

BANGLADESH UPDATE



515
New cases in 24hrs



5,32,916
Total cases



8,055
Deaths



4,77,426
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

2,152,820
Deaths



100,401,592
Total cases

Ex-univ teacher held for militant link

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Jobless since the start of the pandemic, private university teacher Minhaj Hossain started seeking a job online and was soon drawn by the lure of an international militant outfit.

Minhaj, 38, then prepared a proposal to establish Khilafat (Islamic state) and sent it to the outfit – Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) – seeking an administrative position.

The outfit, formed in January 2017, accepted the proposal and summoned him to Syria.

Minhaj then flew to Turkey on a 15-day visa in September last year and then went to Syria. But he failed to communicate with the HTS leaders despite staying in Syria and Turkey for three months, before coming back to Bangladesh in the first week of January this year.

Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit said it learned Minhaj's story following his arrest from the capital's Darussalam area on January 23.

CTTC officials said they had gotten intel on January 15 that a private university teacher suspected to be involved in militancy entered Bangladesh from Syria, then started looking for him, and finally made the arrest.

A top CTTC official said after returning from Syria, Minhaj started communicating with the IS-inspired militant outfit Neo JMB with an aim to establish a Khilafat.

Although he lived in the capital's Uttara, Minhaj had gone to Khulna after returning from abroad and was trying to establish a Neo JMB network, the official added.

CTTC sources said Minhaj's mother was an employee of the World Food Program (WFP) and his father had a printing press in the capital's Paltan.

As his mother was stationed in Pakistan, Minhaj grew up there and completed his O-levels and A-levels in the country.

He later moved to America from

Pakistan after his mother married a Dutch national.

According to information from the private university where Minhaj was employed, he completed his Bachelors from the London School of Economics.

He later enrolled at George Mason University in the United States to complete his postgraduate studies. Minhaj then completed his PhD from a university in Brunei.

He is a fellow of the Australian Academy of Business Leadership. So far, he has written a total of three books. After completing his PhD, he travelled to several countries including Brunei, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea.

He came to Bangladesh in 2017 after his mother got divorced from the Dutch national, CITC sources said.

Minhaj then started working for a private university but left the job. He then worked for a private company, before joining another private university.

But in March last year, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the country, Minhaj became jobless.

He then started looking for jobs abroad. During this period, he started reading different religious books and online content and was lured into militant outfit activities.

CTTC officials said Minhaj then got connected with the international outfit HTS.

Saiful Islam, deputy commissioner of CTTC unit, told The Daily Star yesterday that Minhaj was drawn to militant activities through different online contents. He was also planning to carry out anti-state activities in the country as part of Neo JMB as he believed in establishing a Khilafat, he said.

"Analysing his devices, we have already learned of his activities in Syria. We are now sending his laptop and cell phone for forensic examination to get details of the activities," he said.

"We also found some communication details of two to three of his associates. We are now analysing the information and trying to locate his associates in Bangladesh," he added.

I'm not afraid

FROM PAGE 1

"I wanted to be part of history. I told my [hospital] authorities that I would like to take the vaccine first," she said.

Asked what motivated her to be the first in the country to take the vaccine, the 38-year-old Costa said, "I have been in the profession for a long time. When the pandemic was hitting hard, I did not retreat from my duties. My hospital was a Covid-19 dedicated one. I have been serving here since the pandemic started; I did not leave the profession then. So, when the vaccine arrives, why should I retreat? There is nothing to fear."

Costa said two of her colleagues will also get the vaccine dose on the first day of piloting the vaccine in the country.

She also said her family members were very supportive of her bold decision.

"I talked to my husband and he

encouraged me. No one said a negative word about the vaccine. Every vaccine has side effects. This vaccine might also have some side effects. If I'm extremely unlucky I might experience some side effects. But I'm not worried about it at all," said Costa, who is a mother to a son and a daughter.

She said after completing her diploma in nursing, she joined United Hospital as a nurse in 2002.

Hailing from Gazipur, Costa served there for nine years before joining the government job in 2013.

"Kurmitola General Hospital was my first working station in a government job. And I have been serving here since then," Costa said.

She said her husband Pobon Gomes, whom she married in 2005, is an administration officer of a private company.

Her 13-year-old daughter Protha Gomes and 10-year-old son Prayash Gomes are in school.

Intra-party rivalry not a challenge

FROM PAGE 1

When the Covid-19 pandemic started, I went door to door with food and other relief items," said Rezaul, also joint general secretary of AL's Chattogram city unit.

"I also introduced an isolation centre with treatment facilities for patients during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"People want the person who stands by them in their distress. As I was with them in weal and woe, they will vote for me, I believe."

People have seen that the country has had a great change in every sector as they voted for "boat", the electoral symbol of AL, Rezaul added.

"Bangladesh has become a role model in the world from a country afflicted by poverty. Besides, large development projects have been implemented in Chattogram – many more are ongoing.

"People want this development to continue. So, they will vote for the candidate of boat so that the legacy of development goes on."

Asked about intra-party rivalry, Rezaul said there is no rivalry in the party regarding the mayoral seat, but

admitted that there is rivalry for some councillor seats.

However, he said, "Both the party-supported councillor candidates and rebel candidates work for me."

"There is no question about the candidate of boat and the party is united so that the party-nominated mayoral candidate may win the polls," he added.

The central leaders warned the rebel candidates and their patrons of tough action, Rezaul said, but no action has yet been taken against them. He added that the party's high command knew best about the matter.

Asked about BNP's allegation that AL activists conducted attacks on their leaders and activists, Rezaul said BNP leaders always make these allegations.

"Rather, BNP tore off all my posters and banners in front of their party office but our leaders and activists have shown their patience. You see the posters of BNP candidates hanging on the road in front of my house. Nobody touched those."

Rezaul said he expected that a large number of voters will go to the polling centres to exercise their right to vote and the polls will be held in a festive atmosphere.

Cases filed against 600 BNP men

FROM PAGE 1

Shahadat alleged police have arrested their campaigners, raided the houses and campaign offices of many BNP-supported councillor aspirants, threatened their relatives, and warned them not to deploy polling agents during the polling to be held today.

"Under these circumstances, it might be difficult for me to get the necessary number of BNP leaders and workers to work as my polling agents in the voting centres," he also said.

The BNP contestant alleged the Election Commission has failed to ensure a congenial atmosphere and create a level playing field for holding the CCC polls in a free and fair manner.

"We have filed scores of complaints with the EC but it didn't pay heed to any of those," he added.

Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) has given the usage permission of 50 lakh purchased vaccines, which arrived in Dhaka on

Monday, after examining the samples from each batch.

Major General Md Mahbubur Rahman, director general of the DGDA, told journalists that the piloting of the vaccine will start with the government purchased vaccines.

Bangladesh purchased 3 crore doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from Serum Institute of India (SII). The first consignment of 50 lakh arrived on January 25. Bangladesh also received 20 lakh doses of the Oxford vaccine produced in SII as gift from the Indian government on January 21.

MANAGING SIDE EFFECTS
Healthcare officials said the Oxford-



With buses only a few metres away from them, pedestrians, mostly garment workers, jaywalk on Dhaka-Aricha highway in Savar's Ulail area, putting their lives at risk. The photo was taken around 7:30am on Saturday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Govt measures failed miserably

FROM PAGE 1

The teams found that the cost of rice processing (by millers) had gone up because of increased transportation costs. Despite this, the millers still made Tk 4.7 in profit for every kg during the Boro season and Tk 5.2 per kg during the Aman season.

"If you take only rice into consideration, the profit would not be noticeable, but millers produce a lot of by-products, and those widened the profit margin," said Md Abdur Rouf Sarkar, senior scientific officer of Agricultural Economics Division at the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute while presenting the findings of one of the teams.

The profit, however, was less than that of other years.

The team also pointed at the government's failure in procuring rice. "The government rice stock had gone down to as little as 5 lakh tonnes," said Rouf.

The team recommended that the government should always maintain a reserve of at least 12.5 lakh tonnes of rice every month to control market prices during August-October.

Agriculture Minister Abdur Razaque admitted that the government had failed to procure rice from the farmers. "Last year our procurement price was lower than the market price, so farmers

refused to sell [their produce] to us. Last year, we could not even procure Tk 1 lakh tonnes of grains," he commented.

"We opened up rice imports to ease the market, but the traders refused to import it saying that the 25 percent import duty would not let them make profit," he added.

"Millers and wholesalers are now controlling the market," he said.

The price of Aman rice was 74 percent more than what it was in 2019, the team found, while the price of Aman paddy almost doubled.

Another team found similar reasons behind the increase in potato prices.

"There was a surplus of 3.41 lakh metric tonnes," said Prof Dr Shaikh Abdus Sabur of the Department of Agribusiness and Marketing at Bangladesh Agricultural University, presenting the findings of the team.

The price of potatoes peaked after September and October, while data shows that between July and November, the cold-storage facilities released on average 16.3 percent of their stored potatoes, while the selling price of potatoes shot up to Tk 1,650 per 40kg. In March, when 65 percent of potatoes were released from the storages, the price had been Tk 470 for 40kg.

"The main cause of this price hike was the artificial crisis created by

profit-seeking traders, rather than low production and high consumption of potatoes," concluded the team.

"Market intervention by Trading Corporation of Bangladesh [TCB] was also very much limited. TCB only sold 215.5 metric tonnes of potatoes so far in different districts," found the team.

The national demand was 6,817,000 metric tonnes and TCB's intervention was a drop in the bucket.

Stockpiling was also the primary reason behind the price increase of onions, found another of the study teams.

The net demand for onions was 22.92 lakh metric tonnes, while the supply was 25.77 metric tonnes, said Dr Md Abdur Rashid, chief scientific officer at Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute.

"When India stopped onion exports, the traders started stockpiling onions," he said.

According to data collected from Faridpur, Pabna and Natore, following the export ban by India, onions were released into the market slowly.

"Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a lot of migrant workers returned from overseas. They turned to onion business and most of their investment was in hoarding of onions, but they did not dispose of the onion in time, raising the prices," he added.

AL, BNP lock horns for port city

FROM PAGE 1

Talking to The Daily Star at his office yesterday, Returning Officer Mohammad Hasanuzzaman said they have taken all measures to hold the local body election in a free and fair manner.

"My appeal to the voters is that they go to the polling centres without any fear and cast ballots for whoever they want. We have taken all-out measures so that voters can return home safely after casting votes."

He warned that stern action will be taken if anyone tries to ruin the election atmosphere.

"We have covered the city corporation area in a security blanket.

"There is no concern over any possible untoward incident during the election."

Despite the assurance, the BNP camp is apprehensive about the holding of a free and fair election. A number of party leaders have alleged that police are harassing and arresting their activists in "false cases".

BNP candidate Shahadat was seen busy yesterday putting pressure on the RO so that law enforcement agencies do not harass his party men involved in election activities.

Around 2:00pm, he went to the Election Commission Office and submitted a written complaint mentioning that 56 of his polling

agents without criminal records were arrested in police raids in different areas of the city between Monday night and yesterday morning.

The RO assured him that no polling agents would be barred from entering the centres on the election day.

Talking to reporters later, Shahadat said the arrest of his polling agents just days before the voting day ruined the election atmosphere.

"The government is paving the way for holding a one-sided election through vote rigging."

Members of law enforcement agencies have stoked fear among BNP leaders and activists over the last week by raiding houses of many party loyalists. They are arresting those who are working in the field and do not have any criminal record, he alleged.

"We tried a lot to create a festive atmosphere so that people become interested to go to polling centres and vote, but now panic and fear have set in," he said.

On the other hand, AL candidate Rezaul spent the day with party leaders and activists, having discussions on their tasks on the voting day.

Before leaving his residence around 11:30am, he talked to journalists and expressed satisfaction over the election atmosphere.

SECURITY BLANKET
Hasanuzzaman said 416 of the 735

polling stations in the city were identified as risky, and 18 members of police and ansar will be deployed in each of those. Besides, 16 members of law enforcement agencies will stand guard at each of the remaining 319 polling centres.

A total of 15,000 members of the BGB, Rab, police and ansar have been deployed all over the port city for holding the election in a free and fair manner.

Moreover, 69 executive and 20 judicial magistrates will carry out election duties in the 41 wards of the city, the RO mentioned.

Earlier in the morning, Hasanuzzaman distributed EVMs and other materials among the presiding officers of different polling centres.

Back in 1994, AL leader ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury became the first democratically-elected mayor of the port city. He later became CCC mayor for two consecutive terms.

BNP-backed M Manjur Alam was elected mayor in 2010. Then AL-backed AJM Nasir Uddin became mayor in 2015.

The CCC polls were scheduled to be held in March last year. But it had to be deferred due to the Covid pandemic.

The CCC is third among the country's 12 city corporations in terms of number of voters.

Covid vaccination kicks off today

FROM PAGE 1

He also said they have prepared a list of 20 to 30 people to inoculate on the opening day.

"Each vial has 10 doses. So, once we open a vial, we have to administer all 10 doses. Accordingly, the number of recipients should be either 20 or 30," Khurshid Alam said.

He also said, except India, none of the South Asian countries has more vaccines than Bangladesh right now.

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MANAGING SIDE EFFECTS
Healthcare officials said the Oxford-

AstraZeneca vaccine is safe and has minimal side effects.

Prof Khurshid Alam, in a recent press conference, said, "The data we have on the Oxford vaccine suggest the side effects are minimal. If any vaccine recipient faces severe allergic shock, we have arrangements to treat them. For this, we have set up vaccination centres only in hospitals."

The DGHS has published advertisements on the media which said the vaccine is safe. But some vaccine recipients may face a few physical complexities, such as pain or swelling on the arm where the shot is given, mild fever, nausea, body pain and headaches.

These side effects may sustain one or two days, according to the DGHS.

Health officials also said side effects may arise if the purity of the vaccine is damaged due to improper storage. Faulty syringes and needles may cause side effects.

The vaccination guideline for healthcare workers said that in some cases side effects like eye and face swelling, mild breathing issues, low blood pressure, nausea or unconsciousness might occur after vaccination.

In such instances, healthcare workers have been advised about what medical intervention has to be

taken.

According to the vaccination plan, all recipients have to stay at the vaccination centre for 15-30 minutes after the vaccination. There will be arrangement for this in the hospital.

A medical team will also be present to tackle such adverse event in every vaccination centre. All civil surgeons, deputy civil surgeons and other district level trainers have been trained in this regard recently in Dhaka.

During the next few days, the local vaccination team will also do follow ups and keep updates of the recipients.

Officials said training for other teams in upazila health complexes and hospitals in city corporation areas will also be completed within the next few days.

On Monday, some 124 doctors and nurses from five hospitals in Dhaka city, where the first-run of the vaccine will start the day after the PM's inauguration, received training.

During a visit to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Muga Medical College Hospital and the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, officials said they have formed multiple medical teams and arranged hospitals beds to tackle any adverse situation.

515 new Covid cases detected, 14 more die

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh's Covid-19 fatalities rose to 8,055 as the health authorities recorded 14 more coronavirus-related deaths in 24 hours till yesterday morning.

"The mortality rate is now 1.51 percent," the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said in a handout.

Meanwhile, 515 new cases were identified pushing up the national tally to 532,916.

The daily detection rate fell to 3.58 percent while the current overall rate is 14.87 percent.

Until yesterday morning, 477,426 patients – 89.59 percent – have recovered. So far, 3,584,788 samples have been tested, including 14,696 in those 24 hours.

Bangladesh reported its first coronavirus cases on March 8 and the first death on March 18.

Three hurt as land grabbers attack cops

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Three police personnel, including a sub-inspector of Birganj Police Station, were injured as they came under attack by some land grabbers in the upazila yesterday.

The injured are SI Bipul Hossain, 25, constables Mozibul Haq, 55, and Habibur Rahman, 30.

They took treatment at Birganj Upazila Health Complex.

Monwar Hossain, a witness, said there had been a longstanding dispute over an acre of land in Chakai village between Afzal Hossain and Abdul Latif Lutu.

Afzal was the legal owner of the land, said police sources.

Recently, a court ordered police to hand over the land to its legal owner after evicting the illegal occupiers.

Accordingly, a team from Birganj Police Station, led by a magistrate, went to the land on Monday and evicted the grabbers. Law enforcers and labourers spent the whole day on knocking down the illegal structures.

At night, the grabbers returned to the land and constructed fresh structures overnight. The grabbers did this after driving away two nightguards, said Monwar.

As Afzal and his family members found structures on the land yesterday, he informed police of the matter.

A team from Birganj Police Station went to the spot. As they reached there, some 30 grabbers attacked the police personnel with sticks, Monwar added.

On information, additional police personnel went there and sent the injured to Birganj Upazila Health Complex.

Masud Hossain, 30, a man associated with Afzal, was also hurt in the attack.

Anwar Hossain, superintendent of Dinajpur police, said many police personnel had been deployed in the area and the situation was under control.

Police detained four people in connection with the attack, he said.

Tension was prevailing in the area over the incident.

Primary schools

FROM PAGE 1

"We have no probation for those who are not enlisted. If the enlisted ones want to reopen, they can talk to us," he added.

The state minister also said that they were thinking about increasing the fund for school-level improvement plan (SLIP) under the Primary Education Development Program to ensure hygiene in educational institutions.

All educational institutions have remained closed since March 17 because of the coronavirus pandemic, hampering academic activities of about two crore students of more than one lakh primary schools and kindergartens.

GUIDELINES

On Sunday, DPE sent the directives to all district primary education officers for taking the necessary preparation to reopen schools.

As per the directives, school authorities, upon getting approval of the authorities concerned, would prepare the timing of school opening and closure and distribute mid-day meals in a way that would avoid the gathering of students and guardians.

The DPE guideline wrote that safe water and sanitation facilities should be prepared and enough arrangement of water tape for hand washing should be ensured before reopening schools.

For measuring body temperature, non-contact thermometers must be collected.

The guideline read, "Only two students will be allowed to sit on each bench at classrooms after the reopening of primary schools. Every student, teacher, and other staffers have to wear masks."