

BANGLADESH UPDATE

912
New cases in 24hrs

5,52,087
Total cases

8,489
Deaths

5,05,349
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

2,617,405
Deaths

118,014,531
Total cases

Maintain highest possible caution

Says PM on Covid; infection rate crosses 5 percent

STAR REPORT

With the Covid infection rate on the rise, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the people to follow the health safety protocols to check the spread of the virus in the country.

She made the call at the weekly cabinet meeting at the Secretariat, joining it virtually from the Gono Bhaban, reports BSS.

Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam briefed reporters later.

"Wherever we are -- vaccinated or not -- we should follow three protocols -- wear facemasks, maintain the highest possible caution and crowd less in public places such as recreational sites or social events," Anwarul quoted the PM as saying.

At the meeting, Hasina said, "We don't think that we are in a comfort zone. Yes, we are in a much better position ... it doesn't give us the certainty that we are in a comfort zone."

Over the last few days, experts have been suggesting not to be at ease at this moment as the country saw the highest infection rate in the last summer.

The PM said, "It cannot be assured that Covid infection would not peak again."

"The peak [Covid infection] was in the high summer though all of us thought it would happen in winter... April, May and June [this year] will be our high summer and that is why our experts suggest that we remain cautious in these months."

No one is fully protected with a single shot of vaccine. All are advised to

wear facemasks even after inoculation, she told the meeting.

In reply to a query about steps to encourage people to wear facemasks, the cabinet secretary said they are observing the situation and carrying out different campaigns to that end.

About the decline in the number of vaccinations, he said the health ministry and the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) are working for mass inoculation.

Motivational programmes are being carried out in unions and upazilas to make the people aware of the health protocols to curb the spread of the virus, he mentioned.

Asked what measures the government will take if the infection rate jumps again, the cabinet secretary said the government has so far worked prioritising people's life and livelihood and will do so in future.

Meanwhile, at least 912 people tested positive for the novel coronavirus across the country in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, taking the total number of Covid cases to 552,087, according to the DGHS.

Earlier on Monday, the health authorities confirmed 845 new cases. The number was 606 on Sunday.

The daily infection rate rose to 5.13 percent yesterday. It was 4.98 percent on Monday and 4.3 percent on Sunday, according to DGHS data.

Bangladesh reported its first Covid case on March 8 last year and the first death on March 18.

The virus has so far claimed 8,489 lives in the country.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

The Maitree Shetu over the Feni River in Khagrachhari's Ramgarh upazila. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi jointly inaugurated the 1.9km bridge virtually yesterday. The bridge connected Sabroom of India's Tripura state with Ramgarh of Bangladesh. The photo was taken on Sunday.

One step forward

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Attending the event virtually, Sheikh Hasina said Bangladesh expects the bridge to help the country conduct trade more smoothly with Nepal and Bhutan alongside India.

"We're creating a new era in South Asia, providing connectivity to India. I think the Maitri Setu will further connect the two nations and play a significant role in business, trade and economic development."

"The event is taking place at a time when we are celebrating the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence, and 50th year of Bangladesh-India diplomatic relations," she added.

The prime minister also expected the Maitri Setu to significantly improve the socioeconomic condition of the people of Tripura and the surrounding north-eastern states of India. She hoped it will also contribute towards improving the livelihoods of those living on the Bangladeshi side of the bridge.

She said Bangladesh's growth trajectory and its geographic location make it an extremely attractive South Asian neighbour.

As one of the global leaders in textile production, Bangladesh carved its

distinct path and has become a favoured destination for foreign investment, she added.

Hasina said Bangladesh is ready to maximise its locational advantage as a connectivity hub between South and Southeast Asia.

"We believe the cross-border transport systems that Bangladesh is developing with India is an important step in this regard and will enable us to play an important role in regional trade and commerce," she said.

The Feni bridge is a testimony to the Bangladesh government's continued commitment to support India in strengthening connectivity in the region, particularly for the northeast of India, said Hasina.

She recalled that India opened up its border in 1971 for Bangladesh's people to support their struggle for freedom.

"Today, we're building a prosperous region together. I wish [for] successful operation and utilisation of the Feni Maitri Setu."

Modi thanked the Bangladesh government and Hasina for the cooperation in the completion of the bridge project.

Due to the bridge over the Feni, Tripura state's capital Agartala will become the city nearest to an international sea port in India, said Modi.

It is poised to herald a new chapter for trade and people-to-people movement between India and Bangladesh, our New Delhi correspondent reports, quoting a statement of Indian Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

With this inauguration, Tripura has now become the "Gateway of North East" with access to the Chattogram port of Bangladesh, which is just 80 kilometres from Sabroom, it said.

Modi also inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of multiple infrastructure projects in Tripura during the event, via video conferencing, reports India TV news.

The Indian National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd started the project at a cost of Rs 133 crore, said the PMO statement.

Modi also laid the foundation stone for setting up an Integrated Check Post at Sabroom, which will help ease the movement of goods and passengers between the two countries, provide new market opportunities for products of north-eastern states and assist seamless movement of passengers to and from India and Bangladesh, the Indian PMO said.

The project is being taken up by the Land Ports Authority of India at an estimated cost of about Rs 232 crore, the statement said.

Rajshahi AL seeks govt permission for filing sedition case against Minu

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi city Awami League yesterday sought approval from the government to file a sedition case against Mizanur Rahman Minu, an adviser to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, over his remarks on "repeating 1975 assassination".

Musabbirul Islam, law affairs secretary of the city AL, submitted the application to the district magistrate under Section 196 (Ka) of the Criminal Procedure of Bangladesh.

In his application, he also sought the government's permission for accusing

the central BNP Organizing Secretary Ruhul Kuddus Talukhder Dulu, Rajshahi city BNP President Mosaddek Hossain Bulbul, and Secretary Shafiqul Haque Milon in the same sedition case.

The District Magistrate and Deputy Commissioner of Rajshahi Abdul Jalil received the letter and told Musabbirul that he would send the letter to the home ministry for its approval.

In his application, Musabbirul wanted to file a case under sections 123 (Ka), 124 (Ka) and 34 of the Penal Code for the accused persons gave "anti-state remarks to uproot an elected government".

HC upholds Salim

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imprisonment to Salim for concealing information about his wealth to the Anti-Corruption Commission.

Delivering the verdict following an appeal by Salim, the HC also said his illegal wealth worth Tk 27 crore would remain confiscated.

Beside, the HC ordered the AL leader to surrender before the trial court concerned in 30 days once the latter receives a copy of the verdict. It said if he fails to do so within the given time, the Dhaka court can issue an arrest warrant for him.

The HC bench of Justice Md Moinul Islam Chowdhury and Justice AKM Zahirul Huq delivered the verdict after rehearing the appeal.

The HC bench, however, abated another appeal filed by Salim's wife Gulshan Ara Begum challenging the trial court judgment that had sentenced her to three years' imprisonment in the same case.

Gulshan Ara died in November last year.

The bench said in the verdict that the ACC has been able to prove the charges brought against Salim that he possessed wealth beyond known sources of his income. Therefore, the trial court verdict stays affirmed.

The ACC, however, failed to prove the charge that Salim concealed information about his wealth to the ACC and therefore, the three years' imprisonment sentence was scrapped. He is acquitted of this charge, the court said.

Details of the grounds and observations on which the HC bench delivered the verdict could not be known as the full text was not released yesterday.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star that Salim could no longer remain an MP as per Article (2) (d) of the constitution as the HC upheld his 10 years' jail sentence.

Salim's lawyer Sayed Ahmed Raza, however, said his client would move an appeal before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court challenging the HC verdict.

"My clients parliamentary membership will stay as the issue will be settled by the apex court," he told this correspondent.

Contacted, eminent legal expert Dr Shahdeen Malik said usually a parliamentary membership of a person does not get scrapped until the issue of his or her conviction is settled by the apex court.

He, however, said no judgement clarified that the verdict of which court -- the trial court or the appeal court (the HC) or the final court (Appellate Division) -- should be considered for cancelling the Jatiya Sangsad membership of Salim.

Shahdeen said Salim continued being a lawmaker after the lower court handed him 13 years' imprisonment as his appeal against the judgement remained pending with the HC.

and Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya were also convicted by lower courts, but their parliamentary memberships were not cancelled as their appeals were pending with the appeal court, he added.

On April 27, 2008, the Special Judge's Court-7 of Dhaka convicted Haji Salim and sentenced him to a total 13 years' imprisonment over two separate charges brought in the corruption case.

The court also sentenced his wife for abetting her husband's crime and keeping the ill-gotten wealth in her possession.

She was also fined Tk 1 lakh, in default of which she had to suffer six more months in prison.

Judge Sirajul Islam of Special Judge's Court-7, set up on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises, also fined Salim Tk 10 lakh, in default of which he had to stay another year in jail.

Besides, the judge issued orders for confiscating all his ill-gotten assets worth Tk 27 crore.

Salim and his wife Gulshan Ara were tried in absentia.

They filed two separate appeals with the HC on October 25, 2009, against the trial court verdict. Following his appeal, the HC on January 2, 2011, acquitted Salim of the corruption case.

The ACC then appealed against the HC verdict to the Appellate Division.

The Appellate Division on January 12, 2015, scrapped the HC verdict and directed the HC to hold a rehearing of Salim's appeal and to dispose of the appeal again.

SALIM'S JS MEMBERSHIP
The parliament secretariat will make a decision on Salim's JS membership once the ACC sends documents regarding the HC verdict to the Speaker and the secretariat.

Zafar Ahmed Khan, senior secretary at the secretariat, confirmed the matter to The Daily Star.

He said they did not receive the documents last night.

"The Speaker will take necessary measures regarding Haji Selim's membership in parliament in line with the constitution after getting the documents from the Anti-Corruption Commission," said the senior secretary.

According to the Article 66 of the constitution, there are several provisions under which an MP shall be disqualified for being a member of parliament.

One of the provision says: "A person shall be disqualified for election as, or for being, a member of parliament who has been, on conviction for a criminal offence involving moral turpitude, sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than two years, unless a period of five years has elapsed since his release."

In the same Article, it also says in case of any dispute over vacating membership of the respective MP, it shall be referred to the Election Commission to hear and determine it and the decision of the commission on such reference shall be final.

It can boost nat'l income by 17pc

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border at Petrapole-Benapole, the most important border post between the two countries, takes 138 hours, including 28 hours for transloading cargo, the report mentioned.

In contrast, the time to cross border points handling similar volumes of traffic in other regions of the world, including East Africa, is less than six hours.

The northeastern part of India is particularly isolated from the rest of the country and connected only through the 27-km-wide Siliguri corridor called "chicken's neck". This leads to long and costly routes. Goods from Agartala, for example, travel 1,600 km through the Siliguri corridor to reach the Kolkata port, instead of 450 km via Bangladesh.

Cargo transported by train also has to be transloaded at the border, because of restrictions on the use of freight wagons of foreign railways. Cargo shipped between Bangladesh and India in seagoing vessels has to be transhipped in Colombo or ports in East Asia, such as Singapore and Port Klang.

"If the borders were open to Indian trucks, goods from Agartala would have to travel just 200 kilometers to the Chattogram port in Bangladesh,

and the transport costs to the port would be 80 percent lower," the report said.

Seamless regional connectivity requires road, rail and inland water corridors as well as land, river, and seaports that can handle current and future freight volumes in a timely and cost-effective manner.

"Under full integration, exports and imports would be cleared at the destination, obviating the need even to stop at the border. Thus, income would increase by 16.6 percent in Bangladesh and 7.6 percent in India," the report adds.

Districts in Bangladesh would see reduction in prices of goods and inputs from India and get higher prices for their exports, said the report.

The eastern districts would benefit the most, because of their comparative advantage, which would lead workers in southwest Bangladesh to migrate to the north and east of the country where real wages would increase by as much as 37 percent, it said.

For several years, South Asian countries attempted to reach multilateral agreements to create integrated and modern transit systems across the region. These attempts failed, largely because of tensions between India and Pakistan.

1 killed, 30 hurt in AL factional clash

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Mayor Quader Mirza, brother of Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader, and Companiganj upazila unit Awami League Organising Secretary Mizanur Rahman Badal at Basurhat Bazar around 6:00pm.

The Noakhali administration imposed section 144 in Basurhat for 18 hours from 6:00am today, said Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Companiganj Ziaul Haque Mir.

The clash sparked yesterday evening when allegedly Quader Mirza's supporters attacked a rally organised by Badal's supporters to protest an attack on Khizir Hayat Khan, former president of Companiganj upazila AL, reportedly by Mirza's men the day before.

Both groups chased each other and threw brick chunks, exploded

crude bombs, and fired shots for over two hours, witnesses said.

Alauddin, 22, son of Momtun Haque of Charkali village in Char Fakira union, was killed.

Resident doctor Syed Mohiuddin Abdul Aziz at Noakhali General Hospital said Alauddin was dead on arrival.

He was shot and stabbed. The doctor said 12 were taken to his hospital with gunshot wounds.

The condition of an injured was so severe that he was referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

AL leaders said deceased Alauddin was a Chhatra League activist but both groups claimed him to be their man.

Talking to reporters, Companiganj AL Organising Secretary Badal alleged that the clash ensued as followers of Quader Mirza attacked their rally at

Maksuda Girls High School.

Badal was the chief guest of the programme.

Contacted, Quader Mirza said he did not know who attacked the rally. He denied his and his men's involvement.

Rabiul Haque, inspector (investigation) of Companiganj Police Station said the OC of the police station and five other cops were injured trying to calm the feuding factions.

A team of Rab-11 and additional policemen had to go to the spot to bring the situation under control, said Md Alamgir Hossain, superintendent of Noakhali police.

On February 19, journalist Borhan Uddin Muzakkir, 30, was shot in Companiganj upazila during a clash between the two groups.

Both groups used firearms and

PBI presses

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Rangpur police, Sumaiya Parvin Meghla, Suravi Aktar, Mohammad Babu, and Mohammad Kalam.

Rahenul has been suspended after the incident.

Saiful Islam, an inspector of PBI in Rangpur, filed the 367-page charge sheet against the five persons, including Rahenul, yesterday noon before the court.

Court sources said that PBI pressed charges against Rahenul and two other women Meghla and Suravi, under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, while human trafficking charge was pressed against Kalam and Babul, who were arrested from Lalmonirhat.

ABM Zakir Hossain, superintendent of PBI in Rangpur, confirmed to the local journalists.

A court source, quoting the charge sheet, said that accused Rahenul Islam, who was then posted to Haragachh Police Station, built an affair relationship with a tenth grader girl of Haragachh Municipality in Kaunia upazila of Rangpur.

Rahenul went to the rented house of Sumaiya Parvin Meghla, taking the tenth grader victim on October 18 last year.

There he raped the girl. Later, Rahenul himself had dropped the girl at her home at around 10:00pm.

Babul and Kalam raped the girl again later that night. After the rape, the girl became sick.

Police rescued the girl the next day from the rented house of Meghla.

Afterward, the girl's father filed a case with Haragachh Police Station accusing Rahenul and Meghla.

The case was later handed over to PBI in Rangpur.

The PBI high officials said the victim gave her testimony before the court. Rahenul also confessed his involvement with the incident.

DNA testing was also conducted on the victim and the accused. It was a gang-rape, as the police investigation found, said the SP.

the sub-region, especially as it begins its economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic."

"States bordering Bangladesh such as Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura in the northeast, and West Bengal on the west, and states further away from Bangladesh such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra would gain huge economic benefits from seamless connectivity," he mentioned.

Tembon said the WB is supporting infrastructure development in the Western Corridor, and more funding is in the pipeline.

The global lender suggested that countries need to address a number of challenges such as infrastructure deficits, particularly in designated border posts, and harmonisation of regulations and customs procedures. Matias noted that the regional transport agreements can achieve full potential by adopting good practices, addressing gaps and inconsistencies in infrastructure and market failures in transport services.

He also suggested adopting complementary policies that remove binding constraints caused by market imperfections. The regional corridors also need to connect the markets and areas that are lagging behind for reaping full benefits.

police had to open fire to bring the situation under control.

Muzakkir died a day later at DMCH.

Quader Mirza has been making comments against corruption and misdeeds committed by AL men in Noakhali and Feni for the last two months. On multiple occasions, he even came down heavily on government officials for their alleged involvement with corrupt politicians.

On February 18, Quader Mirza and his followers enforced a half-day shutdown in Companiganj upazila, demanding the transfer of some government officials and punishment of some party men for "their involvement in corruption".

Local AL leaders claim that supporters of Quader Mirza took away all the furniture from the party office and later padlocked it.

HC asks Wasa to sever their water supply

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The bench made the remarks during hearing a writ petition, filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB) in May 2010, seeking necessary directives to close the drains and sewage lines connected

to the Buriganga and to save it from pollution.

Yesterday, the HC bench asked Dhaka Wasa and Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) to make the owners and users of the structures and buildings, which do not have sewage

lines and septic tanks, aware by issuing notices and making announcements through loudspeakers on the banks of the Buriganga before snapping their water supply connections.

The HC bench came up with the directives after examining two

compliance reports submitted by Dhaka Wasa, a report submitted by Dhaka South City Corporation and another one submitted by HRPB, writ petitioner's lawyer Manzill Murshid told The Daily Star.