

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



**1,335**  
New cases in 24hrs



**4,01586**  
Total cases



**5,434**  
Deaths



**3,18,123**  
Recoveries

**GLOBAL UPDATE**



**1,166,931**  
Deaths



**43,957,856**  
Total cases



Members of Islami Andolan marching towards the French embassy near Kakrail yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

## Police foiled march towards French embassy

STAR REPORT

A group of leaders and activists of Islami Andolan staged demonstrations in front of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque yesterday morning, protesting recent comments made by French President Emmanuel Macron.

Later, they brought out a procession that headed towards the French Embassy in Dhaka.

As the procession reached Shantinagar intersection, police obstructed it.

Earlier this month, Macron pledged to fight "Islamist separatism", which he said, was threatening to take control in some Muslim communities around

France. He also said the government would present a bill in December to strengthen a 1905 law that officially separated church and state in France, reports Qatar-based Al Jazeera.

On Friday, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) condemned what it said was France's continued attacks against Muslims by insulting religious symbols.

The secretariat of the Jeddah-based organisation said in a statement it is surprised at the official political rhetoric issued by some French officials that offend French-Islamic relations and fuels feelings of hatred for political party gains.

## Safeguard it

FROM PAGE 1  
troubles in its financial activities relating to the foreign exchange reserve.

The country's forex reserve has seen an upward trend in recent months and the policymakers should take care of the fund properly, he noted.

He also mentioned that the government had earlier taken a cautious stance on utilising the forex reserve to materialise its development projects, and it should maintain that stance.

**ANU MUHAMMAD**  
Professor at Jahangirnagar University

If the central bank allows Orion Group to get a loan from the forex reserve, this will have two dreadful impacts simultaneously, said Anu Muhammad.



"Firstly, an ecological imbalance will occur when the coal-based power plant starts production. Secondly, the existing indiscipline in the financial sector will deepen further."

The coal-based power plant will wreck the environment to a great extent. The forex reserve should not be used for implementing such a project, noted the eminent economist.

**SHAMSUL ALAM**  
Energy adviser to CAB

Orion Group does not have any financial and technical skills to set up a big power plant, said Shamsul.

Some companies like Orion had earlier managed government approvals to set up power plants without taking part in open tenders, which was totally unfair, said the energy adviser to the Consumers Association of Bangladesh.

He questioned why the business entity would set up a power plant by taking loans from the forex reserve whereas the government itself can implement such a project with its funds.

"This will go against public interest," he added.

**BADRUL IMAM**  
Professor at Dhaka University

The Power Cell, a wing of the power, energy and mineral resources ministry, has recently put forward some suggestions, urging the government not to set up any more coal-based power plants, said Badrul.

The government had earlier faced an awkward situation due to its approval to set up power plants indiscriminately, mentioned the professor of geology.

## 20 more die

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In the 24-hour period, 1,523 patients have recovered from Covid-19.

With them, the total number of recoveries went up to 318,123 which is 79.22 percent of all confirmed cases.

Among the 20 deceased, 14 were males and six females. All of them died in hospitals, said the DGHS press

"It will face the same situation once again if any private company is permitted to build coal-based power plants by using the forex reserve."

"We don't need coal-based power plants anymore as the production capacity of the country's power plants is much higher than the existing requirement," he noted.



For instance, the country's electricity demand is now a maximum of 12,000-13,000MW against the production capacity of 20,383MW, he said referring to Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) data.

In 2010, the government planned to meet half of its total electricity requirement by 2041 from coal-based power plants, but it revised the roadmap in 2016 and decided to meet 35 percent of the requirement from such plants.

Last month, the Power Cell suggested that the government produce only 5,500MW electricity from coal-based power plants, Badrul said.

Only two coal-based power plants -- Payra and Barapukuria -- have so far gone into production. Another 14 such plants are now at various stages of construction, which is too many given the size of the country, he pointed out.

Seven of the 16 projects are being bankrolled by private companies, according to the BPDB data.

Once these coal-based power plants start generating electricity, they will cause severe pollution damaging the environment, he noted.

**DR IFTEKHARUZZAMAN**  
Executive director of TIB

The government has recently decided not to set up more coal-based power plant, responding to the local and global calls for moving towards sustainable energy, said Iftekhazzaman.

"No commercial bank should even finance any coal-based power plant project as the government now seeks to encourage renewable energy," said the executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh.

But it is surprising that Bangladesh Bank responded positively to the credit proposal of Orion Group, he said.

"The central bank should have scrapped the proposal at the primary stage," Iftekhazzaman said.

Both the BB and Agrani Bank should consider the Rupali Bank's concern about financing the project, he said.

"There may be a collusion between a section of the central bank officials and the business entity. This might have helped Orion manage the initial positive response from the central bank to bag the fund," he said.

release.

One of the dead was aged between 11 and 20 years, one between 21 and 30, one between 31 and 40, two were between 41 and 50, three between 51 and 60 and the rest 12 were above 60.

Among the total 5,838 deceased, the highest 52 percent were from Dhaka division.

## Clear, yet not seen

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Another camera on the ground floor of the seven-storey market, where the hotel is located, had captured moments of the two being taken away around 12:25pm.

But the first information report (FIR) prepared by the police a day after the incident, on November 7, gives a completely different story, contradicting the clips of both cameras and multiple witness accounts.

According to the FIR filed with Motijheel Police Station, officers arrested Hasan and Soheli from an alley near Fakirapool Fish Market area around 4:15pm. The duo was caught while fleeing the spot with Tk 25 lakh worth of fake notes, it mentioned.

Hasan and Soheli, who were arrested, and subsequent case had been cooked up by the DB.

"We have been framed in a false case as I refused to give Tk 3 lakh that the police officers at the DB office on Minto Road had demanded for our release," he told The Daily Star recently.

Out on bail in April 2017, Hasan also said he was in police remand for two days before a court sent him to jail. He was behind bars for five months and 17 days.

"It was just the beginning of my long sufferings," said Hasan, who has explored multiple avenues of justice these last four years, to little success.

**MULTIPLE PROBES, NO ACTION**  
Hasan and his brother Hossain Majumdar filed 10 complaints -- six with the Police Headquarters, two with Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), one with the Prime Minister's Office, and one with the home ministry -- at various times over the last four years.

Five probe committees -- three by Police Headquarters and two by DMP -- were formed to investigate the allegations against nine DB men of Motijheel Zonal Team who conducted the controversial drive.

They are Sub-Inspector Dewan Uzzal Hossain, Inspector Tapan Kumar Dhali, Assistant Sub-inspector Ziaur Rahman, ASI Soheli Mahmud, ASI Abul Bashar, ASI Mominul Haque, ASI Nazmul Haque Prodhan, and constables Nayan Kumar and Golam Sarwar.

The leader of the DB team was Jewel Rana, the then assistant commissioner of DB (East), now promoted to additional deputy commissioner.

However, till date there is no information available about what these multiple probe committees have found.

Additional SP Sharif, who headed one of the two probe committees formed by DMP, said he questioned both sides and submitted the report.

"It's a confidential matter. I cannot comment on this; I am not authorised to do so," he told The Daily Star recently.

DMP Cantonment's Additional Deputy Commissioner Shabed Miah was given the task of re-investigating the same allegation in 2017.

He didn't pick up this correspondent's repeated phone calls or respond to text messages.

DB ADC Qazi Shafiqul Islam, who was probing the allegations filed with the DMP, also refused to make any comment.

In 2018, the DMP formed a four-member inquiry committee headed by

the then DB chief Devdas Bhattacharya. The fate of the probe remains unknown as Devdas has since been transferred from DMP.

ASP Omar Faruk, who was entrusted with one of the three probe committees of Police Headquarters, said he stopped the investigation after Hasan's brother withdrew his complaint.

Talking to The Daily Star, ASP Omar said he was given charge of the investigation at a stage when the complainant and the accused had reached a way to mutually "settle" the matter.

"If the complainant himself withdrew the complaint, how can I probe further?"

Hasan, however, said the brothers withdrew the complaint following verbal assurance from the accused DB officials that his name would be excluded from the final report and the charge sheet.

"But I felt betrayed when I heard that the charge sheet named me," said Hasan.

Even worse for Hasan was that SI Dewan, one of the DB officials who conducted the controversial drive, acted as the investigating officer of the case and submitted the charge sheet to the court, accusing both Hasan and Soheli.

**REAL WITNESSES OVERLOOKED?**

SI Dewan submitted the charge sheet to the trial court on September 19, 2017. He named a total of 13 people as witnesses -- nine officers who conducted the drive and four locals of Motijheel area.

Md Mintu, who claimed to be a fish trader in Fakirapool Fish Market, said, "I had told the police and the court what I had seen that day. I saw two men fleeing and the police caught them with a bag."

Another witness named in the charge sheet, Md Raju, could not be reached as his phone number was found switched off. Mintu claimed both he and Raju signed the seizure list.

Hasan said these accounts have been made up by the police.

The probe committees formed by police called 23 shop owners and employees of the market in Paltan, who witnessed the incident that day, at various times during the investigations.

Anwar Hossain of AR Metallic is one of them.

Talking to this correspondent, he said, "We saw a group of DB men come and talk to the hotel staff. By that time, they had handcuffed Hasan bhai."

"They then instructed a hotel employee to turn off the CCTV. We asked them why they handcuffed the hotel staff and what their fault was. They rebuked us and told us to go down."

Anwar added that Hasan and Soheli were empty-handed, not carrying anything, and that he had told all this to a police probe body.

Another witness, Md Masum of Teleplus, echoed the same.

**POLICE HUSH-HUSH ABOUT CCTV FOOTAGE**

The charge sheet submitted by the IO did not mention anything about the CCTV footage.

Asked about it, SI Dewan said he could not comment as the matter is under trial. "I checked everything. I can't give any further comment now."

## Target forex reserve

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"The forex reserve is considered as the national security of any country. The fund of the reserve is usually used when a nation faces fund crisis to settle international trade transactions," Anu Muhammad, also an ardent natural resources conservationist, pointed out.

Contacted, Md Ferdous Jaman, company secretary of Orion Group, said, "The cost of the central bank's loan will be lower than the funds offered by local and foreign banks for setting up the power plant."

Asked why the Group is not interested in taking foreign loans for the project, he said the interest rate of such loans is now low because of the ongoing economic slowdown but the rate may go up once the global economy rebounds.

Besides, a good amount of commission has to be paid against the guarantee of foreign loans, mentioned the company official.

"If fund cannot be managed from the forex reserve, we will take money under the existing syndication loan process," Ferdous added.

An uneasy situation arose ever since Orion applied for the loan from the forex reserve in July through Rupali Bank, with decision-makers at the state-owned bank and the central bank soon splitting into two groups -- one backing and the other opposing. But, it was all a very hush-hush affair amid strong lobbying.

Asian countries, except for a few, don't use their forex reserves for giving loans or making investments at home or abroad for a long term. Only a handful of rich Asian countries, including China, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have created sovereign wealth funds to manage their excess foreign exchange reserves by investing them in productive sectors.

**AN UNCOMFORTABLE PROPOSAL ON MANY COUNTS**

Orion has sought to be the first private entity for a loan from the forex reserve, but it would not be the last: a host of shady businesses are to follow suit. If sanctioned, it would go against the Bangladesh Bank Order 1972 for long-term lending. If Orion defaults on loan repayment, Rupali would plunge into an existential crisis with the financial responsibility for repayment.

If the rule for forex reserve is stretched, the government would have

The plaintiff of the case, Inspector Tapan, now posted with the Police Bureau of Investigation in Faridpur, declined to make any comment about the CCTV footage and referred this correspondent to the then DB team leader of the drive.

Contacted, Jewel Rana, now ADC of DB's Ramna Division, told The Daily Star on Saturday that he preferred not to comment as the case is under trial.

He denied the allegations of the DB team demanding money for the release of the two accused, adding that he was also unaware of any "compromise" reached between the accused and his DB men.

"As far as I know, the probe body didn't find the allegations against the DB men to be true. When the accused saw that their false pleas were not granted anywhere, they wanted to make us the victim," he claimed.

**HASAN'S FIGHT CONTINUES**  
Hasan said his family has already spent Tk 6 lakh by selling off land, to meet legal expenses.

"After my arrest, my brother almost stopped his studies as the family fell into financial hardship at the time," he said.

Hasan said the CCTV footage is evidence that can prove his innocence and that he is a victim of police falsehood.

Advocate Abdus Salam Khan, Hasan's lawyer, said they will seek the court's attention and also submit the CCTV footage when it is the defence's turn to present their arguments and witnesses.

The next hearing of the case is set to take place today.

"I have been seeking justice for the last four years and filed several complaints against the policemen in question everywhere possible. However, those officers remain unpunished," said Hasan.

"How long should I bear the brunt of a false case?"

Sohel Rana, the chef who was picked up with Hasan, left his job at Hotel Bondhu and now lives in Chandpur.

Remembering the horror, he said, "At one point, DB officials proposed that I give a false statement against Hasan bhai in exchange for Tk 5 lakh and a job. But I refused to do so."

Being the lone breadwinner of the family, he said it's been a tough journey for him to meet the expenses of his family over the last four years as his mother had to sell their last piece of land.

While talking to this correspondent over the phone yesterday, he was on his way from Chandpur to Dhaka to attend today's hearing.

Noted rights defender Nur Khan Liton said such an incident is not isolated -- charge sheet manipulation, arranging fake witnesses, and changing the place of occurrence are "nothing new".

"Unfortunately, when a victim seeks remedy from the higher authorities, it seems they don't give importance to the allegations," he said.

"Most of the time, the probe report of such incidents are not made public," he observed, calling into question the role of Police Headquarters in the matter.

## Building on

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In recent years, sources said Pillu refused to obey some of Haji Salim's decisions. Haji then brought his younger son Erfan to contest against Pillu as an independent candidate in the last councillor election.

The Daily Star asked Pillu about the rivalry, but he refused to comment.

Law enforcement sources said Erfan installed a personal networking system and close-circuit television (CCTV) cameras to monitor his business activities and empire.

A couple of years ago, he allegedly smuggled walkie-talkie handsets from abroad and installed a tower on the rooftop of the 16-storey Madina Ashik Tower in Chawkbazar.

With these walkie-talkie handsets, he was capable of maintaining a communication network throughout a 10-kilometer area. As the devices operated on a special frequency system, no one was able to monitor the communication.

A Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) official, who was present during the drive on Monday to arrest Erfan, said they recovered around 38 walkie-talkie handsets but they believe there are more, which are suspected to be used by Erfan's associates.

"We have not even gotten any trace of Erfan's other bodyguards," the official told The Daily Star yesterday.

Apart from the handsets, Erfan had a torture cell on the rooftop of Ashik Tower, where he used to take those who did not obey his directions or refused to pay him.

Speaking to this correspondent, Jahid Hossain, a businessman in Old Dhaka, said he had seven shops in Bashir Market in Chawkbazar.

"Just a day before Eid, Erfan's people called me to the rooftop and took me inside a room on the tower and forcibly made me sign over my shops, worth around Tk 2 crore, for a pittance," he alleged.

Locals claimed Erfan used to play badminton on the rooftop and set off fireworks. They also alleged that whenever Erfan saw any abandoned buildings in the area, he used to board them up and lay claim to them.

Investigators claimed that when searching Erfan's residence, they found a list of people, including government officials, who allegedly used to help him grab land and property.

"In exchange for help in illegal activities, Erfan used to send them gifts. We are now analysing the claim," added a Rab high-up involved with the investigation.

Meanwhile, two separate cases were filed against Erfan and his bodyguard Zahidul with Chawkbazar Police Station on charges of carrying illegal firearms and possessing narcotics, said Lt Col Ashique Billah, director of Rab's legal and media wing.

Erfan and Zahidul were earlier handed over to Keraniganj Central Jail as Erfan was already sentenced to one year in prison by a Rab mobile court for possessing narcotics and six more months for illegally using walkie-talkies.

Zahidul was also handed a six-month prison sentence for using walkie-talkies. Meanwhile, Detective Branch (DB) of police arrested AB Siddique Dipu, personal assistant to Erfan, from his Tangail home in a case filed over the assault of a Navy official, said HM Azimul Haque, deputy commissioner of Ramna division DB.

Dipu was produced before a Dhaka court with a seven-day remand plea. Erfan and Zahid were also shown arrested in the navy officer assault case with a petition for seven-day remands for each.

The court later granted a three-day remand for Dipu. The hearing on the remand pleas against Erfan and Zahid will take place today.

Earlier, Lt Wasif Ahmad of Bangladesh Navy filed the case against Erfan and four others for assaulting him in the capital.

Meanwhile, the Local Government Division (LGD) suspended Erfan from his councillor's post.

The order, signed by LGD Deputy Secretary ANM Foyzul Haque, says since there is a criminal case filed against Erfan and he has been sentenced to one year in prison, he is suspended according to the Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009.

Earlier, the DSCC in a letter informed the LGD about Erfan's imprisonment, referring to media reports.

## UN decries

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excluded from citizenship," Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in a briefing in Geneva.

Additionally, there has been significant disenfranchisement as the elections will not take place in 56 townships, including in Rakhine State. The Election Commission did not provide public justification for its decision, she said.

Also, an internet shutdown effectively remains in place in eight townships in Rakhine and Chin states, severely limiting the ability of residents to avail their right to receive and impart information, including on Covid-19 and the elections.

Blanket internet shutdowns may be counterproductive and contravene international law. Again, the measure disproportionately affects minority groups, including the ethnic Rakhine, Rohingya, Kaman, Mro, Daingnet, Khamis and Chin communities, Ravina Shamdasani said.

"While the restrictions on freedom of expression continue to mount, we deplore the unrelenting proliferation of hateful speech against Muslims on Facebook," she said, calling on Myanmar to take action to denounce such hateful language publicly and to promote tolerance, non-discrimination and pluralism in speech by public officials and electoral candidates.

The UN said it is troubled by the intolerance of criticism against the government or the military.

Over the last two months, at least 34 student activists faced legal measures after they demanded an end to the conflicts in Rakhine and Chin states and reinstatement of 4G mobile internet services in those areas.