

Lithuania won't donate Covid vaccines to Bangladesh

Cites Dhaka's failure to condemn Russian invasion as reason

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Lithuania has changed its decision to donate Covid-19 vaccines to Bangladesh as the latter abstained from voting in favour of the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia for invading Ukraine. Lithuanian National Radio and Television reported this on March 3, quoting Rasa Jakilaitienė, a spokeswoman for Lithuanian prime minister.

Lithuania earlier announced a decision to send 444,600 doses of the Pfizer vaccine to Bangladesh.

The UN General Assembly on Wednesday adopted a resolution that demands Russia to immediately withdraw

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Senior government and armed forces officials see off Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the VIP terminal of the capital's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday as she leaves for the UAE on a five-day official visit.

PHOTO: PTD

3 of bike-stealing gang arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Police in Natore arrested three members of a gang of thieves and recovered 13 stolen motorcycles from their possession.

The arrests and the recoveries were made as teams of detectives and police raided different places in Natore and Pabna over seven days, Liton Kumar Saha, superintendent of police in Natore, told reporters yesterday.

The arrestees are Al Amin Hira, Sakhawat Hossain Palash and Nirmal Sarkar.

Contractor sued for assaulting engineers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A contractor was sued over the assault on two engineers of the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) in Dumki, Patuakhali, on Sunday.

Nazim Uddin, one of the two engineers, wrote in the complaint that Golam Sarwar Badal, owner of a construction firm, assaulted him after he refused to release the payment for the construction of a bridge unless the site is visited by LGED officials.

Contacted, Badal, the contractor, said as the officials demanded Tk 10 lakh in bribes to release the payment of Tk 1.40 crore, there was a heated argument. "But I did not assault anyone."

Man hacks two nieces to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A 20-year-old man was arrested for killing his two nieces, aged six and four, and seriously injuring another child on the street in the Kazir Bolsa area in Ishwarganj, Mymensingh, yesterday.

Sayma Akter and Tripti Akter were daughters of two sisters of accused Mahbub Mia, police said.

Mahbub is accused of stabbing them to death at his house where they came to visit him with their mothers, said Abdul Kadir Miah, officer-in-charge of Ishwarganj Police Station.

Mahbub's education at a Qawmi madrasa stopped about a year ago when he started to act strangely, locals said.

Before killing the children, Mahbub attacked a 12-year-old boy with a spade near his house and seriously injured him, the officer said.

Nine-year-old raped in Netrakona

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police arrested a 58-year-old man for raping a nine-year-old girl in Durgapur, Netrakona.

Samsul Mia, 58, was arrested after the girl's father filed a case yesterday.

Police said Samsul is a father of four.

Officer-in-charge of Durgapur Police Station Mir Mahbubur Rahman said Samsul took the girl to a farm on Sunday evening and raped her.

Sumis suffer in silence

Poverty and pandemic continue to spell curse of child marriage on girls in Jamuna char areas of Tangail

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

In a chilly winter morning, a teenage girl was busy serving customers with tea at a roadside stall in Tangail Sadar upazila's Khudirampur area.

Suddenly, a baby was heard crying out inside the shop. As it got louder, the girl rushed there and returned within a few seconds cuddling a baby in her lap.

The little one is her daughter though she herself is only 16. When the country's law prohibits marrying off a girl before 18, she has already become mother.

"My father is poor. He is struggling to manage our family. So, he decided to marry me off at my early age," said the teenager, Sumi.

She is the youngest among three sisters and two brothers of her parents. Her father, a resident of a char (shoal) of the Jamuna, also runs a tea stall.

She was married with a transport worker at 13 when she was a fifth grader.

"I miss my school days, playground, friends and swimming in the river. Everything has gone from my life after the marriage," she lamented.

"My two elder sisters also got married at their early ages."

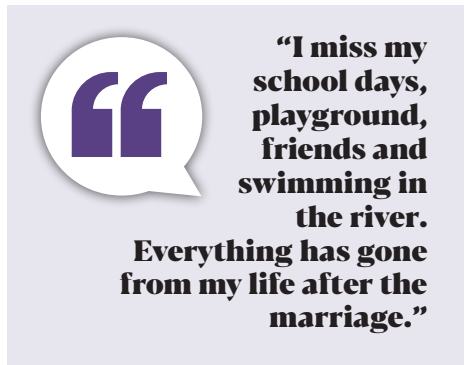
Alongside taking care of her family, Sumi now helps her father-in-law run the tea stall.

"I go through many difficulties because

my baby is too little. She needs special care. How can I manage?" she asked.

Sumi is not alone. Like her, hundreds of girls in the char areas are the victims of child marriage, thanks to never-ending poverty and then pandemic.

In Kakua Char, adjacent to Sumi's village, a 55-year-old man married a 13-year-old girl last week, said locals.



According to media reports, at least 60 girls of a school at Hugra, another char area of Jamuna, were got married in the last one year.

Maharunesa Moni, recently transferred district women and children officer, said the child marriage increased during the pandemic as schools remained closed for a

long time.

"To prevent child marriage is a huge task. Awareness of guardians and the coordinated efforts of all concerned can stop it," she added.

Illiteracy is another reason for marrying off the girls in char areas at early ages, said MA Jinnah, chairman of Kakua Union Parishad.

"In many cases, parents marry off their child daughters secretly. They take their daughters to relatives' houses elsewhere and arrange the marriages," said Rafiqul Islam, former chairman of Baghil Union Parishad.

Another child marriage victim Munni, of Deulee char in Delduar upazila, is campaigning against this social cure. She runs a football academy for girls in the district headquarters.

She alleged that some dishonest kazis (Muslim marriage registrars) for administering child marriages by using fake birth certificates.

Seeking anonymity, a kazi admitted it and said they sometimes are compelled to do it under pressure from influential quarters.

Abul Fazal Mohammad Shahabuddin, Tangail's civil surgeon, said most of the victims suffer from post-marital health and mental complications.

Locals alleged that no effective efforts

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2 kids hurt as abandoned bomb goes off

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Two primary school students were injured while playing with an abandoned crude bomb in Natiabari area of Bera, Pabna, yesterday.

Twelve-year-old Ovi and his 10-year-old sister Mondira were returning home from school when they found a round object wrapped in tape by the road in the Natiabari area and thought it was a ball, said their grieving father Dilip Sutrodhor.

The object exploded, critically injuring the boy when he kicked it, said Dilip, who is a carpenter.

The siblings, who are students of Natiabari Government Primary School, were admitted to Pabna General Hospital in critical condition, said Rawshon Alom, officer-in-charge of Aminpur Police Station.

He added that the incident happened in front of the house of former

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Defying odds

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landed on her feet once more. Just four months ago, she started working as an agent at a Bank Asia outlet in Fakir Plaza of Bera municipality.

"With the support of the government's a2i [aspire to innovate] project, I am working in agent banking. I've already bagged 2,018 customers, cash deals of over Tk 4 lakh and opened

40 DPS accounts," said Tania.

Presently, she is trying to complete her honours in business management from a local college.

"I want to work for improving the lives of underprivileged women in my area. I also want to work to end child marriage," she said.

"I embraced so much

torture, negligence and widespread criticism in my life. I wish nobody has to suffer the same fate."

Tania has also received recognition as the "best entrepreneur under the a2i project" and was recognised by the Joyeeta Foundation, under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, at the district level, said Kaniz.

Is war the real cause?

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"The district administration is yet to start any drives to monitor the market. Without regular market monitoring throughout the year, it is not possible to control product prices in any way."

Bangladesh imported 14.66 lakh tonnes of wheat, 3.95 lakh tonnes of peas and 3.37 lakh tonnes of mustard seed and canola seed and 4,428 tonnes of sunflower oil in the first eight months of the current 2021-22 fiscal year, till February.

During that time, around 40 percent imported wheat, 47 percent of peas, 40 percent of mustard and canola seed and 20 percent sunflower oil were imported from Russia and Ukraine.

Apart from these two countries, these commodity items are usually imported from countries like Canada, India, Cyprus, Italy, Argentina, Belgium, the US, Australia, etc.

In January and February,

3.37 lakh tonnes of wheat, 90,000 tonnes of peas, and 13,000 tonnes of mustard seed arrived in the country through the Chattogram port.

Visiting Khatunganj trade hub yesterday, it was found that prices of different varieties of wheat had risen considerably in the last two weeks.

Price of wheat imported from Russia, India or Ukraine was found to have increased by Tk 150 per maund (around 37kg) in the last two weeks and was being sold at Tk 1,250 a maund in Khatunganj.

The price of Canadian wheat rose to Tk 1,710 per maund yesterday, against Tk 1,500 a maund two weeks ago.

Traders at the wholesale hub were selling peas at Tk 49 a kg, up from Tk 45 around 10 days ago.

Wholesale traders were found selling mustard seeds at Tk 90-95 per kg, compared to Tk 70-75 per kg a week ago.

Although no lentil was imported from the war-

torn region in the last eight months, there was a sharp upward trend in prices of all varieties of lentil in the last 10 days.

The price of good quality locally grown lentil rose to Tk 122 per kg in Khatunganj, against Tk 116 two weeks ago.

Medium category Indian lentil was selling for Tk 91 per kg yesterday, up from Tk 88 a kg 10 days ago.

Biswajit Saha, director for corporate and regulatory affairs of leading commodity importer City Group, said commodity prices in the global market were on an upward trend for quite some time now due to huge increase in freight rates.

The conflict in Ukraine made the market a bit more volatile, he opined.

Canadian wheat price, which was \$450 per tonne in the first week of February, rose to \$520 at the end of the month, he said.

Sources said wheat price in India has recently increased by \$60 per tonne

to reach \$360 per tonne in the span of a month.

Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) President Mahbubul Alam had the same thoughts.

He, however, said any type of artificial crisis or price hike by unscrupulous traders need to be checked.

The price hike in the wholesale hub already has an impact on the retail market.

Mohammad Aziz, a retailer at Karnaphuli CDA market, was found charging Tk 125 for a kg of good quality lentil, against Tk 120 two days back.

He said on February 23 they bought lentil for Tk 116 a kg from Khatunganj, but the price has already risen by Tk 6 per kg at the hub, which prompted them to raise prices too.

In the capital's Karwan Bazar wholesale market, the price of 5-litre bottled sunflower oil was found to have risen to Tk 1,680 yesterday from Tk 1,420 two weeks ago. Peas now cost Tk 55 a kg as opposed to Tk

50 a week ago. Meanwhile, mustard seeds were being sold for Tk 110 per kg, up from Tk 100 a week ago.

Chattogram Additional Deputy Magistrate Sumani Akther said last week they had a meeting with businessmen, who promised not to increase the prices of essentials.

Mentioning that they do not have information about traders charging higher prices, she said, "If it is the case, we will conduct drives."

The Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection (DNCRP) conducted a drive in Khatunganj on Sunday.

DNCRP Assistant Director Anisur Rahman said they fined two traders Tk 2 lakh for charging customers high prices.

"Sensing our presence, most traders closed their shops and fled," said Anisur, who vowed to continue the drives.

Our Staff Correspondent Shaheen Mollah contributed to this report

Colossal failure, misuse

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board but it is not at all a healthy situation and simply not acceptable. How can we possibly insist on citizens abiding by the law when certain government bodies show a brazen disregard for it as in this instance?" Saber said.

He said robust oversight of actions of the executive branch and ensuring accountability is a fundamental task of the committee and it will continue to vigorously implement its mandate to ensure the rule of law and that it is never compromised.

Enquired whether it would be possible for the authorities to shut the tannery estate to save the Dhaleshwari, the standing committee chief said he was happy to confirm that the DoE already shut down seven tanning factories there and also snapped their water and power connections.

"Also, I believe that a fine of over Tk 4 crore has been levied on the BSCIC for the pollution caused in recent years and this is perhaps

the first time that we will be realising such huge fines.

"We will progressively continue to take actions against all non-compliant units and this initial action and our policy of 'zero tolerance' should be clear to all."

The DoE earlier severed a notice on the joint committee that runs the tannery estate, with around 110 tanning units, asking it to explain why the estate will not be closed.

Asked why the Jatiya Sangsad body was not satisfied with the committee's reply to the show cause notice, Saber said the estate even did not bother about applying for a no-objection certificate in over 10 years.

"They mentioned about what they hope to do in the future, but they did not explain why they showed a complete disregard for rules and provisions of the law," he said.

Regarding the concern of the stakeholders that the closure of the tannery estate would severely affect their businesses, the lawmaker

said they know about the legal requirements very well and they should have set up their tanning units accordingly.

"We as a committee are only working to ensure compliance with the law and all the related rules and provisions."

He said the tanners should focus on meeting the standards and requirements of the law.

The JS body chief said it's supremely ironic that the government relocated tanneries from the capital's Hazaribagh to Savar to save the Buriganga, but the relocation only fueled the pollution of another river in Savar and the environment continues to lose.

"We are absolutely in favour of development and under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has indeed witnessed a remarkable growth."

Protecting and promoting the environment, health, and wellbeing of the country's citizens must also be regarded as a growth imperative, Saber said.

Mahfuz, Hanif elected

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during a meeting of the council held at The Daily Star Centre in the capital on Sunday, according to a press release yesterday. As the incumbent president, Anam, who has been serving as the council's president since September 2019, presided over the meeting.

In the new committee, New Age Editor Nurul Kabir

and Bhorer Kagoj Editor Shyamal Dutta have been elected vice presidents and Dhaka Tribune Editor Zafar Sobhan is the assistant general secretary.

Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, the editor of Manabzamin, is the treasurer of the committee.

The committee also comprises of five members: Tasmina Hossain, editor of Ittefaq; M Golam Rahman,

was observed at the beginning of the meeting in remembrance of the council's founding member and senior journalist Reazuddin Ahmed, who breathed his last on December 25 last year at the age of 77.

Sunday's meeting was originally scheduled for December 14 last year but was postponed for Ahmed's illness.

Prothom Alo Editor and Publisher Matiur Rahman served as the chief election commissioner for the new executive committee.

Samakal Acting Editor Mozammel Hossain and Inqilab Editor AMM Bahauddin also attended the meeting.

Established in 2013, the association campaigns for freedom of speech and freedom of the press.