

BANGLADESH
UPDATE2,060
New cases in 24hrs4,47,341
Total cases6,388
Deaths3,62,428
RecoveriesGLOBAL
UPDATE1,390,315
Deaths58,739,895
Total cases

Govt changes, but his 'magic'

FROM PAGE 1
Rab seized three luxury cars from Monir's dealership and two such vehicles from his residence on Saturday. One of the latter belonged to a whip and member of parliament of greater Mymensingh area, who got the SUV in 2017 and sold it off to Monir for Tk 1.3 crore. According to law, an MP cannot transfer ownership of his duty-free vehicle within five years of its purchase.

The Daily Star called the MP, but he did not receive the call and his phone was found switched off a minute later.

Investigators said Monir was earlier detained by Rab in 2004 for speeding while driving in Badda.

Maintaining good relations with top officials of Rajuk, Monir was also involved in dealing with Rajuk recruitment and different land projects from 2001-18.

Asked, former Rajuk Chairman Abdul Rahman denied the allegations that he had any links to what Monir did.

"In my tenure, I had no intimacy with Monir. I came to know about his frauds and corruption after I retired," he added.

Rab arrested Monir on Saturday after a 12-hour raid at his six-storey building on Road-11 in Merul Badda.

The crime busters recovered gold ornaments weighing 8kgs, Tk 1.09 crore in cash, Tk 9 lakh in currencies of 10 countries, five SUVs, a pistol, four bullets and four litres of foreign liquor.

They 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.

Rab said Monir has amassed over Tk 1,050 crore by forging Rajuk documents, gold smuggling, land grabbing and other crimes.

Describing his background, Rab said Monir worked as a salesperson at different shopping malls in the capital in the 90s. Then he worked at a crockeries shop in Mouchak Market. Later, he started luggage business via Dhaka-Thailand-Dhaka -- bringing goods hidden inside luggage to dodge tax.

At one stage, he started smuggling huge amounts of gold into Bangladesh via Dhaka-Singapore-India. People started calling him "Golden Monir" for gold smuggling. He then opened his own jewellery shop, "Uma Jewellers", in Baitul Mukarram Market.

MONIR WAS UNTOUCHED

Fazlul Haque, an owner of Poly Overseas Ltd had been using a room on the fifth floor of Rajuk on contract basis since 1986. Later, Fazlul rented the room to Monir. On October 15,

2019, Rajuk conducted a drive at the room and recovered documents of 70 plots, 15 seals of Rajuk officials, 170 recommendation letters of city corporation and other documents.

Then, Motijheel police arrested Rajuk official Parvez Chowdhury. The other accused -- Monir, Zinnah and Nasir -- were on the run.

Investigators said police took no action against Monir because of the influence wielded by the state minister.

The Daily Star called the state minister several times and sent texts for his comments about the allegations yesterday evening, but got no reply.

Rajuk Chairman Sayeed Noor Alam yesterday told reporters that they would take action against officials if anyone is found involved, and also cancel the plots of Monir if any irregularities are found in the process.

He said, "It didn't happen in one day, it has been happening for a long time. We have been able to unveil it when we came to know about it last year... we took action."

When asked why action was not taken earlier, he said last year's operation was Rajuk's own and that they will take action if any other people are found involved after police file a charge sheet in the case.

Regarding VIP protocol given to Monir by Rajuk, the chairman said, "We preserved documents according to government rules. No VIP protocol was given to anyone. There was no violation of rules here."

When asked whether one person owning over 200 plots was not seen as an irregularity, the Rajuk chief said, "These need to be verified. We will take action after that. There will be no irregularities in the future," he said.

Asked whether any cleansing operations will be carried out, he said, "We have that plan."

RAB TO WRITE TO FOUR AGENCIES
Meanwhile, Monir was placed on 18 days' remand yesterday under the Special Powers Act, Narcotics Control Act and Arms Act.

At a press briefing yesterday, Rab Legal and Media Wing Director Lt Col Ashique Billah said they are working to identify the patrons behind the rise of Monir.

He also said there was a previous corruption case against Monir, brought by the Anti-Corruption Commission in 2012.

The Rab official said the amount Monir mentioned in the income tax file is far from reality.

Rab will write to the Anti-Corruption Commission, National Board of Revenue, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority and Rajuk to launch investigations into him, he said.



A trader displays apples as if they are hanging from a tree as a gimmick to increase sales. The upshot is he sells more than other traders in his area. The photo was taken recently in Karwan Bazaar.

PHOTO:
PRABIR DAS

38 more die from Covid in a day

2,060 test positive

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh reported 38 more Covid-19 deaths in past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, taking the number of fatalities to 6,388.

The country also recorded 2,060 new cases at that time, pushing the infection number to 447,341. The death rate stood at 1.43 percent, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services.

So far, 362,428 patients -- 81.02 percent -- including 2,076 new ones in the last 24 hours have recovered.

Of the 38 deaths, 28 are males and 10 females, the release said.

Bangladesh reported its first Covid-19 cases on March 8. The infection number reached the 300,000-mark on August 26. The first death was reported on March 18 and the death toll hit 6,000 on November 4.

Up to now, 2,649,072 tests have been carried out, including 13,870 new ones, and 14.85 percent of the patients have tested positive.

Bangladesh is seeing 2,626.68 infections, 2,128.09 recoveries, and 37.51 deaths per million.

So far, 3,377 people have died in Dhaka division, 1,234 in Chattogram, 389 in Rajshahi, 488 in Khulna, 215 in Barishal, 262 in Sylhet, 291 in Rangpur, and 132 in Mymensingh.

EMPOWERING PRESIDENT Kyrgyz protest over proposed constitution

AFP, BISHKEK

Hundreds took to the streets in Kyrgyzstan yesterday to oppose a proposed constitution that critics say would empower the presidency and damage freedom of speech.

Constitutional amendments currently undergoing public discussion would return cabinet-forming powers to the president and allow incumbent leaders to run for office.

Initiators say the draft constitution should be put to a referendum on January 10, the same day that the ex-Soviet country is holding presidential elections.

In October, Sooronbay Jeenbekov became the third Kyrgyz leader since independence to resign over political unrest -- this time over a disputed parliamentary vote.

Disarray in the Central Asian country has caused concern for key allies Russia and China.

Several hundred protesters who gathered in the centre of the capital Bishkek held up signs decrying a "Khanstitution" -- a reference to the absolutist rulers who dominated Central Asia for centuries.

Some chanted against Sadyr Japarov, who this month resigned as acting president and prime minister to compete in a presidential election set for January 10, which he is tipped to win.

WHO envoy

FROM PAGE 1

Mexico with 550.

The United States is the worst-affected country with 255,905 deaths from 12,090,469 cases. After the US, the hardest-hit countries are Brazil with 168,989 deaths from 6,052,786 cases, India with 133,227 deaths from 9,095,806 cases, Mexico with 101,373 deaths from 1,032,688 cases, and the United Kingdom with 54,626 deaths from 1,493,383 cases.

The country with the highest number of deaths compared to its population is Belgium with 134 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Peru with 108, Spain 91, Argentina 82.

China -- excluding Hong Kong and Macau -- has to date declared 86,431 cases, including 4,634 deaths and 81,481 recoveries.

Latin America and the Caribbean overall has 433,865 deaths from 12,431,882 cases, Europe 369,144 deaths from 16,253,491 infections, and the United States and Canada 267,302 deaths from 12,414,386 cases.

Asia has reported 187,681 deaths from 11,869,395 cases, the Middle East 73,549 deaths from 3,106,525 cases, Africa 49,433 deaths from 2,059,651 cases, and Oceania 941 deaths from 30,131 cases.

Nabarro lauded the response of Asian countries like South Korea, where infections are now relatively low: "People are fully engaged, they take on behaviours that make it difficult for the virus. They keep their distance, wear masks, isolate when they're sick, wash hands and surfaces. They protect the most endangered groups."

Nabarro also said Asia did not relax restrictions prematurely.

"You must wait until case numbers are low and stay low," he said. "Europe's reaction was incomplete."

Govt to keep all safe

FROM PAGE 1

She again urged everyone to follow health instructions. "Keep yourself protected and keep others protected," she said, adding that it is a shared responsibility.

The PM said the government and the people now have the experience of facing Covid-19.

"We firmly believe that we'll be able to do that [successfully tackling a second wave]," she said.

Bangladesh reported its first coronavirus cases on March 8 and the first death on March 18.

Although the PM has been warning of a second wave, the people still appear reluctant to follow health guidelines.

The government has recently adopted a "no mask, no service" policy and launched a drive to ensure the use of masks by people.

OPENING OF BRIDGES

Talking about the newly constructed bridges in Magura, Narayanganj and Jashore, Hasina said the socio-economic condition of the people will improve with the developed communication system.

She said after coming to power, the Awami League government has built a huge communication network in the country.

"As a result, today our economy is very much active, we've started so many projects, Inshallah we'll complete them," she said.

Hasina said the newly constructed bridges in Jashore, Magura and Narayanganj would make the economy stronger, while communications and transportation of goods would be easier.

These will also play a very significant role for the socio-economic development of the respective areas and alleviating poverty from the region, she opined.

The PM said the Padma bridge would make communication networks easier with other parts of the country

as the newly constructed bridges were open to traffic yesterday.

Besides, every region, particularly the southern part of the country, would be more developed once the construction of the mega project is completed.

Hasina said as a political party, the AL always worked with a far-sighted economic plan and it implemented all the plans undertaken in light of the directives in the constitution.

As a result, the people get good results of the initiatives of the AL government, she said.

Hasina said her government could not implement all of its development plans due to the coronavirus pandemic this year.

But the coordinated efforts of all, including administration, police, BCG, Rab, and the Armed Forces, made it possible to keep the economy running, she said and extended her sincere thanks to all concerned for their efforts.

LGRD Minister M Tajul Islam and LGRD Secretary Helaluddin Ahmad also spoke joining the event through video conference from the cabinet division at the secretariat while businessman Anjan Chowdhury also spoke at the programme from Pabna.

Earlier, the PM inaugurated a number of newly constructed development projects through video conferencing from the Gono Bhavan.

The projects include newly constructed Sheikh Hasina Bridge over the Madhumati river at Anghkhali ghat of Magura's Mohammapur, Muktiyoddha Golam Dastagir Gazi (Bir Protik) Bridge over the Shitalakkhya river in Narayanganj, and a bridge over the Bhairav river connecting Amtala GC via Maricha, Nauli Bazar road from Bhangagate (Badamtala) of Jashore-Khulna highway in Jashore's Abhoynagar and Bir Muktiyoddha Rafiqul Islam Bakul Shadhinota Square in Pabna.

populated districts of Kabul Saturday -- including in and around the heavily fortified Green Zone that houses embassies and foreign firms.

The attack came hours before US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was to meet with negotiators from the Taliban and Afghan government in Qatar, amid signs of progress in talks between the two warring groups.

Afghan VP vows to track down Kabul attackers

AFP, Kabul

Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh yesterday vowed to track down those responsible for a rocket attack on the capital that killed at least 10 people, even as the Islamic State group claimed to have fired the salvo.

The rockets struck several densely

Dhaka's air quality getting worse

FROM PAGE 1

than it was a year ago," Prof Mohammad Kamruzzaman Majumder, director of the Center for Atmospheric Pollution Studies at Stamford University, told The Daily Star yesterday.

A Dhaka University study released in November last year, found the air in surveyed schools to be hazardous for children. Bangladesh remains to be among the countries with the poorest air in the world in winter.

The country witnessed fresh air and clear skies during the lockdown this year, but it seems like the pollution has come back with a vengeance.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said cities with higher levels of air pollution should boost their preparedness against the coronavirus.

Bangladesh is already witnessing a surge in Covid-19 cases even though the winter has yet to set in. Poor quality air causes inflammation in the lungs, making people more vulnerable to respiratory diseases like Covid-19.

"Poor air quality is a threat to anyone with respiratory problems. And if someone with respiratory problems gets infected with coronavirus, they will be in great danger," IEDCR Consultant Prof Mushtuq Hussain told The Daily Star.

Researchers at Harvard University associated an increase of only one microgram per cubic metre of air in fine particulate matter called PM 2.5 with an 8 percent increase in Covid-19 morbidity.

Last year, Dhaka's air remained "very unhealthy" and "extremely unhealthy" for 197 days, according to AQI.

Globally, around 93 percent of the children aged 15 and below, are exposed to PM2.5 levels above WHO air quality guidelines, putting their health and development at serious risk, says a 2018 report of the WHO.

According to WHO, household and outdoor air pollution affect

neurodevelopment and cognitive ability, damage children's lung function, and put children at greater risk of chronic diseases later in life.

In low- and middle-income countries, air pollution causes more than half of acute lower respiratory infections in children aged five and below.

Air pollution led to 1,73,500 deaths in Bangladesh last year, says a global report as experts find the country's air becoming increasingly poisonous in the absence of effective measures to control the release of pollutants.

The report titled State of Global Air 2020 identifies air pollution as the fourth major mortality risk factor worldwide, surpassed by high blood pressure, tobacco use, and poor diet.

It added that air pollution accounted for 10,500 neonatal deaths in Bangladesh. Of the deaths 62 percent is attributable to household air pollution.

POOR AIR QUALITY IN SCHOOLS
The Dhaka University study titled Health Impact of Gaseous Air Pollutants from Different Schools in Dhaka was conducted by chemistry teachers and students. They measured air pollutants at 10 schools in different locations between April and November 2018 and found high levels of nitrogen dioxide and carbon dioxide both outside and inside classrooms.

The schools were in Mugda, Shukrabad, on DU campus, Khilgaon, Motijheel, Maniknagar, Ahmedbagh, Chankharpool, Wari and Badda areas. The air was monitored between 7:30am and 11:30am.

The school in Maniknagar had the worst air, with a quotient of 1.92. A hazard quotient over 1 is deemed dangerous to health, according to the United States Environmental Protection Agency. The lowest hazard quotient was found in the school in Khilgaon with 1.15.

Experts said that the study points out an urgent need to contain air

pollution, especially near schools.

"This report highlights that exposure of children to toxic compounds in the air not only occurs outdoors but also inside schools and classrooms. More research on the health effects of such exposure over long periods is urgently needed," DU Chemistry Prof Abdus Salam said.

Children are particularly at risk of developing asthma, especially if they live near busy roads, he said.

WHO says children are more vulnerable to air pollution because they breathe more rapidly than adults and absorb more pollutants.

The study also found that outdoor pollution influenced indoor air quality and carbon dioxide was at higher levels in the morning. Other major air pollutants with health effects are particulate matter (PM), ozone, nitrogen dioxide, and sulphur dioxide.

"The major cause of increased indoor NO2 concentration is the exhaust fumes from vehicles," said Prof Salam. "Policymakers should act on the matter promptly and initiate some action to reduce traffic congestion and the number of cars on the roads."

The researcher said none of the schools had air purifiers or masks to protect the students.

DoE's Air Quality Control Wing Director Ziaul Haque said smoke and fog create smog in the morning hours in winter.

"This is very harmful to human health and certainly for children who go to school at the time," he said.

He added that his department has been monitoring brick kilns and construction sites, and spraying water in different places in the city to contain air pollution.

"Containing air pollution is not possible by a department or ministry alone. It requires a coordinated effort and every stakeholder has to step forward."

They're enemy of state, nation

FROM PAGE 1

passing further orders on the issue. The bench issued the order and rule on a suo moto move following reports in The Daily Star, Bangla dailies Prothom Alo, Janakantha and Bangladesh Pratidin about Bangladeshi nationals purchasing luxurious residences in different countries with laundered money.

During court proceedings, Justice Talukder said a number of businessmen, government service holders and politicians have reportedly bought luxurious residences in countries including Canada, Malaysia and Singapore by laundering money from Bangladesh in violation of the law.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan and Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik participated in the virtual proceedings of the HC bench.

According to a report published on The Daily Star on November 20, the "Begum Para" of Toronto in Canada

They have grown up and studied in Bangladesh but have illegally laundered huge amounts of its money abroad without authorisation, the HC bench said.

The perpetrators have no love for the country, Justice Talukder said, adding that appropriate action must be taken against them, without which the money-laundering will not stop and so the actual development of the country will not take place.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan and Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik participated in the virtual proceedings of the HC bench.

According to a report published on The Daily Star on November 20, the "Begum Para" of Toronto in Canada

has come up during numerous political discussions in Bangladesh.

Many Bangladeshis have bought luxurious residences in "Begum Para", spending millions laundered from Bangladesh. Mainly, the wives and children of Bangladeshi millionaires live in these homes, hence the name Begum Para.

It is largely believed that mainly politicians have bought homes there. Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen recently raised eyebrows saying that government officials are forging ahead of politicians in the race to purchase luxurious homes in Begum Para. The minister spoke to The Daily Star on this issue over the phone on November 19.

Badal Roy no more

FROM PAGE 1

Mandir Shoshan. Roy left behind his wife, a son, a daughter and a host of well-wishers to mourn his death.

A midfielder of the highest calibre in Bangladesh, Roy wore the black and white jersey of Mohammedan Sporting Club for more than a decade after making his debut for the Motijheel-based outfit in 1977.

He also captained the Bangladesh national team on many occasions.

Abdul Gaffar, another former national team player and a long-time friend, expressed his sadness at the untimely death of the noted footballer.

"My friend is gone and I could not do anything about it except for looking at his face," said Gaffar, who attended to Roy at the hospital over the last few days.

Roy had suffered a stroke in

2017 and was taken to Singapore for emergency treatment on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's advice. The star footballer recovered, not fully though, as he became partially paralysed.

Despite his physical limitations, Roy continued his organisational duties, including as a vice-president of Bangladesh Football Federation for three terms from 2008 to 2020. He was also a vice-president of the Bangladesh Olympic Association.

He had also served as Mohammedan's manager in various terms.

Despite his ill health, Roy ran for the president's post in BFF's recent election, losing eventually to incumbent Kazi Salahuddin.

It was after the elections that Roy fell seriously ill. He was diagnosed with breathing problems and a kidney ailment and was shifted from one

hospital to another.

He was eventually taken to the Bangladesh Medical College for dialysis on Saturday.

Former national team captain and coach Golam Sarwar Tipu remembered Roy with great affection and respect.

"As per my knowledge, Badal Roy is the only footballer to have played for a single club in the Dhaka league," Tipu told The Daily Star.

"He loved football too much and perhaps deprived his family too because of his love for the game," Tipu said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel, Bangladesh Football Federation, Bangladesh Olympic Association and other sports-related organisations expressed condolences at the passing away of the noted footballer.