

BANGLADESH UPDATE
2,275 New cases in 24hrs 4,43,434 Total cases 6,322 Deaths 3,58,431 Recoveries GLOBAL UPDATE 1,372,662 Deaths 57,662,264 Total cases

'SALARY DISCRIMINATION' Govt health workers to go on indefinite strike from Nov 26

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All health inspectors, assistant health inspectors and health assistants will start work abstention for an indefinite period from November 26, demanding a solution to "salary discrimination".

As a result, the routine vaccination programmes and the measles-rubella campaign slated for December 5 have now become uncertain.

Sheikh Rabiul Alam Khokon, convener of Bangladesh Health Assistant Association (BHAA) announced their abstention programme yesterday at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka.

Their demands include promotion of all health inspectors, assistant health inspectors and health assistants from grade 16 to grades 11, 12 and 13.

Sheikh Rabiul Alam said, "We are so discriminated against that none of us is awarded promotion even after 20 years in government service. Only a few get promotion five to six months before retirement. We want the government to stop this discrimination."

Health inspectors, assistant health inspectors and health assistants are staffers under the Directorate General of Health Services who work for the vaccination programmes of the government, a BHAA press release said.

In the 1970s, health assistants were

assigned for small pox and malaria vaccination programmes and those diseases were eliminated in the country, it added.

Later, on April 7, 1979, these health staffers were assigned under the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI), under which vaccinations of 10 types of diseases are being conducted in 1.2 lakh centres across the country, the press release said.

The government is also preparing for the Covid-19 vaccination through the EPI programme, according to the DGHS.

During the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, these health workers were assigned for Covid-19 control activities.

So far, more than 800 health inspectors, assistant health inspectors and health assistants have gotten infected with novel coronavirus, claimed BHAA.

They said they were assured at different times that their demands would be met by government high-ups including Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Health Minister Zahid Maleque, former health secretary Ashadul Islam and former director general of DGHS Prof Dr Abul Kalam Azad.

On February 20 this year, they had postponed a previous work abstention upon assurances that their demands would be met, BHAA said.



This shabby passenger shed in the capital's Basabo area is on the verge of collapse. The structure poses risk to pedestrians as part of its damaged roof is obstructing their movement. Locals said the shed was set up about a year ago, but no repair work was carried out since then.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Mostly govt officials bought

FROM PAGE 1

are not so financially solvent. So, how could they buy houses in Canada? We don't know how it is possible. Maybe their credit rating is high. You [journalists] know that handsome amounts of loans can be arranged against high credit rating in North American countries. They may have bought houses this way. Besides, houses may be purchased by depositing only down payments. I don't know the details. That is why, it is not a big issue. We are gathering more information on it.

DS: We understand that this information came from unofficial channels, but we want to know whether the decision to gather information was a policy decision of the government?

AM: We just want to know what the situation is. We often see news reports over money laundering. But I cannot say anything about that. It can also be possible that they may have earned money abroad and purchased the houses using that money. I don't know.

DS: Have you gathered information on behalf of the foreign ministry?

AM: We just want to investigate what is happening. But collection of information is a difficult task. Information cannot be gathered easily.

DS: Is it also difficult if attempts are made officially?

AM: Yes, The Canadian government does not disclose information. You have to go case by case. If you want to get information about a particular house, you will have to visit websites to find out about it. The Canadian government will not give any information.

DS: Is it difficult, too, if the Bangladesh government wants the information officially from the Canadian government?

AM: It is very difficult. If any American citizen deposits money to any bank in Bangladesh, this information can be disclosed because the Bangladesh government has signed an agreement on it. As per the agreement, if any American citizen invests or deposits money in Bangladesh, then Bangladesh Bank

will inform the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS). As per US rules, the citizen will have to pay tax, if s/he deposits an amount over \$10,000 to Bangladesh Bank. That is why they get information about their citizens easily. Bangladesh has signed this agreement. In that case, the Bangladesh government is transparent. But the situation is different in case of North American countries. These are less opportunity to get information if any Bangladeshi citizen deposits money there.

DS: Is it not a disparity? The Bangladesh government is sharing information, while the American or Canadian government is not.

AM: Their governments cannot disclose the information even if we want it, because North American federal governments don't deal with these issues.

DS: Does that mean that you [the government] are trying to understand the situation for the first time?

AM: Yes, we are trying to know and understand the situation. It is now at a very initial stage. We are just trying to understand.

DS: Do you think that your initiative will give a message to those -- who have already bought houses and those who are planning to buy -- that these will not remain hidden anymore?

AM: Definitely, a message will be sent. Since you (journalists) are writing about it, they will be more cautious.

DS: Bangladeshis, who are living in Canada, are now mobilising. Do you (government) have any communication with them?

AM: Yes, we have communication with those who are mobilising in Canada to bring the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman back to Bangladesh.

DS: We want to know about Bangladeshis in Canada who have started activities against those who have laundered money from Bangladesh to Canada. We want to know whether you have any communication with them.

AM: No, we don't have any involvement or communication with them.

PM for global action

FROM PAGE 1

virtually from the Gono Bhaban as a co-chair.

She said there is no doubt that antimicrobial resistance has become a global public health challenge both for humans and animals endangering food production and leading all towards catastrophic results.

"We're running out of available antibiotics and soon could face another global emergency, far worse than the current Covid-19 pandemic," Hasina observed.

She mentioned that this menace has the potential of rolling back most of human's medical and therapeutic successes achieved through scientific advancements over the ages.

"The unnecessary use of antibiotics, wrong doses and overall poor infection prevention are causing this grave situation," the PM said.

Inspired by the WHO Global Action Plan in 2015, Hasina said Bangladesh formulated the "National Action Plan for Antimicrobial Resistance Containment 2017-2022".

She said the documents and its associated "roadmap" speak about

the government's policy thrust and commitment to addressing AMR, and this is an important component of the country's efforts to ensure universal health for all.

Saying that prevention is better than cure, she called upon the global leaders to make this timely initiative successful by providing advocacy, technical and financial support for effective implementation of the recommendations by the Inter-agency Coordination Group on Antimicrobial Resistance" to address the global antimicrobial resistance crisis.

Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Amor Mottley, directors general of World Health Organisation, Food and Agricultural Organisation and World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) also spoke at the programme.

The three organisations took the initiative to establish this group for a coordinated action and collective global governance to address the serious challenges of the antimicrobial resistance.

Hope brightens

FROM PAGE 1

score has risen to 75.3 from 72.8. The HAI is an indicator of nutrition, health, adult literacy and secondary school enrolment rate.

In the EVI criterion, a country's score has to be below 32. Bangladesh's score is 27.3 against 25 two years ago.

The EVI is a composition of some indicators such as instability of agricultural production and exports of goods and services, population size, and share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in gross domestic product. The lower a country scores in this index the better it performs.

Officials at the Economic Relations Division think that the inclusion of a few indicators in this criterion by the CDP at the beginning of this year resulted in the fall in Bangladesh's performance.

The CDP will scrutinise Bangladesh's progress towards the graduation for the second time at its triennial review in February next year. The country's official graduation from the LDC category will take place after a three-year transition period.

If the country maintains its position in all the three categories for the next three years, it will be recognised as a developing country in the UN General Assembly in 2024.

"We believe that Bangladesh will get the recommendations in the second review as well because we meet all the prerequisites for the graduation," a

top official of the ERD told The Daily Star, seeking anonymity.

Introduced by the UN in 1971, the LDC category is characterised by low levels of income and severe structural impediments to sustainable development. There were 25 LDCs at that time. In 2018, the number increased to 47.

Bangladesh was included in the LDC list in 1975. In 2015, it crossed the threshold of the World Bank-defined lower middle-income country and became eligible for graduation in 2018.

ERD officials said the CDP will hold a meeting next month where Bangladesh will present the progress towards its transition to a developing country. In the meeting, the UN committee will hold discussions on economic vulnerability assessment it made recently in the wake of the pandemic.

In January next year, a group of CDP experts will meet again to review Bangladesh's position on the indices.

Upon getting the experts' views, the CDP will hold the triennial review on February 7, 8, and 9 and recommend Bangladesh's name for the graduation if the country passes the assessment.

If Bangladesh gets out of the LDC bloc in 2024, it will be given a three-year transition period before it loses duty-free and quota-free market access to the European Union under the Everything but Arms initiative for

LDCs, according to the CDP.

The benefits of technical cooperation and other forms of assistance such as fund support for scholarship, fellowship, participation in special training as well as research will be withdrawn. The scope for credit accessibility will also be reduced.

According to an impact assessment on LDC graduation by the Planning Commission last year, the country would lose \$7 billion in export earnings every year after the end of the transition period.

By 2031, the amount would balloon to \$13 billion, it said.

A taskforce which has been working on Bangladesh's LDC graduation process is also assessing the implications for the country's economy following its graduation to a developing country.

ERD officials said considering the economic fallout of the pandemic, the government wrote to the CDP and requested it to keep the duty-free export facilities and other benefits for Bangladesh till 2030.

They also mentioned that the UN may extend the transition period by two more years till 2026, considering the impacts of the pandemic on the economy.

Bangladesh is in talks with international bodies, such as the LDC Group of the World Trade Organisation, for export duty waivers on its products, added the officials.

Rehabs in need for revamps

FROM PAGE 1

the centres are virtually run by unskilled professionals, resulting in many patients relapsing even after getting treatment, they added.

More worryingly, there are reports of deaths at the rehabilitation centres. In the last three years, at least 17 bodies have been recovered from rehabilitation centres across the country, according to police data.

The recent death of Anisul Karim Shipon, a senior assistant superintendent of Police (ASP), at the Mind Aid Hospital once again brought the issue to the fore.

Video footage of the incident showed some staff pinning him down and beating him up until his body became motionless. The hospital authorities, however, said Karim died of cardiac arrest.

'SIGNBOARD ORGANISATIONS'

Experts working in the drugs prevention and correction fields said most of the rehabilitation centres are "signboard organisations" and lack the necessary trained workforce and other facilities.

"Except for a very few, the majority of rehabilitation centres are not rehabilitation centres at all. Inmates in those centres are kept in locked rooms with shackles in hands and legs. This is not treatment; this is abuse," said Dr Arup Ratan Choudhury, a member of the National Drug Control Board.

Dr Arup, also president of the association for the prevention of drug abuse, said private rehabilitation centres have been mushrooming across the country with the rise of addicts of different kinds of drugs.

A rehabilitation centre must have a psychiatrist, clinical psychologist, counsellors and other health workers.

There should also be enough space for physical activities for patients, according to DNC guidelines that laid out at least 14 criteria for rehabilitation centres to get a licence.

"But those are absent in most of the private centres, and health workers are basically unskilled," said Dr Arup.

Rizmi Akter (not her real name), a private university student, shared her experience of being treated for her addiction to yaba at one such rehabilitation centre in Uttara.

"I stayed in a small room. When I got adamant for drugs, they gave me sleeping pills but when I refused to take medicine, the ayahs and nurses beat me. I became mentally depressed," she said.

What an official of the DNC found during a raid in a rehab centre also paints a grim picture.

"In that facility, we found a ward boy who never worked in any rehabilitation centre before and has no training. His uncle just brought him there to do the job," said the official, wishing not to be named.

He said rehabilitation centres hire strong men and women to serve the admitted patients. They are often called bouncers, a professional group employed by a nightclub or similar establishments to prevent troublemakers and other unwanted people entering or to eject them from the premises.

'IT'S A DISEASE, NOT A CRIME'

Mekhala Sarkar, associate professor of the psychiatry department at the National Institute of Mental Health, thinks there is a lack of understanding on treatment of the people on dope. The knowledge to guide them towards a healthy and meaningful life is also

absent.

"Drug addiction is a psychiatric disorder. It's a disease and it's not a crime. We have to understand it first. Treating a drug patient requires a highly organised and systematic approach," she told this newspaper.

A general nurse or ward boy cannot handle drug addicted patients as they sometimes get violent. But finding the right professionals is a challenge too, she said.

"People often do not feel encouraged to take up the job due to social stigma. In rehabilitation centres, attendants of patients are not allowed. So, hospital staff alone have to attend the patients, which is highly risky. Unfortunately, they do not get incentives for taking all the risk. That's why we are not getting enough skilled professionals, said Mekhala Sarkar.

Bazlur Rahman, former director general of the DNC, said a taskforce can be formed with close cooperation of the home ministry to strictly monitor the activities of the rehabilitation centres.

"Now the DNC has a good number of manpower and they can also take action if they find any irregularities."

Contacted, DNC Director Md Nuruzzaman Sharif said they have already monitored all the rehabilitation centres and their status. Actions will be taken against those who violated the rules, he said.

"We will sit with the owners of the rehabilitation centres very soon to send a strong message that any sort of physical or mental torture is strictly prohibited and if any complaints are found, licenses of those will be cancelled," he told this newspaper.

Cops identify 3 'arsonists'

FROM PAGE 1

police recovered the 31 crude bombs from a flat on the third floor of the six-storey under-construction building around 5:00pm yesterday, police said.

Later, the bomb disposal unit of DMP's Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit defused them, Kazi Shafiqul Alam, deputy commissioner of Detective Branch of DMP, told this paper.

Police earlier arrested a man named

Sohel Rana in connection with a bomb blast near a polling centre in Uttara during the by-polls to Dhaka-18 on November 12.

During interrogation, Rana disclosed some names, including Mamun and Sumon, who were involved in the bomb blast, said the DB official.

Shafiqul Alam said Mamun and Sumon had been involved in making crude bombs since 2012 and they also made the 31 crude bombs.

Police were trying to identify those who directed the two Jubo Dal men to make the bombs, added the police official.

Law enforcers have so far filed 18 cases against more than 1,000 people, mostly leaders and activists of BNP and its affiliated bodies, with different police stations in the city over torching of buses and carrying out subversive activities.

The cases were filed on November 12 and 13.

Govt spreading fear to stop criticism: BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday alleged that the opposition leaders and activists were being made to disappear to stop the criticism of the government's misdeeds.

"The government has been in power for the last one decade by introducing the culture of enforced disappearance. As they are now isolated from the people, they are torturing people by continuing the culture of enforced disappearance, spreading fear and establishing a reign of terror," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir.

Speaking at a virtual press conference, he said the government's main motive behind this is to stop the criticism of its misdeeds. "The government is spreading panic among its critics and making them disappear."

Fakhru alleged that five BNP leaders -- Leon Haque, Mamun Parvez Tamoy, Towhidul Islam Hasib, Ferdous Majumder Masum and Selim Mia -- remained missing since they were picked up recently by plainclothes policemen from different places in the country.

He said police has been denying detaining the BNP leaders and also claiming that they do not have any information about the missing party men.

"The families of those who have gone missing are very anxious and we are also worried about the matter."

The BNP leader said it is the government's full responsibility to trace people if anyone goes missing. "It's unimaginable that plainclothes policemen are picking up people who come out of the High Court after securing bail."

Fakhru also demanded the government release those arrested on "false" charges and withdraw "false" cases filed against them.

Morgue asst arrested on charges of necrophilia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

CID officers arrested a morgue assistant of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College on charges of necrophilia.

Munna Bhakta was arrested after the forensic lab of Criminal Investigation Department found his sperm on multiple dead bodies of women whose autopsies were done at the SSMC morgue between March 2019 and August 2020.

Officials making DNA profiles first came to the conclusion that the sperm found on five bodies of women, who died by suicide, are from one man, said CID Additional Superintendent of Police Zakir Hossain.

The forensic lab informed CID's Dhaka Metropolitan (West) unit about the matter on November 10.

Investigators initially thought a rapist serial killer was on the loose. But the postmortem reports showed no indication of rape, nor did the bodies bear any bruise mark.

The officers also noted that the five bodies had been kept at the SSMC morgue the night before the autopsies were done.

Upon further scrutiny, they learned about 20-year-old Munna who used to live on the morgue premises. Officials then collected his DNA samples from tea cups and cigarette butts and a test revealed that sperm found on the bodies was his.

The CID in a press release yesterday said they filed a case with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station in this regard.

Police said Munna has been working as an assistant for the last two years.

"When we interrogated him, he seemed quite nonchalant. He has a perverse fascination. The bodies are of women who died aged between 12 and 20," the ASP said.

4 'militants'

FROM PAGE 1

their phone numbers, which the law enforcers got from those arrested in Rajshahi.

The suspected militants finally surrendered around 10:30am yesterday and came out of the house.

Rab members later searched the house and found two firearms, gunpowder, bomb-making materials and extremism-provoking books there.

The arrestees were regrouping the banned Islamist group in different districts of the north Bengal and providing other operatives training. More operatives were supposed to gather in the hideout, but that did not happen following instructions from a leader, Col Tofayel said.

The Rab official said JMB's north Bengal Regional Commander Mahmud was arrested earlier, but came out of jail on bail and re-engaged himself in militancy. He was organising the banned outfit in the northern region.

Abdullah Al Mamun, a neighbour of the house, said the youths, identifying themselves as students, rented the house from the owner who lives and works in Bogura.