

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



2,230
New cases in 24hrs



4,51,990
Total cases



6,448
Deaths



3,66,877
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,405,953
Deaths



59,738,464
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.

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

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 (PPPA), 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 with Japan.

The mass rapid transit (MRT) line-6 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 line-6 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 line-6 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 line-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, MD of the DMTCL MAN Siddique could not be reached for comments over his mobile phone yesterday evening.



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

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.

Huthis launch missile attack on Saudi Aramco site

AFP, Riyadh

Yemen's Huthi rebels launched a missile attack on a Saudi Aramco oil facility in the Red Sea city of Jeddah on Monday, triggering an explosion and a fire in a fuel tank, officials said.

The strike occurred the day after the kingdom hosted a virtual summit of G20 nations, and more than a year after the targeting of major Aramco sites that caused turmoil on global oil markets.

The Iran-backed Huthis said they launched a Quds-2 missile at the oil distribution facility, in retaliation for Saudi's role at the head of a military coalition that supports the government in Yemen's long conflict.

The rebels have since the start of last year stepped up attacks on neighbouring Saudi Arabia, mainly targeting southern provinces along their shared border. Jeddah however lies some 600 kilometres (370 miles) from the frontier.

"An explosion took place as a result of a terrorist attack by a projectile, causing a fire in a fuel tank at the petroleum products distribution terminal in the north of Jeddah," the Saudi energy ministry said in a statement.

Firefighting teams extinguished the blaze and there were no casualties, it said, adding that Aramco's fuel deliveries were not affected by this act of "terrorism and sabotage".

The Saudi-led military coalition said the Huthis were "implicated in this cowardly terrorist attack, which does not target the national capabilities of the kingdom, but rather targets the nerve of the global economy and its supplies as well as global energy security".

EC sending staff

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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

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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.