

## BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,888

New cases in 24hrs



4,75,89

Total cases



6,807

Deaths



3,93,408

Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE



1,528,037

Deaths



66,429,093

Total cases

ATTACKS AGAINST JOURNALISTS

# Cross-border media cooperation launched

**IPI, five South Asian media organisations join hands**

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The International Press Institute (IPI) and five South Asian media organisations on Thursday launched a cross-border cooperation to highlight attacks on journalists and create public awareness and influence policymakers to end impunity for crimes against journalists in the region.

News organisations partnering with IPI under the project -- "Covering and investigating attacks against journalists in South Asia: a Cross-Border cooperation" -- are The Daily Star in Bangladesh, The Week - Malayala Manorama in India, Dawn in Pakistan, and Nagarik (Nepali) and myRepublica (English) in Nepal.

"We are excited at the prospect of working with some of South Asia's most respected news organisations to give visibility to the attacks that journalists face in the region as well as their consequences on people's right and ability to be informed," IPI Executive Director Barbara Trionfi said.

The project is partially supported by UNESCO's Global Media Defence Fund, a multi-partner trust fund. The media partners will gather information about attacks on journalists and the impunity for crimes against journalists in their respective countries.

Also, throughout the year, the participating newspapers will cover the issue of journalist safety through different journalistic formats, in line with their editorial policies.

Special attention will be given to attacks against women journalists. The partners will also publish in-depth reports on the topic. All the



stories and reports will be shared for publication by participating news organisations.

IPI will engage with like-minded organisations in South Asia and around the world to raise awareness about the challenges journalists face.

Speaking on the collaboration, The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam said, "South Asia has witnessed a rapid decline in press freedom and safety of journalists. At least seven journalists have been killed in the four countries this year and investigations in earlier killings remain pending.

"The collaboration between publications in the region will shed light on this grave situation and allow us to highlight the challenges that we journalists face."

The Week Editor-in-Charge VS Jayachandran said The Week has been proud of standing by courageous journalists who risk their lives for truth and freedom, both of which are vital to the magazine's own existence as an honest and unbiased publication, as well as to the growth of good journalism in India, a country that has seen a number of attempts at silencing journalists in modern times.

Dawn Editor Zaffar Abbas said the cross-border collaboration is an excellent initiative as safety of journalists is a common cause for all. "I am quite confident that together we will be able to highlight the issue of threat to journalists and journalism not just in our own countries but in the whole of South Asia."

Nagarik Editor-in-Chief Guna Raj Luinl said it's an important and timely effort to highlight the issue of safety of journalists in South Asia.



**Modunaghat Water Treatment Plant's daily withdrawal of 36 crore litres of water from the Halda river will pose a serious threat to the unique water body, experts, environmentalists say. Halda is the lone natural spawning ground of carp fish in South Asia.**

PHOTO: FILE

## Fresh threat haunts Halda

FROM PAGE 1

of Water Modelling (IWM) drew the ire of environmentalists for being vague, ill-motivated, and intentionally evading the risk factors facing the water body.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the feasibility study and found gaps between the final version and a summary presented in a review meeting organised by the Department of Environment on October 13 this year.

Following the criticism and a letter from the water resources ministry last month, IWM is now set to review the study.

### QUESTIONS OVER FEASIBILITY STUDY

Chattogram Wasa wants to take around 336 million litres per day (MLD) water, according to the study. This will be added to the existing 225 MLD withdrawn for irrigation and other purposes.

That means a total of 561 MLD water will be extracted from Halda river every day.

Taking an average of water flow (1,875 MLD) during the dry season, particularly in February-March, total withdrawal would then be nearly one third of Halda river's water flow.

These two months are the pre-spawning period as brood fish usually lay eggs in April.

Noted Halda researcher and professor at the zoology department of Chittagong University Dr Manzoorul Kibria told The Daily Star, "The feasibility study assessed the water flow as 1,600 MLD to 2,150 MLD in the February-March period, which is crucial for Halda because spawning occurs in April."

"The total withdrawal of water will be 29.92 percent of the total water Halda holds at that time. This will reduce water flow drastically, allowing salinity far deeper into the economic zone."

But this figure was presented as different in the review meeting, where IWM showed the water flow during February-March as 27,402 MLD -- raising doubts about the authenticity

and thoroughness of the study, Kibria said.

Referring to a study he conducted last year, he said, salinity is a major concern for Halda as it is on the rise after the construction of sluice gates, rubber dams, and irrigation projects. Due to salinity, a venomous sea snake -- Belcher's sea snake -- is now present in the Halda river, he added.

A three-year study since 2016 by Chattogram Wasa revealed 700mg of salinity per litre of water of Halda, while the ideal according to international standards is 600mg per litre.

The feasibility study also did not focus on specific details of how much plankton, and micro benthic organisms are needed for brood fish to be able to lay eggs as it regularly takes place in Halda.

It is also not made clear in the report how the withdrawal of water will affect the brood fish, dolphins, and overall biodiversity of the water body.

Kibria also said the study was based on old data -- for example, the study intentionally omitted the fact that high yields of fish eggs have been collected in the Halda every year since 2016, and the highest haul of eggs in the decade this year.

The IWM team did not meet local stakeholders such as egg collectors and local fisheries and administration officials when they prepared the feasibility study, Kibria said. Egg collectors, who work and live close to the Halda, confirmed this to The Daily Star.

Kibria proposed an alternative solution, suggesting a water reservoir be built with streams in the Mirsari hilly area, rain water harvesting, and withdrawing water from the Muhuri river, Mohamaya lake, and Feni river -- all of which are also close to the economic zone.

A 2016 study on the ecological impact of water withdrawal from Halda led by Prof Ainun Nishat, a prominent water resources management and climate change specialist, had warned more removal

of water from Halda will have drastic impact on brood fish and overall aquatic life in the river.

Chairman of National River Conservation Commission Muzibur Rahman Hawladar, in a webinar held on November 20, said, "Chattogram Wasa assured us of not taking this project when I visited the spot after the first project [2018 project withdrawing 18 crore litres water daily] was implemented by them."

As per a High Court directive, there has to be a "no objection certificate" from the river commission for projects involving rivers but the Chattogram Wasa has not yet obtained it, he said.

"Halda River is a super living being. It has the right to live. Our constitution, laws allow us to sue any project that wrecks harms on a river, its biodiversity," he added.

### REASSESSMENT 'SOON'

On November 8, the water resources ministry sent a letter to IWM asking it to review the feasibility study and include all stakeholders' comments.

Contacted, Executive Director of IWM Abu Saleh Khan told The Daily Star that they were going to launch the reassessment of the study soon.

About the concerns raised by Halda experts and the river conservation commission, he said the study prepared had valid grounds.

"If 200 cubic metre per second water is released from Kapta Dam, there will be no harm to Halda. As in the dry season, water flow recedes to a remarkable level, Chattogram Wasa and the Power Development Board [which runs Kapta Dam] must come to an understanding about releasing water from upstream," he said.

AKM Fazlullah, managing director of Chattogram Wasa, claimed that he did not know about the High Court directive to obtain a "no objection certificate" from the river commission.

"If so, we will get it from them. No, we have started paperwork seeking clearance from DoE and other relevant authorities," he said.

"I don't know about the study as it is IWM's function," he added.

## Bangabandhu's sculpture found defaced

FROM PAGE 1

10:30am yesterday. The criminals distorted the face and broke the right wrist.

SM Tanvir Arafath, superintendent of Kushtia police, said, "Several teams of police have started investigation into the matter."

Police are checking CCTV footage of adjacent areas to identify the criminals and that two have already been IDed, he said.

Robiul said a total of three sculptures of Bangabandhu are being built side by side at an estimated cost of Tk 35 lakh.

The portraits of four national leaders were also to be displayed near the sculptures.

The construction work was inaugurated on October 12.

Kushtia municipality Mayor Anwar Ali alleged that fundamentalist groups, who are against sculptures, could be

behind the incident. "We demand immediate arrest and punishment of the criminals," he added.

Around 7:40 in the evening, a microbus with no plates stopped at the intersection where the sculpture was vandalised. Two shot in the air were fired from the vehicle.

Police are looking into whether the two incidents had any links.

The recent dispute between AL and some Islamist parties originated when AL announced to set up a sculpture of Bangabandhu in Dhaka's Dholaiapar.

Immediately after the announcement, the Islamist parties said they would resist the move, claiming sculptures go against Islam.

The Islamist parties include Hefajat-e-Islam and Islami Andolan Bangladesh.

In response, different pro-AL bodies

"We are in power. It will not be wise to show impatience over any issue. The prime minister is handling the matter. She will face everything with courage as she has tackled coronavirus pandemic," he added.

He said there were sculptures in many countries across the world and even in Muslim countries. "If establishing sculptures was not conflicting with Islam there, why will it be so in Bangladesh?"

## Antigen testing finally begins

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Speaking at the event yesterday, the health minister said, "Testing is very much needed to control novel coronavirus and its treatment. Antigen tests will be introduced in all districts at the earliest."

He said the antigen tests were being carried out following the guideline of World Health Organization (WHO).

Mentioning that the number of Covid-19 patients and the death rate are on the rise recently, Zahid said, "Patients can be brought under treatment fast through detection of the infection. However, maintaining self-protection is more urgent than that."

Bangladesh is now conducting around 15,000 Covid-19 tests a day in 118 authorised laboratories. It is ranked at the bottom of the list of countries in the world in terms of conducting tests considering its population of over 160 million.

Asked whether the government had any plan to significantly increase the number of daily tests, the minister claimed that people were not reporting for tests. "That's why the number of tests is lower."

DGHS DG Prof ABM Khurshid Alam said they could introduce the rapid antigen-based testing although it was delayed. "It is better late than never."

Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of the DGHS, civil surgeon of 10 districts and the directors of 10 hospitals attended the online event, conducted by Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, additional director (planning and development) of DGHS.

### 35 MORE DIE

Thirty-five more people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, according to a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With this, the total number of deaths from the virus in the country has reached 6,807. The death rate is 1.43 percent.

Among the 35 deceased are 23 males and 12 females.

A total of 1,888 new infections were recorded in the same 24-hour period, taking the total number of infected people to 475,879, added the release.

With 13,540 tests conducted, the positivity rate was 13.94 percent for the same period. The overall positivity rate now stands at 16.70 percent.

Meanwhile, 2,457 Covid-19 patients have recovered in 24-hour period.

With this, the total number of recoveries rose to 393,408. The recovery rate is 82.67 percent.

Of the 35 deceased, one was aged between 21 and 30 years, one between 41 and 50, nine were between 51 and 60 and 24 were above 60 years, added the DGHS release.

## Still not there

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**ASHIM KUMAR UKIL**

Election Commission has become strong. But a better system of democracy is yet to get a complete shape," he said.

A top leader in the "Sarbadalai Chhatra Oikya", a platform of all students organisations that led the mass uprising against military ruler Ershad, Ashim Kumar also said, "We are yet to be able to completely uproot militancy and fundamentalist groups, who were patronised by those who came to power after the fall of the Ershad's regime."

Ashim Kumar, one of the popular student leaders during the anti-Ershad movement, said, "Due to some silly mistakes, the foundation of democracy has not become as strong as desired."

Despite this limitation "we have achieved many goals that we had set during the mass movement", he said.

"We have stopped the culture of change in power through killings, coups, conspiracies and the back door. We have ensured change in power through ballots although 1/11 type government [military-backed caretaker government in 2007] comes as a threat to us," he also said.

He said, "We have no scope to become complacent with this achievement."

Ashim said, "We, the students organisations of the country, had formed "Sarbadalai Chhatra Oikya" in October 10, 1990, to achieve some goals, which included restoration of democracy by restoring people's voting rights and by ending the politics of killings, coups and conspiracies, and establish Bangladesh in light of the spirit of the great Liberation War."

"We vowed in front of the 'Aporajeo Bangla' in Dhaka University that we will not give up our movement until our goals were achieved."

All political alliances as well as the country's people rallied to achieve those goals, he said.

**AMANULLAH AMAN**

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Khaleda Zia, said.

"During the formation of the Sarbadalai Chhatra Oikya, I administered the oath taking in front of Aporajeo Bangla that we will ensure people's voting rights through restoration of democracy. But what we see now -- people have no voting rights," he said.

Aman alleged that an undeclared one-party rule was going on in the country.

He said Shaheed Dr Milon, Nur Hossain, Selim, Delowar,