



"We can look for alternative vaccines that are being recognised by the World Health Organisation and international bodies after their trials...."  
BNP LEADER KHANDAKER MOSHARRAF HOSSAIN



"I am very disappointed with this news... and others were not able to travel at the last minute."  
WHO CHIEF TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS AS CHINA BLOCKS ENTRY TO COVID EXPERTS



"You [President] should remove them [election commissioners]. The CEC and other commissioners are guilty of moral turpitude, it is now your moral duty...."  
COMMUNIST PARTY OF BANGLADESH LEADER ABDULLAH AL KAFEE RATAN

## Unauthorised, uncontrolled

Cheap face masks flooding market without DGDA permission; little care about hygiene, standards in production

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MUNTAKIM SAAD

Alamgir Hossain was fixing pieces of elastic thread to surgical masks using a heat pressing device inside a barely hundred square feet room in the Balurmath area of Kamrangirchar.

The way the 35-year-old was going about his job inside that dingy room was anything but hygienic -- he was not wearing any gloves or mask. His wife and their two children, also without any protective gear, were seen putting the finished products inside a sack.

Masks kept falling off from the table onto the grubby floor. Open bundles of masks were scattered around, lying next to used kitchen utensils and other household items, in the cramped room where the family also lives.

Alamgir got a contract to attach the elastic thread to masks from a factory.

"The factory supplied the elastic thread and the mask fabric. I will get Tk 0.20 per mask. I earn Tk 500 every day by doing this," said Alamgir, who started the business after losing his job as an assistant operator at a tailor shop due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Asked about maintaining hygiene, he said, "Why do I have to follow health and safety here? I didn't set up any factory. I just work as a contractor after getting an order from the factory."

Many like him are involved in the production of non-woven surgical masks in Kamrangirchar, Keraniganj, Gazipur, Narayanganj, and Savar areas. In the wake of growing cases of coronavirus patients in winter, the demand for masks is on the rise again.

These masks are supplied to the local market from where wholesale buyers purchase those in bulk at cheap rates, without any packaging.

Later, they sell these masks packed in boxes with no producer's name, trademark, or other means of identification, according to people with knowledge of the booming mask business.

Healthcare experts said such face masks produced by some factories without the authorisation of the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) and marketed by greedy wholesalers is a cause for concern for public health and safety.

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One would think that people who bother to buy and sell masks care about social distancing and other coronavirus rules. But under the Babubazar bridge in Old Dhaka, people form crowds as they buy masks, and some of them have no face covering. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Pakistan ghost haunts the BCL anniversary!

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A commemorative stamp is being criticised on social media for saying, "73rd founding anniversary of the East Pakistan Muslim Chhatra League".

The Department of Posts and Telecommunications issued the postage stamp on Monday on the occasion of the 73rd anniversary of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL).

The stamp should have simply mentioned Bangladesh Chhatra League, said many former members of the organisation and academicians.

The words East Pakistan were gradually shunned by the Chhatra League in 1970, and in 1971, they were completely erased, said Zafar Wazed, Director General of Press Institute of Bangladesh [PIB].

"Will the Bangladesh Awami League observe the 72nd anniversary of East Pakistan Awami League in June? Then what will happen in the 50th anniversary of the Liberation War?" he asked.

"It sounds puzzling," said the former BCL leader.

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## More rice import to boost reserve

Govt okays purchase of 2.5 lakh tonnes; stock falls to 5.32 lakh tonnes

REJAIL KARIM BYRON and DWOHA CHOWDHURY

In a bid to boost food grain reserve, the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase yesterday approved a proposal for procuring 2.5 lakh tonnes of rice.

The price of rice is soaring in both retail and wholesale markets at a time when the government's rice reserve has gone down to 5.32 lakh tonnes as of January 4.

According to the food ministry, the total reserve of food grain was 7.27 lakh tonnes -- 5.32 lakh tonnes of rice and 1.95 lakh tonnes of wheat -- as of January 4, down from 13.83 lakh tonnes at the same time last year.

The permission was granted by the government as part of a plan to import a total of 10 lakh tonnes of rice from different countries.

In December 2020, the purchase committee had given the Directorate of Food the nod to import 1 lakh tonnes of rice.

The food ministry has also so far permitted 29 private firms to import 3.3 lakh tonnes of rice at a reduced tariff.

The meeting of the purchase committee yesterday gave the nod to import of 1 lakh tonnes of non-Basmati parboiled rice and 50,000 tonnes of sundried rice from National Agriculture Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd under a government-to-government agreement.

The price of the parboiled rice is set at \$407 per tonne, while the price of the sun-dried rice per tonne is \$417.

The purchase committee also gave approval to the Directorate of Food to purchase 50,000 tonnes of non-Basmati parboiled rice from ETC Agro Processing (India) Pvt Ltd of India at a price of \$405.6 per tonne.

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## 6 COMMON RIVERS Dhaka, Delhi to share data on water flow

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka and Delhi have agreed to share water-flowing data of six common rivers -- Manu, Muhuri, Khawai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudhkumar -- as both countries are working on water sharing deal.

Both sides reached an understanding at the two-day virtual technical committee meeting that ended yesterday.

"We have already shared data on the water flow of the six rivers. What we need to know is the amount of water used by the two countries from each of the rivers," said Malik Fida A Khan, a member of the committee and executive director at the Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS).

Bangladesh and India began talks on water sharing of the rivers in August 2019 as the two countries failed to sign the Teesta water-sharing agreement due to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's last-minute opposition in 2011.

The two countries have 54 rivers in

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## UZI IN GUISE OF RIFLES Take legal action against importers

Police HQ writes to home ministry

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

The police headquarters has recommended taking lawful action against the arms importers who sold semi-automated Uzi pistols after importing them under the declaration of rifles.

The Arms Rules 2016 states that the import of semi-automatic or automatic weapons are prohibited in the country. The "Uzi pistol" looks more like a submachine gun than a rifle or a pistol.

In a letter to the home ministry, the PHQ said the magazine of the .22 bore Uzi pistol can hold 20 bullets and the weapon is more powerful than any .22 bore pistol authorised for public use.

Service pistols, used by law enforcers, can hold 15 bullets.

If the Uzi lands in the hands of militants or any other criminals, there are possibilities that they will plan or execute grave crimes, reads the letter sent recently.

Some importers are bringing in the Uzi in the name of .22 bore rifles and selling them to arms holders who are licensed to purchase and carry rifles. Both the importers and the arms holders are violating the law in this case, reads the letter.

Punishment for such an offence can be seven years in prison or even life-term imprisonment, according to the PHQ.

According to the PHQ letter, there are 84 licensed arms dealers in the country. Of them, 14 import arms directly from abroad and 12 are based in Dhaka.

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## Man killed in Cox's Bazar 'gunfight'

Police, family versions contradict each other

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A youth was killed during a "gunfight" between police and some people who allegedly tried to snatch an arrestee from a police vehicle at Mithapanirchara Bazar area in Teknaf Sadar upazila of Cox's Bazar yesterday.

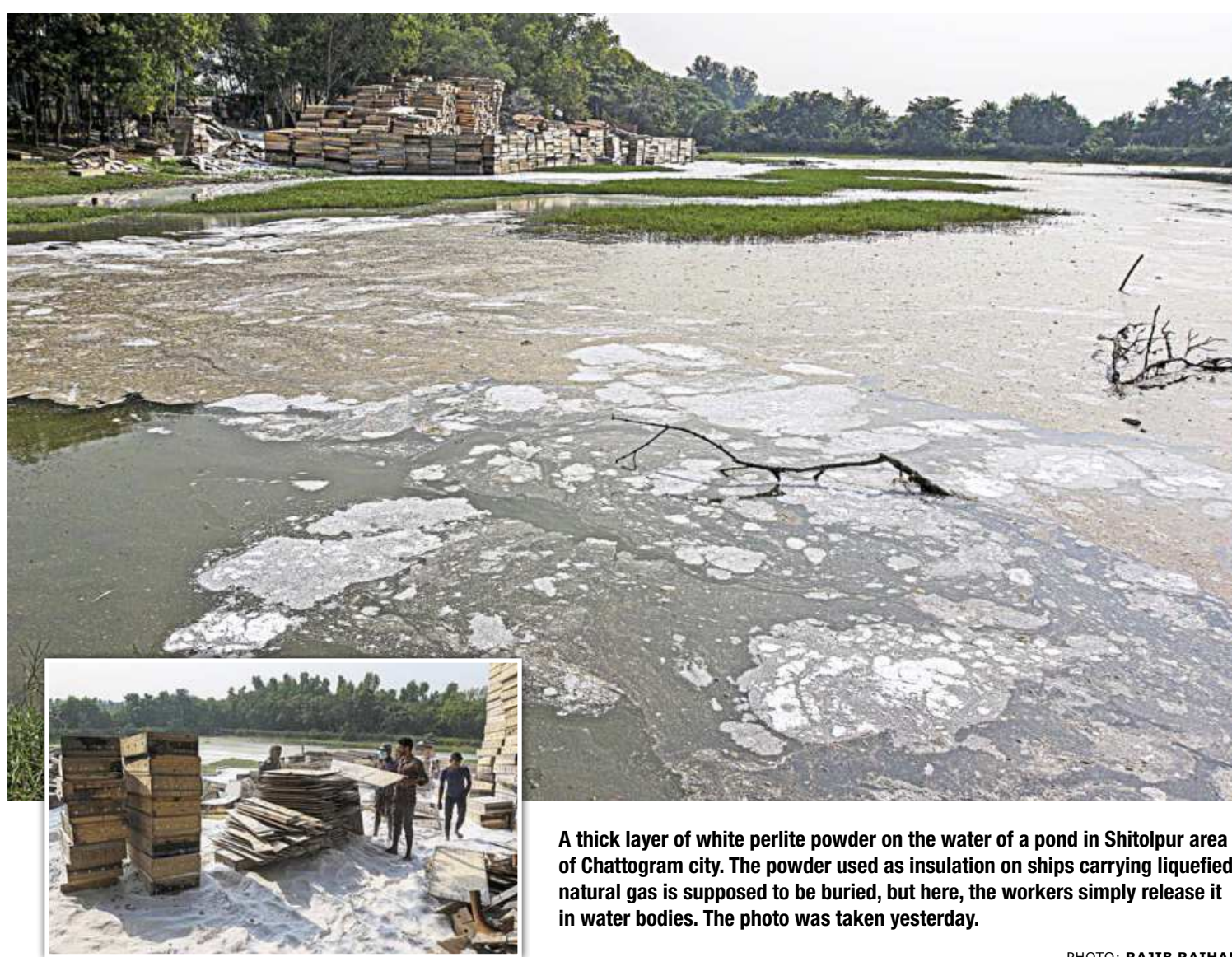
The dead was identified as Khorshed Alam, 22, younger brother of the arrestee Shamsul Alam, 35, of Mithapanirchara area in the upazila, said police.

Acting on a tip-off, police arrested Shamsul Alam, 35, a fugitive accused in seven cases including drug peddling and money laundering from his village, said Mohammad Hassanuzzaman, superintendent of police in Cox's Bazar.

The police team came under attack at Mithapanirchara Bazar area around 12am yesterday, he claimed.

SP Hassanuzzaman also claimed that a group of

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A thick layer of white perlite powder on the water of a pond in Shitolpur area of Chattogram city. The powder used as insulation on ships carrying liquefied natural gas is supposed to be buried, but here, the workers simply release it in water bodies. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## FAIRNESS OF POLLS Quader's brother keeps questioning

STAR REPORT

The younger brother of Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader continues to raise questions about the fairness of elections and some lawmakers in greater Noakhali, stirring up a debate in the country's political arena.

Abdul Quader Mirza, the incumbent mayor of Basurhat municipality in Noakhali, claimed at least on two occasions that if elections were held in a free and fair manner, all AL MPs in greater Noakhali, except for the ones in three or four constituencies, "would not have found ways to escape".

Mirza is contesting the Basurhat municipality polls, slated for January 16, for the mayoral post on the AL ticket.

While unveiling his election manifesto on December 31 last year, he brought allegations of corruption, tender manipulation and recruitment scams against some local lawmakers and AL leaders.

He claimed that the district AL committee was formed, excluding the party's devoted and tested leaders.

"With regret, I want to say some sycophants often claim that the BNP's bastions in Noakhali and Laxmipur have been destroyed because of certain leaders.

"Have the BNP's bastions been really destroyed? If elections were held in a fair manner, our MPs, except for the ones in three or four constituencies in greater Noakhali, would not have found ways to escape. That's the truth."

At a street rally in Basurhat's Jamairek area yesterday, Mirza said, "If I make a comment, it is considered as an offence. They are threatening to shoot me down. But I am not afraid. I am not even scared of Obaidul Quader."

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Abdul Quader Mirza