

BANGLADESH UPDATE



991

New cases in 24hrs



5,17,920

Total cases



7,670

Deaths



4,62,459

Recoveries



1,870,566

Deaths



86,562,679

Total cases

'MURDERED GIRL' FOUND ALIVE

Cops tortured 3 for fake confessions

Judicial probe finds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A judicial probe committee yesterday submitted its report to the High Court saying officials of Narayanganj Sadar Police Station tortured and forced three people to give confessional statements about raping and killing a minor girl who later turned out to be alive after 49 days last year.

Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) of Narayanganj Farhana Ferdousi submitted the probe report to the HC through its registrar's office during hearing on a revision petition filed in connection with the issue in line with its November 19, 2020 directive.

CJM Farhana Ferdousi in the report cited the statements of the three accused -- Abdullah, Khalil and Rakib -- who said that the then officer-in-charge of Narayanganj Sadar Police Station Mostafizur Rahman and its Sub-inspector Shamim Al Mamun and Abdul Hye have tortured and forced them in different ways to give confessional statements.

In the conclusion of the probe report, Farhana Ferdousi, said SI Shamim Al Mamun tortured the accused after arresting them in connection with the incident.

At the same time, the judicial committee said in its inquiry report that two judicial magistrates -- Aftabuzzamam and Humayun

Kabir -- have properly recorded the confessional statements from the three accused as they made the statements spontaneously.

Petitioners' lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir, who read out the judicial probe report before the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman, said that the contents of the probe report are seriously contradictory.

The facts behind the incident would remain unearthed if the victim child could not be found alive, he said.

The lawyer also prayed to the HC to issue some directives about interrogation of the accused and recording their confessional statements.

The HC bench then said that the accused persons might have been sentenced to death following their "confessional statements" if the victimised girl would not be found alive.

The bench asked Attorney General AM Amin Uddin to place arguments on this issue and fixed January 13 for further hearing and passing order on the matter.

According to the statement of revision petition, the Class five student went missing on July 4 last year.

Her father Jahangir Hossain filed a case with Narayanganj Sadar Model Police Station on August 6 last year on charge of abducting his daughter.



The authorities of Bangladesh Railway (Eastern zone) evict illegal establishments, mostly shops and markets, in Akhaura Bypass area beside Dhaka-Agartala highway in Brahmanbaria yesterday.

PHOTO: MASHUK HRIDYO

Govt's cost not over \$5 a shot

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largest vaccine manufacturer in the world, charges Bangladesh more than India for the vaccine.

"It is an international agreement. Any deviation from the agreement will be a violation of it. We believe Serum Institute will not do that," he said.

Referring to the deal, Poonawalla pointed out that if Serum charges India less than \$4 per shot, it will also be applicable to Bangladesh. In that case, Bangladesh will be at liberty to buy more shots from Serum with the surplus money or get a refund.

On the other hand, if Serum charges India more than \$4 for a vaccine shot, it would not be applicable to Bangladesh.

Health Secretary Abdul Mannan echoed Papon.

"As per the agreement, we will not pay more than the Indian government pays for the vaccine," Mannan told The Daily Star.

He also mentioned that the government yesterday made an advance payment to Serum for the vaccine.

Asked, Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, said the government paid Serum Tk 509.70 crore (around \$59 million) in advance for the vaccine shots.

As per the agreement, three crore doses will arrive in Bangladesh in six instalments -- 50 lakh shots a month. The first shipment is expected to arrive in mid-February.

In a tweet yesterday, Poonawalla clarified that export of vaccines to all countries is permitted.

"I would like to clarify two matters; as there is confusion in the public domain, exports of vaccines are permitted to all countries and a joint public statement clearing up any recent miscommunication with regard to Bharat Biotech will be made," he wrote.

Later in a joint statement, Serum and Bharat Biotech pledged "a smooth rollout of Covid-19 vaccines to India and the world".

The two firms said the more important task in front of them is saving lives and livelihoods of populations in India and the world.

"Vaccines are a global public health good and they have the power to save lives and accelerate the return to economic normalcy at the earliest," the statement read.

BRIEFING

Beximco Pharmaceuticals Limited started negotiating with Serum for getting the much-sought-after Oxford vaccine four to five months ago, according to Papon.

"We found that only 10 crore shots were up for grab at Serum's plant," he said at a press briefing in the capital on Monday.

"As a private company, we booked 5-10 lakh doses for \$8 per shot. Serum offered us to be its local agent in Bangladesh and we accepted it."

He said they later asked the Indian firm whether it could provide the

vaccine to Bangladesh in a large volume.

"Initially, we demanded 10 crore doses. Later, we were able to convince Serum to provide three crore doses."

He further said that when the issue of pricing of the vaccine came up, they told Serum to directly negotiate with the Bangladesh government.

The Indian firm asked the Bangladesh government to take "the research risk", which the government refused, mentioned Papon.

Serum also said it would keep seven crore doses for the Indian government. "We then asked them [Serum] what price the Indian government would pay for it. They said they asked for \$5 per dose and the Indian government was willing to pay \$3," he said.

"Bangladesh finally agreed to set the price at \$4 per dose on condition that if the Indian government pays more for the vaccine shots, Serum won't be able to charge us more. But if India purchases the vaccine at a lower price, Serum will also reduce the price accordingly for us."

About Beximco's commission, Papon said the firm will provide the vaccine to the government for \$5 per dose, which includes standard charges of 80 cents and also service charge of 20 cents for transporting the shots to vaccination centres through its cold-chain mechanism.

Vaccine is not like other medicines such as capsules or syrup. It is temperature-sensitive, he added.

Vietnam jails three critics ahead of major party congress

AFP, Hanoi

Vietnam yesterday jailed three pro-democracy bloggers on anti-state charges, one of their lawyers said, weeks ahead of the communist government's party congress.

The run-up to a leadership transition later this month is a particularly tense period for the state as candidates jostle for power behind closed doors.

In recent months, the authoritarian regime has stepped up its crackdown on dissent and has arrested numerous critics.

At a quick trial in Ho Chi Minh City, three critics of the state who belong to the outlawed Independent Journalists Association of Vietnam (IJAV) were

sentenced to jail for "making and disseminating information against" Vietnam.

High-profile writer Pham Chi Dung, 54, founding member and president of IJAV, was jailed for 15 years, while military veteran Nguyen Tuong Thuy, 69, was sentenced to 11 years.

A younger member of the group, Le Huu Minh Tuan, was also handed an 11-year term.

The trio are well-known for calling for greater democracy in Vietnam.

Lawyer Nguyen Van Mieng told AFP they admitted writing articles "to support freedom of speech and other democratic rights", but denied spreading information against the communist regime.

Police ask Interpol to locate

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justice Mustafa Kamal; Samia Binte Islam, assistant inspector general (NCB) of Police Headquarters, told The Daily Star.

He said they sent a letter to Interpol on Monday with all details of the former managing director of NRB Global Bank, also known as PK Halder. The letter will be placed before a commission of independent lawyers, he said.

The commission will analyse the details in the files that the NCB sent and then a red notice will be issued publicly, said the NCB official.

"It may take sometime, but we are expecting the notice will be issued soon," he added.

The four NBFs are: International Leasing and Financial Services Limited, People's Leasing, FAS Finance and Investment and Reliance Finance.

The Anti-Corruption Commission on January 8 last year filed a case against PK Halder on charges of illegally amassing wealth worth Tk 275 crore.

In another development, the High Court yesterday issued a travel ban against 25 accomplices of PK Halder, including his mother Lilaboti Halder, so that the ACC can question them about money laundering allegations.

While hearing a suo moto rule, the court ordered the authorities concerned of the government to restrain them from leaving the country till further order.

It also asked the ACC to question them in accordance with the law if it feels necessary.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Ahmed Sohail came up with the order after five depositors of People's Leasing and Financial Service (PLFS), a non-banking financial institution, submitted the names of 25 accomplices of PK Halder before the court and said they abetted Halder embezzling and laundering a huge amount of money from PLFS abroad.

The 24 other accomplices are: SK Sur, Harunur Rashid, Uzzal Kumar Nandi, Shami Huda, Amitabh Adhikary, Abontika Boral, Shamima, Runai, NI Khan, Sukumar Mridha, Anindita Mridha, Tapan Dey, Swapan Kumar Mistri, Avijit Chowdhury, Rajib Shom, Erfan Uddin Ahmed, Angan Mohan Roy, Nongo Chow Mong, Nizamul Ahsan, Manik Lal Somadhar, Sohail Shams, Mahbub Musa, AQ Siddique and Moazzem Hossain.

Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik confirmed it.

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He gets bail in 2 cases based on police report

FROM PAGE 1

He was speaking to journalists at a programme marking Bangabandhu's birth centenary at the Rab headquarters.

"Police have filed the investigation report according to their understanding. Now it is a sub-judice matter. We don't really want to speak much about a sub-judice matter," he added.

Later, Lt Col Ashique Billah, Rab's legal and media wing director, told reporters that Rab carried out the drive based on specific information and seized items including firearms and alcohol in the presence of an executive magistrate.

A Rab official gathered all information and evidence and filed cases with Chawkbazar Police Station under the Narcotics Control Act and Arms Act in this regard, he said.

"We are not aware what the investigation officer did later on. We think the investigation officer submitted the final report according to their understanding," he said.

Asked whether Rab, the complainant of the cases, will file any no-confidence petition, Ashique Billah said they were not aware of what the investigation officer mentioned in the final report.

"After receiving the copy of the final report, we will take a decision," he said.

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A deadline that would never end

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over the meeting virtually, directed the authorities concerned to investigate the delay and cost hike and take departmental action against those responsible, meeting sources said.

The DGHS sought extension of the project deadline till June 2023 and a rise in project cost, which is 147.76 percent more than the original one.

After the meeting, Planning Minister Abdul Mannan told reporters that the project was supposed to be completed in 2014 and the deadline was extended to December 2019 in several phases.

Now, the DGHS sought another extension till 2023, meaning it would take 11 years to implement one project, he said, adding, "The prime minister has expressed serious discontent and annoyance over the matter. This is not acceptable."

Although the project authorities tried to give reasons for the delay, the PM did not want to hear any excuses.

"She [the PM] asked me to conduct an investigation through IMED [Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division] immediately. She also asked to involve other agencies concerned, and, if necessary, to investigate every nook and cranny [of

the project]," Mannan said.

He said they will form a committee today and submit report before the prime minister soon.

'MISMANAGEMENT FROM THE START'

In 2012, the government took up the project to establish an institution for medical education and provide modern medical facilities to the people of Kushiya and adjacent areas.

But no feasibility test was carried out before the project was approved. Even a land was not selected till then, according to an in-depth report of IMED released in June last year.

The deadline of the project was extended till 2016 in two phases, without escalating the project cost. But when the project went through the first revision in 2018, the cost rose to TK 611.08 crore and the deadline was set to December 2019.

The project saw 34 percent physical progress till 2019 and the second revision proposal remained pending for one year, creating obstacles in implementation.

According to the report, not only was construction of the buildings incomplete, the bidding process of some buildings was not done.

"Mismanagement was found from the outset," read the report, adding that all infrastructures are being implemented under 71 packages, where only one building is being constructed under four packages.

"As a result, time and money were wasted," it said, adding that as the project work was divided into small packages, major contractors did not show much interest.

The project authorities called tender following the rate schedule of 2011, instead of the rate schedule of 2008 as mentioned in the Development Project Proposal, which created further complexities, read the report.

As the medical college has been admitting 50 students every year since 2012, its academic activities have been ongoing in other buildings and without any medical equipment.

No equipment for the hospital or medical education could be procured as constructions of the buildings could not be completed.

While approving the first revision of the project on June 21, 2018, the Ecnc directed the authorities concerned to take action against those responsible for irregularities by changing "the scope of work" mentioned in the DPP and

14cr to get Covid

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government earmarked around Tk 4,236 crore to procure, preserve, and distribute the vaccine. Another Tk 1,006 crore was allocated to buy healthcare equipment, according to the project documents.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnc) approved the project yesterday at its meeting held at the NEC Conference Room in the capital. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina chaired the meeting virtually from the Gono Bhavan.

Yesterday's approval is a crucial step in the country's efforts to contain the coronavirus outbreak, which has so far infected at least 5,17,920 people.

The approval came a day after the government okayed the Oxford University-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine for emergency use. The government also made an advanced payment of Tk 509.7 crore yesterday for the three crore doses of the vaccine to be manufactured by Serum Institute of India (SII).

The pandemic preparedness project documents do not mention the vaccine of SII.

Planning Minister MA Mannan yesterday told reporters that the vaccine for coronavirus and healthcare equipment would be bought under the project.

"When this project was approved first in June, the issue of vaccine import was not included. The vaccine import issue has been newly included in the project plan. So the cost of the project has increased."

The minister said, "The government has taken the highest preparation in importing vaccines. The prime minister has also put the highest priority on it. The prime minister said 'vaccine will be available as per the contract. We believe we will get vaccines.' The vaccines will be distributed fairly."

The country has so far signed agreements to procure 9.8 crore doses of vaccine -- 6.8 crore from COVAX and 3 crore from SII. These would inoculate 4.9 crore people of the country, considering two doses per person.

THE PROJECT

The aim of the project is to tackle the pandemic through detecting Covid-19, contact tracing, and strengthening healthcare systems and emergency operation centres; and increasing storage of the emergency medical equipment.

Around 80 percent of the 170 million population will be vaccinated in two phases as per the plan.

Teams of six would be engaged in running the vaccine programme.

Each team will consist of two vaccinators (from among nurses, paramedics, interns and hired medical staffers) and four volunteers for screening, mobilisation, and record keeping.

The budget includes Tk 1,175 crore for COVAX vaccines purchased at subsidized prices; Tk 2,262 crore for direct purchase from COVAX or other sources; Tk 68 crore as shipping cost; Tk 384 crore for vaccine transport and operational expenses; and Tk 346 crore for vaccine preservation, cold chain, and supply chain management.

Apart from procuring, preserving, and distributing the vaccines, the other major project operations include installing modern microbiology laboratories alongside PCR machines at 27 medical colleges and hospitals in the country.

Besides, RT-PCR, antigen, and health safety kits will also be procured under the project. Biosafety Level-3 labs will also be set up at IEDCR and Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID), Chattogram.

Under the project, 10-bed intensive care units (ICU) and 20-bed isolation units would be set up in 43 district hospitals.

The other major parts of the project include setting up of 10-bed ICU units at 10 medical college and hospitals and five-bed ICU units in infectious disease hospitals in Dhaka and Chattogram, setting up of seven medical screening units at five ports of entry, setting up of infectious disease units at 27 medical college and hospitals, setting up of infection prevention and control units at 62 district hospitals, setting up of medical waste management plants at 10 medical college hospitals and 10 district hospitals, and installing central liquid medical oxygen system at 30 government hospitals.

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