



"Remarkable how our doctors and scientists have worked in quick time to strengthen the global fight against COVID-19."

MODI SAYS AFTER TAKING FIRST DOSE OF HOME-GROWN COVAXIN



"I am actually passing time by watching Netflix, Amazon Prime, and sleeping as we are not allowed to exit our rooms and meet others."

BANGLADESH ODI CAPTAIN TAMIM IQBAL DESCRIBES HIS DAYS IN ISOLATION IN NEW ZEALAND



"Political participation and freedom of expression should not be crimes."

US SECRETARY OF STATE ANTHONY BLINKEN ON DETENTION OF HK DEMOCRACY CAMPAIGNERS



STATE-RUN JUTE MILLS

Govt going for lease to private

Decides on short-term contracts; experts, industrialists sceptical about feasibility of the plan

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

The government has decided to lease out all 25 state-run jute mills to the private sector despite initial plans of reopening them either through joint venture, public-private partnership, or a government-to-government (G2G) agreement.

A nine-member inter-ministerial committee has nearly finalised the terms and conditions of the lease contracts and international tenders for this purpose might be issued within a week or two, said sources at the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC).

According to BJMC and ministry sources, it has been decided to lease out the mills for a period of five to 20 years through an open bidding system.

The government closed all state-run jute mills on July 1 last year due to heavy losses and excessive production costs, laying off more than 50,000 workers in three categories -- permanent, temporary, and substitute.

At the time, the Ministry of Textiles and Jute in a press release stated that the mills would be modernised and reopened

soon through joint venture, PPP, or a G2G agreement.

Later on July 16, a 13-member technical committee was formed to suggest ways to reopen the mills. It also recommended leasing out the mills to the private sector for a short term besides the options of joint venture, PPP and G2G.

The BJMC and ministry have now decided on the short-term contracts and are currently considering leasing out the mills, along with some of the land, as its first priority, said BJMC Chairman Abdur Rouf on February 20.

Talking to The Daily Star again yesterday, "Our decision is to modernise and reopen these mills through private management while the state ownership will remain in place.

"This is what we mean when we talk about leasing out the mills to the private sector."

Contacted, Secretary of the Ministry of Textiles and Jute Mohammad Lokman Hossain Mian said the options to go for a G2G agreement, PPP, or other forms of investment are still there.

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An image of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman depicted with paddy on a 100-bigha crop field in Balenda area of Bogura's Sherpur upazila. Organised by National AgriCare, a private company, and guided by cadet college students, 100 female farmers gave the field this shape, in celebration of the Father of the Nation's birth centenary. This is also an attempt to secure a spot in the Guinness World Records for "the largest crop field mosaic (image)", said the organisers.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

PK Halder beat them by an hour

Immigration police at Benapole got his travel ban notice after his departure

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former NRB Global Bank managing director Proshanta Kumar Halder fled the country through Jashore's Benapole land port less than an hour before immigration police received his travel ban notice, Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik said yesterday.



"Officials from immigration department of special branch of police said PK Halder crossed the Benapole border at 3:38pm on October 23 in 2019," he told The Daily Star.

The Anti-Corruption Commission issued a travel ban on PK Halder on October 22, 2019 and sent the notice to immigration police by post, which the officials received at 4:30pm the next day, he added quoting immigration officials.

The DAG said Halder possessed two passports -- one Bangladeshi and the other Canadian -- and used his Bangladeshi passport to go to India.

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COMMENTARY

Celebrating our graduation

Congratulations to our people and PM

MAHFUZ ANAM

There are two realities of today's Bangladesh -- the reality of graduation to a developing country and that of the repressions of digital security act, the former we celebrate and the latter we condemn. Today, however, we only celebrate.

Like millions of freedom fighters, I am also happy beyond measure that we have passed all the requirements to become a developing country and will formally become so in 2026, two years late due to the global pandemic.

This graduation has a special meaning for those of us who were present at the country's birth and who, however peripherally, played a small but proud role in it. We became a part of an exorable historical force that led to our liberation. We were not only sucked into this process but that our lives were totally shaped and driven by it. By some unknown and, it seemed at that time to be, unknowable cosmic force we all seemed to be woven together into collective consciousness inexorably pushing ourselves towards a tumultuous eventuality of which we were still only vaguely aware.

With each event the people of then East Pakistan, especially the students, were becoming more and more determined for the ultimate goal and through a very brave and tragic -- in terms of loss of lives- event we became independent Bangladesh.

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Erfan cleared in narcotics case as well

STAR REPORT

Mohammad Erfan Salim, son of Awami League lawmaker Haji Mohammad Salim, has been cleared of drug charges, days after officers dropped the charges of possession of illegal firearms in another case.

A Dhaka court yesterday cleared Erfan in the narcotics case.

On February 18, a Special Tribunal in Dhaka cleared him in the arms case because the police did not find evidence to prove the charges and the prosecutors did not demand further investigation.

Following a raid on Erfan's Chawkbazar house on October 26 last year, Rab Deputy Assistant Director Kaiyum Islam filed the arms and narcotics cases with Chawkbazar Police Station.



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FOILING BNP PROGRAMMES

Transport strike, a tool govt using

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Is this just a coincidence?

When the BNP tries to organise a large political programme, it faces obstacles to mobilising its leaders and activists as transport services become unavailable all of a sudden.

This has happened more than once in the recent past.

In the meantime, common people suffer because of the sudden transport crisis.

BNP leaders allege that the government misuses the state machinery to suspend transport services in its efforts to foil their peaceful programmes.

Political analysts echoed their views and said the government keeps resorting to the same tactics to prevent its political archrival from getting organised and staging protests.

Ahead of today's BNP-announced rally in Rajshahi demanding a fresh national election, something similar was noticed yesterday.

Bus services started becoming unavailable from morning. Till noon, the services were completely "suspended", alleged party leaders.

Wishing not to be named, owners of several private bus services said some traffic sergeants stormed into their offices in the morning and asked them not to operate vehicles for the day.

An official of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) confirmed the matter to The Daily Star. He too wished to remain unnamed.

Golam Ruhul Kuddus, additional deputy commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, however, denied the allegation and said no one from police did anything like that.

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COVID VACCINE

Govt won't supply it to pvt hospitals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will not provide Covid-19 vaccines for the private healthcare sector, Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, said yesterday.

If any private healthcare organisation wants to import vaccines, the government will allow it, he said while addressing journalists at the health directorate.

"In that case, the government will set a price for vaccines [imported by the private healthcare sector]," he added.

Earlier on February 10, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said that the government was taking steps to engage the private healthcare sector in the mass Covid-19 vaccination campaign.

The minister made the announcement at a seminar in Dhaka where leaders of the private healthcare sector demanded that the

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A mural, titled "Borak Duldul", by Hamidur Rahman and a sculpture, inset, by Novera Ahmed, are among four artworks that are left uncared for on the walls of Dhaka University Central Library. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

ARTWORKS AT DU LIBRARY

MASTERPIECES left to decay

TARUN SARKAR

Four important examples of the country's modern art -- a sculpture by Novera Ahmed and three murals by Hamidur Rahman -- have been decaying on the walls of Dhaka University Central Library.

Spider webs and dirt have engulfed and termites have eaten up parts of these artworks with cracks developing and colours fading in places due to negligence of authorities and lack of maintenance.

During a recent visit, it was found that a new room has been built in front of Novera's sculpture. A wall has been constructed dividing Hamidur Rahman's mural titled "Fisherman's Village" and the room housing it.

A hanging corridor linked to the west wall, where another mural called "Borak Duldul" is painted, is currently used as a makeshift storeroom, filled with abandoned materials.

What was once the reception centre, which hosts the mural "Boat Composition", has also been turned into a storeroom.

Researchers and historians say these works have historical and cultural

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significance and steps must be taken for their conservation.

The library itself is a major artistic feat in its own right.

Starting its journey as the public library in the '50s, it was named Dhaka University Central Library after the establishment of the Central Public Liberty at Shahbagh in the '80s.

The DU library building was designed by Muzharul Islam, a pioneer of modern architecture in Bangladesh, said Prof Abu Sayeed M Ahmed, former president of Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB).

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