

BANGLADESH UPDATE



387
New cases in 24hrs



5,38,765
Total cases



8,229
Deaths



8,44,573
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE



2,343,531
Deaths



107,240,449
Total cases

Cops recover 14 lakh yaba pills in Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENTS, Cox's Bazar

Police yesterday recovered around 14 lakh yaba tablets and Tk 1.71 crore in cash in separate drives in Cox's Bazar.

Four people were arrested in this connection, said police.

The arrestees are Jahurul Islam Faruk, 37, and Mohammad Babu, 57, Abul Kamal, 55, Sheikh Abdullah, 40 -- all residents of Nuniarchara area near Cox's Bazar Airport.

Faruk and Babu were arrested in the afternoon, while the two others were arrested in the evening.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team raided a fishing boat on a canal in Chowfaldondi area around 1:00pm yesterday, said Mohammad Hasanuzzaman, superintendent of police (SP) of Cox's Bazar.

The police team recovered seven sacks of yaba tablets from the boat. There were around 14 lakh tablets in the seven sacks, said the SP.

A syndicate is involved with this huge consignment of yaba pills, the

SP said, adding that it was one of the largest consignments recovered by law enforcement agencies in recent times.

During interrogation, one of the arrestees, Faruk, informed that there was a huge amount of cash at his residence.

Police then took Faruk and raided his residence at Nuniarchara, recovering two sacks filled with a large amount of cash, said Mohammad Ali, officer-in-charge of Detective Branch (DB) of Cox's Bazar police.

SP Hasanuzzaman said the bags contained Tk 1,70,68,500.

Law enforcers had launched an anti-drug crackdown in May 2018. Since then, many drug traders were killed in 'gunfights' with law enforcers and many others were arrested.

Besides, law enforcers have recovered huge amounts of yaba tablets in various drives in Cox's Bazar, which is considered one of the major hubs of the yaba business.



Pile caps and piers of the Trimohoni bridge on the Balu river are visible as the water body has dried up in the capital's Khilgaon area. The water has also become dark due to pollution. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Rape accused cellmate goes berserk in jail, kills youth

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Israil Mia handed over his 27-year-old son Abdul Hye to police voluntarily to take care of his drug habit.

Yesterday, around a month later, the father returned to receive his son's body. Abdul was beaten to death by his cellmate at Kishoreganj District Jail. Another prisoner was injured in the attack.

Quoting other inmates, Kishoreganj Superintendent of Police (SP) Masrur Rahman Khaled, who visited the spot, said five accused in different cases were kept in Cell-11.

One of them, identified as Md Saidur Mia, a rape accused, started indiscriminately assaulting two inmates -- Abdul Hye and Jahangir Mia, 35 -- of the cell with a piece of wood, injuring them critically just before 4:00am yesterday.

On information, jail police rushed

to the spot and rescued them and took them to Kishoreganj General Hospital, where Abdul died around 4:30am, the SP said.

He added that Saidur got the piece of wood after breaking down the cell's bathroom door.

Jahangir, accused in a drug-related case, is undergoing treatment at the hospital.

Abdul, a drug addict, was handed over to police by his family members recently and was sent to jail, Masrur said.

Soon after the incident, Kishoreganj District Commissioner Mohammad Shamim Alam also visited the spot.

Meanwhile, security inside the jail has been beefed up and two separate probe bodies, one by the jail authorities and the other by the district administration, were assigned to investigate the incident.

May cost even more

FROM PAGE 1

the design of viaducts on both sides of the bridge and a huge amount of allocated money for the project was refunded in the last two fiscal years as the project authority could not utilise it.

Like all other projects, this one also ran into problems from early last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Although work did not stop during this Covid crisis, progress was hampered. So, it is a major challenge to complete the project work in the stipulated time as per the work plan," reads a document the project authority placed before yesterday's meeting.

The problem does not end here.

In July last year, Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project (PMBP) authorities expressed serious concerns over poor vertical and horizontal clearance of the railway viaducts on both sides of the bridge. As a result, work on two points of the viaducts on either side of a bridge was halted for several months.

They said the construction of viaducts with the existing vertical limit will hamper movement of heavy lorries or loaded vehicles and the existing horizontal limit will shrink the width of the connecting roads of the country's longest bridge.

The project authorities yesterday told the meeting that they have to change the design of the viaducts at rail-road crossing points.

"So, it appears that the deadline for construction of the railway viaduct at the Mawa-Bhanga section would be delayed and the cost would be hiked," reads the document.

Asked about the length of the delay and the amount of the cost hike, Project Director Golam Fakhruddin Ahmed Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday, "It is not possible to say now as the contractor is still assessing it."

He, however, said design-related problems have been solved.

The project authority plans on opening the Bhanga-Mawa section of the route when the Padma Bridge would be opened for public, expected in June next year.

Asked whether they would be able to meet the deadline, the PD said, "We are hopeful about it. The overall project may see a delay but we are hopeful about covering the delay for the [Bhanga-Mawa] section."

At a time when the overall progress of the project is 37.39 percent, this priority section has witnessed 64 percent progress.

The project authority also mentioned changes in design of different structure, in coordination

with the changed parameters of different government agencies and ongoing and future projects, was also a challenge.

"Changes in work scopes due to different demands of local representatives and government decisions may have an impact on the project cost and duration," reads the document.

They also said the contractor has submitted Interim Payment Certificate (IPC) of Tk 2,046.54 crore and they have to send the IPC to the Chinese embassy within 56 days, otherwise they have to pay a fine.

But the project authority did not get Tk 1,801.14 crore additional money from the annual development programme even though they sought the money on November 25, reads the document.

However, the PD told this correspondent yesterday that they have been able to manage the funds and will thus be able to avoid the fine. He declined to disclose how and from where they managed the funds, terming it an "internal matter".

CHALLENGES IN OTHER PROJECTS
The authority of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Railway Bridge Project said they had asked for Tk 1,291 crore for the next fiscal year, but the planning cell of BR proposed to allocate Tk 530 crore.

They would require the total fund otherwise they would not be able to pay the contractors and release imported goods. If they fail to do so, the project cost and duration may increase, they said.

Physical works of the Tk 16,781 crore project began in August last year to build a 4.8km bridge over the Jamuna river. The project has seen 20 percent progress so far and is expected to be completed by 2024.

Project authorities for the construction of a new rail line between Chattogram and Cox's Bazar mentioned that their work is being hampered as overhead electricity poles on the route could not be shifted fully.

Besides, affected people in different areas are obstructing the construction as district administrations of Chattogram and Cox's Bazar could not complete the compensation process, they said.

The Tk 18,034-crore first-track project has seen 49 percent progress till January.

The project to construct a dual gauge double line between Akhaura and Laksam on the Dhaka-Chattogram route also faces several other challenges. The Tk 6,504 crore project progressed 72 percent so far.

Criminals from 6 nations involved

FROM PAGE 1

in the case, it was decided that if the case in the US was settled first, it will be much easier to bring back the money, he added.

On February 4, 2016, around \$81 million was stolen from the BB account with the New York Fed. On March 15 the same year, BB Deputy Director (accounts and budgeting) Zobayer Bin Huda filed a case with the Motijheel Police Station.

CHARGE SHEET

Seeking anonymity, a CID high official involved in the probe said they found that the people who directly took part in the heist are mostly from four countries -- the Philippines, China, Sri Lanka and Japan.

Besides, Bangladeshi and Indian nationals working at financial institutions were involved in the heist. They include Indian nationals, who worked for international payments network SWIFT, and also BB officials, said the CID high-up.

"We have got response from all these foreign countries, except for China. Sri Lanka and Japan have given response through the Interpol's official channel," mentioned the CID official.

On the number of people involved in the heist, Mostofa Kamal, special superintendent of CID's financial crime unit, said the agency has so far identified around 40 people but the number could go up.

Among them, at least 25 are from the Philippines. "We are preparing charge sheet against them," he said.

Asked how the issue would be taken up with the foreign countries whose citizens were involved in the heist, the CID chief said, "These people committed the heist, sitting in different countries. That is why the names of those countries have come up. The states have nothing to do with it."

CID sources said six to seven BB officials would be named in the charge sheet.

Contacted, Sirajul Islam,

spokesperson for the BB, said, "The CID is yet to disclose any information to us about BB officials' involvement. How can we comment on the issue at this moment?"

BB CASE IN NEW YORK

On February 1, 2019, the BB filed a case with the Southern District Court in New York against the Philippines' Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC) and scores of individuals, including several top executives, for their involvement in a "massive and multi-year conspiracy" to steal its money.

Abu Hena Mohd Razee Hassan, head of Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, told this correspondent yesterday that the court reviewed the case and served summonses on those who took part in the heist from the Philippines.

"It may take one or two more months for the hearing [in the case in the US] to begin. We hope to see the outcome [of the case] soon," he added.

Teachers to get jobs in a week

FROM PAGE 1

get vaccinated, and requested all to wear masks.

On January 30, the prime minister ordered the authorities concerned to ensure that everyone at all educational institutions gets the vaccine as soon as possible.

After everyone concerned gets the vaccine, the government will monitor the Covid-19 situation throughout February and will then decide on reopening the educational institutions across the country, the PM said.

Against this backdrop, the government launched the countrywide Covid-19 vaccine campaign on Sunday following a two-day successful piloting held on January 27 and 28.

Government officials claimed that the fear regarding the vaccination was gone since more and more people were showing interest in taking the jobs.

As many as 1,01,082 people received the first shot of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine yesterday, which took the total number to 1,79,318 in the first three days of the inoculation campaign, according to DGHS.

The number is, however, lower than the government capacity of vaccinating 3.6 lakh people every day at 2,400 vaccination centres across the country.

Talking to The Daily Star, Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of the pharmacology department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), supported the government plan on vaccinating all teachers and said it must be done before the educational institutions were reopened.

"All teachers should be given the jobs. Only then, you should go for the reopening," he said.

In the first three days of the vaccination campaign, 5.12 percent of the first month's target -- 35 lakh doses -- has been given. Initially, the government had planned to administer 60 lakh shots in the first month, but the number was revised apparently due to a lukewarm response to the online registration.

Over the last 14 days, around seven lakh people have registered for the vaccine visiting the government website www.surokha.gov.bd.

Around 2.3 lakh people did the registration yesterday till 9:10pm, according to the DGHS.

The government had also planned to administer each vaccine recipient the second dose two months after the first one, but it later narrowed down the gap to one month.

The government had a stock of 70

lakh doses of three different batches. Shots from two of the batches will expire in April while those of the other in June this year.

Since January 20, the Covid-19 transmission in the country has apparently slowed down. The daily percentage of positive cases against samples tested has continued to be below five since that day.

The percentage of positive cases is a critical measure because it gives an indication of how widespread the infection is in the area where testing is occurring, according to Johns Hopkins University.

In May, the World Health Organization recommended that the positivity rate should be below five percent for at least two weeks before governments considered any reopening.

Since the first three confirmed cases were reported on March 8 in the country, the transmission of Covid-19 was highest between June and July, shows DGHS data.

The highest daily positivity rate -- 31.91 percent -- was recorded on August 3. It remained stagnant at around 12 percent throughout September and October.

From November, however, the rate started rising again.

One in 5 deaths globally: study

FROM PAGE 1

the potential health impacts," co-author Joel Schwartz, a professor of environmental epidemiology at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, said in a statement.

The potential to avoid millions of premature deaths should be a powerful additional incentive for policymakers to drive down greenhouse gas emissions and hasten the global shift from brown to green energy, he said.

Worldwide, air pollution shortens lives by more than two years on average, earlier research has shown.

Worst-hit is Asia, where average lifespan is cut 4.1 years in China, 3.9 years in India, and 3.8 years in Pakistan. In some regions of these countries, life expectancy is reduced by twice as much.

In Europe, it is shortened by eight months on average.

The study estimated that on average fossil fuels caused deaths of adults aged 14 and over at 30.7 percent in Eastern Asia; in Europe 16.8, Canada 13.6, USA 13.1, Central America and the Caribbean 8.2, South America 7.8, Western Asia and the Middle East 6.5, Africa 3.7 and Australia and Oceania 3.2.

The new study nearly doubles previous estimates of the number of people killed by fossil fuel pollution. The World Health Organisation says that air pollution -- including indoors -- kills seven million people a year, with 4.2 million of those deaths

due to ambient, or outdoor, pollution.

The most recent Global Burden of Disease study -- the most comprehensive catalogue of why people die -- advances roughly the same numbers.

Both of these estimates relied on satellite data and surface observations to determine concentrations of the smallest -- and most deadly -- calibre of pollution, known as PM2.5.

But they cannot determine whether these microparticles come from burning fossil fuels or, say, dust and wildfire smoke, according to co-author Loretta Mickley, an expert in chemistry-climate interactions at Harvard.

"With satellite data, you're seeing only pieces of the puzzle," she said.

For decades scientists have known airborne particles are a danger to public health, but there have been a few epidemiological studies to quantify the effects of very high levels of exposure, like in India and China.

This new research deploys a more detailed analysis of the impact of sooty airborne particles thrown out by power plants, cars, trucks and other sources.

To get a more fine-grained picture of where particle pollution comes from and its health impacts, Mickley and colleagues used a 3D model of atmospheric chemistry, known as GEOS-Chem, that divides Earth's surface into 50-by-60-kilometre blocks.

"Rather than rely on averages spread across large regions, we wanted to map where the pollution is and where people live," said lead author Kam Vohra, a graduate student at the University of Birmingham.

The next step was to plug in data on carbon emissions -- from the power sector, industry, shipping, aviation and ground transport -- along with NASA simulations of air circulation.

Once the researchers had PM2.5 concentrations for each box in the global grid, they still needed to determine the consequences for health.

Previous calculations of air pollution impacts -- based on exposure to indoor second-hand smoke -- seriously underestimate the danger, recent studies have found, so the researchers developed a new risk assessment model.

Compared with other causes of premature death, air pollution kills 19 times more people each year than malaria, nine times more than HIV/AIDS, and three times more than alcohol.

The death toll exceeds the combined total of people who die globally each year from smoking tobacco plus those who die of malaria.

Without fossil fuel emission, the average life expectancy of the world's population would increase by more than a year, while global economic and health costs would fall by about \$2.9tn.

Verdict in Dipan murder case today

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The judgment in a case filed over the murder of publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan against eight members of banned militant outfit Ansar Al Islam is set to be delivered today.



Judge Md Majibur Rahman of the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal of Dhaka is scheduled to read out the verdict around 11:30am, Assistant Public Prosecutor Golam Sharuar Khan told The Daily Star.

The accused are: Ansar Al Islam's top commander Sayed Ziaul Haque alias Maj (sacked) Zia, killing squad leader Moinul Hasan Shamim alias Samir alias Imran, trainer Abdus Sabur alias Samad alias Sujon alias Raju, and top operatives Khairul Islam alias Fahim alias Jishan, Sheikh Abdullah, Abu Siddiq Sohel, Mozammel Hossain alias Saimon and Akram Hossain alias Hasib.

Of them, Major Zia and Akram are still absconding, while the rest are behind bars.

During the closing arguments on January 24, the prosecution told the court that they were able to prove the charges against the accused and sought capital punishment for them.

However, the defence sought acquittal of their clients during their arguments.

Earlier, the tribunal recorded statements of 23 prosecution witnesses, including complainant of the case.

Jagriti Prokashani publisher Dipan, also son of Dhaka University's former professor Abul Quasem Fazlul Huq, was stabbed to death at his office in Shahbagh on October 31, 2015.

On November 2 that year, Razia Rahman, the victim's wife, filed the case with Shahbagh Police Station accusing some unknown persons.

On November 14, 2018, Assistant Commissioner Md Fazlur Rahman of Detective Branch (DB) of police submitted a charge sheet against the eight members of banned militant outfit Ansar Al Islam in the case.

The tribunal framed charges against them on October 13, 2019.

Eight more die, 387 infected with coronavirus

UNB, Dhaka

Eight more coronavirus-related deaths and 387 fresh cases were recorded in the country in the 24 hours ending at 8:00am.

The national case tally soared to 538,765, including 8,229 fatalities. The mortality rate stood at 1.53 percent, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said in a handout.

Until morning, 484,573 patients (89.94 percent of the total reported cases) have recovered.

Bangladesh reported its first Coronavirus cases on March 8 and the first death on March 18 last year.

So far, 3,777,242 samples, including 14,468 in the past 24 hours, have been tested.

Currently, the DGHS said, the daily Covid-19 infection rate stands at 2.67 percent.

Won't allow pick

FROM PAGE 1

seeking anticipatory bail in two corruption cases, which were lodged by the ACC.

One of the cases was filed over the misappropriation of Tk 13 lakh from the lease of six Kheya Ghats (boat stations) in Sathkira in the last 10 years.

The HC bench found that higher officials of Sathkira Zila Parishad were not implicated in the case, which was lodged with the ACC's Khulna office on January 27 against 12 people, including Chief Assistant of the Parishad Khalilur Rahman and Assistant SM Nazmul Hossain.

Khalilur and Nazmul filed a petition with the HC, seeking anticipatory bail. They also appeared before the HC bench yesterday.

The bench asked ACC Deputy Director in Khulna Md Nazmul Hossain and three senior officials of Sathkira Zila Parishad to appear before the court on February 14 to hear their explanation on the embezzlement of the state money.

During the hearing of the bail petition, the lawyers of the two accused, Md Ozi Ullah, told the court that the ACC implicated the lower-level officials of the Parishad in the case, excluding the higher-tier ones.

The HC asked ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan how lower-level officials could embezzle money, keeping their superiors in the dark.

The lawyer replied that the commission would implicate the higher officials if they were found involved in the corruption.

The HC bench said it could not be always happy with ACC's activities.

The bench held hearing on another anticipatory bail petition filed by Jahangir Alam, the then sub-registrar of Bhaluka upazila in Mymensingh. Now, he is a sub-registrar of Jashore.

The ACC filed the case with its Mymensingh district office against Jahangir and two others over misappropriating Tk 9 crore of two persons of Voradubi Union using forged documents.

"How a sub-registrar dares to commit such big corruption!" the HC exclaimed.

The bench refused to grant bail to Jahangir and ordered him to surrender to the trial court concerned in two weeks, Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik told The Daily Star.