

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...

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.

Safeguard it

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.



ANU MUHAMMAD

Professor at Jahangirnagar University

"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.

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.



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 CAB.

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.

SHAMSUL ALAM

Energy adviser to CAB

DR IFTEKHARUZZAMAN

Executive director of TIB



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.

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 Iftekharuzzaman.

BADRUL IMAM

Professor at Dhaka University

"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.

20 more die

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

Clear, yet not seen

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"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.

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.

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.

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.

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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 Shahed Miahi was given the task of re-investigating the same allegation in 2017.

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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 witness.

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?"

Soheli 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.

Target forex reserve

to act as guarantor of the unusual loan. It would be for a coal-fired plant project, from which the government is moving away. And then, Orion Group has a controversial past in using the funds of Orion Bank in 2007. (www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-16813)

Yet, on August 13, the Rupali board gave a go-ahead to its management to act as a "dealer" or "agent" bank of Orion, with full financial responsibility for the loan from the central bank reserve.

A string of scams, habitual loan defaults and irregularities over the years brought the banking sector to its knees, forcing the central bank to appoint its observers in 10 banks, six of which are public. Eight state-run banks accounted for 49.34 percent of the outstanding defaulted loans, amounting to Tk 96,116.65 crore as of June this year.

Acting as an observer for Rupali, Md Serajul Islam, an executive director of the central bank, strongly opposed the move. But his objection held no ground at the board meeting on August 13. It was brushed aside along with some directors' reluctance to take full responsibility for the loan, The Daily Star learnt talking to five bank officials directly involved in the matter.

Rupali went on to send a letter to the central bank six days later. Interestingly, the regulator of the banking sector saw no evil in the proposal. Rather, it responded positively to Rupali's proposal, asking, in a letter on August 31, for further details from the lender.

But then followed a dramatic turn of events. On September 30, the Rupali board came back to its senses at a board meeting and went back on its decision, concluding that it would take no financial responsibility for Orion loan.

Baffled, Orion rushed to Agrani Bank with the same credit application on October 6, requesting the state-run lender to manage its fund from the forex reserve.

Agrani had earlier struck a deal with Orion to be its lead arranger for a syndication loan, a financing in which a group of lenders work together to raise funds for a single borrower. Under the arrangement, Agrani has already approved Tk 120 crore loan to Orion, and Janata Bank Tk 574 crore and Premier Bank Limited Tk 200 crore.

But Orion is no longer interested in syndication loan, ever since it has set its eyes on the forex reserve. And, why

should it be? A possible interest rate of 4 percent with a grace period of three years is no match for what is on offer from local banks at 9 percent. On top of it, the government is always there with a bail-out measure in case it defaults on repayment.

"our foreign currency reserve is surplus, hence, with the guidance of our Honorable Prime Minister, govt has taken decision to invest foreign currency for mega projects like big power plants.. This will be supportive for saving foreign currency in the long run," read the application, undersigned by Orion Group Chairman Mohammad Obaidul Karim, to Agrani.

In recent months, the forex reserve has reached a new high on the back of remittance, dwindling import payments and budgetary support and loans from the Asian Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Islamic Development Bank.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal told The Daily Star on October 7 that the government is exploring ways to invest in selected government projects with the forex reserve.

Top BB officials said that even if the government takes funds from the forex reserve, it will have to provide guarantee.

To win over Agrani, Orion argued in the letter that the lender will enjoy a hefty amount of commission by way of using the central bank's fund for implementing the project. A service charge of minimum 1.5-2 percent along with commissions and charges from opening of letters of credit of more than \$800 would add to its gains. Besides, the project is to be mortgaged to the bank.

Orion's first meeting with Agrani on October 19 is learnt to have gone well, and the board will decide on it soon.

When approached, Mohammad Shams-Ul Islam, managing director of Agrani Bank, said that no decision has been made yet.

Steps will be taken after discussions with the bank's board, the central bank and the member banks of the syndication loan, he said.

"We will follow the related policy guidelines."

The total outstanding loans of Orion Group stood at Tk 6,036 crore in the banking sector as of November 2018, according to a report of the Credit Information Bureau of the central bank.

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 Medina 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

FROM PAGE 1

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.