

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,848
New cases in 24hrs



445,281
Total cases



6,350
Deaths



360,352
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE



1,384,326
Deaths



58,331,536
Total cases

RELOCATION TO BHASHAN CHAR

Rohingyas 'being coerced' into getting registered

Amnesty Int'l says based on allegations from 5 refugee families in Cox's Bazar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amnesty International issued a statement yesterday saying that they received allegations from Rohingya refugees about government officials in charge of camps coercing them into registering for relocation.

"According to local media reports, the Bangladeshi government has completed preparations to relocate 300 to 400 Rohingya refugees to the silt island of Bhashan Char this month on a 'voluntary basis,'" said the statement.

But the organisation stated that they interviewed refugees whose names were included in the list of the Rohingya families identified for relocation to Bhashan Char, who alleged that they were being coerced. Amnesty International interviewed five family members who represent 23 refugees on the list for relocation, said the statement.

"Two Rohingya families were put on the list for relocation after they reported partial damage of their shelters to the 'majhi' -- a Rohingya community leader, selected by the Bangladeshi authorities in most of the camps -- to and government officials in charge of the refugee camps. Instead of having their shelters repaired, they were told that they must relocate to Bhashan Char," said the statement.

The statement quoted the head of one of the families as saying, "I

requested many times to the NGOs and CIC (camp authority) for support to fix my shelter. We are still having difficulty staying in it. They are not helping me relocate within the camp or to other camps."

Instead the head majhi in his camp told him that debts he had incurred to feed his family and pay for his wife's medical treatment would be cleared if he relocated, adds the statement. He reportedly told Amnesty, "I decided to register for the relocation as I have no other option."

One 33-year-old head of a five-member family told Amnesty that he registered to relocate to the island in 2019, after being deprived of relief support by the majhi in his camp but has changed his mind since then because the issue has been resolved. His name, however, is on the list prepared this month by the government official in charge of the refugee camp.

Ahead majhi allegedly told Amnesty International that government officials in charge of camps put pressure on them to provide lists of refugees to be relocated.

"Based on the experiences of those that Amnesty International has spoken to, many of the Rohingyas who have signed up to relocate to Bhashan Char are doing so out of compulsion rather than choice," said Omar Waraich, deputy South Asia director of Amnesty.

Dozens at large after Lebanon jailbreak

AFP, Beirut

Over 60 people fled a detention centre in Lebanon yesterday, including six who later died in a car accident on a nearby road, a judicial source said.

The prisoners broke past tight security at the facility near the presidential palace in Baabda, near Beirut, early in the morning, according to the source.

Nine have since been recaptured while six others died after a tree in slippery road conditions, the source added.

The official National News Agency reported the breakout and crash but did not specify how many people had fled or the accident toll.

Lebanon's Internal Security Forces were not immediately available for comment.



Cash, a firearm, watches, fake government seals and other objects seized during the Rab raids at properties owned by Monir. PHOTO: COLLECTED

A salesman who struck gold!

FROM PAGE 1

Rab officers led by Executive Magistrate Palash Kumar Bosu recovered gold ornaments weighing 8kg, Tk 1.09 crore in cash, Tk 9 lakh in forged currencies of 10 countries, five SUVs, a pistol, four bullets and four litres foreign liquor.

Officers also found forged land ownership documents and 32 fake seals of land management officials at his home and office. Using these, Monir used to take over lands belonging to other people, Rab said.

Monir is also involved in laundering money and owns a car dealership called Auto Car Selection on Pragati Sarani where Rab conducted another raid and seized three SUVs without papers, Ashique said.

Officers seized two other SUVs that he used, but didn't have ownership documents of either.

Ashique said Rab raided the properties after receiving the information provided by an intelligence agency.

A Rab source said Monir had plans to leave the country for Dubai

yesterday. Rab also seized his passport.

Sources said Monir was once a close aide to a former BNP leader and ward commissioner. Officials said Monir was a financier of a political party.

In 2007, he was accused in several cases for gold smuggling. In 2019, Rajuk sued him for illegally possessing and forging documents of 70 flats. Besides, the Anti-Corruption Commission sued him over illegal wealth.

Rab said at least three cases will be filed against Monir for possessing firearms, foreign liquor and foreign currency.

Besides, Rab will write to the Anti-Corruption Commission, National Board of Revenue, BRTA and CID to launch investigations on him.

Refuting the allegations, Monir's son Mohammad Rafi told reporters that his father is a well-known businessman.

He added that his father booked air ticket for Dubai for a medical check-up. He also denied any political involvement of his father.

Govt alerts banks

FROM PAGE 1

In August, the Bangladesh Bank alerted banks about a possible threat of hacking in the banking transactions through ATM booths, credit cards and other modes of online banking.

Almost all banks kept the ATM services and point of sales (POS) suspended from 12:00am to 7:00am.

Hackers stole \$101 million from the Bangladesh Bank's account with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York in February 2016. Of the sum, \$81 million ended up in the Philippines and \$20 million in Sri Lanka.

While fighting the pandemic, a good number of members of the Armed Forces got infected and some of them died, the PM added.

Hasina lauded the Armed Forces for brightening the country's image abroad through discharging their duties with skills and sincerity in UN peacekeeping missions.

Talking about Bangladesh's socioeconomic development, she said, "At a time when many developed and developing countries are struggling with negative growth due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our growth increased to 5.24 percent."

The premier said the country's



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina meeting the chiefs of the three forces on the occasion of Armed Forces Day 2020 yesterday. PHOTO: PID

History erased

FROM PAGE 1

The property was also under the supervision of the Office of the Administrator of Waqf Bangladesh, and a letter it issued in April last year showed that they had not given permission for the building to be broken down.

In the letter, they expressly requested Rajuk not to approve the demolition, and further construction of anything new.

The demolition of the building also violated a High Court order.

Video interviews given to various media organisations by the then officer-in-charge of Chawkbazar police station, Shamim Al Rashid, show him alleging that Haji Salim's men demolished the building.

"Haji Salim, local lawmaker of Awami League, was present during the demolition and informed them that he bought the two-storey building," he told this newspaper.

The accusations are verified by the current store owners of a plethora of makeshift corrugated tin shops lining the property.

The store owners, who sought anonymity, said to this correspondent that they had stores inside the Jahaj Bari itself and have been promised fancy stores inside the new market building that will be built "soon" on the plot.

But there's more. The most egregious destruction that happened recently was the destruction of the mansion famed to be that of 19th century Armenian merchant and landlord Nicholas Pogose.

"This house belonged to the founder of Pogose school, Nicholas Pogose, and it is known locally as Niki Saheb er Bari," said Taimur Islam, chief executive of Urban Study Group, which works for the conservation of Old Dhaka's architectural heritage.

The first blows levelled at the house were in October 2017, when the roof and much of the first-storey walls were peeled away.

A writ petition was filed by Urban Study Group and the High Court intervened, halting the destruction periodically over the years.

"But during the lockdown, the building was completely broken down," said Taimur. A recent visit shows that the building has been razed to the ground to make way for a marketplace.

Haji Salim is said to have negotiated the process of seeing the building handed over from a long-term tenant who kept the building intact, to a group of new owners, who tore it down.

This group consisted of 17 buyers

with businesses in Armanitola's chemical industry.

As Enayet Hossain Maruf, one of the buyers, told this correspondent, "We bought the property in 2005 from owners who are now either dead or absent in the country. At that point the property had been leased out to AP Pharmaceuticals for many years, and we needed them to leave."

"After many years of trying, finally, in 2014, we sat down with AP Pharmaceuticals to discuss how the handover would work, and Haji Salim mediated the process. It was done peacefully, and the pharmaceutical company vacated the premises."

The meeting was held at a restaurant in Monipuripara. Maruf's testimony was verified by another person present at the table, who requested anonymity. Maruf, however, vehemently denies that the demolished building had any heritage value.

"What proof is there that this was Pogose's house? This is not in the government's list of protected sites," he told this correspondent recently, adding that he does not know if the building was over a century old.

The Antiquities Act, 1968 defines an antiquity as anything that is older than the preceding 100 years. BLATANT VIOLATIONS OF LAW, HC ORDERS

In 2015, the lawmaker faced contempt of court, when he didn't let the government evict illegal structures built alongside the Lalbagh fort.

Law enforcers led by an executive magistrate attempted to conduct this operation on March 30, 2014, but failed to do so when Salim obstructed them. The High Court pressed charges on April 6, 2014.

The magistrate's team was in the right legally -- according to The Antiquities Act, 250 metres around an archaeological site must be kept free as a buffer zone.

This, however, is the most neglected and most violated section of the act.

An issue regarding this provision cropped up in 2013, when a high-rise building was being constructed right alongside Chhoto Katra in Chawkbazar.

"The construction of the building is happening without any Rajuk authorisation. To construct the building, they created a 15-foot deep crater right adjacent to Chhoto Katra, which puts it at risk of infrastructural damage," said a press statement issued by Urban Study Group on September 18, 2013.

Where the crater was, now stands a seven-storey high-rise. "We got the government to stop the construction, but the local lawmaker restarted the

construction," Taimur of Urban Study Group alleged.

His testimony was echoed by the owner of the plot, Nurun Nahar. The owner's family lives in a tiny one-roomed house adjacent to the building, where this correspondent talked to her two weeks ago.

"The land is a disputed property belonging to my grandfather. It was forcefully occupied by another person who began construction. The people from the government came and stopped the construction. Haji Salim intervened and restarted the construction again," claimed Nahar.

Nahar also met Haji Salim to talk about why he is allowing the construction, she said.

"We implored to Haji Salim to give us our land back and he agreed to discuss with the current occupier and get it back for us. During the meeting he told us, 'Nurun Nahar I did not know that this was your plot, otherwise I would not have intervened with the government and restarted the construction,'" she claimed.

Taimur said, "Salim also broke down a property in Nolgola near Mitford Hospital that used to be the Bhawal Raja's tax office or kachharibari."

Taimur recalled that night in 2014. "It was chaand raat, the night before Eid. At 10:30pm, one of my local sources told me that the kachharibari is being broken down. I went to the spot with a policeman and the people breaking it down told me that Haji Salim sent them."

"Upon learning that the lawmaker was involved, the police were hesitant to accept the general diary I was trying to file."

Salim's lawyer, Shree Pran Nath, attested to the fact that the lawmaker is involved in this.

"The MP bought 36 decimals of land from the owner but there is a dispute surrounding the land. This is an ongoing case and it was filed seven to eight years ago," he said.

Asked why the building was demolished, he, however, said that he does not know the current state of it.

Several attempts were made to contact Haji Salim but he could not be reached. This correspondent also tried to speak to the lawmaker's personal assistant, who did not respond to repeated calls and text messages.

On a recent visit to the spot, the ruins of the British-era building were difficult to mark out among the throngs of factories and warehouses.

It is almost as if it was never there, as if the history of this city does not matter to those in charge of it.

Hasina made co-chair of global body on antimicrobial resistance

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been made co-chair of One Health Global Leaders Group on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) along with her Barbados counterpart Mia Amor Mottley.

The AMR made an announcement in this regard on Friday. The two premiers will hold the post for three years.

One Health Global Leaders Group on Antimicrobial Resistance, a group jointly initiated by World Health Organisation, Food and Agriculture Organisation and World Organisation for Animal Health (Oie), was formed in response to a recommendation from the Interagency Coordination Group on Antimicrobial Resistance. It is supported by the UN secretary-general.

Madrassa teacher held for raping boy in Cumilla

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

Police arrested a madrasa teacher for allegedly raping an 11-year-old boy in Cumilla town on Friday night.

The accused Tanvir Ahmed, 24, of Chandpur Sadar, is a teacher of Darun Nazat Hafezia Madrasa, said police.

Another senior teacher of the madrasa Faruk Hossain alias Boro Huzur, 48, of Chandpur's Haziganj upazila, was absconding, the law enforcers added.

The victim's father filed a case against the two teachers on Friday night.

Anwarul Haque, officer-in-charge of Cumilla Kotwali Police Station, confirmed the matter to The Daily Star.

According to case statement, Tanvir raped the boy while Faruk threatened the boy with death if he shared his experience with anyone.

Faruk also tortured the boy by hitting him on his hands and foot palms with electric cables.

The victim's father mentioned that he admitted his son to the madrasa around six months ago. While visiting him at his dormitory, he shared his experience with his parents.

The OC said they were handling the matter very strictly and trying to arrest Boro Huzur soon.

2 killed, 10 injured in gas cylinder explosion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Two people, including a balloon vendor, were killed and at least 10 others injured in a gas cylinder explosion near the venue of a Waz Mehfil in Bhola's Borhanuddin upazila on Friday night.

The dead are Mohammad Nirab, 23, a balloon vendor from Bhola Sadar upazila, and Mohammad Hasnain, 18, of Baramanika ward no-6.

Witnesses said the explosion took place around 10:00pm when Nirab was filling a balloon with gas to sell those to children near the Waz Mehfil venue in Baramanika union of the upazila.

Hanif Mia of Boromanika union said they heard a big bang and found some men lying on the ground in a pool of blood.

The explosion also caused damages to some makeshift shops in the area, said another witness.

The blast left Nirab and Hasnain dead on the spot. The injured were whisked off to Borhanuddin Upazila Health Complex by locals.

Among the injured are Shakil, 20, Firaj Alam, 26, Nannu, 20, Sagar, 18, Limon, 20, Yusuf, 40, Russell, 35, and Bappi, 20.

Several of the wounded were receiving treatment at Bhola General Hospital and Borhanuddin Upazila Health Complex yesterday.

Borhanuddin OC Mazaharul Amin said the two bodies were handed to the victims' families after autopsies were carried out on them at the Bhola General Hospital morgue yesterday.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Saifur Rahman said the Bhola deputy commissioner gave Tk 10,000 to each of families of the two deceased as an assistance for burial.

The OC said they opened an investigation into the incident.

Country ever ready to protect its sovereignty

FROM PAGE 1

Nation," she said.

The PM was delivering her pre-recorded speech on Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar yesterday on the occasion of Armed Forces Day. Private television channels and radio stations also broadcast her around 13-minute speech.

Hasina said the government has formulated the Forces Goal-2030 following Bangabandhu's Defence Policy-1974 to protect the country's sovereignty.

"As part of continuation of that process, the Armed Forces are being rebuilt organisationally, provided with advanced training and equipped with specialised militarily adorns."

In the last one decade, the government has developed every section of the Armed Forces with modern weapons and equipment, she added.

"I would like to firmly say that the way the armed forces have been modernised during the tenure of our government had never happened in the past," she said.

Hasina briefly described various development programmes

implemented for the Armed Forces.

She hoped that the members of the Armed Forces would be able to contribute more to the country's defence and nation-building activities, imbued with the strength of honesty, patriotism, and professional skills.

She praised the members of the Armed Forces for their highest devotion and sacrifice while discharging their duties in any crisis of the country, including the Covid-19 pandemic as the frontline fighters.

While fighting the pandemic, a good number of members of the Armed Forces got infected and some of them died, the PM added.

Hasina lauded the Armed Forces for brightening the country's image abroad through discharging their duties with skills and sincerity in UN peacekeeping missions.

Talking about Bangladesh's socioeconomic development, she said, "At a time when many developed and developing countries are struggling with negative growth due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our growth increased to 5.24 percent."

The premier said the country's

remittance inflow, agricultural production and export have made a turnaround as its foreign currency reserve exceeded the \$41 billion mark.

"We have to move forward with our economic activities maintaining health rules. Inshallah, we will establish hunger-poverty-and illiteracy-free secular Golden Bengal as dreamt by the Father of the Nation," she said.

Covid deaths

FROM PAGE 1

Bangladesh reported its first novel coronavirus cases on March 8. The infection number reached the 300,000-mark on August 26.

The first death in the country was reported on March 18 and the death toll exceeded 6,000 on November 4.

Until now, 2,635,202 tests have been carried out, including 12,643 during the 24-hour period, and 14.61 percent of the patients have tested positive.

Bangladesh is seeing 2614.59 infections, 2115.90 recoveries, and 37.29 deaths per million.