

Iran to enrich

FROM PAGE 12

The letter dated December 31 "did not state exactly when this enrichment activity would begin", the spokesperson added.

"It is an additional blow," a diplomat based in Vienna told AFP, as Tehran continues to retaliate to US sanctions by progressively abandoning limits on its nuclear activity laid down in the deal.

According to the latest report available from the UN agency, published in November, Tehran was enriching uranium to levels greater than the limit provided for in the Vienna agreement (3.67 percent) but not exceeding the 4.5 percent threshold, and still complied with the Agency's very strict inspection regime.

But there has been turmoil since the assassination in late November of Iranian nuclear physicist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

In the aftermath of the attack, blamed on Israel, hardliners in Tehran pledged a response and parliament passed a controversial law calling for the production and storage of "at least 120 kilograms per year of 20 percent enriched uranium" and to "put an end" to the IAEA inspections intended to check that the country is not developing an atomic bomb.

Disorder

FROM PAGE 12

two-day tour of Barisal and Patuakhali.

BANGABANDHU'S MESSAGE TO NE WIN

Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today expresses his confidence that the warm friendship and cooperation between Bangladesh and the Union of Burma would be further strengthened and developed in the years to come. In a message of felicitation to Ne Win, chairman of the Revolutionary Council and the prime minister of the Union of Burma, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Independence of the country, Bangabandhu conveys his best wishes for the personal health and happiness of Ne Win and for the progress and well-being of the people of Myanmar.

SOURCES: January 4, 1973 issues of *Bangladesh Observer*, *Dainik Bangla* and *Dainik Ittefaq*.

UNOs are rulers

FROM PAGE 12

of the officials, it said.

Harun said upazila has been declared an administrative part in the related law and its administrative structure is the elected upazila parishad. At least 17 departments under 12 ministries, along with its officers, employees and functions, have been handed over to the upazila parishad in accordance with the Upazila Parishad Act.

But various ministries and departments are issuing circulars without taking the law into consideration. Through these circulars, the UNO concerned has been made the chairman of almost 100 percent committees formed for the disposal of the functions of all departments in the upazila, he said. The UNO concerned is also the income and expenditure officer of these 17 departments. Being the chairman of the committees, the UNO is controlling all activities without the approval of the upazila parishad chairman, Harun told the press conference.

He said circulars and orders were issued several times by the local government ministry and the Cabinet Division for carrying out the activities following approval of the upazila parishad chairman concerned. But the instruction or order is not complied with at the upazila level.

It further alleged that public representatives get in trouble if they take initiatives to implement the instructions in accordance with the constitution, laws, and circulars.

"Elected representatives are removed through conducting an executive inquiry after creating an issue. In this way, the participatory governance system of the people's representatives and the people at the local government level is being damaged," the Upazila Parishad Association said.

Mentioning that the 5th upazila parishad polls were held in 2019, the platform said it wrote several times to the LGRD minister, cabinet secretary and senior secretary of the Local Government Division informing them about all these issues and requested them to take action in this regard. However, the association was yet to receive any reply.

The organisation said public representatives do not have the authority to provide government assistance to farmers, rehabilitate rural poor, and homeless people, choose locations for installing tube wells and distribute winter clothes as everything is done by the UNO.

"The people's representatives are facing controversy as they are not able to play any role in development and service activities due to the negative attitude of the administrative officials," it mentioned.

The organisation, on behalf of upazila chairmen, vice chairmen and women vice chairmen, made several demands, including immediate amendments to the circulars, issued by various ministries, which put obstacles in the way of carrying out the activities of the 17 departments by upazila parishads.

Saiful Islam, general secretary of Bangladesh Upazila Parishad Association, and Golam Sarwar, senior vice president, were present at the press conference, among others.



An artist gives finishing touches to a mural depicting frontline workers carrying a syringe containing coronavirus vaccine in Kolkata, yesterday.

Lost rhythm in new reality

FROM PAGE 12

From April till September last year, a total of 37,912 women from districts in its working areas said they faced domestic violence. Of them, 16,485 women had suffered such violence for the first time in their lives, said the survey report.

Since children are staying at home more, they are also at risk of abuse. At least 1,387 children faced abuse in the first half of 2020, according to Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF).

The added burden of unpaid care and domestic work also became a major issue among families, as the pandemic-caused shutdown disproportionately affected women, even though they said men have been participating in housework more compared to pre-coronavirus times.

Young female professionals said millennial men were still not holding

up their end of household duties and they found that happiness and peace in their marriages hinged on whether or not they had domestic help.

"When men can pay a woman to do their share of work, they will, and when they can't pay, they expect the one they married to replace the one they paid," said Elina Rahman, a young professional based in Dhaka.

"We used to have a domestic help coming in three times a week but after that service was stalled during the pandemic, we would end up having raging fights about cleaning the house. My husband refused to pitch in and would say that he is tired of doing chores, not respecting the fact that when he doesn't pull his weight -- I have to be the one to do it."

A rapid assessment by Brac's Gender, Diversity and Justice Programme early on during the pandemic found 91 percent of 557 women working

in both formal and informal sectors reported doing higher amounts of unpaid care work, and 89 percent reported having no leisure time at all.

Brac's findings also warned of a negative impact on women's mental health as a result of the extra work.

The pandemic created stress and anxiety for many families -- worries about jobs, money, new realities of working from home, and the mental effects of reading and hearing of illnesses and deaths on social and mainstream media.

Lack of sufficient personal space, the pressures of doing more child and elderly care, not being able to engage in social activities or meet people they love, also impacted many.

UNCERTAIN TIMES
Mostafizur Rahman, a mid-career researcher, said he reassessed his career priorities during this time. "My job sector [development] has been

impacted financially. Therefore, I am planning to switch my job."

However, securing a new job is tricky at a time when the local and global job market has been shaken up and uncertainty reigns.

He said he had otherwise been excited to enjoy the "new normal", as he relished the opportunity to spend more time at home with his only son, work with less commuting, and enjoy a slower pace of life in general.

Work from home provided busy professionals like him the unexpected opportunity to enjoy quality time with their families -- allowing them to share meals at home and spend more time with elderly parents and young children.

"However, I found the real-life experience to be different and I am still struggling to strike a better balance between work and family life," Mostafizur said.

Delays put justice at risk

FROM PAGE 1

Vatara, Khilgaon, Jatrabari, Kafrul, Kamrangirchar and Darus Salam police stations, he added.

At least two of the cases were still awaiting charge sheets till filing of this report.

According to a High Court ruling issued in December 2016, rape cases must be concluded within 180 days.

The officer said the accused in most of the 10 cases were arrested, and in five cases the accused confessed to their crimes before the court. Yet police could not press charges within the stipulated time because of the delay in receiving medical reports or DNA test results.

REASON FOR THE DELAY
Badda police said they received DNA reports of two cases -- including that for the rape of the two schoolgirls and another filed on April 21 following the gang-rape of a 20-year-old girl -- from the DNA Profiling Lab at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) in November.

They already submitted the charge sheets in the two cases.

"The charge sheet of another gang rape case filed with our police station around a year ago is still pending as we are yet to receive the reports," said an officer of the police station in mid-December.

"It often takes six to seven months to get such reports," he said, requesting anonymity.

The officer added that the court concerned sometimes summons investigation officers (IOs) to explain the reason behind the delay in charge sheet submission. Sometimes, the accused is granted bail if the charge sheet is not submitted within six months and he then goes into hiding.

Sharif Aktaruzzaman, chief of the National Forensic DNA Profiling Laboratory (NFDPL) of Dhaka

Medical College, said last month that if the collection of all necessary samples remains pending, they cannot prepare the reports in time.

"For example, sometimes we get the victim's samples but not that of all the accused. If police delay sending samples, the preparation of the report also gets delayed," he explained.

The lab was closed for a month due to the pandemic, which hampered some work, yet no DNA test results are pending, he added.

Replying to another query, he said, depending on the number, type and quality of samples, it takes a month to a month and a half to complete a DNA report.

For the Badda rape case of two girls, an official said police had appealed to a Dhaka court for collection of DNA samples of the three accused a few days after their arrest in February last year. They got the order in July as the court was closed due to the pandemic.

On July 17, they sent samples of the accused to the DNA lab and received the results in November. "The lab did not complete the test until we provided them the medical report of the victims, which we received on October 16," he told The Daily Star.

Dr Bilkis Begum, coordinator of the One Stop Crisis Centre at DMCH, admitted that medical reports of many of the rape cases were delayed.

"Many radiology staff of DMCH were on Covid duty and they did not give us time. They are also hesitant to touch victims in fear of infection."

She, however, could not give the number of such pending reports.

Apart from the lab at Dhaka Medical College, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) also runs a lab from where police can get this profiling done.

Additional DIG Md Shahadat Hossain, head of the Forensic

Department of CID, said they never delay completing DNA tests in important cases.

"It is actually an excuse of the IOs that delay in receiving DNA reports is resulting in delayed submission of charge sheets," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Md Walid Hossain, deputy commissioner (media and public relations) division of DMP said, "Cases related to women repression are our high priority and high-ranking officials supervise these."

"Time limit for completing investigation in the cases filed under the Women and Children Repression (prevention) Act is stipulated, but the probe cannot be concluded unless medical reports and in some cases DNA reports are not received."

Last year, the act was amended introducing death penalty as the highest punishment for rape following a number of heinous incidents that sparked huge protests countrywide.

COMPLAINANT PRESSURED

The complainant of the case over the rape of two school girls told The Daily Star on December 11 that Emon's family members called her several times and pressurised her to withdraw the case.

"They boasted that nothing would happen to Emon and he would obtain bail which will require a big amount," she said. "They asked me to withdraw the case taking the amount that they would have required to obtain Emon's bail."

Expressing frustration with the delay in completing the investigation, she said, "Now I do not even look for the updates of the case. I am poor and do not have enough money to continue the legal battle."

"I am worried about my daughter who stopped going to school and is passing days in a nightmare," she said with dismay.

Roki Shikder, president of Badda Thana Krishak League, a front organisation of ruling Awami League, claimed that Emon was sacked from the organisation seven to eight months before the alleged rape for his involvement in an illegal act.

There were instances where political pressures delayed and disturbed rape investigations, especially if the accused were from influential families or the ruling party, according to police officials.

Salma Ali, president of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, said everyone involved in medico-legal activities, including DNA tests, and trial procedures have specific responsibilities.

But due to lack of strong monitoring, accountability, transparency, coordination and expertise, the medico-legal activities and investigations are not done in time.

She further said due to the delays, investigation officers are transferred while the probe is incomplete and many important pieces of evidence get damaged, hampering the cases.

"The more investigation is delayed, more the cases go in favour of the accused," Salam said. "Besides, these delays often led to out-of-court settlements as the victims lose interest and energy in legal battles."

When the victims see offenders see roaming around them, they get traumatised, she added.

Referring to the recent amendment that makes a DNA test of every rape incident mandatory, Salma Ali said it will not be good idea as in the case of minor girls, DNA samples of the offender is not often found.

She suggested fixing a specific timeframe for completing medico-legal jobs like that in police investigations.

US Covid cases

FROM PAGE 12

to fill this gap," BioNTech co-founder Ugur Sahin told Der Spiegel weekly.

Criticism of the slow pace of the vaccine rollout has grown louder in recent days.

In Germany, senior doctors have complained that hospital staff are left waiting for vaccines despite being in a priority group.

France has seen similar complaints, prompting the government to announce that health workers aged over 50 could get the shot from tomorrow -- sooner than originally planned.

The French government on Friday also announced that a nationwide nighttime curfew would be lengthened in 15 regions where infections are high. The curfew will begin at 6:00 pm rather than 8:00 pm, including in the Mediterranean city of Nice.

Also in France, some 2,500 partygoers attended an illegal New Year rave near Rennes, clashing with police who tried to stop it, authorities said.

But worldwide, normally extravagant midnight celebrations in cities such as Sydney, New York, Rio de Janeiro and Edinburgh were scaled back or cancelled, and crowds banned from attending.

Rio saw one upside: 89 percent less garbage on Copacabana beach, which is left clogged with trash each year after its New Year party.

Experts believe the worst is yet to come globally, predicting a sharp rise in cases and deaths after weeks of holiday gatherings.

According to Johns Hopkins University, the US hit a record number of daily deaths on Wednesday when more than 3,900 people died of Covid-19.

President-elect Joe Biden, who takes office on January 20, has criticized the troubled vaccine rollout and implored Americans to wear masks.

350,000 years

FROM PAGE 12

abrading, researchers say, though for exactly what purpose is still unknown.

Tabun Cave, located on Mount Carmel near Haifa, was first explored by British archaeologist Dorothy Garrod in the 1920s.

It is believed to be home to one of the longest periods of human occupation in the Levant.

Excavations have suggested hominid activity there dating back at least 500,000 years.

Flint fragments discovered in the cave have provided the oldest signs of humans controlling fire.

Made of the mineral dolomite, the tool was first uncovered in the 1960s, but its simplistic appearance led it to be largely ignored for decades.

More recently it was reexamined by a team from the University of Haifa's Zinman Institute of Archaeology as part of an ongoing effort to reassess items found at the cave.

Judging by microscopic wear patterns, they determined it was used for scraping surfaces—a groundbreaking discovery.

They hypothesize it was used to work soft animal hides but whether for clothing or some other purpose is still a mystery.

Earlier stone tools have been found before—some dating to more than 3 million years ago—but they usually showed evidence of pounding or beating, which are vertical motions.

This dolomite cobble is the first known item used for scraping, which requires a horizontal motion and allows for more delicate manipulation of a material.

Marks on the stone are similar to those found on later grinding tools, The Times of Israel.

The discovery connects us more closely to our pre-human ancestor and allows scientists to trace how cognitive and motor abilities that developed during human evolution eventually evolved into important phenomena in human culture to this day, the authors said in a statement, including agriculture, food production, fixed residences, storage and an increase in social and economic complexity.

India holds

FROM PAGE 12

trained for the inoculation drive.

The drills saw 25 health workers receive dummy vaccines at each of the centres to be used across the country in a test run ahead of the launch.

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said the exercise would help build expertise "so that the upcoming vaccination drive may proceed without any glitch."

He has also called for a campaign to counter "misleading rumours" that may scare people off getting the vaccine.

While India is only second to the United States for the number of cases, its rate of infection has come down significantly from a mid-September peak of 90,000 plus cases daily and its fatality rate is lower than other badly affected countries.

Britain and Argentina this week authorised the AstraZeneca vaccine while the World Health Organization on Thursday granted emergency validation to the rival Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

Covishield is expected to get more use in India as it can be stored and transported under normal refrigeration while the Pfizer shot needs ultra low temperatures for storage.

Onion prices tumble as imports from India start

FROM PAGE 12

entered Bangladesh through the port in the district's Hakimpur upazila around 3:30 pm, while another loaded truck was waiting at the Indian territory to come in.

Harun Ur Rashid, the president of the Importer and Exporter group of Hili Land port, said that India has fixed the minimum import cost of each tonne of onion to Bangladesh at US \$250.

The onion import will begin at full swing from Monday, he added.

With the import, the price of locally produced onions has started dropping

in the markets in the district.

During a visit to different markets in Dinajpur, the correspondent found that each kilogram onion was being sold at Tk 35 to 40 in the current season, while onions of the last season were available at Tk 50 per kilogram, depending on quality.

A couple of days earlier, the price was around Tk 65 per kg.

With onion prices soaring in the local market of India, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade under the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Department of Commerce banned the onion export

to Bangladesh on September 14 last year, for domestic shortage for various natural disasters.

After the ban, the price of onions in the local markets started skyrocketing. Each kilogram onions was available at the market at Tk 120 per kg at the end of September last year. However, the price began dropping gradually.

A month ago, it was Tk 85 per kg.

At Sonamasjid land port of Shibganj upazila in Chapainawabganj, onion-laden trucks from India entered yesterday.

Mainul Islam, manager of

Sonamasjid-Panama Port Link Limited, said, seven trucks carrying onions entered Bangladesh through the Sonamasjid land port.

He said, around 180 tonnes of onions imported from India entered reached the land port through the Indian Mohodipur land port of Malda in West Bengal.

More trucks, which are stranded at the Mohodipur land port, will enter tomorrow.

(Our correspondents from Dinajpur and Chapainawabganj contributed to the report.)