangail district unit secretary of Bangladesh Manobadhikar Bastobayon Sangstha, which assists the prosecution in the

On January 31, the prosecution on

Rupa rape

ments sought capital punishment for all the accused, saying that they were able to prove the allegations against Trial of the case began on January 3 with recording deposition of the plain-

tiff of the case. Later, 26 more witnesses, including the investigation officer of the case, the doctor who conducted the autopsy on Rupa and the senior judicial magistrates who recorded confessional statements of the accused under Section 164, gave their statements before the court, he added. On August 25 last year, police

recovered an unidentified body of a woman near Tangail-Mymensingh road in Tangail's Madhupur. Sub-inspector Aminul Islam of

Aronkhola Police Outpost in

Madhupur Police Station on the same Following an autopsy, the body was buried at the Tangail central graveyard the next day. Seeing the news in the media,

Madhupur filed a murder case with

Rupa's family members went to Madhupur Police Station on August 28 and identified her from the photographs. The law enforcers on the same day

detained five employees of a bus -helpers Shamim, 26, Akram, 35, and Jahangir, 20, driver Habibur, 45, and bus supervisor Safar Ali, 55 -- in Madhupur.

The arrestees during interrogation admitted their involvement in the crime, police sources said.

The Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court in Tangail on August 29 and 30 recorded confessional statements of the arrestees under Section 164 and sent them to jail.

Following a court order, police on August 31 exhumed Rupa's body and handed it over to her family. The victim was later buried at her village in Sirajganj's Tarash upazila.

On October 15, Sub-inspector Kaiyum Khan Siddique, investigation officer of the case and the then incharge of Aronkhola Police Outpost in Madhupur, pressed charges against the five accused.

On November 29, District and Sessions Judge in Tangail Robiul Hasan, who worked as the acting judge of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal, framed charges against the five transport workers.

## Muhith pledges

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Officials of Bangladesh Bank and Janata Bank said the big loans were sanctioned and disbursed in violation of the credit discipline.

The major portion of the loans was given to 22 companies of the group through Letters of Credit and Cash Credit when Barkat was the bank's chairman between 2009 and 2015.

But the companies did not repay the loans and became defaulters.

The bank, however, rescheduled the loans later.

Contacted, Barkat said the group had set up industrial units following European standards, and its loan repayment was very good during his stint as the bank chairman.

Asked whether he inspected the factories of the group, he said he had not visited those but top officials of Janata Bank and a number of academicians and students of industrial economics at the DU had earlier visited the factories.

All of them had said the factories were of European standards, claimed Barkat.

Responding to a question, he asked this correspondent to find out when the group had stopped repaying the loans.

"I left the bank three years ago, and another person was appointed as its chairman," he added.

## Microplastics

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that these filter feeders are taking up microplastics in their feeding grounds," said Professor Maria Cristina Fossi of the University of Siena. Microplastics are small pieces of

plastic less than five millimetres in size. Some microplastics are manufactured, such as the microbeads added to health and beauty products, while others result from larger plastics gradually breaking down. These plastics are pervasive in

marine environments, and they are known to harbour toxic substances Prof Shamsul Haque of civil engisuch as heavy metals and phthalates. Since many animals are known to

> eat microplastics, scientists are concerned about the toxic substances contained within them, as well as their capacity to accumulate within the animals and stop them from absorbing nutrients correctly. "Exposure to these plastic-associated toxins pose a major threat to the health

of these animals since it can alter the hormones, which regulate the body's growth and development, metabolism, and reproductive functions, among other things", said Professor Fossi.

The study was published in the journal Trends in Ecology & Evolution.

# Swiss president

FROM PAGE 1

The Swiss president said Switzerland pledged eight million Swiss francs [equivalent to \$8 million] at a conference in Geneva in October for emergency humanitarian aid for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

today [yesterday] that this year Switzerland will provide an additional 12 million francs [equivalent to \$12 million] for the Rohingya refugees." He said the agreement on repatria-

tion between Bangladesh and Myanmar was a positive step towards a solution to the current crisis. "It'll be important that all returns are

voluntary and safe, and carried out with dignity," said the Swiss president.

Berset will visit Cox's Bazar today to see Rohingya situation on the ground.

He will visit Kutupalong Rohingya camp. The Swiss president will also talk to journalists at the camp.

Berset will return to the capital in the afternoon and meet civil society representatives. In her statement, Hasina said, "We

had a productive meeting today [yester-

day]. We've discussed the Rohingya

crisis during bilateral talks. I shared

that as the root of the problem lies in Myanmar, the solution has to be found in Myanmar." "I put emphasis on full and immediate implementation of the recommendations of the Kofi Annan Commission Report, as that will be critically important for the sustainable return of the

Rohingya people, in safety and dignity, to their homes in Myanmar," the PM At yesterday's meeting, she said they discussed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which provides a unique opportunity to build

new global partnerships. Hasina said both the countries yesterday agreed to conclude a framework of MoU on collaboration on matters related to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 in near future.

A joint declaration identifying the key areas for broader cooperation between the two countries was issued yesterday, she said. "We may now ask our respective

authorities to develop a roadmap for the implementation of our joint undertakings in a time-bound manner for the shared prosperity of the two states," she added. She thanked Berset for making his

historic first-ever official visit to Bangladesh and termed it a milestone in 45 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

invitation of the then president of the Swiss Confederation. Switzerland was among the first few West European countries to recognise "And I'm very pleased to announce

Bangladesh as an independent state on March 13, 1972. Since then, Switzerland became an important development partner and a time-tested

by Switzerland regarding the Rohingya crisis at different United Nations forums and beyond. "I'm very happy to learn that high-

the first-ever high-level Bangladesh-Swiss Business and Investment Forum held today [yesterday]." would explore business opportunities in Bangladesh, and invited them to partici-

development, ICT, banking and insurance, and pharmaceuticals. Terming the relations between Switzerland and Bangladesh good, Swiss President Berset said Switzerland with this visit demonstrated its support

"The bilateral relations between our countries are good. We've had the opportunity to exchange today [yesterday] on areas -- trade, development cooperation, cultural exchanges and climate change -where both the countries see a strong

He also greeted Bangladesh as it was including respect for human rights."

# S Korea appeals court frees

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reported record profits, is the flagship subsidiary of the giant Samsung group, by far the biggest of the familycontrolled conglomerates known as chaebols that dominate Asia's fourthlargest economy. The chaebols played key roles in the

legal treatment of their leaders.

At his original trial Lee, 49, was convicted of a range of offences, including bribery, embezzlement, money laundering and perjury in parliament, in connection with the sprawling corruption scandal that

The case centred on payments Samsung made to Park's secret confidante Choi Soon-Sil, with prosecutors arguing they were intended to secure government favours.

He had been sentenced to five years in jail, making him the first Samsung chief to serve prison time, even though his father was twice convicted of criminal offences and his grandfather was earlier embroiled in scandal.

struck out most of the convictions and reduced the penalty on the remainder to a suspended prison sentence of two and a half years.

"forced" to offer Park bribes and there was "no evidence" that Lee explicitly demanded policy favours in return.

should be seen as the main players in this scandal," said the ruling, read out in court by one of the judges.

#### Four Indian FROM PAGE 16

India regularly accuses Pakistan of aiding fighters in crossing the LoC to

attack Indian targets. Pakistan denies the allegations. The civilian population living near

because of the latest violence between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. Earlier on Sunday, a teenage girl was wounded in the Poonch region.

fought two of three wars over Kashmir, which both countries claim in its entirety. Anti-India sentiment runs deep

rebels' cause against Indian rule. Tens of thousands of people have

complete.

Hasina appreciated the role played

powered business delegations from both the countries exchanged views in

She hoped that Swiss companies pate in sectors like oil and gas exploration, power and energy, critical infrastructure

and solidarity for Bangladesh during the Rohingya crisis.

tions," he said in another statement. efforts in improving the business clisustainable business environment,

between the two countries has almost doubled over the past seven years, he said, "It's my firm belief that the Swiss-Bangladeshi trade and investment will reach new heights in the future." Switzerland is very much interested

in continuing this path with the govment, governance and safe migration.

Samsung Electronics, which last week

South's dramatic economic growth but have long had close and sometimes murky ties with political authorities. Commentators said yesterday's decision was in keeping with past lenient

brought down Park Geun-Hye.

But the Seoul High Court yesterday

The court said Lee had been

"Park Geun-Hye and Choi Soon-Sil

the border has been severely affected

Since independence in 1947 from Britain, India and Pakistan have

among Kashmir's mostly Muslim population, and most support the

died in the decades of violence.

Hasina recalled her visit to Switzerland in December 2000 at the

friend, she said.

potential for development of our relaheading towards emerging a middleincome nation. "We also welcome mate, legal security and the need for a

Mentioning that the bilateral trade

ernment of Bangladesh, the private sector and civil society organisations, said Berset, adding that a particular focus on the next couple of years will be on social inclusion, economic develop-

Lee walked out of the courthouse swinging the hands that had been cuffed every time he arrived and left the building since he was first detained in February last year, television pictures showed.

The badge bearing his prisoner

number that had been pinned to his

jacket earlier was gone, and he smiled -- although he had appeared to have lost weight during his time in custody. He was driven back to his detention

centre for formalities before being The Samsung group, whose revenues are equivalent to around a fifth of the country's GDP, has lobbied hard against the convictions of Lee and four other senior executives. Shim Jung-Taik, an author of several books on Samsung and its corporate culture, said: "It shows that, in South Korea,

politicians come and go but Samsung's power never fades away. "We still have this widespread mindset that 'our economy will collapse without chaebols, and the chaebols will collapse unless they are controlled by the members of their

#### founding families," Shim told AFP. Piling problems

FROM PAGE 16

due to the character of the Padma riverbed there. Over the last several months, the BBA and its consultants have been

It found that piling could not be done

trying to fix the problem. Now, they have decided to re-design the 14 piers. They are considering deeper piling for the piers. Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury,

chairman of the government's panel of

experts on Padma Bridge, said the

problem with piling work was going to be resolved as experts were working on redesigning the 14 piers. "Some of the piers require more piling and that will depend on the character of earth around it," he told The Daily Star. Given the current work progress

rate, he predicted that the Padma Bridge project would be completed in the second half of next year. A team of the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Department

(IMED) after visiting the Padma Bridge area in November last year said construction of the main bridge was lagging about eight months behind. According to a government report of December on fast-track projects, 53 percent work on building the main

bridge had been completed while

about 34 percent of river-training work had been done. The Jajira approach road was almost finished and Mawa approach road was

It claimed that half of the entire Padma Bridge project work was done.

#### Against this backdrop, the Cabinet the foreign labs for tests of the milk Division has sent the proposal to the