







4,01,194 Recoveries







Norway accuses Russian hackers of parliament attack

AFP, Oslo

domestic spy agency yesterday blamed a Russian hacker group linked to Moscow's military intelligence for a cyberattack on the Norwegian parliament earlier this

The Norwegian intelligence agency (PST) said the likely perpetrators were the Fancy Bear collective -- a group regularly accused of attacks including on the US election -- but there was not enough evidence to pursue charges.

A "vast" cyberattack on August 24 gained access to the emails of some MPs and parliamentary employees, officials announced at the time, without speculating on the identity of the attackers.

Norwegian Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Soreide later accused Russia of being behind the attack, and PST investigators have now strengthened

A proposal was placed at yesterday's

The premier asked the officials

meeting for extending the deadline by

two years with an additional cost of Tk

concerned to explain why the project

got delayed and why its cost was

raised. The project director was not

present at the meeting. The newly

remained silent, Shamsul said adding

that the agriculture minister is now

was delayed. By this time, the project

should have been completed. And

now you are seeking time extension

project implementation," the PM was

resentment when another proposal

was placed for time extension of the

project titled "Charkhali-Tushkhali-

Shamsul said the PM sought

"This project should have been

explanation from the implementing

agency why the project was delayed

involved development and widening

parts of Barguna and Patuakhali.

The PM again expressed her

quoted by Shamsul as saying.

Mothbaria-Patharghata

cost of Tk 44.57 crore.

and why cost would rise.

December 2018.

"Why the project implementation

secretary

Road

appointed agriculture

abroad.

for this project.

of Tk 68.70 core.

Put an end to this

"The investigation shows that the network operation which the Storting (Norwegian parliament) was subjected to was part of a broader national and international campaign that has been going on since at least 2019," PST said in a statement.

"Analyses show that it is likely that the operation was led by a cyber actor . known as APT28 or Fancy Bear. This actor has ties to GRU, Russia's military intelligence agency.'

Using a method known as a brute force attack", where multiple passwords and usernames are submitted with the hope of eventually getting the right combination, the hackers were able to download sensitive" information, PST said.

"The investigation has however not yielded enough elements to bring charges," it said in a statement.

ACC roar fades as cases pile up

Bypass area of Tangail early yesterday. The accident left five people dead and two injured.

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 Jubo League Ismail Hossain Samrat, organising secretary Khaled Mahmud Bhuiyan, Samrat's associate Jakir Hossain and online casino kingpin Selim Prodhan.

The investigation into irregularities

At least 16 leaders of Bangladesh

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish and

Islami Oikya Jote earlier were in the

BNP-led alliance and both are registered

with the Election Commission as

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

The council was held around two

The formation of the new committee

previous committee, terming the new

He claimed that Hefajat had never

Soon after the formation of the

new committee, Hefajat hogged the

had any top leader who had affiliations

committee completely illegal.

with any political party.

months after the death of Hefajat amir

Khelafat Majlish, four of Islami Oikya

Jote and six of Khelafat Andolon were

accommodated in the Hefajat's new

committee.

political parties.

On November

as its secretary general.

in health sector also did not see much

The mangled remains of a truck and a pick up after they collided head-on on Dhaka-Tangail highway in Gharinda

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 anticorruption 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.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

"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.

International Transparency 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.

Prof Dilara Chowdhury, another

She said Hefajat's activities were

government is to be blamed if Hefajat

centred around Hathazari Madrasa in

Chattogram. But through accepting all

demands of Hefajat, the government

has shown them that they can act as a

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.

"There is nothing to be surprised

enters politics.

pressure group.

Truck-pickup

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 the visibility on the

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

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

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

Punish the culprits

Bangabandhu's monuments 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 the monuments under Article 24 of the constitution, the petitioner said, adding that setting up statue of the Father of the Nation is not contradictory o 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 madrasha students Abu Bakkar Mithun, 19, and Md Sabuj Islam Nahid, 20, and seven-day remand each for madrasa teachers Al Amin, 26, and Md Abu

Yusuf, 31. The court, however, granted five-day remand of each of the students and

four-day remand of each of the teachers. The four are students and teachers of Ibn Masood (R) Madrasa.

ISLAMI ANDÓLON TONES DOWN

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

"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. Reading out a written 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 said. The party came up with this 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 in a sedition case. Mamunul is also the secretary general

of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish.

about damaging 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 proper investigations."

The IAB amir demanded withdrawal of the sedition case.

Earlier on Monday evening, Hefajat Joint Secretary General Mamunul condemned damaging of Bangabandhu's sculpture.

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

of the existing road. One of the two projects titled "the "You bring a proposal for time Agriculture Information Service extension that increases the project Modernization and Digital Agriculture cost. Such tendencies have to be Information and Communication stopped. It cannot happen over and Strengthening" was supposed to be over again," Hasina was quoted by completed by June this year at a cost Shamsul as saying.

At the meeting, the PM also pointed out that the road is vital for communication in the region as the Padma Bridge is going to be open to traffic soon. Besides, work of Paira 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 and movement of heavy vehicles once the Padma Bridge opens. APPROVAL OF PROJECTS

The Ecnec meeting yesterday approved four project proposals involving Tk 3,903.61 crore. Two of those are for It gave the nod to the Tk 2,242

"Because of this, the project cost crore project to widen the road and will rise to Tk 109 crore from Tk 68 elevated expressway from Panchaboti crore. Take measures so that all the in Narayanganj to Muktarpur in projects are completed on time. Munshiganj. Find the reasons behind the delay in It 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

Development and Widening" covering concerned to change title of the The proposal sought to extend the project to "double-deck road" instead deadline for completing the project by of "elevated expressway". two and a half years with an additional

Shamsul said the expenditure for consultancy in the project was raised The Tk 104.76 crore project to Tk 25 crore from the proposed Tk was supposed to be completed by 10 crore following request from the officials concerned.

The Ecnec 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 completed by the stipulated time, as it drainage network in the city.

Uncertainty over EPI

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 vesterday. He said, "We have been informed that the health ministry has not responded positively to the health directorate proposal on demands. It should be considered

that Bangladesh received four international recognitions 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.

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.

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

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

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

rate was 12.89 percent while the overall positivity rate was 16.65 percent.

patients recovered in the same 24 hours, raising the number of recoveries to 4,01,194.

percent.

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.

Rabiul said the prime minister

"Hopefully we will get a positive

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.

country.

Against 17,084 tests, the positivity

Meanwhile, 2,571 Covid-19

The recovery rate is now 83.24 Among the 32 deceased, 25 were

headlines as it strongly opposed soft stance" was also responsible for Six top leaders of Khelafat Majlish, the construction of Bangabandhu's Hefajat's gaining strength and acting another component of the BNP-led sculpture in the capital. against the state. alliance, were also included in the new During a meeting on November 19 in the capital's Mohammadpur, Junayed political analyst, said the present

Babunagari vowed that they were ready

Politicking in the garb of religion

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

and achieve their political goals as Hefajat has thousands of its dedicated followers across the country, they said. "Hefajat is indeed is a political party and they are working targeting to achieve certain political aim," said

are using the platform to gain popularity

Ahmed Shafi, who passed away in Serajul Islam Choudhury, professor emeritus of Dhaka University. Hefajat's demand to change the sparked an outcry within the existing structure of the state is nothing organisation with Moulana Mainuddin but a political demand which manifests Ruhi, joint secretary general of the

that they want to go to power. He said they don't bother to talk on different public 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

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

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. Nonessential travel was also temporarily restricted statewide as California experienced record new Covid-19

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

who earlier warned that the state hospital system was at risk of being overwhelmed.

grant emergency authorisation for the Pfizer-BioNTech and another vaccine produced by Moderna, hoping to vaccinate millions by the end of the

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Pfizer and BioNTech will deliver their first doses to his nation within weeks.

- including Serum Institute, the world's biggest manufacturer of vaccines -- on Monday sought fast-track approval for

140,000 deaths. And in Brazil's Sao Paulo state --Latin America's coronavirus epicentre authorities will launch a campaign from January providing the Chinesedeveloped vaccine CoronaVac to

healthcare workers, seniors and other vulnerable groups first. **RESTRICTIONS REMAIN** Even as hopes rise for vaccines and a resulting economic recovery, governments around the world are

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

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. 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.

UK starts Covid vaccine drive

"My advice to anyone offered the vaccine is to take it," said Keenan, wearing a mask and a penguin T-shirt. "If I can have it at 90 then you can have British officials hailed the Pfizer-BioNTech jab as a turning point in the

fight against the pandemic, and on what has been dubbed "V-Day", people rolled up their sleeves for an initial dose from early morning.

The UK's second jab reportedly went to a man named William Shakespeare. The over-80s, care home workers, and

at-risk health and social care staff will

be at the front of the line. The British public has been largely supportive of the rapid approval of the vaccine, but ministers and health professionals are aware they still need to combat mistrust over treatments that risks hampering global efforts to fight the disease. Russia on Saturday began vaccinating

inoculation campaign with a medicine made in China. Britain's start to its vaccinations came as around the world the virus picture darkens, with more countries reimposing curbs and around 30 million people in California placed

high-risk workers with its own jab and

Beijing has also begun an emergency

under stay-at-home orders to fight a deepening US crisis. Ŵhile the World Health Organization

populations growing increasingly weary of restrictions and economic pain they CALIFORNIA LOCKDOWN

"The overwhelming majority of

The United States is expected to

In India, two pharmaceutical firms

coronavirus shots. India is the second-worst hit nation having already recorded more than

being forced to tighten restrictions to contain surges in infections.