

BANGLADESH UPDATE



363

New cases in 24hrs



534,770

Total cases



8,111

Deaths



479,297

Recoveries



2,222,254

Deaths



102,878,901

Total cases

MP PAPUL'S CONVICTION

Sad, shameful

Says Foreign Minister Momen

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said the conviction of lawmaker Mohammad Shahid Islam alias Kazi Papul is a matter of sadness and shame for the country.

"He is not an Awami League lawmaker. He is independent lawmaker. But it is sad and shameful," he told journalists after inaugurating Bangabandhu Diplomatic Tennis Tournament at the State Guesthouse Meghna.

Asked if the conviction of a Bangladeshi MP abroad, first of its kind, for crimes like bribery, human trafficking and money laundering, tarnishes the image of the country, the minister said any criminal act committed by any Bangladeshi tarnishes the image. "It is shameful."

On Thursday, a Kuwaiti court sentenced Papul, an independent lawmaker from Laxmipur-2, to four years in prison and fined him 1.97 million Kuwaiti dinars (around Tk 55 crore) in a bribery case.

He admitted to bribing millions of Kuwaiti dinars to Kuwaiti officials for securing work visas unlawfully and getting job contracts for his company Marafie Kuwaitia Group where he held the position of managing director and CEO.

On June 6 last year, Kuwait's Criminal Investigation Department arrested the MP. After holding the trial for about eight months, he



was convicted by a criminal court. However, he has the scope for appeal. Meanwhile, questions have been raised about his membership of parliament.

Foreign Minister Momen said, "We have already instructed our ambassador in Kuwait to collect the official documents of the conviction. Once we have it in our hand, we will provide it to parliament. The parliament will take actions as per the law."

According to law, if any MP is jailed for more than two years, his membership will be cancelled.

"As per our conversation with our ambassador in Kuwait, there are three cases against Papul over bribery, human trafficking and money laundering. He was convicted in one case. Two more cases are still pending trial," the minister said.

Momen said the Bangladesh government had sought information from Kuwait government immediately after Papul's arrest, but the Kuwait government did not respond. "The issue was also not discussed when I visited Kuwait late last year."

Papul did not go to Kuwait as an MP, and he did not have a diplomatic passport either. He stayed there as a businessman, the minister added.

He said Bangladesh and Kuwait have a very strong diplomatic relationship and it would not be hampered due to this issue.

Refrain from unnecessary

FROM PAGE 1

Language Institute in the capital's Segunbagicha. The PM joined the event through videoconferencing from the Gono Bhaban.

Since no exam took place last year amid the pandemic, the results were prepared based on the candidates' results in the Junior School Certificate (JSC), Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and equivalent exams. The results were published after coordinating 75 percent marks from the SSC and 25 percent marks from the JSC-JDC results.

Hasina said many people are saying many things. "But I think it would be better not to make unnecessary comments or create bitterness."

She said all have to look at the academic life of the students as they must not be made upset.

"Already, they are not being able to go to schools, colleges, and universities. This has created a big obstacle to their lives. In this situation, any negative comment regarding their results and its system will put mental pressure on them," the premier said.

About not holding the HSC and equivalent exams last year, she said the government was compelled to look at the health safety of the students, teachers and other employees and make this decision.

"Many people are making sentimental comments, but who will take the responsibility if anyone gets infected while doing this job [holding and attending exams]?" the PM questioned.

Talking about reopening of educational institutions, Hasina said if everybody follows the health safety guidelines properly, then the pandemic situation will come under control and the government will be able to reopen educational

institutions very soon. "The government will observe the situation in February as it spread massively in the country in March last year."

"If a good situation prevails in February, then we will take steps to reopen educational institutions on a limited scale...we have a plan like that."

Education Minister Dipu Moni and Deputy Minister for Education Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury Nowfel also spoke at the programme.

Chairmen of education boards handed the results to the PM. The education minister received the results on behalf of the premier.

The Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and its equivalent examinations were postponed in October last year due to the pandemic situation.

The HSC batch of 2020 is the first batch of students who are getting certificates without taking the exams as it is the first time in Bangladesh's history that a public examination has been cancelled.

The prime minister said it was a tough job to publish the results without holding any examination. She thanked the education ministry and all concerned for doing that job properly.

"We never want that a precious year gets wasted from the lives of students. Let their academic life continue... we want that. Hope, all will be happy with their results and continue their studies," Hasina said.

Regarding the Covid-19 vaccine, the premier said the government has already procured vaccine doses and the vaccination programme has started in the country.

She said the government has asked the authorities concerned to ensure quick vaccination of teachers and the other people concerned.

13,000 sign up for Covid-19

FROM PAGE 1

"If someone enters their present address, the list of centres will not appear. We have the permanent address of the NID cardholders in our database," said the official.

"There are a few more minor technical issues. We are working on it and it will be fixed in the next few days," he said.

Officials said current online registration is based on the priority list provided by various enlisted organisations such as government hospitals, law enforcement agencies, journalist associations, and people aged over 55.

Many people in these priority groups aged below 55 said their registration was declined when they filled out the form.

"We have been updating the list of frontline workers immediately after getting the list from their organisations," Md Toufiq Hassan Shawon, medical officer at the MIS, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Every vaccine recipient will get necessary information via their mobile number. They must register even after inclusion of NID numbers

in the database," Shawon said.

On January 13, the DGHS asked all deputy commissioners to send the list of frontline staffers and their NID numbers.

MIS is yet to receive the priority lists from many districts, officials said.

"The mobile app will be available for the users by February 4," Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of DGHS, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The app uploaded to Google Play Store and is awaiting authorisation, he added.

A total of 567 frontline workers received the first jab during the two-day piloting on Wednesday and Thursday last week.

The government has decided to inoculate 1.5 crore people in the first phase.

The mass vaccination campaign is set to start on February 7 -- the government has planned to inoculate 60 lakh people in the first month and another 50 lakh the following month.

Vaccine inoculation will start in 49 centers in Dhaka city and in 613 centers outside.



Education Minister Dipu Moni at the announcement ceremony of the Higher Secondary Certificate 2020 results at the International Mother Language Institute in the capital.

PHOTO: PID

Stellar results in exams never held

FROM PAGE 1

Historically, the HSC exams take place between April and May, but the country was in lockdown during that period in 2020.

The government had to amend three laws to be able to publish the HSC results without exams.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina joined the result announcement ceremony from the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

She said the officials followed internationally accepted methods while calculating the grades and urged people to refrain from criticisms.

"Negative comments would put mental stress on the students. I request you to stop making such comments," she said.

GPA 5 GALORE
In nine general education boards, 5,65,905 boys and 5,79,424 girls registered for the HSC. All of them would get the certificate.

There were 2,68,244, science 6,27,642 humanities and 2,49,443

business students.

The percentage of students getting GPA 5 jumped to 13.41 in 2020 from 3.71 in 2019.

Over 78,911 girls and 74,703 boys secured GPA 5.

A total of 1,61,807 students of general education, madrasa, and technical education boards were awarded GPA 5. The number was 47,286 in 2019. The rate jumped to 11.83 percent from 3.54 percent.

All boards combined, 13,67,377 students -- 7,06,885 boys and 6,60,492 girls -- who registered for the 2020 HSC-level exams from 9,063 institutions will get the certificates. In 2019, the percentage of students who passed the exam was 73.93.

A total of 88,304 madrasa students and 1,33,746 technical education students registered passed the exams. All of them will get a certificate.

A total of 4,048 madrasa students and 4,145 technical learning students have got GPA 5 in 2020.

For technical students, the results

were reflections of their SSC and grade XI results, Dipu Moni said.

RESULT PROCESS

Officials followed what the education minister said was a method of mapping the candidates' scores in JSC and SSC exams to determine the HSC grades.

The SSC results were weighted at 75 percent, on the basis of averaging the scores in Bangla, English and ICT, while the JSC scores in the same subjects accounted for 25 percent of the 2020 HSC grade.

While preparing results for science students, maths and science scores in JSC and physics, chemistry, maths, and biology scores in SSC were counted.

For humanities and business students, maths and Bangladesh and Global Studies scores in JSC and three subjects from business and humanities were counted, Dipu Moni said.

Students can apply for reviewing the results by February 6.

The last battlefield

FROM PAGE 1

1972, when a group of Bangladesh Army soldiers took position in Mirpur-12 to assist the police in the recovery of arms and ammunition from the Biharis holding out there.

Helal Morshed Khan, then East Bengal Regiment Delta Company's commanding officer, thus describes the start of the battle at Mirpur nearly 50 years ago today, in an interview with The Daily Star recently.

A chorus of clanging noises suddenly engulfed the area, emanating from the striking of telephone and electric poles all over.

A few moments later, bullets started ripping through the air from what seemed like all sides. The opposition were firing from the surrounding houses.

"There were screams of agony as bullets tore into our men, giving them no chance for the basic drill of dash down-crawl-observe-fire back. There was no real cover," said Helal, also a retired major general, decorated with the gallantry award Bir Bikram.

One bullet hit soon-to-be-martyred Second Lieutenant Selim Mohammad Kamrul Hasan, who Helal said fought in the Liberation War courageously and proved a leader in battle.

As Helal lowered him to the ground, an injured Selim said, "Sir, in the end I am dying at the hands of thieves."

THE FIGHT BACK

With the Bangladesh army soldiers and policemen caught off-guard, many had been hit and were either dead or gravely injured.

But after the sudden shock, they too opened fire. A group took positions inside a house -- half a dozen with Helal and as many with Selim, who was still firing even after being shot.

"We were trying to do only one thing -- not let the enemy come close to us. We also felled scores of them," said Helal, a former chairman of Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad.

The Bangalee soldiers held their ground -- covering the nearby lanes and were shooting at any Biharis fighters if they came close and tried to scale the compound walls.

Mokhlesur Rahman, another East Bengal Regiment Delta Company member, said that he was posted in the Mirpur-12 Panir Tank area, around 500 yards east of Helal's position.

Bullets had started to fall on them like rain, he told The Daily Star in a recent interview.

Mokhles said he saw writer and filmmaker Zahir Raihan, who is known to have accompanied the security units to Mirpur, and some others lying shot on the road.

Journalist Julfikar Ali Manik, in several investigation reports published by the Daily Bhorer Kagoj in 1999, established that Zahir Raihan was shot to death in Mirpur on January 30, 1972 when he went there in search

of his brother -- writer Shahidullah Kaiser -- who was abducted by al-Badr forces on the eve of liberation in December 1971.

The bodies of Zahir and many members of the security forces who died that day were never found.

Mokhles said at one point he saw around 60 enemy fighters coming towards them, opening fire. Their bullets killed lance naik Nurul Islam. Mokhles then charged a grenade and simultaneously opened fire to disperse them.

In the afternoon, Mokhles said, he along with two other soldiers jumped into a waterbody to lay low but was shot.

Finally, when the sun set, he was able to leave by crossing the waterbody and was later rescued in the early hours of the next morning by some people going to the mosque for Fajr prayers in the Matikata area.

Helal, too, said darkness came to his aid that day. He and some others also swam a waterbody to reach the Balurghat area.

Selim's brother MA Hasan, also an East Bengal Regiment Delta Company officer stationed in the Pilkhana area during the battle, said Second Lieutenant Selim was a brave fighter.

"In the evening, he along with several soldiers reached Kala Panir [Jheel [a local waterbody]] and encouraged the soldiers to cross it," said Hasan, who later became a physician after leaving the army.

Selim himself did not cross the water body as he had bullet injuries on his body, he added.

Helal said Selim told his soldiers, "While I live, I will not leave you."

FREE MIRPUR DAY
Helal and Mokhles both said they witnessed Biharis fighters gathering the bodies of Bangalee soldiers and hacking the bodies into pieces and then hiding them.

"They did not want to keep any evidence," said Helal.

After the battle, the survivors did not manage to find any of their martyred compatriots' bodies but finally, in 1999, got some of the mortal remains -- bones and skulls -- at the site of the Noori Mosque in Mirpur-12, Helal said.

"The battle of Mirpur still does not have any official recognition as part of the Liberation War. That the mortal remains of so many brave soldiers remained traceless until 1999 was a crime," said Hasan, also convener of the War Crimes Facts Finding Committee, Bangladesh.

On January 31, 1972, around 80 army men and 250-300 policemen had gone to Mirpur, Helal said.

"Forty-two soldiers of the East Bengal Regiment and we can estimate that around 80 policemen embraced martyrdom and dozens other sustained injuries," he said.

Bihari allies and collaborators of

the Pakistani forces from every corner of the country gathered in Mirpur and Mohammadpur areas with their weapons.

Among them were some Pakistan army soldiers -- even commando troops members, said both Helal and Mokhles.

A battalion of East Bengal Regiment Delta Company later moved in and cleared the area in 10 days, recovering at least four truckloads of weapons.

Citizens observe Free Mirpur Day on January 31.

The Dainik Bangla on January 31, 1972 carried a double column news on the front page, reporting that bullets were fired on Bangladesh forces when they went to recover illegal arms.

The Bangladesh Observer on February 1, 1972 reported that a large quantity of arms and ammunition were surrendered in the Mirpur area after people there were notified to surrender all unauthorised arms in their possession by 2:00pm on January 31.

Both the newspapers on February 3, 1972 also reported on "going missing of Zahir Raihan" after he went to Mirpur.

THE LAST BATTLE

"People did not know what was happening in Mirpur. The focus was then on the arms surrender ceremony at Bangabandhu Stadium. It was a secret operation," Helal said.

The Mohammadpur and Mirpur areas -- full of water bodies -- were under the control of pro-Pakistani Biharis and a relatively safe haven for Pakistani soldiers and Al-Badr and Razakar forces to carry out atrocities and torture, said Julfikar Ali Manik, author of the book "Muktijuddher Shesh Ronangan Mirpur".

Manik said that pro-Pakistani Biharis were already armed and some Pakistani soldiers who did not surrender on December 16 joined the Biharis living in Mirpur -- meaning there were large quantities of arms in the area.

The ultimatum to surrender arms was issued after Pakistani collaborators hiding in Mirpur and Mohammadpur had opened fire on Bangladesh forces.

The liberation of Mirpur was the last battle of the country's road to independence, said Manik.

"If you want to write the full history of the Liberation War, you cannot deduct the battle of Mirpur."

The government has a responsibility to officially endorse this chapter of Liberation War -- including the martyrdom of Zahir Raihan and others who were killed in the battle of Mirpur -- as these incidents took place in a sequel to the nation's struggle for independence, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

This must not be set aside as "unsolved mysteries" anymore after all these years and there should be closure, he added.

UAE says will cooperate with UN, US on Libya conflict

AFP, United Nations

The United Arab Emirates, accused this week by the United States of military intervention in Libya's protracted civil war, issued a statement Friday stating its readiness to work "closely" with the new US administration for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

"There is an urgent need for renewed diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict in Libya," Lana Nusseibeh, the UAE ambassador to the UN, said in a letter.

"The UAE stands ready to work closely with all Security Council members, including the new US administration, to achieve a peaceful settlement for the Libyan people," she said.

She said the country welcomed the Security Council's "call for all foreign forces to withdraw from Libya. Foreign intervention in the conflict must end now."

The day before, during a virtual meeting of the Security Council on Libya, the United States called on "all external parties, to include Russia, Turkey and the UAE, to respect Libyan sovereignty and immediately cease all military intervention in Libya."

Together with Egypt and Russia, the UAE is one of the main backers of Khalifa Haftar, the strongman in the east of Libya who is fighting the UN-supported Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli.

"The UAE firmly believes that diplomatic and political solutions are the sole path to end the Libyan conflict," Nusseibeh said.

"The first priority is to preserve and reinforce the ceasefire agreement" agreed to in October, she said.

"This will enable and encourage a political process and a Libyan-led transition that fulfills the aspirations of the Libyan people for stability, peace, and prosperity," she added.

A project

FROM PAGE 1

Bringing Mongla Port under a railway network is one of them.

Once the broad gauge rail line is installed between Khulna and Mongla, the port would directly be connected with the capital. The Mongla-Khulna rail line is expected to be operational by June 2024.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnc) had approved the project on December 31, 2010. At that time, the cost was estimated at Tk 1,721 crore.

The deadline was initially extended to December 2014, then to June 2018, June 2020 and June 2021.

After the first revision, the project cost rose to Tk 3,801 crore, of which India would provide Tk 2,371.34 crore in soft loans.

Apart from the rail line, the project includes a 21.11-km loop line, eight stations, 716-metre Rupsha Bridge, and 31 major and minor bridges.

WHY 2ND REVISION SOUGHT?

The project authorities have recently submitted a revision proposal on the project. The project evaluation committee held a meeting on the issue on January 25.

As per the proposal, the project cost would reach Tk 4,799, meaning Tk 997 crore more than the existing costs, relevant documents show.

Of the additional cost, Tk 741 crore would come from the project aid while Tk 256 crore the government exchequer.

The proposal mentioned several reasons behind the cost escalation, including changes in designs of bridges and acquiring of more land.

One of the major works of the project is the construction of Rupsha rail bridge. The contractor has to increase the length of the bridge's piles as the piles, designed earlier, were found not to be capable of carrying the stipulated load.

Besides, the length of piles of 31 bridges and 107 culverts also had to be increased due to the poor quality of soil, the documents show. So, the construction cost of those structures rose, it mentioned.

The authorities have to make several other changes to the design of some bridges, building and platform of stations, also contributing to the cost escalation.

The authorities are going to increase the height of the approach roads considering "ground reality", the documents mentioned.

Besides, the authorities proposed to acquire another 91 acres, that would cost Tk 156.52 crore, they added.

Md Arifuzzaman, the newly-appointed project director, said the railways authorities were working on the revised proposal. So, the revision costs have not been finalised yet, he said.

"After finalisation of the proposal, it will be sent to the Planning Commission via the railways ministry soon for approval," he told The Daily Star yesterday.