

# Three of a family murdered at home

Police recover their decomposed bodies in Pabna; mother, daughter murdered at Moulvibazar home

STAR REPORT

Five members of two families in Pabna and Moulvibazar were found dead in their houses yesterday.

In Pabna, three members of a family were found dead at their rented house in Sadar upazila's Dilalpur area.

The dead are Abdul Jabbar, 60, a retired senior officer of Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank, his wife Summa Begum, 55, and their daughter Sanjida Khatun, 12.

Nasim Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Pabna Sadar Police Station, said they recovered decomposed bodies of the trio on information.

The victims were strangled to death and their bodies were chopped. Their house was ransacked too. They might be killed two to three days ago, the OC said.

The bodies were sent to Pabna Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsies, he added.

Jabbar's sister Nazma Begum said her brother retired a year ago and was staying at the rented house with his

wife for the sake of their daughter's education.

Nurul Islam Nuru, brother of Summa Begum, said this was a planned murder and sought proper investigation to find out the culprits.

Meanwhile in Moulvibazar, bodies of a mother and her daughter were found at their house in Sreemangal upazila's Purbo Jamshi area.

The dead are Jayeda Begum, 55, and her daughter Yeasmin Akther, 25, said Nayan Karkun, inspector of Sreemangal Police Station.

The mother and daughter were stabbed to death. Police recovered their bodies on information from the locals, he added.

Wahid Miah, son of Jayeda Begum, said, he was at his in-laws house when the murder took place. "My aunt informed me of the murder in the morning."

The bodies were sent to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsies, Inspector Nayan said. Our Pabna and Moulvibazar correspondents contributed to this report.



Dismayed at not being able to give samples for Covid-19 testing, police constable Rokibul Islam leaning on his bicycle outside Muga General Hospital in the city yesterday. He left the area around noon after waiting for about five hours to collect a token for the test. Posted at the Bangabhaban, he has been on leave since late last month due to illness.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Mega projects

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Another first track project is the construction of a single-line dual-gauge Railway Track from Dohazari to Cox's Bazar via Ramu. The long-drawn project also faces obstacles for lack of workers -- both Chinese and locals -- officials involved said.

Project director Mofizur Rahman said they have resumed work before the Eid and the number of workers was increasing gradually. "Most of the workers will start working from next week," he told The Daily Star.

"However, it's not possible to say now whether this problem would affect the deadline of the project."

Although the project was supposed to be implemented between July 2010 and June 2022, physical work from Dohazari to Ramu started in March 2018.

The project could spend TK 631 crore as of February, out of TK 1,135 crore. It would get TK 1,500 crore in the coming year.

Among other mega projects, Rooppur nuclear power plant will get the highest TK 15,691 crore, Matarbari coal power plant TK 3,670 crore, Karnaphuli river tunnel TK 1,550 crore, Dhaka-Ashulia elevated expressway TK 755 crore, Padma Rail Link TK 3,684 crore and Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport expansion (first phase) TK 2,900 crore in the next ADP.

Besides, installation of a single point mooring with double pipelines would get TK 752 crore, Payra port infrastructure development TK 350 crore, Payra port first terminal TK 350 crore, Rooppur Power Evacuation Line TK 585 crore and Kuril-Purbachal Canal TK 1,316 crore.

Three other mega projects would get allocation from ADP for the first time from next fiscal year. They are: Mass Rapid Transit (metro rail)-5 Tk 1,300, Mass Rapid Transit (metro rail)-1 Tk 791 crore and Matarbari Port Development project Tk 76 crore.

Asked, Prof Kanak Kanti Barua said performance trial of a drug or a kit was solely a scientific matter. "As a VC, I have nothing to intervene."

A team of Bangladeshi scientists -- Dr Bijon Kumar Sil, the lead researcher, Nihad Adnan, Raed Jamiruddin and Firoz Ahmed -- developed the antibody kit. They also developed an antigen kit.

RT-PCR, a test presently considered as the gold standard and suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO), is widely used for diagnosing novel coronavirus. It uses samples swabbed from the nose and throat to detect the presence of the virus, but the testing is expensive and time-consuming.

On the other hand, the antibody test takes less than 15 minutes. The kit can detect antibody that develops six to seven days after an individual is infected with Covid-19. The antigen kit can diagnose the infection soon after one is infected.

Dr Bijon Kumar Sil says results could be nearly 100 percent accurate if samples from each patient is run through both tests.

He also said Bangladesh could have gone for large-scale tests if approval had come earlier. It could have largely prevented the spread of new coronavirus infection, he said.

Last week, Dr Zafrullah said this is a time of grave crisis and the authorities should work on an emergency basis, especially when it is an issue of life and death.

There has, however, been a series of events that led to the delay.

When Gonoshasthaya first approached the drug administration on April 26 for validation of the kit, the latter suggested that Gonoshasthaya goes through the contract research organization (CRO), but Gonoshasthaya refused to do it saying it

would raise the price of the kit and that CROs were "a vehicle of corruption".

Later, on April 30, the DGDA allowed Gonoshasthaya to have the performance trial at the BSMMU, which then formed a committee and on May 12 wrote a formal letter asking Gonoshasthaya to supply kits.

Since May 13, Gonoshasthaya has supplied 500 antibody and 500 antigen kits to the BSMMU. The trial of antibody kit is over, but the trial of the antigen kit has been suspended as Gonoshasthaya Kendra found discrepancies in the process of collection of saliva samples.

Dr Mohib Ullah Khondoker, coordinator of the Gonoshasthaya's Covid-19 Rapid Dot Blot Project, said clear saliva was needed for the antigen test, but they found presence of cough, which was why they wrote to the BSMMU on June 2, requesting suspension of the antigen trial.

"We have, meanwhile, developed a device to properly collect saliva. We will supply those devices to the BSMMU in two to three days so that they can continue to work on that," he told The Daily Star.

He said as the antibody test was complete, Gonoshasthaya wrote to the DGDA seeking a preapproval on import of reagents so that once DGDA registers the antibody kit with it, they can immediately go for importing reagents.

Last week, Dr Zafrullah also said many countries like Britain, USA, European Union, Germany and India have already started antibody tests.

Many countries are considering mass antibody testing as a way to speed up the reopening of economies devastated by lockdowns and to introduce more tailored social distancing measures.

Health experts say Bangladesh, which had been in shutdown for nearly two months and now has partially reopened to save the economy, needs to go for antibody testing for the same reason.

"No one in the world has yet developed this combined [antibody and antigen] test. Now, just as we have developed it, other big foreign companies can also try and develop the combined testing. Then, we will fall behind others," he said.

## Internal feud in ministry key reason

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some missteps and its failure to provide necessary PPE to healthcare professionals in the early stages of the outbreak. The ministry has also been seen as culpable for not resorting to aggressive testing and tracing from the very beginning, ultimately contributing to community transmission and the present situation of deaths and infections rising every other day.

Although it was a collective failure, insiders and experts said the "internal feud" among Zahid Maleque and officials of the ministry played a major role for Asadul's removal.

Before joining the health ministry as the secretary, Asadul was the director general at Government Employee Welfare Board. Coming from the secretariat cadre (now defunct), Asadul worked in the health sector for most of his career. He was well-known and praised for his honesty, a DGHS official who worked closely with him told The Daily Star seeking anonymity.

The feud that created friction in the ministry came to light after allegations of supplying sub-standard personal protective equipment (PPE), in particular the N-95 masks to the government hospitals during April.

After that, the Central Medicine Store Department (CMSD) came under the scanner.

On April 20, the health ministry formed a three-member committee led by the ministry's Additional Secretary

(Development) Saidur Rahman. The committee submitted its report within three days.

The ministry, however, is yet to publish the report or announce what action it had taken as per the report.

"We have submitted the report within the deadline. I do not know what measures were taken [based on the report]," Saidur Rahman told The Daily Star.

On May 22, the public administration ministry announced the appointment of Additional Secretary Abu Hena Morsheed Zaman as CMSD director.

He replaced Brig Gen Md Shahidullah, who has been assigned to the Armed Forces Division and said after his removal that he was a victim of the machinations of a syndicate.

"When I joined here [CMSD], people said many syndicates are active here. There were requests from different high-ups to buy their products; [but] I did not consider those. When they saw there was no chance to serve their stakes, at that time [they removed] me. I am guessing [this is what happened]," Brig Shahidullah told a private TV channel after his removal.

Insiders said the ministry failed to take organised steps to contain the Covid-19 outbreak from the very beginning, although it had gotten enough time to take proper preparation.

As the top executive officer of the ministry, the health secretary was blamed for this along with the minister.

However, they said the government probably did remove Health Minister Zahid Maleque in the fear of possible backlash.

On April 6, less than a month after the first cases of coronavirus was reported in the country, the health minister aired his frustrations about the wider handling of the situation.

"I have been made the chairman of the national committee as the health minister. However, the decisions are taken on behalf of the committee without our [health ministry] knowledge," he had told a discussion of healthcare professionals on April 6.

"Nothing other than health issues is discussed with us. Even decisions like the closure of factories, prayers at mosques and suspension of transportation are not discussed with us. I cannot reply to journalists' questions... I am blamed for not knowing anything despite being the head of the national committee."

Prof Nazul Islam, former Vice-chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University told The Daily Star, "It is a decision from the top of the government, so we do not know what happened. But such move during this crisis may create a bit of problem, I think."

About the failure of the health ministry to fight the coronavirus crisis, he said, "Actually it is a failure of the government where health ministry is a part of it. Our health system has not developed much since our Independence."

## Boro procurement far from target

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increased distribution of rice and wheat flour among low-income, poor and vulnerable people to protect them from hunger during the days of Covid-19 crisis.

The pandemic has left thousands of people in trouble, either cutting their wages or leaving them unemployed. The recent Cyclone Amphan also made the situation worse for many.

The government's food distribution under various schemes such as Gratuitous Relief, special Open Market Sale (OMS), food friendly programme to support the poor rose 12 percent year-on-year to 24.50 lakh tonnes between May 21 and July 1 this fiscal year from a year ago.

And the food stock at the state godowns dropped to 11.33 lakh tonnes on June 3, down 16 percent from the same day a year ago. The stock of staple food rice declined 29 percent year-on-year to 800,000 tonnes on June 3, shows food ministry data.

The DGF has a capacity of storing 19.5 lakh tonnes of food.

In the letter, the DGF directed its field offices to gear-up efforts to achieve previously-set target of buying 60 percent of the Boro paddy by June, 90 percent by July and 100 percent within mid August before the drive would end. It fixed the target last month and asked field offices to work to achieve the targets.

Besides, the government is going to increase food-based safety net operations the next fiscal year, according to finance ministry.

Talking on the matter, Akhter Ahmed, country representative of International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI),

said the stock was set to decline further as the government would distribute more. So, replenishment of stock has become important, he said.

"Because of the Covid-19 crisis, maintenance of a good stock is vital this year compared to the past years as distribution has to increase to ensure food to the poor, including those who lost their livelihoods due to Covid-19," he said.

"Without a good stock, food-based safety operations would be affected. Besides, we saw in 2008 that private sector hiked prices of rice, taking the advantage of low stocks at public godowns," Akhter said.

Contacted, DGF Chief Sarwar said the government does not procure only to build stock.

"One of the main goals is to ensure fair prices to growers. Market has been buoyant this year. Farmers are getting better prices for their produce. They are not incurring losses. This is the target of the government," he said.

It has been possible to achieve the objective due to government declaration on buying higher quantity of paddy, he said.

Sarwar said millers were purchasing higher quantity of paddy assuming that because of the government purchase, they might not get enough grain later to supply rice to the public storages in line with their contracts with the DGE.

Department of Agricultural Marketing data shows prices of coarse paddy rose 51 percent year-on-year to Tk 770 each maund on June 3 this year from a year ago. Market prices are, however, below the government's purchase prices of Tk 1,040 for each maund.

He said rains began early this year. And owing to rainfall and Cyclone Amphan, paddy has higher moisture.

"We cannot procure when moisture level remains high in grains," he said adding that paddy supply to markets and local food storage depots would increase if farmers could dry paddy for some days.

IFPRI's Akhter said the government should buy paddy from growers even if moisture levels were higher than the officially-fixed highest limit of 14 percent. And prices of paddy could be determined based on conversion factors suggested by the IFPRI, he said.

In a recent study commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, the IFPRI said farmers' paddy usually has high level of moisture. It is difficult for them to dry paddy and then sell it to the food department by ensuring the required moisture level.

"Therefore, the procurement price would be adjusted based on the moisture of farmers' paddy," it said, adding that paddy with higher moisture contents could be given at relatively lower prices.

MA Sattar Mandal, former vice chancellor of Bangladesh Agricultural University, said the government should focus on building enough stock of food, particularly this year.

He said it should buy 20 lakh tonnes of paddy from farmers. And it should have started the purchase early, he added.

Akhter suggested the government buy rice from the domestic market through open tender in case the target is not achieved. Purchase from international market is time consuming, he added.

## DEATH FROM COVID-19 Doctor's family to get govt compensation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Family of Dr Md Moyeen Uddin, who died after being infected with coronavirus, is going to receive the government-declared compensation soon.

They will be the first to receive such compensation, said Md Habibur Rahman Khan, additional secretary (admin) to Health Services Division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Dr Moyeen, an assistant professor of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College, tested positive for the infection on April 5.

He died on April 15, while undergoing treatment at Kurmitola General Hospital in Dhaka.

He was the first doctor to die in the country from Covid-19.

"All formal procedures regarding the claim filed by Dr Moyeen's family were completed and forwarded to the Ministry of Finance couple of days ago for the release of the compensation as soon as possible," said Md Habibur Rahman Khan.

On April 23, Ministry of Finance issued a circular stating that all government officials including doctors, nurses and health workers will be compensated if they are infected with Covid-19 while on duty.

The compensation amount for getting infected ranges from Tk 5 lakh to 10 lakh while the compensation for death with the infection ranges between Tk 25 lakh to 50 lakh, as per the salary grade of the employee.

Dr Moyeen's wife Dr Choudhury Rifat Jahan filed the claim on April 27 with all required documents and recommendation of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College authority.

Dr Rifat Jahan, an associate professor and head of the department of Physiology of Park View Medical College in Sylhet, said, "Everyone was very cordial during the process of claiming compensation. The medical college's principal, health ministry officials and others moved the claim promptly. I haven't yet been confirmed about the claim being cleared, but believe that the ministry will inform us soon."

Dr Mohammad Abu Yusuf, deputy secretary to the Ministry of Finance, said, "The claim of doctor Moyeen's family will be approved and handed over soon."

"It is our utmost priority to clear such claims as soon as possible so that the people serving the country in the frontline may be assured of financial safety," he said.

Syria Kurdish-led force launches new anti-IS campaign

AFP, Beirut

US-backed Kurdish fighters in Syria yesterday announced a fresh campaign to hunt down remnants of the Islamic State group near the Iraqi border following a recent uptick in attacks.

The Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-led paramilitary alliance that has spearheaded the ground fight against IS in Syria since 2015, said that the new campaign is being carried out in coordination with the Iraqi army and the US-led coalition.

"This campaign will target ISIS's hideouts and hotbeds," it said, using a different acronym for the jihadist group.

It said operations will focus on the vast east Syria desert near the border with Iraq where IS has conducted a spate of attacks in recent months.

Since the loss of its last territory in Syria in March 2019, IS attacks have been restricted to the vast desert that stretches from the heavily populated Orontes valley in the west all the way to Iraqi border.

Nasim

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Physical condition of Nasim deteriorated following a brain stroke while he was undergoing treatment at Bangladesh Specialized Hospital at the city's Shyamoli.

Director and CEO of Bangladesh Specialized Hospital Imran Chowdhury said, "The Awami League leader suffered a stroke around 5:00 am on Friday. He is undergoing a surgery under Dr Rabiul Haque, chief of Neurosurgery Department of Dhaka Medical College and Hospital," reported UNB.

On Thursday, the condition of the politician improved and he was scheduled to be shifted to a cabin from ICU, he added.

On June 1, Mohammad Nasim was admitted to Bangladesh Specialized Hospital as he was feeling unwell. Later, he was tested positive for coronavirus.

Nasim has been acting as the convener of AL-led 14-party alliance. Top leaders of 14-party alliance expressed deep concern over the deterioration of health condition of Nasim yesterday through a release.

Covid-19 cases

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"We won't be able to fight back the disease without ensuring uninterrupted oxygen in the hospitals," said Dr Mohammad Shahidullah, chairperson of the NTAC.

The NTAC on Thursday night held a meeting with authorities concerned and the recommendation was made at the meeting.

## 'Keep fighting'

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"You changed the world, George," he said. "We're going to keep fighting, George."

"We're going to keep going until we change the whole system of justice."

Members of Floyd's family were among several hundred people attending the North Central University service.

Minneapolis police chief Medaria Arradondo dropped to a knee as the hearse bearing Floyd's remains arrived for the service.

"NECESSARY AND OVERDUE" A vigil for Floyd was also held in New York and was attended by thousands of people, including Floyd's brother, Terrence.

"White Silence is Violence," a sign read. "Make America Not Embarrassing Again," read another.

Arrests were reported in Manhattan after the 8:00 pm curfew passed.

Upstate in Buffalo, two police officers were suspended without pay after a

video showed them pushing over an elderly protester who fell and suffered a head injury.

Reporting the suspension on Twitter, city mayor Byron Brown said he and the police commissioner were "deeply disturbed" by the video.

An earlier police statement said the man, who appeared unconscious and bled heavily from one ear, "tripped and fell."

"This incident is wholly unjustified and utterly disgraceful," New York governor Andrew Cuomo tweeted.

"Police Officers must enforce - NOT ABUSE - the law."

A Republican senator, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, broke ranks with her party meanwhile and revealed she was "struggling" with whether to support President Donald Trump's reelection.

Murkowski said her move was prompted by remarks from Trump's former defence secretary James Mattis, who a day earlier delivered a biting

assessment of a president who "tries to divide us."

"I thought General Mattis's words were true and honest and necessary and overdue," Murkowski told reporters.

Her comments mark a major break with Trump within the Republican camp, which has largely held together through various crises including his impeachment and current threat to use military force against protesters.

'FRANKLY CRIMINAL' While condemning Floyd's death, Trump has adopted a tough stance towards the protesters, saying they include many "bad people" and calling on governors to "dominate the streets."

US civil rights groups filed a case Thursday suing Trump, after security forces fired pepper balls and smoke bombs to clear peaceful demonstrators outside the White House before the president walked to a church for a photo op earlier this week.