

## SAGAR-RUNI MURDER

## Probe report delayed for the 78th time

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday again asked Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) to submit by March 11 the probe report of a case filed over the murders of journalist couple Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi.

With yesterday's date, the investigation officer has so far taken 78 dates to complete the investigation.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Debdash Chandra Adhikary passed the order after Rab's Additional Superintendent Khondoker Shafiqul Alam, also investigation officer of the case, failed to submit the report yesterday.

Sagar, news editor at private TV channel Maasranga, and his wife Runi, a senior reporter at ATN Bangla, were killed in the early hours of February 11, 2012 in their rented flat in the capital's West Razabazar.

After Sher-e-Bangla Nagar police and the Detective Branch of police, Rab was tasked with the probe on April 18, 2012.

At least eight people, including suspects Rafiqul Islam, Bakul Miah, Masum Mintu, SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Two fruit-sellers spend an idle morning browsing their phones, with customers far and few on cold day when the sun didn't show even at 9am. This photo was taken yesterday at Sylhet city's Hasan market.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## Number of children trafficked tripled in 15 years globally

UNODC's Global Report 2020 finds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 2,904 persons were arrested on trafficking in persons charges in Bangladesh between 2017 and 2018, says a new report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

The Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020, launched on Tuesday, says in the period, nine persons were convicted of trafficking in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh recorded 778 cases of trafficking in persons in 2017, and 561 cases in 2018, says the report's country profile on Bangladesh.

In 2017, Bangladesh Police recorded 155 children, 233 females, and 382 males as victims of trafficking. In 2018, it recorded 80 children, 210 females, and 212 males as victims, it says.

The report adds the current legislation on trafficking in persons in Bangladesh covers all forms of trafficking indicated in the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol.

Globally, the share of children among detected trafficking victims has tripled while the share of boys has increased five times in the past 15 years, UNODC said in a news release on Tuesday, citing the report.

Girls are mainly trafficked for sexual exploitation, while boys are used for forced labour, according to the report.

It says in 2018 about 50,000 human trafficking victims were detected and reported by 148 countries. However, given the hidden nature of this

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## Premature death of babies on the rise

Finds USAID research

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite significant strides over the past few decades, death of newborns remains a major issue which requires effective intervention, speakers at a discussion said yesterday.

Premature deaths are on the rise in the country, they said in an evidence sharing session at icddr, jointly organised by USAID supported Research for Decision Makers (RDM) activity of icddr and Data for Impact (D4I).

Referring to the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), speakers said data showed a declining trend in newborn death until 2014. But the last BDHS 2017-18 report showed that the rate has bounced back.

The study showed 30 newborn children die in Bangladesh per 1,000 live births. Of this, 19 percent are premature births and low birth weight (LBW) combined. Dr Ahmed Ehsanur Rahman, associate scientist of icddr, made the keynote presentation where he remarked that Kangaroo mother care (KMC) -- a method of care of preterm infants, is effective in preventing premature death, and considered as an easy and low cost intervention.

"But it involves time and effort from the families and health system to provide KMC to a child as it requires mother and baby's skin-to-skin contact for extensive hours and follow-ups," he said.

Speakers also stressed that in an ongoing pandemic, World Health Organization stated that with specific precautions, KMC does not put babies in additional risk of getting infections. Hence, it is very important to give proper attention to make KMCs and other interventions available and to ensure their use by promoting their benefits to families.

Chaired by Dr Shams El Arifeen, Prof Mohammad Shahidullah, president of the National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19 and Dr Kanta Jamil, senior advisor at USAID-Bangladesh also spoke at the event.

## MJF handing cash support to 15,000 Covid-hit women

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), a human rights organisation focusing on dignity and well-being of the country's marginalised population, has begun distribution of livelihood support to 15,380 Covid-19 affected marginalised women in 35 districts under 'Excluded People's Rights in Bangladesh' (EPR) programme.

The month-long programme has been supported by the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), according to a press release.

Beginning on February 1, MJF is distributing Tk 7,000 to each beneficiary, selected through a rigorous process involving its 42 partner NGOs.

Some 391 citizens' committees were involved in the selection process and also are assisting in the distribution of cash support.

The beneficiary list, verified by union parishes and endorsed by upazila administration, includes women from poor and marginalised communities, indigenous communities of CHT and plainlands, Dalit and Harijan; women with disabilities; Bede community; transgender and fisher folk.

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## Race against time to finish training

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

The Covid-19 vaccines have reached Mymensingh, but the health officials of the division are racing against time to complete the training of field level workers and raise mass awareness among people to join the mass inoculation campaign.

The countrywide vaccination against the pandemic starts on February 7.

The master training for vaccination in the upazila level was completed on Sunday, ABM Mashiul Alam, civil surgeon of Mymensingh, told The Daily Star on Monday.

He said that those healthcare professionals would start a two-day training for field level workers from Monday, adding that training for volunteers and all medical persons will be completed by February 4.

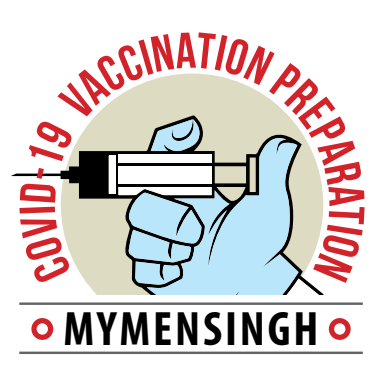
Mymensingh Divisional Director (Health) Dr Md Shah Alam however said that the training of the healthcare professionals and volunteers of the four districts of the division will end on February 6.

On the difficulties people are facing to register for vaccine, the civil surgeon of Mymensingh Mashiul Alam said, "As it is a new app, some people might find it a bit troublesome."

"But registration will go on until the programme reaches its end," said Alam.

Talking to this correspondent, 56-year-old businessman Shahjahan Ansar said that he was yet to learn the registration process.

He said that it would be difficult for



everyday people to register for vaccine unless there was strong campaigning from the government.

Ansar also said that he has not seen much publicity from the government so far.

Emdadul Haque Monzu, a 60-year-old homeopathic practitioner at Mymensingh city's Swadeshi Bazar area, said that it would be extremely difficult for people of his age to register

online personally because most of them are not computer literate.

He also said that his nephew took his NID card for registration.

"I still don't know when and where I will get vaccine shot," Haque said.

"We will go for all-out awareness programmes at grassroot level after vaccination in the division starts on February 7," said Divisional Director (Health) Dr Md Shah Alam.

He also said that the vaccine seekers who don't have internet facility will get registered by the health workers.

Shah Alam said the health workers at field level have initially started awareness campaigning along with their daily assigned job.

Dr Jannatul Ferdous, Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer in Muktagacha of Mymensingh, said they have started training for technical workers who will administer the vaccine at the hospital on Monday.

She said that participants were enthusiastic about the training.

Shahidullah Siddique, a sub-assistant community medical officer (SACMO) said it would not be difficult for them [to carry out the vaccination] since they have been conducting different vaccination programmes

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## Development of oncology drugs in Bangladesh: A success story

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Just 12 years ago, Bangladesh was a 100 percent importer of oncology drugs. Today, it is an exporter that also meets local needs.

This was possible due to the efforts of local pharmaceutical companies, their far-sighted vision and the trust patients have in local products.

In the past 10 years, pharmaceutical companies such as Beacon, Eskayef, Renata, Incepta, Healthcare, and Techno Pharma have come to manufacture more than 110 types of oncological drugs. Just six to seven years ago, around 50 percent of the lifesaving medications had to be imported, posing risks of unavailability, high costs and price fluctuations. Now local pharmaceuticals not only meet 80 percent of the country's demand but also export to at least 140 countries, beginning their journey with limited scale shipments in 2015.

Local companies manufacture 99 percent of the oncology drugs but some patients still use imported drugs or unofficially import them.

"People laughed at me in 2002 when I had taken an initiative to manufacture oncology products. Finally, my plans came to fruition in 2009. Now the patients can get drugs

at a reasonable price," said Md. Ebadul Karim, managing director of Beacon Pharmaceuticals Limited. In the past, only financially solvent patients were able to get treatment due to the high cost of drugs and low-income patients would have to wait till the last moment, he said.

According to Karim, Beacon not only manufactures oncology drugs but it also provides support of BDT three crore per annum to the poor patients and provides diagnostic support. He further said neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka have a government financial support system for cancer patients. The Bangladesh government can provide similar facilities for cancer patients, he said.

Beacon is planning to establish a palliative care centre so that the patients do not have to suffer so much. "We help the patients lead a quality life after taking treatment," he noted.

With a mission to deliver world class anti-cancer products at an affordable price, Eskayef Oncology started its journey in 2018 with many pioneering technologies. Recently, Eskayef Oncology touched another milestone as it has become one of the few Asian companies to get the approval from the prestigious global regulatory body

European Union Good Manufacturing Practice (EU GMP) for manufacturing anti-cancer medicines.

Eskayef's Oncology Manufacturing Facility is the country's first entity that has secured approval from the EU GMP, which is recognised by 27 nations of the EU and considered a passport for entry into the global market. Eskayef is currently producing both oral and injectable anti-cancer medicines maintaining the standards of the EU regulator. "This recognition will help our drugs enter the EU market and other countries," Dr. Mohammad Mujahidul Islam, Executive Director, Marketing & Sales of Eskayef, said.

He also added, "Eskayef is currently exporting its high-quality medicines to 54 countries. With all the latest technologies, facilities and our earnest commitment, Eskayef Oncology is determined to serve the people of Bangladesh and the world with its affordable and global-standard anti-cancer products."

Now, the export of oncology drugs is bigger than domestic market demand. To put things into perspective, Bangladesh exported cancer drugs worth over Tk 500 crore in 2019, and the export of these products in 2020 was almost the same although they

are yet to receive the full export details, industry insiders said.

Meanwhile local cancer drug sales amounted to about Tk 500 crore. Demand is growing by 15 percent on average every year, according to the manufacturers.

Along with conventional chemotherapy drugs, local pharmaceutical companies manufacture the latest oncology products such as oral therapy, immunotherapy, monoclonal antibodies, oral targeted therapies, and liposomal technology products, said the director for global business development of Beacon, Monjurul Alam. He informed that Bangladesh's export of cancer drugs was increasing by around 30 to 35 percent year-on-year. Oncology products were beyond the purchasing power of patients in the past but prices went down by 40 percent when Beacon started production through compliance with high standards, he said. Patients in Bangladesh now spend around Tk 500 crore per year for cancer treatment while it would cost at least Tk 2,000 crore if oncology drugs were imported, according to Alam.

Bangladesh's drugs are winning the global market for their quality and

low prices; the medicines are cheaper than those provided by the developed world, he added. Beacon now manufactures 110 different drugs for all kinds of cancer and exports them to 134 countries.

Alam said there is no difference between the generic and original oncology drugs as the local pharmaceutical companies have built world-class manufacturing plants with sophisticated European equipment.

Locally produced cancer drugs are of international standards and cheaper than imported ones, which is helping cancer treatment in Bangladesh, Md Azizul Islam, consultant physician general and specialist of medicine and oncology at Bangladesh Armed Forces, said earlier.

He believes it will not be long until local pharmaceutical companies manufacture all types of cancer drugs.

## CANCER PATIENTS AND TREATMENT FACILITIES

According to Bangladesh Pharmaceutical Journal, with the increasing rate of people being affected by cancer in Bangladesh, the disease has become a national concern. Anti-cancer drugs play a significant and crucial role in cancer treatment regimen. Inadequate access to essential

anti-cancer medicines may impose serious public health problems in Bangladesh.

According to National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), there are 13 to 15 lakh cancer patients in Bangladesh, with about two lakh patients newly diagnosed with cancer each year. Lung cancer and mouth-oropharynx cancer rank as the top two prevalent cancers in males. Other types of cancer are esophagus cancer and stomach cancer.

In women, cervix, uterus, and breast cancer are most prevalent. Other cancer types, which affect women, are mouth and oropharynx cancer, lung cancer, and esophagus cancer.

There are around 150 qualified clinical oncologists and 16 pediatric oncologists working in the different parts of the country. Regular cancer treatment is available in 19 hospitals and 465 hospital beds are attached as indoor or daycare facilities for chemotherapy in the oncology/radiotherapy departments.

There are about 15 linear accelerators, 12 Co-60 teletherapy, and 12 brachytherapy units currently available. There are approximately 56 cancer chemotherapeutic agents in Bangladesh.

I AM AND I WILL

4 February 2021



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It is an honor to lead the fight against the deadliest diseases in society. Serving the patients with quality medicines is our motto. We have served the best quality medicines through our decade of experience and skill. Our footsteps are widening day by day, country to country. Despite many challenges like the global pandemic, we are committed to strive for affordable innovation to lessen the cancer burden around the world.

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