

BANGLADESH UPDATE



316

New cases in 24hrs



5,38,378

Total cases



8,221

Deaths



4,83,931

Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

2,329,397

Deaths



106,786,237

Total cases

Fix the error, not the mirror

FROM PAGE 1

There may be a few faulty mirrors that give wavy 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

in a free media.

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 about 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.

Mugda lacks

FROM PAGE 1

Talking to The Daily Star, they complained of mismanagement at the public hospital's inoculation management.

Abul Hossain, 73, and his wife Monowara Begum, 65, are among them. "We came here around 10:00am. We had to wait for three hours to take the shot," said Abdul, who lives in Gopibagh area.

The vaccination is supposed to start at 8:00am and end at 4:00pm every day. But at the hospital at Mugda, the first shot was administered around 10:00am yesterday, officials said.

A total of 500 people were scheduled to be given the dose. Of them, 354 were vaccinated yesterday. On the first day of the mass inoculation against the Covid-19, on Sunday, 314 of 500 registered people were given the shots at the hospital, said officials.

Muhtasim Belal, who came along with father Nurul Haque Patowary, 93, and mother Rokeya Begum, 75, said they too did not find any hospital attendant after arriving there.

"I asked the receptionists where the vaccination booths were and he told me that they were on the second floor. It would have been better if the vaccination centre had been situated on the ground floor since the vaccine recipients include many elderly people like my parents," Belal told this newspaper at the hospital.

They also should have arranged wheelchairs, he added.

Many others said there were no printers at the vaccination booths, so they had to go outside to take a printout of the registration form's copy.

Asked, the deputy director of the hospital Md Nurul Islam said they pasted written instructions on the ground floor's wall.

Asked about the lifts, Asim Kumar Nath, director of the hospital, said two of the four elevators there were out of

order. Of the two, one was dedicated to the doctors.

"We are repairing the lifts. Wheelchairs have been provided for the elderly," he said.

In Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University and Shuhrawardy Medical College Hospital, elderly people, on the contrary, expressed satisfaction at their services yesterday.

Retired Engineer Sayed Hossain and his wife went to the BSMU vaccination centre and took the jabs around half an hour before the schedule.

"We're happy with the services. We are now going back home," Sayed told this newspaper sitting on a wheelchair, before boarding an ambulance.

For businessman Hazi Tofazzol Hossain, 68, who came from Sankar area of Dhanmondi, taking the vaccine was his responsibility, he said.

"Many people don't want to get vaccinated. For me, it was an urgent issue. I am feeling well after taking the shot," he said, as he was waiting at the post-vaccination observation room at Shuhrawardy Medical College Hospital.

Urging people to take the vaccine, he said, "We should not believe any rumours. If the vaccine was not good, hundreds of thousands of people would not take this worldwide."

At the same centre at the hospital, Ahsan Habib, a young banker from Keraniganj's Kalatia, took the jab yesterday.

"All of my colleagues have also registered for the vaccination. We all are taking the vaccine willingly to stay safe from Covid-19," Habib told The Daily Star.

Martha Mondal, a nurse who was injecting the vaccine at the centre, said people were taking the vaccine eagerly.

"The presence of the vaccine recipients is good. None of them showed any symptoms during the last two days of vaccination," she said.

Haitian opposition names judge as transitional president

AFP, Port-Au-Prince

Haitian opposition parties named a top judge as interim leader overnight Sunday, the latest attempt to oust President Jovenel Moise, whose term they say has expired.

In a video statement sent to AFP, Judge Joseph Mécene Jean-Louis, 72, said he "accepted the choice of the opposition and civil society, to serve (his) country as interim president for the transition."

Moise has been governing without any checks on his power for the past year and says he remains president until February 7, 2022 -- an interpretation of the constitution rejected by the opposition, which has led to protests asserting his term has ended.

The political crisis intensified on

Sunday, when authorities said they had foiled an attempt to murder Moise and overthrow the government.

But the opposition said Moise could not claim to have suffered a coup attempt because his presidential term had expired.

"We are waiting for Jovenel Moise to leave the National Palace (the president's official residence) so that we can get on with installing Mr Mécene Jean-Louis," opposition figure Andre Michel told AFP.

Former senator Youri Latortue said overnight Sunday that the transition period was expected to last around 24 months.

"There's a two-year roadmap laid out, with the establishing of a national conference, the setting out of a new constitution and the holding of elections," he said.



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

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Govt not sincere in curbing graft

FROM PAGE 1

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

FROM PAGE 1

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 Mushtaq 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.

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.

No corrupt person

FROM PAGE 1

damaged if a case is filed against him. Had the accused lawmaker surrendered to lower court and sought bail, his dignity would have enhanced and people would have considered it as an example, it pointed out.

The bench granted anticipatory bail to Shariful for three weeks. It also ordered the lawmaker, who was present at the court, to surrender before the trial court concerned in three weeks.

Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik told The Daily Star that the lawmaker in his bail petition mentioned that he is a regular tax payer and the National Board of Revenue has never raised questions 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.

Cops the captors

FROM PAGE 1

door, calling out Mannan's name. When the family members opened the door, two of them introduced themselves as Detective Branch (DB) men and detained Mannan. Later Mannan was picked up and taken around 200 feet away from his house.

After few minutes, he was made to board one of the bikes and was taken to Koigram Rastar Matha area of Vellapara Bridge in Paita upazila, sources said. They stopped in front of a tea stall, where Mannan was threatened with death for Tk 10 lakhs.

The sources said the eight men forced Mannan to call his relatives to arrange the money and threatened to shoot him if the matter was disclosed to any law enforcing agency.

Mannan phoned his relatives and arranged Tk 1.80 lakh. His relatives handed over the money around 5:00am.

The sources said the men released Mannan after taking the money and 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.

2 Rohingya

FROM PAGE 1

to Sadar Hospital where doctors declared them dead. The accomplices of the two, however, escaped.

Two BGB members were also injured in the incident, the BGB official said.

One lakh yaba pills were seized and two guns, four cartridges and two bullets were recovered from the spot.

A case was filed in this connection.

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.

non-government doctors and nurses has now been opened, he told The Daily Star.

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

The government has a stock of 70 lakh vaccine doses of 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 Covid-19 vaccine is six months.

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

"But we have to increase the number of registration and vaccination.

Otherwise, it will be a disaster," he said, wishing not to be named.

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. But, we have directed all our officials to increase the numbers as much as possible."

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

Meanwhile, different eminent personalities have taken vaccines on the second day of nationwide vaccine inoculation.