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CSO SUSTAINABILITY INDEX Environment continues to worsen

Report says civil society bodies in Bangladesh subject to strict control

WASIM BIN HABIB

Civil society organisations working on democracy, good governance, and human rights last year were subject to strict control by the regulatory authorities and various types of bureaucratic harassment in Bangladesh, says a global index report.

The overall sustainability of the organisations deteriorated slightly, according to the 2020 Civil Society Organizations Sustainability Index, Bangladesh.

"The legal environment governing CSOs deteriorated slightly in 2020. CSOs continued to face prolonged registration and renewal processes and bureaucratic delays throughout 2020, and Covid-19 restrictions increasingly limited civic space and CSOs' ability to operate," it reads.

Besides, they were increasingly engaged in self-censorship to avoid clashes with the government, according to the report by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

"As in previous years, the government continued to use the DSA [Digital Security Act] to severely limit freedom of expression, thereby impacting CSOs' ability to exercise their freedom of speech, criticise the government, or engage in advocacy."

The report was launched in an international event held virtually on Thursday night. Seventy-three countries were

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A boy holds a basket while his father pours the surplus chinigura paddy into it so that they can take it home for their family. This type of paddy is used to make pilaf rice, a delicacy prepared for special occasions all over the country. The photo was taken at Char Aicha village of Barishal Sadar upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

COVID VACCINE Booster doses to be trialled from tomorrow

Says health minister

UNB, Manikganj

Covid-19 booster jabs will be administered on trial basis from tomorrow, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said yesterday.

However, the minister did not mention the time or venue where the booster doses will be administered.

Maleque said this at a Pitha-Puli festival in Manikganj.

The minister said the government decided to administer booster doses to senior citizens aged above 60 and the frontliners -- including doctors, nurses, government officials and journalists -- who got both doses of vaccine six months ago.

He said all activities to administer booster doses are underway. "The prime minister also has given approval to start administering booster jabs."

In this regard, steps to update the "Surokha" app are in progress. Besides,

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2009-18 EXPORT-IMPORT Bangladesh lost \$8.27b a year to misinvoicing

Says Global Financial Integrity report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country lost \$8.27 billion every year on average between 2009 and 2018 resulting from misinvoicing of values of imported and exported goods by traders to evade taxes and illegally move money across international borders, the Global Financial Integrity (GFI) said on Thursday.

The average loss of customs and taxes was 17.3 percent of Bangladesh's trade with all its trading partners during those years, said the GFI in its latest report, "Trade-Related Illicit Financial Flows in 134 Developing Countries 2009-2018."

The Washington-based think tank did not provide data on trade misinvoicing on Bangladesh after 2015.

The report comes at a time when illegal money transfer through various channels, including under and over invoicing of internationally-traded goods, are believed to be rampant in the country due to alleged collusion between dishonest customs officials and traders.

The GFI report did not have year-wise data on Bangladesh for 2014, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

The Daily Star emailed GFI Communications Coordinator Lauren Anikis about the reason. No reply came until this report was filed last night.

Last year, in a reply to an email from The Daily Star,

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JAPAN CLINIC BLAZE

At least 24 killed

Arson suspected as man seen with bag leaking liquid



AFP, Osaka

At least 24 people were killed after a blaze gutted a mental health clinic in a commercial building in the Japanese city of Osaka yesterday, local media said, with police reportedly considering it a possible arson case.

The fire broke out mid-morning and raged for half an hour on the fourth floor of the clinic, which also provided general medical care.

The clinic's charred interior was visible through burnt-out window frames as firefighters put up a tarpaulin to block the scene from view.

Public broadcaster NHK and other major Japanese media said 24 people had died, citing local police, who did not immediately confirm the toll.

Earlier yesterday, an Osaka fire

department official feared 27 people had perished in the blaze. In Japan, only a doctor can officially certify a death.

"The municipal fire department is investigating the cause of the fire. I have received a report that Osaka police is investigating the fire as possible arson," regional governor Hirofumi Yoshimura said on Twitter.

Japanese media said a man in his 50s or 60s had allegedly dispersed a liquid to start the blaze.

Kyodo News, citing police sources, said the man had placed a paper bag containing a flammable liquid next to a heater, which he then kicked over to ignite.

Masakatsu Shinozaki, 74, the owner of a shop across the street from the building, told AFP he had seen a lot of smoke coming out of the windows.

"I saw a girl shouting for help from the sixth floor, but I didn't realise there were so many people in the building," he said.

"Fire is really scary. It takes away everything. A thief can take away some items. But a fire takes away everything."

DARK SMOKE
Prime Minister Fumio Kishida offered his "sincere condolences" to the victims and sympathy to those injured in the incident.

"We must get to the bottom of this

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

Wikipedia creator's computer, NFT auctioned for \$1m



AFP, New York

An NFT memorializing Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales's first edit on the online reference resource 20 years ago and the computer he used when programming the platform sold for a total of almost \$1 million at auction Wednesday.

Christie's sold the NFT -- Non-Fungible Tokens that are unique digital objects and confer ownership through blockchain technology -- for \$750,000 and the Strawberry iMac for \$187,500.

The NFT is of Wikipedia's debut onscreen image when Wales posted the first words, "Hello world."

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UK firm teams up with Incepta on intranasal Covid vaccine

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

British biomedical firm Viracorp has joined forces with leading Bangladeshi pharmaceutical company Incepta to develop needle-free Covid-19 vaccine, which uses state-of-the-art intra-nasal technology.

Under its subsidiary Viravac, Viracorp's new vaccine is based on the work of Lancaster virologist Dr Muhammad Munir, who has taken on the role of chief scientific officer at Viracorp, says a press release.

The vaccine features a unique formulation and delivery method which means it not only protects against Covid-19, but it can be delivered by nasal spray and transported using traditional cold transportation, the release says.

This has numerous advantages compared to other vaccines currently on the market.

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Youth killed, UP candidate hurt in B'baria gun attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Unidentified gunmen shot dead a 23-year-old while a Natghar union parishad chairman candidate sustained bullet wounds in the same incident in Brahmanbaria's Nabinagar upazila last night.

Brahmanbaria Additional Superintendent of Police (administration and crime) Mollah Mohammad Shahin said officials from Nabinagar Police Station rushed to the spot, Kurighar Bazar of the union, after learning of the incident.

The dead is Badal Sarkar, a resident of Nandura

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Shoppers looking at sweaters, jackets and other winter wear at the Friday market in the capital's Motijheel. As the mercury continues to drop, the demand for winter clothes has been rising.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 18
Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:20 12:45 3:45 5:22 7:00
JAMAT 5:55 1:15 4:00 5:25 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Star HEALTHLINE

Why we vomit and HOW TO MANAGE IT

STAR HEALTH DESK

Vomiting is a reflex. It is a fairly common phenomenon in children as well as in adults. But have you ever wondered what causes people to throw up?

Although not a comfortable situation, puking usually happens for a reason.

Throwing up allows the body to rid itself of ingested toxins, according to physicians. That is why we tend to feel better after we are done puking.

Vomiting in adults can occur for the following

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HygineX instant hand sanitizer

BEACON Pharmaceuticals Limited