

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,499
New cases in 24hrs



3,71,631
Total cases



5,405
Deaths



2,84,833
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

1,050,693
Deaths



35,861,195
Total cases

GANG RAPE OF NOAKHALI WOMAN Outraged, they continue to protest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Protesting torture and rape of a Noakhali woman, students and right activists across the country took to the streets for the second consecutive day yesterday.

In the capital, Bangladesh Chhatra Union brought out a black-flag procession and marched towards the Prime Minister's Office to press home its demand for ending rape incidents.

But the procession was foiled by police near the Hotel Intercontinental intersection.

Students started gathering in front of the National Museum around 11:45am. They chanted slogans against the government and law enforcement agencies for their "inactive" role in stopping rapes.

Meghmalla Basu, assistant general secretary of the student body's Dhaka University unit, called for updating the related laws to contain the rape incidents. "Our rotten system helps producing rapists."

Around 1:15pm, students started their march from Shahbagh via TSC to the Prime Minister's Office.

When they reached near Hotel Intercontinental intersection, police put up barricades on the street.

Police and students had heated arguments there. At one stage, they pushed and shoved each other, leaving at least five students injured.

Failing to march towards the Prime Minister's Office, the agitated students chanted slogans against police on the spot.

Samajik Protirodh Committee, a platform of civil society, held a protest rally in front of the Jatya Press Club.

Protesting the incidents of rape and violence against women, they said increase of violence against women was hampering their progress.

A massive technological

development has happened, but the mentality towards women is yet to be developed," they said.

"If the administration fails to prevent the criminal force who got political and administrative patronage, the incidents of violence will keep rising."

The event was presided over by acting president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad Central Committee Fouzia Moslem, said a press release.

They also called for speedy trial of rape cases.

In Tangail, students of different educational institutions brought out a procession, formed a human chain and staged a sit-in in the town to protest the rape and barbaric torture on the woman in Noakhali's Begumganj.

Fatema Rahman Bihi, a student of Government Saadat College, Karatia, Tangail, came to the town's Central Shaheed Minar in the morning with placards bearing slogans against rape. Later, other students joined her.

"As a woman, I feel insecure and that's why I've started this sit-in to ensure our safety," she said.

Earlier, leaders and activists of Sadharon Chhatra-Jubo Odhikar Parishad staged demonstrations in the town, demanding exemplary punishment of the culprits of Noakhali rape incident and other such incidents.

In Chandpur, Badlao Youth Foundation formed a human chain in the town, seeking justice for the Noakhali rape victim.

There was widespread outrage on social media after the graphic video of a woman in Noakhali being gang-raped was uploaded and shared on Sunday.

The video also documents that sticks were used as instruments of torture when executing the action of rape and the whole gang of men aided and abetted each other in raping the woman.



Protesters in a march towards the Prime Minister's office try to break a police barricade on the street in the capital's Paribagh area around 1:30pm yesterday. They staged the demonstrations protesting the recent spate of rape incidents in the country. Failing to remove the barricade, the protesters returned to Shahbagh. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Keepsakes are all she has

FROM PAGE 1

[His belongings] in a similar way," said the 53-year-old mother.

The heinous murder a year ago has completely torn apart a happy family. Abrar's mother is devastated. His father, Barkat Ullah, is suffering from health complications at the age of 58. All their dreams and aspirations centred on their bright son now lie shattered.

Even as he suffers health complications, Abrar's father quit his job two months ago so that he can make the frequent trips to Dhaka to attend trial proceedings of the murder case of his son.

His younger brother, Abrar Faiyaj, was so shocked by his brother's demise that he had to leave Dhaka College. It was Abrar who helped Faiyaj get admitted to the college. Now he studies at class XII at Kushtia Government College.

"Our happy family is now full of distress. All we are concerned with now is when we will get justice," the distressed mother said.

Before his death, Abrar, a second-year student of electrical and electronic engineering department of Buet, was brutally tortured for hours in room 2011, which used to be a "torture cell" of the BCL men. The incident sparked a firestorm of protests on campuses across the country.

'I WANT JUSTICE'
Recalling the last time she spoke to Abrar, Rokeya said she kept the bus ticket of Super Deluxe Paribahan that her son used to go to Dhaka from Kushtia at 9:30am.

"Reaching the Buet hall in the evening, Abrar called me over phone and said not to worry. He said he shared the food that I cooked for him with one of his roommates. This was my last conversation with him," she said, fighting to hold back her tears.

Rokeya said that both her sons' lives revolved around her.

"Even after his admission at Buet, I

used to go there and pay his fees. My younger son too is like him. They are very innocent. So what offence could Abrar have committed that he needed to pay with his life?" she questioned.

"I want justice," she said.

Rokeya is now waiting for her younger son to grow up.

"Faiyaj has been doing good all along, like Abrar. He is still trying... Now only Allah knows what awaits us in the future," she said.

For Faiyaj, it took at least seven months to cope with a changed life.

He said they initiated "Shaheed Abrar Fahad Foundation" in the hope that the foundation would provide scholarship and financial support to insolvent bright students. But they still have not been able to manage sufficient fund.

For now, they just keep people updated on their fight for justice for Abrar.

The family said they are happy to see the trial proceedings going well. They hope that they will get justice.

TRIAL UNDERWAY, THREE STILL ABSCONDING

On November 13 last year, detectives submitted a 105-page charge sheet against 25 Buet students in connection with the murder. The accused were mostly leaders and activists of the university's Chhatra League unit.

The horrifying description of the torture came up in the charge sheet. It stated that 11 of the accused either hit Abrar with cricket stumps and skipping ropes or slapped and kicked him for hours.

The 14 others abetted the killing by calling Abrar to room 2011 or by carrying the unconscious victim to another room and finally to the landing of the staircase, according to the charge sheet.

Of the 25 accused, 22 were earlier arrested and remanded several times. During the investigation, eight of the accused gave confessional statements to

magistrates on different dates.

Three other accused -- Mustaba Rafid, Muhammad Morshed-Uz-Zaman Mondol alias Jishan and Ehtashamul Rabbi Tanim -- have been absconding since the incident.

On September 15, the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 of Dhaka framed charges against all the 25 accused.

On October 5, Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 of Dhaka recorded the statement of complainant Barkat Ullah, father of the victim, for over an hour. He sought exemplary punishment for all 25 accused.

CHANGES IN BUET
Abrar's death seemed to have brought changes to the campus environment and shaken up the Buet authorities.

Following his death, students erupted in fiery protests, forcing the authorities to ban all political activities on the campus on October 11 last year.

The authorities later expelled 26 students, mostly leaders of the university's BCL unit who were accused in the case.

The fearful environment that hung over the campus in the aftermath of the murder has now passed. The central BCL has not formed any new committees in the university.

"Now we have no fear of BCL. We can express our minds freely -- on Facebook and on campus. But the sad part is we had to lose a friend to achieve this freedom," said a Buet student who was involved in the protests.

Several Buet students said BCL men earlier used to monitor Facebook posts critical of the government and the ruling party. The BCL men used to take screenshots of such posts and circulate them among themselves to target students. Some students used to be questioned, interrogated or even assaulted over the posts, after being labelled as "Shibir" activists.

But with the ban on politics on the campus, these practices are gone now, they said.

Iran must free political prisoners amid pandemic: UN

AFP, Geneva

The UN yesterday called on Iran to immediately release human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh and other political prisoners who have been excluded from a push to empty jails amid the pandemic.

UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet expressed deep concern over the deteriorating situation of rights activists, lawyers and political prisoners held in Iran as a result of the coronavirus crisis.

A system of temporary releases to reduce the populations in severely overcrowded prisons, introduced by Iran in February to rein in transmission

of the virus, had benefitted some 120,000 inmates, although a number had since been required to return, her office said.

But people sentenced to more than five years behind bars for "national security" offences were excluded, it pointed out.

Such sentences are often handed to people "arbitrarily detained, including human rights defenders, lawyers, dual and foreign nationals, conservationists, and others deprived of their liberty for expressing their views or exercising other rights," it said.

Biman, Saudia cannot take all

FROM PAGE 1

Talking to this newspaper in front of the Biman office in Motijheel yesterday, Mir Morsalin, a migrant worker from Brahmanbaria, said he had a return ticket of Kuwait Airways with a stopover in Kuwait city.

He returned home in February and was expecting to go back to Saudi Arabia on June 29. But the flight was cancelled following suspension of air travel due to Covid-19.

Morsalin said he had been trying to get a new ticket of Saudia or Biman for the last two weeks but to no avail. Officials of the two airlines told him that at present, they are not issuing any new tickets to Saudi Arabia.

"My residence permit [iqama] will expire in 13 days. If I fail to reach Saudi Arabia by that time, I could lose my job," he said.

Another migrant worker, Mohammad Masum from Cumilla, said he had bought a return ticket of Air Arabia from a travel agency in Al Qassim of Saudi Arabia. He was to fly back to the kingdom on March 30 but the flight got cancelled.

He then communicated the matter to the travel agency which asked him to contact the Air Arabia office in the capital. But the staffers at the office could not say when the airline would resume flights from Dhaka.

"I will be in deep trouble... If I cannot return to Saudi Arabia soon, I will lose my job," he added.

Students, labourers

FROM PAGE 1

Planning Minister MA Mannan disclosed the report findings to journalists after the meeting.

He said the entire world witnessed negative impact of the virus and Bangladesh was no exception.

However, the country's economy was turning around now, he added.

This survey was conducted following the direction of the Prime Minister's Office. This was the very first report of BBS that was conducted using mobile phones and the samples were collected from both rural and urban areas, he said.

According to the report, people's monthly income dropped by around 20 percent while expenditures also decreased by 6.14 percent during the pandemic.

In March, the average monthly income was Tk 19,425 and in August

it came down to Tk 15,892 whereas the monthly expenditure in March was Tk 15,403 and it dropped to Tk 14,119 in August, the report mentioned.

The report mentioned that around two thirds of the families in the country faced various problems between April and July. Around 21.33 percent households -- one fifth families -- received government assistance or reliefs, it added.

Another such report, conducted by the World Bank, however, suggested that around 68 percent people were unemployed during the pandemic.

The World Bank report was carried out in two phases -- one after the pandemic began and the second one from June 10 to July 10.

According to the World Bank report, the rate of the job loss was 76 percent in the capital while it was 59 percent in the port city.

Delwar raped her several times before

FROM PAGE 1

over the year, but also felt that they were entitled to her body, as if she was property.

Kabir told journalists that the survivor will also file a rape case with the court, and additionally give her statement to the court. The case will be represented by Advocate Jafar Uddin Babul.

"We will create a report of our findings and submit it to the NHRC chairman," said Kabir.

Officer-in-Charge Begumganj Model Police Station Harunur Rashid Chowdhury said he was not aware that the victim has been repeatedly raped by the accused. "She did not tell me, nor did she tell the magistrate on Monday [the day after the video footage went viral]. I only learnt of this when NHRC told me," he said.

Rapid Action Battalion-11 officials told our correspondent that upon interrogating the accused rapists, they found that the video was released through social media because the survivor refused to agree to their proposals for sex.

"Delwar had a gun on him, which is illegal. There are two existing murder charges against him. He will be transferred to Shiddhirganj police station for further interrogation, while his accomplice Badal will be sent to Begumganj Police Station," said Rab-11 commanding officer Saiful Alam.

VIDEO KEEPS CIRCULATING

Meanwhile, more than 24 hours after the High Court instructed Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to ensure that the video is taken down from websites and social media, the video is still available through a simple search.

Among others sharing the video, social media vloggers and online portals actively continued to include the video in their own video content in a misguided approach to raise awareness about rape. Some blurred

out the entire video, some blurred out the survivor's body but kept the face unblurred, some trimmed the video to only keep certain sections and others zoomed out the video to make it less visible -- but none of that alters the reality that it is a video of a violent rape.

BTRC Director General of Systems and Services Division Brigadier General Md Mustafa Kamal said they are actively taking down links as they see them, but more keep cropping up.

"We identified 17 links and reported them to authorities and we are still actively on the lookout for more. If anyone finds any link with the video and refers the link to us, we will take action," he said.

As the video continues to crop up faster than it can be taken down, the survivor hides to protect herself and her family.

She is a mother with a married daughter and a teenage son.

"My life is already ruined. I am now worried about my children, especially my daughter. I cannot bear the thought that my daughter's in-laws have seen the video. What are they thinking? What if they take it out on my daughter and throw her out?" she told our correspondent.

Our Noakhali correspondent's personal office is in a computer market in Maizdee Old Bus Stand area. Over the last two days he has witnessed how the video spread over the whole market. It was played and replayed in public on computer screens as everyone crowded to perceive first-hand the horror inflicted on the woman.

"Bhaiya, do you have the video? I had it but it got deleted... I wanted to show it to someone," said a computer businessman, approaching our correspondent, who declined to entertain the request.

Snippets of conversation overheard on the street also attest

30 more die, 1,499 infected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thirty people have died from Covid-19 in the country during the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, read a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With this, the total number of deaths rose to 5,405 which is 1.45 percent of all confirmed cases.

In the same 24 hours, a total of 1,499 new infections were recorded, taking the total number of confirmed cases to 371,631, added the release.

Against 12,345 tests in 109 labs in the same 24 hours, the positivity rate was 12.14 percent. With this, the overall positivity rate was 18.45 percent.

Bangladesh is currently on the 16th position in the list of worst affected countries in the world in terms of the number of confirmed cases, according to worldometers.info.

The position is one step behind Iraq and one step ahead of Saudi Arabia.

In those 24 hours yesterday, a total of 1,651 Covid-19 patients have recovered.

With this, the total number of recoveries rose to 284,833 which is 76.64 percent of all confirmed cases.

Among the 30 deceased yesterday, 20 were males and 10 were females. All of them died in hospitals, according to the release.

One of them was aged between 11 and 20 years, one between 21 and 30, two between 31 and 40, two between 41 and 50, seven between 51 and 60 and 17 were above 60 years, added the release.

One was from Sylhet division while two each were from Rangpur, Barishal and Khulna divisions, four were from Chattogram and the rest 19 were from Dhaka division.

'Pandemic fatigue' hits Europe

Warns WHO as Covid cases mount

AFP, Copenhagen

The World Health Organization yesterday warned European countries about "pandemic fatigue" which it says threatens the continent's ability to tackle the coronavirus.

"Although fatigue is measured in different ways, and levels vary per country, it is now estimated to have reached over 60 percent in some cases," WHO Europe director Dr Hans Kluge said.

He said this is based on "aggregated survey data from countries across the region."

Citizens have made "huge sacrifices" over the last eight months to try and contain the coronavirus, he said in a statement.

"In such circumstances it is easy and natural to feel apathetic and demotivated, to experience fatigue."

Kluge called on European authorities to listen to the public and work with them in "new and innovative ways" to reinvigorate the fight against Covid-19, which is on the increase throughout Europe.

He cited a local authority in the UK which has consulted communities to gauge their feelings, and a municipality in Denmark where students have been involved in drawing up restrictions that allow them to return to university.

Turkey has employed social media polls to understand public sentiment, while Germany's government "has consulted philosophers, historians, theologians, and behavioural and social scientists," Kluge said.

The WHO's Europe region, which encompasses 53 countries including Russia, has seen more than 6.2 million cases and nearly 241,000 deaths related to the virus, according to the organisation's official statistics.

47 Vietnam

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On Saturday, 20 Bangladeshi workers, who came back home from Vietnam, were freed from prison.

Eighty-three Bangladeshi workers were deported on August 18 following their imprisonment in Qatar and Vietnam for their involvement in criminal activities.

They were shown arrested in criminal cases as they got involved in many criminal activities while staying in Vietnam and Qatar, said Officer-in-Charge of Turag Police Station Nurul Mottakin.

Two of them returned from Qatar while the rest from Vietnam, said the OC.

A Dhaka court on September 1 sent them to jail on charge of their involvement in criminal offences in foreign countries. They were sent to jail after a 14-day quarantine in Uttara.

On September 21, the High Court issued a rule asking the government to explain why directives should not be given to the authorities concerned to free the 83 Bangladeshi migrant workers.