

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,531
New cases in 24hrs



4,30,496
Total cases



6,173
Deaths



3,47,849
Recoveries



1,312,446
Deaths



53,937,111
Total cases

Screening revamped at HSIA

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inspectors are working at the airport. There used to be four doctors, 14 nurses and 17 sanitary inspectors earlier.

The move came after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently instructed the authorities concerned to ramp up screening at the country's ports and quarantine facilities as part of preparedness in case a second Covid-19 wave hits the country.

At present, on an average 4,000 passengers land at the airport daily. After going through four infrared thermal scanners, all the inbound passengers are required to produce a Covid-19 negative medical certificate at the entry point.

The passengers having the certificates are then directed to undergo home quarantine for two weeks. Those who fail to provide the certificates are sent to the institutional quarantine in Dhaka.

According to DGHS officials, the government arranged institutional quarantines in the capital's Ashkona Hajj Camp with around 400 accommodations and in Diabari where around 2,000 people can be accommodated.

Experts appreciate the government for ramping up the screening, but said there are a lot more to do. As Covid-19 will remain as a threat until a safe and effective vaccine is available, the government must take steps in accordance with the experience gathered, they said.

On January 21, the DGHS started screening activities by setting up a health desk for the passengers coming from China -- where the novel coronavirus is thought to have emerged in December last year.

"Even if the country fully prevents the spread of the deadly virus, screening at the entry points should remain in place to sort out any incoming case," Dr Mushtaq Hussain, consultant of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told The Daily Star.

Recently, China has suspended visas from France, Italy, India, Bangladesh, Russia, Ukraine, Belgium and a numbers of other countries temporarily to prevent incoming cases of Covid-19.

According to the DGHS, nearly 1,000 people are entering the country via 25 land ports and two sea ports in the country. On an average, nearly 800 people are being screened at these entry points.

Health staffers at the country's

three international airports said they find it hard to tackle when all or many of the passengers of a flight arrive with no Covid-19 certificate.

"We often find passengers of a flight -- especially from the Middle East -- arrive without any health clearance. Many of them create ruckus when they somehow realise that we would send them to institutional quarantine," Dr Shahriar Sajjat, a health official at the HSIA, told The Daily Star.

On November 3, the DGHS has placed a proposal to the health ministry on deploying members of law enforcement agencies to help the health staffers at the airport. Besides, it plans to setting up Covid-19 sample collection booths at three quarantine centres in Dhaka, according to a health ministry source.

AHM Touhidul Ahsan, director of HSIA, told this paper, "Passengers, mainly from the United Kingdom and the Middle Eastern countries, come without Covid-19 certificates. We send them to the institutional quarantine camps directly."

Top officials of DGHS and officials of International Organisation for Migration (IOM) are likely to hold a meeting in this regard today with the airport officials following a visit to the HSIA, sources said.

SITUATION IN OTHER AIRPORTS

There are two infrared thermal scanners and a few health screening desks at the country's two other international airports -- Shah Amanat International Airport in Chattogram and Osmani International Airport in Sylhet.

Civil Surgeon Dr Fazle Rabby of Chattogram said a Covid-19 health certificate is mandatory for all international incoming and outgoing passengers using air and sea ports in the district.

Passengers without the certificates are sent to a government-arranged quarantine centre. As of yesterday, there were 51 such passengers in quarantine there, he told our correspondent in Chattogram.

On the other hand, incoming passengers coming through the Sylhet airport do not require any health certificate to produce. All the passengers are asked to quarantine themselves at home, according to airport officials.

In Benapole land port, incoming passengers are not asked to show any health certificates. They only go through the thermal scanner for temperature check, reports our correspondent there.

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Dr Firdausi Qadri, head of the Mucosal Immunology and Vaccinology unit at ICDDR,B, had won the L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Award (Asia-Pacific region) this year. Her research focuses on infectious diseases affecting children in developing countries.

However, authors opined that just looking at the number of citations does not truly measure the impact of the researcher, since some fields are more vibrant with research than others.

For example, there is less research done in field of library science, they said. Their database, they argue, "allows the inclusion of more comprehensive samples of top-cited scientists for fields that have low citation densities and therefore would be less likely to be found in the top 100,000 when all scientific fields are examined together."

To this end, they assigned scientists ranks based on their impacts within the subfields of their disciplines.

Judging by rank, Dr AA Mamun, professor of the Physics department at Jahangirnagar University tops the list of Bangladesh-based researchers -- ranked at 14,338.

To compare, the rank number 1 in the database is held by Swiss scientist Michael Grätzel, pioneer in photonics from Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne -- potentially making him the most impactful scientist in the world according to the database. The second position is held by American physician Walter Willett from Harvard University.

Teen killed by rival gang

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Police and Apu's friends said the fights began over playing cricket on the field that morning. Some teens from one of the gangs suddenly started beating up one boy -- Shamim. Apu and some other boys then went to the playground around 6:00pm to calm the situation and then the attack was launched.

Shamim, 17, and Shihab, 16, were also injured in the incident.

Apu's mother Parul Begum filed a murder case naming Sanju and Ibrahim along with 10-12 unnamed people with Kamrangirchar Police Station. Police took two teenagers, who were not accused, in custody for interrogation.

Hailing from Brahmanbaria, Apu was the second among his three siblings. Shock took hold of his family when they learned about their son's tragic demise at the DMCH.

"Bury me with my son's body or else bring him back... How will I live now? Give me an answer," Parul cried out.

Mostafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kamrangirchar Police Station, said they were trying to arrest the killers.

A police officer, preferring anonymity, said the killing took place over establishing turf control in the area by teenage gangs.

"The gang led by Apu had been in conflict with on led by another teenager named Saddam for a while now. Ibrahim and Sanju are members of Saddam's gang," he said.

Locals and police said several teenage gangs were active in the area.

On July 15, another 17-year-old boy named Sajib was brutally killed by a rival teenage gang in Rasulpur of the same area.

According to media reports, the recent spike in teen-gang violence has apparently become a major concern for law enforcement agencies as more than a dozen teenagers have been killed over the last four months by the juvenile offenders across the country.



BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir addressing a rally in front of Jatiya Press Club yesterday protesting the arrest of party activists and demanding cancellation of Dhaka-18 and Sirajganj-1 by-polls results. The BNP alleges that the polls were rigged.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Too dangerous to be ignored

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member of a local gang, allegedly backed by two sons of a ruling party leader.

On October 9, a teenager named Nayeem was stabbed to death during a clash between two gangs in Fatullah, Narayanganj.

Earlier on April 1 in the same area, 30-year-old Sharif Hossain was hacked to death for protesting gang activities.

On August 10, two boys died after they jumped into the Shitalakhya in Bandar area of the district, apparently that this group was also patronised by the two brothers.

Law enforcers say there are over 40 teen gangs with about 15-20 members in each.

They operate in areas including Uttara, Turag, Khilgaon, Dakshin Khan, Tongi, Sutrapur, Demra, Sabujbagh, Khilkhet, Kotwali, Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Dhanmondi, Agargaoan and Hatirheel, according to law enforcers.

The notorious Nayan Bond's 007 group in Barguna, which killed Rifat Sharif in broad daylight last year, is a glaring example of the youth gang culture, criminologists say. The gang was reportedly backed by the son of a top local Awami League leader.

A Barguna court sentenced 11 juveniles to prison for the murder, observing that juvenile crimes were on the rise across the country and godfathers were using children. Unless the accused are awarded the highest punishment, other teen gangs will get encouragement, the court said.

The gang-rape in Noakhali's Begumganj that shocked the nation recently was committed by a youth gang named Delwar Bahini. In Begumganj alone, at least two dozen such gangs operate with blessings from some ruling party leaders, according to reports.

RULING PARTY LEADERS PATRONISE

On August 28, college student Md Sohag was killed in Uttara Khan area in Dhaka. It was learnt that he had protested when they assaulted a rickshaw-puller.

According to police and locals, the

gang is led by Uttara East Chhatra League leaders Sakibul Islam Sunny, cultural affairs secretary of the unit, and his elder brother Arfin Shakil, vice-president of the unit.

Sunny is one of the accused in Sohag murder case.

The siblings were suspended recently from the posts.

Few months ago, Tiktok and Likee celebrity Yasin Arafat alias Opu Bhai got arrested after alleged his followers stabbed and beat up three local youths in Uttara. Locals alleged that this group was also patronised by the two brothers.

They alleged the gang patronised by Shakil and Sunny has been creating terror and involved in various criminal activities in Uttara and Abdullahpur areas for the last several years. At least six cases in Dakshin Khan and Uttara East police stations have been filed against the two brothers since 2016 on charges of murder, attempted murder and possession of narcotics.

Such gangs are also active in Savar, Ashulia, and Narayanganj.

In Ashulia, local Jubo League convener Abul Hossain Apon had been patronising one such gang for years in order to establish his supremacy in the area. Abul and three of his accomplices were arrested in late September for allegedly kidnapping a teenager and torturing him to death for ransom.

In Sylhet, 18-year-old Rakibul Hossain Niju of Dariapara area was arrested on October 3 in a case filed for raping a 14-year-old girl.

Rakibul, along with five others, was arrested for assaulting three expatriates on August 7. When they were released on bail on January 7, a city councillor greeted them with a garland. The gang is allegedly sheltered by a local political leader.

In Chattogram, hundreds of such teenage gangs are active in different areas, police said.

At least 12 leaders of the ruling party are sheltering the teens and youths, according to police and local sources.

Police sources said Chawkbazar, Kotwali, Panchliash, Khulshi, Chandgaon and Bakalia areas are the

safe havens for teenage gangs.

CMP Commissioner Saleh Ahmed Tanvir said police are trying to stop the gangs.

Rajshahi Metropolitan Police has recently launched a crackdown on teen gangs, detaining nearly 400 members. Among them, at least 300 were later released under their parents' custody.

IS POLICE ACTION ENOUGH?

AIG (media) Md Sobel Rana at the Police Headquarters said, "We are creating awareness among stakeholders across the country to curb this type of crimes."

Criminologists say teens and youths are engaging in gang culture for two reasons: to dominate others and to get connected to power.

"Those who do power politics, abuse the adolescents to dominate a community or an area by creating fear," said Dr Omar Faruk, professor of Criminology and Police Science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University.

The professor emphasised more on establishing social control than the reactive actions from law enforcers.

He said teenage gang culture develops due to the lack of necessary guidance from the family, neighbours, educational institutions, and the society.

"The gang culture will only flourish if our law-enforcement agencies want to stop it by legal actions. It should rather be dealt with a broader perspective, encompassing the legal and social aspects of the issue," he added.

Contacted, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said they didn't know whether the teenage gangs were being sheltered by any political groups.

"Sometimes we observe that they [teenagers] are following the commands of some identified criminals who are on the run. This has come to our notice."

"They [teenage gangs] create groups among themselves. There has been a rise in criminal activities among them. You [journalists] have a responsibility to write against these teenage gangs..." said the minister.

They lose hope

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Families of road accident victims in the country hardly get justice. Legal procedures end only in a handful of cases and that too after massive protests, said road safety campaigners.

Besides, getting compensation for road crashes is also a far cry. The new law -- Road Transport Act-2018 -- stipulates setting up a new system to deal with compensation-related issues after a road accident.

As per the act, there would be a trustee board and a fund for giving compensation regarding road crashes. But, the rules of law -- which is required to form the board and to run the fund -- was not formulated in the last two years.

Against this backdrop World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims is being observed today.

The day, initiated by the British charity RoadPeace in 1993 and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005, is being observed on the third Sunday in November every year as the appropriate acknowledgment of victims of road crashes and their families.

There is, however, no official programme to mark the day in Bangladesh.

The objectives of the day this year, among others, are to provide a platform for road accident victims and their families to "draw attention to the generally trivial legal response to culpable road deaths and injuries and advocate for better support for road traffic victims and victim families."

Supreme Court lawyer Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua, who is also vice-chairman of Road Safety Foundation, said road traffic victims or their family members demand mainly two things -- justice and compensation.

"But it is very difficult to get these in our country due to many reasons," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Transport associations are very powerful and road crashes victims, in most instances, do not dare to file cases. If a case is filed, he or she has to wait for a long time to see the end of the lengthy legal process, he said.

About compensations, he said there was a provision in Motor Vehicles Ordinance-1983, now defunct, under which a victim or their family members could have filed case for compensation. But very few people, including lawyers, were aware about it.

He said the provisions under the new law for compensation looks good, but feared that the fund collection mostly with the contribution from transport associations would promote extortion.

"These associations will give the money actually taking from people and I think this system will legalise extortion," he alleged.

Ekram Ahmed, convener of Families United Against Road Accident (FUARA), said road accident victims and their family members do not get justice mainly due to weakness in police investigation and poor evidence.

He said many people do not file case after accident thinking that it would take long time and has to spend huge money to complete the legal procedure. Lengthy procedures caused "justice delayed, justice denied", he added.

Ekram, a former chairman of Bangladesh Public Service Commission, who lost his son in a road crash in November 2009, said in some cases related to road crashes, court fines the accused.

There should have a provision so that the victim or their family members can get the fine, he added.

At least 37,170 people were killed and 82,758 injured in 26,902 road accidents in the last five years since 2015, according to Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity.

Ahmad Shafi

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the conference attended by six members of Hefajat central body and Shafi's grandson Maolana Kaisar.

Moin Uddin claimed that Shafi's son Anas Madani was also supposed to attend the press conference but failed as he was compelled to remain absconded due to life threats.

In his written statement, Moin Uddin also mentioned that Jamaat-Shibir men attacked Hathazari Madrasa in 1985 with an intention of killing Shafi and taking control of the madrasa.

There was anger among Jamaat-Shibir men against Shafi as the later used to speak and write books against anti-liberation forces, he added.

The plot to kill Shafi was being made ever since he escaped the trap of BNP-Jamaat in the capital's Shapla Chatter on May 5, 2013, he claimed.

He also claimed that miscreants snapped the oxygen supply of Shafi several times to deteriorate his condition that led him to go into coma.

Later, several blockades were made on the way to hospital to delay his treatment, he added.

Meanwhile, another faction of Hefajat-e Islam claimed that Shafi was killed.

Attending a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club, Hefajat Joint Secretary General Mufti Foyzullah claimed that an identified quarter killed Shafi to materialise their vested agenda.

Cases riddled with questions

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to talk to SI Sujan, the investigation officer of the case.

Sujan said they were investigating whether Ali was involved in the arson attack.

Another shopkeeper Moin Uddin, the accused No-2 in the case, was also picked up from Shegunbagicha kitchen market at that time.

"Police might have included Ali's name in the case from the list of local BNP leaders without verifying who were behind the arson attack," said a trader on condition of anonymity.

Over a dozen cases were filed in the last couple of days after about 12 buses were torched and several crude bombs were exploded in the city on Thursday, the day of polling in the by-polls to Dhaka-18 parliamentary seat.

Police in the cases mentioned that BNP men were attempting to foil the election.

The charges brought against several hundred accused, mostly BNP men, includes attempted murder by torching buses, sabotage attempt, exploding bombs and possessing explosives.

Speaking to this newspaper, many leaders and activists of the BNP and its front organisations alleged that police named their men in the cases

to harass them.

This correspondent visited Bangshal, Shahbagh, Chawkbazar, Sutrapur, Kotwali and some other areas of the capital after the filing of the cases, but hardly found BNP leaders and activists, including those not accused, in their houses as there were many "unnamed accused" in the arson cases, locals and relatives of the BNP men said.

Jahanara Begum, a 60-year-old cancer patient, said his son Rolex Parvez Happy was supposed to take her to a private hospital for treatment, but he went into hiding as Bangshal police accused him in an arson case.

Rolex claimed that he went to a Dhaka court on Thursday, the day when the arson attack took place in Naya Bazar area, to appear before it in a case filed on September 19, 2018, but police accused him.

"Whenever any incident happens in my area, police include my name in a case," said Rolex, an accused in 35 cases, over the phone.

Contacted, SI Dulal Chandra Kunda, who filed the case, said the bus was torched from a procession and that was why the number of accused was big.

But at least 20 residents of Naya Bazar told this correspondent that no

procession was brought out in their area on that day.

MORE CASES FILED

More cases have been filed against BNP men over torching buses and exploding crude bombs in the capital on Thursday.

Two cases were lodged with Uttara East Police Station on Friday -- one over the arson attack on a bus in Azampur area, and another over exploding crude bombs in front of a polling centre, police said. Police named 19 and 28 people in the cases respectively as accused. Nine people were arrested in the cases.

BNP's SM Jahangir, who was defeated by the Awami League candidate in the by-polls, was named as the mastermind of one incident, police said.

Jahangir, along with 27 others, was accused in another case filed with Khilkhet police station over torching a bus.

More than 100 people were accused in another case filed with Khilkhet police station over setting a bus on fire.

Earlier, at least 10 cases were filed with seven police stations in the capital over Thursday's arson attacks. Nearly 500 people were accused in those cases.