

Benazir takes charge as new police chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newly appointed inspector general of police Benazir Ahmed took charge of office yesterday.

The government appointed Benazir as the 30th IGP on April 8. Till then, he was serving as the director general of Rapid Action Battalion.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan adorned Benazir with the IGP rank badge in presence of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Gono Bhaban, reads a statement from Police Headquarters (PHQ).

He took charge from outgoing IGP Javed Patwary at PHQ around noon.

Javed Patwary has been appointed the new Bangladesh ambassador to Saudi Arabia, while Abdullah Al Mamun has been given the charge of director general of Rab.



Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan adorned Benazir Ahmed with IGP rank badge in presence of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Gono Bhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Testing machine lying idle at RMCH for 4yrs

*Lone divisional lab at Rajshahi Medical College struggles to cope with novel coronavirus samples*

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

While the lone laboratory in Rajshahi division is struggling to cope with the increasing number of samples, a real-time Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) machine for detecting Covid-19 has been gathering dust at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) for around four years.

The hospital authorities argued that they could not operate the machine due to a lack of skilled manpower, space shortage and required infrastructure.

Yet they allegedly refused several requests of Rajshahi Medical College (RMC), which has the expertise and a coronavirus laboratory to test samples, to let them use the PCR machine during this crisis period, according to sources.

In the last week of March when coronavirus broke out in the country, Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) installed a new PCR machine at the medical college as part of the government's programme to assure testing

facilities at the grassroots.

The virology department of RMC began using the machine and testing samples from Covid-19 suspects from across eight districts of the division on April 1.

However, DGHS gave the Rajshahi hospital a PCR machine in 2017 for detecting diseases related to bacteria, virus and fungus, said a hospital official.

In May 2018, the RMCH authorities handed over the machine to its outdoor pathology department and set up a room for its installation.

Since then, the PCR machine has been lying unpacked at the department.

Asked, RMCH Deputy Director Saiful Ferdous said the hospital could not use the machine as they lacked expertise. The outdoor [pathology] also has space constraints, he said.

"Working with the machine is risky and requires special training," he said, adding that they thought it would have been unwise to use the machine at RMCH's

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Used masks, gloves dumped on roads

*Experts caution of risks if these are not disposed of properly*

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Like elsewhere, use of disposable gloves and masks has increased rapidly in Sylhet due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but most of the items are not being disposed of properly and thrown on roads, posing a serious health risk.

While visiting Chowhatta and Kajalshah areas -- where the coronavirus isolation centre at Sylhet Saheed Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital and Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital are situated -- and some other



PHOTO: SHEKH NASIR

**Disposable masks and gloves have become must-have items during the coronavirus pandemic, but after being used, some of these PPE are being dumped on roads, posing health risks. This photo was taken from Chowhatta area of Sylhet recently.**

parts of the city recently, this correspondent saw a notable amount of discarded gloves and masks at roadsides.

According to doctors and health officials, people including conservancy workers of Sylhet City Corporation are at high risk from these used materials.

Dr Himangshu Lal Roy, deputy director of Osmani Medical College Hospital, said, "The virus can survive a few hours, while some say even for days, in masks and gloves. Since no one knows for sure who is infected, there's a risk of contracting it from the used materials, if they are not disposed of properly."

Dr Anisur Rahman, assistant director (disease control) of Sylhet divisional health office, said the city corporation should be aware about the safety of their workers -- who work with bare hands -- as well as residents, by managing the waste in a proper way.

"The corporation should set up dedicated dumpsters for used masks and gloves," he suggested.

Healthcare experts also urged people to be more aware and dispose of the items properly in a separate closed bin.

Contacted, Dr Md Jahidul Islam, chief health officer of SCC, said, "We have arranged personal protective equipment for our conservancy workers. As the transmission in Sylhet is not at community level yet, we have been ordered [by the higher authorities] not to use them. But for safety, we have asked our workers to use gloves and masks. As most of them are not aware, they at times prefer not to."

About safe disposal of gloves and masks, he said, "We're monitoring the situation and will take necessary measures in this regard."

Awareness is a must in this regard, he stressed, urging residents to be more alert in this regard.

378 Bangladeshis arrive from KSA

RASHIDUL HASAN

A total of 144 Bangladeshis -- including 13 cabin crew -- who remained stranded in Saudi Arabia (KSA) for over a month following suspension of air communication between Dhaka and Riyadh due to global outbreak of Covid-19, returned to Dhaka last night.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia yesterday deported around 234 Bangladeshis who were kept at different deportation centres in Riyadh on charges including expiry of visas and passport, Golam Mosh, Bangladesh Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, told The Daily Star over telephone.

A special flight of Saudi Airlines carrying the 378 Bangladeshis landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at around 9:15pm, airport sources said.

Apart from the deportees and cabin crew, the 131 Bangladeshis who returned had gone to Saudi Arabia to perform umrah and remained stranded there for a month, said the Bangladesh envoy.

KSA suspended air communication with Bangladesh since middle of March following the global outbreak.

Officials at the Dhaka airport said passengers who will display Covid-19 symptoms will be taken to Ashkona Hajj Camp for quarantine, and others will be advised to stay in mandatory 14-day quarantine at their houses.

A life of crime catches up to them

*Prime suspect in pharmacy robberies killed in 'shootout'*

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

They spent their childhood working as labourers in the capital's Karwan Bazar kitchen market. Their task was to unload vegetables from trucks that arrived in droves at the market.

The two teenage friends -- Md Sohel and Md Titu -- were of the same age, worked together, stayed at the market together and also planned together how to make more money.

The plans, which soon turned into action, involved petty thefts such as hiding a basket full of vegetables, fish or chicken while unloading and later selling those to make a quick buck.

It worked out for a while, but they eventually got caught. Sohel and Titu were sent to a correctional facility, from where they got out and once again got involved in theft, thus unleashing a chain of events involving robbery, doing time and leading a life of crime.

By the time they became adults, they had been involved in numerous robberies. And by 30, they even formed a gang of robbers with around 15 members who they met at different prisons at different times.

The duo, now 36, used to operate in the capital and its outskirts, and conducted robbery three to four times a week.

But their actions eventually caught up with them when five members of the gang including Sohel got arrested by the Detective Branch of police on Sunday and Titu was killed in a "gunfight" with police at Bacchila in Mohammadpur early Tuesday.

In a special drive, officials of Pallabi and Mohammadpur zonal teams arrested the five around 8pm in Mirpur on Sunday. Golam Mostofa Rashed, deputy commissioner of DB (west), told The Daily Star. The other four arrestees are Sohrab (30), Newaz (22), Shaheen (25) and Raju, (25), he added.

He said the DB teams also seized a pick-up van, Tk 5,000, a machete, iron rod and kitchen knives from them.

Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said interrogating the arrestees, the DB team went on a drive at Bacchila around 12:15am on Tuesday.

Sensing police presence, criminals opened fire, forcing law enforcers to retaliate. At one point, police found one injured person at the spot and took him to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead, said DC Masud.

Police later came to know that the deceased is Titu. DC Masud said law enforcers also recovered a revolver and

knife from the spot.

**PHARMACY HEIST**

The deputy commissioner of DB (west) said wearing masks, the gang had robbed Billal Pharma in Mohammadpur on April 1 and Lazz Pharma in Khilgaon on April 5.

DB officials said the group mainly conducted robberies in the bordering areas of the capital like Badda, Rampura, Beribadh, Adabar, Mirpur, Jatrabari, Turag and Kanchpur Bridge so that they can flee easily.

Sahadat Hossain, additional deputy commissioner of DB police, said robbing pharmacies was a first for them and they did so as the city roads were empty due to the shutdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

During interrogation, the group members said on April 1 they robbed a pharmacy and intercepted an SUV in Mohammadpur.

"From Lazz Pharma in Khilgaon they took Tk 5,000 and a laptop. Then on April 10, they stopped a truck and looted 15 to 20 cartons of shrimp. They sold those for Tk 25,000 although the actual price should have been Tk 2 lakh," said the DB official.

He said the gang never tried to score big to avoid attention and chose soft targets intentionally. "We will interrogate them further after placing them on remand," he

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REFUSAL TO REPATRIATE MIGRANT WORKERS

UAE warns countries of strict restrictions for recruitment

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The United Arab Emirates has warned migrant-sending countries, including Bangladesh, of imposing strict future restrictions on recruitment of workers if they refuse to repatriate their nationals from the Emirates amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Nearly 90 per cent of 10 million population of the Gulf nation are expatriates, mostly from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Philippines, Egypt and Iran, who built the modern UAE. The number of Bangladesh in the Emirates would be around 700,000.

In a statement on Tuesday, UAE Embassy in Dhaka said the country's Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation is considering several options to restructure its cooperation and labour relations with countries

refusing to receive their nationals working in the UAE private sector.

Private sector employs the majority of the migrants, officials concerned said.

"The options include imposing strict future restrictions on the recruitment of workers from these countries and activating the "quota" system in recruitment operations," they said, "The options also include suspending memoranda of understanding (MoU) signed between the ministry and concerned authorities in these countries."

UAE had been recruiting Bangladeshis mainly for domestic services until Covid-19 pandemic began, but there have been talks going on for opening up of the labour market for all sectors.

The labor market was restricted

for Bangladeshis since late 2012 for reasons that were never clarified officially, but some officials said it was mainly because of some criminal activities and also to create a balance among various nationalities.

UAE embassy statement said the country was considering these options of restrictions after "many countries" refused to receive their citizens wishing to go back to their home countries either because the citizens are taking early leave or because their services have been terminated in light of the current circumstances.

UAE said all countries of foreign workers in the UAE should be responsible for their nationals wishing to return to their countries.

Asked about UAE warning, a foreign ministry official of Bangladesh said the government was not made

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Extraction kits run low at Ctg's BITID

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chattogram

A shortage of testing kit components is threatening to impede Covid-19 testing in Chattogram from today.

According to sources at Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID), the only organisation trusted with testing in the port city, sample extraction kits were almost out of stock.

"There are different steps in Covid-19 testing, and it needs both PCR kits and extraction kits to complete the whole process," said Prof Dr Shakil Ahmed, in-charge of BITID laboratory.

"We have received 950 PCR kits from government on Tuesday but those would have of no use unless we get the same number of extraction kits," he added.

Dr Shakil told this newspaper that they had around 100 kits, with which they could manage testing till yesterday.

"If extraction kits do not come immediately, testing might be halted," he said.

Contacted, Chattogram civil surgeon Dr Seikh Fazle Rabbi said buffer kits are needed to complete the testing process.

"BITID has been provided with around 1,000 PCR kits; the same number of buffer kits would be reached by tomorrow (Thursday)".

Contacted, ABM Azad, divisional commissioner and

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Waterways workers seek special allowance

*Noujan Sramik Federation says 1.5 lakh workers engaged in carrying goods*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Noujan Sramik Federation has demanded special allocation for waterways workers who have been "risking their lives to ensure transportation and supply of essential goods".

President of the organisation Shah Alam Bhuiyan and general secretary Chowdhury Ashiquel Alam made the call on Tuesday.

In a statement, they said the government has closed all public and private offices from March 26 and most districts have already been put under lockdown to slow the spread of coronavirus in the country.

While most of the people are staying home for health safety reasons, waterways workers are risking their lives to ensure transportation and supply of food and other emergency products and to keep the economy alive, it said.

Workers are also facing harassment at different terminals, it added.

While incentives, risk allowance and health insurance have been declared for many sectors, silence of the government and the state about waterways workers is very unfortunate, they said, demanding that the prime minister announce special allowance for them and ensure monthly salary and dues for all workers.

Ashiquel said although operation of passengers and carrier launches have remained suspended, around 1.5 lakh workers are now working across the country for carrying goods. "Many of them are being harassed by locals and police when they go to terminals, yet they are working for the country. The government did not even thank them for their services, let alone any financial support," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

100-tonne aid en route to Maldives

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladesh Navy ship yesterday left for The Maldives, carrying more than 100 tonnes of food, medicines and equipment as assistance to help fight the coronavirus.

"The ship sailed from the Chattogram port at 2:20pm," Sarwar Mahmood, director general of South Asia Desk at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told The Daily Star.

Shah Kamal, senior secretary at Ministry of Disaster Management, said the items include 40 tonnes of rice, 20 tonnes of potatoes, 10 tonnes of lentil, five tonnes of onion, five tonnes of eggs, and five tonnes of vegetables and medicine.

As per directive of PM Sheikh Hasina, Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with Bangladesh High Commission in Male is facilitating dispatch and delivery of the materials to the Indian Ocean archipelago, said a foreign ministry statement.

The Bangladeshi foreign minister is in touch with his Maldivian counterpart and has reiterated Bangladesh's solidarity with Maldives in facing the threat, it said.

The Maldives, which is home to some one lakh Bangladeshis, has been suffering from financial shocks, as tourism, one of its main income earning sectors, is brought to a halt.



The Barishal unit of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal is organising a bazaar for poor and visually-impaired people at the city's Fakirbari road. People can pick up a fixed amount of rice, lentil, potato and vegetables from the bazaar, according to the number of family members they have. Last Tuesday on the occasion of Pchela Baishakh, they also arranged for hilsa fish for the poor. Dr Manisha Chakraborty, member secretary of BSD, said this free bazaar will continue to help the underprivileged.

PHOTO: TITU DAS