

BANGLADESH UPDATE



2,198
New cases in 24hrs



4,69,423
Total cases



6,713
Deaths



3,85,786
Recoveries



1,491,289
Deaths



64,417,268
Total cases

JUSTICE FOR RAPE Compensation as important as prosecution

Say speakers at webinar of BLAST, UN Women, The Daily Star

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

While prosecution of rapists is essential, it is just as important to ensure redress for survivors of rape and other gender-based violence through compensation, said speakers at a webinar last night.

The discussion titled "No Justice without Reparation: Why Rape Survivors Must Have a Right to Compensation", was jointly organised by Bangladesh Legal Aids and Services Trust (BLAST), UN Women and The Daily Star.

Taqbir Huda, research specialist at BLAST, said UN in 1993 gave a declaration of elimination of violence against women in four stages -- preventing violence, protecting them, ensuring justice and redress through compensation.

"However, in Bangladesh, the issue of compensation is hardly discussed in our policies and laws," said Taqbir.

Under the Women and Children Repression Act 2020, the perpetrators are fined along with the punishment, but the amount goes to the state, Taqbir said.

The courts have the right to provide the amount to the survivors, but it is not mandatory, and survivors have been ensured compensation in only seven percent of the cases, he added.

Fowzul Azim, senior district judge, who is also the chief research officer of the Law Commission, Bangladesh, said although in laws protecting women from gender-based violence there are reparations for survivors, these have not been made effective yet.

"For example, under the Women and Children Repression Act 2020, a survivor can receive compensation against 10 offences, ranging from Tk 10,000 to Tk one lakh, fixed by the court. The amount should be extended," said Fowzul.

Besides, since there is no specific guideline on how the payment will be made, it becomes difficult for the judges

to hand the money.

Fowzul also urged that in cases where the perpetrators do not have the ability to pay, the state must take the responsibility.

Dr Abul Hossain, project director of multi-sectoral programmes for violence against women, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), said MoWCA, with Centre for Policy Dialogue and CARE Bangladesh, did a survey on gender-based violence (GBV) survivors to determine the cost of violence but unfortunately they found it difficult to measure the cost.

"Although the cost of physical violence can be measured, you cannot measure the lifetime mental trauma of survivors," he said.

Dr Hossain however said there are compensation packages for GBV survivors from MoWCA's Women and Children Repression Cell, from where they can avail initial support.

Rita Das Roy, capacity building manager of GIZ, focused on how incidents of rape or other forms of violence create lifelong trauma and hamper survivors' confidence, education, productivity, and ultimately isolate them.

It is the responsibility of the state to ensure their compensation, she said.

Shoko Ishikawa, of UN Women, said if women truly have the right to live free of violence, it is the obligation of every state to make sure that their rights are fully protected.

"These key principles and obligations are stressed in international laws as well as by the treaty bodies, such as the Committee Against Torture, Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and Bangladesh is a party to all these treaties.

BLAST executive director, advocate Sara Hossain moderated the webinar.



A hawker sets up shop in Gulistan to sell repaired and refurbished feature and smart phones yesterday. He also sells parts for repairing broken phones. Despite the prices of entry-level phones dropping over the years, many still cannot afford those while some decide to keep their old ones going.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

All set with UN views put aside

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They were also not sure how funding for meeting the needs of the Rohingyas would be managed following their relocation. They stressed that any relocation must be safe, dignified and voluntary.

A UN source said the UNHCR requested the Bangladesh government late last year to allow a technical team to the island in Noakhali's Hatiya, but it did not receive any response.

"We have no clue as to why the team was not allowed there," the source told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Tk 3,100-crore housing project, funded with public money, was taken after some 750,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military campaign in Myanmar's Rakhine and took shelter in Cox's Bazar since August 2017. They joined some 300,000 other Rohingyas, who had fled previous waves of violence in Rakhine.

Destruction of forests and hills and risk of landslides in Cox's Bazar prompted the authorities to choose the temporary housing site on Bhasan Char, which is around 37 miles off the coast of Bay of Bengal.

The project implemented by Bangladesh Navy has 120 cluster villages that are capable of accommodating one lakh Rohingyas.

Government sources yesterday told this paper that the authorities were preparing to shift the first batch of around 2,500 Rohingyas to the island from Cox's Bazar camps within a couple of days.

Around 66 tonnes of food and other necessary household items were taken to the island as of November 29, the sources said.

The houses have been built four feet above the ground with concrete blocks. The entire housing site is protected by a 13km-long flood embankment. There are also 120 cyclone shelters, which are planned to be used as schools, medical centres and community centres.

Government officials said there were large swathes of land that could be used for livestock and fish farming if the Rohingyas were relocated there. The

refugees in the Cox's Bazar camps have a very little work to do now.

UN and several international aid agencies have, however, been opposing the relocation plan, saying Bhasan Char is an isolated island and people there would be dangerously exposed to cyclones.

At one point last year, the UN wanted to send an independent technical team to Bhasan Char to visit the project. Accordingly, a request along with terms of reference was submitted to the government.

In a statement yesterday, the UNHCR -- the UN refugee agency -- said it had not been involved in preparations for the relocation or the identification of the refugees and has limited information on the overall relocation exercise.

Since the government announced the project, the UN has offered to engage in constructive consultations aimed at better understanding of the relocation plan, the UN said, adding that it remains willing to continue dialogue in this regard.

The UN has consistently maintained that any relocations to Bhasan Char should be preceded by comprehensive technical protection assessments for reviewing the safety, feasibility and sustainability of Bhasan Char as a place for refugees to live.

It said it also spoke of the framework for protection and the assistance and services they would be able to access on the island. The United Nations is prepared to proceed with the technical and protection assessments, if permitted by the government, it said.

"These assessments would be the concrete next step in determining whether the UN can engage operationally with the government's Bhasan Char project.

"If so, further work would be needed in order to develop plans and budgets, in consultation with the government and national and international NGO partners, as well as with the international donors whose support makes the Rohingya humanitarian response possible in Bangladesh."

Meanwhile, European Union Ambassador to Bangladesh Rensje Teerink said the underlying important issue was that a UN technical mission to Bhasan Char was pending.

"We always said let's first see what mission brings. If the mission says it is totally safe and sustainable for these people to be relocated, then we can look how we can support this process. At the moment, we feel it is a bit premature because the missions have not taken place on the Bhasan Char," she said at a talk hosted by the Diplomatic Correspondents Association of Bangladesh yesterday.

Asked about the relocation move by the government when the UN waits for a visit by its technical team for assessments, COAST Trust Executive Director Rezaul Karim Chowdhury said Bangladesh risks losing the reputation it earned by sheltering the Rohingyas and the good relationship with UN.

"Our government should engage in dialogue with the UN on Bhasan Char. The UN also should understand the challenges Bangladesh faces and facilitate the relocation. If necessary, more facilities can be added to what is there in Bhasan Char now," he told The Daily Star.

It will be difficult for the government to arrange food for the 1,00,000 Rohingyas and meet their other humanitarian needs if the international community is not involved in the process, he said.

"Can we manage it without the support of the international community?" he asked.

This correspondent tried to contact Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen, State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Dr Md Enamur Rahman, the ministry's Secretary Md Mohsin and Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Shah Rezwana Hayat over phone yesterday for comments on why the UN team was still not allowed to visit Bhasan Char.

None of them, however, could be reached.

Work going on for 5-layer

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protection system in the island as the government decided to relocate a group of Rohingyas there.

"We have developed a protection system after analysing the weather models of the last 176 years," Commander Md Anowerul Kabir, deputy project director of Ashrayan-3 project (the official title of the Bhasan Char project), told The Daily Star on Monday.

Strong concrete pillars have been installed along the 2.5km long sea shore of the island to weaken strong currents as its first line of defence. This protection dyke, called "Screen Break Water", would weaken sea waves by 75 percent, said officials.

Gravels of diameters one to two inches have been dumped beside the pillars. This would weaken the sea currents by another 25 percent, they added. Besides, geo bags have been dumped on the layer of gravels to make sure that the island is protected even better.

Commander Kabir said they adopted a scientific protection system and there was no scope for erosion of the shore.

A natural defence mechanism has also been used in the island by planting mangrove saplings. Around one lakh saplings were planted in the island last year. Steps have been taken to plant another 10 lakh saplings, said project officials.

A former forest department official, who has 25-year working experience in mangrove forests, is helping project officials plant the saplings.

Construction of the main embankment is going on around 100 feet away from the sea shore. The embankment will be 19 feet high from the ground and 12-km long around the new settlement.

"We will plant grass along both sides of the embankment to make it stronger," said Commander Kabir.

Mangrove afforestation is going on to protect the island from cyclones and storm surge.

About possible waterlogging, Kabir said they have already built a modern drainage system in the island and there will be around 18 sluice gates in the embankment.

Seeking anonymity, a project official said they were planning to develop a dredging system in the island and that they have already wrote to the authorities concerned in this regard.

"We would dump the dredged up soil on the island which will create another layer of protection," said the official.

Each of the 120 cyclone shelters in the island are built on a plinth 12 feet above the ground. Each shelter can accommodate 1,000 people and 200 cattle.

Md Fakir, a cowboy living in the island for nine years, said Bhasan Char used to go under water during high tides.

"We did not see water entering the island in the last three years after the navy officials started the development work and built an embankment here," he added.

and one medical college from Saturday.

"Initially, we are starting antigen-based rapid testing at nine district-level hospitals and at one medical college from Saturday. It will be expanded to other districts from the next week," said Habibur Rahman, the director of Management Information System (MIS) at DGHS.

The hospitals are in Panchagarh, Gaibandha, Joypurhat, Patuakhali, Meherpur, Munshiganj, Jashore, Sylhet, Madaripur and Brahmanbaria districts. Shaheed Shamsuddin Medical College Hospital in Sylhet is the other hospital.

38 DIED, 2,198 INFECTED
Meanwhile, 38 people died with Covid-19 in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, according to a press release of the DGHS.

With this, the total number of deaths rose to 6,713 while the death rate stood at 1.43 percent.

Another 2,198 cases were recorded in the same 24 hours taking the total number of positive cases to 469,423, added the release.

Against a number of 15,972 tests conducted in those 24 hours throughout the country, the positivity rate was 13.76 percent, while the overall positivity rate stood at 16.74 percent.

In the previous day, the positivity rate was 14.79 percent.

At least a total of 2,562 Covid-19 patients have recovered in the same 24 hours.

With this, the total number of recoveries rose to 3,85,786 while the recovery rate stood at 82.18 percent.

Among the 38 dead yesterday, 25 were males.

One aged under ten years, one between 21 and 30 years, three between 31 and 40, four between 41 and 50, four between 51 and 60, and 25 above 60 years old, added the release.

Cabinet okays

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compliance with the Provision 76 of the Public Procurement Rule-2008.

Earlier on November 5 last, the government signed a tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Serum Institute of India (SII) and Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd to collect three crore doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca SARS-CoV-2, AZD1222 vaccine.

On Monday, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said that the approval from the Economic Affairs Committee is required as per section 76 of the Public Procurement Rules since it will be bought from a single source.

On the next day, Health Secretary Abdul Mannan said the country would receive the vaccine hopefully by February next year or earlier.

"We hope we will get corona vaccines very soon. Hopefully by the month of February [2021] or earlier... Until then, however, wearing a mask is the only way to live and prevent transmission," Abdul Mannan said while addressing as chief guest in a World AIDS Day 2020 event in Dhaka.

The finance ministry on November 16 initially allocated some Tk 735.77 crore for the Health Service Division to procure the Covid-19 vaccine.

Apart from the vaccine from SII, Bangladesh will buy 68 million doses from the Cavi under a global arrangement called COVAX. The first shipment of vaccine doses from SII, the Vaccine Alliance, is likely to be delivered between February and June next year, said officials of the health directorate.

ANTIGEN TESTING STARTS FROM SATURDAY

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) is going to start antigen-based rapid testing for coronavirus at nine district hospitals

ROHINGYA CRISIS

US to keep supporting Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US would continuously support Bangladesh through humanitarian assistance and political engagement for a solution to the Rohingya crisis.

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Earl R Miller made the statement on Tuesday while attending a virtual view exchange meeting with the Editors' Council of Bangladesh.

According to a press release of the US embassy in Dhaka, the US also wants to ensure safe, voluntary, sustainable, and dignified repatriation of the refugees back to their home.

Some 750,000 Rohingyas fled brutal military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine State in 2017, but none of them returned saying the environment in Rakhine was not conducive.

The US donates the largest stake of humanitarian assistance to the Rohingyas and will continue to work with Bangladesh and the international community for a sustainable solution to the problem, Earl R Miller said.

He also said that his country is committed to working with Bangladesh to fight Covid-19 and expand trade and other areas of cooperation including clean energy and countering terrorism.

He highlighted the strength of US-Bangladesh relations and expressed confidence that this partnership will continue on its positive trajectory, deepening and expanding in 2021 as Bangladesh celebrates its 50th anniversary of independence.

Miller also paid tribute to Bangladeshi journalists and media outlets for their tireless efforts during the ongoing pandemic to ensure the public has accurate, life-saving information about coronavirus.

7 Myanmarese held with 2.8 lakh yaba pills

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Coast Guard detained seven Myanmar nationals with 280,000 yaba tablets from a boat in the Bay of Bengal in Teknaf's Katabunia area early yesterday.

Tipped off, coastguards conducted a raid in Shah Pari Dwp area and chased down a boat entering Bangladesh territory from Myanmar, said Lt Commander M Hamdul Islam, media officer at Coast Guard headquarters.

The coastguards found seven Myanmar citizens smuggling the contraband tablets into Bangladesh. They seized the yaba tablets stashed in two containers on the boat, the official added.

The detainees, yaba tablets, and the boat were handed to Taknaf Model Police Station.

Amnesty slams Egypt 'execution spree'

AFP, Beirut

Amnesty International yesterday denounced a "horrifying execution spree" in Egypt, saying dozens of people had been put to death in the past two months.

The UK-based rights group said that "in October and November alone, the Egyptian authorities executed at least 57 men and women", adding that this was almost double the number for all of last year.

"The Egyptian authorities have embarked on a horrifying execution spree in recent months... in some cases following grossly unfair mass trials," Amnesty's regional research and advocacy director, Philip Luther, said in a statement.

Legal action

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The DMP ordinance stipulates that an organisation must obtain prior permission from the DMP for staging such programmes and using sound devices so that the authorities can keep the people's civic rights protected, maintain law and order and control the movement of traffic, it added.

If a deviation occurs, the authorities cannot ensure security of the participants of processions or rallies. Besides, some quarters get the opportunity to cause damage to lives and properties and deteriorate law and order through organising rallies, read the DMP release.

On November 13, a rally was held at Dhupkhola ground in Gandaria under the banner of "Touhid Janata Oikya Parishad" to oppose the installation of a sculpture of Bangabandhu on the occasion of Mujib Borsho.

On the same day, Hefajat-e-Islam Joint Secretary General Mamunul Haque publicly opposed setting up of Bangabandhu's sculpture at the BMA Auditorium in the capital.

Speaking at a recent programme in Chattogram, Hefajat chief Junaid Babunagari also threatened to pull down and destroy all the sculptures no matter which party puts those up.

HC raps 2 firms for grabbing wetlands

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the Bangladesh Economic Zone Act, 2010, after obtaining clearance certificates from the DoE and other authorities concerned, it said.

Noor Ali's firms can submit afresh applications to the BEZA for permission to establish an economic zone in Sonargaon in accordance with the law, it added.

The HC bench delivered the verdict following a writ petition filed by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) in 2014 challenging the activities of the UPDL to set up a resort in Sonargaon.

The court kept the writ petition as *continuing mandamus* so that any aggrieved person can move a prayer before it for necessary orders on the issue in the future.

Earlier on November 24, the bench verdict December 2 for delivering its verdict after the final hearing on the writ petition.

Vaccination starts next week in UK

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Asked about the British approval of the Pfizer vaccine, the agency said: "EMA considers that the conditional marketing authorisation is the most appropriate regulatory mechanism for use in the current pandemic emergency."

The approval of a jab for use almost exactly a year since the coronavirus emerged in Wuhan, China, is a triumph for science, Pfizer boss Albert Bourla and his German biotechnology partner BioNTech.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization said it had received data from Pfizer and BioNTech on the Covid-19 vaccine and was reviewing it for "possible listing for emergency use", a benchmark for countries to authorise national use.

President Vladimir Putin yesterday ordered Russian authorities to begin mass voluntary vaccinations against Covid-19 next week as Russia recorded 589 new daily deaths from the coronavirus.

Russia will have produced 2 million vaccine doses within the next few days, Putin said. Russia said last month that its Sputnik V jab was 92% effective at protecting people from Covid-19 according to interim results.

'NO CORNERS CUT'

The US drugmaker said Britain's emergency use authorization marks a historic moment in the fight against Covid-19. Pfizer announced its vaccine breakthrough on November 9 with stage III clinical trial results.

"This authorization is a goal we have been working toward since we first declared that science will win, and we applaud the MHRA for their ability to conduct a careful assessment and take timely action to help protect the people of the UK," said CEO Bourla.

Britain's medicines regulator approved the vaccine in record time by doing a "rolling" concurrent analysis of data and the manufacturing process while Pfizer raced to conclude trials.

"No corners have been cut," MHRA chief June Raine said in a televised briefing from Downing Street, adding that the first data on the vaccine had been received in June and undergone a rigorous analysis to international standards. "Safety is our watchword."

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said hospitals were ready to receive the shots and vaccination centres would be set up across the country, but he admitted distribution would be a challenge given

with the HC which on October 25, 2016, modified its 2014 order, allowing the company to go ahead with its project.

Bela on November 3, 2016, filed a petition with the SC which stayed the October 25 HC order and upheld the 2014 HC order. The apex court asked the HC to hear and dispose of its 2014 rule.

Later, Bela filed a contempt of court petition with the HC on January 16, 2017, as the UPDL started work in the moujas for establishing an economic zone in violation of the HC directives.

On August 14, 2018, Bela moved to the SC for necessary directives to stop land grabbing and earth filling in the six moujas.

The apex court then ordered Noor Ali to refrain from filling up farmlands and wetlands near the Meghna in the moujas. It also instructed the Narayananj deputy commissioner to take necessary measures to that effect.

storage at temperature typical of an Antarctic winter.

Pfizer has said the shots can be kept in thermal shipping boxes for up to 30 days. Afterwards, the vaccine can be kept at fridge temperatures for up to five days.

Other frontrunners in the vaccine race include US biotech firm Moderna, which has said its shot was 94% successful in late-stage clinical trials, and AstraZeneca, which said last month its Covid-19 shot was 70% effective in pivotal trials and could be up to 90% effective.

FREE TO ALL

Coronavirus vaccines will be optional and free to all citizens and residents of Kuwait, the Gulf state's prime minister said yesterday, in comments reported in al-Qabas newspaper. Prime Minister Sabah al-Khalid al-Sabah was speaking at a meeting of various ministers.

Italy will give all its citizens free vaccinations against coronavirus starting with doctors and care home residents once the jabs are approved, its health minister said.

Japan will give free coronavirus vaccines to all of its residents under a bill passed yesterday, as the nation battles record numbers of daily cases, reports AFP.