

2,156 New cases in 24hrs
4,54,146 Total cases
6,487 Deaths
3,69,179 Recoveries
1,422,921 Deaths
60,518,725 Total cases

Three get death for rape, murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A Shariatpur court yesterday sentenced three people to death for raping and killing of a housewife last year.

The convicts are Morshed Ukil, 56, of Madha Kodalpur village, Abdul Haque Mutait, 42, of Char Charoa village, and Zakir Hossain, 33, of Daimi Charboira village, of the district's Gosairhat upazila.

Firoz Ahmed, public prosecutor of Shariatpur, said Judge Abdus Salam Khan of Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal in Shariatpur delivered the verdict in presence of the convicts.

The court also fined Tk 50,000 each of them.

It also acquitted nine other accused of the case.

According to the case statement, Haowa Begum, 40, wife of Khokon Ukil of Charboira Ukilpara village, went missing after she went to a neighbour

house for charging her mobile phone on January 20 last year.

Following day, police found her body in an abandoned house of the same village and arrested Morshed after tracking the victim's mobile number.

Morshed later confessed to police that they killed Haowa and left her body there after raping her.

The victim's husband filed a case with Gosairhat Police Station.

After investigation, police submitted a charge sheet against nine people, including the three convicts.

On October 7 last year, a Shariatpur court framed charges against 12 people.

After examining witnesses and evidence, the judge found the three guilty and convicted them.

Shah Alam, the convicts' lawyer, told The Daily Star that they were not satisfied with the verdict. They would appeal to the High Court against the judgement.



In the ashes and charred remains of the shanties that were their home a day ago, people scavenge for anything that might be useful. A fire razed the shanties of Bihari community in the capital's Mohammadpur to the ground Tuesday afternoon. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

'IS bride' may not be 'continuing threat', UK court told

AFP, London

A woman stripped of her UK citizenship after joining the Islamic State group in Syria may not pose an ongoing security risk to Britain, the Supreme Court was told on Tuesday.

Lawyers fighting for Shamima Begum's right to return to the UK to challenge the 2019 decision to revoke her citizenship said her case must be heard with the 21-year-old present.

"What security threat Ms Begum will pose... will inevitably depend on the circumstances of her case (and) an assessment of her, of the risk -- if any -- that she as an individual poses on her return," her lawyer David Pannick said.

Death of a man

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10,000 miles away from the great South American footballing nation.

When Maradona dribbled past four England players before rounding off Peter Shilton and scoring that poem of a goal in the Mexico 1986 World Cup, the whole world admired the genius with awe. That was also the moment Bangladesh football fans fell in love with Maradona, which only grew over the years.

The sight of thousands of Argentine flags in every nook and cranny of the country and the massive fan following that grew disproportionately compared with loyalities to other established football powerhouse... even Brazil fell behind in the wake of one Diego Maradona's mystique and magnificence.

So lasting is his aura and the belief he inspired that, during the 2018 World Cup, if 10 fans were seen in Argentina jerseys, the name of Maradona -- who last played for the Albiceleste in 1994 -- was seen on the back of more shirts than the current candidate for all-time great, Lionel Messi.

The greatest footballer on the planet never visited Bangladesh. There were occasions when our football authorities said there was a chance for the 'football god' to make a brief visit to these shores. It did not happen.

Maradona is no more. The man died yesterday at the young age of 60, but his legend will live on as long as football lives. And his followers in Bangladesh will keep him close to their hearts as long as they live.

39 more die

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of infection reached the 300,000-mark on August 26. The first death was reported on March 18 and the death toll exceeded 6,000 on November 4.

Until now, 2,695,150 tests have been carried out, including 16,001 during the 24-hour period, and 16.84 percent of the patients tested positive.

Bangladesh is seeing 2666.64 infections, 2167.73 recoveries, and 38.09 deaths per million.

With the number of Covid-19 patients at different hospitals on the rise over the last few days, public health experts have urged the government to equip all hospitals and upazila health complexes with necessary equipment, including adequate oxygen-supply facilities, to ensure proper healthcare services to the infected people.

Rupayan chief

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"The ACC will soon submit the charge sheet before the court," said ACC Director Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya.

The fire broke out on March 27, 2019.

In the investigation, the ACC found that although authorities had legally obtained permission for a 15-storey building, they made the FR Tower a 23-storey one over time. The FR Tower had no fire alarm, had narrow exit points and staircases, blocked fire exits and other issues. As a result, the casualties peaked, ACC found.

Faruque got the land on lease in 1989 from the now-defunct Dhaka Improvement Trust. He applied to Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha for permission to construct a 15-storey building on the land in 1990 and got approval the same year.

In 1996, permission was illegally given for extending the 15-storey building to an 18-storey one. The building was later extended to the 23rd floor without any official clearance from Rajuk.

Rajuk officers helped create fake designs of the building and get approval for the illegal extension, the investigation officer found.

Rajuk officers who are found to be involved in the illegal extension are: Assistant Authorised Officer Nazrul Islam, Director Shamsul Alam, Deputy Director Muhammad Shawkat Ali, clerks Muhammed Mujibur Rahman Molla, Md Shafulallah and Saiful Alam, computer operator Md Enamul Haque, building inspectors Imrul Kabir, Shawkat Ali, former director Abdullah-Al-Baki, former authorized officer Shafiqul Islam, former assistant officer Shah Md Sadrul Alam, former superintendents Jahanara Begum and Mofazzal Hossain, and former inspector Mehduzzaman.

MYANMAR ELECTIONS Reschedule cancelled polls Says Fortify Rights

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Myanmar should immediately schedule by-elections in areas where the Union Election Commission (UEC) cancelled the November 8 polls, Fortify Rights said yesterday.

It also said the right to vote must be ensured for all eligible persons, including Rohingyas and others who are disenfranchised under discriminatory laws.

"Free and fair elections must be held at the earliest opportunity in all areas where they were suspended," said Ismail Wolff, regional director of Fortify Rights.

On October 16, the UEC announced the cancellation of by-polls in parts of 15 townships in Bago Region, Kachin, Kayin [Karen], Mon, Shan, and Rakhine states, saying the areas were "unsafe".

It added that elections will be held in those areas when the situation is stable enough.

However, the commission has yet to commit to a timeframe for the by-elections or explain what conditions would constitute as "stable enough."

Myanmar's ruling party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), claimed a landslide victory in the November 8 elections, but the authorities denied almost all

age-appropriate Rohingyas the right to vote through the arbitrary and discriminatory application of Myanmar's citizenship law.

Global election monitor the Carter Center said the UEC rejected or de-registered 17 candidate nominations on the grounds of the applicants' "parents not holding Myanmar citizenship at the time of their birth".

Fortify Rights similarly documented the arbitrary rejection of Rohingya candidates based on false conclusions regarding the citizenship status of their parents.

R Rohingyas participated in the 2010 national election in Myanmar, and three served in parliament as recently as 2015.

That very year, the government excluded Rohingyas from voting, running for office, or maintaining any Rohingya-led political party.

Myanmar's continued denial of the Rohingyas' right to vote or to participate in elections is part of its wider persecution of the indigenous ethnic group, including its ongoing denial of their existence, the rights body said.

Myanmar has long denied Rohingya access to citizenship, most recently through National Verification Cards, which effectively identifies members of the community as foreigners.

School admissions by lottery this time

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Millions of students and their guardians have anxiously been waiting for the start of school admission as public and private school authorities have not yet decided anything on holding entrance tests or selling admission forms.

Usually, private schools start selling the forms as early as mid-November. On the other hand, government schools begin the form distribution in December. But this year has been different as all schools have been closed since March 17 amid the pandemic.

The school closure has recently been extended to December 19 to ensure health safety.

Dipu Moni said the "catchment" quota for schools located in Dhaka had been increased to 50 percent from 40 percent. And students willing to enroll in government schools in Dhaka will be able to choose five schools from each of three clusters. Currently, a student can choose a single school from each of three clusters.

Now, schools take fresh students for all classes based on vacancy. But they enroll the bulk of students in class-1, at the beginning of students' academic life, and in class-6 after completion of primary education.

Each year, several million students get fresh admission to schools across the country.

Admission to class-1 takes place through lottery all over the country. Students get admitted to class-9 based on their results of Junior School Certificate (JSC) or Junior Dakhil Certificate (JDC) examinations. Students willing to enroll to other classes need to take admission tests.

Meanwhile, the government decision to admit students based on lottery has triggered mixed reactions among educationists.

Former Buet Prof M Kaykobad and Brac University Professor Emeritus and also founder-director of the private university's Institute of Educational Development Manzoor Ahmed welcomed the decision.

They said the government should make admission through lottery and expansion of the quota facilities for admission to local schools a permanent system.

Manzoor Ahmed said the government should work to create good schools in all areas by taking up plans on improving education quality.

"If there are good schools in our locality, parents will not run after some reputed schools elsewhere. It will also reduce traffic jam in the capital," he said.

Former director of Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research and a member of the National Education Policy 2010 Formulation Committee, Prof Siddiqur Rahman said the lottery system was the right one for admission to class-1.

"Children of this level will learn through fun and play ... but lottery for admission to upper classes might not be that good. The lottery system will allow students of all standard -- low, medium and high performing -- to sit in the same classroom. Teachers might find it difficult to deal with such a classroom which will be heterogeneous in nature," he said.

"If you want to reduce the disparity between high-performing and low-performing schools, you will need to improve the quality of education. You need a competency-based education system."

Dipu Moni said making the lottery-based admission system permanent depended on the success of this year's model.

"Some might link lottery with fate ... But the lottery system might bring some positive changes in schools and the education system," she said.

"Under the current system, everybody runs after some reputed schools for admission and it allows the disparity among schools to grow. The new move will help us close the gap," she said.

SSC AND HSC

Dipu Moni hinted that next year's SSC and HSC examinations might be delayed by a month or two. Usually, SSC exams start on February 1 and the HSC tests on April 1.

She said the SSC students would be evaluated on the basis of a curtailed syllabus, ensuring that minimum competency is needed for promotion to the next level.

Due to the Covid-19, the government in October had announced that examinees of this year's HSC and its equivalent tests would be evaluated based on their results of their Junior School Certificate (JSC), SSC and their equivalent test grades.

Dipu Moni said the SSC grades might get 75 percent weight to the HSC results, while the JSC results 25 percent weight.

Regarding the public university admission tests, the minister urged all universities to follow the cluster admission system to lessen the financial burden on admission seekers and reduce their hassles.

Frontliners to be first in line

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global effort to improve poorer countries' access to vaccines.

The officials said that in the second phase, frontline professionals such as members of law enforcement agencies and journalists, and people aged above 60 with comorbidity are likely to receive the shots.

People aged under 18 may not be vaccinated in the first and second phases, hinted the officials.

The core committee on vaccine preparedness and deployment will submit the final draft of the plan on Covid vaccination to the health ministry in a day or two, Dr Shamsul Haque, director of Expanded Programme for Immunisation of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), told The Daily Star.

VACCINES FROM GAVI, SERUM

Bangladesh will get 68 million doses of vaccine for at least 20 percent of its population (34 million) by next year from Gavi under COVAX facility, DGHS officials said at a press conference in the capital yesterday.

Each person will need two doses. The cost of each shot has been estimated at \$1.62 to \$2, they said.

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, is an international organisation created in 2000 to improve access to new and underused vaccines for children living in the world's poorest countries.

The vaccine doses from Gavi are in addition to the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine doses that Bangladesh will procure from India's Serum Institute via Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd.

The health ministry on November 5 signed a tripartite contract with Serum and Beximco to import 30 million doses of the vaccine.

The officials said Bangladesh has to pay for the Gavi-COVAX vaccine under co-financing arrangement. And the health directorate will submit the National Vaccine Deployment Plan to Gavi as per the conditions.

At yesterday's press conference, Shamsul Haque said they are working to submit the final plan to Gavi on December 7 when the global vaccine alliance will start taking such plans from different countries.

Earlier, Bangladesh had sent an official Expression of Interest (EOI) to Gavi on July 9. Gavi sent a letter to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on September 18, announcing the country's eligibility for getting the Covid vaccine, he said.

DGHS officials said the first shipment of the vaccine doses is likely to arrive in the country between

February and June 2021.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Experts have lauded the government for ramping up its efforts to get Covid vaccines, but stressed the need for a prudent vaccine policy.

They urged the government to stay in touch with all other countries and organisations that are conducting the phase-III trial of vaccine development.

Prof Nazrul Islam, member of the National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid, said the government has made good progress in getting vaccines. However, there are lots of issues in vaccine deployment -- cold chain, necessary equipment, transportation and human resources.

"Government officials are saying they are prepared for vaccine deployment. We hope it is not a mere statement," he told this newspaper.

The noted virologist pointed to the previous "failures" in maintaining proper screening at airports and said, "If a new strain of the novel coronavirus enters the country and spreads, vaccination may not be sufficient to tackle it."

"We have to ensure stringent screening at airports. Also, it has to be made sure that people wear masks even after vaccination."

Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of pharmacology department at the BSMMU, appreciated the government initiatives to procure vaccines.

He, however, said concern remains as to "when the vaccines would reach the country and whether those could be administered to the people timely and properly."

OTHER VACCINES

The government may not procure the vaccine developed by Pfizer as it requires cold chain temperature of minus 70 degrees Celsius. Bangladesh does not have that cold chain capacity, said DGHS officials.

At yesterday's briefing, Shamsul Haque said the government has been in talks with Russia for Sputnik-V vaccine.

He further said two Bangladeshi institutes have expressed willingness to host the 3rd Phase Clinical trial of Sanofi and GSK's protein-based vaccines.

About the Oxford vaccine, he said Bangladesh will receive three crore doses -- 50 lakh doses a month -- in phases by next year. Under the initiative, around 1.5 crore people will be vaccinated and each person will need two doses.

Prof Dr Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general (Health) of the DGHS, was also present at the briefing.

Farewell, magical Maradona

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and was being treated at his home north of Buenos Aires.

"There are four ambulances at the door of the residence. They have summoned family members to come. It is serious," the TyC Sports channel reported.

The life of the divine footballing talent that was Diego Armando Maradona was marked by wild highs and lows, with Argentina and with club sides Boca Juniors, Barcelona and Napoli.

Excesses with cocaine and alcohol had long taken their toll on the mercurial talent's health.

The former player underwent surgery earlier this month to remove a clot lodged between his brain and skull.

Maradona has been admitted to hospital three times in the last 20 years for serious health issues -- two of which were potentially fatal -- due to his drug and alcohol addictions.

The highs were crowned by his performances when he captained

Argentina to victory in Mexico in 1986.

In the final, Maradona set up the 86th-minute winner against West Germany. He scored twice in the semi-final against Belgium, beating four defenders for the second.

But the match that defined his tournament, and possibly his international career, was that win over England, in which he scored two goals that will be remembered forever -- for very different reasons.

In the 51st minute, as England goalkeeper Peter Shilton reached to catch the ball, Maradona jumped alongside him and with a deftness that fooled the eye, flicked the ball with his hand through the England goalkeeper's arms and into the net.

After the game, Maradona said he scored "a little with the head of Maradona and a little with the hand of God."

The goal he scored four minutes later, when he picked up the ball in his own half and glided past six England players, including Shilton, was named

"Goal of the Century" by FIFA.

He played for Argentinos Juniors and Boca in Argentina before joining Barcelona in Spain, but it was in Naples where he would enchant an entire city by leading the then unfashionable club to its only two Italian league titles in 1987 and 1990. "Always in our hearts. Ciao Diego," Napoli tweeted after his death was announced.

European football's governing body UEFA announced that Maradona would be honoured with a minute's silence before Wednesday's Champions League games.

In 2000, FIFA ran an online Player of the Century poll. Maradona gained 54 percent of the vote, Pele was second with 18 percent, but FIFA declared their joint winners.

Maradona married his long-time girlfriend Claudia Villafane in 1984. They had two daughters, Dalma and Gianinna, and divorced in 2004.

He also had a son, Diego Junior, born in Naples in 1986, although he only acknowledged paternity in 2004.

New initiative offers

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workers were earlier denied "final exit" permission by sponsors, and such workers could go to the Saudi labour court to settle the dispute, he added.

Migrant workers become eligible for final exit when the work contract ends.

Now, the new reforms will allow them "to leave the Kingdom after the end of the employment contract without the employer's consent", according to a Saudi Press Agency report.

On November 4, the Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development launched the LRI under the "National Transformation Program" (NTP) to enhance the contractual relationship between workers and employers.

The re-entry reforms will allow workers to travel outside Saudi Arabia without the employer's approval after submitting a request; the employer will be notified electronically of their departure.

The Saudi authorities made the move amid criticism from global

migration experts and rights defenders who have long been demanding a drastic reform to the rigid nature of its "kafala" system.

The Gulf nation is the biggest overseas labour market for Bangladesh and also the top remittance-generating country. It is home to more than 22 lakh Bangladeshis, most of whom are employed in the private sector.

In the 2019-2020 fiscal year, Bangladesh migrant workers sent home around \$4 billion in remittance from Saudi Arabia, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

Migrant rights activists said the Bangladesh government should look at LRI implementation with due importance to protect the rights of Bangladeshi workers there.

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, said the reform initiative is the inception of a positive move.

"I think Saudi Arabia has been undergoing a process which at the end of the day will benefit all migrants," he added.

He, however, said the government should see to what extent this initiative

will be fruitful for Bangladeshi migrant workers.

Pointing out that many Bangladeshi workers are employed as housemaids and drivers in Saudi Arabia, Shariful said the Bangladesh government has to look into how these groups of migrant workers are benefited from the new reforms.

The Brac official said the government should also observe whether the reform initiative will uphold migrants' rights safeguarded by the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

It covers a migrant's right to movement, wage protection, and scope for sharing opinion, he added.

Shakirul Islam, chairperson of Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program, said the Saudi authorities seek to move from individual sponsorship to the "state-governed structural system" through this reform.

It should be implemented, he said, hoping the new reform will create more space for the protection of Bangladeshi migrant workers there.