

**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**



1,407
New cases in 24hrs



3,60,555
Total cases



5,193
Deaths



2,72,073
Recoveries



**GLOBAL
UPDATE**



1,003,353
Deaths



33,376,396
Total cases

Protector became perpetrator

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can file a case against them with the local police station like it is done over any crime?"

Sharmeen said the River Conservation Commission has to exist with ambivalence towards the government. "The commission has struggled since its inception and it has not ceased to struggle. I myself have seen the shipping ministry try to influence the commission in the past."

She said the commission was able to identify the bad actors, but only a few evictions have been completed as per its recommendations. "The commission is very small and it has no courage and resources."

M Inamul Haque, chairman of Institute of Water and Environment, said the commission has no power except for making recommendations.

Khushi Kabir, secretary of Nijera Kori, said the commission engages with the district commissioners about the state of rivers, but they do not stay at a particular place for more than three years. "We need a systemic shift to make sure that the people can hold the perpetrators accountable."

The River Conservation Commission should be empowered in such a way that it can take actions, said Shamsul Huda, executive director of ALRD. "It should not be restricted to being a recommendation-making commission."

Eminent water resource and climate change specialist Dr Ainun Nishat said the scope of river conservation has to be broadened beyond just looking into pollution and encroachment. "There are many other environmental factors that need to be thought about."

Tuhin Wadud said, "I have

personally visited 180 rivers in the region and found that the Water Development Board does not dredge rivers according to CS blueprints. During the dredging of a river to increase its navigability, I have seen them dump the silt in the middle of the river, turning one river into three."

Rizwana stressed the need for identifying rivers which were losing biodiversity due to use of fertilisers in agriculture.

River Conservation Commission Chairman Mujibur Rahman Howlader said, "The commission was created due to public demand, and it was done very hurriedly. It was supposed to be empowered with many things, but it doesn't have those. I am sorry we have not been able to fulfill people's demands. Maybe the expectations are not right, given the circumstances."

He, however, agreed that there is an urgent need to save rivers. "Our country has been waterlogged for months. We always had floods, but they had never been this long-lasting. Climate change is real -- more water will come from the upstream. How will we prepare for the future if we cannot save our rivers?"

Khushi Kabir suggested that a watchdog of civil society members be formed to continuously hold violators of laws accountable, which could be an alternative to the commission.

Aliur Rahman, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Forum and Chattogramer Nodi o Khal Rokkha Andolon; Anwarul Kadir, president of Sachetan Nagorik Committee Khulna; Hasibur Rahman Bilu, northern zone chief of Independent Television; and Salehin Chowdhury Shuvo, executive director of Haor Area Upliftment Society, also spoke at the discussion.

TIB demands review

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Masum Billah, TIB's deputy programme manager (outreach and communication), in a keynote presentation at the discussion.

TIB arranged the discussion marking the International Day for the Universal Access to Information.

He said Bangladesh witnessed a number of corruption incidents in different sectors during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

But journalists faced harassment and repression for covering such corruption incidents, he said, adding that 37 journalists have been sued since the first coronavirus was spotted in early March.

He also said 67 cases were filed under the DSA during this period while at least 88 people were arrested for "spreading rumours and false information."

Masum said 180 journalists are currently facing cases under the DSA and section 57 of the ICT Act filed since the beginning of 2018.

He said the DSA should be reviewed in line with international standard.

During the presentation, he also mentioned that many journalists are losing jobs during the coronavirus crisis. If journalists cannot earn a living, the media sector will plunge into a crisis.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said the government organisations' limiting of information has put pressure on investigative journalism.

"This is an ominous sign for

democracy", he said.

Pressure on journalism is a hurdle for curbing corruption and ensuring accountability, he said, adding, "This is suicidal and can turn into a boomerang."

Journalist-writer-researcher Prof Afsan Chowdhury, Dhaka University Prof Gitiraj Nasreen and journalist Julfikar Ali Manik, among others, emphasised on the preparation, studies, enhancement of skills and capacities of journalists for their development.

They said if the journalists do not improve themselves they will not be able to make the authorities concerned accountable and challenge them for the betterment of the society.

At the programme, TIB announced names of four journalists and a TV programme for their significant roles in investigative reporting on corruption.

Atifur Rahman of The Daily Kalerkantho was awarded in the national print media category while Shafiq Shahin of NTV was awarded in the national electronic media category.

In the local print media category, Foyzal Islam of Jashore-based daily Gramerkagoj and Mohammad Salim of Chattogram-based Weekly Chatgarbani jointly won the award.

Searchlight, a programme broadcast by Channel 24, won the award in the TV documentary category.

TIB has been giving the investigative journalism award since 1999.

Place detailed report on returnees

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the meeting, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said, "At the end of the meeting, the prime minister went for unscheduled discussions on overseas employment and asked the foreign minister to place a comprehensive report at the next cabinet meeting over how the stranded expatriate workers can be repatriated, be reemployed in proper ways, and the new overseas job markets can be explored."

There are some potential job markers like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan for Bangladeshi workers, he said.

According to the data placed before the cabinet meeting, a total of 141,046 Bangladeshi workers returned home this year and 88,586 of them came without passes or travel passes, Anwarul said.

He said the expatriates welfare ministry presented its future work-plan over manpower export and the scenario of overseas jobs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The number of returnees is not an alarming one for Bangladesh as around 1 crore Bangladeshi expatriates stay abroad and a good number of the expatriates travel back to the country regularly, the cabinet secretary added.

Some 181,273 Bangladeshi workers went abroad in the past eight months till August 2020, while the number was 406,962 during the same period last year.

Anwarul said despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the remittance inflow in the last fiscal year (2019-20) was \$18.21 billion, which is 9.6 percent higher than the amount of the previous fiscal year.

About the stranded Saudi returnees, the foreign minister informed the cabinet that he talked to his Saudi counterpart on Sunday and requested him to allow the operation of a greater number of Saudi and Biman flights and extend the 24-day visa renewal deadline.

Though the time for visa renewal was extended several times, the Saudi authorities assured Bangladesh of considering further time extension, said the minister.

DRAFT LAW APPROVED

Yesterday, the cabinet in principle approved the draft of "Private Medical

and Dental College Bill, 2020" in order to bring the private medical institutions under a law instead of two separate guidelines.

"At present, private medical and dental colleges are run under two guidelines.... Now it's not possible to run the institutes properly by only guidelines. A law is needed to regulate these. So, the Medical Education and Family Welfare Division framed the bill," said the cabinet secretary.

The private institutes are now run under the Private Medical College Establishment and Operation Guidelines 2011 and Private Dental College Establishment and Operation Guidelines 2009, he mentioned.

PM SEEKS BLESSINGS

Speaking at the cabinet meeting, Hasina said it was a tough job for her to work for the country after losing almost every family member, including her parents.

"But above all, I thought one thing [that] I have to do something for the country and the people that my father had loved so passionately. His dream must not remain unfulfilled, I have to materialise his dream," the premier said.

Yesterday was the 73rd birthday of the PM, also the Awami League president. Her cabinet colleagues wished her on her birthday.

Hasina expressed her gratitude towards the people of the country and sought their blessings.

"I seek your blessings so that I can live with honour as long as I am alive and the people of the country get benefit from me and do well."

The PM said she was trying hard to turn the country into "Sonar Bangla" of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

She said the people of Bangladesh have the capability to overcome all sorts of hurdles.

"With cooperation from all, we are taking the country forward. I thank the people of the country [in this regard]. We could have done many more works if the novel coronavirus hadn't come. However, the people of Bangladesh have the capability to overcome all hurdles whatever they may be," the PM added.



Using binoculars, two tourists look towards Dawki town of India from the bordering area of Jafflong in Sylhet yesterday. A local, Nazrul Islam, said he used to earn Tk 700 to Tk 1,000 every day by renting out binoculars to tourists in Jafflong, but his income has reduced significantly since the pandemic struck. He, however, said tourists have started returning lately.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Disparity in disbursement

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A MIXED PICTURE

Of the scheme, there are five large loan-related packages where the lion's share -- around Tk 75,750 crore -- will go. Those include export-oriented industries, large businesses, service sectors, SMEs, and refinancing for pre-shipment credits.

Of the amount, Tk 25,574 crore was disbursed to these five sectors, according to the progress report documents.

The export-oriented sector, mainly the readymade garments, is ahead of all so far, as the Tk 5,000 crore support here has been fully disbursed.

Soon after the deadly virus arrived on the shores of the country, the government allocated the interest-free fund for the export sector with a service charge of two percent as employment of nearly 50 lakh workers became vulnerable amid cancellation of orders and placement of no new order from the buyers.

The funds were released as salaries for workers and employees of export-oriented industries through equal instalments in the three months from April to June. Nearly the entire fund -- Tk 4,935 crore -- was disbursed as of July.

As many as 1,992 such industries borrowed the funds through 47 commercial banks.

Significant progress was made in dispensing the Tk 33,000 crore funds to affected large industries and services at 9 percent interest rate to be repaid equally by the borrowers and government as subsidy.

Some 2,062 large companies received the low-cost loans as of September 17 Tk 25,461 crore, which is 77.15 percent, according to data from the central bank.

The quick fund disbursement by the lenders has already had a positive impact on the ongoing recovery process of the business sector.

For the cottage, micro, small and medium enterprise sector, the picture is rather gloomy.

The government announced Tk 20,000 crore as the working capital support to the pandemic-hit small businesses at 9 percent interest rate -- four percent to be paid by the borrower

and five percent interest by the government as subsidy.

Till July, only Tk 1,491 crore was disbursed for the sector where 6,432 firms got the loan through 76 banks and financial institutions. As of end of last month, it went up to 20 percent with number of enterprises 11,183, said sources.

The pre-shipment credit refinance scheme amounting to Tk 5,000 crore for export-oriented industries has also not made any progress.

The Bangladesh Bank issued the scheme on April 13, but it's yet to release any funds under the scheme till now. As of August 4, 30 banks signed deals with the BB for releasing the fund.

AGRICULTURE SECTOR LAGS BEHIND

This slow pace was also observed in the case of the special refinancing scheme worth Tk 5,000 crore for the agricultural sector. But only Tk 497 crore was disbursed as of July, the documents showed.

However, there was a rise in the disbursement till August 31 as 46,804 farms and farmers got the loan support of Tk 1,095 crore in total, said sources.

Similar was the case for the disbursement of Tk 3,000 crore in refinance loans meant for low-income farmers and small traders in the agriculture sector. The progress of lending was so slow that the Bangladesh Bank last week extended its timeframe.

As of August 31, the amount stood at Tk 286 crore.

Forty-three banks have so far signed participation agreements with the central bank to disburse the loan by December 31.

The government included agricultural subsidy in a stimulus package as it gave the food security issue the utmost importance in the wake of the pandemic.

Last year, the subsidy was Tk 8,000 crore, of which Tk 7,188 crore was spent. Now the government increased it by Tk 1,500 crore, but the disbursement process is yet to begin.

The government allocated a Tk 3,200 crore stimulus package to speed up mechanised farming. However,

no money was disbursed yet as the agriculture ministry is outlining a project under which it would be spent.

HEALTHCARE LESS CARED-FOR

The government set aside an allocation of Tk 850 crore for the doctors, nurses, health workers; field officers; members of law enforcement agencies, armed forces, BGB; and other government employees, who are on the front line risking their lives.

They will receive compensation under the package if they fell sick or die. However, the compensation has so far been doled out to two victims, Tk 1 crore to each of their families.

Also, an allocation of Tk 100 crore was made as a special honorarium for doctors, nurses and health workers, who are directly involved with the treatment of Covid-19 patients. But the fund was not released as the health ministry did not send the list of the recipients yet, sources said.

EMERGENCY FOOD SUPPLY AND CASH HANDOVERS

Notable progress was made in the free distribution of food materials to the people who became jobless after the Covid-19-induced shutdown. More than 2.54 crore families in 496 upazilas and municipalities got rice and cash handovers in April, May and June.

There was also a good progress in the open market sale operation of rice at Tk 10 per kilogramme. Over 67 lakh families in all unions and 439 municipalities, city corporation areas.

But the progress in distributing cash incentives to selected families is not satisfactory. The government announced a stimulus package of Tk 1,258 crore to give each of 50 lakh families Tk 2,500 a month.

The distribution, however, had to be stopped after allegations surfaced over the lists of beneficiaries despite preparing the list twice. So far, some 35 lakh families got the support.

Another package that moved at a slow pace is the free housing for the homeless people. Against an allocation of Tk 2,310 crore, the Department of Disaster Management could build 1,112 houses at the cost of Tk 33.34 crore.

Another 32 migrants land in jail

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November 2019 and March 2020. Since the Syrian airport is closed, they were brought to Lebanon for their flight back to Bangladesh. After deportation, they were in Beirut for two days," said Abdullah Al Mamun, first secretary (labour) and head of chancery at the Bangladesh embassy in Beirut, Lebanon.

Thirty-year-old arrestee Mizanur Rahman's brother-in-law Emdadul Haque spoke to this correspondent about the matter. "Mizan went to Lebanon 10 years ago in 2010 as a young boy. He used to do odd jobs at different places in Lebanon and at one point, became undocumented. Since he became undocumented, he could no longer get well-paid jobs, nor come back to Bangladesh," said Emdadul.

"During the dollar crisis early this year, it became impossible to get jobs, and that is when he met an agent who promised to take him to Italy," said Emdadul.

Lebanon witnessed several months of currency shortage. When the value of the US dollar plummeted, the economy went into a crisis and jobs dried up, resulting in violent protests by citizens in June.

"Mizanur left Lebanon a month or two before the pandemic started in Bangladesh. They were travelling via road and they got caught in the hands of Syrian border guards," he said.

"He stayed in jail for eight or nine days, following which he was taken to a United Nations camp, where he stayed for the rest of the months before coming back to Bangladesh."

"My brother-in-law is finally back to Bangladesh, 10 years after he first left. Please get him released, his aging parents are waiting anxiously to see him," Emdadul pleaded.

Talking to The Daily Star, Shariful Hasan, programme head of Brac Migration, said, "All of these people are deportees. This is a violation of human rights to keep them arrested like this. They were supposedly going to Italy as aspiring migrants. We do not know whether they went legally or illegally, but undocumented migrants

are victims. Individually, they are not criminals."

A total of 416 migrant worker returnees have been arrested in Bangladesh under Section 54 in five different incidents during this pandemic, stated Shariful.

The first group of returnees -- 219 migrants from Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain -- were arrested on June 5. These are comprised of workers detained for being undocumented, as well as workers convicted of petty crimes.

Another group is consisted of 81 migrant worker returnees from Vietnam, all of whom had gone legally and were victims of trafficking.

No charges have been brought against any of the arrested migrants as yet, added Shariful.

OC Mottakin said charges would be framed once investigation was over. When asked why it was taking so long to complete the investigation, he said, "Different agencies are involved here, and there are a lot of migrants' cases to investigate."

Trump paid no income taxes

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presidential tradition by refusing to release his tax returns, fighting a long battle in the courts and triggering speculation about what they might contain.

"First of all, I paid a lot and I paid a lot of state income taxes too... It'll all be revealed," Trump said as he shrugged off the Times story that cited tax data extending more than 20 years.

The Times said that Trump reduced his tax bill via a \$72.9 million tax refund that is the subject of an Internal Revenue Service audit. He also reportedly took tax deductions on residences, aircraft and \$70,000 in hairstyling for television appearances.

Meanwhile, his golf courses report losing large amounts of money, and hundreds of millions of dollars in loans he personally guaranteed will soon be due for repayment, according to The

New York Times.

Democrats jumped on the allegations, with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi saying it showed "Trump's disdain for America's working families," and party colleague Chuck Schumer calling for everyone "who paid more in federal income tax" to raise their hand.

Massachusetts representative Richard Neal, the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee who has tried unsuccessfully to obtain Trump's tax records, said the Times report makes it even more essential for his committee to get the documents.

"It appears that the President has gamed the tax code to his advantage and used legal fights to delay or avoid paying what he owes," Neal said in a statement on his Facebook page.

"Now, Donald Trump is the boss of the agency he considers an adversary. It is

essential that the IRS's presidential audit program remain free of interference."

Biden's campaign team posted a tweet that simply stated how much federal income tax had been paid by teachers (\$7,239), firefighters (\$5,283) and nurses (\$10,216) -- all groups that have been hit hard by the pandemic or the West Coast wildfires, two major topics ahead of the debate.

At Tuesday's election debate, millions of Americans will watch as the two antagonists -- who depict each other as existential threats to the country -- step into the ring live on television after months of shadow-boxing.

Trump taunted Biden on Sunday with a fresh salvo on his mental acuity.

"I will be strongly demanding a Drug Test of Sleepy Joe Biden prior to, or after, the Debate on Tuesday night," he tweeted, saying he would take one also.

Hasina, Modi to meet virtually in December

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi will hold a virtual meeting in December.

The meeting between the two prime ministers would be held during Bangladesh's Victory Day and ahead of completion of Mujib Borsho.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said this while talking to reporters at his office yesterday.

He also indicated that Modi would be in Dhaka if the Covid-19 situation improved.

"India is our neighbour and our best friend. We have many things to discuss," said the foreign minister.

Momen hinted that bilateral agreements would be signed at that time.

He said today's foreign minister-level meeting between the two countries would be a short one and they were not planning to sign any documents.

On October 5 last year, Hasina and Modi held bilateral talks in New Delhi. Hasina was in India on an official visit at the invitation of the Indian PM.

In March this year, the two prime ministers joined a virtual meeting of Saarc countries on cooperation to deal with the Covid-19 situation in the region.

INDO-BANGLA JCC MEET Fresh push for water-sharing deals likely

PORIMOL PALMA and PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

Dhaka may give a fresh push for water-sharing deals of Teesta and other common rivers during the Bangladesh-India Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) meeting scheduled to be held today.

To this end, Dhaka may propose a meeting of the Joint River Commission (JRC), the dedicated bilateral arrangement for discussing the water-sharing issues, which has not met since 2010, said officials concerned.

Border killings may come up as another issue of importance from the Bangladesh side, they said.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar will lead their respective delegations in the virtual meeting.

This year, Dhaka is hosting the sixth JCC meeting, an annual foreign minister-level event that reviews the bilateral relations. Last year, the JCC meeting was held in New Delhi on February 8.

"The two sides will review the recent developments in various sectors of Bangladesh-India bilateral engagements. They may discuss common programmes during Mujib Borsho and Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary," said a foreign ministry official.

Other issues to be discussed include trade, border issues, energy, connectivity and Rohingya repatriation, he told The Daily Star.

Officials said Bangladesh and India have been enjoying very friendly relations over the years but the water-sharing issue, specifically of the Teesta, and border killings by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) remain major irritants.

According to rights body Ain o Salish Kendra, border killings rose from 15 in 2018 to 43 last year. At least 29 Bangladeshis were killed in the first seven months of this year. In a recent meeting, the BSF assured the BGB of bringing down the border killings to zero.

Shahed gets

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deserve the court's mercy."

This judgment will send a clear message for other criminals like Shahed, the judge added.

Dhaka Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Abdullah Abu expressed satisfaction over the verdict. However, Defence lawyer Moniruzzaman said they would challenge the verdict at the higher court.

Shahed was arrested on July 15 from Sathkira when he was trying to leave the country on a boat.

He was later remanded in a case filed over issuing fake Covid-19 test results and charging patients unfairly for testing and treating the virus.

On July 19, a team of DB police found Shahed's private car in front of a house at Sector-II in the city's Uttara Paschim area.

They then seized a pistol with bullets from the car and later a case under the Arms Act was filed against him with Uttara Paschim Police Station.

DB Inspector Sairul Islam, on July 30, submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka.

The Special Tribunal-1 of Dhaka framed charges against Shahed on August 27 in the case.

Eleven prosecution witnesses, including complainant of the case, gave their depositions in the case before the tribunal.

Earlier on August 18, 2010, another Dhaka court sentenced Shahed to six months of simple imprisonment and fined him Tk 53 lakh in absentia in the cheque dishonour case.