

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



**1,567**  
New cases in 24hrs



**3,47,372**  
Total cases



**4,913**  
Deaths



**2,54,386**  
Recoveries



**958,217**  
Deaths



**30,813,995**  
Total cases

## Thrown into abyss of abuse

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wife pushed me off. I fell on some old furniture in the yard. I crawled out of the gate. I was sitting beside the road and crying when a Bangladeshi man saw me and agreed to drop me to the police station. He dropped me a little way off from the police station, and I crawled to the station on all fours," described Akhter, showing the wounds on her legs which are visible to this day.

"The police just took my statement and then sent me back to my kafalah. Once inside, they whipped me with a belt, and locked me in a room. Then the father and his eldest son came in and took turns to rape me. This happened twice while I was in that state," she said.

Rape, however, was nothing new to her -- she had been raped thrice before this incident, by her employer and his son, and once by the local recruiting agent of M/H Trade International.

The first instance of rape happened five days after she joined work. "I had gone two days after Pahela Baishakh ... and within the first week of joining work I was raped by my employer and his eldest son," she said. "I cried, refused to work and wanted to return home, so they dropped me at the maktab, the local recruiting office, with some Bangladeshi men. There I was beaten badly, and at night a man came to bed with me." She was "disciplined" thus, and returned back to her employer.

In addition to the multiple instances of rape, she was denied food. "I used to cook for them. I cooked chicken and rice, but I was not allowed to eat that. The employer's daughter stood guard over me while I cooked. I was allowed a piece of flatbread every day ... I was so hungry all the time that I sometimes picked food from the trash to eat, when I used to go out to put out the trash," described Akhter.

She claimed that the arrested recruiting agent Mokbul knew of her plight. "I stole and used the phone a few times to call my mother and my mother called Mokbul. But he did nothing."

The woman had gone to Saudi Arabia with hopes of sending some money for her family -- her husband is one of the kitchen market labourers who gut and clean fish for fishmongers and at the time she left, she had a two-year-old son. "When I had gone I was told that I am being employed as a nanny to two children. I stayed in that house for three months, and could finally come back home when both my legs were broken and I could not walk anymore," she said. She came back penniless and permanently disabled.

Similar torture was inflicted on the murdered 14-year-old Kulsum. In a video call with her family members made from a hospital bed in Riyadh, the child kept saying over and over again how she can't walk anymore. "How do you go to the bathroom then?" her family member asked. "I have to constantly wear pampers [adult diapers]," replied a frail and sick Kulsum.

In 2017, R. Begum was sent to Riyadh, where her employer, Ibrahim Al Solaimanu, handed her over to the police, and she was jailed for seven months -- but what the charges were, this housewife from Patuakhali does not know to this day.

"I worked for two months. I was sexually abused by my employer -- he used to come to my room after the

morning prayers and grope me. He indicated to me that he will pay me for sex. This happened four or five times," said Begum, "and I used to plead with him, tell him this is haram and that he is like my father."

"I used to be given food only once a day. Food was a fistful of rice and leftover bones to eat at three at night," she described.

"After two months, I asked for my salary, and my employer said he will give me the money after five months. I protested, so they took the long end of the vacuum cleaner and beat me up with that. I was denied food for eight days straight. Soon after I was taken to the police and imprisoned for seven months and one day. No lawyer ever met me," said Begum.

She too claimed that the agency's owner Mokbul knew about this. "I had called him and asked him to change my employer, but he told me to tolerate it," she said.

Begum started crying, "During Eid I even butchered three goats for them, thinking I would be able to take some money back home for my two children, but I have come back empty handed."

Begum claimed that she is still owed Tk 2 lakh in wages and her passport, all of which are with the recruiting agency. "I came back two years and four months ago, and since then he never received my calls, and blocked my number. The one time he did pick up, he pretended not to know me."

Yet another woman, Rahana Begum, described how she was physically abused by the employers chosen for her by M/H Trade International. She was sent to work for the family of Rahim Bin Aziz Al in Riyadh.

"When they beat me they never thought about what they are hitting me with or where they are hitting me," said the woman from Pirojpur. She worked for 11 months, but was paid for nine.

Meanwhile, Mokbul denied responsibility of the abuse the women went through.

According to the Kafalah system, if a female worker comes back without completing her contract, the agency has to provide a substitute worker, or pay \$2,000.

All the women interviewed above, came back without completing their contracts -- so this correspondent asked Mokbul, whether he sent women to replace them, even after knowing that their employers were abusive.

He denied doing so. "If a woman came back without completing her contract, we paid back \$2,000 that the employer had given for her. The local office in Saudi Arabia either found another worker, or paid on our behalf, and that money was adjusted from our account," he claimed.

Asked if he had receipts to prove that he paid \$2,000 for every abused woman who came back without completing their contracts, he said he had no receipts.

The exact number of women trafficked by this agency is still not known, but Additional Superintendent of Police Bina Rani Das from Rab-3 told this correspondent that the number could go into the hundreds. "We will be investigating to see how many women were trafficked by this agency," she informed The Daily Star during the operation.

[This newspaper is not publishing full name of the rape victims to protect their identity]

## CID arrests 8 suspended

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Zonal Office Manager Sirajul Islam, 42, Deputy Manager Mahmudur Rahman Rabbi, 34, Assistant Engineer SM Hasan Shahriar, 32, Assistant Engineer Manik Mia, 33, Senior Supervisor Munibur Rahman Chowdhury, 56, Senior Development Worker Ayub Ali, 58, Assistant Hanif Mia, 48, and Ismail Pradhan, 49.

DIG Mainul also said that they would produce the arrestees before court today with a five-day remand plea.

The members of the mosque committee, whose negligence were also found, would also be arrested soon, he added.

On September 4, an explosion at Pashchim Talla Baitus Salat Mosque around 8:45pm and claimed 33 lives so far.

Fire officials said the explosion was caused by the accumulation of leaked gas from an underground Titas Gas pipeline that somehow came in contact with an electric spark.

On September 6, Sub Inspector Humayun Kabir of Fatullah Model

Police Station filed a case against unidentified people, alleging negligence resulted in the explosion and casualties.

Titas Gas suspended eight of its officials and staffers in connection with the blast.

**TWO MORE DIE**  
Meanwhile, two persons who suffered severe injuries in the blast died at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in Dhaka yesterday.

The dead are Abdul Aziz, 40, and Farid, 55.

Of them, Aziz breathed his last around 5:30am with 45 percent burns while Farid passed away around 1:45pm with 50 percent burns, Dr Partha Shankar Paul, resident surgeon of the burn institute, told The Daily Star.

Both of them were undergoing treatment at the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital, he added.

With them, 33 people have so far died from the blast while the condition of four others admitted at the hospital remains critical.

## Taiwan scrambles fighters as Chinese jets again fly near island

REUTERS, Taipei

Taiwan's air force scrambled jets for a second consecutive day yesterday as multiple Chinese aircraft approached the island and crossed the sensitive midline of the Taiwan Strait, with the island's government urging Beijing to "pull back from the edge."

Taiwan's Defence Ministry said 19 Chinese aircraft were involved, one more than in the previous day,

with some crossing the Taiwan Strait midline and others flying into Taiwan's air defence identification zone off its southwest coast.

It said China, which claims democratic Taiwan as its own territory, sent 12 J-16 fighters, two J-10 fighters, two J-11 fighters, two H-6 bombers and one Y-8 anti-submarine aircraft. According to a map the ministry provided, none got close to mainland Taiwan itself or flew over it.



Thousands of people at the janaza of Hefazat leader Ahmed Shafi on the premises of Al Jameyatul Ahlia Darul Ulum Moinul Islam Madrasa in Chattogram's Hathazari yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

## BSF makes the promise, yet again

FROM PAGE 1

Both sides agreed to hold the next DG level conference at Guwahati, India preferably within the second week of November.

The BSF chief said they assured the BGB that they can bring down the number of deaths along the border with a joint coordinated patrol system which has stopped due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and also by continuing formal and informal interactions at the field level.

"Our troops have been instructed very clearly that we should open fire only as a last resort," Rakesh said replying to a query.

He said such a situation arises mostly due to criminal activities like smuggling of cattle, narcotics, gold, weapons and ammunitions on both sides of the border.

"In order to prevent such criminal activities, weapons are being used which have resulted in unfortunate deaths in the past," he said explaining the reason for the killings.

He, however, said he was not justifying any killing. "I reiterate that we are committed to reducing border killings to zero," he said, adding that India has very good relations with Bangladesh.

"I have joined recently and in the future you will see the progress," the BSF DG added.

To prevent the illegal activities, both the sides decided in the meeting that they should have real time sharing of intelligence and information about the movements of criminals across the border and about the activities of the syndicates who are running such activities from behind the scene.

"Seventy percent of deaths happen between 10:00pm and 5:30am. Normally, criminals remain active during this period. Secondly, the operations have taken place inside the Indian territory," Rakesh said replying to another query.

He claimed that 52 BSF personnel have been injured this year by criminals operating in both countries.

The BGB DG said his counterpart assured that he would do his best to work out a strategy to make sure that loss of human lives can be avoided. He said the border killing issue was given top priority in the discussion as it has psychological impact on the people of Bangladesh.

Asked whether it was BGB's failure that Bangladeshi citizens were entering Indian territory, Shafeenul

said, "Bangladesh has a border of 4,427 km and it is a porous border. It has many rivers, marshes, hills and plain land. We have a border outpost in every 5 km. We are trying to guard it with the help of technology."

During the talks, both the DGs also agreed to aid victims of human trafficking and to facilitate their rescue and rehabilitation as soon as possible as per the law of the land.

Both the sides also agreed to continue sensitising the border people to refrain from crossing the border illegally.

Appreciating the cooperation extended by BGB and other security forces of Bangladesh against Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGs), the BSF chief sought further cooperation from BGB for destroying "reported hideouts of IIGs in Bangladesh."

Shafeenul assured that there was no IIGs camp or hideout inside Bangladesh.

Asked about flow of untreated chemical waste from India through a river in Brahmanbaria's Akhaura upazila, the BGB chief said the ministries concerned of both the countries were deeply engaged in resolving the issue.

## Dreams dashed

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where I was born."

He said it is not money he is after. "I want to work in my motherland. If I get a work permit, then I have to submit the documents to the Bangladesh Embassy in Singapore. They will then give me an employment visa. I can then return."

He said if Gonoshasthaya Kendra gets approval then they can go for production of antigen and antibody test kit.

"My presence may be needed. If I can't be here, I will try to cooperate from Singapore."

Bijon's wife and two children live in Singapore. He has worked in the laboratory of Gonoshasthaya Kendra for the last seven months with his colleagues. He could not go to Singapore due to the pandemic.

He still believes that the government will approve the antigen and antibody test kits he developed. He wants to stay in Bangladesh during the production.

"I do believe we will get approval because our kit is unique. Through our antibody kit, we can examine whether antibodies and neutralising antibodies were created in someone's body."

Dr Bijon said if neutralising

antibodies are created in the body, the person does not need any vaccine. "We cannot vaccinate 17 crore people. Another point is that we have to see whether neutralising antibodies are created in the human body after vaccination. If antibodies are not created then the vaccine is ineffective."

He stressed the need for antibody testing as a vaccine alone will not help in getting rid of the coronavirus.

Dr Bijon said the procedure for patent of Gonoshasthaya Kendra's testing kit has already been completed.

He said many countries in the world have already developed rapid test kits and started using them, although Bangladesh was the first country that made an announcement of it.

Sources at Gonoshasthaya Kendra said some countries have already shown interest in producing the kit but the organisation wants to wait.

"We invented it first but could not release it in the market. I have to endure this disappointment for the rest of my life. But the good news is that we completed the patent. Other countries cannot produce our kit. From the beginning, some countries showed interest in going for production and they still want that."

"Dr Zafullah Sir always wanted

the people of the country to get the benefits of the kit at a minimum cost. But if we don't get approval, we may consider the alternatives."

Gonoshasthaya Kendra, in the second week of March, announced the development of Dr Bijon Kumar Sil's antigen and antibody test kit. Then the organisation applied to the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) for approval. Many started saying that rapid test kits are not approved by the World Health Organization and no country in the world is using the kits.

On June 17, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University gave the antibody test kit report. Before that, the antigen test kit examination was suspended for a few technical errors. Gonoshasthaya Kendra submitted the antigen test for approval to the authorities concerned again.

BSMMU results showed that antibody kits are successful in 70 percent of the cases. DGDA suggested improving the quality of the kit, and did not give approval.

Gonoshasthaya Kendra and Dr Bijon improved the quality of the kit but the procedure of testing the effectiveness of it for the second time is still pending.

## A rare and welcome instance

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of saving project money is definitely praiseworthy," Obaidul Quader, road transport and bridges minister, yesterday said.

He said this after revealing that Tk 286 crore has been saved so far in the WBBIP, while talking to project officials at a virtual meeting. Road Transport and Bridges Division Secretary Nazrul Islam and RHD's Chief Engineer Quazi Shahriar Hossain, among others, took part the meeting.

Quader mentioned two other RHD projects for which total costs were reduced. He said more than Tk 1,000 crore was saved in a project under which three new bridges were constructed and three old bridges on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway were repaired.

Tk 220 crore was saved in a project under which the third bridge on Karnaphuli was constructed, he added.

**HOW THE MONEY WAS SAVED**  
In October 2015, the government sent 12 J-16 fighters, two J-10 fighters, two J-11 fighters, two H-6 bombers and one Y-8 anti-submarine aircraft. According to a map the ministry provided, none got close to mainland Taiwan itself or flew over it.

packages between October 2015 and June 2020 at the cost of Tk 2,911.75 crore.

But last year, 21 more bridges were added to the project, resulting in an extension of the deadline till June 2022, a project official said. However, the project cost remains same as the construction of one major bridge in Narsingdi was dropped and its budget was repurposed for the 21 smaller bridges.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated 25 in Khulna, Barishal and Gopalganj zones on March 12, which were under packages three, four and five, he said. The works of packages one and two are now undergoing and have been 80 percent completed.

The project authority in July signed two contracts for building the 21 bridges under a sixth package.

Asked, Project Director Abdus Sabur said changes in the currency rate (Japanese Yen vs Tk) was main reason behind the save. "Besides, we have saved money from the contract cost and contingency cost," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

**10 BRIDGES TO BE REPLACED**  
Abdus Sabur, also an additional chief engineer of RHD, said they have

already submitted a proposal to the Chief Engineer's Office in regards to building 10 more bridges with the saved money.

"JICA has given verbal consent to our proposal. Now, the RHD would send the formal proposal and once JICA approves that, it would be sent to the ministry."

Obaidul Quader yesterday directed the authority concerned to complete the procedure regarding the 10 bridges as soon as possible. He also asked them to complete the works of other bridges within their given deadlines.

Md Rucunuzzaman, project manager-2 of WBBIP, said analysing the procurement cost of the latest contracts, they came to the decision that they would be able to build around an 850-metre bridge with the saved money.

"So we have selected 10 bridges with the total length of 842 metres," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the bridges, mostly bailey bridges and narrow bridges, were selected from the areas where they are now implementing package-6 to make their works easy and they are hopeful to complete the additional work, if approved, within the current deadline.

## Ahmed Shafi laid

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comment about the matter to this correspondent.

The crowds pouring in from across the country spilled over the 2-km stretch of Hathazari-Kharachari road. Nearby rooftops and alleys were also filled with people who could not get to the madrasa premises.

Abdur Rahim travelled over 160 km from Laxmipur to see Shafi for the last time.

"But I could not enter the main premises and had to take part in the Janaza on the street," he told The Daily Star.

Police teams in riot gear were seen at key points.

As the crowd started to leave the area on foot later in the afternoon, Chattogram-Rangamati and Chattogram-Khagrachari highways got almost blocked.

## Wasa MD for 11

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being supplied poor-quality water throughout the year.

Wasa MD Taqsem said the TIB report was 'taunted'.

Environmentalists say that Wasa has no success in improving drainage and waterlogging and Taqsem has not done anything to deserve to be in the position for three more years.

TIB yesterday demanded appointment of a qualified and experienced new managing director at Dhaka Wasa before the tenure of the current MD expires in October.

In a statement, the anti-graft watchdog also demanded a complete and impartial audit of the questionable appointment and repeated re-appointment of the MD.

It also demanded the Dhaka Wasa Board be disbanded due to its inability to prevent corruption through good governance, transparency and accountability.

TIB strongly condemned the proposal to re-appoint the current managing director, terming the process unethical and unlawful.

TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said it is certain that the Dhaka Wasa Board is either not fulfilling its responsibilities properly, or it is not being allowed to do so.

TIB said it was clear from the agenda of the meeting that all measures were taken to keep the power of the same person unaffected in the top management while ignoring the rules and regulations.

The questionable appointment and continued re-appointment despite serious allegations of failure and irregularities has turned the state's commitment to good governance in the country into a farce, TIB said.

The statement also said there was no mention whether any application for the post was invited as per the rules. It is not known whether anyone applied for the post, if yes, why they were not considered, or why the current managing director was deemed the only suitable candidate, and why it was necessary to renew the term of the same person in defiance of the rules.

Allegations of unprecedented irregularities and corruption in the small and large projects of Wasa were raised in TIB's 2019 research.

According to media reports and other reliable sources, each of his appointments as MD took place through violation of laws and rules.

Taqsem was widely criticised last year for claiming that Wasa water was 100 percent safe.

He also told reporters on various occasions that water-related issues can be attributed to technical problems, and often denied reports of corruption and mismanagement within Wasa.

## Onions start

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waiting with his onion-laden truck at Ghojadanga since September 13.

Half the onion of his truck got perished during this period, he said.

Meanwhile, onion-laden trucks standard at the Indian Mohodipur land port started entering Bangladesh through Sonamasjid land port in Chapainawabganj since yesterday morning.

A total of eight trucks carrying onions entered Bangladesh through Sonamasjid land port from 11:00am to 2:00pm, said Toufiqueur Rahman, general secretary of the import-export association of the land port.

He expressed hope that more trucks carrying onions would enter Bangladesh, reports our Chapainawabganj correspondent.

In Dinajpur, three Indian trucks carrying onion entered Bangladesh through the Hili Land port in Hakimpur upazila, reports our Dinajpur correspondent.

Onion-laden trucks started coming in Bangladesh from around 3:00pm, said Harun Ur Rashid, president of Hili importer and exporter association.

Harun said importers opened Letters of Credit (LCs) for importing 10,000 metric tonnes of onion through Hili land port.

This was not the first instance of India banning onion exports without any prior notice, causing onion prices in Bangladesh to go through the roof.

In late September last year, a similar ban was imposed by India, which had a rapid ripple effect. Onion prices in Bangladesh soared close to Tk 300 per kg from Tk 40.