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COUP IN MYANMAR

China's State Councilor Wang Yi hopes for 'soft landing' as Asean leaders meet to discuss crisis

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Lockdown now in reverse gear

Shops, malls open tomorrow; transport owners want to resume bus service after April 28 if govt permits

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

At a time when the country has begun to see a decline in Covid-19 infections and deaths, the government decision to reopen shops and malls can jeopardise all its efforts to fight the virus and worsen the situation, experts warned.

"We've just been able to put the brakes on the spike in coronavirus cases and it was leading us to a win-win situation. But now, we're moving towards a lose-lose situation," Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, a public health expert, told The Daily Star after a notice regarding the reopening was issued yesterday.

In the notice, the government said shops and malls can reopen tomorrow maintaining health guidelines properly. The announcement came on the 10th day of the ongoing restrictions, imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

"Markets may remain open from 10:00am to 5:00pm every day from April 25," read the Cabinet Division notice, signed by Deputy Secretary Md Rezaul Islam.

Earlier, a technical expert committee on Covid-19 had suggested that the government lift the restrictions in phases after analysing the situation.

In a meeting Sunday, the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 also had recommended extending the "lockdown" for another week, asking the government to enforce the restrictions strictly.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, experts said letting the shopping

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Resting his ailing wife Hawa Moni's head on his lap, Khalil waits anxiously on the premises of Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday to see if he can get her admitted. With her oxygen levels falling, the suspected Covid-19 patient was turned away by several hospitals and clinics before she was allowed admission to the DMCH.

Shut borders with India

Experts ask govt, say it's needed to prevent spread of new Covid-19 variant

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

With the Covid-19 situation deteriorating in India, experts in Bangladesh have suggested closing the borders with the neighbouring country to contain the spread of a new and potentially more transmissible variant of the virus.

In a meeting Tuesday, the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 also recommended that the borders should not reopen until the situation in India improves.

"We have suggested that the government seal off the borders with India right away as the situation there is grim," Prof Nazrul Islam, a member of the NTAC, told The Daily Star.

"If the government does not close the border completely, it must ensure institutional quarantine for all returnees from India," he said.

The new variant, which has a so-called double mutation, is reported to be fuelling India's second wave of coronavirus cases

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BANSHKHALI POLICE FIRING

Treatment cost weighs heavily on the injured

Doctors remove bullets from 11 wounded workers

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

Workers who were shot during police firing at the SS Power I Plant in Chattogram's Banshkhali have had their bullets removed surgically, but that has not signified an end to their struggles.

Survivors of the shooting, which took place on April 17 when workers of the power plant owned by S Alam Group were protesting over unpaid salary and unhygienic accommodation, are now worried about their long-term treatment costs.

At least seven workers died and 15 others were injured during the Banshkhali power plant shooting.

Five workers died on the spot and two others succumbed to injuries at Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and Parkview Hospital in the port city.

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FLIGHTS TO MIDDLE EAST

Sky-high airfare adds to migrant workers' woes

Price of one-way ticket to KSA rises up to **Tk 95,000** from **Tk 20,000**

RASHIDUL HASAN

Airfare to different Middle Eastern countries has increased manifold in the last few months, putting an additional burden on migrant workers returning to their workplaces.

A year ago, a ticket to Saudi Arabia cost between Tk 20,000 and Tk 25,000 in most cases. But nowadays, a ticket to the same destination would cost Tk 90,000-95,000, recruiting association leaders said.

In some cases, expatriate workers end up paying Tk 1.10 lakh or more for a Biman or Saudi Arabian Airlines ticket, M Tipu Sultan, president of Recruiting Agency Oikkya Parishad, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Ticket prices to Oman, the UAE and Qatar now cost Tk 80,000 to Tk 1 lakh, up from Tk 25,000 to Tk 30,000 a year ago, according to Bangladesh

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CLIMATE SUMMIT

Biden urges world to work together on clean energy

REUTERS, *Washington*

US President Joe Biden yesterday called on nations to work together on the transition to clean energy, the second and final day of a climate summit he is hosting that seeks to rally world ambition to reduce global warming.

"Nations that work together to invest in a cleaner economy will reap the rewards for their citizens," the Democratic president said at the virtual summit.

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CLIMATE FUNDING, CUTTING EMISSIONS

Dhaka very optimistic

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has expressed optimism over the funding for climate actions and cutting carbon emissions as global leaders at the Leaders Summit on Climate made political commitments to turn the tide on global warming.

"We are very optimistic about mobilisation of $100 billion a year by the developed countries," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told reporters at a virtual press conference on the summit hosted by US President Joe Biden.

Forty world leaders attended the two-day summit that ended yesterday, with leaders committing to significantly cut carbon emissions.

The US announced cutting emissions by 50 to 52 percent by 2030 compared with 2005 levels. Japan announced it would reduce emissions by 46 percent in 2030 compared with 2013, while Canada boosted ambitions to reduce emissions by 40-45 percent below 2005 levels, compared with an earlier target of 30 percent.

"These are all good news. We are optimistic about the development," he said.

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Chemicals stored in a warehouse on the ground floor of Hazi Musa Mansion in Armanitola of Old Dhaka. A fatal fire in the six-storey building early yesterday left four people dead and 23 injured.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

4 killed in chemical warehouse fire in city

SHAHEEN MOLLAH *and* SHARIFUL ISLAM

Haunted by the fear of deadly fires caused by chemical warehouses in Old Dhaka, Maidul Alam Akash's family rented a flat in Armanitola's Musa Mansion seven years ago mainly because the building housed no chemical warehouses.

Five years ago, however, after the death of building owner Musa Mia, his sons

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CHEMICAL WAREHOUSES OF OLD DHAKA

Relocation a far cry

REJAUL KARIM BYRON *and* HELEMUL ALAM

Relocation of the hazardous chemical warehouses from old Dhaka is still a far cry since the government failed to accomplish any of the goals set after the devastating fires in the past decade.

The delay in moving the warehouses out of the congested neighbourhoods has kept the fear of another tragedy alive in the collective mind of residents.

Soon after stored chemicals caught fire in Nimtoli, claiming 126 lives in June 2010, the government took up four projects to relocate chemical, plastic, printing, and electronics industries from old Dhaka.

But none of the projects has been completed in 11 years, mostly because of bureaucratic tangles and complications related to land acquisition.

Not even the fire in Churihatta, Chawkbazar, in February 2019 that killed 80 people, could spur the authorities to act decisively.

Yesterday's fire at a building with a chemical warehouse in Armanitola that left four dead and 25 others injured is a reminder that Old Dhaka neighbourhoods are never too far from a tragedy.

The Dhaka South City Corporation stopped issuing new licences or renewing the old ones for chemical businesses in Old Dhaka. But had very little effect on reality.

The chemical traders say they can't leave the area unless the government relocates them, as was agreed in a MoU signed in 2017.

Arif Hossain, general secretary of Bangladesh Chemical and Perfumery Merchants' Association, said, "We will

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