

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,367
New cases in 24hrs



504,868
Total cases



7,359
Deaths



444,345
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

1,731,420
Deaths



78,755,899
Total cases

Ankara eager to sell weapons to Dhaka

Visiting Turkish FM discusses it with Momen; PM seeks Ankara's help in Rohingya repatriation

STAR REPORT

Turkey is willing to sell weapons to Bangladesh as it is now producing the most of its required arms.

The issue was discussed in a meeting between Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and his Bangladeshi counterpart AK Abdul Momen in the capital yesterday.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Momen said, "This was not on the agenda. But the Turkish minister shared the idea of defence cooperation."

The visiting minister said his country is producing world-class military equipment and it does not impose many conditions on sales.

Asked about Bangladesh's response, Momen said they did not make any prompt response to it. He, however, said Bangladesh wants to diversify its sources of defence purchase.

"We don't buy much defence equipment. If needed, we may consider the issue, but nothing concrete was discussed."

The minister said Bangladesh is more interested in trade and investment with Turkey.

TURKISH MINISTER MEETS PM

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday sought Turkey's involvement in ensuring the return of Rohingyas to their homeland Myanmar from Bangladesh.

She made the request when visiting Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu called on her at the Gono Bhaban, reports UNB.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, PM's Deputy Press Secretary Hasan Jahid Tusher said the premier also sought more Turkish investment in Bangladesh's special economic zones.

She said Bangladesh offers a huge market as the country is situated at the centre of South and South-East Asia. Both countries will be benefited from this investment, the PM added.

Expressing Turkey's keen interest in strengthening bilateral relations with Bangladesh, the visiting minister said his country will do whatever is needed to strengthen bilateral trade.

Hasina thanked Turkey for repairing Bangladesh's Naval warship "Bijoy" which was damaged in a devastating blast in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon.

She reiterated the invitation for the Turkish president to visit Bangladesh.

Mevlut Cavusoglu said the Turkish president might visit Bangladesh in

March, the golden jubilee month of Bangladesh's Independence, if the novel coronavirus situation improves.

He highly appreciated the PM's leadership and the development of Bangladesh.

Principal Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office Ahmad Kaikaus and Turkish Ambassador to Bangladesh Mustafa Osman Turan were present.

TURKEY SUPPORTS ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

The visiting Turkish foreign minister yesterday lauded Bangladesh's progress saying that the country has become a rising star in South Asia and a model of sustainable development for the entire world under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

He made the remarks at a joint briefing with his Bangladesh counterpart Momen at state guesthouse Padma after holding their bilateral talks, adds UNB.

Mentioning that the Rohingya issue has become a huge burden for Bangladesh, the Turkish minister assured Dhaka of Ankara's continuous support to resolve the crisis. "This burden could be shared by the international community."

Cavusoglu said the Rohingyas must return to their homeland in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner and this is one of the areas where the two countries will continue to work together.

He congratulated Bangladesh for successfully fighting Covid-19 under the leadership of the PM. "We will provide more support if Bangladesh needs."

He said they discussed how to build a Turkish hospital in Bangladesh and that they were working on different models.

The Turkish minister congratulated Bangladesh on the occasion of the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and 50 years of Bangladesh's Independence, to be celebrated in March next year.

Earlier, the two foreign ministers discussed bilateral and regional issues, including the Rohingya situation.

They met briefly at the same venue prior to the bilateral meeting.

Cavusoglu arrived in Dhaka on Tuesday night. Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen received him at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.



Bikers go on a pavement in the capital's Banglamotor area yesterday and weave through a group of pedestrians. The authorities had set up iron poles on the pavement to stop bikers from violating traffic rules, but one of them is missing, allowing some bikers to get on the pavement.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The unlucky 7

FROM PAGE 1

"If all our demands are not fulfilled within a week, we will not wait for police permission for our movement," he said.

Their main demand is to reduce session jam in the colleges, Shahriar said, with only one batch of students per session.

The students' other demands are that the number of courses students are allowed to fail in and still be promoted to the next year be raised from two to three, all exam results be published within 90 days, and that the newly attached word "affiliate" be removed from their certificates.

On Tuesday, the principals of the seven colleges held a meeting after the students announced their protest.

At the meeting -- chaired by Professor Muhammad Abdul Moveen, chief coordinator of the seven colleges -- they decided to start taking the postponed exams from January 20.

Contacted, Prof IK Selim Ullah Khandaker, coordinator of the seven colleges, said three sessions' final exams, which had been postponed in March, will be resumed on a priority basis.

The other four sessions' exams, scheduled to be held in July this year, will now be held using the OMR (Optical Mark Reading) method -- tests with multiple choice questions instead of written ones.

Selim Ullah, also the principal of Kabi Nazrul Government College, said

they will start taking class assignments and presentations online from December 26, the date when Dhaka University announced it would start their final exams.

The DU authorities said they were preparing to hold the exams of honours courses using the OMR method instead of written tests to complete the postponed examinations quickly.

"Except for the master's exams, we are waiting for the government's decision and preparing to hold the rest of the tests in the future using the OMR method," said Baharul Haque Chowdhury, examinations controller of DU.

DRAWN-OUT AFFILIATION PROCESS

In 2017, the seven colleges were brought under DU from National University (NU) with the aim of increasing the quality of education and reducing session jam.

However, this affiliation -- without a proper plan to make it work -- only put students in trouble with uncertainty over their examination schedules and results, even now three years on.

It was an unpopular decision at DU, where its students held protests in July last year and in January 2018 over concerns with the overall affiliation and opposition to the seven colleges' students receiving the same certificates DU students received.

But as the system finally started getting into shape, came the Covid-19 pandemic -- dashing the career

ambitions of nearly 200,000 students in the seven colleges.

They are now lagging behind the NU colleges in completing their graduation and post-graduation, the students alleged.

"My batch mates at NU completed their post-graduation in August last year whereas we're still in the dark about our exam schedule. We used to think NU college students faced bad session jam, but ours is even worse," said Ishrat Jahan, a master's student of Government Titumir College.

Ishrat was admitted into the college in the 2012-13 academic year, when it was under NU.

Students of the 2016-17 session -- the last batch while still under NU -- are the worst sufferers of session jam.

"We are one year behind the National University students. Their final tests are also on hold due to the coronavirus situation. But we only just started our fourth year," a Dhaka College student told The Daily Star, requesting anonymity.

Eden Mohila College postgraduate student Mahmuda Jahan said, "When we speak to the principals, they say they can't do anything until Dhaka University gives a decision. We've wasted almost a year and a half during the affiliation process. Now we have also been stuck for nine more months."

"If the situation remains unchanged, many of us won't be able to apply to government jobs because of our age."

Freeze 613 bank accounts

FROM PAGE 1

Department of police yesterday also filed an application with a Dhaka court to freeze bank accounts and seize illegal properties of Papul, his family members and associates.

The move came a day after the CID filed a money laundering case against them.

"While investigating a human trafficking case filed earlier against Papul and his associates, we found evidence of money laundering. We hope the court will soon consider our prayer to freeze illegal properties which were amassed through human trafficking," CID chief Mahbubur Rahman, also an additional inspector general of police, told reporters at his office yesterday.

According to CID findings, Papul and his family members amassed more than Tk 355 crore. Transactions were made from 526 bank accounts and fixed deposit receipts (FDRs) of 13 banks. Over Tk 130 crore is still in these accounts.

CID officials said they have found evidence that at least Tk 38.22 crore was amassed mainly through human trafficking since 2016.

On Tuesday, the CID filed the money laundering case with Paltan Police Station against Papul, his daughter Wafa Islam, brother Kazi Badrul Alam Liton, sister-in-law Jesmin Prodhan, staffers Sadiqur Rahman Monir and Golam Mostafa, and two overseas employment agencies owned by Badrul and Jesmin.

The CID said they were investigating whether Papul's wife Selina Islam, also a lawmaker, was involved in human trafficking.

During the briefing, the CID chief said names of some other people surfaced during the investigation and they would press charges against them if they found evidence in this regard.

"You cannot stop human trafficking if you cannot nab the big fishes in the racket. We are working to stop it," the CID chief said.

The CID official suspected that the accused might have amassed more wealth illegally. He said prime accused Papul could have illegal assets abroad. Information regarding this will be obtained from the financial intelligence units of the respective foreign countries through mutual legal assistance requests.

This is the third case filed against the lawmaker and his family members so far.

On July 7, Kuwait-returnee Abdul Alim from Naogaon filed a human trafficking case against Papul with Motijheel Police Station.

The ACC on November 11 had filed a case against Papul, his wife, daughter and sister-in-law over laundering Tk 148 crore.

The High Court on Tuesday ordered Papul's wife and daughter to surrender before the lower court concerned by December 28 in the money laundering case.

Pornography spreads amid futile govt ban

FROM PAGE 1

to monitor the consumption and technological capacity to stop this menace."

"However," he added, "we are working on using artificial intelligence and designing new software to track and identify porn users and producers."

PORN POPULARITY RISING

Using Google Trends, which analyses the popularity of top search queries in Google Search in a particular region or country, The Daily Star explored popularity of a collection of search terms that are used in Google to visit porn sites by Bangladeshi users. These terms are "Sex Video", "Porn", "XXX Video", "Bangla Sex Video", etc.

The time period of the analysis was fixed from February 2017 to October 31, 2020 as blocking of porn sites started from January 2017.

The reason behind choosing Google Trends is that Google estimates locations of the users even when they browse internet in incognito mode (hiding identity) or using a virtual private network (VPN).

Google Trends measures search interest in a scale of 0 to 100. The value of 100 means the search term is most popular, 50 means the term is half as popular and 0 means there is no sufficient data about the term.

The analysis showed these porn related terms are some of the most searched phrases on Google by Bangladeshis.

For instance, the term "Bangla Sex Video" has been consistently valued more than 70 since 2017. It has hit the peak popularity value of 100 several times and mostly remained over the

value of 90. Throughout September this year, the popularity value of this term was above 75.

For the terms "Sex Video", "Porn" and "XXX Video", Google Trends show similar results. All these search items reached the peak popularity value several times in the last three years and most of the times remained above 75.

Google Trends also revealed popularity percentage of other related terms that Bangladeshi users used while searching for the above mentioned terms. And, these data are even more alarming.

For instance, those who searched for "Sex Video" and "Bangla Sex Video" also searched for the terms "Porn Video", "New Bangla Sex Video", "New Sex Video" and "New Bangla Sex" whose popularity value are 100, 100, 99 and 97 respectively.

Popularity of web porn among Bangladeshi users can be better understood when these search items are compared with other popular search items. Within the same time period (2017-October, 2020), "Sex Video" had the popularity value 50, "Cricket" 22, "Bangla Song" 10, and "Hindi Movie" 7.

One interesting part of the analysis is popularity of these pornographic search terms dropped sharply (even up to below 50) during May-June in 2017, 2018, and 2019 and April-May in 2020 which were in and around the holy month of Ramadan.

Ahmad Musaffa Chowdhury, a software architect and director of Corpovisual, a technology and communication agency, said Google estimates its users' locations even when they browse internet using VPN.

"For instance, if you log in to your Google account and watch some videos on YouTube, you may still see similar content suggestions next time you go to the website while connected to a VPN."

He added, "It is quite understandable that Google uses these data for itself and a part of these data are shared through Google Trends. So it is quite possible to estimate search interest reliably by analysing Google Trends data."

Prof AKM Ashikur Rahman, department of computer science and engineering at Buet, said, "Google can track users depending on their search behaviour. Many third party VPN applications also share information with Google as these applications are often used as add-ons to the web browser or run in operating systems designed by Google."

WAY TO CONTROL?

The Cyber Crime Investigation Division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police is tasked with patrolling, preventing, detecting and investigating cybercrime in Dhaka city.

AFM Al Kibria, deputy commissioner of the division, said, "We are patrolling the cyberspace constantly. But pornography in these days is spreading so fast through social media and other new sites that it is extremely difficult for us to stop it effectively."

"However, if someone notifies us about any crime related to it, we are able to track the offender down immediately and request Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission [BTRC] to block the content or the website."

In fact, BTRC sees no solution

7-day quarantine

FROM PAGE 1

"Apart from our ministry, the foreign ministry, and the health ministry, the Prime Minister's Office is also monitoring the UK issue... Stopping air communication is not a big deal... We will take necessary steps in time."

At the same event, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) Chairman Air Vice-Marshal M Mafidur Rahman said, "Passengers arriving from the UK [in all three international airports] will be screened separately... so that the risk that is being talked about can be mitigated."

Asked what action would be taken in case passengers from the UK transit in another country, the CAAB chairman said, "Airlines have been asked to provide us with the list of passengers in advance who are coming to Dhaka... This will ensure separate health check-ups for them."

MEASURES ADEQUATE?

More than 40 countries have banned UK arrivals because of concerns about the spread of the new variant of coronavirus. Spain, India, and Hong Kong suspended flights from the UK, reports BBC.

Experts said for Bangladesh there was no need to cancel flights from the UK "right now". However, implementation of "a stringent" screening process at airports was important.

"Shutting down flights is the last step to curb transmission. For now, it is more important to maintain stringent screening," Mushtuq Hussain, consultant of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) told The Daily Star last night.

Echoing him, Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist, told this newspaper, "The plan is okay. But we are sceptical about how rigorously the plan will be implemented as there have been examples of many such announcements before."

"If the plan is a mere announcement, the problem may turn more severe than that of the previous time," he warned.

DAILY UPDATE

In the 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, 30 more people died from Covid-19 and 1,367 new cases of the novel coronavirus were detected, taking the tally of infections to 504,868.

With the latest figure of deaths, the death toll due to Covid-19 climbed to 7,359 which is 1.46 percent of all confirmed cases.

As another 2,416 patients recovered from the illness, the total number of recoveries rose to 444,345.

As many as 15,932 samples were tested at 161 authorised labs across the country in the same 24 hours, yielding a positivity rate of 8.58 percent.

M.Sc. in BIOTECHNOLOGY & BIOINFORMATICS

Admission for Spring 2021 is now open

The only M.Sc. program offering both Biotechnology & Bioinformatics in any private university in Bangladesh

Application deadline	January 13, 2021
Registration	January 19, 2021
Orientation	February 6, 2021
Class Begins	February 7, 2021

For more information:
www.sls.iub.edu.bd/admission
 Email: nazratunofficial@gmail.com

IUB
Independent University,
Bangladesh

School of Environment and Life Sciences

Formulate another

FROM PAGE 1
 Shamsul Alam, member of General Economics Division of the Planning Commission, presented the final 8th Fifth Year Plan with the slogan "Towards the prosperity with all".

Hasina saw the plans of various ministries and divisions in the 8th Fifth Year Plan and gave necessary directives.

She asked the Planning Commission to prepare separate highlights on the strategy and action plan of the Plan.

The 8th Fifth Year Plan will be approved in the next meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council.

Speaking at the meeting, the premier said she planned a roadmap for the country's development when she was in a sub-jail in the capital during the tenure of the 1/11 caretaker government.

She asked the authorities concerned to work for expanding markets of Bangladeshi products in regional and international arena alongside creating a stronger domestic market.

Cabinet Secretary Khandaker Anwarul Islam, Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus, Bangladesh Bank Governor Fazle Kabir, Senior Secretary to the Planning Commission M Asadul Islam and Senior Secretary to the finance ministry Abdur Rouf were present in the meeting.