

Let barriers be removed

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top official of the finance division told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

The dialogue series will start on November 26 on the topic “Job Retention, Restoration of Demand and Maintenance of Supply Chain,” the official said.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Ahmad Kaikaus, World Bank’s Country Director for Bangladesh Mercy Tembon, Japanese Ambassador in Dhaka Ito Naoki, Centre for Policy Dialogue Executive Director Fahmida Khatun, and SANEM Executive Director Selim Raihan are among the panelists of the dialogue, said finance ministry officials.

The second day of the dialogue would be held on December 3 on employment creation and revitalisation of the rural economy. The last part of the series would be held on December 10 on food security, they added.

Experts believe that the dialogues would also help them find out the barriers standing in the way of the packages’ implementation, and speed up the execution.

Hailing the initiative, Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist at the World Bank’s Dhaka office, said, “It will be important to focus on the discussion on the specific issues such as food security and assisting the informal sector in the midst of the pandemic as identified.

“The government needs to pay serious attention to the assessments of why the implementation of stimulus packages for the cottage, micro and small enterprises in the formal and informal sectors is so slow,” he told this paper.

The government’s evaluation of the huge stimulus packages comes after experts and think-tanks decried over the slow disbursement of the funds to some of the sectors hit hard by the pandemic.

Since the virus was detected in Bangladesh in March, both the government and the central bank have unveiled 20 stimulus packages involving Tk 120,053 crore. The combined support now accounts for 4.3 percent of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The packages have been provided in the form of low-cost loans to micro, small, medium and large industries and service-providers and food security, social protection and special allowances as the pandemic-induced shutdown paralysed the economy, drying up millions of jobs and creating the new poor.

For sectors like the export-oriented ones and large industries, the disbursement of the funds was quick. But the needy small and medium enterprises and farm sectors are yet to avail much of the support.

As of September, the banks disbursed 48 percent of Tk 76,000 crore funds they were entrusted with lending to the large industries. It means the banks have disbursed Tk 36,624 crore.

The export-oriented sector, mainly the readymade garments, is ahead of all so far. Initially, they were given Tk 5,000 crore. When the sector demanded more after the funds exhausted, the government allocated another Tk 3,000 crore. The second tranche has also been distributed.

But there are sectors where the disbursement of the stimulus fund has been very slow.

The special refinancing scheme worth Tk 5,000 crore for the agricultural sector can be a case in point.

Some 78,526 farmers or farms received Tk 1,892 crore from 43 banks, which was less than one third of the allocation.

Food security is another sector that apparently gets lesser priority.

The food ministry had aimed to buy 16.70 lakh tonnes of boro rice during the procurement period from April 26 to September 15. But it could manage to purchase only 9.10 lakh tonnes.

Despite the pandemic, the government could distribute around 7.45 lakh tonnes of rice from July 1 to October 15 this fiscal year whereas it was around 7.97 lakh tonnes during the same period a year ago, documents show.

One of the reasons behind the slow distribution is the decline in the country’s food reserve.

Food Secretary Mosammat Nazmanara Khanum, however, said the distribution was low because the government doled out cash incentives instead of food under its food programme.

The Tk 20,000 crore fund as the working capital support to the pandemic-hit small businesses has also moved slowly. So far, Tk 4,822 crore have been disbursed from the package. Some 21,642 male entrepreneurs and 1,124 female entrepreneurs received the loans.

Similarly, the pre-shipment credit refinance scheme amounting to Tk 5,000 crore for export-oriented industries has not made any progress.

Bangladesh Bank started the scheme on April 13, but only Tk 16.6 crore was disbursed as of September.

In a recent paper, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) found only 8 percent of the employed workforce benefited from the stimulus packages.

There are about 6 crore people engaged in the formal and informal sectors in the country. But the packages failed to create required jobs to help people, the think-tank said.

Zahid Hussain said local think-tanks have done a lot on this together with the development partners. The dialogue will provide a forum for synthesising the insights obtained from these analyses.

“We hope at the end of it, there will be some clear directions on how to reform the existing initiatives and who will do what going forward. The crisis is deepening all over the world and the challenges are unprecedented. There is good news on the vaccine front, but a long way is still to go.

Families of POWs

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from Pakistan, the spokesman gives no indication whether Pakistan is ready to respond to the venture by repatriating families of stranded Bangalees in Pakistan.

LIFE TERM FOR MALIK
Dr Abdul Mottalib Malik, governor of the then East Pakistan during Yahya Khan’s occupation regime, is sentenced to life term today for his offence of waging a war against Bangladesh and helping the occupation forces of Pakistan.

DRAFT ELECTORAL ROLLS PUBLISHED

A total number of 3,51,19,800 voters are registered throughout the country in the draft electoral rolls published today. The CEC says the number of voters registered this time has increased by nearly 12 percent over the number of voters of 1970 elections. The increase is attributed mainly to the extension of franchise to the age of 18 years.

SOURCES: November 21, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Dainik Ittefaq.

Oxford Covid vaccine safe

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how well the vaccine works in preventing Covid-19 disease.

“We’re still waiting to get to the point where we can do the analysis to just work out how well the vaccine can protect people, and we’re getting ever closer to that,” he told journalists.

The Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine candidate, called AZD1222 or ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, had been among the front-runners in global efforts to develop shots to protect against infection with the novel coronavirus, or SARS-CoV-2.

Pfizer said Wednesday that a completed study of its experimental vaccine showed it was 95 percent effective, while fellow US firm Moderna said this week that its own candidate was 94.5 percent effective. Russia claims its candidate is more than 90 percent effective.

“We’re not in a rush. It’s not a competition with the other developers,” Oxford’s Pollard said, adding that AstraZeneca would release headline efficacy data before it was published in an academic journal.

Unlike the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna shots, both of which use new technology known as messenger RNA (mRNA), AstraZeneca’s is a viral vector vaccine made from a weakened version of a common cold virus found

in chimpanzees.

The Phase II trial reported in The Lancet involved a total of 560 healthy volunteers, with 160 aged 18-55, 160 aged 56-69, and 240 aged 70 or over.

Volunteers got two doses of the vaccine or a placebo, and no serious side effects related to the AZD1222 vaccine were reported, the researchers said.

AstraZeneca has signed several supply and manufacturing deals with companies and governments around the world.

Meanwhile, while acknowledging the vaccine news as encouraging, WHO urged world not to be too hopeful, at least not for the ongoing second wave of pandemic.

The WHO’s Michael Ryan said vaccines should not be seen as a “unicorn” magic solution -- and countries battling a resurgence of the virus would once again have to “climb this mountain” without them.

“I think it’s at least four to six months before we have significant levels of vaccination going on anywhere,” he said, during a public question and answer session live on social media.

Despite recent promising announcements from final-phase candidate vaccine trials, “We’re not there with vaccines yet,” said Ryan.

The universe is like a giant

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them up.

It suggests that vastly different physical processes can lead to very similar complex and organised structures.

For example, the human brains works because of the network of nearly 70 billion neurons that together make it up. The universe is thought to have

at least 100 billion galaxies.

In each system, they are assembled together in a complex web or network, spread out in long filaments and nodes that link them up. Those spreading nodes are familiar to pictures of both the universe and the brain, and account for some of the superficial similarities in images.



Submerged houses are seen on Wednesday around San Pedro Sula, 240 km north of Honduras capital of Tegucigalpa, after the devastation of Hurricane Iota. Storm Iota, which made landfall in Nicaragua as a “catastrophic” Category 5 hurricane Monday, killed at least ten people as it smashed homes, uprooted trees and swamped roads during its destructive advance across Central America.

PHOTO: AFP

UN adopts resolution for urgent solution

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of the Rohingya crisis, including granting them citizenship, and ensuring their safe and sustainable return to their homes.

“As a country that hosts over 1.1 million forcibly displaced Rohingyas, Bangladesh continues to seek a peaceful solution to this crisis, which lies in their safe and dignified return to Myanmar,” said Ambassador Rabab Fatima, Bangladesh permanent representative to the UN.

She thanked the international community for their unremitting support to the UN resolution.

This resolution, which was adopted on Wednesday, would reinforce the calls made by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for an urgent solution to this crisis, the root of which lies entirely in Myanmar, said the Bangladesh mission in New York on Wednesday.

The resolution, co-tabled by OIC and European Union, received sponsorship from 104 member states, demonstrating strong and unified support in favour of the persecuted Rohingya Muslims and other minorities, who continue to suffer from human rights violations in Myanmar.

A total of 132 countries voted in favour of the resolution, while nine voted against and 31 abstained.

Apart from the EU and OIC member states, the resolution received significant cross-regional support, with co-sponsorship from the USA, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland etc.

Some key ASEAN countries like Indonesia and Malaysia also cosponsored the resolution.

This year, the resolution has taken some new developments into account, such as, provisional order of the International Court of Justice, initiation of an investigation by the International Criminal Court and the issue of continued disenfranchisement of the Rohingya and other minorities, who were barred from participating in the recent general election in Myanmar.

The resolution also expressed deep appreciation to the Bangladesh government, which under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has demonstrated exemplary humanitarian gesture by sheltering and protecting the Rohingyas.

The Bangladesh government’s efforts in tackling the spread of Covid-19 pandemic in the largest camp in the world was also recognised. The resolution called for the international community to support Bangladesh in its humanitarian endeavour.

The ambassador of Bangladesh expressed hope that the resolution

would create renewed pressure on Myanmar to address the Rohingya crisis by engaging with Bangladesh and other international actors in a constructive manner.

“The ongoing justice mechanisms in respect of the human rights violations committed by Myanmar authorities will also enjoy greater support from the international community,” added Rabab Fatima.

Before the voting on the resolution, the permanent representative of Germany on behalf of EU and the permanent representative of Saudi Arabia on behalf of OIC made statements in support of the resolution.

They expressed hope that this resolution would help address the longstanding plights of the Rohingya Muslims and other minorities by ensuring their basic human rights to return to their homes in safety, security, and dignity, and would also help Myanmar overcome the challenges it faces in its democratic transition.

They called Myanmar to take urgent actions to address the citizenship issue of the Rohingya minorities.

The UN resolution on Myanmar continues to remain an important source of international norms in guiding a desired solution to this long standing Rohingya crisis.

UP members alone at fault?

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Since the relief was too scanty for a ward of nearly 7,000 people -- mostly CNG-run auto-rickshaw drivers, day labourers, beggars, rickshaw and van pullers -- Kabir said he spent money from his own pocket to distribute a separate relief package to 500 families on April 10-11, according to documents submitted to the ACC.

Each package contained 5kg of rice and 1kg of wheat.

The Daily Star, however, could not independently verify his claims.

“I requested UNO sir to inaugurate the distribution. He declined to come but suggested I carry out distribution maintaining social distancing,” reads the letter.

Kabir said the UNO asked for the donation from him on April 10, when he met him that afternoon.

“The UNO asked me whether I’ll be able to donate Tk 2 lakh for relief. I told him that I do not have that much money,” claimed Kabir.

Two days later, on April 12, Kabir came to know that he had been suspended.

The order stated Kabir’s suspension was “for misappropriating relief and tarnishing image of the government by spreading rumour.”

Kabir was also show-caused and asked to explain why he should not be suspended permanently.

He replied to the show-cause notice the following day and later appeared in a hearing before the additional deputy magistrate of Narayanganj Khadija Tahera Bobby on June 23.

In his written reply to the show-cause, Kabir said neither had the UNO seized any relief from his possession

nor had given him any chance to reply to any query, if the UNO had any.

Khadija said she submitted the probe report to her superiors. “I can’t recall what was in the report,” she said, when asked about the probe findings.

Saidul was transferred to Tangail Sadar Upazila as UNO on July 14. Contacted recently, Saidul said he took the action against Kabir after “scrutiny”.

Asked how many packets of relief Kabir misappropriated, Saidul said: “I sought particulars of the beneficiaries but he failed to submit these.”

Saidul refuted Kabir’s allegation that he asked for Tk 2 lakh.

“There are so many industries in Sonargaon. If I needed money, I could have asked them. Why do I need to seek it from a member like him?”

Contacted, an official of Pirojpur Union Parishad, wishing to remain unnamed, said all members submitted particulars of the beneficiaries on the same day as the distribution.

“No one had brought allegations of misappropriation against the members,” the UP official said.

Talking to this correspondent over the phone, Kabir said, “He [Saidul] has damaged my career with a false allegation and I’ll have to live with this scar for the rest of my life.

“I have thought of filing a defamation suit but I know the administration will not allow me to do so.”

Earlier this year, Chairman of Muriauk union of Habiganj, Rafiqul Islam, too, was suspended over the allegation of nepotism in preparing the list of beneficiaries of the prime

minister’s cash aid of Tk 2,500 to poor families.

Rafiqul, however, regained his post following an order of the High Court. He said the UNO called him over phone and asked him to prepare a list of 1,176 beneficiaries within 48 hours, between May 1 and May 2.

“Ward members could prepare a list of 728 people by that time. It was submitted to the UNO’s office and the UNO office’s secretary completed the full list,” he said.

“Some discrepancies were found and school teachers were assigned to check the list,” said Rafiqul, adding, “Suddenly I saw on the media that I was alleged to be involved in the irregularities.

“I had no involvement in the list preparation but I was suspended.”

Contacted, UNO of Lakhai upazila Losikanta Hazong said the issue of time constraint was there but as chief of the union parishad, the chairman could not avert his liabilities.

Losikanta said departmental proceedings against the UNO’s secretary are on-going.

Iftekher Ahmed Chowdhury, deputy secretary of Union Parishad-1 section of LGD, said they have so far suspended 108 UP chairmen and members over allegations of Covid-19 relief misappropriation.

“Two of them are suspended permanently for misappropriation and 30 chairmen and members have regained their positions following stay orders of the High Court, so far,” said the deputy secretary of LGD’s UP-1.

The fates of the remaining 76 UP chairmen and members were yet to be decided, he added.

Lone accused gets

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implicated in the case, Majnu claimed.

At one stage, he attacked a policeman and swore at other cops in the court.

Before the pronouncement of the verdict, all reporters and other people were asked to leave the courtroom, witnesses said.

Parents and teachers of the DU student were not present at the court.

Her lawyer Abdur Rashid, who is with Ain O Salish Kendra, expressed satisfaction over the judgment.

Robiul Islam, who represented the accused, however, expressed dissatisfaction and said his client would challenge the judgement with the higher court.

On November 12, the tribunal fixed yesterday for delivery of the judgment after conclusion of arguments from both sides.

During arguments, the prosecutors told the tribunal that they were able to prove the charges against Majnu and sought exemplary punishment for him.

The defence lawyer told the tribunal that there were no eyewitnesses in the case and appealed to it to acquit the accused.

Twenty out of 24 prosecution witnesses, including the victim and complainant of the case, gave their depositions in the case.

On January 5, the DU student was raped while she was walking from Kurmitola bus stop to a friend’s house near Shewra rail gate in the capital around 7:30pm.

The next day, the girl’s father filed the case with Cantonment Police Station, accusing unknown suspects.

The rape sparked widespread protests and condemnations across the country. DU students protested on the streets and demanded immediate arrest of the culprits.

On January 8, the Rapid Action Battalion arrested Majnu in the capital’s Shewra area. He was handed over to the Detective Branch of police, which was probing the case.

The following day, Manju was placed on seven-day remand.

On January 16, the arrestee confessed to a magistrate that he alone raped the woman.

DB Inspector Abu Bakar Siddique submitted the charge sheet against Majnu to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate’s Court in Dhaka on March 16.

On August 26, the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-7 of Dhaka framed charges against the accused.

No separate

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But the proposals were rejected by voice vote.

The bill was brought to have a provision of holding trial of narcotics-related cases in courts having the jurisdiction for quick disposal of such cases and easing the huge backlog of drug-related cases.

It was supposed to form necessary number of narcotics control tribunals in line with article 44 of the existing Narcotics Control Act-2018.

But the Law and Justice Division cannot set up any narcotics control tribunal yet or cannot entrust the tribunal’s responsibility with any additional district judge or sessions judge for administrative reasons.

So, complexities have been created in disposal of cases filed under the Narcotics Control Act-2018 since it has become effective, and the number of pending cases filed under this law keeps growing day by day.

According to article 44 of the proposed law, the courts with jurisdiction can try narcotics-related cases as per the gravity of crimes and a sessions judge concerned or a metropolitan sessions judge concerned can fix one or more courts with the jurisdiction to try narcotics-related crimes in their respective areas.

In the bill, changes have been brought in 22 articles of the existing act.

Rape accused

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Station.

Both the victim and the accused said they were involved in a romantic relationship and got intimate after Zia promised to marry her.

As he refused to keep his promise, she filed a rape case against him, said court sources.

On May 29, police arrested Zia, who later filed a bail petition with the HC.

During the hearing on the bail petition on November 1, the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman issued a condition that Zia would be granted bail if he married the victim as they had a relationship previously.

Zia’s lawyer Alamgir Faruk Chowdhury agreed with the condition and told the HC that his client would marry the victim if the court granted him bail. Deputy Attorney General Sarwar Hossain Bappi told The Daily Star yesterday.

The same day, the HC ordered the jail authorities to allow Zia and the victim to get married and submit a report in 30 days after compliance.

DAG Bappi said the trial proceedings in the rape case against Zia will not be halted after their marriage and the case will be settled based on statements from the witnesses and victim and relevant documents.

He, however, did not give further details about the accused Zia and the victim, but said the HC will consider granting bail to Zia once the jail authorities submit the compliance report.

Bappi added that same HC bench has so far issued directives on four accused rapists in separate cases to marry their victims considering all the relevant aspects and documents.