

Govt moves to normalise

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vehicles at full capacity at the previous fares, claiming that the coronavirus situation is getting back to normal gradually.

However, 34 people have died from Covid-19, and 1,973 people have tested positive in 24 hours till 8:30am yesterday, and health experts said allowing full-scale movement of public transport would definitely increase the transmission of novel coronavirus.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity yesterday demanded that the government withdraw the 60 percent bus fare hike immediately to stop unrest over fares and harassment of passengers.

Public transport services, including buses and minibuses, resumed on June 1 after more than two months. The government had suspended the services on March 26 to contain the spread of the virus.

Following demands by transport leaders, the government hiked bus fares by 60 percent from June 1 on the condition that buses would carry passengers at half capacity and follow other health safety guidelines.

But complaints on the breach of the aforementioned conditions kept pouring in.

Between July 22 and August 12, BRTA mobile courts filed 787 cases against more than 100 bus operators, mainly for violating health safety guidelines and charging passengers extra fares, said BRTA officials.

In this situation, Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association (BRTOA) on August wrote to the road transport and bridges ministry that all other modes of transport were carrying passengers at full capacity as the coronavirus situation was

gradually returning to normal.

So, they wanted buses to be allowed to operate at full capacity and, if allowed, bus operators would start charging passengers previous fares, reads the letter signed by BRTOA Secretary General Khandaker Enayet Ullah.

Leaders of transport owners and workers made the same demands when BRTA on Wednesday sat in a meeting with the transport sector stakeholders to discuss enforcement of health safety rules in public transport services.

It was decided during the meeting to send a letter to the ministry to take necessary measures, including informing the cabinet division, about the proposal of the transport leaders.

It was also decided to continue operation of bus services at 50 percent capacity and following health safety guidelines until further notice.

"We have sent the letter to the ministry on Thursday and now the ministry will take necessary measures in this regard," BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder told The Daily Star yesterday.

Jatri Kalyan Samity in a press statement said despite the government's conditions, transport operators are carrying extra passengers much like in pre-coronavirus days.

As a result, common people already facing economic hardship due to the pandemic are enduring further hardships and in many cases, transport workers and passengers have been engaging in altercations over the hiked fares, it added.

The organisation also said when the government hikes bus fares, fares of other transport like human haulers and auto-rickshaws also doubles, causing further woe for passengers.



PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

A horse-drawn van carries a man and the boat he recently bought across a bridge in Tangail. With floodwater having inundated many areas of the district, boats have become an increasingly important means of transport.

Zia 'involved in Bangabandhu killing'

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Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Birth Centenary Celebration National Implementation Committee organised the programme at the International Mother Language Institute, marking the 45th martyrdom of the Father of the Nation and National Mourning Day.

She said Ziaur Rahman had made collaborators like Abdul Alim, Maulana Mannan and Shah Aziz ministers, prime minister and advisers.

Following Zia's footsteps, Hasina said, Khaleda Zia also made ministers Nizami, Mujahed and culprits involved in the intellectuals' killings.

The prime minister mentioned that Khaleda Zia made killer Rashid and Huda members of parliament.

"If there was no link with them, why did Khaleda Zia pave the way for them to sit in Parliament snatching the voting rights of people in the February-15 farcical election? They (Ziaur and Khaleda) always patronised those who were involved in terrorism and killing," she said.

Talking about the August-15 massacre, the prime minister said the main aim of the conspirators was to destroy the ideal of the Independence as they could not tolerate the victory of Bangladesh.

"Those who were with Pakistan

during the Liberation War also could not accept our victory. There were conspiracies [against the country], from the day we attained our victory... There were a deep-rooted conspiracy against our victory," she said.

Regarding the involvement of Ziaur Rahman in the Bangabandhu killing, she said that killers Faruq and Rashid in their statement had told that Ziaur Rahman was with them always and being empowered by these killers Ziaur Rahman later proclaimed himself as the president of the country.

Sheikh Hasina said by selecting Ziaur Rahman as the army chief Khandaker Mustaque had proved that they were together in this conspiracy.

About the August-21 grenade attack, she said Khaleda Zia and her government were involved in that attack and that is why after the grenade charge police and law enforcement personnel had charged baton on those who tried to rescue the injured and take them to hospitals for treatment.

"They drove away the party leaders and activists from the spot to clear the path for the culprits to flee the scene," she said.

The prime minister said the advancement of the country has been halted due to the coronavirus pandemic, but the government is trying hard to put the country back

on its previous track for economic progress.

"We've one aim and that is to materialise the ideals of the Father of the Nation for which he liberated the country. We'll try our best to materialise the dreams of the Father of the Nation for Bangladesh to change the fate of people," she said.

Awami League advisory council member Amir Hossain Amu, MP, Law Minister Anisul Huq and Professor of Dhaka University History Department Abu Md Delwar Hossain also spoke at the programme.

President of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Birth Centenary Celebration National Implementation Committee Professor Rafiqul Islam gave the vote of thanks while Chief Coordinator Dr Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury delivered the welcome speech.

The prime minister also inaugurate an exhibition of paintings and pictures titled "Mukhtir Mohanayak" digitally, which is taking place at the International Mother Language Institute.

A documentary on Bangabandhu was also showed in the programme. Eminent cultural personality Asaduzzaman Noor, MP recited a poem written by renowned poet Mohadeb Saha.

Ailing Kajol stuck in jail

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which hospital Kajol should be taken to.

Kajol spoke with his wife at the end of last week, and repeated his earlier statement – his health is failing and he is not doing well.

The Dhaka Central Jail authorities said that they have received the court directives of taking necessary steps to ensure Kajol's treatment, but he cannot be treated outside jail at the moment because of the pandemic.

"The court has ordered that steps be taken for his treatment. There is a hospital inside the jail and he has been receiving treatment there," Mahbulul Islam, jailer at Dhaka Central Jail, told The Daily Star on Saturday night.

Asked if he would get treatment in a hospital outside the jail, Mahbulul said, "You can understand the situation now. There is no scope to admit anyone at hospitals outside because of coronavirus. If there is any major health problem and if the jail doctor thinks, only then can we think about it."

Asked about Kajol's health condition, the jailer said he could not comment as only the doctor can talk about it.

Dhaka Central Jail has two doctors. Mahmudul Hasan Shuvo, the chief doctor, told this newspaper that he was infected with coronavirus and is currently on leave.

"I don't know any updates about journalist Kajol," he said.

Sources in the jail told this correspondent that there is also a shortage of prison guards as many are infected with Covid-19 and as a result, providing the logistic support necessary for transporting inmates would be difficult.

One of the prisons guards, wishing not to be named, said, "Earlier, 15-20 inmates used to take treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital

per day. But today [Saturday], there are only two inmates admitted there. Only the inmates with major problems are now sent outside the jail to be treated."

Senior superintendent Iqbal Kabir Chowdhury refrained from commenting on the issue citing departmental restrictions on talking to the media.

Meanwhile, expressing deep concern over the jail authorities' slowness, rights body Ain O Salish Kendra said despite getting instructions, prison authorities have not yet taken any action for the better treatment of Kajol.

Kajol has been kept in jail for almost three months even though there is a pandemic, and it is evident from the jailer's comments to the media that they have not given the court directive importance, despite Kajol's deteriorating physical condition, the statement added.

The rights body demanded immediate medical treatment and release of the imprisoned journalist.

Yesterday, artists and activists joined in a protest at the Central Shaheed Minar, demanding Kajol's release.

Fifty-three days following his disappearance after leaving his office in Dhaka's Hatirpool, Kajol was found by Border Guard Bangladesh in Benapole on May 3. He was then arrested, initially on charges of trespassing, but was granted bail by a Jashore court.

However, that same evening he was shown arrested under section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure after police informed the court that three more cases under the Digital Security Act against Kajol were pending with different police stations in the capital.

The court then sent him to Jashore Jail. Later, he was moved to the jail in Keraniganj.

Return of normalcy

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Also, 2,754 workers came back from seven countries, including Singapore, South Korea, Jordan, Japan, and Mauritius following the expiry of their job contracts.

The reasons for the return of 3,095 workers were not mentioned.

According to the ministry data, the authorities in Italy denied 151 Bangladeshi workers entry to that country on suspicion that they might have been infected with Covid-19. They had left for Italy on July 6.

Upon their return, they were kept in institutional quarantine under the supervision of Bangladesh Army.

Addressing a programme at his ministry yesterday, Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad urged all concerned to create job opportunities for the returnees in the country.

He mentioned that training is being given to migrant workers with an aim to send them abroad, focusing on the changing demands in the post-Covid international labour market, according to a press release of the ministry.

The government is now working to send more workers abroad from the country's less-developed areas, he added.

There are more than one crore Bangladeshi workers in 160 countries, according to government officials.

The majority of them are employed as low-paid workers in Middle East countries, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, and Lebanon, and also in Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore.

Migrant workers sent home more than \$18 billion in fiscal 2019-2020, shows Bangladesh Bank data.

Their contribution is considered as

HOST COUNTRY	NUMBER OF RETURNEES
The UAE	25,653
Saudi Arabia	15,389
The Maldives	7,909
Kuwait	7,329
Qatar	6,601
Oman	3,884
Malaysia	2,226
Iraq	2,136
Turkey	1,948
Singapore	1,382

SOURCE: EXPATRIATES' WELFARE MINISTRY DATA (APRIL 1-AUGUST 22)

one of the key pillars of the country's economy.

Following the coronavirus outbreak, thousands of Bangladeshi migrant workers faced economic hardship because of job losses in the host countries.

For them, the government came up with immediate food and medical support involving Tk 11 crore which were distributed through Bangladesh missions abroad.

Besides, expatriates' welfare ministry created a Tk 200-crore fund for giving soft loans to returnees and the family members of those who died from Covid-19 abroad for their economic reintegration. The Probashi Kallyan Bank has been disbursing the loans from last month.

Also, the government announced a separate loan package of Tk 500 crore for the expatriates who lost jobs amid the pandemic.

Mother, son, daughters beaten up

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1:00pm Friday, suspecting that they lifted a calf. They then beat up the five, witnesses said.

On the instructions of Miranur, the five, including the mother and her son, two daughters, were tied up hands and waists with rope and paraded before villagers, the witnesses added.

Later, the five were taken to the union parishad office, where the chairman and village police beat them up a second time around 5:00pm, they added.

They were then handed over to police who took them to Chakoria Upazila Health Complex. After primary treatment, they were brought to Chakoria Police Station.

One Mahbulul Haque of Bandabonkhil village filed a case against the five – Chuttu, 27, Parvin, her son Emran, 21, and two daughters Selina Akhter Sheuli, 28, and Rozina Akhter, 23, for cattle theft with the station at night.

Of them, Chuttu is from Cox's Bazar's Pekua and Parvin from Chattogram's Patiya.

A Cox's Bazar court sent them to jail after police produced them before the court on Saturday, showing them arrested in the case.

Plaintiff Mahbulul told this correspondent over phone that locals beat up the accused when they beat up his son.

They were tied up and taken to the union parishad office, from where the chairman handed them over to police Friday evening, he said.

At night, he along with Harbang Police Outpost in-charge Aminul Islam went to Chakoria Police Station and lodged a case against them, he added.

Chairman Miranur could not be contacted over phone as it was found switched off.

However, in a video message from an unknown place, the chairman claimed that he was not involved in the incident.

His rivals are trying to spread propaganda against him, he said.

Those who tortured the women will be identified and legal action will be taken against them, said Habibur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Chakoria Police Station.

Police are working to identify the people involved.

A three-member probe committee, led by Shabasti Roy, deputy director of local government department, was formed by Kamal Hossain, deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar.

The committee has been asked to submit the report within seven working days, said Shabasti.

Meanwhile, a petition was filed with Chakoria Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court yesterday, seeking the bail of the five.

The court fixed today for hearing the petition, said lawyer Ilias Arif, who filed the petition, adding that the five were going to Dulahazra Christian Memorial Hospital.

Plundered by

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trees that must have been planted in 1980 when, according to officials, the forest was created under a government programme.

According to data from the Department of Forest, 10 percent of the country's total forestland has been lost since the independence due to deforestation, land grabbing and allocation for government and non-government projects and leasing.

Besides, illegal tree felling remains rampant in most reserved forests. This has been happening at a time when the government is trying to increase the country's forest coverage to 18 percent from the current 15.58 percent by 2030 which is a condition to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG).

In the reserved forest in Chattogram's Rangunia, locals said tree felling in the remote Chiria forest has been going on for the last few years by a local gang that remain unbothered by the forest officials.

Just a few miles away, in Narischa Beat area which is also under the Chattogram South Division Forest, this correspondent saw stumps of at least 150 teak trees that had been stolen recently. This forest has around 500 stumps marked by the department as stolen.

A signboard mentions that Block Sharaf Bhata, Narischa Beat, is a forest on 6.40 Hectares of land.

Contacted, Beat Officer Abdul Mannan said no tree was stolen from the forest.

When this correspondent told him about the stumps, he admitted that "a few trees" had been felled and he filed

a Prosecution Offence Report about it.

Locals said the gang of thieves takes the logs to the nearby Betagi union across the Karnaphuli River where sawmills shape the logs into smaller sizes. Eventually, they end up at the hand of furniture traders.

Contacted, Proholland Ray, range officer of Rangunia under Chattogram South Forest Department, claimed that many of the stumps seen by this correspondent must be of dead trees which are taken away by local miscreants.

He added that officials had recently recovered the 15 pieces of logs from Ramgotir Haat area of Betagi union. But who cut the trees remains unknown, he said.

"I asked my beat officer to look into the matter seriously to find out the people involved," he said.

Forest department insiders said many forest department officials are involved in the racket.

Contacted, Mozammel Haque Shah Chowdhury, divisional forest officer of Chattogram South Forest Department, told The Daily Star that he was not aware of any tree felling.

Professor Sikandar Khan, president of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon's Chattogram Chapter, said, "The razing of forests is systematic. Authorities who are supposed to protect either look the other way or skim off the top. They are jeopardising our future, our biodiversity, and our wildlife."

Exemplary punishment should be handed down to the criminals if the government wants to protect the forest at all.

Lebanon's Hezbollah says downed Israeli drone

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah movement said Saturday it had downed and seized an Israeli drone that flew over the UN-demarcated Blue Line border.

The Israel Defense Forces said that "earlier today, during IDF operational activity along the Blue Line, an IDF drone fell in Lebanese territory".

"There is no risk of breach of information," it added in a statement.

Hezbollah said its fighters had downed the drone near the town of Aita al-Shaab.

The Jewish state, which is technically at war with Lebanon, late last month said it had repelled an attempt by Hezbollah fighters to penetrate the border.

The Shia Muslim group Hezbollah denied any involvement in the incident, which came after an alleged Israeli missile attack hit positions of Syrian regime forces and their allies south of Damascus, killing five.

Hezbollah, whose fighters back Damascus in the nine-year-old Syrian civil war, at the time said one of its own was among the dead and it vowed to respond.

Hezbollah had in September 2019 vowed to down Israeli drones overflying Lebanon following an incident a month earlier when two drones packed with explosives targeted Hezbollah's stronghold in south Beirut.

Lebanon and Israel are still technically at war, and the United Nations force, UNIFIL, patrols the border between the two.

Set up in 1978, UNIFIL was beefed up after a month-long devastating war in 2006 between Israel and Lebanon's Iran-backed Shia militia Hezbollah.

The 10,500-strong force, in coordination with the Lebanese army, is tasked with monitoring a ceasefire and Israeli pullout from a demilitarised zone on the border.

Israel accuses Hezbollah of stockpiling weapons at the border to prepare for a new war.

US-led troops withdraw from Iraq's Taji base

REUTERS, Camp Taji

United States-led international coalition troops withdrew from Iraq's Taji military base yesterday and handed it over to Iraqi security forces, Reuters witnesses and the coalition said.

The base, 20 km (12 miles) north of Baghdad, had been the site of frequent rocket attacks by Iran-backed militias targeting US-led troops in recent months.

"The movement of coalition military personnel is part of a long-range plan coordinated with the government of Iraq," the coalition said in a statement, adding that Camp Taji has historically held up to 2,000 coalition members, most of whom have departed this summer.

Pradeep made

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from her father, finds the ACC.

"It seems that OC Pradeep Kumar Das built the building with the money earned through bribe and corruption. And to conceal it, he gave it to his father-in-law who handed it over to his wife," reads the FIR.

Chumki is a housewife. She submitted income tax return for the first time in 2013-14 fiscal year. Since then, she has been mentioning her profession business. She declared of getting involved in commission and fish business.

In her 2013-14 and 2014-15 income tax return, she declared her capital in commission business 11.2 lakh and income 3.8 lakh.

But no existence of commission business was found. She also could not provide any licence for business or bank statement in this regard.

As the wife of a government official, one needs to get approval from authority but she did not have it either.

Chumki also declared of earning Tk 1.5 crore from fish business from 2002 to 2013. She declared of taking lease of five ponds in Boalkhali in 2002 at Tk 16.5 lakh for ten years.

In the enquiry, the ACC found that his husband Pradeep joined the force in 1995 as sub-inspector. Chumki was a housewife.

They failed to show any document about the source of Tk 16.5 lakh invested in the fish business in 2002.

"It proves that Chumki, in a bid to conceal Pradeep's ill-gotten money, showed fake fish business. Her income Tk 1.5 crore from fish business is not acceptable," the FIR reads.

Analysing documents, the commission also found that Chumki had amassed Tk 4.22 crore immovable property and spent Tk 21.7 lakh as family expenditure.

On the other hand, her legal income is found only Tk 49.13 lakh.

Therefore, she amassed Tk 3.95 crore beyond the known income sources.

TikTok to challenge Trump's executive order

REUTERS, Washington

TikTok said on Saturday it plans to file a lawsuit today against President Donald Trump's executive order prohibiting transactions with the popular short video app and its Chinese parent ByteDance, confirming an earlier Reuters report. Reuters exclusively reported on Friday that TikTok would challenge Trump's executive order as early as today.

TikTok said it had tried to engage with the U.S. administration for nearly a year, but faced "a lack of due process" and that the government paid no attention to the facts.

"To ensure that the rule of law is not discarded and that our company and users are treated fairly, we have no choice but to challenge the executive order through the judicial system," the company said in a statement.

TikTok's owner ByteDance issued a separate statement yesterday saying it will officially file a lawsuit against Trump administration today.

Trump issued an executive order on Aug. 14 that gave ByteDance 90 days to divest the U.S. operations of TikTok. ByteDance has been making progress in talks with potential acquirers, including Microsoft Corp and Oracle. Some of ByteDance's U.S. investors could also join the winning bid.