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Your Right to Know

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"We've reviewed the data on deaths. There has been no death, to date, proven to have been caused by vaccination.... Yes, we should continue using the AstraZeneca vaccine."
WHO SPOKESWOMAN MARGARET HARRIS



"Climate shocks and the Covid-19 pandemic are adding fuel to the flames. I have one simple message: if you don't feed people, you feed conflict."
UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTONIO GUTERRES WARNS MILLIONS RISK FAMINE



"This allegation against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the state councillor, is groundless, especially regarding the dollars and gold bars -- it is the most hilarious joke of all."
SULU KYI'S LAWYER KHIN MALUNG ZAW ON MYANMAR JUNTA'S BRIBERY ALLEGATIONS

ROHINGYA RELOCATION TO BHASAN CHAR

UN will now see it first-hand

The decision comes after a year of impasse between the global body and govt

PORIMOL PALMA

The United Nations is going to send a delegation to visit Bhasan Char, where the government has developed a housing facility for 100,000 Rohingyas but faced reservations from aid agencies about the move.

The development comes following an impasse of more than a year between the government and the UN regarding the global body's technical assessment of the facility.

The United Nations revealed the decision after a meeting between heads of some UN missions in Dhaka and Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen on Tuesday, a day after newly-appointed UNHCR Representative Johannes van der Klaauw presented his credentials to Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen at the foreign ministry.

"The UN has agreed to undertake its first mission to Bhasan Char at the earliest possible date," Mostafa Mohammad Sazzad Hossain, communications officer at the UN Refugee Agency in Dhaka, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The UN is in discussions with the government about finalising all details of

the visit," he said.

The government has already relocated some 13,000 Rohingyas to Bhasan Char, an island under Noakhali, from Cox's Bazar in phases since December last year. It is in the process of shifting more in the coming days.

Bangladesh Navy implemented the Tk 3,100 crore housing project after some 750,000 Rohingyas had fled a military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine State in 2017 and took shelter in the camps in Teknaf and Ukha.

Apart from the risk of landslides in the hilly terrain, the government cited issues such as drug peddling, human trafficking, gender-based violence, conflicts between factions of the refugee communities in Cox's Bazar, and environmental degradation as major reasons for the relocation move.

The UN raised concerns over risks of tidal surge and cyclone at the remote island, but the government said with 120 brick-built cluster villages and 120 cyclone shelters, flood protection embankments, facilities for education, farming and fishing, hospitals and playgrounds, the Char is a much better living place than the Cox's Bazar camps.

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Assisted by fellow passengers, an elderly man gets on to a moving launch from another in the Padma, putting his life at risk. Bound for Barishal, he had to catch the other vessel after finding that he boarded a Shariatpur-bound launch in Dhaka. The photo was taken in Munshiganj recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Govt may rethink reopen decision if outbreak worsens

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will reconsider its decision to reopen educational institutions on March 30 if the Covid-19 infection rate keeps rising in the country.

"We are observing the situation regularly like we have done in the last one year. We'll make decisions considering the health and other safety issues of our students, teachers, staff and guardians," Education Minister Dipu Moni said yesterday.

The minister was replying to a query from a reporter after a programme at the capital's International Mother Language Institute in the afternoon.

She said as per the existing schedule, secondary and higher secondary educational institutions are scheduled to reopen on March 30, universities on May 24 and student halls on May 17.

"Currently, it appears that there is a rising trend of Covid-19 infection... If the rising trend continues, the government will reconsider its decision whether schools will reopen on March 30 or it will

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DESHBANDHU GROUP

Target \$250m from global investors

SOHEL PARVEZ

Deshbandhu Group plans to raise \$250 million (more than Tk 2,100 crore) from international investors through a Sukuk bond as the conglomerate looks to expand its business and repay its local debts.

Golam Mostafa, chairman of the group, said they want to raise the fund through the Shariah-based Sukuk bond as funds from domestic banking sources are expensive.

"We cannot afford to do business by paying effective interest of as much as 16 percent on loans. We want to clear our debts by raising the fund. We want to become a company with zero loan," Mostafa told The Daily Star yesterday.

The group has business ventures in various sectors, including food and beverage, textile, real estate, shipping and service sector. Its annual turnover is Tk 2,400 crore.

The group will invest part of the \$250 million fund in establishing a fibre factory in Sirajganj to produce Polyester Chips (PET chips) and Polyester Staple Fibre (PSF), which will be exported to European and American markets.

The annual production capacity of the factory will be 300,000 tonnes, said the group on its website.

"We have already developed land for setting up the factory. We will

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13 more die from Covid

1,066 test positive in a day

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh recorded 13 novel coronavirus deaths and 1,066 fresh cases in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday.

The recovery count rose to 5,09,172 after another 1,252 patients were discharged from hospitals during the period, a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said yesterday.

"Thirteen more Covid-19 patients died in the 24 hours, increasing the death toll from the pandemic to 8,515," the release said.

It said the tally of infections has surged to 5,55,222 as 1,066 new cases were confirmed during the time.

A total of 16,111 samples were tested at 219

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30,000 homes for freedom fighters

Plans the govt in a bid to help the insolvent war heroes

RAJAIL KARIM BYRON

The government has planned to build 30,000 homes for insolvent valiant freedom fighters and family members of the martyred and deceased war heroes in a bid to uplift their socioeconomic status.

Titled "Bir Nibash", the homes will be constructed in 64 districts of eight divisions under a Tk 4,122.98-crore project.

The homes will be given to them as a gift from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the occasion of the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the golden jubilee of the country's independence, according to the project proposal.

The Liberation War affairs ministry will implement the housing project by June 2023. The ministry will place the project proposal before the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council next week for approval.

"If implemented, the project will help uplift the social status and improve economic condition of the insolvent freedom fighters, Birangonas, and widows and children of the martyred and late freedom fighters," said the project proposal.

The government earlier had planned to build multi-storied buildings for 14,000 valiant freedom fighters

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State of liberal democracy worsening

Says a Swedish think-tank about Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The state of liberal democracy in the country has worsened significantly over the last 10 years.

With its score 0.1 (on a scale of 0-1), Bangladesh stood 154th among 179 countries in Liberal Democracy Index (LDI), according to the Democracy Report-2021 of Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute.

Denmark secured first place in the index with the score of 0.88.

The fifth annual democracy report by Sweden's V-Dem Institute, titled "Autocratisation goes viral", has categorised Bangladesh's current regime as an "electoral autocracy".

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There may be crimes against humanity

Says UN special envoy about Myanmar junta's crackdown on protests

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Myanmar junta's crackdown on peaceful protests has led to likely crimes against humanity, said UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews, calling for a united global response.

"The Myanmar junta's brutal response to peaceful protests likely meets the legal threshold for crimes against humanity," Andrews told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Thursday.

"The people of Myanmar need not only words of support but supportive action," he said in a statement. "They need the help of the international community, now."

Andrews stressed that reports indicate that the junta's security forces are committing acts of murder, imprisonment, persecution and other crimes as part of a coordinated campaign, directed against

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Women walk in a procession on Abdul Goni Road near the secretariat in the capital yesterday, protesting suppression of rights. The International Women's Day Committee organised the procession with the assistance of 50 organisations, marking the International Women's Day 2021. The participants made various demands, including scrapping of the Digital Security Act and an end to patriarchal dominance in families. Story on page 3.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

KILLED IN COMPANIGANJ VIOLENCE

The 2 had nothing to do with politics

MUNTAKIM SAAD and ANWARUL HAIDER from Companiganj

Two lives have been cut short, caught in the crossfire of gunfights between the two groups of the ruling Awami League in Noakhali's Companiganj in recent weeks.

The victims, one a local journalist and the other an auto-rickshaw driver, were not affiliated with any political party, their family members said.

After losing the breadwinners, the families now fear that they may never get justice.

Residents and local political leaders said, had police acted promptly after the clash on February 19, the second clash and the second death might not have happened.

Three days into the killing of auto-rickshaw driver Alauddin, 32, his family members could not file a case as of yesterday.

In her rickety tin-roofed house in Char Fakira area of Companiganj, 22-year-old Parvin Akhter Sumi was mourning the death of her husband Alauddin yesterday. She fears that the future of her two children, one aged four years and the other just nine months, is bleak.

"He was just an auto-rickshaw driver, a labourer," Sumi said in tears. "How will I live my life now? I want justice."

Alauddin went to Basurhat with two passengers on Tuesday night. After dropping off the passengers, Alauddin went to Basurhat Municipality area when the clash broke out, said a grieving family member.

The groups chased each other, threw brick chunks, hurled crude bombs, and used firearms for over two hours, witnesses said. Police also used firearms.

It is not clear whose gunshots killed Alauddin.

One of the groups is led by Abdul Quader Mirza, younger brother of AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader. The other group is led by Mizanur Rahman Badal, organising

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