OFFICE OF COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

## 6.4 lakh objections struck off at one go

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (OCAG) has decided to consider 640,000 general audit objections, filed from 1971-1972 to 2009-2010 fiscal year, as resolved.

In an order issued on Sunday, the office said the decision was made because the traditional audit objection settlement activities were not being considered as "cost effective".

Most of the general audit objections are related to methodical and managerial errors and those are less significant in consideration of financial irregularities, said the order.

"We have settled all general audit objections filed from 1971-1972 to 2009-2010 fiscal year, except those involving serious financial irregularities, through an office order issued on June 14," a top CAG official said on Wednesday.

The official said they have already informed the officials concerned regarding the order.

Officials said there were about 8 lakh unresolved audit objections, and 80 percent of them were general audit objections. Decisions on a large number of objections had been pending for several decades, and settling those was one of the major challenges for the CAG

About 80 percent of the unresolved audit objections are general audit objection in nature, the office order said.

It said both the executive authorities and the CAG office need to engage huge manpower, time and resources to resolve the audit objections. That's why timely quality performance and financial audit cannot be brought to the desired level.

In order to better use the manpower, time, and money of the executive

Perhaps the earliest such case can

be traced back to March 13, when a

deputy assistant engineer of Satkania

upazila in Chattogram was arrested

for posting a news item titled "one

found with coronavirus in Boalkhali"

Though he realised his mistake

and removed the Facebook post later,

people started sharing its screenshots

on Facebook and police arrested him.

They charged him with "spreading

rumours to create panic" when it was

probably just an honest mistake, and

there was no visible social effect of his

post. After all, news literacy -- the skill

of being able to verify which news is

true or impartial and which is false or

biased -- is lacking among a large part

"maintaining etiquette in cyberspaces

can only be done through community

management, not through the use of

any illogical, malicious criminal law."

college teachers were suspended for

criticising on Facebook the lack of

safety equipment for doctors. The

Secondary and Higher Education

Division said their Facebook posts

went against Government Servants

is not immediately clear which rule

they broke, because the grounds on

which a civil servant can be penalised

are avoiding duty, ignoring orders,

dishonesty, lodging false complaints,

three teachers have been arrested

(excluding the two this week) for

their social media activity since the

from speaking to the media, and

on April 23, Health Minister Zahid

Maleque ordered health officials

not to talk to the media. On May 3,

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical

University followed suit by silencing

On April 16, all nurses were banned

coronavirus pandemic started.

Data from BPO shows that at least

corruption, desertion and terrorism.

But upon reading the said rules, it

(Discipline and Appeal) Rules-2018.

Ten days later, two government

of the general populace.

when in fact that was not true.

When critiquing courts danger

As 55 academics said in a statement (DGHS) since April 8. Even as the

circulated to the media on June 16, DGHS holds press briefings every day

authorities and the CAG office, ease the sufferings in the pension approval process, and strengthen the activities of quality audit settlement and financial audit, the CAG of Bangladesh has made the decision to consider all general audit objections, filed from 1971-72 to 2009-2010 fiscal year, as settled, said the

However, steps will be taken in line with court orders if there is any case in connection with the unresolved audit objections, added the order, signed by Deputy CAG Mahbubul Hoque.

A letter attached to the order said most of the general audit objections were so old that those became insignificant with the passage of time. The rate of resolving the objections was very low considering the amount of time and work hours spent on those.

"Identifying those involved in the audit objections become tough as the objections were filed long ago. That's why decisive measures cannot be taken in regards to most of the objections," said the letter.

As a constitutional body, the OCAG is responsible for auditing government receipts and public spending. It also ascertains whether expenditures have yielded value for money in government offices, public bodies and statutory

The OCAG audit report includes serious unresolved audit objections which are sent to parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) for

Replying to a query from a lawmaker, former finance minister AMA Muhith in June 2016 told the previous parliament that 876,013 audit objections involving Tk 778,739.85 crore were pending

The amount was more than double of the 2016-17 fiscal's proposed budget figure of Tk 340,605 crore.

task to get front-line health workers to

even as they used one pair of gloves

for multiple patients, refrained from

going to the bathroom to make that

single PPE suit last throughout the

A photo of a man trying to comfort

shift; even as they got sick and died.

his ill wife after being turned away

from hospitals went viral this week,

and was published on the front

pages of two national dailies. The

situation is so dire that when this

correspondent got in touch with the

man, he requested to be left alone

barred from speaking to the press,

journalists have been unable to

ask questions to top officials of the

Directorate General of Health Services

tirelessly, information is orated with

little scope for justification, and there

is no space for getting any additional

information outside the day's agenda.

yesterday said the pandemic was

likely to stay in the country for the

next two to three years. When the

DG stated that this was according

to public health experts, questions

naturally arise who these experts are,

what epidemiological modelling they

did, and what the overall science

behind the statement is, but no such

such

information could have only served

to bolster the declaration, as evidence,

and help the media treat it with the

government officials also results in

the spread of misinformation, as

speculation reigns supreme -- such

as the "VIP hospital" debacle in April

when rumours spread that VIPs will

be taken to a special hospital meant

access to information can hardly keep

Muzzling, silencing, restricting

Blocking public access to question

Grasping the gravity of the

background

questions could be asked.

importance it merits.

statement,

Case in point, the DHGS DG

While frontline workers have been

because he holds a government job.

tell the media their needs on record --



Congress party supporters shout slogans as they gather around a flag displaying the country and flag of China along with an inscription reading 'Boycott Made in China' before burning them during an anti-China demonstration in Kolkata, India yesterday.

## Gone mostly unheeded

A few days ago, the Central Technical Group under the DGHS primarily identified 45 areas in the capital as 'red zones".

It also put in the "red zone" category 11 areas in Chattogram city, the entire Gazipur district, and several upazilas in Narsingdi and Narayanganj.

But this created confusion among people about when their localities will be put under strict lockdown. As of yesterday, the government was yet to issue any circular with details of the places to be categorised as "red zones".

Asked, Habibur Rahman Khan, additional secretary at the Health Services Division of the health ministry, claimed that they are taking into account the recommendations of the national advisory committee.

"That's why the government is planning to go for [zone-based] lockdown. If they [the committee] ask for a complete lockdown of an entire area, that will be difficult because it will halt economic activities," he told The Daily Star on Sunday.

About the area-wise lockdown, he said, "It is a huge job; multiple ministries are involved here... hopefully, the list of the zones will be announced soon.

However, Habibur had told the committee at its June 4 meeting that they would finalise the list of zones within a week, according to a meeting

The additional secretary had also informed the committee that the high-flow oxygen therapy devices would be procured and installed at 39 public hospitals across the country within two weeks, said the source.

But a member of the committee,

Mentioning the importance of

continuing economic activities, he

said the government must consider

both the well-being and livelihood of

said, "Lockdown will be imposed

on certain zones when needed. A

to make available the facilities that

would be required to tackle the rush

with high flow oxygen support are

available," Mohammad Shahidullah,

chief of the National Technical

Advisory Committee on Covid-19

Sultana, additional director general

at the DGHS, said the Covid-19

mortality rate in the country was 1.31

At the daily briefing, Prof Nasima

told The Daily Star yesterday.

specialist group is working on it."

of patients.

percent.

Regarding further restrictions, he

Experts have urged the government

"We have to ensure hospitals

Covid-19 cases surge

seeking anonymity, said the devices are yet to be purchased.

"We have been pressing for ensuring oxygen supply [at public hospitals from the very beginning. But there is hardly any progress...," the member said, adding that the rise in the number of deaths and infections shows that the measures to control virus transmission are not working.

At its June 10 meeting, the committee reminded the health ministry and the DGHS to take steps immediately to procure necessary equipment for providing high-flow oxygen therapy at the public hospitals.

Dr Mohammad Shahidullah said, "We have been saying this from the very beginning, but there has been much progress in this regard."

"Besides, we have said time and again to appoint technologists since many posts are lying vacant. But we don't know why it's being delayed," he said.

Habibur Rahman could not say how long it would take to install the high-flow oxygen therapy at the

hospitals. Oxygen cylinders are being imported... The local companies are also supplying cylinders," he said.

There are many more instances where recommendations from the national technical advisory committee were not taken into account.

The committee, at its first meeting on April 20, recommended that information on vacancy of hospital beds for Covid-19 patients be put online so that they don't face difficulties in finding beds.

But there is no progress in this

Yesterday's new cases were reported

The total number of people who

after testing 16,259 samples at 61 labs

recovered from Covid-19 reached

40,164, with 1,975 recovery cases

The current recovery rate is 39.26

Of the people reported dead

yesterday, 31 were males and seven

females; 14 were from Dhaka, 18

from Chattogram, one from Rajshahi,

two from Khulna, one from Barishal,

one from Mymensingh and one from

two between 21 and 30, five between

31 and 40, three between 41 and 50,

six between 51 and 60, 14 between 61

and 70, five between 71 and 80 and

A total of 674 people were placed

Of them, one was aged below 10,

across the country.

reported yesterday.

Rangpur divisions.

two between 81 and 90.

in isolation, she said.

percent, Prof Nasima said.

The suggestion on easing shutdown is another glaring example. On May 28, the committee warned

that the number of covid-19 cases would rise unless the requirements for preventing virus transmission are met before easing shutdown.

But the government, apparently desperate to resume business activities, decided to reopen shopping malls, all types of shops and other businesses from May 10 on a limited scale ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr. A day late, it resumed transport services.

And the country started seeing a steady rise in infections and deaths after the reopening.

the number Yesterday, coronavirus infections crossed the 100,000-marke with the health directorate confirming 3,803 new cases. The caseload now stood at

Thirty-eight deaths from the virus were recorded within 24 hours till vesterday afternoon, taking the death toll to 1,343.

Prof Nazrul Islam, a member of the advisory committee, said, "We don't know whether the recommendations are being implemented or not. You [journalists] better ask the government about it."

They [government] are saying they are working based on the recommendations from the technical committee. But I assume that [they are not] taking [the recommendations] into consideration."

He warned that the decisions such as reopening of businesses for economic reasons may backfire.

"If transmission continues to rise, the economy will ultimately suffer more," added the virologist.

## sanctions on Syria

Vows to boost trade with ally

Iran yesterday condemned as inhumane a fresh round of US sanctions against its regional ally Syria and said it would expand its trade ties

The United States on Wednesday imposed its toughest sanctions targeting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to choke off revenue for his government and force it back to

"As the world is involved with the Corona pandemic, the imposition of such inhumane sanctions will only exacerbate the suffering of the Syrian people," Foreign Ministry spokesman

with Damascus.

UN-led negotiations on ending his country's war.

Abbas Mousavi told state media.

# Iran rejects US

REUTERS, Dubai

#### 'Why did I even get tested, if no one would check?' of my Covid-19 negative certificate, been closed down; when I arrived, the

their healthcare workers as well. the discourse clean, it only serves to "When they sold the tickets, the airline Since then, it has been a herculean make the waters muddier.

only for them.

## RU teacher held over FB posts

Engineering of RU, was arrested from campus quarters, said Golam Ruhul Kuddus, additional deputy commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police.

Zahidur, who is also assistant provost of Madar Bux hall of the university, was arrested in connection with a case filed under Sections 25, 29 and 31 of the DSA, he said.

Tapos Kumar Saha, a lawyer, filed the case with Motihar Police Station on Wednesday night.

According to the case statement, Zahidur criticised former health minister Mohammed Nasim in two Facebook posts on June 1 and 2, with intentions to "defame" Nasim and

"hurt public sentiment". At that time, the veteran political leader was fighting for his life in hospital

after contracting the coronavirus. ADC Kuddus said the RU teacher did not mention anyone's name in the Facebook comments, but the plaintiff claimed that the comments were against Nasim as he shared a news report from Channel i Online on Nasim's health condition and commented that public

opinion over the news should be brought under government notice.

The arrestee, Zahidur, was also former information and research affairs secretary in Narail district. After his Facebook posts, his primary membership of the party was revoked on June 16.

Meanwhile, BRU lecturer Sirajam Munira's suspension has been effective since her arrest on June 14.

Sirajam is now in Rangpur jail. The BRU press release said that under the order of Professor Dr Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah, vice-chancellor of BRU, the suspension letter was prepared and signed by the university registrar Abu Hena Mostafa Kamal.

It added that Sirajam was suspended for violating university discipline.

Sirajam Munira, lecturer of the Bangla department, made an insulting comment about Nasim on Facebook after the formal health minister's death. Later, the university registrar sued her

under the DSA. (Our correspondents from Rajshahi and Dinajpur contributed to this

had told us they would maintain social distancing and other health regulations on the flight, but there were over 150 of us in the aircraft, packed to capacity. When I asked about it, airline staff said the Malaysia government allows carrying passengers at full capacity, so they were

doing it. They also provided us food on the flight, which I was not expecting under the circumstances. They did not seem to even have any gloves in stock, and when my latex gloves ripped in the flight and I requested for a pair, the steward walked off and never came back. "Another flight from Maldives

landed in Dhaka at the same time as ours, around 5:00pm. There is just one thermal scanner at the airport. I stood in a crammed queue for over three hours just to get to the health desk, sweating through a PPE.

They just took my temperature at the health desk, and did not even ask me if I had done a Covid-19 test, let alone any other questions. They took the health declaration form (that we were given in the flight and asked to fill up), and gave us a stub back to submit at the immigration desk. Then the person handed me a leaflet on what to do while in home quarantine and a hotline to

contact if I felt sick," he shared. "I had obtained three official copies anticipating that I would need to submit it to various authorities when I returned. But at the desk, I wondered what the use of the test was if the authorities were not even going to check it upon my entry to the country.

"The person at the health desk did not even give us any document that we were cleared from the airport, nor what date we arrived and up to which date we have to be in home quarantine. How is this an official procedure? They just took my health declaration form, on which I could have easily lied. All they did was check my temperature and hand me a leaflet. This is what bothered me the most," said Asif.

"Even at the queue, were crowding together instead of maintaining distance, and the authorities merely watched," said Asif when asked if social distancing was maintained by returnee passengers at the airport.

"Let me tell you the difference between the KL airport and Dhaka. Before entering the KL airport, there are thermal scanners at every gate. After the check-in and before immigration, there is a second thermal scan, and before boarding the flight there is a third. At Dhaka, there is a grand total of one scanner. All cafés, restaurants and souvenir shops at the KL airport have

usually-bustling airport looked like a zombie land. Here in Dhaka, I saw fast food shops open here and there. Even my co-passengers, who followed social distancing properly at the KL airport, seemed to have entirely forgotten it when they landed here.

"It was not just at the airport. Even as I crossed Chandra and Bypail intersections on my way home, I saw fruit markets and tea stalls open and thriving late into the night. The traffic jam on the highway, and all the open shops and businesses were not something I was expecting. In the three months in Malaysia, their government showed us what a lockdown really should be, but here, it felt like there's no reason for alarm.

"I am at home now, in complete isolation. I did the Covid-19 test before flying back not just because of regulations, but because I wanted to keep my family safe. But the system I saw in place has me worried," said Asif.

"However, I must tell you one more thing. Being in a PPE for the entire journey, I gained massive respect for all frontline workers who have to do this every day. It is an ordeal in itself, and I salute them," said Asif, almost as if he was determined to end the conversation on a positive note, despite all his disappointments.

### CURBING HUMAN TRAFFICKING It's Kuwait's top

## priority right now Says interior minister; MP

Shahid admits to 'involvement in bribe', denies other charges

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Combating human trafficking is one of Kuwait's highest priorities, said its Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh, terming the country's security a "red line" reported Kuwait Times on Wednesday.

The comment came after the arrest of Bangladeshi MP Mohammad Shahid Islam alias Kazi Papul who is accused of human trafficking, money laundering, fraudulence in workers' recruitment and bribing.

Anas Al-Saleh, also Kuwait's deputy prime minister and minister of state for cabinet affairs, made the statement during the parliament's discussion on Wednesday of a letter from MP Abdulwahab Al-Babtain regarding the assignment of the interior minister to prepare a report on human trafficking and the ministry's mechanism to combat it.

Saleh affirmed that the names of those involved in the so-called human trafficking are with the public prosecution. Shahid was arrested by Kuwait's

Criminal Investigation Department on Bangladesh embassy in Kuwait wrote to Kuwait's foreign ministry to know the

reasons for his arrest, but it is yet to get any response. During interrogation by Kuwait's prosecution, Shahid, an independent lawmaker from Laxmipur-1, confessed to bribing Kuwaiti officials with millions

of dinars to get job contracts for the company -- Marafie Kuwaitia Group -that he jointly owns with a Kuwaiti. In February this year, the Anti-Corruption Commission of Bangladesh also opened an investigation on charges that he laundered Tk 1,400 crore. He is

also accused of laundering money from Kuwait to the USA. Kuwait Times reported that Shahid denied all charges that have been filed against him, except for "involvement in

He has admitted to offering gifts and assisting his friends in what he called several agencies" and they in turn helped him complete the company's transactions.

Quoting sources, the newspaper reported that the public prosecutor is expected to summon three persons whose names have appeared during the investigation -- the names of people whom the Bangladeshi said he offered gifts.

They include a Kuwaiti who manages a group of well-known businesses, another Kuwaiti who runs a factory and the third one is a senior official in one of the ministries who has been suspended from work for three months, and 50 percent of his salary has been deducted upon a ministerial decision pending investigation.

The prosecution has also summoned approximately 20 employees working in the firm that is run by the accused. including the accountant, and listened to their statements regarding the salary payments for the employees. It is believed the accused runs three other

The prosecution has yet to summon people related to the case, whether witnesses or people whose names were mentioned during the investigation, except for the 20 employees, reported the daily.

The source stressed that the prosecution's investigation and the statements of the accused did not mention any names other than the three people referred to and who the prosecutor is going to summon to investigate on charges of accepting bribes, it reported.

Regarding the defendant's statements, the source stated that the defendant mentioned during the investigation that he came to Kuwait in 1984 and has always respected the laws of the country.

Shahid has 34 government contracts and is employing 9,000 workers through cleaning tenders, Kuwait Times reported.

He is accused of recruiting thousands of foreign workers, mostly Bangladeshis, and charging huge amounts of money and of paying low salaries and deducting salaries.

#### ACC to probe FROM PAGE 1

ACC Chairman Iqbal Mahmood said masks and PPEs are linked to the health security of doctors, nurses and health workers. "The commission will unearth the

truth and bring responsible persons to the book," he said. Anyone found involved in

the irregularities will be made accountable, Iqbal added. Earlier on June 10, the commission

decided to enquiry into the allegations. On June 3, ACC sent a letter to the Ministry of Health asking for the probe findings. After the detection of COVID-19

patients in Bangladesh, Central Medical Stores Depot supplied PPEs to government hospitals those included packets of masks labelled as N95 masks. But upon opening the packets,

the government physicians found ordinary face masks in them.

On April 20, the health ministry formed a three-member committee led by the ministry's Additional Secretary (Development) Saidur Rahman. The committee submitted its report within three days

The ministry, however, is yet to publish the report or announce what action it had taken after the report was submitted.