



P7
India approves new emissions targets to tackle climate change



P9
To debate or not to debate



P10
In quest of justice - friendly family courts



B4
Wage growth declines to 7-year low

MEDICAL KIT PURCHASE

Tk 117cr lost to anomalies

Finds audit into Covid-response project of DGHS

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

When a piece of Personal Protective Equipment (medical coveralls) was Tk 1,200, the authorities bought 50,000 of them for Tk 3,900 each from a motor parts supplier.

The supplier, Jadid Automobiles JAI, with no experience in dealing with medical equipment and supplies, was also given another order for 1.5 lakh KN95 masks for Tk 520 each, when the market price was Tk 320.

The inflated prices cost the government Tk 16.05 crore. The inexperienced firm delivered products late and 24,000 of the KN95 masks were unusable, which cost the exchequer Tk 1.25 crore, the report said.

The government lost Tk 117.53 crore to such irregularities, found an audit by Comptroller and Auditor General's office into "Covid-19 Emergency Response and Pandemic Preparedness Project".

The project authorities issued supply orders worth Tk 59.40 crore to companies who had no experience with medical supplies.

For instance, it ordered MS SRS Design and Fashion Ltd for 1 lakh KN95 masks at a cost of Tk 27.50 crore. It ended up with poor-quality masks, said the report submitted to parliament.

The project, funded by the World Bank and taken up by Directorate General of Health Services in April 2020 to fight the pandemic, simultaneously bought the same product at different prices, issued supply orders to inexperienced firms, and paid suppliers without deducting VAT, income tax, and fines for delayed deliveries.

It also delayed paying taxes and delivering the goods to hospitals, found the audit conducted in just three weeks in 2020.

The project authorities also unlawfully assigned E.Music and MS Brain Station 23 Ltd for software development, the report added.

The Tk 2,550 crore project, scheduled to end in 2023, was supposed to buy necessary medical equipment, including testing kits, masks, and ICU beds. In January last year, the government revised the project and gave it another Tk 4,236 crore from the World Bank.

According to the audit report, 12 types of anomalies occurred in the initial period of the project when Prof Iqbal Kabir was the project director and Saiful Islam was his deputy. Both were removed following media reports on irregularities.

Yesterday, Kabir declined to comment and Saiful was unreachable.

Contacted, Shamimuzzaman Kanchon, owner of Jadid Automobiles, told The Daily Star on Tuesday, "I have received the work order following due process. If there was any breach, I have nothing to do with it. I have not supplied any substandard product and it is documented."

About the high prices, he said, "Those were high-quality coveralls and we had to collect those during an emergency"

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

THE ANOMALIES

Medical equipment bought at inflated prices

Same products purchased at different prices

Inexperienced firms got supply orders

Hospitals did not get supplies in time

Emergency kits worth Tk 47cr left unused



Chinese military helicopters fly past Pingtan island, one of mainland China's closest points from Taiwan, in Fujian province yesterday, ahead of massive military drills off Taiwan following US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to the self-ruled island.

PHOTO: AFP

A chilling tale of a highway robbery

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

The woman gang-raped in a moving bus early Wednesday said she had been violated six times.

Testifying before a court in Tangail yesterday afternoon, she also said the robbers were angry with her because she did not let one of them sit beside her before the robbery began and because she resisted when they blindfolded her and tied her hands.

She boarded the bus around 8:00pm and the robbery started over five hours later.

She saw the bus driver and the two crew members being taken to the back of the bus at knife point.

The robbers tortured everyone, including the women, until the vehicle stopped several hours later, she said.

None of the passengers had any idea of where they were. They later learnt that they were in Madhupur.

Rehena Parveen, assistant professor of gynecology at Sheikh Hasina Medical College, who led a team of doctors that examined the woman, said there were signs that the woman had been raped and there were injury marks on different parts of her body.

Sarkar Mohammad Kaiser, superintendent of police in Tangail, yesterday gave reporters a harrowing account of how the robbery unfolded.

The bus heading for Dhaka from Kushtia stopped for about 30 minutes at a restaurant around 11:30pm on Tuesday in Sirajganj. Soon after it resumed the journey, 10-12 robbers in disguise of passengers got on the bus from different places. They took seats in the back.



Around 1:30am, when the bus was in Natiapara area of Tangail, the robbers asked the driver to stop the bus at knife point and then put him under the rear seat with his hands and legs tied, the SP told a press conference at his office.

One of the robbers then began driving the vehicle and took a left turn before Elenga and kept driving towards Mymensingh. Meanwhile, the robbers tore the window curtains and the passengers' clothes and used those to blindfold and tie everyone in the vehicle.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

AFTERMATH OF PELOSI'S TAIWAN VISIT

China stages largest ever military drills

Fires 11 missiles in waters around the island; Asean warns tensions could spark 'open conflicts'

AGENCIES

China yesterday deployed scores of planes and fired live missiles near Taiwan in its biggest-ever drills in the Taiwan Strait, a day after US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi made a solidarity trip to the self-ruled island.

China's military confirmed multiple firings of conventional missiles in waters off Taiwan as part of planned exercises in six zones set to run until noon on Sunday. It activated more than 100 planes, including fighter jets and bombers, and over 10 warships, state broadcaster CCTV said.

"The US-Taiwan collusion and provocation will only push Taiwan towards the abyss of disaster, bringing catastrophe to Taiwan compatriots," said a Chinese defence ministry spokesperson.

Taiwan said 11 Chinese Dongfeng ballistic missiles had been fired in nearby waters - the first time since 1996 - while Japan protested that five missiles appeared to land in its economic zone.

Tokyo's defence ministry said four of the five missiles that appeared to land in Japan's exclusive economic zone are "believed to have flown over Taiwan's main island". Japan has lodged a diplomatic protest with China over the presumed missile landings in its EEZ.

Taipei's defence ministry said it had detected 22 Chinese fighter jets briefly crossing the Taiwan Strait's "median line" during the exercises. Taiwan also scrambled jets and deployed missile systems to track Chinese aircraft crossing the line.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

6 pellets were lodged in head

The slain president of Bhola JCD had no other major injuries, say morgue sources

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

There were six pellets in the head of Noor-e-Alam, president of Bhola Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal who was shot during a clash between police and BNP men, said morgue sources yesterday after an autopsy.

"No other major injuries were found on the body," the sources at Dhaka Medical College morgue added.

After the autopsy, Kazi Golam Mokhlesur Rahman, head of Dhaka Medical College's forensic medicine department, told reporters that they have found pellet injuries on the body but did not specify the area.

He said they have collected samples from the neck tissue, blood and viscera for tests and will be able to give a complete report after receiving those results.

Three days after Sunday's clash in Bhola, Noor-e-Alam, who had been on life support, died at Dhaka's Comfort Hospital on Wednesday.

When asked about pellets found in Noor-e-Alam's head, Saiful Islam, Bhola superintendent of police, said only the doctor conducting the autopsy could determine the cause of death in a final report.

Asked whether police fired from their shotguns, he said

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4



People join the namaz-e-janaza of Noor-e-Alam, president of Bhola Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, in front of BNP's Nayapaltan central office yesterday. Alam died in a city hospital on Wednesday, three days after he was critically injured in a clash between police personnel and BNP men in Bhola town.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

TAIWAN CONFLICT

Bangladesh adheres to 'One China' principle

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has reiterated its firm adherence to "One China" principle and urged all parties concerned to resolve their differences in accordance with the UN Charter and through dialogue.

In a statement, the foreign ministry yesterday said Bangladesh has urged all parties concerned to exercise utmost restraint, and refrain from any actions over the Taiwan issue that may aggravate tensions and undermine peace and stability in the region and beyond.

Bangladesh is closely following the developments in the Taiwan Strait, said the statement that comes a day after US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, which has escalated tensions between China and the US.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4