# Gold worth Tk 55 lakh seized in Benapole

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Members of Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate arrested a woman with gold worth Tk 55 lakh in Benapole yesterday.

Umme Salma, 25, of Dhaka's Demra, was smuggling the gold to India, said Moniruzaman Chowdhury, assistant director of CIID in Benapole.

A team of CIID conducted a raid at International Customs Checkpoint on information that a woman was smuggling gold to the neighbouring

The team checked the woman and found 72 bhori of gold, he added.

CIID deposited the gold to Benapole Customs House and filed a case against her with Benapole Port Police Station, he further said.

#### **HEATWAVE IN EUROPE** More than 500 died in Spain: PM

Spain's prime minister said "more than 500 people died" during a 10day heatwave as Europe counts the cost of a record period of extreme temperatures.

Climate change protesters said the scorching weather should be a wakeup call for the continent.

"This has nothing to do with ideologies, but with a reality, with a climatic emergency that the planet is living through," said Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez yesterday.

Speaking against a backdrop of charred trees and burnt ground in the hard-hit northeastern Zaragoza region, he urged people to exercise "extreme caution".

Cooler air swept in yesterday, bringing relief to people from Portugal to Britain, but thousands of firefighters continued to tackle blazes that have broken out in multiple countries after months of droughtlike conditions.

The heatwave saw a new all-time record for Britain where the national weather service clocked 40.3C in eastern England, surpassing the previous high set in 2019.

Meanwhile Greek firefighters gained the upper hand in a battle firefighters against a wildfire raging for a second day in mountainside suburbs north of Athens that had forced hundreds of people to flee, an official said.

In France, firefighters brought twin blazes near the southwestern city of Bordeaux under control.

Temperatures of more than 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) over previous days have enea misery ioi shattered heat records.



A local resident helps firefighters to put out a fire in the town of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region following an airstrike on Tuesday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

# Russia looks beyond Donbas

Lavrov says western arms in Ukraine forced Kremlin to rethink objectives

**AGENCIES** 

Russia's military aims in Ukraine are no longer focused "only" on the country's east, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, adding that supplies of Western weapons had changed the Kremlin's calculus.

'The geography is different now. It is not only about the DNR and LNR, but also the Kherson region, the Zaporizhzhia region and a number of other territories" Lavrov told state media in an interview published yesterday. "This process is continuing, consistently and persistently."

The pro-Moscow breakaway so-called Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) are in east Ukraine. Moscow's forces already control the southern Kherson region and parts of the southeastern region Zaporizhzhia.

Lavrov said that while Moscow's aim "denazification remains the same -and demilitarisation" of Ukraine "geography" has changed since Istanbul talks between Moscow and Kyiv in March

He said Western supplies of weapons to Kyiv including US-made Himars missile systems had made Moscow review its

will move even further from the current had shelled a border crossing there. line" if the West continues to "pump" Jkraine with weapons, adding that it makes no sense to resume peace talks with Kyiv at the moment.

Russian forces shelled eastern and

"The geography is different now. It is not only about the DNR and LNR, but also the Kherson region, the Zaporizhzhia region and a number of other territories."

southern Ukraine vesterday after Washington said it saw signs Moscow was preparing to formally annex territory it has seized during nearly five months of

Five civilians were killed and 16 wounded by Russian shelling in the Donetsk region, while two civilians were killed by shelling in the city of Nikopol in the south, the respective Ukrainian regional governors said on Telegram.

Kursk region, which borders Ukraine, act and leave ourselves vulnerable to it, Lavrov said Russia's "geographical aims" wrote on Telegram that Ukrainian forces one EU official said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin,

meanwhile, said Moscow would only ease the path for Black Sea exports of Ukrainian grain if the West lifts sanctions on Russia's shipments.

We will facilitate the export of Ukrainian grain, but we are proceeding from the fact that all restrictions related to possible deliveries for the export of Russian grain will be lifted," he said after talks with both Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran on Tuesday night.

Uncertainty swirled over the planned restart of a huge Russian gas pipeline to Europe today, as Putin warned that its capacity could be further reduced due to slow progress in equipment maintenance.

The West has accused Russia of using its energy supplies as a tool of coercion. Russia denies those accusations, saying it has been a reliable energy supplier.

Setting out its emergency plan, the EU yesterday told members states to cut gas usage by 15 percent until March as part of an emergency plan.

"We believe that a full disruption is Roman Starovoit, governor of Russia's likely and it is especially likely if we don't

## 1,104 new Covid cases and 1 death recorded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health directorate yesterday reported just one death from Covid-19, down from eight the previous day.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) also reported 1,104 new cases. However, the positivity rate increased to 12.20

percent from 9.66 percent the previous day.

This takes the total number of confirmed cases to 19.99 lakh and deaths to 29,250 lives.

In Tuesday's inoculation campaign, 56,37003 people received booster shots and 2,24845 their second dose of a vaccine, according to the DGHS.

## Man shot dead in Rangunia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctq

A man was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Azimnagar area of Rangunia, Chattogram, on Tuesday night.

Mohammad Enam, 30, was shot in the chest and head, police said.

Enam, who was a tractor driver, was at home with his wife and two children around 11:00pm when the armed men broke in, said Obaidul Islam, officer-in-charge of Dakkhin Rangunia Police

Enam managed to flee and took shelter at a neighbour's house, but the attackers found him and shot him dead, the OC said, adding that the motive behind the murder was not clear.

# Former Akhaura UNO, 2 others sued over allegations of irregularities

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

A departmental case has been filed against the immediate past upazila nirbahi officer of Akhaura and two other officials following allegations of irregularities and negligence during the construction work under Ashrayan project.

Former UNO Rumana Akhter, former assistant commissioner (land) Saiful Islam and Project Implementation Officer Tapas Chakrabarty were accused in the case, said Deputy Commissioner Shahgir Alam of Brahmanbaria at a press conference vesterday.

Rumana and Saiful are currently posted in Rangamati.

The deputy commissioner did not say exactly when the case was filed.

The DC announced that the prime minister is set to virtually inaugurate 834 houses in seven

# EC's dialogue

FROM PAGE 1 said, "It would have been better if they [the BNP] joined the talks. The talks are going well because political parties are giving thoughtful opinions. These will help us hold a better election.

"We are repeatedly taking initiatives to [bring the BNP to the talks]. We will contact them time and again."

The EC's latest talks with political parties started on Sunday. Eleven parties have participated while the BNP, Bangladesh Kalyan Party and Bangladesh Muslim League shunned the talks.

On March 13, the EC began another round of talks with a cross section of people, including educationists, civil society members, journalists, former CECs and ECs, and local election observers.

The CEC yesterday said, "It is really our sole responsibility to ensure that every voter can cast their vote freely. This is the foundation of democracy. And for this, everyone's cooperation is needed. Every party has said they believe in political consensus. Whether there is consensus or not, we said we will continue our efforts."

#### Road crash claims

FROM PAGE 1

Nirbahi Officer Sajal Chandra Shil, adding that the driver managed to flee the scene.

Alauddin Milan, officer-in-charge of Bakerganj Police Station, said the auto-rickshaw got completely mangled in the impact.

Shah Alam, assistant director at Bangladesh Road Transport Authority office in Barishal, said the bus had no fitness certificate since May 28, 2015, and its registration expired towards the end of 2017.

"We cannot say anything about the driver because we do not have the identity of the driver. We are searching for information on the driver," he told The Daily Star.

# Electricity crisis may worsen

of coal without replenishment. The coal production at its mine was suspended in late April for underground development work, and the plant would not get fresh coal until

the middle of August, said sources. The plant now has a coal stock for only 15 days, even though it is generating only 200MW with a capacity of 525MW.

An official of the Barapukuria coal mine said the plant might have to stop generation due to the shortage of coal. Data from Nesco, the power distributor for northern districts,

shows it received 500MW yesterday, about half of what it needs. The demand-supply gap resulted in serious power cuts in the north.

Officials of Dhaka's two distributors DPDC and DESCO -- told The Daily Star that they got less power than required and that they could not maintain one to two hours of load

shedding in some areas. Shamim Hasan, director (public relations) of Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB), said they received some allegations that the distribution companies failed to maintain the schedule but "that was not at a large scale".

The coal-fired 1,320MW Payra Power Plant is producing 1,000-1,050MW, but it can only supply the power to the Barishal-Khulna region as the transmission line to Dhaka is yet to be completed.

On top of the issues with coalfired plants, the stock of furnace oil is running low.

Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation official told The Daily Star, "We have only 1.2 lakh tonnes of furnace oil in stock against the monthly requirement of 55,000 tonnes.

The official said the stock was below the standard practice and the BPC was yet to buy its next consignment of furnace oil.

Bangladesh has a capacity to generate 22,348MW electricity. Of that, around 52 percent is from gasbased plants, 27 percent from furnace

oil-based plants, 5.86 percent from diesel-based, 8.03 percent from coalpowered plants. 1 percent from hydro. 0.5 percent from other renewable energies, and 5.27 percent is imported, according to the BPDB data.

The government this week decided to shut 10 diesel power plants. Last month, it stopped importing LNG from the high-priced spot market, and the power cuts began after this.

LNG injection into the national gas grid has slipped further in recent days. Petrobangla data shows.

Yesterday, it was 430 million cubic feet (mmcfd). On June 29, the injection was 854 mmcfd and in the first week of July, it was 500 mmcfd.

The country is generating 12,000-13,000MW electricity a day against a demand of 14,000-14,500MW.

Talking to The Daily Star, energy expert M Shamsul Alam said, "The schedule [for power cuts] was not made to be maintained automatically. will be manually implemented and the negligence and ignorance of officials may ruin this process."

He observed that there needs to be more professional efficiency.

Amid this situation, the stateowned Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Ltd suspended production due to gas shortage on Tuesday night. Jamuna Fertiliser Company Ltd, the country's largest urea producer, had shut down earlier for the same reason.

Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque yesterday the government was trying to find alternative sources of fertiliser. "We're trying to make both Jamuna Fertiliser Company Ltd and Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Ltd operational. The government has to provide gas to bring these two factories back into operation."

#### STEPS TO CURB CONSUMPTION

Senior secretaries and secretaries of all the ministries and divisions sat at the PMO yesterday to find ways to reduce expenditure.

The meeting, chaired by Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus, came up with six decisions and recommendations.

It decided that the Finance Division would issue a circular to cut 20 percent energy sector expenditure.

Officials would avoid in-person meetings and foreign trips as much as possible. Markets would be monitored to keep prices of essentials at a tolerable level and action would be taken against hoarders.

The National Board of Revenue will take steps at the beginning of the financial year to increase internal resource mobilisation and to achieve the revenue collection target.

The meeting also asked all ministries to review their procurement plans and take initiatives to reduce expenditure.

Talking to reporters afterwards. Kaikaus said, "There's no reason to panic. These are precautionary measures so that we don't have to face any kind of crisis in the future."

urged non-government organisations to follow suit.

Hours after the meeting, the water resources ministry issued an office order asking its officials to avoid personal use of government vehicles and set the thermostats at 26 degrees Celsius at the Pani Bhaban.

#### China speeding up approvals for new coal plants: Greenpeace

China has ramped up approvals for new coal power plants this year, Greenpeace said yesterday, with authorities trying to lower the risk of economically painful electricity shortages.

China is the world's biggest emitter of the greenhouse gases driving global warming, and President Xi Jinping last year vowed to phase down coal use from 2026 as part of an ambitious set of national climate commitments.

# Govt now has cold feet

"This round of talks can be viewed as preliminary work for the loan if the need arises in future," the finance ministry official added.

Meanwhile, the IMF mission has expressed reservations about the BB's method of calculating foreign currency reserves. The BB reports on gross reserves

and includes local investment exposure. The IMF prescribes reporting net reserves. IMF's Going by method,

Bangladesh's actual reserves at present would be about \$7 billion less. defiant and maintains that there

The central bank, however, is should be no distinction between local Kamal added.

and foreign investment exposure. "We will continue to calculate the reserves in the manner that we have been doing," Kamal said.

IMF

The

recommended the NBR come up with a robust revenue action plan with reduced exemptions and more autonomy to buy the government more fiscal space. While Bangladesh's external debt situation is at ease, the IMF mission

mission

taking on more bilateral loans and providing guarantees to state-owned enterprises' loans. "It is a consultative committee and

prescribed more caution while

the IMF's advice is always helpful,"

# Rajapaksa ally elected

for the former leader by the protesters who forced him from his palace after months of demonstrations over the

unprecedented economic crisis. On the streets, the mood was sombre. Soon after the election result was announced, a burst of chants broke out against Wickremesinghe. It lasted only a few minutes, before the small group of protesters left the

steps of the secretariat. But some vowed to keep up their protest against the 73-year-old

Civil engineer Nuzly Hameem said he was "disappointed" by the result. "We expected more from our parliamentarians," he told AFP. The protests would "obviously"

continue, he said, but added "We are burnt out. It's been four months." "The reason why people came out against Gota(baya) was not a personal grudge. It was protesting for ideals

and values he held," said Buwanaka

Perera, a 26-year-old protester. "We see those same values, corruption and oppression in Ranil."

Wickremesinghe has pledged to crack down hard if protesters take to the streets and hundreds of heavily armed troops and police stood guard outside the parliament, but there two decades, for his victory.

were no signs of demonstrators.

As acting president, Wickremesinghe extended a state of emergency that gives police and security forces sweeping powers, and last week ordered troops to evict protesters from state buildings they had occupied.

A court yesterday ordered the protesters to vacate their camp near the Presidential Secretariat and confine themselves only to an area designated as a protest site.

Opposition MP Dharmalingam Sithadthan said ahead of the vote that Wickremesinghe's hardline stance against demonstrators had gone down well with MPs who had been at the receiving end of mob violence, describing him as the "law-

and-order candidate". Wickremesinghe automatically became acting president when Rajapaksa resigned and political analyst Kusal Perera said he had "regained the acceptance of the urban middle classes by restoring some of the supplies like gas and he has already cleared government

buildings showing his firmness". But he appears to be indebted to the Rajapaksas, a clan of four brothers who have dominated Sri Lankan politics for much of the last