

BANGLADESH UPDATE



692
New cases in 24hrs



5,21,382
Total cases



7,756
Deaths



4,66,064
Recoveries



1,928,761
Deaths



89,767,357
Total cases

25 hurt as workers, cops clash in 2 districts

STAR REPORT

At least 25 people were injured in separate clashes between workers and police in Kushtia and Narayanganj yesterday. Of them, five Bidi workers sustained bullet injuries as police opened fire on them at Hossaimabad in Kushtia's Daulatpur upazila. According to witnesses, around 30 to 40 workers of Akij Bidi Factory reached their workplace around half an hour late. The guards of the factory resisted them from entering their workplace. At one point, it triggered chaos. On information, police rushed there around 10:00am and started charging batons on the workers. In response, workers also hurled brickbats targeting police. As the situation went out of control, police opened fire on the workers, leaving five of them injured, the witnesses added. Workers' leader Nayon Islam and Daulatpur Upazila Parishad Chairman Ezaz Ahmed Mamun confirmed. Contacted, Zahurul Alam, officer-in-charge of Daulatpur Police Station, admitted that five workers sustained bullet injuries. "The situation is now under control," he said.

Meanwhile in Narayanganj, at least 20 readymade garment workers were injured in a clash with police in Shiddhirganj upazila. The clash took place when the workers were staging demonstration demanding their due wages in front of the main gate of Adamzi EPZ around 1:00pm. Police and witnesses said workers of Kwun Tong Apparels Ltd started demonstration at around 8:00am demanding due wages. Later, around 1:00pm, the workers took position on Shimrail-Adamzi-Narayanganj road and halted vehicular movement. On information, police rushed to the spot and tried to drive away the workers. It triggered clash between the two groups. Police charged batons and lobbed tear shells to disperse the workers. At least 20 workers were injured in the incident, claimed workers. Contacted, Moshitur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Siddhirganj Police Station, said the demonstration caused long tailback on road. "That is why, police drove them away. Now the situation was under control," he added. Our Kushtia and Narayanganj correspondents contributed to this report.



A rickshaw-van is loaded with rusty corrugated iron sheets in such a way that its puller is not even peddling the vehicle to the destination yesterday. The photo was taken on Dhaka-Chattogram highway near Jatrabari where plying of such non-motorised vehicles is illegal.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

22 more die, 692 get Covid-19

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh witnessed 22 more deaths and 692 new cases of Covid-19 in past 24 hours until yesterday morning. The infection tally stood at 521,382 with the new cases. So far, a total of 7,756 people have lost their lives and 466,064 recovered from the disease since the first death was reported in the country on March 18. The country saw a daily infection rate of 5.36 percent with 89.39 percent recovery and 1.49 deaths. Until now, 3,344,399 tests, including 12,524 new ones, have been carried out. The overall infection rate stood at 15.59 percent and 89.39 percent have recovered so far, the Directorate General of Health Services said. The country's infection number reached the 500,000-mark on December 20. The first cases were reported on March 8. The death toll exceeded 7,000 on December 12.

Still active in disguise

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The SC had ordered the project owner Metro Makers and Developers Limited to complete the restoration of the wetland in six months, dismantling all the construction of the 550-acre project. The land is identified as floodplain in the 1997 Dhaka City Master Plan. The apex court also ordered the project owners to refund all plot buyers double the amount, including the registration fees. Besides, the SC directed Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) to reclaim the wetland in case the project owners failed to complete the restoration within the six-month period. "But more than a year after the SC verdict, the project is still there and no structure or building was demolished or removed from the place, even no earth has been removed from the project area so far," Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), told The Daily Star recently. BELA filed a writ petition with the High Court in August 2004 challenging the legality of the project, saying it was developed violating the Environment Conservation Act, Town Improvement Act, and Rajuk rules. NEW NAME, NEW GUISE During a recent visit to the project area near Aminbazar, The Daily Star found nothing changed other than the previous large signboard of Modhumoti Model

to take necessary steps to incorporate the project as an urban area or withdraw it from the sub flood flow zone in the DAP. The letter was issued following an application by plot owners of Modhumoti Model Town on September 17 last year. "We have asked [Rajuk] in the letter to take action as per the rules. [But] if the Supreme Court has given this directive, it will not get approval," said an official of the planning section at the ministry, when asked about the plot owners' application. The official, preferring to remain anonymous, said they were not informed about the court verdict. "Besides, the applicants also hid that information in the letter addressed to us." Regarding the matter, Rajuk Chairman Sayeed Noor Alam said, "Their application will not be acceptable as there is a restriction from the court." Regarding these developments, BELA's Rizwana Hasan said, "When a project is announced illegal twice by a highest court of the country and when the review petition of plots owners is rejected by the Supreme Court, then there is no scope of its inclusion as an urban area in the DAP." She said following the SC verdict, there is no scope for the plot owners to submit any application like this and for the government authorities to entertain it. "If the authorities concerned consider its application, then it means the



Town missing from the entrance of the housing project. Rather, there was only a small notice board which mentions the project's name as "Nandonik Housing". There was also a noticeably large signboard at the centre of the housing area with the following messages -- the project was "built without obstructing flood flow", there are "two lakh trees, a beautiful wide lake" and that it is the "dream of 1.5 lakh people of 3,000 families". Inside the housing area, many plots were demarcated by walls. Some plots had signs with the owner's names on them, still mentioning Modhumoti Model Town as the title of the housing project. Abdullah Sheikh, a staffer at the project office, said they have been using the name "Nandonik Housing" instead of Modhumoti Model Town for the last one year.

He said the housing project comprises 6,000 plots of 4,000 owners. And the plot owners are now overseeing the project and some are selling their plots to third parties. According to the project office, 20 duplex houses, eight resorts, around 300 one-storey buildings, and 150 tin-shed houses have already been constructed there. Contacted, AF Kallol, president of the plot owners' association, said he would give a comment regarding the court order and the recent application to the public works ministry later on. But afterward, he did not pick up this correspondent's phone calls. The Daily Star also repeatedly attempted to contact officials of Metro Makers and Developers Limited, but their phones were found switched off. On a visit two weeks ago, this correspondent found the company's headquarters in the city's Green Road area under lock and key.

NON-COMPLIANCE WITH SC VERDICT Rajuk Chairman Sayeed Noor Alam told The Daily Star recently that they have formed a committee to take necessary steps after the Supreme Court verdict on the matter. He said they have held a meeting around five to six months ago and asked all departments concerned to take necessary steps to follow the SC order. He, however, did not specify what steps they have taken so far in line with the SC verdict. Planning section-3 of the housing and public works ministry, in a letter to Rajuk dated October 18, 2020, asked the latter

executive division will interfere with the jurisdiction of the court and it would be a classic case of contempt of court," she said. It is very important to restore the wetland to establish rule of law, she added. **LONG LEGAL BATTLE** In its petition filed with the High Court in 2004, BELA mentioned that if the project continued, the character of the area would be destroyed and the environment would be polluted. The HC on July 27, 2005, declared the project unauthorised, illegal, and against public interest. It also said the interest of the buyers must be protected. The Supreme Court upheld the HC verdict on August 7, 2012 and declared Modhumoti Model Town illegal. The apex court directed the authorities concerned to keep the area as a free flood flow zone. On July 11, 2013, the Appellate Division released the full text of its 159-page verdict directing Metro Makers and Developers Limited to restore within six months the wetland in Bilamalia and Baliarpur mouzas of Savar where it had developed the project. The apex court came up with the verdict to keep the area as a free flood flow zone and protect the capital from waterlogging. In September 2013, Metro Makers and Developers Limited and plot purchasers moved five separate petitions with the Supreme Court seeking review of its judgment. The full bench of the SC dismissed all five review petitions and upheld its earlier verdict on April 25, 2019.

TIMELINE

FROM PAGE 1
SEPT 2013
Metro Makers and Developers Limited and plot purchasers move five petitions with the SC seeking review of judgment

APRIL 2019
SC bench dismisses all five petitions

SEPT 2020
Plot owners apply to housing ministry for incorporation as urban area or withdraw it from sub flood flow zone in DAP

OCT 2020
Housing ministry sends letter to Rajuk in this regard

Focus on issues that'll help you get GSP Plus

FROM PAGE 1

to the pandemic. Are you taking any new strategy? Teerink: We need to be proud of Bangladesh that it has been able to provide stimulus packages and find ways to continue businesses and help the people during the pandemic. This is where we want to step in and provide support. In the first wave, Germany and we came up with assistance of €130 million for social protection scheme. That will go as payments to the workers of the RMG, leather and footwear industries. The payment is not one off. The first disbursement of our frontloading money would actually be a pilot. The ultimate goal is to help Bangladesh become a country that has a social security system. That will also be important for the country to achieve the SDGs and eventually become a developed country by 2041. TDS: What are the challenges that Bangladesh faces at this juncture of time? Teerink: Bangladesh needs to be vigilant and ensure its economic situation remains stable during the pandemic. For example, we have seen some glitches in the global supply chain where Bangladesh has suffered along with many other countries. There, we have looked at the whole question of mandatory due diligence. Hopefully, the EU will pass a new law on it. That will shield the RMG companies from the situation where buyers have not lived up to the promises of honouring orders or paying for orders that have already been produced. We need to work on that, and in 2021 we hope to have a sustainability compact in Bangladesh. Another challenge that Bangladesh faces is the need for diversifying its export basket. So far, the export has been mostly reliant on RMG. The government has already begun working on it. We would also support

Bangladesh in many ways, including by encouraging our companies to step up investments. However, we think Bangladesh still needs to do some homework for doing business with ease. We are already engaged with the government and are trying to make it more pragmatic. Our private sector companies are working to single out the main obstacles that prevent EU companies from making bigger investments. I think the business climate would be better in the coming days. Ultimately, it will help Bangladesh a lot. TDS: How would EU act as Bangladesh transitions from LDC to a developing country? Teerink: We have been working on the Multi-Annual Financial Framework for seven years. That is going to be 1.8 trillion Euro package. Euro 800 billion is basically for the Covid response in Europe. More than one trillion Euros will be for development cooperation and other aspects. That means we can start working over seven years and Bangladesh will remain an important partner country. We will be working in the next few months on the allocation for Bangladesh. Humanitarian assistance will always be there if there is a humanitarian crisis. As of now, we see trade to be important. We are also in the process of adapting GSP Plus. We don't know at this stage what it would look like but we hope Bangladesh would be ready to be eligible for the GSP Plus scheme. TDS: What are the criteria that can make Bangladesh eligible for GSP Plus? Teerink: Bangladesh needs to respect the human rights and ILO conventions. The GSP Plus has more of these conventions than the EBA. It requires improvement of not only human rights and labour rights, but also environmental rights. That's

prompted other players like China and India to set similar goals. We are now focusing on going away from coal to renewable energy like wind solar. Researches are underway for an experimental reactor in France. Greening the houses, improving energy efficiency and imposing carbon tax on countries that produce without stringent environmental criteria will be the means of future to protect the environment. In Bangladesh, we will focus on decent work and green energy. About cooperation with Bangladesh... I think the government is very interested about the Delta Plan. It is promising. It is not only about water management but also on tackling climate change. We can work with other donors, international financial institution or private sectors on implementing the plan. TDS: How do you assess Bangladesh's performance in addressing climate change impacts? Teerink: I think climate change is very high on Bangladesh's agenda. What is missing in the conversation is environmental protection... preserving the rivers. The encroachment of rivers cannot just continue unabated because it is endangering the water bodies. Also ensuring food security and keeping the Bay of Bengal safe is important. Blue economy is largely untapped in Bangladesh but it has to be sustainable blue economy. Another thing worth mentioning is the protection of the Sundarbans that saves the country from cyclones. Transport of coals through the Sundarbans' very fragile ecosystem also endangers the forest. If the unique ecosystem, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site, is lost, I think you will never get it back. Bangladesh should do everything that it can to protect the forest. If we could help, we would be very happy to do so.

Khokon questions

FROM PAGE 1

employees of the DSCC were not being paid their due salaries for months, he further said. Also, the city corporation's different development projects were halted because of budget shortage, alleged Khokon. He said that, by committing such acts, Taposh has lost eligibility as mayor under the city corporation law. This newspaper yesterday tried to reach Mayor Taposh for his comments over phone but could not. Contacted, DSCC Public Relations Officer Md Abu Naser said they will not make immediate comments. The media will later be informed about the DSCC's formal position regarding the matter, said Naser, also spokesperson of the city corporation. About former mayor Khokon's allegation of non-payment of salaries to DSCC employees, sources at the city corporation said such allegation are false. Addressing the human chain, Khokon also alleged that after becoming DSCC mayor, Taposh had been "talking big" against corruption. He said such stories "do not suit coming from Taposh", claiming the incumbent mayor needs to free himself from corruption first to make his administration graft-free. Khokon also termed the DSCC demolition drive "illegal". He sought Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's intervention to ensure rehabilitation of the affected people. On December 8 last year, the DSCC demolished several hundred illegal shops at Phulbaria Supermarket-2 in Gulistan, which were built violating the main design of the supermarket. Traders and shop owners protested the DSCC move back then.




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