

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



2,230
New cases in 24hrs



4,51,990
Total cases



6,448
Deaths



3,66,877
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,408,839
Deaths



59,859,400
Total cases

Slum fire ravaged everything they had

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Rahmat Mia, 23, lives in a tin-shed room with a monthly rent of Tk 3,500 with his wife, mother, sister and niece in Mohakhali's Sat Tola slum.

Rahmat was struggling to make ends meet and had two months' worth of rent pending.

While he was already worried about how to run his family in the days ahead, the horrific fire at the slum on Monday night burnt everything to ashes.

Rahmat's family was able to save their lives but all their belongings were destroyed.

The fire broke out around 11:45pm, gutting 72 houses and 26 shops.

Rakib Islam, 15, sustained burn injuries from the fire. The boy, who works as a labourer, has been undergoing treatment at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery around 2:00am since yesterday with 25 percent burns.

Firefighters suspect the fire began from an electric short circuit, while locals say it originated in a shop.

During a visit to the slum yesterday, Rahmat was found searching for anything that could be salvaged from his burnt possessions.

Describing how he came to know about the fire, Rahmat said it occurred after they all had fallen asleep following dinner at 10:00pm. They woke up to people shouting and then saw the fire right next to their house.

"I managed to get out safely with my

family but could not take any valuables out," he told this correspondent.

Rahmat said ever since they came to the slum 16 years back from their village home in Narsingdhi due to struggles, their home had burnt down twice, rendering them helpless and in financial ruins.

"Ten years ago, our house was first burnt. We struggled very hard to save money and buy household items. But now, everything is gone again!" he said with grief.

Like Rahmat, every victim has their own story to tell.

Beauty Rani Chandra was seen crying as she looked at the wreckage inside her home. All the belongings of her one-year-old family, include her wedding attire, were burnt to ashes.

Her husband Dulal Chandra said that though his income dropped due to pandemic, he managed to save some money even after family expenses and house rent.

He saved Tk 40,000 to pay off a Tk 1 lakh loan.

However, the money and his wife's gold were destroyed in the fire. "With everything else, our dreams of our future have also been destroyed. I do not know how will I be debt free," he said.

Shilpi Begum, another resident of the slum, said she lived there for ten years with her husband and two children. "The fire reduced my 10-year savings to ashes," she wailed.

She and other victims of the fire sought help from the government and from those who are financially well off.



Swapna, 25, a domestic help, with her baby on her lap picks through the charred remains of her shanty at Sat Tola Bosti in the capital's Mohakhali yesterday, hours after a devastating fire gutted about 100 shanties and shops there.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Stopover Dhaka

FROM PAGE 1

Over the year, at least 600kg was smuggled out of Bangladesh after its arrival from India. One kg of the powder sold at Tk 1 crore.

The DNC learnt all this while probing a case filed over the seizure in September and after arresting 13 people, including six staffers of a courier service.

So far the investigators found the six were unaware that the courier service was being used for smuggling the contraband as they don't have the capacity to detect it. All of them already secured bail last month.

Seven other arrestees -- Abul Kalam Azad alias Bunty, a chemical trader in the capital's Mitford Hospital area, Junayed Ibne Siddiqui, and Bunty's associates Rezaul Haque Bablu, Nazrul Islam, Babul Mazumdar, Md Mazed and Md Bappi -- are now in jail.

Junayed, who is from Chandpur, met Chennai-based chemical trader Habib Master in Bahrain in 2018. In the Gulf country, he was running the real-estate business of his father-in-law, who passed away the previous year.

"In 2019, Habib visited Bangladesh and proposed Junayed get involved in the chemical business. Habib also said they had business in the Mitford area in Dhaka and some Indians are involved in it," said a DNC official, requesting anonymity.

Junayed later met Bunty and Indian nationals Rajkhan and Satish and their operations began.

Bunty was the recipient of the consignments of amphetamine sent through the Benapole border under false declaration while Junayed would courier them to different countries after repackaging at his house. Habib Master and his associates oversaw the entire operations.

The official further said they have so far come to know that this powder used to enter Bangladesh from Kolkata. "We are now trying to

collect details whether it is available in Kolkata or it comes from any other state in India."

Md Mehedi Hasan, assistant director of DNC, told The Daily Star recently that they have got some more names after interrogating the arrestees. "We are now conducting drives to arrest other syndicate members."

He further said they have also learned about some locations and identities of the people who received these consignments in different countries. "We have sought support from the CID for investigating the foreign links and we may seek Interpol assistance."

Fazlul Haque Khan, superintendent of DNC, and also the investigating officer of the case, told The Daily Star that they have made some progress in the investigation and are now trying to get details about the smuggling process of the powder from India to Bangladesh.

Kusum Dewan, director (operation) of DNC, told this newspaper that they have some developments regarding the investigation into amphetamine smuggling.

"We have also found some involvement of Indian smugglers behind it and written to the Narcotics Control Bureau of India," he said.

No response from the Indian side reached the DNC till filing of this report.

SCREENING, DETECTION

"The syndicate used to courier the narcotics after putting it in special packets. As there is no 3D scanner at the airport, it never got detected," said a high official of DNC.

"Such a consignment is difficult to find out if expert narcotics officials do not check the packages properly or an ultra-modern scanner is not used," he told this correspondent.

In some cases, some staffers at the airport or courier service might have been involved, he added.

An investigator said that in the

absence of modern equipment, courier service offices are also unable to detect it. They have been asked by the department to buy 3D scanners and the Dhaka office of one international courier agency already got one.

Asked about the detection of the consignment in September, another official said, "We suspect it was the poor packaging that might have helped law enforcers detect the amphetamine."

The Aviation Security Force (Avsec), the agency which seized the amphetamine, refused to comment on this issue and suggested communicating with the director of Shahjalal airport.

Group Captain AHM Touhid-ul Ahsan, director at Shahjalal airport, told The Daily Star on November 15 that they have already beefed up security after the seizures of amphetamine and yaba earlier this year.

"We have installed some more CCTV cameras to cover every inch of the airport and are working to increase trained manpower to work more efficiently," he said.

Besides, steps have already been taken to buy 11 new X-ray machines for the airport to ensure clear scanning of every package, he said. "The X-ray machines are expected to be included in the airport scanning system within this fiscal year."

Asked whether these are 3D scanners, he said the details cannot be provided without seeing the papers but this will be modern technology.

Regarding smuggling of amphetamine, Group Captain Touhid said multiple agencies are working at the airport.

"We seize illegal consignments whenever we find any. We even sat with Biman, as they also conduct security scanning, so that we can work jointly with them whenever necessary or they find anything suspicious," he added.

Work to ensure

FROM PAGE 1

Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd to collect three crore doses of Covid-19 vaccines from Serum.

Pune-based Serum has an agreement with AstraZeneca to manufacture the vaccine, ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, being developed by Oxford University. The vaccine has been named Covishield in India.

Once the vaccine is approved for human application, Beximco Pharma will buy each dose from Serum for \$4 and then supply it to the government for \$5.

The three crore doses will be delivered in phases with 50 lakh doses every month, according to the agreement.

Some 1.5 crore people will be vaccinated and each will need two doses.

Besides, the government will get vaccines from Gavi, the vaccine alliance, under the supervision of the World Health Organization.

Officials said transportation and preservation of the vaccines while maintaining the exact cold chains will be a challenge.

The vaccine must be stored at 2-8 degrees Celsius.

According to the deal, Beximco will collect and transport Covishield vaccines to storage facilities under the health directorate's Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) cold-chain network.

Officials said the EPI has the storage capacity.

"They will supply the vaccines in phases -- 50 lakh doses each

month. We have enough capacity to store them. We will, however, place proposals before our high-ups to increase the capacity if the regular vaccination programme does not get hampered," Shamsul Haque Mridha, director of the EPI programme, told The Daily Star after the signing ceremony.

The health ministry has received Tk 100 crore against its proposal for Tk 318 crore for cold chain management of the Covid-19 vaccines, according to media reports.

SURPASSING 4.5 LAKH-MARK

Meanwhile, with 2,230 people testing positive for Covid-19 in the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the total number of confirmed cases in the country rose to 4,51,990.

In the same period, 32 people died from the virus, according to a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The total number of deaths has now reached 6,448, with the death rate at 1.43 percent.

Against 15,018 tests in 117 labs, the positivity rate was 14.85 percent.

The overall positivity rate rose to 16.86 percent.

In the meantime, at least 2,266 Covid-19 patients have recovered.

With this, the total number of recoveries reached 3,66,877 and the recovery rate is 81.17 percent.

Among the 32 dead, 25 were men and seven women. One was aged between 31 and 40, seven between 41 and 50, five between 51 and 60 and 19 were above 60, added the release.

Kamalapur station

FROM PAGE 1

According to the BR, the existing design for MRT-6 extension will frustrate its plan to turn the Kamalapur station into a MmTH.

Apart from the railways minister, Salman F Rahman, private industry and investment adviser to the PM; Salim Reza, secretary at the railways ministry; Md Shamsuzzman, director general of the BR; and MAN Siddique, managing director of the DMTCL, attended the meeting.

DISPUTE OVER EXISTING PLAN

The latest development comes two weeks after the Sub Working Group formed by the Japanese government provided Bangladesh with an alternative plan for extending the MRT-6 line up to Kamalapur.

The group said the existing design would seriously hamper the prospect of turning the country's premier railway station into a true transport hub.

It sent a letter to the railways secretary in the first week of November, giving details of its alternative plan, ministry sources said.

Besides, the Japanese ministry of land, infrastructure, transport and tourism wrote to the Public Private Partnership Authority of Bangladesh, saying the alternative plan of the sub-working group would bring down costs, compared to that under the existing plan.

The Kamalapur hub is going to be established under public-private partnership model with government-to-government initiative between Bangladesh and Japan.

The MRT-6 line was initially designed as an elevated line from Uttara to Motijheel. Later, a skywalk was planned to connect the line with Kamalapur Railway Station.

Last year, the DMTCL planned to stretch the MRT-6 line directly to the railway station following the PM's directive.

Bangladesh Railway opposed

the proposal and cited its plan for Kamalapur MmTH.

Railway officials said they were not against the extension of MRT-6 line up to Kamalapur, but the DMTCL's current design would upset their MmTH plan. They had asked the DMTCL to modify its blueprint.

The DMTCL sought help of the Prime Minister's Office in resolving the issue. The DMTCL plan was given the go-ahead at a meeting with PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus in the chair on September 3.

The meeting also directed the railways ministry to take immediate steps to allow setting up of MRT-6 station and a scissors crossing at Kamalapur Railway Station.

YESTERDAY'S DECISION

The railways minister said that as per the existing plan, the railway station will be shadowed by the elevated structure of MRT-6 and the loop line that allows trains to change direction.

"We had reservations about the plan. Kajima also expressed its reservations."

As per the new plan, the loop line (scissors crossing for trains to change direction) would not go towards the station, rather it would go in a different direction.

"We have taken the decision at today's meeting. If the prime minister agrees to the plan, we will move forward with it."

"Once the design-related problem is solved, we will sign a MoU [memorandum of understanding] with Kajima for establishing the hub," the minister mentioned.

He further said they have to shift the Inland Container Depot from Kamalapur to Dirasram in Gazipur, and a development project proposal has already been prepared to that effect.

Despite repeated attempts, MAN Siddique, MD of the DMTCL, could not be reached for comments over his mobile phone yesterday evening.

Defiant Trump allows Biden transition

FROM PAGE 1

signaled that even he sees the writing on the wall after three weeks of evidence-free claims that the November 3 election was stolen from him.

This means that Biden's team will now have access to funds, office space and the ability to meet with federal officials.

Biden's office, which hours earlier announced a highly experienced group to be nominated for top US foreign policy and security posts, said the GSA would now allow "support necessary to carry out a smooth and peaceful transfer of power."

"In the days ahead, transition officials will begin meeting with federal officials to discuss the pandemic response, have a full accounting of our national security interests, and gain complete understanding of the Trump administration's efforts to hollow out government agencies," Biden's transition director Yohannes Abraham said in a statement.

The sudden break in Trump's dogged attempt to deny Biden's win came after Michigan became the latest state to certify its results and more powerful Trump supporters came out demanding that the impasse end.

BIDEN TO SHIFT DIPLOMACY

Earlier, Biden announced a foreign policy and national security team crammed with veterans from the Barack Obama years, teeing up an end to the upheaval under Trump and a return to traditional US diplomacy.

Top of the list was former State Department number two Antony Blinken, tapped for secretary of state.

Biden also named the first female head of intelligence, the first Latino chief of Homeland Security, the first woman as treasury secretary, and a heavyweight pointman on climate issues -- Obama-era top diplomat John Kerry.

The list put out by Biden's team ahead of a formal announcement demonstrated a push to bring back

the US role of leader in multilateral alliances, in contrast to Trump's "America first" regime.

"They will rally the world to take on our challenges like no other -- challenges that no one nation can face alone," Biden tweeted. "It's time to restore American leadership."

Blinken, a longtime advisor to Biden, will spearhead a fast-paced dismantling of Trump's go-it-alone policies, including rejoining the Paris climate agreement and the World Health Organization and resurrecting the Obama-crafted Iran nuclear deal.

Biden named the first woman, Avril Haines, as director of national intelligence, and Cuban-born Alejandro Mayorkas to head the Department of Homeland Security, the agency whose policing of tough immigration restrictions under Trump was a frequent source of controversy.

Signaling the Democratic president-elect's campaign promise to raise the profile of global warming threats, he named Kerry as a new special envoy on climate issues.

And in a further message of US reengagement with the international community, Biden named career diplomat Linda Thomas-Greenfield for UN ambassador.

Jake Sullivan, who also advised Biden when he was vice president under Obama, was named national security advisor.

Picked to manage the world's biggest economy as Treasury secretary was Janet Yellen, who will make history as the first woman in the job if confirmed. The 74-year-old was confirmed as Federal Reserve chairwoman under Obama in 2014 and replaced by Trump four years later.

The picks underline an emphasis on professionals whom Biden already knows well, in contrast to the Trump White House where officials were often picked without having traditional

background for the job or proved incompatible and departed in acrimony.

Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris were expected to formally introduce their appointments in Wilmington, Delaware yesterday.

DWINDLING OPTIONS

The president, meanwhile, has largely halted at least his public work duties, while heading out to a golf course he owns in Virginia half a dozen times since the election.

He has also not taken questions from reporters since the election -- a previously unimaginable silence from a president who for most of his time in office sparred near daily with the press.

His options for overturning the election, however, are dwindling rapidly in the face of repeated court defeats.

With Biden having won a comfortable victory, Trump's last card is to disrupt the normally routine process of state-by-state certification of results, followed by the formal December 14 vote by the Electoral College. However, that too is bearing little fruit.

More cracks appeared in the facade of Republican unity on Monday when Senator Rob Portman said it was "time to expeditiously resolve any outstanding questions and move forward."

Senator Lamar Alexander, a senior Republican and close ally of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, said "it seems apparent that Joe Biden will be the president-elect."

"My hope is that President Trump will take pride in his considerable accomplishments, put the country first and have a prompt and orderly transition to help the new administration succeed," he said after having issued a similar if less forthright statement a few days earlier.

There was also a push from Trump's highest profile Wall Street backer, Stephen Schwarzman, head of the Blackstone private equity group, who told Axios "the country should move on."

Singapore deports 15 Bangladeshis over social media posts 'inciting violence'

AGENCIES

Singapore has deported 15 Bangladeshis over social media posts that incited violence or encouraged communal unrest in response to recent terror attacks in France, officials said yesterday.

France is on high alert following jihadist attacks in recent weeks, including the beheading of a teacher who showed his pupils cartoons considered blasphemous for Muslims and a deadly assault on a Nice church.

Security agencies in Singapore have been on heightened alert since early September and, as a result of their investigations, the Bangladeshis were deported, the interior ministry said.

The individuals, most of whom were construction workers, put up social media posts "which incited violence or stoked communal unrest" in response to the attacks in France, AFP reported citing a ministry statement.

Officials did not disclose the content of the posts.

In a separate incident, a 26-year-old Bangladeshi man was picked up under the Internal Security Act earlier this month in Singapore for his involvement in terrorism-related activities.

Ahmed Faysal was arrested on November 2 after preliminary investigations found that he had been radicalised and intended to carry out acts of armed violence in his home country. The Straits Times reported yesterday.

Faysal left Bangladesh for Singapore in early 2017 to work as a construction worker, and became radicalised the following year through online propaganda.

The interior ministry said investigations so far have not indicated that Faysal intended to carry out any acts of violence in Singapore.

EC sending staff

FROM PAGE 1

Abul Kalam said all citizens above 14 would get smart NID cards under the second phase of the IDEA project. But the project director, Saidul, said, "Our ultimate plan under the second phase of the project is to distribute smart NID cards among all aged above 10."

Till now, the EC has given smart NID cards to citizens aged 18 and above.

Other targets of the second phase of the IDEA project include expansion of the NID database and updating it to make the existing server more efficient and help the EC have a flawless voter list.

"We will need to modernise and enhance the database and server as the number of people and voters are increasing every day. Although the target of distributing smart NID cards was initially set at nine crore, we now have around 10.98 crore voters," said Saidul.

Abul Kalam said the major operations of the project include production and personalisation of smart cards.

"We've placed a recommendation at the meeting that the NID services be brought under the revenue budget, instead of keeping it under any project," he said.

Meanwhile, Planning Division Senior Secretary Ashadul Islam said the government was planning to bring all data registration activities, including NID registration, birth and death registration, and the registration activities carried out by Directorate General of Family Planning under a single entity.

The five-year-long first phase of the IDEA project was launched in 2011, aiming at establishing a secure, accurate and reliable national identification system in Bangladesh.

During the first phase, the commission is supposed to have personalised and supplied NID cards to about nine crore voters up to upazila level. However, it has so far personalised and supplied 6.5 crore cards till date, said EC officials.

After missing four deadlines, the first phase of the project is now set to be completed next month. Its cost has risen to Tk 1,696 crore, up from the primary budget of Tk 1,379 crore.

Rest of the cards will be distributed in the second phase, IDEA project officials said.

Faridul takes oath

FROM PAGE 1

The post remained vacant for around five months.

According to the parliament's website, Faridul Haque Khan is a jute businessman by profession having qualification up to higher secondary certificate.

Born in January 2, 1956, Faridul Haque Khan is hailed from Islampur village in Islampur upazila of Jamalpur. He was also a chairman of Islampur upazila.

Faridul Haque Khan was elected as MP in 2009, 2014 and 2018 parliamentary elections.

With the inclusion of Faridul Haque Khan, the number of members in Sheikh Hasina's cabinet rose to 46.

Of them, 24 are full ministers, 19 are state ministers and three are deputy ministers.