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DUTY DODGING AT CTG PORT

Tricks not so secret

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, *Chattogram*

In the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, four expatriates returned from Saudi Arabia by air on November 29 last year.

Under their names, 2,500kg of various used goods were brought in as unaccompanied baggage through the Chattogram Port.

A clearing and forwarding (C&F) agent then released the goods showing only 1,200kg from the port in four separate consignments on December 2, thus evading tax for the undeclared 1,300kg.

This is one of the instances where dishonest importers and C&F agents, with the help of some senior customs officials, concealed more than half the weight of goods in consignments imported as unaccompanied baggage in the name of expatriates to evade customs duties.

According to the Passenger (non-tourist) baggage (import) rules-2016, when returning expatriates bring goods themselves, it is called baggage; if an expatriate is not able to bring it themselves, it is referred to as unaccompanied baggage or U-baggage at the port.

Expatriates get duty-free benefits for 26 self-use goods such as personal mobiles, laptops, and printers. They can also bring in other goods worth up to \$5,000 at a low duty once a year.

Various commercial importers and C&F agents are abusing this policy by using the names of expatriates, customs sources said, and also reducing the weight of

goods shown in the release documents of unaccompanied baggage and getting away with paying less tax.

U-BAGGAGE FRAUD

The Daily Star collected documents of 80 consignments -- all under U-baggage rules -- where 53,000kg of goods were shown in the master BL (bill of lading) but only 25,000kg in the house BL (release documents).

These consignments were released from the port between October and November last year by three C&F agents -- Nahar Trading Company Limited, Spread Link, and Amin Brothers.

On these 80 consignments alone, the government lost more than Tk 5 crore in revenue.

According to the documents, Joint Commissioner of Customs Mohammad Mahbub Hasan issued clearance for the release of these consignments.

A C&F agent proprietor, on condition of anonymity, said a long-time joint commissioner in charge of supervising the inspection and release of U-baggage at the port jetty for the last 20 years, was suddenly replaced.

Towards the end of October 2019, the charge of this branch was suddenly given to Joint Commissioner Mahbub, who was already at the helm of several sections in the Customs House, he said.

"Since then, the U-baggage fraud has started."

After taking over the branch, Mahbub

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



With schools closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Srishty, Farzana and Maisha are busy helping their mother design a wedding sari with intricate stone work. The three are students of classes 5, 6 and 7 respectively. Sari store owners of Kishoreganj town hire women in the villages for stone and lacework for Tk 600 a sari. This picture was taken from Kishoreganj's Bajitpur area recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Cops bust 'weapon factory' in port city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police claimed to have busted a makeshift weapon-making factory on a building's rooftop in Chattogram city's Bangshal Para early yesterday.

A woman was arrested in connection with the incident.

At a press conference later in the day, Deputy Commissioner (West) Faruque Ul Haque of Chattogram Metropolitan Police said locals in the area told them that they had heard a gunshot on Thursday night.

Later, a team from the Double Mooring Police Station rushed there and started investigation.

At one point, the law enforcers went to the roof of a building, owned by one Gafur Khan Sowdagar, and discovered the factory.

The DC said they recovered two pipe guns,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Rare Botticelli portrait sells for record \$92.2m



REUTERS, *New York*

A rare Botticelli portrait sold for \$92.2 million at auction at Sotheby's in New York on Thursday, a world record for any work by the Italian artist.

The Renaissance artist's "Young Man Holding a Roundel" is one of only around a dozen of his portraits known to survive today. Sandro Botticelli's large-scale "Birth of Venus" and "Primavera" paintings are displayed in Florence's Uffizi Gallery.

Sotheby's said it was one of the most significant portraits of any period ever to appear at auction and fetched the second-highest price for any Old Master painting. At \$450 million, "Salvator

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

MURDER OF HOUSE HELP Marine engr, wife tortured her to death, dumped body

Says PBI after arresting the couple in M'singh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Mymensingh*

A marine engineer confessed to torturing a 20-year-old house help to death and dumping her body in a suitcase under a bridge in Gouripur, Mymensingh.

A court in the district recorded the confession and sent Abul Khair, 44, and his wife Rifat Jesmin Jesi, 30, to jail on Thursday.

They also admitted that they quite frequently tortured Sabina, 20, who worked in their 14th-floor apartment in Taimur Excel Tower on Gangadas Guha Road for the last four years.

They were arrested by Police Bureau of Investigation on Wednesday from a house in Barera area of the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

EU regulator okays AstraZeneca vaccine

Worries grow over effectiveness of jabs against new virus strains; Novavax vaccine shows 89% efficacy in UK trials

AGENCIES

Europe's medicines regulator yesterday approved the Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine for people over the age of 18, as concerns grow around the world over the effectiveness of different jabs against new strains of Covid-19.

The announcement from the European Medicines Agency (EMA) paves the way for a third vaccine to be approved for use in the EU, following the jabs made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna.

But it adds another twist to the increasingly bitter row between Brussels and British-Swedish drug company AstraZeneca, which has admitted it will only be able to deliver a fraction of the doses promised to the EU in the short-term due to production problems.

That has come as a huge blow to Europe's already struggling rollout, while setting the EU on a collision course with former member Britain as they jostle for AstraZeneca's limited supplies.

In a sign of the growing tensions, the EU yesterday released a redacted version of its contract with AstraZeneca, while announcing a mechanism that could allow it to reject the export of vaccines made on European soil.

There is also controversy over the jab within the EU itself, with the EMA saying it was suitable for adults of all ages, but Germany's medicines regulator advising it should not be used on over-65s due to insufficient evidence that it works.

And beyond Europe, scientists are concerned that the coronavirus variant first detected in South Africa may elude some vaccines, considered crucial to ending a pandemic that has killed close to 2.2 million people worldwide.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Election today in 62 more municipalities

Fears of violence in many polling areas

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

A total of 62 municipalities would go to polls today amid worries of violence.

This time, the Election Commission (EC) is conducting the polls in five phases. Today would be the third phase of it.

The battle of ballots is expected to be held between two arch-rival political parties -- the Awami League and the BNP -- although candidates of other political parties including Jatiya Party and Islami Andolan Bangladesh are contesting in it.

Mohammad Alamgir, senior secretary to the EC, told The Daily Star, "We have completed our preparations and believe that voting will be held peacefully."

The EC has also taken measures to prevent any kind of violence during and after the elections, he added.

He said that they have taken a lesson from Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) elections where organised people created some untoward incidents.

"We have asked law enforcers to increase intelligence surveillances so that organised people cannot carry out any untoward plan," he added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

COVID DEATHS Country sees lowest daily death toll in nine months

BSS, *Dhaka*

Bangladesh yesterday recorded seven coronavirus deaths, the lowest daily count since early May.

"Seven more Covid-19 patients died in the last 24 hours [till yesterday morning], increasing the death toll to 8,094," read a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The recovery count rose to 478,960 after another 414 patients were discharged from the hospitals during the period, the press release added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



PRAYER TIMING JANUARY 30

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:35 12:45 4:15 5:46 7:15
JAMAT 6:10 1:15 4:30 5:50 7:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



Thirteen-year-old Shafika Begum standing on the ship deck with her only playmate, a goat she named Jhunjhuni after her favourite toy, on way to Bhasan Char from Cox's Bazar yesterday afternoon. She is among the third batch of Rohingya refugees being relocated to the island on the Bay of Bengal.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

REFUGEE RELOCATION TO BHASANCHAR

1,776 more arrive with new hopes

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA, *from Bhasan Char*

Shafika and Jhunjhuni are inseparable. Fondly named after Shafika's favourite toy from when she was a toddler, the Black Bengal follows Shafika everywhere.

The two looked very happy as they pranced towards the large playground under the bright morning sun yesterday.

In fact, that was the first thing that Shafika -- and most likely Jhunjhuni too -- noticed, when they reached Bhasan char along with other refugees from the Cox's Bazar camps.

"We did not have anything like this [playground] at the camps. And the roads were hilly," she said, beaming at this correspondent.

Yesterday a total of 1,776 Rohingyas arrived at Bhasan Char in the third batch while another 1,800 are expected to arrive today, said A A Mamun Chowdhury, project director of Ashrayan Project-3.

Initially a total of 1,778 were scheduled to arrive but in the morning one woman went into labour in Chattogram, where they were stayed overnight after arriving from Cox's Bazar.

People with luggage, chickens, ducks, goats, solar panels, food and other belongings arrived at the ships at 9:00am and were given breakfast and lunch during the journey. The aged were seen being carried on the shoulders of the young.

Four ships arrived at Bhasan char around 12:00 pm. Rohingya refugees are increasingly showing their desire to move to Bhasan Char from the cramped camps in Cox's Bazar with the hopes of a better future.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5