

BANGLADESH UPDATE



2,202
New cases in 24hrs



4,81,945
Total cases



6,906
Deaths



4,01,194
Recoveries



1,557,301
Deaths



68,292,981
Total cases

Stop them from fleeing abroad

BSEC asks police to ensure 6 businesspersons accused of graft stays in country

AHSAN HABIB

Stock market regulator has written to the police to take initiatives so that six directors of three listed companies cannot flee the country.

They are Azimul Islam of Alif Manufacturing Company, Tasbirul Ahmed Chowdhury of United Airways and Mohammad Ali, Jebunessa Akhter, Hamida Begum and Lokman Chowdhury of Imam Buton Industries. On Sunday, the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) sent the letter to the Criminal Investigation Department.

The companies raised funds from the stock market through initial public offering (IPO), repeat public offering (RPO) and rights share offering and they sold off their shares to the general stock investors, the letter read.

United Airways raised Tk 100 crore through IPO in 2010. In 2011, it again raised Tk 315 crore from the stock market through issuing right shares.

The airlines started its commercial operations in 2007 and flight operations have remained suspended since 2016.

After that it started to incur loss and then its directors began to sell their shares to the general investors.

At present, directors are holding 4.16 percent shares of the company and the rest are held by institutional and general investors.

But the listed companies' directors are ordered to hold at least 30 percent shares of their companies.

The directors have breached securities rules and that's why the BSEC is taking legal actions against them, it said.

The BSEC called the directors several times to come to the commission and give their explanations, but they did not do so, said the stock market regulator.

For several reasons, the BSEC assumes that the directors can flee the country and that why it urged the law enforcement agency to take necessary steps to bar their escape.

Alif Manufacturing raised Tk 109 crore through issuing right shares. Though the fund utilisation time was 2019, but it only used around 33 percent, according to the BSEC.

Imam Buton Industries is a Chattogram-based button producer that has been listed with the stock market since 1996.

The BSEC also sent copies of the letter to all land ports and airports of the country.



The mangled remains of a truck and a pick up after they collided head-on on Dhaka-Tangail highway in Gharinda Bypass area of Tangail early yesterday. The accident left five people dead and one injured. PHOTO: COLLECTED

ACC roar fades as cases pile up

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Shaon and Shamsul Haque Chowdhury were among them.

Later on, the names of other lawmakers, including Afzal Hossain, Mahfuzur Rahman Mita, Pankaj Nath, Moazzem Hossain Ratan, Omar Faruk Chowdhury, Mahi B Chowdhury, Nazrul Islam Babu, Abdullah Al Islam Jacob, Kazi Shahidul Islam alias Kazi Papul and Selina Islam, also came up for their alleged involvement in corruption.

Of them, the ACC filed a case against Kazi Papul and Selina for laundering around Tk 148.41 crore.

The ACC also investigated corruption allegations against former lawmakers BM Mozammel Haque, Kamrul Ashraf Khan Poton, Abdul Awal, Sirajul Islam Molla and Shamsul Haque Bhuiyan.

After enquiry, it filed two separate cases against Shamsul and Awal.

Enquiries into corruption allegations against former BNP lawmakers Ruhul Quddus Talukdar Dulu, Asadul Habib Dulu, Abdul Momin Talukdar and former secretary general of Jatiya Party ABM Ruhul Amin Hawladar are still pending.

Without elaborating, an ACC director said they were working on the matters and "examining the documents."

Besides, the ACC filed 22 cases after the crackdown was launched on casinos and against ruling party men, among others, over illegal wealth.

So far, charge sheets in four cases have been submitted against former general secretary of Dhaka South Juba League Ismail Hossain Samrat, organising secretary Khaled Mahmud Bhuiyan, Samrat's associate Jakir Hossain and online casino kingpin Selim Proddhan.

The investigation into irregularities

in health sector also did not see much progress.

Since the Covid-19 hit the country, the government took initiatives to procure masks, PPEs and other equipment to fight the pandemic.

Cashing in on the crisis, a quarter attempted to make quick money by supplying low standard masks. But some doctors protested it and brought the matter to light.

On June 18, the ACC formed a four-member committee, headed by a director, to investigate irregularities in purchase and distribution of PPEs, masks and other equipment.

The health division took a move to keep doctors, nurses and health workers, involved in treating Covid-19 patients, at hotels and made allocations in this regard. Allegations were raised that some top government officials misappropriated the fund.

The ACC quizzed some officials in this regard but there is not much progress, except for filing of some cases.

One case was filed against Abdur Razzaq, the chairman of JMI Hospital Requisite MFG Ltd, and six doctors over supply of fake N-95 masks.

The ACC also filed two cases against Regent Hospital boss Mohammad Shahed for corruption.

However, the anti-graft watchdog got something to cheer about.

According to a recently published Transparency International report, 86 percent respondents said the anti-corruption agency of Bangladesh is doing a good job in tackling corruption.

The survey titled "Global Corruption Barometer - Asia 2020" was conducted on 1,000 people.

'SOME PROGRESS SOON'

ACC Chairman Iqbal Mahmood said the pandemic slowed their investigation.

Replying to a question about the delays in investigation, he said they needed to quiz doctors to enquire into the anomalies in the health sector.

"Since doctors are fighting the pandemic on the frontline, quizzing them at this moment might hamper healthcare services. That is why we're dealing the matter carefully."

Regarding the casino scams, he said enquiries and investigations were ongoing.

"Soon you'll see some progress," he told this newspaper on Sunday, adding their work was getting pace.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman compared the ACC with a toothless tiger.

"The primary factor is a dividing line it [ACC] has drawn for itself beyond which it is unwilling, incapable or fearful of going based on the identity and status of the individuals concerned," he said.

The other factor is that like most other instances of collusive corruption, casino business did not flourish in Dhaka without the participation, collusion and protection of powerful entities other than the frontliners.

"The local political elites knew it, the administration knew it, so did the law enforcement agencies," he said, adding, "The ACC may therefore be facing the risk of burning fingers if they went too deep into the scandals."

Iftekharuzzaman said some small fries may face a degree of inconvenience while the big fish are likely to enjoy the proverbial impunity.

Put an end to this

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Modernisation and Digital Agriculture Information and Communication Strengthening" was supposed to be completed by June this year at a cost of Tk 68.70 crore.

A proposal was placed at yesterday's meeting for extending the deadline by two years with an additional cost of Tk 41.20 crore.

The premier asked the officials concerned to explain why the project got delayed and why its cost went up. The project director was not present at the meeting. The newly appointed agriculture secretary remained silent, Shamsul said adding that the agriculture minister is now abroad.

"Why the project implementation was delayed. By this time, the project should have been completed. And now you are seeking time extension for this project."

"Because of this, the project cost will rise to Tk 109 crore from Tk 68 crore. Take measures so that all the projects are completed in time. Find the reasons behind the delay in project implementation," the PM was quoted by Shamsul as saying.

The PM again expressed her resentment when another proposal was placed for time extension of the project titled "Charkhali-Tushkhali-Mothbaria-Patharghata Road Development and Widening" covering parts of Barguna and Patuakhali.

The proposal sought to extend the deadline for completing the project by two and a half years with an additional cost of Tk 44.57 crore.

The Tk 104.76-crore project was supposed to be completed by December 2018.

The PM sought explanation from the implementing agency why the project was delayed and why the cost would rise, Shamsul said.

"This project should have been completed within the stipulated time, as it involved development and widening of the existing road."

"You bring a proposal for time

extension that pushes up the project cost. Such tendencies have to be stopped. It cannot happen over and over again," Hasina was quoted by Shamsul as saying.

The PM also pointed out that the road which is being widened under the project is vital for communication in the region as the Padma Bridge is going to be open to traffic soon. Besides, construction of the Payra port is going on and there will be a cantonment in the area.

She instructed the officials concerned to make a master plan on roads in the southern region, keeping in mind the growing volume of traffic as well as increased movement of heavy vehicles once the Padma Bridge opens.

APPROVAL OF PROJECTS

The Ecnc meeting yesterday approved four project proposals involving Tk 3,903.61 crore. Two of those are for new projects.

It gave the nod to the Tk 2,242 crore project to widen the road and the elevated expressway from Panchaboti in Narayanganj to Mukhtarpur in Munshiganj.

The project will be completed in June 2025.

Citing a government study, the officials said once the project is implemented, it will reduce the travel cost by 62 percent and the waiting time by 74 percent. The average speed of vehicles on the road would increase by 4.45 times.

The PM asked the authorities concerned to change the title of the project to "double-decker road" instead of "elevated expressway".

Shamsul said the expenditure on consultancy in the project was raised to Tk 25 crore from the proposed Tk 10 crore following requests from the officials concerned.

The Ecnc also approved a project for improving civic amenities in Mymensingh City Corporation at a cost of Tk 1,575 crore. The work includes development of roads and drainage network in the city.

Uncertainty looms

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Meanwhile, the health directorate on December 3 issued a circular warning that action would be taken under the Government Employee Act 2018 if any staffer attempted to hamper the measles-rubella vaccination.

A health staffer at Pirgachha Upazila Health Complex of Rangpur told The Daily Star that health assistants assaulted an employee trying to carry vaccines to a centre yesterday.

Source said there are 1.2 lakh EPI vaccination centres across the country. The centres are manned by 26,000 health assistants. The government holds vaccination programmes once a month in each of the centres.

"We will go and talk to the honourable director general of the health director on Thursday [tomorrow]. We will decide our future programmes after the meeting," Sheikh Rabiul Alam, convener of the BHAA, told this correspondent yesterday.

He said, "We have been informed that the health ministry has not responded positively to the health directorate proposal on our demands. It should be considered that Bangladesh received four international recognitions for successes in vaccination, including the latest 'Vaccine Hero' title of honourable prime minister. We, the health assistants, are the contributors behind these achievements."

There are three types of staffers under the EPI programme of the directorate general of the health services (DGHS). They are: health inspector, assistant health inspector, and health assistants.

Under the pay scale, the health assistant post is 16th grade and they are demanding that EPI staffers' pay scales be upgraded to 11th, 12th and 13th grades respectively.

Rabiul said the prime minister had made promises to them in a conference on December 6, 1998. "We were assured several times that our demand will be met," he said.

He said they might withdraw their strike during the measles-rubella vaccination campaign.

"Hopefully we will get a positive response from the honourable director general on Thursday," he added.

Shamsul Haque Mridha, director of EPI at the DGHS, told this paper last night, "The problem is there are multiple factions among them. We, however, held a daylong discussion today [yesterday] with them. We agreed to their demand. We have placed a proposal to the health ministry, which has assured us of considering the matter. We hope the issue will be resolved this time."

32 DEAD; 2,202 INFECTED

Thirty-two more people died from Covid-19 and 2,202 new infections were recorded in the 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, according to a press release of the DGHS.

With this, the total number of deaths reached 6,906, which is 1.43 percent of all confirmed cases in the country.

The total number of confirmed cases rose to 4,81,945.

Against 17,084 tests, the positivity rate was 12.89 percent while the overall positivity rate was 16.65 percent.

Meanwhile, 2,571 Covid-19 patients recovered in the same 24 hours, raising the number of recoveries to 4,01,194. The recovery rate is now 83.24 percent.

Among the 32 deceased, 25 were males and seven females.

One was aged between 21 and 30, three were aged between 41 and 50, six between 51 and 60, and 22 were above 60 years, added the release.

Politicking in the garb of religion

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At least 16 leaders of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, four of Islami Oikya Jote and six of Khelafat Andolon were accommodated in the Hefajat's new committee.

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis and Islami Oikya Jote earlier were in the BNP-led alliance and both are registered with the Election Commission as political parties.

On November 15, Junayed Babunagari was declared Hefajat ameer at the end of its council held at Darul Ulum Moinul Islam Hathazari Madrasa in Chattogram. Before this committee was announced, Junayed served Hefajat as its secretary general.

The council was held around two months after the death of Hefajat amir Ahmed Shafi, who passed away in September. The formation of the new committee sparked an outcry within the organisation with Moulana Mainuddin Ruhil, joint secretary general of the previous committee, terming the new committee completely illegal.

He said Hefajat had never had any top leader who had affiliations with any political party.

Soon after the formation of the new committee, Hefajat hogged the headlines as it strongly opposed the construction of Bangabandhu's sculpture in the capital.

During a meeting on November 19 in the capital's Mohammadpur, Junayed Babunagari vowed that they were ready to sacrifice their lives to establish rule of Allah in the land of Allah.

He even warned the government of facing consequences if it did not meet their demands.

The political analysts said the presence of political leaders in its new committee and its recent activities and demands signalled that it has turned into a political party.

Different religion-based political parties are using the platform to gain popularity and achieve their political goals as Hefajat has thousands of its dedicated followers across the country, they said.

"Hefajat is indeed a political party and they are working targeting to achieve a certain political aim," said Serajul Islam Choudhury, professor emeritus of Dhaka University.

Hefajat's demand to change the existing structure of the state is nothing but a political demand which manifests that they want to go to power.

He said they don't bother to talk on different political interest issues.

"They are using religion to do politics and they are depending on madrasa students to do it."

Prof Serajul said the present government's "compromising and soft stance" was also responsible for

under stay-at-home orders to fight a deepening US crisis.

While the World Health Organization has warned that successful vaccines on their own will not immediately end the crisis, nations around the world are seeking safe candidates to administer to populations growing increasingly weary of restrictions and economic pain they cause.

CALIFORNIA LOCKDOWN

The floundering efforts to quell the pandemic in the US have been widely criticised -- the nation is the world's worst-hit with known infections approaching 15 million and more than 283,000 deaths.

The extent of the crisis was illustrated by the lockdown in California, the most populous American state, where authorities forced most offices to close and banned gatherings among different households.

Bars and services such as hair salons were shut and restaurants were only allowed to serve takeaways. Non-essential travel was also temporarily restricted statewide as California experienced record new Covid-19 cases.

"The overwhelming majority of Californians are now in this new stay-at-home order protocol," said state Governor Gavin Newsom,

Hefajat's gaining strength and acting against the state.

Prof Dilara Chowdhury, another political analyst, said the present government is to be blamed if Hefajat enters politics.

She said Hefajat's activities were centred around Hathazari Madrasa in Chattogram. But through accepting all demands of Hefajat, the government has shown them that they can act as a pressure group.

"There is nothing to be surprised about Hefajat coming to politics as it was the present government that has invited them to politics," said Dilara, a former professor of political science at Jahangirnagar University.

Hefajat first appeared on the scene in 2009 by protesting a draft national women development policy that provided equal inheritance rights to women.

On April 6, 2013, Hefajat leaders and activists marched towards Dhaka and held a rally at Shapla Chattar with a 13-point demand, including enactment of anti-blasphemy act and stringent punishment of "atheist bloggers".

Then came the May 5 mayhem. As Hefajat activists turned increasingly violent and kept Motijheel occupied for nearly 12 hours after their rally there on May 5, 2013, law enforcers swung into action after midnight and drove them away.

Truck-pickup

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to the spot. They recovered the bodies and took the injured labourer to Tangail General Hospital.

Rezaul Karim, assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defence in Tangail, said the accident had occurred due to reckless driving by the driver of the truck that swerved off the lane and hit the pick-up coming from the opposite direction.

He mentioned that dense fog might have affected visibility on the highway.

Meanwhile, vehicular movement on the Bangabandhu Bridge was halted twice following two minor accidents on the west side of the bridge yesterday, said sources in the traffic control room of the bridge.

The first one occurred around midnight, bringing traffic movement on the bridge to a halt for more than half an hour.

Vehicular movement on the bridge was again suspended for about an hour after another mishap at about 3:00pm.

No casualties were reported, Kazi Aiyubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Bangabandhu Bridge East Police Station, told this correspondent.

Punish the ulprits

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prosecute the perpetrators of the damage to Bangabandhu's monuments on charges of sedition and violating the constitution.

The HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Md Khairul Alam came up with the order and rule following a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Uttam Kumar Lahery seeking necessary directives on this issue.

Nahid Sultana Juthi, Shah Monjurul Hoque and several other lawyers appeared for the petitioner while Attorney General AM Amin Uddin represented the state during the hearing on the petition.

The under-constitution sculpture of Bangabandhu in Kushtia town was damaged on Saturday. The following day, Uttam Kumar filed the writ petition with the HC seeking its directives on the government to protect and preserve all sculptures, including those of Bangabandhu, across the country.

The respondents are duty-bound to protect all monuments under Article 24 of the constitution, the petitioner said, adding that setting up statue of the Father of the Nation is not contradictory to religion.

Secretaries to the ministries of home affairs, liberation war affairs and religious affairs, the inspector general of police, the director general of Bangladesh Islamic Foundation and the khatib of Baitul Mukarram national mosque have been made respondents to the rule and directive.

FOUR PLACED ON REMAND

Meanwhile, a Kushtia court yesterday placed four arrestees on remand in a case over vandalising the sculpture of Bangabandhu at Panch Rastar intersection in Kushtia town, reports our correspondent.

Kushtia Model Police Station Inspector Nishikanta Das, also the investigation officer of the case, produced the arrestees before Kushtia Senior Judicial Magistrate Enamul Haque seeking 10-day remand each for Ibn Masood (R) Madrasa students Abu Bakkar Mithun, 19, and Md Sabuj Islam Nahid, 20, and seven-day remand each for their teachers Al Amin, 26, and Md Abu Yusuf, 31.

The court, however, granted five-day remand for each of the students and four-day remand for each of the teachers.

ISLAMI ANDOLON TONES DOWN STANCE

Islami Andolon Bangladesh (IAB) yesterday apparently toned down its stance on construction of sculptures saying it did not express any opinion about demolition of sculptures or idols.

"We have opposed setting up of sculptures and idols in a logical way. But we did not make any comment on the demolition of any sculpture or idol. It is completely illegal if anyone gets involved in such an activity," IAB Amir Syed Mohammad Rezaul Karim said at a press conference at its central office in the capital.

In the statement, he said the country's Alem community and religious-minded general people can speak their mind against construction of sculptures.

"But it is the responsibility of the authorities concerned whether they will pay heed to it or not," Rezaul added.

The party came up with the statement a day after Hefajat-e Islam Bangladesh Amir Junayed Babunagari, Joint Secretary General Mamunul Haque and IAB Senior Nayeb-e-Amir Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim were sued for sedition.

Mamunul is also the secretary general of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis.

Asked about the damage to Bangabandhu's sculpture in Kushtia, Rezaul said, "If anyone gets involved in such an activity, it would be a provocative act. We support the government's stance on taking actions against those responsible through conducting proper investigations."

The IAB amir demanded withdrawal of the sedition case.

On Monday evening, Hefajat leader Mamunul also condemned defacing of Bangabandhu's sculpture.

Talking at a Facebook Live event on his verified page, he said they never spoke against Bangabandhu.

Even as hopes rise for vaccines and a resulting economic recovery, governments around the world are being forced to tighten restrictions to contain surges in infections.