



INDO-PAK TENSIONS
Pak FM Qureshi says he is ready for talks if India revisits its Aug 5, 2019 decisions on J&K
SEE PAGE 6

The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

www.thedailystar.net

Your Right to Know

RAMADAN 14, 1442 HIRI



REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XXXI No. 102

BAISHAKH 14, 1428 BS

16 PAGES PLUS LIFESTYLE PRICE : Tk12.00



"The only politics is now to stop this horrific spread of coronavirus and protect the country's people from the invisible enemy."
AWAMI LEAGUE GENERAL SECRETARY OBAIDUL QUADER



"As a political party, we [BNP] think the government has created a crisis in Hefajat and it's now taking advantage of it."
BNP SECRETARY GENERAL MIRZA FAKHRUL ISLAM ALAMGIR



"Just as India sent assistance to the United States...we are determined to help India in its time of need."
US PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN ASSURES HELP AMID COVID

INDIA HALTING SUPPLY Oxygen crunch may turn grave

Govt bans use of oxygen for industrial purposes

MUNTAKIM SAAD and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

The sudden halt to oxygen import from India amid the second Covid-19 wave may put Bangladesh in a precarious position if the current coronavirus situation deteriorates, fear health officials and suppliers.

Facing an acute shortage of oxygen due to a record rise in virus infections, India imposed a ban on supply of industrial oxygen from April 22 to cope with its huge demand.

Bangladesh used to meet 15-20 percent of its monthly requirement of around 5,400 tonnes of both medical and industrial oxygen through import from India.

Oxygen suppliers in the country said they are still managing the supply chain for public and private hospitals by switching their production to medical oxygen from industrial one.

Meanwhile, the government has banned the use of oxygen for industrial purposes to ensure smooth supply of oxygen at hospitals.

In a circular issued on April 23, the department of explosives said hospitals and clinics are not getting oxygen for critically ill Covid patients as per their demands. Amid this situation, the use of oxygen for industrial purposes will remain suspended.

A number of Oxygen suppliers told this newspaper yesterday that a week ago when the country was seeing a spike in infections, the ratio between medical and industrial oxygen supply was 80:20. Now, the companies in the country are producing oxygen only for medical purposes.

The good news is that the infection rate is now on a downward trend, they said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Renu Singhal, seeing her Covid-19 positive husband gasping for breath, tries to resuscitate him but couldn't save his life. Even as she performed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on her husband, Ravi Singhal died on her lap inside an autorickshaw outside a hospital in Agra, India. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: INDIA TODAY

COVID PANDEMIC PM for stronger role of developed nations



BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday sought a stronger role of the developed world and the development partners in attaining quick recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Delivering her recorded statement aired in the 77th Session of the UN-ESCAP, she placed a four-point proposal in this regard.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

Shafi followers out to reclaim Hefajat helm

2 cases filed against Babunagari

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With Hefajat-e-Islam's central committee dissolved, followers of its late amir Shah Ahmad Shafi now eye top posts in the new committee.

Leaders of the Qawmi-madrasa based organisation said the government was backing the leaders of the pro-Shafi group to take up posts in the new committee.

Most of the pro-Shafi leaders were not included in the previous committee.

Meanwhile, two cases were filed against Hefajat Amir Junayed Babunagari on Thursday in connection with the violence in Chattogram's Hathazari upazila during demonstrations over Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh.

Hours after dissolving its central committee, Hefajat early yesterday named a five-member convening committee, with Muhibullah Babunagari as chief adviser, Junayed Babunagari as amir and Nurul Islam Jihadi as secretary general.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

MITIGATING VACCINE SHORTAGE

Russia, China can be new sources

Expert body recommends Sputnik, Sinopharm

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The government is seriously considering importing Covid-19 vaccines from Sinopharm of China and Russia's Sputnik V in order to ensure continuation of the ongoing mass vaccination programme.

An eight-member committee formed by the government submitted a report yesterday shortlisting the two companies, said committee sources.

"We have analysed various sources of the vaccine. We found that Sinopharm and Sputnik V is suitable right now," Maj Gen Mahbubur Rahman, director general of Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA), told The Daily Star.

With the Serum Institute of India failing to comply with the commitment to supply three crore vaccine shots in six instalments, the Bangladesh government started to explore alternative sources for the jobs, DGHS officials said.

On April 19, the government formed the eight-member committee and tasked it with finding alternative sources and submit a report to the Prime Minister's Office within seven days.

Mahbub, also the chief of the eight-member committee, said they are trying to bring vaccines from alternative sources as soon as possible to keep the mass vaccination process smooth.

The government is also pursuing manufacture of vaccine doses under joint collaboration with foreign countries.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 6

'Lockdown' extended till May 5

More curbs may come amid worry over India surge

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and PORIMOL PALMA

Concerned over the steep rise in coronavirus cases in India, the government mulls imposing more Covid-19 restrictions in Bangladesh in the coming days.

The issue dominated an inter-ministerial meeting, chaired by Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam, yesterday, a day after the government decided to suspend passengers' travel from India through land borders to stem the spread of mutant variants of Covid-19 from the neighbouring country.

Considering the global situation and following the advice of public health experts, the government yesterday also decided to extend the ongoing restrictions on "overall activities and people's movement" for one more week -- from April 29 to May 5 -- to fight the second wave of the Covid-19.

"We are closely watching the situation in India, especially in Kolkata. We may

SEE PAGE 10 COL 3

Save lives now, all else can wait

Economist fears second wave may bring on even grimmer economic, humanitarian toll

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Ten months ago, a government-commissioned research report on the fallout of the pandemic-induced shutdown divulged some grim projections: over 1.64 crore people in the country would become new poor in the second quarter of 2020.

The report, prepared by a team of researchers of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) in June last year, estimated that the poverty rate could rise by 9.1 percentage points.

It meant that the new poor would join the previous 20.5 percent of the country's population who had already been poor, said the report titled "Poverty in the time of Corona: Trends, Drivers, Vulnerability and Policy Responses in Bangladesh".

According to the report, the poverty rate increased to 25.13 percent at the end of 2020.

Although the government does not have the latest data of new poor as a result of Covid-19 crisis, the report's lead researcher, Binayak Sen, warns that the second wave of the pandemic could take a more severe humanitarian and economic toll.

Reflecting on last year's situation, Binayak, now the director general of BIDS, fears a frequent shift in the policy over the lockdown and reopening businesses would hardly make any positive impact on containing the rogue virus.

"There would be a rise in the infection, which would lead to more deaths and prompt the government to go for a stricter lockdown. People's

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Govt to buy 18 lakh tonnes of paddy, rice

Procurement price paddy Tk 27, rice Tk 40 a kg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid the Boro harvest, the government has decided to buy 6.5 lakh tonnes of paddy and 11.5 lakh tonnes of rice from the local market to increase its food stock.

The government will buy the paddy at Tk 27 per kg, 10 lakh tonnes of parboiled rice at Tk 40 per kg and 1.5 lakh tonne of sunburnt rice (atap) at Tk 39 per kg.

Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder made the announcement yesterday at a virtual press briefing.

The purchase of paddy will start from tomorrow and the rice from May 7, he added.

The government intentionally set a price higher than last year's to benefit the farmers and to make sure the purchase price is higher than the farming costs.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4



With absolutely no regard for physical distancing, people busy shopping at a wholesale and retail cloth market in Old Dhaka's Nawab Bari area yesterday. Traders there said the crowd of customers has been getting bigger since Sunday when shops and malls were allowed to reopen ahead of Eid. The situation was similar at almost all other markets in the city, raising concerns that the Covid-19 cases may increase in the coming days.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

JOBS TAKEN, BENEFITS TOO

Termination rules not followed by many garments factories amid pandemic

ZYMA ISLAM

After Dragon Sweaters' Dhaka factory closed due to the pandemic last year, former garments worker Abdul Kuddus had to sign away rights to half of his termination benefits.

It had been nine months since he had earned a salary, nine months since he was retrenched -- so something was better than nothing.

"Our factory closed down on March 26, 2020 when the shutdown was announced, but unlike the other factories which opened up in April, ours never opened. When we tried to join work, they told us that the factory was closed until further notice," said Kuddus.

He and his colleagues were, however, not terminated -- a process that lawfully involves providing termination benefits to the workers and handing over their provident funds.

After nine months of protests, physical sit-ins and continuous occupation of the parking lot of Sromo Bhaban, at the end of last December, the workers settled for a portion of the money they were legally owed. Even then, many workers still haven't received these dues.

According to Bangladesh's labour laws, employers have a right to stop work and retrench workers in case of an epidemic (or a pandemic, in this case), but

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3