Deaths

BANGLADESH UPDATE 910 New cases in 24hrs 5,16,929 Total cases

GLOBAL

As the news spread, Bangladesh

Health Minister Zahid Maleque

told reporters at his office yesterday

afternoon that he heard about the

foreign ministry. We have also talked

to the Indian high commissioner to

Bangladesh. We hope the contract

with SII will not be hampered and we

that we would get the vaccine. Today,

we heard the Indian government has

He added that the ministry was in

touch with the Indian authorities and

has got assurances that the country

would get the vaccine doses as per the

same briefing said there was nothing

to worry about and that "the vaccines

Health Secretary Mannan at the

He claimed that the agreement was

government-to-government (G2G)

But Beximco's Papon said, "The

deal and that the ban India imposed

agreement that we signed is not a

G2G deal for sure. But we don't know

whether the government has any G2G

pharmacology at the Bangabandhu

Sheikh Mujib Medical University

Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of

was on commercial export.

imposed a ban on vaccine export."

"Yesterday [Sunday] we were sure

will get vaccines as per the contract.

"We're communicating through the

Indian embargo.

agreement.

deal

will reach in time".

DEATH OF APPRENTICE LAWYER Police refuse to record case against DB men

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

2 The Baily Star

Relatives of apprentice lawyer Rejaul Karim Reja, who died in a prison cell of a Barishal hospital, yesterday alleged that Kotwali police did not record a murder case against three members of Detective Brach of police. A DB team detained

Rejaul at a tea stall near his home on Barishal city's

Hamid Khan Sarak around 8:00pm on December 29 when he was having tea, said his brother-in-law Abdul Barek Hawlader.

The DB that night filed a drugs case against the 30-year-old apprentice lawyer with Kotwali Police Station and handed him over to police, he added.

A local court sent him to jail the following day. On January 1, he was admitted to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

He passed away on Saturday night. Yesterday, Barishal Metropolitan Police Commissioner Md Shahabuddin Khan asked Rejaul's father, wife and Barek to meet him at his office.

The three met the BMP commissioner around noon. The commissioner listened to them separately and asked them to talk to the Kotwali OC over filing a murder case in this regard.

Barek said Kotwali OC Nurul Islam refused to record the case arguing that he could not do so as the apprentice lawyer passed away in the hospital's prison cell.

Rejaul's family was preparing the

draft of a case to be filed with a local court today in this regard. Sub-Inspector DB Mohiuddin Mahi and two other members of DB would be accused in the case, Barek added.

Rejaul told his wife at the hospital that he was brutally tortured by Mohiuddin, said family members.

Rejaul Karim Reja Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not reach the BMP commissioner, the deputy commissioner (DB), the Kotwali OĆ and SI Mohiuddin over the phone for comments.

Earlier, BMP Deputy Commissioner Md Manzur Hossain denied the allegation of Rezaul being tortured. DEMONSTRATION

Lawyers and apprentice lawyers yesterday formed a human chain on Fazlul Haque Avenue in Barishal city around noon protesting Rezaul's death in jail custody.

Former general secretaries of Barisal District Bar Association Mohsin Montu and Abul Kalam Azad spoke at the programme, among others.

The protesters said Rezaul was a very bright student. He wanted to take over the responsibility of his hard-up family, but he was "killed" after being picked up by the DB police.

They demanded trial of SI Mohiuddin over the alleged murder. They also warned of announcing tougher agitation programmes if their demand was not met.

Australian 'lives and homes' at risk as fire nears Perth

AFP, Perth

An out-of-control bushfire threatened lives and homes in Australia's west coast city of Perth yesterday, with locals told to shelter in place from toxic fumes.

Residents in several suburbs south of Perth have been warned to be on watch as around 150 firefighters fire.

battled a blaze which has razed more than 230 hectares since Saturday.

The local emergency department downgraded the fire from earlier "emergency" level, but warned there was still "a possible threat to lives and homes as a fire is burning in the area and conditions are changing".

ACC arrests PK Halder's 'associate' The ACC found that PK Halder has

The anti-graft body arrested Shankha legal income of about Tk 12.48 crore following hours of quizzing by its Deputy Director Salahuddin, who is investigating the case.

"Shankha used to abet PK Halder laundering money," ACC Secretary Anwar Hossain Howlader told the media.

"There is a flat under the possession of Shankha in Dhanmondi. But PK It is not known what triggered the

whereas his total wealth -- including moveable and immovable property -- is worth Tk 287.39 crore. "He has amassed Tk 274.91 crore beyond his known sources of income," it said. contract. He joined NRB Global Bank as its

managing director in 2015. Several enquiries over embezzlement of crores of taka from NBFIs by PK



Apprentice lawyers form a human chain in Barishal yesterday, protesting the alleged murder of their fellow apprentice lawyer Rejaul Karim Reja. PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh okays it for emergency use

FROM PAGE 1

last night said he has yet to formally receive the NOC.

The developments come after India on Sunday banned export of the vaccine for two months to make sure emergency local demands are met.

As many people here expressed concerns that the shots might not arrive on time, the Bangladesh government yesterday said the ban would not affect the import of Covishield.

"The deal was done on the basis of discussions at the highest level, between Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Indian Premier Narendra Modi. So, no ban will be applicable for us. There is no reason for us to worry," said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen referring to a correspondence with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.

It will come towards the end of this month ... India and Bangladesh will get the Serum vaccines at the same time," he told reporters at a briefing at the Foreign Service Academy.

other countries.

Secretary Abdul Mannan of the health

Bangladesh is supposed to get 50 lakh doses of Covishield every month for the first six months as per the

In the evening, Papon said,

few months before receiving their first to roll out, perhaps by the end of [the] month." shots".

During a virtual summit between Hasina and Modi on December 17, the latter promised to promptly and effectively deliver to Bangladesh the Covid-19 vaccine.

Bangladesh is Stating that significant pillar in India's "Neighbourhood First" policy, Modi pharmaceutical companies said on both sides made plans for supplying the vaccine. Modi also spoke of exploring the potentials of cooperation in vaccine production.

- Agreement signed between Serum Institute of India (SII) **D** and Beximco Pharmaceuticals
- A total of three crore doses
- 50 lakh doses will arrive in

It can be stored at 2-8 degree ົ Celsius temperature

SII has now **50 million** doses 2 SII to make one billion doses for developing nations

- Indian regulator approved the 3 vaccine for emergency use on Sunday
- Approval given on condition 0 that SII doesn't export the

THE CONFUSION TRIGGER

shots

The confusion arose after Serum CEO Adar Poonawalla said in an interview

(BSMMU), said, "The government should strengthen the diplomatic efforts to get the vaccine on time.

"India now has four million vaccine doses and an additional 10 million with the Associated Press on Sunday will be produced by this month. So, India can give Bangladesh 50 lakh doses per month. For that, diplomatic efforts should be strengthened." Eminent virologist Nazrul Islam said, "These are not onions... we could purchase them from other countries. It is a vaccine. It is not available everywhere. Depending on only one source for the vaccine was a wrong decision. It is suicidal."

24 more die, 910 test positive for Covid

Y Total cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

1,856,577 • 85,832,333

The health directorate reported that 910 people were infected with the novel coronavirus in the 24 hours ending 8:00am yesterday.

This was below 1,000 new cases for the third consecutive day. The previous day, 835 people tested

positive for the viral infection while the number was 684 on Saturday, according to a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services.

With yesterday's cases, the total number of confirmed cases rose to 5,16,929.

Meanwhile, 24 people died from Covid-19 in those 24 hours.

The death toll reached 7,650 and the death rate was 1.48 percent.

Against yesterday's 12,096 tests, the positivity rate was 7.52 percent and the overall positivity rate 15.80 percent.

In the same 24-hour period, 917 Covid-19 patients recovered from their illnesses.

With this, the number of recoveries stood at 4,61,515 and the recovery rate at 89.28 percent.

Among the 24 deceased, 18 were males.

One of them was aged under 10, one petween 41 and 50, eight were aged between 51 and 60, and 14 were above 60 years, added the release.

Two men get death for rape, murder of girl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A Madaripur court yesterday sentenced two people to death for killing a sevenyear-old girl after rape on November 27, 2012.

The convicts are Mahmudul Hasan alias Madhu, 32, and Milon Mollah, 30, of Sreenadi village of Madaripur Sadar upazila.

Moslem Ali Akhand, public prosecutor of Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal in Madaripur, said Judge Dilruba Sultana of the court delivered the verdict in presence of the convicts.

The court also fined Tk 1 lakh each. According to the case statement, Rabia Akhter Riya, daughter of Gaus Napti of Kotbari Sreenadi area under Sadar Upazila, was killed after rape by criminals in a bush in the afternoon on November 27, 2012, while she was returning home from her coaching centre.

She was a class-II student.

The next day, the victim's father filed a case against some unknown people with Sadar Police Station.

After investigation, Fayakuzzaman, then sub-inspector of Sadar Police Station, submitted a charge sheet against Mahmud and Milon on February 3, 2013.

After examining witnesses and

Ltd on November 5 last year will arrive in six phases each month

The Serum Institute on Sunday said

ministry yesterday told reporters that the ban would not affect Bangladesh's

agreement.

"The vaccine will arrive on time.

it intends to concentrate on meeting India's own immediate demand for two months before exporting it to

Health Minister Zahid Maleque and

Halder bought it," he said.

Earlier, the investigation officer seized PK Halder's two flats and six acres of immovable properties following a court order last month.

According to the case statement, PK Halder has immovable property worth about Tk 187.78 crore. Of the amount, he has investment about Tk 123.54 crore in Lipro International.

He purchased 589 decimals of land for Tk 1 crore in Mymensingh.

In the enquiry, the ACC found that there is about Tk 67.35 crore investment in eight companies.

Besides, documents show he has Tk 32.25 crore worth of moveable property, reads the FIR.

The total amount of his moveable property stands at Tk 99.61 crore, which he amassed directly and indirectly using others' names, said the FIR.

Halder are pending with the ACC.

On Sunday, four depositors of People's Leasing and Financial Service (PLFS), one of the NBFIs, described their plights and sufferings before the High Court for not getting back their money from the PLFS.

The ACC and the home ministry provided relevant documents and papers to the Interpol to arrest PK Halder and bring him back home.

According to Canadian media reports, Halder is now in Toronto. He is a director of P&L Hal Holding Inc, a Canadian corporation.

The three other NBFIs from which PK Halder allegedly misappropriated crores of taka are: International Leasing and Financial Services Limited (ILFSL), FAS Finance and Investment, and Bangladesh Industrial Finance Company.

we have signed an agreement, it is my firm belief that it will not be a problem. We have talked to Serum today [yesterday], but we did not get any indication that there would be any delay [in getting the vaccine]."

"It's an international agreement," Papon told reporters at a hurriedlycalled briefing.

But how quickly the vaccine could be availed depends on the government, he added.

The sooner the government meets the conditions of making payment in advance and getting the vaccine approved by the DGDA, the earlier the vaccine will arrive, he said.

A top Indian foreign ministry official yesterday told The Daily Star, "We will prioritise our neighbours, particularly Bangladesh, in sharing our vaccines. It will take a few weeks

that, "The vaccine has been granted emergency authorisation by the Indian regulator on Sunday, but on the condition that Serum Institute doesn't export the shots to ensure that vulnerable populations in India are protected.

"We can only give the vaccines to the government of India at the moment," he said, adding that the decision was also made to prevent hoarding

Poonawalla further said the "company also has been barred from selling the vaccine in the private market".

Besides, Serum was planning to give 200 to 300 million doses to COVAX by December 2021, said the AP report.

The report also observed that the nations will probably have to wait a considering various options."

He said if Bangladesh had allowed the vaccine trials of Sinovac, it would have had a chance to get that vaccine. In August 2020, Bangladesh approved Chinese company Sinovac Biotech's human trials in the country, but it did not happen because in mid-October, the government refused to co-fund the domestic trials.

Asked if Bangladesh will look for alternative sources for the vaccine, ban on export "means that poorer the foreign minister said, "We are

evidence, the judge found the two guilty and pronounced the verdict against the two.

BSMMU mulls FROM PAGE 1

Bangladesh, saying there was a "fund shortage", despite the fact that icddr,b -- the contracted research organisation - had finalised its plan for the trial.

Experts, however, said the reason behind the company's stepping back was the government's months-long delay in making the decision.

About the Anhui Zhifei proposal, Md Muhibur Rahman, additional secretary of the health ministry's health services division, told The Daily Star, "We do not know anything about it yet... However, we the government is ready to give [permission for the trial]."

He said that the approval from the Bangladesh Medical Research Council and the Department General of Drug Administration will be required for the third phase trial.

In its proposal, the Anhui Zhifei, according to officials, said the company will bear the cost for the trial. Besides, it will take the initiative to set a vaccine production plant in Bangladesh if the vaccine passes the trial.

Meanwhile, icddr,b submitted another proposal for the third phase rial of a Covid-19 vaccine developed by another Indian company, sources said

However, no further information was disclosed in this regard.



The Quasem Foundation today marks one year since the passing of our former Executive Director and Chief of Operations, Professor Dr. Mohammad Abdur Razzak. Before joining the Quasem Foundation, he was a renowned Professor of Anesthesiology and Pain Management Specialist, most notably at BIRDEM Hospital. Dr. Razzak passed away last year. He left behind a host of friends and well-wishers along with his wife Shahnaz and daughter Maisha. The year since his passing has been one devoid of his unmatched wisdom, knowledge and kindnessthree of his countless glowing attributes that are most missed by all those who knew him and continue to mourn his loss while cherishing his memory.

BB officials harbour

FROM PAGE 1

auditor to find out the total amount of money embezzled from the BIFC by Proshanta Kumar Halder, also known as PK Halder, and his cohorts in the last five years.

The petitioner alleged that the then BIFC board of directors led by PK Halder embezzled around Tk 500 crore from the BIFC and a business group owned by Maj (retd) Abdul Mannan plundered around Tk 1,000 crore sanctioned as loans to the companies belonging to him and his family.

In the full text of its order, the HC said, "For the case in hand, the general managers who were in charge of overseeing the activities of the financial institutions from the year 2002 to date should be made answerable for causing the disaster in the financial sector."

"Although this court is wellcompetent to draw the attention of the Anti-Corruption Commission to initiate a primary enquiry against the aforesaid persons, I opt to refrain from passing such orders/directives for now with an expectation that the governor of Bangladesh Bank shall look into the matter for the greater interest of the nation in order to dismantle the prowess and ill-plans of the offenders so that no further public money is purloined by the crooked businessmen in collaboration with the unscrupulous Bangladesh Bank officials," Justice Khurshid noted.

The HC bench appointed Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury, a retired

judge of the Supreme Court, as the independent director-cum-chairman of BIFC to preside over the company's board meetings and annual general meetings.

It also appointed four independent directors to the company. They are Shamol Kanti Ghosh, former agriculture secretary; Dr Md Jamil Sharif, a teacher at Dhaka University; Md Mahamud Hossain, ex-vice president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh; and Md Shahadat Hussain, ex-member of the national wage and productivity commission.

The newly-appointed chairman is empowered to call, conduct and hold a board meeting of BIFC at his earliest convenience in consultation with the advocates of the parties and all the board members.

The court also tasked "Nurul Faruk Hasan and Co. Chartered Accountants" with carrying out audit of the company.

It ordered the CA firm to find out the assets, liabilities, and balance of BIFC, the amount of personal investments of the sponsor shareholders in BIFC and the mode of investment by the sponsor shareholders.

The HC also asked the BB governor to do the needful to give effect to the BIFC board of directors.

Lawyer Omar Farouq appeared for Tees Mart Inc, while counsels Hasan Azim, Mahfuzur Rahman Milon and Md Saiful Islam Saif argued for BIFC at the hearing.

Erfan Salim cleared of charges

FROM PAGE 1

"It was a guest bedroom, not Erfan's personal bedroom. Because this is a political family, a variety of guests, political leaders-workers, and community residents enter this room to have personal meetings with Erfan Salim," read the report.

"Erfan Salim finished his BBA degree in 2010 from Canada's Hudson University. In order to destroy his political career, and ruin his social standing, one or more people planted the gun in the bedroom with dishonest motives -- however no proof of their identity could be obtained.

"We also could not find proof of Erfan owning or publicly brandishing illegal weapons, or of him being involved in any criminal activities."

The deputy police commissioner of Lalbagh zone, Biplob Bijoy Talukdar, was asked why they thought the arms and illegal devices recovered from Erfan's residence did not belong to him. He replied, "I can only tell you that we investigated the matter and we submitted the final report based on our findings."

In their final report, the police, however, did not mention about the rest of the alarming discoveries made by the Rab in Erfan's residence and office.

In the FIR, Rab DAD Kaiyum wrote, "We entered a room called the 'control found an air gun leaning against the wall beside the wardrobe. In addition, in the bottom shelf of the wardrobe we found two black daggers, one of which was 11 inches long while the other was 11.4 inches long. We also found one 8.5 inches long 'Chinese' cleaver, which had a black blade and a green hilt. The hilt itself was 18.7 inch."

He wrote that while raiding the building, they found 38 black walkietalkies, one pair of handcuffs and one drone camera.

Several other findings were not included in the FIR, but were seen by reporters of this newspaper during the raid on the 15th floor of Madina Ashik Tower. Those included surgical tape, devices for intercepting radio frequencies, thick rope and a single large bone, which was believed to be that of a human although no forensic tests have been conducted yet.

Lt Col Ashique Billah, media wing before the raid, director of Rab, had told journalists on a navy officer record back then that the 15th floor of the tower was used as a torture cell.

"During preliminary our interrogation of Erfan Salim, we learned about this torture cell," he had said.

During the raid, Executive Magistrate Sarwoer Alam had told our correspondents, "Erfan used to torture

room' on the fifth floor where we different people after bringing them to the room".

> In the days following the arrest, law enforcers involved in the interrogation of Erfan had told The Daily Star that Erfan installed a personal networking system and close-circuit television (CCTV) cameras to monitor his business activities and empire.

The sources said that using the walkie-talkie handsets, he was capable

of maintaining a communication network throughout а

10-kilometre area. They said that as the devices operated on a special frequency system, no one able was to monitor the communication.

A few days accused Erfan of assaulting him after Erfan's SUV hit the official's motorcycle.

Erfan and his bodyguard have been in jail since their arrest.