

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



**619**

New cases in 24hrs



**5,48,549**

Total cases



**8,435**

Deaths



**5,00,468**

Recoveries



**2,574,825**

Deaths



**115,960,837**

Total cases

NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

# Existing problems should be resolved thru' discussion

PM tells visiting Indian external affairs minister

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the existing problems between neighbouring countries need to be resolved through discussions.

"There might be problems among neighbouring countries. The problems should be resolved through negotiations and discussions," she told visiting Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar when he met her at the Gono Bhaban.

PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters after the meeting.

The Indian minister praised Hasina's leadership for meeting the eligibility criteria for Bangladesh's graduation from the LDC group to a developing country.

"It's a great achievement. The development of Bangladesh is miraculous," Jaishankar was quoted as saying.

About Covid-19, Hasina said Bangladesh took prompt actions to check the pandemic by engaging all concerned, including physicians, law enforcers, members of the armed forces and the administration.

The PM said Bangladesh launched a nationwide vaccination programme last month. "The [inoculation] programme is being rolled out in phases as it aims to include everyone ..."

She appreciated the support received from India on Covid-19 vaccine.

Hasina said the economy of Bangladesh is progressing despite the pandemic, recent floods and cyclones.

Its remittance inflow has also increased during the period, she added.

She said the government also extended support to Bangladeshi expatriates who returned home during this tough time.

Jaishankar reaffirmed India's commitment to assist Bangladesh in facing the pandemic. "We all of this region face difficulties due to the Covid-19 pandemic."

He said it is a great honour for India to participate in the celebrations of Bangabandhu's birth centenary and Golden Jubilee of the independence of Bangladesh.

The Indian minister said he had a fruitful meeting with his Bangladeshi counterpart AK Abdul Momen over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh to join the Golden Jubilee celebrations.

Jaishankar presented two books, including one titled "Liberation War of Bangladesh" written by his father K Subrahmanyam, to Hasina.

The Bangladesh premier also gifted seven volumes of a 14-volume book titled "Secret Documents of Intelligence Branch on Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman" to the Indian minister.

Jaishankar arrived in Dhaka on Thursday morning on a brief official visit to Bangladesh at the invitation of Foreign Minister Momen.

PM's International Relations Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi, Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus, and Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Vikram K Doraiswami were present.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina talking to visiting Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar as he called on her at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

## Modi to visit Tungipara, Barishal

Bss, New Delhi

Alongside Bangabandhu Memorial in Tungipara, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Orakandi, a sacred shrine of the "Matua" community in Gopalganj, and "Satipith" in Shikarpur, Barishal, during his upcoming Bangladesh visit.

Modi is set to visit Bangladesh on March 26-27 at the invitation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to join the 50th anniversary celebration of the Independence of Bangladesh, the Birth Centenary of Bangabandhu, and the 50th year of Bangladesh-India diplomatic ties.

The Indian premier is set to visit the Bangabandhu memorial in Tungipara to pay homage to Bangladesh's Founding Father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 27 and on the same day he is expected to visit Orakandi temple and "Satipith".

Diplomatic sources told BSS that if everything goes well PM Modi is likely to visit Orakandi Temple to pay homage to Harichand Thakur, the founder of the "Matua" community and "Sugandha Shaktipith" (Satipith) in Shikarpur in Barishal district.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 2

## Crystal death summoned

FROM PAGE 1

country's various airports, mostly from Malaysia.

It is sold to affluent people living in upscale neighborhoods -- 10g at minimum Tk 1 lakh, said Detective Branch officials.

Crystal meth is the common name for crystal methamphetamine, a powerful drug that affects the central nervous system. It comes in the form of clear crystal chunks or shiny blue-white rocks.

Use of the drug poses high risks of stroke, heart attack, teeth decay, and permanent hallucinations, among other short and long-term health effects, according to the website of the US National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Smugglers use different techniques such as calling it a "gold-melting chemical" to deceive law enforcers, according to the officials of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, which is currently investigating a case regarding the smuggling and sale of crystal meth.

The case was filed following the arrest of six people from Bashundhara, Gulshan and Banani areas in the capital on November 4 last year. During the drive, the arrestees were found in possession of around 600g crystal meth.

The six include the drug syndicate's Bangladesh chapter leader Chandan and his sub-dealers Siraj, Ovi, Jewel, Rubaiyat, and Canny, said officials.

Chandan, a gold shop owner, used to sell the drug in broad daylight -- saying it was a chemical for melting gold, they added.

Police later arrested a female dealer of the syndicate -- Nusrat -- after collecting information from the six. A readymade garments factory owner, she is allegedly involved in maintaining a drug network of around 50 people.

Officials investigating the case said all the arrestees themselves were crystal meth addicts.

Regarding the Malaysian connection, investigators said they have already identified three people, including a relative of Chandan, mainly responsible for maintaining the racket from Malaysia.

Assistant Commissioner of DB police Javed Iqbal Pritom told The Daily Star recently that they have already collected some details of the smugglers living abroad.

The DB official, however, refused to disclose further details for the sake of investigation.

**COMES BY AIR, LAND**

Crystal meth was found arriving in Bangladesh through different airports until last month.

On February 25, Rab-7 arrested two drug peddlers with this drug during a raid in Muzaffarnagar area of Chattogram.

The arrestees were identified as Shaful Alam, 34, and Yasin Rana, 50. The elite force recovered 150g of crystal meth from their possession.

"We have primarily come to know that the consignment entered Bangladesh from Myanmar but it may have originated from another country," said Major Musfiqur Rahman of Rab-7, involved with the operation.

Replying to a question, he said a

### CRYSTAL METH FACTS

- » A form of methamphetamine
- » Increases dopamine production in brain
- » Highly addictive
- » Popular among young adults at dance clubs, parties
- » May cause speech problems, stroke, heart attack, tooth decay, hallucinations

snorting, injecting directly into the body, or taking in the form of tablets.

Once friends at these parties show interest in the drug, the hosts then provide it, said the official. "Ice dealers never sell it to unknown people, and they provide home delivery," he added.

DBAC Javed Iqbal said they are now looking for drug users to get further details of dealers as they are known to each other and interconnected.

Associate Professor at the National Institute of Mental Health Mekhala Sarkar told The Daily Star recently that the effects of ice are devastating.

"Ice-addicted people may face hallucination, delusion and even schizophrenia-like symptoms may develop. Symptoms of paranoia are likely to develop among the patients."

"If an addict takes this drug for a long period, the person might face depression and may behave abnormally. Physical problems like hypertension, stroke, brain hemorrhage and sexual dysfunction may be observed among the patients," she added.

**CRYSTAL METH TRAVERSING BORDERS**

In the fourth bilateral meeting between the DNC of Bangladesh and Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) of Myanmar on December 15 last year, Myanmar's officials claimed that they have seized around 16.8 tonnes of ice from January 1 to November 30, 2020.

They also claimed that ice and amphetamines were mainly smuggled from China and Thailand to Myanmar, according to sources present at the meeting.

Director (intelligence and operation) of DNC Kusum Dewan, told The Daily Star recently that they were surprised and worried to know about such a huge quantity of ice recovered in Myanmar.

"We have already increased our vigilance and started collecting information about the sources of ice," added the DNC director.

DB police said they have come to know that the persons involved in smuggling crystal meth from Malaysia are also involved in smuggling the drug from China and other countries.

HM Azimul Haque, deputy commissioner of DB (Ramna Division) police, said they have already arrested a number of people and drives are on to arrest others involved in smuggling ice.

This drug is more hazardous than yaba, he told this paper, saying people should be made aware and alerted about the side effects of crystal meth.

On February 14, Abdur Rauf Mia, a deputy secretary of the home ministry, directed the DNC to implement the decision of setting up scanners and dog squads at airports and land and river ports to detect narcotics entering the country.

The decision was taken in the first meeting of the national narcotics control advisory committee, held on December 27 last year, virtually presided over by Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal.

clandestine market of crystal meth has started to grow in Bangladesh.

On Wednesday, a team of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) recovered 2kg of it from Teknaf upazila.

DNC officials said the consignment came to Myanmar from Thailand and then entered Bangladesh through the Teknaf border, an established gateway for yaba. Its destination was Dhaka.

On June 28, 2019, DNC arrested a Nigerian national from Dhaka with around 500g of ice. It was learnt that the drug came to the man, Ajah Anayochukwa Onyeanywusi, through a parcel service from Uganda.

On February 27, the department busted a narcotic manufacturing lab and recovered five grams of crystal meth from Jhigatola in the capital. The drug reportedly came from Thailand to Bangladesh, said DNC officials.

According to an intelligence official, methamphetamine goes to Myanmar from Thailand and China to be used in making yaba. Sometimes, Bangladesh and India are used as a transit route, said the official.

**SMUGGLED IN TRAVELLERS' BAGS**

Syndicate members often convince expatriates that they want to send a gift to their relatives living in Bangladesh and then put the drug inside gift items like packets of coffee and tea, chocolate boxes or blankets, according to investigators.

The drug is also hidden in silica gel packets, and if anyone asks, the expats are coached to say that these are used for removing moisture, they said.

In a majority of cases, the syndicate's local members receive the packets from the airport as soon as the expatriates clear customs and other checks on arrival.

Quoting the arrestees, a high official of DB said if any expatriate refuses to bring a package to Bangladesh, the syndicate would convince him or her by offering an expensive gift.

**HIGH SOCIETY CUSTOMERS**

Investigators claim to have gathered information of over 100 users of ice in the country -- the list includes businessmen, private university students, and youngsters from rich families in Dhaka.

These users mainly became addicted to the drug when they went abroad and they provide it at parties they throw for their friends in the country, said a DB official.

Users take crystal meth by smoking,

## Fate of 56 cases still up

FROM PAGE 1

accused".

Following an HC order, the ACC quizzed former BASIC Bank Chairman Sheikh Abdul Hye Bacchu at least five times between 2018 and early 2019, and questioned all directors of the then bank's board. But there was not much headway in its investigation.

In contrast, when a loan scam of over Tk 10,000 crore in the country's four non-banking financial institutions (NBFIs) came to the fore in 2019, the ACC took little time to uncover the channels through which money was routed before reaching the destination.

When asked why charge sheets have not yet been submitted, outgoing ACC Chairman Iqbal Mahmood, in office since March 2016, in an exclusive interview said he had restructured the pattern of investigation and enquiry after assuming office.

"This is a question [the delay in submitting the charge sheets] I get asked often, and rightly so, based on the gravity of the crime."

"One has to take into account that these cases were lodged with the ACC before its restructuring," he said.

Iqbal reiterated that the ACC has already instructed the investigation officers to trace the destinations of the siphoned money relating to the BASIC Bank loan scam.

"These cases and their investigations are still ongoing. As the chairman, I am unable to comment on cases under investigation," he added.

Last month, the ACC chairman hinted lightly at the fate of the 56 cases the commission had filed in connection with the scam in 2015.

On February 8, at the launch of the ACC's 2019 Annual Report during a views-exchange meeting, Iqbal said around Tk 3,500 crore out of Tk 4,500 crore had been returned to BASIC Bank.

"Let's wait and see whether the final report is given instead of charge sheets," he said.

Ironically, neither former BASIC Bank Chairman Sheikh Abdul Hye Bacchu nor any of the bank board members were named as the accused in these cases.

The perpetrators will undoubtedly be brought to justice in due time, the ACC chairman said, adding that in order to carry out this justice effectively, the ACC has to complete a transparent, detailed, and credible investigation.

The mistaken implication of jute mill worker Jaha Alam in corruption cases in 2019 has been another stain on Iqbal's five-year career.

This commission came under fire for the investigation officers' mistake in 2019 when Alam, wrongly imprisoned for more than three years in place of the actual accused Abu Salek, was released following media reports and the HC's intervention.

**SOME GOOD PRACTICES**

However, some bold steps were taken by this commission under Iqbal's leadership, that offered some solace to justice seekers.

For instance, the introduction of the anti-corruption hotline, 106, was a milestone. Soon after the beginning of the service, the ACC's call center was flooded with allegations, on the basis of which the ACC nabbed several government officials on bribery charges.

Another commendable task carried out by the commission under Iqbal's leadership was bringing several dark spots of corruption at different government organisations to light -- though its recommendations went mostly unheeded, as the chairman himself recently admitted at the views-exchange meeting last month.

Asked, the outgoing chairman said there are no better alternatives to systemic reforms for reducing corruption and harassment prevalent in the delivery of public services.

Had the government followed the ACC's recommendations, the systemic anomalies, corruption and procrastination prevalent in the government's service-providing agencies could have been mitigated exponentially, Iqbal observed.

He also suggested that the cabinet division takes up the responsibility of implementing and enforcing the anti-graft watchdog's recommendations to ensure corruption- and hassle-free services for the public.

## Big haul of meth seized

FROM PAGE 1

Director General Ahsanul Jabbar, adding that the estimated price of the recovered substance would be around Tk 10 crore.

The rich people are the usual consumers of the substance, Jabbar told a press briefing at the DNC office in the capital's Segunbagicha yesterday.

Officers said this has been the largest consignment of Ice to be caught in Bangladesh.

On November 6, 2020, the Detective Branch of police recovered 600gram of Ice.

In June, 201, the DNC recovered around 500 grams of Ice.

DNC officials said the highly addictive drug is popular in Thailand.

The seized consignment came from Thailand to Myanmar and then to

Bangladesh, said Jabbar.

He added that officers had information about the stash since six months ago, he said.

Jabbar didn't say where the stash was intended to be sold. "It will be disclosed after further investigation."

A case was filed with Teknaf Police Station against Abdullah and his brother Abdur Rahman, who is on the run now.

Officers still don't know who is behind smuggling the drugs into Bangladesh, Jabbar added.

The DNC laboratory confirmed that the substance was 100 percent methamphetamine.

Jabbar said Ice is 100 times more powerful than yaba pills and it can be smoked in pipes, snorted in, injected or swallowed.

## Fake businessmen joined hands with

FROM PAGE 1

non-bank financial institution.

The liquidation process began after the board of People's Leasing informed the central bank in April 2019 about its inability to pay back its depositors' money despite maturity of the deposits.

The HC said the situation in People's Leasing resulted in a few hundred depositors and creditors filing petitions with the court.

"When the country is receiving recognition of acquiring financial solvency at the cost of hard work with unquestionable integrity of the head of the government from foreign countries and international bodies, it is really alarming for the nation to notice that a vested group is hatching plots to destabilise the economic

growth of the country."

The HC bench wanted to directly consult with the chairman of Anti-Corruption Commission, governor of Bangladesh Bank and chairman of Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) for solutions to the predicaments regarding PLFSL and other financial institutions.

It invited them to attend a virtual meeting with the court at 2:30pm on March 9.

"There shall not be presence of any lawyer or any other person at the time of the proposed conference," Justice Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar said in the full text of order.

It said if one of the three officials are unable to attend the meeting, the others would not be required to

## 1.21 lakh more get vaccinated

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of Covid-19 vaccine recipients continued rising for the second consecutive day as another 1,21,010 people were vaccinated all over the country yesterday.

Between Sunday and Tuesday, the number of people vaccinated daily was declining.

On Sunday, 1,25,752 people were vaccinated, while 1,16,300 were vaccinated on Monday and 1,14,680 on Tuesday, according to Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) data.

The number started rising again from Tuesday, when 1,18,654 people were vaccinated.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3