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'Multidimensional and democratic society suffers when media does not play its role properly.'
INFORMATION MINISTER HASAN MAHMUD



'I have contested from Nandigram and will win from there.'
WEST BENGAL CM MAMATA BANERJEE A DAY AFTER INDIAN PM MODI SUGGESTED THAT SHE MIGHT BE DEFEATED THERE



'No Iran-US meeting. Unnecessary.'
IRAN'S FOREIGN MINISTER MOHAMMAD JAVAD ZARIF AS POWERS AGREE TO MEET IN VIENNA TO REVIVE IRAN NUCLEAR ACCORD

EDUCATION CRISIS IN SOUTH ASIA

Covid to cause \$1 trillion losses

Students' lost schooling, dropout cause huge impact on their future earnings in Bangladesh, other countries in the region, says WB report

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The prolonged closure of schools is causing an education crisis that may cost Bangladesh and other South Asian countries over \$1 trillion in lost earnings in the long run, according to a World Bank report.

Schoolchildren could lose a whole year of learning due to the pandemic, said the report launched on Wednesday.

"A Bangladeshi student may lose as much as Tk 3,000 per month as a result of lost schooling. This is a serious loss. It could increase poverty," Zahid Hussain, former lead economist of the WB's Dhaka office, told The Daily Star.

The government should take immediate steps to make sure the digital devices needed for online education are available for all people in the urban and rural areas, he said.

"The report shows that Bangladesh's education budget has increased. But it has increased as the allocation for the Rooppur [Nuclear Power Plant] Project was accounted for in the education budget... We need to increase the actual education budget."

An estimated 5.5 million students are likely to drop out due to Covid-19 related income losses, which is over half of the total estimated global dropouts, said the report titled South Asia Economic Focus, Spring 2021: South Asia Vaccinates.

Prolonged lockdowns to suppress the spread of coronavirus in South Asia have implied higher risks for domestic violence and reduced access to education for girls, it added.

South Asia, which grapples with high stunting rates among children and accounts for more than half of the world's student dropouts due to Covid-19, needs to ramp up investments in human capital to help new generations grow up healthy and become productive workers, the Washington-based global lender said in a statement.

The education budgets in South Asia do not appear well-positioned to respond to the unfolding crisis. Across South Asia, the amounts committed in central government budgets for education have fallen by 2.4 percent in real terms from 2019 to 2021.

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Violating the health safety guidelines, parents and guardians of medical college admission seekers crowd a street near the admission test centre at Ideal School and College in the capital's Motijheel yesterday. The test was held at a time when the country logged the highest number of daily coronavirus cases.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Daily record of Covid cases shattered again

6,830 more infected, 50 die

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of Covid-19 cases has continued to spike.

Yesterday, 6,830 new infections were recorded, taking the total number of people infected to 6,24,594. It was the highest number of cases recorded in a single day since the first detection of coronavirus cases in the country on March 8 last year.

The previous day, the number of positive cases was 6,469.

The current positivity rate is 23.28 percent, while the total positivity rate stands at 13.21 percent.

The Directorate General of Health Services data shows that after a dip, the number of Covid-19 cases started increasing from mid-March.

Since the detection of the first case in the country, the lowest monthly infection rate was recorded at 2.82 percent in February this year. The following month, it jumped to 10.39 percent.

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ASTRAZENECA VACCINE

Bangladesh wants to produce it locally

Govt asks for the British-Swedish pharma company's technology for making jabs from 'seed' or 'in bulk'

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The government has requested AstraZeneca to authorise production of its Covid-19 vaccine in Bangladesh.

A proposal was sent to the British-Swedish multinational pharmaceutical company seeking its technology to produce vaccine from seed (manufacturing the vaccine) or vaccine in bulk (importing and repackaging it).

"We have sent a letter to AstraZeneca 10 days ago, requesting them to provide us their technology so that we can produce the vaccine locally and we have that capacity," Health Minister Zahid Maleque told The Daily on Thursday.

He said the government wanted either seed or vaccine in bulk from AstraZeneca to manufacture or bottle the low-cost and widely used vaccine.

Virus seed and host cell banks are raw materials to initiate vaccine production.

Asked whether Bangladesh has the capacity to produce the vaccine, the health minister said there are a few pharmaceutical companies capable of it.

"We have already visited some plants of those companies and found them capable of producing vaccine," he said.

Contacted yesterday, the health minister said they were yet to get any reply from AstraZeneca.

Unlike the BioNTech-Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine does not have to be stored at ultra-low temperatures. The vaccine can be stored, transported and handled at normal refrigeration temperatures of 2-8 degrees Celsius for at least six months.

AstraZeneca and BioNTech-Pfizer both have agreements with COVAX, a global initiative that aims to distribute low-cost vaccines to low- and middle-income countries.

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Tigresses to get Test status

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh women's cricket team are to be awarded Test status, decided an ICC meeting on Thursday. The meeting decided that Test and ODI status would be permanently awarded to all Full Member women's teams.

That means Bangladesh, along with Afghanistan and Zimbabwe, are to be granted Test status.

Australia, England, Ireland, India, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka and the West Indies are the 10 women's teams that have played Test cricket so far.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) women's wing chairman Shafiqul Alam Nadel said the women's team may play their inaugural Test as early as this year.

"The decision to grant

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Reign of fear in Faridpur

Under powerful backing, syndicate unleashed terror and amassed wealth thru' tender manipulation, commission trade, extortion

SUZIT KUMAR DAS and SHARIFUL ISLAM

Their names had become synonymous with fear.

From tender manipulation to extortion and land grabbing, the two Faridpur brothers -- Sajjad Hossain Barkat and Imtiaz Hasan Rubel -- had unleashed a reign of terror in the district until their arrests last year.

The brothers established a powerful syndicate which would brutalise anyone getting in their way.

This syndicate used to control and manipulate all tenders in the district allegedly under the direct patronage of Khandaker Mohtesam Hossain Babar, younger brother of former Awami League minister Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain, and AHM Fuad, assistant personal secretary of Mosharrif.

They would not even spare other local AL leaders and businessmen, if found hurting their interests.

Toufique Hossain was one such contractor who fell afoul of the brothers. An enlisted contractor in the district, he submitted tender documents for repairing three buildings of Faridpur Medical College in 2018.

He won Public Works Department contracts worth Tk 15 lakh in total. But this irked the Barkat-Rubel syndicate, and Toufique, also a former vice-president of the district unit Chhatra League, had to pay the price.

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Rejoinder, Our Reply

Rangunia range office of Chattogram Divisional Forest Office (South) protested a report published by The Daily Star headlined "Gunfight staged to get stolen logs released" on March 7.

A rejoinder signed by Range Officer Masum Kabir claimed that the report was baseless, fabricated, and intentional. It also said no bribe was paid and the attackers launched an attack prompting them to retaliate with gunfire nine times.

Two cases were filed regarding the incident.

The rejoinder, sent on March 8, demanded the report be withdrawn, claiming that such a report would inspire the loggers.

OUR REPLY
Our report establishes the fact that there was no such gunfight. Police also found the same.

We have proof that a forest guard took the bribe on behalf of a forest official and staged the gunfight.

The rejoinder claimed that such a report would inspire illegal loggers. But when The Daily Star correspondent visited

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Staffers take Covid patient Sohrab Hossain to Mugda Medical College Hospital in the capital yesterday. The 58-year-old man from Narayanganj's Rugganj upazila is on oxygen as he suffers from breathing problems. The city hospitals have been struggling to cope with the large number of coronavirus patients in recent weeks.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

MAYHEM DURING MODI VISIT

Hefajat blames it on ruling party

Also criticises media coverage

STAR REPORT

Although Hefajat-e-Islam has unleashed mayhem in different districts recently, it has now blaming the ruling party for it.

Calling the Awami League "Helmet League", Hefajat said the violence was instigated by AL men in helmets.

Mamunul Haque, joint secretary general of the Islamist group, made the remarks while speaking at a protest rally on the premises of the capital's Baitul Mukarram National Mosque after Juma prayers yesterday.

He was addressing the rally amid heavy deployment of law enforcers in the adjacent Paltan area.

Mamunul said ruling party men in helmets attacked Hefajat activists after Juma prayers last week, leading to clashes in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Brahmanbaria and Chattogram.

The clashes began when Hefajat men were protesting the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

For three days from Friday, Hefajat supporters ran amok vandalising and torching establishments and properties in Brahmanbaria and other districts.

Hefajat yesterday slammed the media, alleging that journalists covered their demonstration negatively and that the state was controlling the media and most TV channels and newspapers had become the government's mouthpiece.

"If anyone thinks that Hefajat will bow down before gun barrels, they are living in a fool's paradise. You can't suppress Hefajat through intimidation," Mamunul said at the rally.

"We saw responsible persons from the administration briefing the media. They were crying that a land office, documents and other government establishments were

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