

Iran issues arrest warrant for Trump, asks Interpol to help

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Iran has issued an arrest warrant and asked Interpol for help in detaining US President Donald Trump and dozens of others it believes carried out the drone strike that killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad.

Tehran prosecutor Ali Alqasimehr yesterday said that Trump, along with more than 30 others Iran accuses of involvement in the January 3 attack that killed General Qassem Soleimani, face "murder and terrorism charges", the semi-official ISNA news agency reported.

Alqasimehr did not identify anyone else sought other than Trump, but stressed Iran would continue to pursue

his prosecution even after his presidency ends.

Interpol, based in Lyon, France, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The US's Iran envoy Brian Hook described the move as a "propaganda stunt".

"Our assessment is that Interpol does not intervene and issue Red Notices that are based on a political nature," Hook said at a news conference in Saudi Arabia.

"This is a political nature. This has nothing to do with national security, international peace or promoting stability... It is a propaganda stunt that no-one takes seriously," he said.

An alternative way

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The US Food and Drug Administration and the World Health Organisation (WHO) have already approved GeneXpert testing for coronavirus detection, said the officials, adding that Bangladesh currently has 270 GeneXpert machines.

The development came when the country's Covid-19 testing capacity has been extremely insufficient against its huge population. Bangladesh remains at the bottom among the South Asian countries in terms of number of the tests.

Health experts said only one among every 250 people has been tested so far.

According to www.worldometers.info, 4,452 of every one million people of the country have so far been tested, whereas the number is 5,963 in India, 5,611 in Pakistan, and 96,648 in the US.

On average, Bangladesh is now conducting around 18,000 tests a day with 66 RT-PCR labs. Amid such a low testing capacity, people are suffering. There were instances where individuals had to wait for seven days to get an appointment to get tested.

Talking about GeneXpert, experts said the portable machines could be quite useful in testing Covid-19 in the country's remote areas as well as for emergency patients there.

They said GeneXpert testing is also a real time PCR testing, but it does not need reagents.

According to the National Tuberculosis Control Programme, over 25 lakh TB tests were carried out across the country using GeneXpert in the last four years, and all the machines were functional.

Prof Dr Md Shamiul Islam, line director of TB-Lep, said Global Fund was providing assistance in relation to carrying out coronavirus testing through GeneXpert machines.

"We have already received 10,000 kits and wrote for another 30,000. We will be asking for 70,000 more kits. Apart from this, the government is also considering buying GeneXpert testing kits," he said.

Prof Shamiul said they were planning

to scale up the service in 10 hospitals and then in 40 hospitals in phases if the government wants to make it available across the country.

At full capacity, it is possible to conduct over 5,000 test a day, said Prof Shamiul. "It is fast, accurate and less expensive."

"Through this test, we can easily separate Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 patients in hospitals. In emergency cases, this test is very helpful to identify the status of Covid-19 status," he added.

A GeneXpert kit costs around \$24 dollars and a PCR test kit \$30 dollars without the price of reagents.

ASM Alamgir, principal scientific officer of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), appreciated the initiative, saying it would bring more people under the testing coverage.

"It is a great tool to reach the remote areas and emergency patients there. And if we can ensure enough cartridge supply, it will reduce the sufferings of people who have to wait for long to get tested and receive test results," he said.

He added that the US, India, and some other countries were already using the machine for the tests.

Nazmul Hasan, assistant professor of BSMML's internal medicine department, said GeneXpert is handy as it is portable. "It will be extremely helpful at primary health complexes where sample collection is low and places where you need to test a lot of people," he said, adding that a GeneXpert machine is capable of testing four to eight samples at a time.

Jahidur Rahman, virologist and assistant professor at Shahid Suhrawardy Medical College, said, "It is a good initiative and will be very helpful at the upazila level. Another important thing is that operation of the machines is so easy that it does not require any additional manpower support."

Contacted, Abul Kalam Azad, director general of the DGHS, said, "We have started [the testing] on a small scale. We have plans to expand it across the country if we get the cartridges."

No one will be spared

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She informed the parliament that the government would soon recruit 2,000 more doctors and 4,000 nurses in a bid to ensure treatment to the coronavirus patients.

"More 2,000 posts of doctors have been created. We'll recruit more 4,000 nurses and I've already given this directive to the health minister. They'll be recruited soon," she said.

The premier said the government had already recruited 2,000 doctors and 6,000 nurses in a short time to ensure treatment to the patients.

"Besides, the recruitment process for 3,000 posts of medical technologists, cardiographers and lab attendants already started," she said.

Then the prime minister said that her government arranged accommodation in hotels, foods and transports for the doctors, nurses and health workers who are directly engaged in the healthcare services to the Covid-19 patients.

Pointing at an allegation raised by Deputy Opposition Leader and Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader in the House earlier, Hasina said the cost of Tk 20 crore against hotel rent and foods of a medical college seems to be a bit unusual to her.

"We're investigating it as to why it

is so unusual. We'll take action if any irregularity occurred there and in any other places."

Earlier taking part in the discussion on the proposed budget, GM Quader in his speech raised the issue saying that doctors and health workers of Dhaka Medical College Hospital spent Tk 20 crore against their foods and stay in hotels which is doubtful.

Mentioning that the government has been trying to protect the people of the country from the coronavirus, Sheikh Hasina said among the Covid-19 infected people, the death rate in Bangladesh is 1.26 percent, while death rate in Covid-19 is 3.08 percent in India, 2.03 percent in Pakistan, 14.03 percent in the UK and 5 percent in the USA.

She said it was possible to keep the low death rate in Bangladesh due to the government's proper measures.

The premier assured people that the Awami League government will strongly face whatever hard crisis emerges in future in the country and ensure that none will remain unfed.

Hasina, also president of the ruling Awami League, said her government has taken a comprehensive action plan to offset the adverse impacts of the Covid-19 on the economy.

All-time high new cases

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Since the government started testing earlier this year, 1,41,801 samples have tested positive out of 7,48,034 tests. Individuals tend to get tested more than once, officials said.

The samples testing positive yesterday was 18.96 percent of the total. The death rate among the confirmed Covid-19 patients was 1.26 percent.

This rate does not take into account the ones that officials are not aware of, health officials acknowledged earlier.

Bangladesh remains the 17th worst affected country in the world in terms of the number of cases, according to John Hopkins University.

Meanwhile, 2,053 Covid-19 patients have recovered in the 24 hours, the DGHS said.

The number of people who have recovered reached 57,780 and the recovery rate is 40.75 percent.

A total of 1,028 people were put in isolation.

Of those who were reported dead yesterday, 36 were males and nine females, 30 of them died at hospital, 14

at home and one was brought dead to a hospital.

Of them, 22 were from Dhaka, 10 from Chattogram, one from Rajshahi, one from Mymensingh, five from Khulna, three from Sylhet, and three from Barishal divisions.

Two of them were aged between 21 and 30 years, three between 31 and 40, seven between 41 and 50, 11 between 51 and 60, 14 between 61 and 70, six between 71 and 80, one between 81 and 90, and another was aged between 91 and 100 years.

Prof Nasima Sultana also said there were a total of 6,015 general beds and 134 ICU ones available for Covid-19 patients in Dhaka city.

There are 14,690 general beds and 374 ICU ones at Covid-19 hospitals across the country.

There are 11,108 oxygen cylinders, 104 high flow nasal cannula and 98 oxygen concentrators at these Covid-19 hospitals.

A total of 719 patients were admitted to these Covid-19 hospitals while 646 were released from hospitals.



Hundreds, most without masks, crowd on launches moored in the capital's Shyambazar area to watch the rescue operations after a launch capsized yesterday morning. Inset, on one of the rescue boats, a man's fear is confirmed when his brother's body is recovered.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Steering to disaster

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when at least 71 people drowned as a launch sank being hit by a cargo vessel in the Padma in Manikganj.

Yesterday's tragedy struck around 9:30am when the river was absolutely calm.

The ill-fated launch was going to Sadarghat terminal from Munshiganj.

Boatmen from the banks rushed in to help those who were thrown overboard and were afloat, witnesses said.

The rescuers and divers arrived a little later and began to recover the bodies.

All the victims were passengers of the Morning Bird and most of them were from Munshiganj.

Of the victims, 22 were men, seven women and three children. Family members identified 31 of the bodies. One body remained unclaimed at the morgue, said Fazikul Islam, sub-inspector at Dakkhin Keraniganj Police Station.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) has seized Moyur-2.

The navy, coast guard, fire service, and the BIWTA officials continued the rescue operation until late last night.

The operation stumbled a little after a rescue vessel could not reach the spot due to the Postagola bridge.

BIWTA Chairman Commodore Golam Sadeq said they were carrying out the rescue operation finding an alternative.

He added that 45 passengers got onboard the launch at the first and a few others got onboard at different stoppages.

"We recovered 32 bodies and 10 to 15 people swam ashore. So we don't think the number of missing people would be much," he told this newspaper.

BIWTA diver Mohammad Saidul said the launch was upside down at the bottom of the river around 55 feet below the surface. A part of it sank in the mud. The bodies were recovered from inside the launch.

"It is very dark inside the launch..."

There is a chance there might be more bodies in it," he said, adding that divers tied the launch with a rope to keep it stationary until the rescue vessel arrived.

HOW THE ACCIDENT HAPPENED

The Morning Bird operated between Kathpotti of Munshiganj and Dhaka.

On the other hand, the Moyur-2 operates between Chandpur and Dhaka. It was moored at a dockyard. It was scheduled to leave Dhaka at 12:30pm.

As the Morning Bird was approaching Sadarghat terminal, Moyur-2 came astern, apparently to reach terminal and rammed the Morning Bird, Alamgir Kabir, joint director of BIWTA, said.

CCTV footage of the tragedy was shown on several TVs.

Masud Hossain, a survivor, said he was travelling from Munshiganj with his two uncles.

"As I realised something bad happened, I called my uncle... The launch capsized. It didn't take more than five seconds."

"I thought I was going to die today... I somehow managed to open the window of the cabin and came out. There was no way to look for my uncle," Masud said.

He said the rescuers found the body of his uncle Afzal Sheikh but his another uncle Bachchu Sheikh was still missing.

A cloth trader Masud said he lives in Munshiganj and comes to Dhaka by launch every day for business in old Dhaka's Islampur.

His uncles went to visit his family in Munshiganj and were returning to Dhaka. Masud said there were more than 100 passengers in the launch and around 50 of them managed to swim ashore.

Popy Begum was seen crying at the morgue as her son Ashique, 18, a mechanic of the launch, remained traceless.

"My son left our house on Sunday night after dinner. He was supposed to return home, but I am not finding him anywhere" said Popy.

Workers protest jute mill closure

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Khulna city, demanding cancellation of the government decision.

Md Mizanur Rahman, a worker of Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills in Khulna, said, "The government decided to sack us at a time when we are already in deep trouble due to pandemic."

"We have been living in quarters for labourers at the jute mills for generations. Where will we go with our family members at this time of pandemic? Where will we get jobs when all the factories are firing workers?"

Talking to this correspondent, Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) Chairman Abdur Rauf said all the dues of the workers will be paid in due course.

"According to section-26 of the labour law, we are legally bound to pay all the wages. Once we get the funds, we shall transfer those directly to the workers' bank accounts as instructed by the government. There is no scope for any corruption or mismanagement."

He, however, could not say whether the payment would be made in one or multiple instalments.

Asked, Hamid said, "The government assured that once the gazette notification is published, the mill authorities will pay the workers all their dues and financial benefits."

"Unfortunately, we cannot rely on this statement."

"As per the gazette notification of the Productivity and Wage Commission, 2015, published in January this year, we were supposed to get enhanced wages and arrears by March this year."

"Six months have gone by, but our wages have not been increased. In fact, workers of several jute mills in the Khulna zone have not been paid for eight weeks," he pointed out.

Earlier on Sunday, Khulna City Corporation Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaleque assured the jute mill workers that they would be paid as per the labour law without any delay.

The mayor, along with Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Helal Hossain, spoke at a press conference organised by the district administration.

Helal said that according to the textiles and jute ministry's decision, the workers will be paid 40 percent of their arrears in fiscal 2020-21 and the rest over the next two fiscal years (30 percent per annum).

Each worker will get between Tk 12 lakh and Tk 54 lakh. Besides, those who retired since 2014 will be given lump sums, he mentioned.

PROTESTS BY LEFTIST PARTIES
Leaders of leftist political parties have protested the government decision to shut all state-run jute mills.

The Left Democratic Alliance, a combine of eight leftist parties, will submit a memorandum to the prime minister on July 2, demanding withdrawal of the decision.

Hasanul Huq Inu, president of a faction of Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal, said, "The jute industry is not just about making profits. It's our country's heritage."

"Apart from tens of thousands of workers, millions of jute farmers will be in big trouble. The private mill owners will now manipulate the market and farmers will not get a fair price for their produce. With this decision, the government has pushed millions of families into extreme poverty and joblessness."

Communist Party of Bangladesh President Mujahidul Islam Selim said, "The claim that privatisation will save the industry is absolutely baseless. It could be modernised through

CLEARANCE RAISES QUESTIONS
Shipping Department's Chief Engineer Manjurul Kabir said the Morning Bird, which was built in 2012, has capacity of carrying 90 passengers at day time and 60 passengers at night time.

Although he said both launches had fitness clearance, the National Committee to Protect Shipping, Roads and Railways said Morning Bird launch had "structural flaws".

Ashis Kumar Dey, general secretary of the organisation, said following a media report over some faulty launches last year, they took information about those launches and found Morning Bird with "structural faults."

"In this given situation, the authority usually carries out a special survey and asks the launch owner for special docking. But that was not happening here," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

On the other hand, the Moyur-2 appeared to have major operational faults, Ashis said.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury said that the incident seemed to be carried out in "a planned way".

"Today's incident is totally different from other incidents. I have seen the CCTV footage, and after watching it, it appears to me that it was carried out intentionally. It seemed to be a murder," he told reporters after visiting the spot around 3:30pm.

Khalid Mahmud said his ministry has formed a seven-member committee led by a joint secretary and the committee was asked to submit a report within a week.

"We will take necessary legal action following the investigation," he said.

The minister said officials will provide Tk 10,000 to each family for burial and Tk 1.5 lakh for welfare.

The BIWTA has formed a four-member committee led by its joint-director Zainul Abedin and asked it to submit a report within three days.

Zainul added, "We asked owners and staffers of both launches to come before us tomorrow."

Six steps taken to fix bloated power bill

Minister tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Power Nasrul Hamid yesterday told parliament that the government took six steps to correct the inflated electricity bills and collect electricity bills in arrears.

He came up with the information in reply to a query from ruling Awami League MP from Chattogram-3 Mahfuzur Rahman during a question-answer session.

In a scripted answer, Nasrul said the government had declared a nationwide shutdown from March 26 to May 30 to prevent the spread of coronavirus transmission in the country.

Considering the situation, people were allowed to pay their bills for the months of February, March, April, and May by June 30 without any surcharge.

As a result, most of the customers have not paid their bills, which has created a huge amount of arrears.

The state minister said the steps taken to collect the dues include not to accumulate the units for several months and charge more units at a time, to prepare the bills on a monthly basis, not to take more tariff by billing more units at once, correcting incorrect or excessive bills immediately, to prepare the bill for the month of May (which is being done in June) by taking meter readings and to create the scope for paying the bills from home through mobile, bKash, G-PAY, RobiCash, and other online services.

During a discussion organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue on the power sector on Wednesday, Nasrul said the distribution companies mistakenly inflated bills for about 5 lakh customers while preparing an average monthly charge as officials could not go from door to door amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Pandemic

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"Most people remain susceptible, the virus still has a lot of room to move," he said.

"We all want this to be over. We all want to get on with our lives. But the hard reality is that this is not even close to being over. Although many countries have made some progress globally, the pandemic is actually speeding up."

The head of the WHO's emergencies programme, Mike Ryan, told the briefing that tremendous progress had been made towards finding a safe and effective vaccine to prevent infection, but there was still no guarantee the effort would succeed.

In the meantime, countries could fight the spread of the disease by testing, isolating confirmed cases and tracking their contacts, he said. He singled out Japan, South Korea and Germany for their "comprehensive, sustained strategy" against the virus.

The WHO plans to convene a meeting this week to assess progress in research towards fighting the disease, Tedros said.

Salvage ship

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"We have suspended vehicle movement as a severe crack developed at a portion of the bridge. We will take further measures after our experts visit the site tomorrow [Tuesday]," Sabuj Uddin Khan, additional chief engineer (Dhaka Zone) of RHD, told The Daily Star.

At least 32 dead bodies were recovered after a launch hit and sank a smaller launch near the terminal yesterday.

BIWTA chairman Commodore Golam Sadeq, however, said the crack was not that serious.

"Actually the master of the salvage launch wanted to reach the accident spot as early as possible. So, he might have made the mistake," he told The Daily Star.

As the salvage ship could not reach the spot, they were carrying out the rescue operation using alternative methods, the BIWTA chairman said.

Sabuj Uddin said they have visited the bridge and found signs of damages on its girder, which is an important part of the bridge. He said the lane, which was blocked, was on Dhaka-Mawa route.

"After tomorrow's visit with experts, if we find that more lanes are needed to be closed, we will do that for the sake of the bridge," he added.

Covid testing

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According to the circular, one has to pay Tk 500 for Covid-19 testing if samples are collected from home. The fee will be Tk 200 if samples are given to dedicated sample collection booths or public hospitals.

Any patient admitted to a public hospital will also have to spend Tk 200 for the test, reads the notice.

Private hospitals and health facilities now charge each person Tk 3,500 for Covid-19 testing. The fee goes up to Tk 4,500 if samples are collected from an individual's home.

Earlier, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) submitted a proposal to the health ministry on fixing a fee for novel coronavirus testing.

A senior DGHS official said each RT-PCR Covid-19 testing kit is being imported to the country for Tk 3,000.

The costing for the coronavirus testing goes up to around Tk 5,000 if samples are collected from a place where a person stays, he added.

Statistics of DGHS show that a total of 748,034 tests were conducted in 68 Covid-19 laboratories across the country since January 21. Of them, 18.96 percent of the samples tested positive for the virus.

AFP, Beijing