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"Our mission in Saudi Arabia will help them with hotel bookings... The government will provide subsidy if the cost is high."
FOREIGN MINISTER AK ABDUL MOMEN ABOUT BANGLADESHI WORKERS GOING TO THE KSA



"I hereby humbly and with respect stand by your side today, I come to recognise the extent of our responsibilities."
PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON SEEKS 'FORGIVENESS' FOR FRANCE'S ROLE IN RWANDA GENOCIDE



"I assure you, the United Nations General Assembly is determined to ensure a better future for the Rohingya people."
UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT VOLKAN BOZKIR

PURCHASE OF SINOPHARM VACCINE

Price disclosure sparks confusion

Pfizer vaccine gets nod for emergency use in Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Confusion has arisen over the price of Sinopharm shots as the government closes in on the vaccine purchase from China in a desperate effort to keep the inoculation campaign rolling.

In a meeting, the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase yesterday approved a proposal for buying 1.5 crore doses of Sinopharm's Covid-19 vaccine, paving the way for the final agreement.

Immediately after the meeting, chaired by Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, a Cabinet Division official told reporters at a briefing that they were purchasing the vaccine at \$10 per dose.

However, as the news spread online through different media outlets, including The Daily Star, ministry officials contested the disclosure saying that the price had not been approved yet.

A finance ministry official sent a text to the messenger group of reporters covering the ministry, requesting the media not to mention the price for the "greater interest of the country".

Contacted, Health Minister Zahid Maleque declined to disclose the price of the vaccine.

"As the purchase committee has

approved the proposal, we hope that the procurement agreement between the two countries will be signed very soon," he said.

A Cabinet Division official told The Daily Star that Bangladesh will get 50 lakh doses of Sinopharm vaccines each month (June, July and August).

A total of 1.5 crore vaccine shots will be purchased which will cost Tk 1,267 crore, said the source.

Zahid said the government will bring the vaccine from China at its own cost.

The minister said once the procurement deal is signed and the first shipment arrives by June, the inoculation campaign will gather pace.

"The first dose vaccination programme, which is now suspended, will resume again," the minister added.

The government suspended administering the first dose of vaccine on April 26, soon after India temporarily banned export of vaccine produced in the Serum Institute of India.

Bangladesh purchased 3 crore doses of AstraZeneca vaccine from Serum and was supposed to receive 50 lakh jabs per month for six months from January to June.

The government purchased AstraZeneca vaccine at \$5 per dose through a tripartite

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A goat gets stranded on a small patch of high ground surrounded by rushing water on an inundated field in Barishal's Bakerganj upazila yesterday. Farmlands, fish enclosures and roads in several villages of the upazila have been damaged by tidal surges caused by cyclone Yaas.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

KSA-BOUND WORKERS

Govt steps in to ease their plight

Over a thousand miss flights in last 3 days for failing to book hotels

RASHIDUL HASAN and PORIMOL PALMA

After at least 1,000 migrants missed their flights to Saudi Arabia failing to book or pay for their mandatory quarantine in hotels, Bangladesh yesterday decided to help KSA-bound migrants with hotel bookings and subsidy.

The migrants had been in trouble after the Gulf country, the largest manpower market for Bangladesh, earlier this month said people travelling to the kingdom from Bangladesh would have to be in seven-day mandatory quarantine in hotels at their own cost.

Many workers struggled to manage the additional Tk 60,000-Tk 70,000 needed for their hotel stay. Some unable to book hotels themselves for various reasons, sought the help from airlines, who a few days ago said the migrants would have to book hotels

themselves.

The about 1,000 migrants, who missed their flights, missed them over the last few days alone.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said having realised the problems being faced by the Saudi-bound migrants, the prime minister has instructed the foreign ministry to take initiatives for arranging the hotel bookings.

"I asked our ambassador [in Saudi Arabia] to list the migrants going there and then arrange hotel bookings for their quarantine," Momen said.

If the hotel is expensive, the government will subsidise, he said, adding that he had spoken to the expatriates' welfare minister in this regard.

"If they can go to Saudi Arabia, they can

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CYCLONE YAAS AFTERMATH

Coastal region still reeling under water

STAR REPORT

There is no going back to normal for thousands of residents of the coastal region as tidal surges caused by cyclone Yaas left a trail of destruction on their houses, farms, fisheries and even roads.

Embankment breaches along the coastline affected many villages, flooding homes and washing away the belongings of some of the most underprivileged people of the country.

Several rivers swelled by one or two metres in different places, flooding vast areas of the coastal region, according to a special bulletin of the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC).

Another statement of the FFWC, released at 9:00am yesterday, said, "The coastal rivers of Bhadra, Ichamati, Rupsa-Pashur, Shiba, Daratana, Betnai-Kholpetu, Kirtonkhola, Tentulia, Swarupkathi, Kocha, Burishwar, Bishkhali, Surma-Meghna and Burishwar-Payra of Barishal, Satkhira, Khulna, Bagerhat, Pirojpur, Barguna, Jhalokathi, Patuakhali and Bhola districts of Khulna and Barishal divisions are flowing above danger levels at different points which may fall below danger level in next 24 hours."

In Barishal division, at least 10.18km of embankments were ruined and around 80km were partially damaged, according to the Water Development Board (WDB).

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FIGHTING FLOOD, EROSION

Monsoon nears, projects nowhere

Uncertainty looms over completion of BWDB works to protect embankments and dredge rivers ahead of monsoon

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

At least two dozen river dredging and embankment protection projects aimed at combating floods and erosion across the country are set to miss the deadline of this June due to fund crunch, red tape, and mistakes in assessments.

Completion of these projects is now uncertain particularly because the government opted for austerity measures against the backdrop of the Covid-19 economic downturn, a top official of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) confirmed.

The projects are crucial to reducing the damage of croplands and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, a common phenomenon during the monsoon when rivers of the country swell, said experts.

Last year, floods damaged crops on over 1.58 lakh hectares of land in 37 districts -- worth around Tk 1,323 crore -- according to agriculture ministry data.

Quoting the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in an assessment of last year's floods noted that around 54.5 lakh people in 33 districts were affected.

More than four kilometres of embankments were damaged in 97 unions, two to four kilometres of embankments in 53 unions, and up to two kilometres of embankments in 70 unions.

CPD observed that the government's flood management and control activities are apparently losing steam. It stressed the need for carrying out timely restoration of affected and faulty embankments.

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Star BUSINESS

Graft in relief schemes

Community leaders allege, MP refutes

Many poor people did not get the relief meant for them during the coronavirus pandemic because of the corruption perpetrated by a section of local elected representatives, alleged leaders of community-based organisations yesterday. A ruling party lawmaker, however, said people raised no complaints about the ongoing relief schemes.

They spoke at a virtual dialogue organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue and the Oxfam in Bangladesh in association with the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh.

STORY ON B1



A tree dangerously leans on to the Mouchak-Malibagh flyover in the capital. Vehicles could hit it and get damaged. Motorists making the turn are also blind to what lies ahead. A simple trimming job could make the turn safer. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Narcos now out to create LSD market

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

Narcotics smugglers have long been trying to create a market for the hallucinogenic drug called LSD in Bangladesh, targeting college and university students as consumers.

Law enforcers came up with the findings after seizing 200 pieces of LSD blotter paper from Dhaka on Wednesday night.

The Detective Branch of Police, in a special drive in the capital's Dhanmondi and Lalmatia, recovered LSD worth around Tk six lakh and arrested three university students on charge of smuggling the drug into Bangladesh, said AKM Hafiz Akter, additional commissioner (DB) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

The arrestees are Sadman Sakib Rupol, 25, and Ashab Wadud Turjo, 22, both students of North South University, and Adib Ashraf, 23, a student of Independent University Bangladesh.

Police claimed they found that LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) was being used in Bangladesh while investigating the death of Dhaka University student Hafizur Rahman.

DB chief Hafiz Akter said it is the first time they have recovered this drug.

In order to sell, the arrestees were targeting mainly the school and college students. They used to sell those through a Facebook group called "Apnar Abba" and the Telegram app, he said.

The arrestees sold each LSD paper blot at Tk 3,000 to 5,000, said the official.

Dulal Krishna Saha, chief chemist and forensic head at the department of narcotics control (DNC), however, said they had earlier seized LSD in September 2019 from the capital's Kafrul area.

A boy had allegedly brought the drug from Canada for consumption, but upon his parents' information, the DNC team had arrested the boy and a case was filed with Kafrul Police Station in this regard.

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