

Ecneec approves vaccine plant project

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is finally going to build a full-fledged vaccine manufacturing plant and research institute in Gopalganj, aiming to produce at least 10 types of vaccines, including vaccines for dengue, polio, and Covid-19.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) yesterday approved the proposal for a Tk 3,124 crore project to establish a three-unit vaccine plant. One is a state-of-the-art fill-finish unit for vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics; one is a vaccine production unit; and the other is an international standard vaccine research and development unit.

The seven-year project named “Establishment of Essential Biotech and Research Centre at Gopalganj” will start its activities in January 2024, aiming to produce six fill-finish vaccines, namely, human papillomavirus, Japanese encephalitis, typhoid conjugate,

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meningococcal, flu vaccine, and anti-rabies vaccine, by 2028.

The second phase will see the vaccine go into full-scale production in 2029, with the company manufacturing its own raw materials. In addition, an international standard research centre will be established to develop new vaccines based on the latest scientific research.

Currently, Bangladesh has two private vaccine manufacturing plants. During the Covid pandemic in 2021, the lone state-owned pharmaceutical company, Essential Drugs, initiated the process of building the vaccine plant.

Earlier, the Health Services Division and Economic Relations Division initiated a Pandemic Preparedness and Response Fund with a \$300 million loan from the Asian Development Bank.

The ADB sanctioned spending \$250 million from the fund and agreed to donate \$125 million, according to the project proposal.

At yesterday’s meeting, a total of 52 projects were placed, and the committee approved 37 projects with a cost of Tk 52,612 crore.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON, MOSTAFA SHABUJ, AND RAJIB RAIHAN

On the first day of BNP’s three-day blockade, three motorcycles of ruling Awami League men set on fire after a clash between BNP and AL activists on Dhaka-Rangpur highway in Shajahanpur, Bogura; a motorcycle cavalcade by ruling Awami League activists on Begum Rokeya Sharani in the capital; a train driver wearing a motorcycle helmet at Chattogram Railway Station.



Per capita debt now \$365

Finance minister tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh’s per capita debt at present is about \$365, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal told the parliament yesterday.

The minister came up with the statistics in reply to a query from ruling Awami League MP Haji Selim.

Bangladesh’s total population is 170.79 million, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, meaning the current per capita debt is \$364.85.

As of June, Bangladesh’s foreign debt stands at \$62.3 billion, he said in a scripted answer. Of the sum, \$36.8 billion is multilateral loans and \$25.5 billion is bilateral. The World Bank has given the most loans to Bangladesh: \$19.5 billion.

As of October 12, Bangladesh’s gross reserves are \$21.1 billion, as per the IMF’s BPM6 method, Kamal said in response to

a query from AL MP Kazim Uddin Ahmed from Mymensingh-II.

However, as per the latest published data by the Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh’s gross reserves stood at \$20.9 billion on October 25.

Reserves have depleted due to a hike in the prices of various products including fuel in the international market, an increase in import costs and a decrease in remittance inflows, Kamal said.

“But there is no shortage of reserve in the country.”

In response to the question from Jatiya Party MP Syed Abu Hussain, Kamal said the Ukraine war and war-related sanctions have resulted in increased inflation, depleted foreign exchange reserves and some pressure on the exchange rate.

The government has taken various steps to bring down inflation and replenish

reserves.

In response to a question from the Jatiya Party MP Mashur Rahman Ranga, Kamal said the airport customs authorities have seized 1,408 kilograms of gold from passengers in the last five years.

The estimated value of the confiscated gold is Tk 1,226 crore.

Of the recovered gold, 1,272.1 kg has been deposited in the central bank’s coffer.

While replying to a query from AL MP Nurunnabi Chowdhury from Bhola-3, Kamal said the number of tax identification number holders in the country is 93.46 lakh as of September.

As per the Income Tax Act 2023, spot tax assessment has been abolished.

In response to a question from AL MP Mahfuzur Rahman from Chattogram-3, Kamal said the total number of individual taxpayers in the country is 89.53 lakh as of June.

Biden unveils AI order

Aims for US to ‘lead the way’ on safety

AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden issued an executive order Monday on regulating artificial intelligence, aiming for the United States to “lead the way” in global efforts to manage the technology’s risks.

The “landmark” order directs federal agencies to set new safety standards for AI systems and requires developers to share their safety test results and other critical information with the US government, according to a White House statement.

“To realize the promise of AI and avoid the risk we need to govern this technology,” Biden said before signing the executive order at the White House.

BNP leaders

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from Savar, reports UNB.
He too was taken to the DB office, said Faruk Hossain, deputy commissioner (DC-media) of the DMP.

A team of the DB police led by its chief Harun arrested him in a case filed with Paltan Police Station in Savar.

A person identified as Mahiuddin Shikdar lodged the case against Sarwardy on Sunday night, said Faruk.

Sarwardy’s arrest came hours after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a press briefing urged the authorities concerned to find and quiz him.

On Monday, Mian Zahidul Islam Arefy, who claimed to be an “adviser to US President Joe Biden,” at the DB office said, “Sarwardi brought me to the BNP party office to discuss their programme. They requested me to deliver a speech.”

Arefy was detained at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka on Sunday and is now being interrogated.

Outsiders attack RMG workers in Mirpur factory

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management came and explained why men with rods had threatened them to get off the streets the day before.

A few workers said they were preparing to take to the streets again when men with rods allegedly came near the factory’s cafeteria and assaulted them.

A woman with a blood-stained scarf

yesterday.

Contacted, Awlad admitted that he was indeed present at the spot with his licensed nine-shooter shotgun. “But I wasn’t attacking the workers. I was there because I had a business meeting at Apollo Garments, which is adjacent to Epyllion. There was a lot of commotion around and our vehicles were being turned away, so I took out



PHOTO: COURTESY OF PROTHOM ALO

Jubo League leader Awlad Hossain, left, holding a shotgun in front of Apollo Knitwear Factory around the time a group of unidentified people assaulted workers inside an Epyllion Group factory in Mirpur-11 yesterday.

said, “People with rods attacked my colleagues and one had their head hit. There was so much blood everywhere. I helped bring the [injured] workers to hospital.”

As the workers tried to escape, the outsiders continued the assault on the streets in front of law enforcers, they said.

Many workers were seen with head bandages at the reception area of Islami Bank Hospital, opposite the factory.

Some workers said they suspected the involvement of ruling party activists as the attackers kept calling them “BNP-Jamaat”.

Councillor Bappi could not be reached over the phone despite repeated calls.

During the mayhem, a Prothom Alo photojournalist took a photo of local Jubo League leader Awlad Hossain brandishing a firearm at the scene

my gun for self defense.”

Reazuddin Mamoon claimed, “Workers from surrounding factories had taken to the streets, and there was a rumour that they had been attacked by police. Our workers were attempting to leave the factory to join them, so we locked the gates.

“They then became violent, trying to break down the gates, and started fighting among themselves.”

He added that the workers were provoked by a rumour that two coworkers were killed.

Mamoon further claimed, “We bore the treatment costs for the injured.”

Mashuk Mia, additional deputy commissioner of police in Mirpur zone, said they were yet to collect or inspect the CCTV footage of the area to determine who was responsible.

“There are 235 RMG factories in the area. It’s possible that the owners of

some of those could be politicised.”

Meanwhile, RMG workers allegedly torched a traffic police box and a Walton showroom in Chandra and Shafipur areas in Gazipur’s Kaliakair upazila yesterday afternoon while protesting the killing of a worker the day before.

Raihan Mia, senior station officer of Kaliakair Fire Service, said three fire engines managed to douse the fire at the showroom around 3:00pm.

He also said they rushed to put out the blaze at the traffic police box, but the workers did not allow them to do so.

The workers also vandalised Tanha Health Care Hospital and several shops in the Shafipur area.

The majority of the RMG factories in Ashulia were closed yesterday as worker demonstrations continued.

Eyewitnesses said hundreds of workers from several factories blocked the Baipail-Abdullahpur road in Jamgara and different points in Ashulia’s Narsingpur area from 7:30am. Police later used tear gas shells and water cannons to disperse the workers.

The chaos continued till noon.

Khairul Mamun Mintu, president of Bangladesh Trade Union Centre’s Savar-Ashulia unit, told The Daily Star that the labour leaders requested workers not to hold demonstrations, but they paid no heed. “We know they would face police action even if they demonstrate peacefully for their legitimate demands.”

Meanwhile, IndustriALL Bangladesh Council suspects that opposition parties are taking advantage of the current labour movement.

Its president, Amirul Haque Amin, at a press conference held at Dhaka Reporter’s Unity yesterday, said, “Some people taking part [in the movement and causing destruction] are not RMG workers. A group with vested interests is trying to use it [the movement] politically.

He urged workers not to vandalise any factory or create unrest on the roads.

(Our Savar and Gazipur correspondents contributed to the story.)

3 deaths, arson mark first day

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40, and Chhatra Dal leader Refayet Ullah Tanoy, 21, died after they were shot by officers during a clash between BNP activists and police, said leaders of the party.

Billal died on the spot while Tanoy died on the way to a hospital.

At least 40 people, including 15 policemen, were injured during the clash.

Nurul Millat, president of Kuliarchar BNP, said police opened fire on a BNP procession around 8:00am.

However, Mohammad Rasel Sheikh, superintendent of police in Kishoreganj, said the BNP supporters attacked law enforcers first.

At one stage, police tried to leave the spot, but the attackers threw bricks at them after the policemen took shelter at an abandoned house, the SP said, adding that officers then opened fire in self-defence.

In Sylhet, BNP activists were demonstrating in the Lalabazar area when police chased them away around 8:30am.

Jubo Dal leader Gilu Ahmed Dilu, 42, who was among the protesters, was fleeing on his motorcycle, but he lost control and crashed into a tree, said

Moksud Ahmed, general secretary of Sylhet District Jubo Dal.

“Police took Gilu to a police station even though he was critically injured. They later took him to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital where he died in the afternoon,” he added.

Contacted, Azbahar Ali Sheikh, deputy commissioner of Sylhet Metropolitan Police, refuted the claim that police detained Gilu.

At least 15 BNP and Awami League activists were injured in Bogura town and Shajahanpur upazila as the two camps clashed on Dhaka-Rangpur highway.

In Shajahanpur, AL activists, police, Rab and BGB men clashed with BNP activists, witnesses said.

In Narayanganj’s Araihaazar, at least three police personnel were injured as law enforcers and protesters clashed in the morning.

Several vehicles were vandalised on Dhaka-Sylhet highway at the time.

In Manikganj, at least eight BNP activists were injured and three others detained during a clash between BNP supporters and police.

Police detained 22 activists in Chattogram.

Ensure escort for trucks

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and village police. If possible, two ansars and village police can be deployed every four kilometres.

The DCs were directed to take measures for taking photos and videos of passengers travelling in the buses and railway stations, frisk anyone on suspicion if necessary, and ensure visible presence of the joint patrolling led by an executive magistrate at the district towns.

The patrolling by police, RAB and BGB should also be visible.

Besides, the DCs were asked to set up control rooms in coordination with all the law enforcement agencies.

Soon after receiving the directive, the field administration officials started implementing the instructions with the core committee meetings led by divisional commissioners and DCs in various districts.

Many DCs have already announced

setting up control rooms on their Facebook pages.

To ensure no disruption to the supply chain, the government directive is to provide police escort to the trucks carrying food products if the traders fear any attack during transit.

Similarly, the DCs were asked to keep an eye on such that there is no shortage of essential products and medicines in the major cities, including the capital.

As the prices of essentials, especially vegetables, potatoes and onions, have gone up, the DCs were strictly asked to take necessary steps so that the supply chain is not hampered and there is no further price hike.

According to some district-level officials, the directive to take photographs and videos would be difficult because many districts do not have the logistics. But patrolling has been increased, they said.

OC hurt after gun accidentally went off

UNB, Sylhet

South Surma Police Station officer-in-charge was injured in an accidental fire of a weapon at Satmile in Lalabazar area of South Surma upazila of Sylhet yesterday morning.

Md Shamsuddoha was hit by a shot accidentally fired from the shotgun of the personal assistant to the assistant commissioner of police of South Surma Police Station.

Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet Metropolitan Police (SMP) Azbahar Ali Sheikh confirmed the matter.

“It’s not a big deal. He has been given first aid and is doing his duty now,” Azbahar Ali Sheikh said.

Missing man found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police yesterday recovered a man’s body from a pond near his residence three days after his disappearance in Khulna’s Daulatpur upazila.

The deceased was identified as Rohanur Rahman Rohan, 21, son of Hasan Kha of Banik Para area.

Quoting locals, police said Rohan had been missing since Saturday night.

On Monday, a general diary (GD) was recorded at Daulatpur Police Station in this connection.

Kazi Kamal Hossain, officer-in-charge of Daulatpur Police Station, said, “The deceased’s body was sent to Khulna Medical College Hospital for an autopsy. The cause of his death was not apparent immediately.”

New customs bill passed in parliament

UNB, Dhaka

The Customs Bill 2023 was passed in the parliament yesterday—aiming to ensure fiscal discipline and accountability in import revenue collection and trade facilitation.

Law Minister Anisul Huq, in absence of Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, moved the bill and it was passed by voice vote.

According to the objective of the bill, revenue collection at the import level in Bangladesh is being conducted under the Customs Act, 1969.

Necessary amendments to this act are brought through the Finance Act in the budget session every year.

However, along with the expansion of foreign trade, in light of the Revised Kyoto Convention and the Trade Facilitation Agreement signed later to simplify various customs procedures, there is a need to amend the existing law to make the customs law of Bangladesh easy and compatible with international best practices and to make it business-friendly.

The Customs Act, 1969, enacted in English by incorporating international best practices related to customs was part of the multifaceted reform and modernisation program undertaken by the government and the National Board of Revenue to promote international standards of customs management in international trade and import and export. Initiatives have been taken to enact a modern customs law.

Accordingly, a draft of the Customs Act has been prepared in consultation with various organisations and stakeholders.