City











Indo-Bangla Talks

Dhaka seeks flexible visa regime

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has sought flexibilities in the visa regime and requested the Indian side to address the difference in overstay fine structures applied by India.

Bangladesh also requested the Indian side to ease registration requirements for Bangladeshi patients for treatment at various hospitals in India.

The issues came up for discussion at the second consular dialogue between Bangladesh and India held in New

Delhi yesterday. Request to ease travel restrictions

through all ports for Bangladeshi nationals was also reiterated by the Bangladesh side.

The two sides agreed to expedite the consular access, transfer of sentenced persons, and visa-related issues among

Ambassador Mashfee Binte Shams, secretary (east) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led the Bangladesh delegation. while the Indian delegation was led by Sanjay Bhattacharyya, secretary (Consular, Passport & Visa and Overseas Indian Affairs), Ministry of External Affairs of India.

The Bangladesh delegation included high-level officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, Bangladesh Police, BGB, and Prison authorities.

The entire gamut of bilateral consular issues was discussed in depth during the dialogue, said the Ministry of Foreign

The agenda included expeditious repatriation of each other's nationals, particularly trafficked women and children, smooth facilitation of exit permits, and expediting consular access.

Bangladesh side India's attention on repatriation of the remaining members of Bangladeshi Tabligh Jamaat who are still being held in India.

Both sides agreed that the consular dialogue is an important mechanism to further strengthen the people-centric approach which is at the core of the excellent ties between the two friendly

The dialogue was held in a cordial atmosphere and the leader of the Bangladesh delegation invited the Indian side to Dhaka for the next round of Consular Dialogue at a mutually convenient date.

The first-ever consular dialogue between Bangladesh and India was held in November 2017 in Dhaka.

Thank you and congratulations

However, there are times when a government, as ours in this case, and its leader, Sheikh Hasina, most appropriately deserve praise, and we do so unreservedly. We in The Daily Star are just as ready to criticise when appropriate as are we ready to praise and congratulate when our government achieves beyond expectation. And in this case, it did. There were legitimate fears about how Bangladesh would fare in the intense global competition for early supply of Covid-19 vaccines. So many countries are still without vaccines with no idea about when they will get their supply. In terms of early availability, Sheikh Hasina's government's performance was extraordinary, deserving our sincerest appreciation.

When we listen to the leaders of Italy, Spain, France and other European Union countries complaining about AstraZeneca's failure to live up to their contractual terms and failing to deliver the required quantity of vaccines on time, we can appreciate more the expeditious action of our government. The European governments have failed to provide timely vaccines in sufficient quantity for the safety and security of their population. Ours have not.

Regardless of whose fault it is, people of Europe will blame their respective governments, and rightly so. We would a mystery and a happy one for us. be blaming ours too if it failed to bring Regardless of what may have caused it, us the vaccine in time. But our story we are grateful that both our infection is the exact opposite. Contrary to the press in Europe we have to praise our to remain low. We hope that we government and the prime minister -as nothing big in the country happens without her involvement -- and thank them for such a superb job done. Not only did our vaccine arrive on time -- on the exact day -- but also in the sufficient quantities as agreed. This required advanced planning, timely negotiations, signing deals, making vaccines.

funds available and preparing all the necessary logistics for everything to operate efficiently. So far it has. For all this, the government must be thanked

The gift of vaccines from India also needs to be lauded as their timely arrival -- four days before our own greatly helped to assuage public concerns and reduce the uncertainty of vaccine availability. The location of the vaccine manufacturer -- Serum Institute of India -- being in India and not in any faraway country helped the situation. The constructive bilateral relations between our two countries also played its positive part.

Now, the challenge is to vaccinate our vulnerable citizens and save lives. There are issues of distribution to all the outlying areas, appropriate and hygienic facilities to administer the injections and do the necessary observations for after-effects and attending to patients who may show unforeseen side effects. We need to keep in mind that any mishaps in the process may lead to rumours and negative speculation about the efficacy of the vaccines and reinforce the existing uninformed resistance among a section of the people against the

The unusually low level of Covid-19 infections in Bangladesh remains rate and death numbers continue continue to be lucky, and now with the efficient delivery of the vaccine by the government we can really see this crisis through.

Once again, we congratulate Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government for an excellent job done so far in providing us with timely

Some mistakes made ACC

Enavetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman made the observation while hearing a writ petition filed by a man seeking redress after he was wrongly prosecuted by the

The ACC's conduct is expected to be fair, the HC bench said.

If the commissioners and officials of the ACC disclose their (financial) details, its acceptance will increase, it

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told the court that he would convey the message to the commission.

The ACC has admitted its mistake and takes responsibility for the incorrect investigation in the aforesaid case that led to the prosecution of an innocent man named Mohammad Kamrul Islam.

The commission is sorry and ashamed for the mistake, lawyer Khurshid told the HC bench.

Mohammad Kamrul's Minhazul Haque Chowdhury told the court that the investigation officer of the ACC was solely responsible for the incorrect investigation and prosecution

The ACC has been trying to shift the responsibility of wrong prosecution to the trial court just like it did earlier by shifting the responsibility of the wrong imprisonment of innocent jute mill worker Jaha Alam to the Brac Bank, he

He prayed to the HC to direct the ACC to properly compensate his client

The HC delivered its verdict scrapping the trial court verdict that convicted and sentenced Kamrul to five years in prison.

The HC also withdrew the conviction warrant issued against Kamrul and directed the ACC to initiate departmental proceedings against the officials responsible for the wrong prosecution.

The authorities concerned were directed to launch a further investigation into the original case.

The HC bench also directed the ACC to consider if victim Kamrul sought compensation from the commission.

The ACC has admitted to the HC through swearing an affidavit on January 24 that it made a mistake by conducting the investigation incorrectly and pressed charges of fraud against

Speaking to The Daily Star, the petitioner's counsel Minhazul Haque Chowdhury said in 2003, the then bureau of anti-corruption filed a case against one Kamrul, son of Abul Khair and Fatema Begum, from Noakhali's Paschim Rajarampur on charges of getting admitted to a college with a

forged SSC certificate and mark sheet. In 2013, the ACC submitted a chargesheet against Mohammad Kamrul Islam, son of Abul Khair and Rawshan Ara Begum from Purba Raiarampur, to the trial court concerned in connection with the case.

The following year, the trial court sentenced Kamrul to five years in prison each under three sections in the case on the basis of the ACC probe report. The court later issued an arrest warrant against him

examining the related documents and copies of the national identity cards of the two, the writ petition was filed with the HC in November last year, seeking necessary orders as law enforcers were allegedly harassing Mohammad Kamrul Islam, who is now an employee of a judicial magistrate court, lawyer Minhazul said.

The lawyer also said Mohammad Kamrul Islam was born in 1990 and the original accused Kamrul Islam was born

The HC bench on November 5, last year, issued a rule, asking the authorities concerned to explain why the move to arrest Mohammad Kamrul Islam should not be declared illegal. It also directed the police not to harass or

ACC lawyer Khurshid told The Daily Star that Kamrul had not served in jail



Flanked by leaders and activists of the Awami League, immediate-past Chattogram City Corporation mayor AJM Nasir Uddin, left, presenting a bouquet to the mayor-elect Rezaul Karim Chowdhury at the latter's residence in the port city yesterday.

PHOTO:

MP Papul jailed in Kuwait

Papul is also an accused in two other cases on charges of human trafficking and money laundering.

A foreign ministry official told The Daily Star that the Bangladesh embassy in Kuwait has not received any official notice regarding the imprisonment and fining of MP Papul but instead learned the matter from newspapers.

He said they have so far learned that Papul was sentenced and fined in a bribery case, while the trials of two other cases were ongoing.

On June 6 last year, Kuwait's Criminal Investigation Department arrested Papul, an independent lawmaker from Laxmipur-2 and also the managing director and CEO of Marafie Kuwaitia He was accused of charging each

to 3,000 dinars in exchange for their journey to Kuwait. Many of them, however, alleged they were not given the jobs and wages as promised. Papul was accused of bribing Kuwaiti officials with millions of dollars to

worker, mostly from Bangladesh, up

recruit Bangladeshi workers and get contracts for his company. In response to a complaint filed on February 16 last year, Bangladesh's Anti-

Corruption Commission opened an

enquiry into an allegation that Papul amassed Tk 1,400 crore by trafficking people to Kuwait and laundered the money to different countries.

The ACC said the enquiry was to look into the charges of loan forgery and money laundering by the NRB Commercial Bank Director Shahid Islam Papul, his wife Selina, their daughter Kazi Wafa Islam and Selina's sister Jesmin.

On July 17, the ACC imposed a ban on all of their foreign travels, saying the embargo would be implemented for Papul after his return to the country.

On November 11, the ACC filed a case against Papul, Selina, Wafa and Jesmin for allegedly laundering about Tk 148.41 crore.

The enquiry is still pending. On December 28, a Dhaka Court

ordered the freezing of 617 bank accounts and 92 deeds of immoveable properties of Papul, following a petition filed by the ACC.

He had no involvement in politics back home before 2016.

Sources said Papul invested crores of taka to prevent other potential candidates in the Laxmipur-2 constituency and became an independent MP in the 2018 election. His wife Selina Islam did the same to become an MP in the women's

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen could not be reached for comments in this regard yesterday. Speaking to The Daily Star in June

last year, he had said, "It's a matter of regret and shame for us that an MP has been arrested on foreign land." Bangladeshis living in Kuwait said Bangladesh's overseas labour market

in Kuwait, where some 300,000 Bangladeshis work, already face setbacks and the conviction of Papul may contribute to the further deterioration of the market. Meanwhile, as Papul has been

convicted in one of the three cases, the question of whether his parliament membership would be cancelled arose. Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Shirin

Sharmin Chaudhury or Deputy Speaker Fazle Rabbi Miah could not be reached over phone for comments on the matter.

Earlier in September, Fazle Rabbi, however, had said, "Our consideration is that if we receive any judgment and other related documents that an MP has been awarded more than two years' imprisonment on moral turpitude, the Speaker will verify the documents and will take measures to vacate the seat."

He added that the MP's membership in parliament would be vacated only if he is convicted on moral turpitude.

infected with Covid

15 more die, 509

The health authorities in Bangladesh yesterday confirmed 15 new coronavirus-related deaths and 509 new cases, raising the death toll to The Covid-19 infection rate in the

country now stands at 3.43 percent, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said in a handout.

"The mortality rate is now 1.51 percent," the DGHS said.

Meanwhile, the new cases pushed up the national tally to 533,953 while the current overall detection rate is 14.77 percent.

Until this morning, 478,546 patients -- 89.62 percent of the total reported cases -- have recovered.

So far, 3,615,338 samples have been tested, including 14,633 in the

last 24 hours till yesterday morning. Bangladesh reported its first coronavirus cases on March 8 and the first death on March 18 last year.

Meanwhile, parliament proceedings expert and retired Chittagong University professor Nizam Uddin Ahmed said that Papul's parliament membership should be cancelled as he was sentenced to more than two years' imprisonment.

"It is not a matter of whether the trial of an MP is being held at home or abroad," he said.

According to article 66 of the constitution, a person shall be disqualified for election as, or as a member of parliament, who has been on conviction for a criminal offence involving moral turpitude, sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than two years, unless a period of five years has elapsed since his release.

There are also several other grounds for which an MP can lose his membership in parliament.

Nizam said if a Bangladeshi court awards jail term to an MP, the government notifies the Speaker, who then informs the parliament.

Papul will have to stay in jail for four years, in which case another article of the constitution will be into effect.

According to article 67, a member of parliament shall vacate his seat if he is absent from parliament, without the leave of parliament, for 90 consecutive sitting days.

Ranking same, but 'graft rose'

(TIB) said Bangladesh's overall performance in curbing corruption was

Iftekharuzzaman said the magnitude of graft in the country has increased. "Although Bangladesh's score remains unchanged, it is less than the global average of 43. Bangladesh's score is the second lowest among eight South Asian countries and the fourth lowest among 31 countries in the Asia Pacific region, which is embarrassing and frustrating," he said, according to a TIB press release.

Afghanistan among the South Asian nations in the index. Iftekharuzzaman said Bangladesh's score has remained unchanged for the third time, but the score of Somalia,

Bangladesh is only ahead of war-torn

which is the lowest on the index, has increased by three points. "So, there is no room for complacency." Detailing the reasons behind the disappointing performance of Bangladesh, the TIB said the country

showed failure in transforming its high-

profile anti-corruption pledge into a Erosion of political integrity and linkage of politics with abuse of power, corruption and criminality as well as dysfunctionality of key institutions of accountability and sustained impunity are among the key factors behind the

Policies and actions increasingly became detached from public interest

reflecting pervasive conflict of interest, while political and government positions were increasingly taken as a licence for personal enrichment".

Exposure of widespread corruption, especially in the health sector during the Covid-19 crisis, also contributed to the poor performance, TIB said. It also said high-profile corruptions were rarely brought to justice, while

there was a deficit in effectiveness of

Anti-Corruption Commission, especially in terms of accountability of It said the financial and banking sector ravaged by incidents of loan default and fraud, shrinking media and civil society space, restrictions

tolerance of dissent were among the factors behind the poor performance. Iftekharuzzaman pointed to the lack of effectiveness of the ACC in bringing big fish to trial or account and said it was a main reason behind the poor

of freedom of speech, and deficit of

performance. "There are questions and doubts regarding ACC's effectiveness while the commission has its deficiency in terms of bringing the big fish to account," he

The TIB boss said the government has to implement effectively its zero tolerance policy against corruption if the country wants to make an

improvement. Besides, there is a need for a paradigm shift in the country's culture of politics, Responding to a query, the TIB executive director said pledge to curb corruption from the government's top position was a "necessary condition", but it was not "sufficient" alone. "The sufficient condition is its [pledge's] enforcement."

Iftekharuzzaman said Bangladesh has been considered as a role model in terms of making progress in the development sector. To retain such development, progress has to be made in curbing corruption.

will not 'Development sustainable if there is failure in curbing corruption," he added.

BANGLADESH 7TH AMONG S.

ASIAN COUNTRIES Among the eight South Asian countries, Bangladesh remains the second last, both in terms of score and ranking, faring better than only Afghanistan, which scored 19 and was ranked 165th.

Maldives has recorded the highest rise in score by 14 points to 43 and jumped to the 75th position from 130th in 2019, shows the index. Bhutan fared the best and sealed the

24th position with a score of 68. The Himalayan country is followed by India (ranked 86th; score 40), Sri Lanka (94; 38), Pakistan (124; 31), Nepal (117; 33), Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. Also, Bangladesh's ranking is the 4th

lowest among 31 Asia-Pacific countries included in the index, better than only Cambodia, Afghanistan and North Korea. GLOBAL PICTURE

In the index, Denmark and New

Zealand hold the first position, both scoring 88 out of 100.

With a score of 85, Finland, Singapore, Sweden and Switzerland have been ranked 3rd. The other top ranking countries include Norway (7th), Netherlands

(8th), Germany and Luxembourg (9th), and Australia and Canada (11th). On the other hand, African countries Somalia and South Sudan scored 12 out

of 100 and were ranked the lowest. The other worst performers include Yemen, Venezuela, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, North Korea,

Haiti, and DR Congo. In the index, 62 countries scored better than the previous year, the score of 70 countries, including Bangladesh, remained unchanged, and 48 countries

scored less from the previous year. For the index, TI used data from 13

international surveys. For the Bangladesh part, data from eight different surveys were used.

Those are: World Economic Forum -- Executive Opinion Survey, Economist Intelligence Unit-Country Risk Assessment, World Justice Project-Rule of Law Index, Political Risk Service (PRS) International Country Risk Guide, Bertelsmann Foundation Transformation Index, Global Insight Country Risk Ratings, World Bank- Country Policy and Institutional Assessment, and Varieties of

Democracy Project. The data period considered for Bangladesh was between September 2018 and October last year.

Shahadat got no vote in 7 centres

It's also unbelievable that none of

poor performance, it said.

the BNP-backed councillor candidates won any of the 54 councillor posts, they pointed out. Meanwhile, Election Commissioner

model for irregularities-riddled "... It is unacceptable that we cannot hold an acceptable election in the 50th year of the country's independence,"

Mahbub Talukder termed the polls

he said yesterday. Talking to this newspaper, BNP standing committee member Amir Khashru Mahmud Chowdhury, the chief coordinator of the BNP's election campaign, said, "In the 2015 CCC polls, nine BNP-backed councillor candidates had won.

manipulated and there were so many irregularities that none of the BNPbacked candidates could win the councillor post." Rezaul secured a landslide victory bagging 369,248 votes in Wednesday's

This time, the election was so

election but the polls were marked by violence, low voter turnout and the capture of scores of polling centres by ruling party men. His nearest rival, Shahadat, got only

52,489 votes as per the results of 733

of the 735 polling centres. Voting at two centres was suspended following clashes between supporters of ALbacked councillor contenders and those of AL rebel candidates. turnout was 22.52 percent, according to Election Commission data. Shahadat and five other candidates

for the mayoral post lost their deposits

for not getting one-eighth of the total

votes cast in the election. Shahadat needed 54,567 votes to save his According to Returning Office sources, Shahadat didn't get any vote at seven polling centres, including the BFRI Primary School and Nozimia Naimia Mahmudia Primary Madrasa.

Primary School -- the highest for the BNP candidate at a centre. Asked about this, Khashru said Chattogram city is a strong base of the BNP and it is not believable that the BNP candidate would not get any vote or just two-three votes at a polling centre with 3,000-4,000 voters.

He got 568 votes at Uttar Halisohor

"It was the Chattogram City Corporation where our candidate had defeated Awami League's popular candidate late ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury in an election by more than one lakh votes.

"One or two votes for the BNP candidate reflect how farcical the election was.

"It was Awami League's election

project at its worst. He also claimed that thousands of outsiders from nearby areas captured polling centres, and the law enforcement agencies and the EC worked in favour of the ruling party

At a programme in the capital resterday, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir alleged that the EC has become an affiliated body of the ruling party.

The BNP's opponent is no longer the AL, it's the police and the administration, he said.

Talking to The Daily Star, Shahadat said only six percent votes were cast till 2.00pm at many centres he had Then how could the voter turnout

was totally manipulated and the data on the voter turnout is absolutely false," he said. About his getting no vote at several centres, Shahadat said, "Is it believable? We formed committees with at least

at the polling centres in the city.

be 22.52 percent? The election result

It is very much possible to announce the results within two to three hours of holding an election through EVMs but the authorities announced the result nine hours after the voting ended at 4:00pm. Terming Wednesday's Polls a

mockery, Akhter Kabir Chowdhury, president of Sachetan Nagorik Committee and also Transparency International Bangladesh's Chattogram city unit, said the holding of such onesided election would increase people's mistrust, no-confidence and sense of unease about polls. He also said it doesn't require a long

time to announce results of polls held through EVMs, but the authorities took nine to 10 hours which indicates that they might have tried to increase the voter turnout. Badiul Alam Majumder, secretary of

Shushasoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan), a civil society platform, said the way the CCC polls were held, one could easily understand that it was nothing but a farcical election. "The Election Commission has

totally failed to hold the election in a free, fair and neutral manner." The results of this election in no

100 members each for helping voters way reflect people's mandate, he