

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



834

New cases in 24hrs



5,08,099

Total cases



7,428

Deaths



4,50,488

Recoveries



GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,760,482

Deaths



80,356,534

Total cases

‘Unexpected; a threat to artistic expression’

Filmmakers said about arrests of filmmaker, actor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Arrests of a film director and an actor over “obscene dialogues” in a recently released movie is a threat to artistic expression and freedom of speech, noted filmmakers said.

Police arrested filmmaker Anonno Mamun, 33, and actor Shaheen Mridha, 42, from the capital’s Mirpur area on Thursday night in a case filed with Ramna Police Station under the Pornography Act, over obscene dialogues in the movie titled “Nabab LLB”.

Later, they were produced before a Dhaka court on Friday and were then sent to jail.

“This is a huge threat to our artistic expression. Every single thing only paves the way for more interference in the future, leading to the complete eradication of freedom of speech,” said Nurul Alam Atique, noted scriptwriter and director.

He said that even though he has not watched the film yet, the lack of tolerance will heavily disrupt the artistic community.

Atique used Humayun Ahmed’s BTV classic “Bohubrihi” as an example, where doctors blamed Humayun Ahmed for “ruining” their image.

“Such incidents are always dangerous and we have to make sure that we have the freedom to call a spade a spade”, he said.

Atique went on to mention that the greatest barrier to creative thinking is the fear of censorship and persecution.

“It is getting suffocating, and as an artiste, it makes me extremely sad,” Atique said.

In a scene of the movie Nabab LLB, actress Orchita Sporshia was seen going to a police station to file a case as a rape victim.

A police sub-inspector, played by actor Shaheen Mridha, asked her offensive questions about the rape.

The police had objections about the scene.

Referring to the scene, Shariful Islam, deputy commissioner of the Cyber and Special Crimes Department, said the scene related to the police interrogation -- when a rape victim comes to the police station and complains to police -- was portrayed with extremely offensive language.

He said it is not possible to watch it sitting together with the family and will create negative perceptions about the police among the public. Such videos will discourage victims from going to the police station to seek services in the future.

“The video is very defamatory for the Bangladesh Police Force as we have been portrayed in a very negative way,”

he added. Shariful further said that the filmmaker and the actor used the uniform of Bangladesh Police without their permission.

Film Director and Screenwriter Giasuddin Selim termed it an unexpected incident.

“Since the project has been released on an OTT platform, people have the option to pay and choose what they want to watch.”

The director also mentioned that if corruption and other negatives in our system cannot be portrayed in cinema, it will be more difficult for people to judge the truth for what it is.

Selim further stated that the actions taken would have been somewhat logical if there was a law for web content that had been violated. However, such harassment is not to be condoned, according to him.

Half of the movie “Nabab LLB” was released on December 16 in an app named I-Theater. The rest of the movie is scheduled to be released on January 1, 2021.

Among others, Shakib Khan, Mahiya Mahi, Sporshia and Shahiduzzaman Selim have starred the film.

Three UN peacekeepers killed in C Africa Republic

AFP, Bangui

Three UN peacekeepers have been killed by unidentified combatants in the Central African Republic, the United Nations said, as the country prepares for a general election and fighting continues between rebels and government forces.

The news came after a rebel coalition called off a ceasefire and said it would resume its march on the capital and following the arrival of troops from Russia and Rwanda to shore up the government of the resource-rich country.

“Three peacekeepers from Burundi were killed and two others were wounded” following attacks on UN troops and Central African national defense and security forces, the UN said in a statement Friday.

The assaults took place in Dekoa, central Kemo Prefecture, and in Bakouma, in the southern Mbomou Prefecture, it said, without providing further details.

Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN Secretary-General, strongly condemned the latest incident, and called on the CAR authorities to investigate the “heinous” assaults.

He also warned that “attacks against United Nations peacekeepers may constitute a war crime.”

Ahead of the polls, 63-year-old incumbent President Faustin Archange Touadera has accused his predecessor Francois Bozize of plotting a coup.

Bozize -- who is under UN sanctions and barred from running -- denies the charges.

On Tuesday a militia briefly seized the country’s fourth biggest town, before it was retaken by security forces backed by UN peacekeepers.

- Broken ceasefire -

Rebel groups launched an offensive a week ago threatening to march on the capital Bangui, in what the government described as an attempted coup, but their progress was halted with international help.

However, a three-day ceasefire brokered ahead of the elections fell apart Friday with the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) announcing that it would resume its push for the capital.

The CPC -- whose components are drawn from militia groups that, together, control two-thirds of the country -- was created on December 19 by armed groups who accused Touadera of trying to fix the vote. Clashes resumed on Friday in Bakouma, about 800 kilometres (500 miles) northeast of Bangui, according to Vladimir Monteiro, spokesman for the UN’s MINUSCA peacekeeping force.

MINUSCA said Thursday that a 300-strong contingent of Rwandan reinforcements had arrived in the country.

Russia, which recently signed a military cooperation agreement with Touadera’s government, has also sent at least 300 military instructors to bolster the CAR’s forces ahead of the polls.

Sunday’s elections are deemed a key test of CAR’s ability to recover stability.

But a crucial question is whether turnout will be badly affected by violence or intimidation, denting the credibility of the next president and the 140-seat legislature.

Mineral-rich but rated the world’s second-poorest country on the Human Development Index, the CAR has been chronically unstable since independence 60 years ago.

important.”

As of yesterday, at least 5,08,099 people have tested positive for the virus.

With 30 new deaths from Covid-19, the total number of deaths reached 7,428. The death rate stands at 1.46 percent.

Yesterday’s new cases were detected after testing 9,912 samples.

The total number of recoveries was 4,50,488 and the recovery rate was 88.66 percent.

Of 30 people reported dead, 23 were men and seven women.

Four were aged between 41 and 50 years, five between 51 and 60, and 21 were above 60, said a statement of the health directorate.

Stay off winter

FROM PAGE 1

New variants have also been reported in South Africa, two cases of which have been detected in the UK, reports the Guardian.

People’s movement, large gatherings and reluctance to wear masks contribute to the spike in Covid-19 cases, she said, adding that social events and religious gatherings were taking place in the country as usual. “There is no reason why there wouldn’t be more infections.”

“In Canada and Europe...infections rose after schools and shopping malls reopened. It is the same everywhere -- when we relax restrictions, infections rise again.”

Dr Shimul said, “Stopping the super spreader social events is very



Logs carried by the truck are scattered all over the ditch after a Bailey bridge gave way under the weight of the overloaded truck. A three-wheeler following the truck was the innocent victim. The photo was taken in Khagrachhari’s Dighinala upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Left exposed to human greed

FROM PAGE 1

Chief Scientific Officer of SPARSO Dr Md Mahmudur Rahman analysed an image of 867 hectares (over 2,000 acres) in Sangu reserve forest, of which at least 40 hectares (nearly 100 acres) were totally cleared of trees.

Comparing images taken in 2016, 2019, and 2020, it is clear that loggers are clearing the forest every year, Dr Mahmudur said.

The Daily Star also spoke to at least five witnesses from local villages, all of whom requested to remain anonymous.

They said loggers indiscriminately felled trees from Andarmanik, Dungdung Para, Milinga Para, Mronggong Para, Narisha Jiri, Boromodok Jiri, and Singapa Mouza Jiri areas of the reserve forest.

An eyewitness who recently visited the Andarmanik and Narisha Jiri area said the loggers he encountered were mainly from Chakaria, Cox’s Bazar.

“They have put up tents at Narisha Jiri and are felling the big century-old trees from the Sangu reserve forest indiscriminately using petrol-run electric saws.

“If trees are felled continuously from Sangu reserve forest, one day it will be completely gone.” SANGU’S DESTRUCTION

Thanchi local Nu Mong Prue said last month, “Trees were felled indiscriminately from Sangu reserve forest during the last couple of months. After The Daily Star report, the loggers stopped felling trees these last few weeks.”

In a November 10 report, The Daily Star reported on a local platform’s statement about the illegal logging and smuggling of timber from Sangu reserve forest.

Vice Chairman of Thanchi upazila Cha Sa Thoai Marma said, “Smugglers have already cut around 30,000-feet trees from Sangu reserve forest over the last couple of months.”

He got the figure from a source who saw the illegal logging closely.

“The trees are being carried to Bandarban town by the Sangu river,” added the vice chairman.

Photos and videos collected from witnesses show the logs piled up, waiting to be transported in rafts on the Sangu river. One clip shows a tree being cut down in the dead of night, as revealed by the flash of the mobile phone camera.

After arriving in Bandarban town, they are sent on to Dhaka and Chattogram.

Some locals alleged that forest officers engaged poor locals as

labourers in the theft and transport of the wood. They also point the finger at a few influential timber traders from Bandarban and Chattogram for this daily plundering of the forests.

The timber merchants, on the other hand, maintain that they are not involved with illegal logging in Sangu forest. Long established in the trade, they instead allege that Forest Department officials seize illegally logged timber on a few occasions, as an eyewash.

In most cases, Forest Department officials -- directly or indirectly -- assist illegal loggers in smuggling timber from the reserve forests in exchange for hefty bribes, they claimed.

However, President of the Bandarban District Timber Traders’ Association Abul Bashar said, “Around seven or eight unscrupulous businessmen, mostly from Chattogram, are engaged in felling trees from Sangu reserve forest.”

A Thanchi local, requesting anonymity, said he took around Tk 14-15 lakh in cash from a timber merchant named Jamal to deliver wood from the Sangu reserve forest.

Local sources said Md Jamal Uddin, resident of Chattogram, is one of the most notorious wood smugglers of Sangu reserve forest.

Contacted, Jamal denied the allegations, saying, “I have no involvement with logging in the Sangu forest. I just buy timber from those who arrange and send it to Chattogram and Dhaka from Bandarban.”

Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Bandarban Md Farid Meah denied that wood is logged from Sangu reserve forest but he said “sometimes trees are felled from mouzas adjacent to it.”

However, he added, “We sent a letter to Bolipara BGB and Alikadom BGB to cooperate with us for protecting the reserve forest. We also formed a five-member vigilance team headed by the ACF [assistant conservator of forest] after The Daily Star report was published recently.”

Chief Conservator of Forest Amir Hossain Chowdhury said they have heard about the tree felling in Sangu reserve forest and “We have formed a three-member probe committee to investigate the matter. We will take action after getting the report.”

Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (BELA) served a legal notice to the secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and also to the secretary of the Ministry of CHT Affairs in this regard. Last month, Parbatya Chattogram

Forest and Land Rights Protection Movement demanded the authorities protect Sangu-Matamuhuri sanctuary and the Sangu reserve forest from destruction and take action against those responsible.

Declared protected in 1880, it is known as the only virgin forest in the country. The forest is home to 36 species of mammals, 48 species of reptiles, 19 species of amphibians, and 11 species of rare birds, it also said in its statement.

Botanist Farid Uddin Ahmed, executive director of Aranyak Foundation, said there are many rare species of old trees in the forest.

The most important tree species found in Sangu forest include Gamar, Garjan, Chapalish, Toon, Goda, Gutguya, Champa, Civit, and Shimul. Wildlife expert Dr Reza Khan, currently working with the Dubai zoo, said he visited Sangu reserve forest last year and he himself saw logging there.

“Actually, all the government officials posted in Bandarban know about the logging. It is not possible for anybody to continue these practices without the knowledge of law enforcers or the administration and forest officials,” he said.

“Unless the government forms a separate wildlife department, it will not be possible to conserve the natural forest. Because the Forest Department does not care about the habitat of wildlife and natural forest.” OTHER BANDARBAN RESERVE FORESTS IN DANGER

The district has three main reserve forests -- Matamuhuri in Alikadom, Bamu Bilchhari in Lama, and Sangu in Thanchi upazila.

The total area of Matamuhuri and Bamu reserve forests combined is 1,04,881.42 acres.

At many places, these forests have become barren due to mindless logging and felling of trees, said two top forest officials of Bandarban, seeking anonymity.

Lumberjacks have already destroyed two-thirds of Matamuhuri and Bamu reserve forests mostly by the unabated felling of valuable mother trees, said an official of Lama Forest Division.

“It is really tough to protect the 1,04,881 acre-area of Matamuhuri and Bamu reserve with only 14 staff,” said SM Kaiser, divisional forest officer of Lama.

“We will plant various rare seeds, which are currently non-existent in a 600 hectare-area of Matamuhuri reserve under a project ‘Strengthening Inclusive Development in CHT,’” added DFO Kaiser.

Compensation claims will still remain pending

FROM PAGE 1

year, narrowing victims’ scope for getting compensation. In some cases, victims can now file writs with the High Court to get compensation.

In this situation, the ministry on December 22 issued a circular, giving BRTA’s chairman and its secretary additional duty of the chairman and secretary of the trustee board with immediate effect.

Following the unprecedented road safety movement in August 2018, parliament passed the act a month later.

But the government did not make the law functional by issuing a gazette until November last year due to pressure from transport associations that have been demanding changes to some sections of the act.

Now, the law is implemented partially as the government could not formulate the rules.

The road transport and bridges ministry last year sent for vetting “incomplete” rules for the law to the law ministry, which asked for “complete” rules.

The BRTA, following the road ministry’s directives, prepared the draft rules and sent them to the ministry in September this year. The ministry is expected to send the draft to the law ministry soon, sources said.

As per the draft, if a person is killed in a road accident, his or her family members will get Tk 5 lakh while an injured person will get Tk 3 lakh.

However, the amount could change as the rules are yet to be finalised, a ministry official said.

TRUSTEE BOARD

As per the new act, the government will create a fund for compensating and treating, if necessary, road crash victims.

The fund would be created with one time or annual “contributions” from motor vehicle owners, transport associations, and the government.

As per the draft rules, an owner of a bus or a truck has to pay Tk 1,000 annually. A car owner has to pay Tk 300 annually while a motorcycle owner has to pay Tk 500 once as their contribution.

The government will form a trustee board to manage the fund and related work, the act says.

“We have requested the ministry to appoint trustee board members to make it functional as none can seek compensation [under the act] now,” BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said they will now prepare an organogram and do other work of the board. However, the board will not be able to start its “main work” -- dealing with compensation -- until the rules are finalised, he added.

He said a petition for compensation can now be filed but it will remain pending.

Despite the Covid-19 shutdown for two months, 2,891 people were killed in 3,000 accidents until September, according to the police.

Organisations working for road safety say the numbers are much higher.

Last year, 4,138 lives were lost in 4,147 road accidents, according to police.

Britain and EU release full text of post-Brexit trade deal

AFP, London

Britain and the European Union yesterday published the full text of the post-Brexit trade agreement aimed at governing their relationship when the UK definitively leaves the bloc’s single market in just five days.

The document, which is more than 1,200 pages long, lays out detail on trade, law enforcement and dispute settlement among other arrangements after the UK leaves the single market and customs union on 31 December.

David Frost, the UK’s chief negotiator, told reporters on Saturday the deal was “one of the biggest and broadest agreements ever covering not just trading goods, but services, aviation, road transport, Social Security, health cooperation, law enforcement”.

“This should be the beginning of a moment of national renewal for us,” Frost said, reiterating that the agreement allowed Britain to leave the single market and the customs union without aligning to the EU and the European Court of Justice.

In the foreword to the copy of the text published by the UK government, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the agreement had been “carefully judged to benefit everyone” and preserve “free trade for millions of people in the United Kingdom and across Europe”.

“While we made our fair share of compromises during the negotiations, we never wavered from the goal of restoring national sovereignty,” he wrote.

Senior UK government minister Michael Gove wrote in The Times newspaper that the deal would allow Britain to bring “innovation and investment to parts of the country that have endured economic decline”.

He added there were still “significant changes” to be prepared for by businesses in the short term.

To ratify the deal, Britain’s parliament has been recalled to sit on December 30. A vote in favour is virtually assured after the UK’s main opposition Labour Party said its MPs would back it.

In Brussels, the European Commission has proposed the agreement be applied on a provisional basis until 28 February.

The European Parliament will be asked for its consent to the deal in 2021 and for the process to be concluded the Council, which brings together the executives of all 27 member states, must adopt the decision.

Egypt hospital fire kills 7 coronavirus patients

AFP, Cairo

A fire at a hospital north of Cairo yesterday killed seven coronavirus patients, security and judicial sources said.

The blaze in the intensive care unit of the hospital in Obour district, on the outskirts of Cairo, also injured five other people, the sources said.

It was not immediately clear what caused the fire, the sources said, adding prosecutors had launched an investigation into the incident.

Firefighters were dispatched to the facility and stopped the blaze from spreading, local media reported.

Egypt has so far registered 130,126 Covid-19 cases, including 7,309 fatalities.

Health facilities in the North African country, like elsewhere, have been strained by the mounting number of infections.

In June, a fire at a hospital in Egypt’s coastal city of Alexandria killed seven coronavirus patients and injured seven others.

Russian historian sentenced to 12.5 years for butchering lover

AFP, Saint Petersburg

A Russian historian and Napoleon enthusiast was sentenced to 12-and-a-half-years in prison for murdering and dismembering his young lover last year.

The Saint Petersburg trial, which spurred activists to voice growing anger over domestic abuse in Russia, began in June after delays due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Oleg Sokolov, 64, had admitted murdering 24-year-old Anastasia Yeshchenko but said he committed the crime against his former student and lover in the heat of the moment during an argument.