

BANGLADESH UPDATE

316
New cases in 24hrs

5,38,378
Total cases

8,221
Deaths

4,83,931
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

2,332,371
Deaths

106,884,719
Total cases

VULTURE PROTECTION

Cabinet approves ban on Ketoprofen

UNB, Dhaka

The cabinet yesterday approved a proposal to stop the production of "Ketoprofen" drug in the country in an effort to save the critically endangered vultures.

The approval came from the weekly cabinet meeting, held at the Secretariat. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina chaired the meeting, joining it virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

"There were some 50,000 vultures in Bangladesh in the 1970s, but its population has declined alarmingly. Now there are only 260 vultures in the country, according to the count of the environment ministry," Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said while briefing reporters after the meeting.

The ministry placed the proposal saying that if the supply of

"Ketoprofen" cannot be stopped, the vultures in Bangladesh will keep dying, Anwarul added.

In the proposal, it suggested "Meloxicam" as an alternative to "Ketoprofen" drug since Meloxicam is available in the market and its side-effect is very light, he said.

Nature conservationists have long been demanding a ban on the vulture-toxic drug, "Ketoprofen", for saving the vulture population.

Bangladesh earlier banned "Diclofenac", the most harmful drug for the vulture population.

Vultures play a critical role in maintaining a balanced ecosystem by controlling the spread of diseases to human.

Unfortunately, over 99.9 percent of the vultures of South Asia have disappeared over the past couple of decades.



Motorcycles parked illegally on a pavement near the main gate of the DB office on the capital's Mintoo Road, obstructing the movement of pedestrians. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Writ filed with HC to ban Al Jazeera

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Supreme Court lawyer yesterday filed a writ petition with the High Court seeking its directive on the government to ban the broadcast of Al Jazeera, a Qatar based news channel, in Bangladesh.

Al Jazeera broadcast the much talked about documentary titled "All the Prime Minister's Men" on February 4.

Lawyer Md Anamul Kabir Emon in the public interest litigation also requested the HC to order the government to remove the contents of the report from all social media,

including Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram.

Emon said the documentary damaged the image of Bangladesh at home and abroad and hurt the sovereignty of Bangladesh.

Contents of the report are not authentic, he said, adding that Al Jazeera had earlier broadcast reports for damaging the image of Bangladesh but no action was taken against the people involved in those.

He said that he would place the petition before the HC bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Kamrul Hossain Mollah today for hearing.

Fix the error, not the mirror

FROM PAGE 1

There may be a few faulty mirrors that give way reflections. But, none buys those for use, as everybody wants to get a true reflection.

Do we ask a mirror to reflect us as we wish for? Mirror is unable to make things up. If not crazy, no one will say: "Mirror, mirror make an error -- show me beautiful." One can create a mirror maze, but it's only a temporary visual distortion that would do more harm than good.

Though the media plays a far bigger role but it, in many ways, does the same job as a mirror, reflecting the good, the bad and the ugly in a society. An independent media strives to be perfect like a mirror, quickly helping people with the right information. It exposes devils, discloses evils and digs out the truth from a heap of lies in the society. News aside, it also provides views to shape any important opinion or help policymakers make the right decision. Despite having a set of principles and code of ethics, journalists indeed make mistakes. When noticed or pointed out, a free media quickly corrects its mistakes. And like a mirror, the lone purpose of a free media is to be of help.

People need free media. Societies need it. Democracies need it. So do the governments. And, in a situation where freedom of expression is under attack and democracies are struggling, free media is more required than ever before. But some people in the corridors of power-- the crooked politicians, the corrupt and criminals -- do not like to see their reflections in the media mirror. They doubt, publicly at least, their reflections, and angrily say: "Oh no, it cannot be me," and then they go on to claim that it is a visual trick to taint their image. Instead of fixing the error, they try to fix the mirror.

That's the case with all the governments that have ruled Bangladesh. And that's how crimes and problems are harboured for long till those turn grave enough to get the governments out of power in the end. Sadly though, it's the people who suffer for the denial of their reflections

Cops the captors

FROM PAGE 1

fled the scene, adding, the eight had used three unregistered motorbikes and one of the accused was wearing a "DB uniform".

Anwara Police Station's Inspector (Investigation) Sayed Omar Faruk was given charge to investigate the case. After the arrest, the victim identified all six constables, said the sources.

Speaking to The Daily Star CMP Commissioner Saleh Mohammed Tanvir said, "They were temporarily suspended following the incident, while a departmental case will be filed in this regard."

"No one involved in criminal activities will be spared, even they are police. We have tightened our surveillance in the force."

Earlier on December 25 last year, two policemen of Sitakunda Model Police Station were arrested on charge of mugging Tk 2.80 lakh from a driver, after introducing themselves as "members of the Detective Branch" at Sitakunda upazila of Chattogram.

Unscrupulous leaders, ominous elements within government machinery and the top-flight corrupt fancy having the media mirror to reflect the image they would like. But like a mirror, a free media just cannot be fixed. At worst, one can break it and live a life without a mirror. And the grave predicament of which was aptly voiced by one of the Founding Fathers of America and the third US president, Thomas Jefferson. "Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost," he argued while co-authoring the Declaration of Independence way back in 1776.

Centuries later, the world, however, seemed to have moved far away from the Jefferson-era. Freedom of the press is now under the twin attacks of friendly (to power) media and authoritarian governments in ailing democracies.

People in power try things differently these days by covertly owning or manipulating a section of the media. Free media is quite reluctant yet to dig into its own backyard and admits its weakness in public. But the reality is that the media landscape is split into two streams -- friendly media and free media. The friendly media stream is thickening and free media is thinning out across the globe, especially in Bangladesh.

The allegiance of main catalysts within overall media -- the journalists, leaders and organisations -- is mostly aligned to power, not to the struggle for media freedom.

The first attack on free media invariably comes these days from none but friendly media, much to the satisfaction of its backers in power.

Friendly media may appear to be reigning supreme at the moment. But is it really so? The reflections in the controlled media are just like visual distortions to people, who always turn to free media for authentic information. A free media is after all the mirror they need.

And, press freedom, not "praise freedom", is what turns a media into that mirror.

Govt not sincere in curbing graft

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Government organisations and departments are "not serious enough" about curbing institutional corruption, said Iqbal Mahmood, chairman of the ACC.

He made the comments at the launching of ACC's 2019 Annual Report at a view-exchange meeting with the media at the ACC's headquarters.

"No one is taking it seriously. We've not seen any visible seriousness [among the authority over our recommendations]," he said.

"Take the instance of the health sector. We had asked the authority to blacklist 14 contractors nine months ago but no action was taken. The authority blacklisted them when the High Court asked them to do so," said the ACC's outgoing chairman.

The ACC in December 2019 had asked the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) to blacklist 14 contractors for misappropriating more than Tk 100 crore from the coffers of various government medical colleges and hospitals.

The DGHS blacklisted them in July last year when it faced huge criticism for anomalies in the procurement of PPEs and masks during the pandemic.

Iqbal said that the complexity in tax submission has disinclined people to submit returns.

Replying to a question, the ACC Chairman suggested simplifying the tax return form and making its submission completely online.

"It is the duty of NBR to check the wealth of a person before issuing a certificate. But while dealing with cases on illegal wealth, we've seen these are not done properly," he said, adding, "Taking advantage of whitening black money or legalising bribe is not acceptable."

The ACC submitted the report to President Abdul Hamid on Sunday.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the ACC could not submit the report to the President last year.

A total of 21,371 allegations were submitted to the ACC in 2019, of which 1,710 were approved for enquiry.

The ACC filed 263 cases and submitted charge sheets of 267 cases, and could ensure punishment in 63 percent of cases in 2019.

In that year, the ACC arrested 84 government officials and officers and three public representatives in connection with corruption. It also arrested 20 bank officials and staffer, and 16 others, the report says.

In its recommendations, the ACC said that it often gets allegations of transactions of huge amounts of illegal money through leasing non-banking financial institute, cooperatives and multi-level marketing.

"It seems appropriate to the ACC to introduce a system to disclose the source of money of depositors to the authority. A policy can be formulated in this regard," read the report

Reiterating one of its early recommendations, the anti-graft body said people often do not get their expected service at police stations. Besides, government officials of different cadres work at the upazila level.

In this context, an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) can be given charge of a police station for smooth communication and better services.

Quoting article 77(1) of the constitution, the ACC said an ombudsman is given responsibility to investigate anomalies in ministry and government offices and officers. But over the last 50 years, it has not been implemented.

"To ensure transparency and accountability in other words good

governance, it has become necessary to create a post of ombudsman," it read.

Quoting a report by the National River Conservation Commission, the ACC said 139 rivers of 64 districts have been grabbed and 49,162 grabbers outside Dhaka have been identified.

Saying that misappropriation of public property is a scheduled offence under the ACC Act, the Commission has recommended to the cabinet division to give deputy commissioners of different districts directives to protect rivers.

"The DCs will submit a report about its action against grabbing every month before the cabinet division... A copy can also be given to the ACC," the report read.

Asked about a recent report by Transparency International Bangladesh on the deteriorating corruption situation, the ACC chairman said after assessment, the report seems confusing to him.

"There is a big NGO that becomes critical on every issue, such as corruption, education or politics," he said.

"NGOs only offer criticism but do not do anything visible to address shortcomings," said Iqbal.

Replying to another question about the long delay in submitting charge sheets in the BASIC Bank scam cases, ACC chairman said investigation officers are trying to trace the destination of money.

"We'll have to answer the court regarding the whereabouts of the money. Unless we trace where the money flows to, we would not be able to submit a charge sheet," he said.

Saying that about Tk "3,500 crore" out of Tk "4,500 crore" had been returned to the BASIC Bank, he said, "Let's wait and see whether the final report is given instead of charge sheets."

Police charge journo Kajol, cartoonist

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three cases were recorded under the DSA.

In the charge sheet, the IO said the charges brought against Kajol were primarily proved and he should be brought under trial.

The three cases were filed against Kajol between March 10-11 last year over a Facebook post he had shared regarding the arrest of Papia. He landed in jail on May 3 and was freed on bail in December.

Meanwhile, the charge sheet in the case against Kishore, Mushtaq and Didarul was submitted to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka on February 4. Sub-Inspector Mahasin of Ramna Police Station said he submitted the charge sheet.

The three were prosecuted in the case filed on May 6 last year by Rab-3 under the DSA with Ramna Police

Station. The Rab unit's Assistant Director Abu Bakar Siddique had filed the case and a total of 11 people were prosecuted in the case.

Charges were pressed against Kishore, Mushtaq and Didarul over running propaganda against the government and the state. The names of the eight others were not included in the charge sheet due to a lack of evidence against them, said court sources.

These eight are: Swedish-Bangladeshi journalist Tasneem Khalil who runs Netra News, US-based journalist Shahed Alam, Germany-based blogger Asif Mohiuddin, Minhaj Mannan Emon, managing director of BLE securities and shareholder-director of Dhaka Stock Exchange, expatriate Zulkarnain Saer Khan, Ashik Imran, Shapan Wahed and Philip Schuhmacher.

The 11 were prosecuted under sections 21, 25(1) (b), 31 and 35 of the DSA, which deals with anyone running propaganda or campaign, "against the Liberation War of Bangladesh, the cognition of the Liberation War, Father of the Nation, National Anthem or National Flag", anyone "tampering the image of the nation or spread confusions" or attempting to "create hostility, hatred or adversity among people or destroy communal harmony or create unrest or disorder or deteriorates or threatens to deteriorate law and order".

Kishore and Mushtaque have been behind bars for nine months, while Minhaj and Didarul were granted bail by court in September last year.

Kishore and Mushtaq's bail petitions were rejected six times, said their lawyers.

Age bar brought down to 40 now

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to include all people aged 40 years and above," Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam told reporters after the weekly cabinet meeting.

The directive was put in effect without delay.

The cabinet secretary also said people from other age groups along with the family members of frontline workers would eventually be eligible for registration.

The prime minister also ordered keeping registration arrangements at the vaccination centres for those who might not be able to register in advance, he said.

In that case, the vaccine recipient has to bring their National Identity Card to the vaccination centre, he added.

ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of the DGHS, said, "Poor response from people and the complexities of online registration

are the reasons why the plans had to be revised. We received a number of complaints from across the country about people failing to register online."

Some technical issues have already been addressed and registration for non-government doctors and nurses is now available, he told The Daily Star.

"Despite these, we still don't get the expected response. We might open the option for teachers soon."

The government has a stock of 70 lakh vaccine doses from three different batches. Shots from two of the batches will expire in April and the rest in June this year. Officials didn't say the exact expiry dates. Nor did they say the number vials that will expire in April.

The DG yesterday said the shelf life of the Covid-19 vaccine was six months.

A top official of the DGHS said they sent the doses to the districts and instructed officials to use the doses that

would expire first.

Prof Md Sayedur Rahman, chairman of pharmacology at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said the minimum age requirement should be further lowered if people's response remained unchanged.

Bangladesh purchased three crore doses of the Oxford vaccine from Serum Institute of India at \$5 per dose.

Asked, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general of the DGHS, said, "In the first two days, vaccine recipient turnout was low. We directed all of our officials to increase the numbers as much as they can."

"We only just started yesterday [Sunday]. In the course of time, it will gain momentum."

Meanwhile, different eminent personalities have taken the shot. Among them were Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda and Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain.

over his tax returns.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan opposed the bail petition.

The ACC filed the case with its Dhaka Integrated District Office-1 on February 2 against Shariful for submitting a false Tk 69-lakh wealth statement and for failing to explain the source of Tk 1.6 crore income.

16 more die, 316 get Covid

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh reported 16 new Covid-19 deaths yesterday, taking the national death tally to 8,221.

The mortality rate in the country now stands at 1.53 percent, said the Directorate General of Health Services in a handout.

Bangladesh witnessed a daily infection rate of 2.30 percent with 316 new cases in the last 24 hours, pushing up the caseload to 538,378.

On January 1, the daily infection rate was 8.18 percent.

So far, 3,762,774 tests, including 13,762 new ones, have been carried out since the first cases were reported on March 8 last year.

The overall infection rate now stands at 14.31 percent. However, 483,931 patients -- 89.89 percent -- have recovered so far, the DGHS said.

Bangladesh reported its first Covid-19 cases on March 8 and the first death on March 18 last year.

Medical admission test on April 2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Admission test for the MBBS course at public and private medical colleges will be held on April 2.

Besides, entry test for the BDS courses of dental colleges and units for the academic year 2020-21 will take place on April 30, Prof AHM Enayet Hossain, director general of the Directorate General of Health Education (DGHE), told The Daily Star last night.

In a notification on Sunday, the DGHE announced the schedule for enrolment into the MBBS course.

Those interested in getting admission in medical and dental colleges will be able to fill out the online admission forms by visiting the website www.dghs.telatalk.com.bd from February 11 to March 1.

The number of seats in 47 government medical colleges of the country is 4,350.

Another 8,340 students will get admitted in 70 private medical colleges.

MUNICIPALITY POLLS

One killed, several hurt in clashes in Gopalpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A man was killed and several others were injured yesterday in clashes between supporters of two mayoral candidates in the upcoming polls in Tangail's Gopalpur municipality.

Supporters of Awami League candidate and Gopalpur municipality Mayor Rakibul Haque clashed with followers of AL rebel candidate Gias Uddin in Gopalpur Bazar and Someshpur areas in the evening, said police and witnesses.

Mohammad Khalil, 35, a rickshaw-van puller from Dubai Atpara village, was fatally injured during clashes in Someshpur area around 7:30pm. He was rushed to Gopalpur Upazilla Health Complex, according to witnesses.

"Khalil died from wounds in different parts of his body, including the head, around 7:45pm," Dr Alim Al Razi, upazila health and family planning officer in Gopalpur, told this newspaper.

Contacted, Superintendent of Police in Tangail Sanjit Kumar Roy, however, said it appeared that Khalil was killed in a separate incident, not in the clashes, as the spot of the incident was away from the places where the skirmishes took place.

The situation is now under control and additional law enforcers have been deployed in the area to ward off any untoward incident, he added.

It could not be confirmed whether Khalil was a supporter of any of the two mayoral candidates. The mobile phones of both Rakibul and Gias Uddin were found switched off last night.

The house of the AL rebel candidate and a shop owned by one of his brothers were vandalised during the clashes, KM Mithu, a nephew of Gias Uddin, told this correspondent.

Besides, Rakibul's election office in Gopalpur Bazar area came under attack. A vehicle was also set on fire, according to police and witnesses.

There have been tensions in the municipality after local AL leader Gias Uddin announced that he would run against AL-nominated candidate Rakibul in the municipality polls slated for February 14.

Britain lowers terrorism threat level to 'substantial'

AFP, London

Britain has downgraded its terrorism threat level from "severe" to "substantial", interior minister Priti Patel announced yesterday.

Patel told parliament the decision was made "due to the significant reduction in the momentum of attacks in Europe" between September and November.