

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,018
New cases in 24hrs



5,53,105
Total cases



8,496
Deaths



5,0496
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



2,626,808
Deaths



118,453,309
Total cases

13,886 child marriages took place during lockdown last year

Says MJF study covering 21 dists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 13,886 child marriages took place in 21 districts during the months of the lockdown last year, a study by Manusher Jonno Foundation has found.

The loss of earning and other difficulties amid the coronavirus restrictions were the key reasons behind the early marriage, it found.

The study titled "Rapid Analysis of Child Marriage Situation during Covid-19" includes a survey among 20,575 respondents, 63 focus group discussions, and 105 key informant interviews conducted in November, 2020, in 84 upazilas of the 21 districts.

Experts said the survey offered a partial view of the reality and the situation across the country could be even worse.

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) is expected to officially unveil the findings today. MJF conducted the survey with support from Plan International Bangladesh.

"The number of child marriage has increased across the world during the pandemic. In Bangladesh, since we found such large numbers in the specific study areas, we fear that many more child marriages have taken place across the country," MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam told The Daily Star.

A national-level survey by the government might be able to depict a more accurate picture, she added.

Uncertainty over the future and loss of employment and earning opportunities were cited the most as the reason behind child marriages, she said.

"Child marriage has long term consequences like dropout from schools and unwanted pregnancies. The government has to seriously think how it can provide support to the girls who got married during the pandemic."

Senior Programme Manager Shaikh Giasuddin Ahmed of MJF said in almost 78 percent of the instances of child marriage, the people involved said they were aware that child marriage was illegal and they knew the legal age for marriage.

Of them, about 96 percent said they didn't support child marriage, he added.

In 78 percent of the incidents, it

was a parent who took the initiative of child marriage.

At least 4,866 child marriages were recorded by marriage registrars, according to the data.

Survey data reveals that 30 percent of the respondents mentioned that increased poverty and not being able to arrange basic necessities for family members during the pandemic led to the early marriages.

"Marrying off daughters means there is one less mouth to feed during the economic crisis. The family members' job or business loss due to Covid-19 was a very important factor mentioned by the survey respondents," said Giasuddin.

"Another important reason was the closure of educational institutions which resulted in girls being stuck at home and mostly idle," he added.

Apart from the survey respondents, the study collected data from focus group discussions participated by 178 married and 198 unmarried girls and 202 parents. The 105 key informants included local government representatives, upazila nirbahi officers, officials from the Department of Women Affairs, marriage registrars, village elders, teachers, and police.

Some of the key informants said dowry was a reality for many people and the parents married off their girls during the pandemic in the hope of paying less.

Giasuddin said the survey was conducted mostly among the beneficiaries of MJF's partner organisations in every region of the country.

Respondents of the survey included 8,338 unmarried girls aged 10-19; 8,318 parents who have at least one daughter aged 10-19; and over 3,900 girls who had been married before the age of 18.

All the questions and discussions with the respondents were based on their experiences between April and October, 2020, he added.

Plan International Bangladesh Country Director Orla Murphy said, "We are only beginning to realise some of the consequences of Covid-19, particularly for women and girls. This is just a partial view of the actual scenario of child marriage and the increasing rate will have significant negative impacts on the future of children."



President Abdul Hamid getting inoculated against Covid-19 at the Bangabhaban yesterday. This is his first dose of the vaccine.

PHOTO: PID

Fears of a fresh surge growing

FROM PAGE 1

"People seem to care little about social distancing and are not wearing masks. That's why the transmission rate is now high. Hospital admission is also rising. It is frightening and highly concerning," Health Minister Zahid Maleque told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are trying to overcome the situation, but people seem to be trying to go backwards. We don't want to see what happened in the US or Europe. We have already sent directives to the deputy commissioners across the country to limit social and political gatherings."

The health minister also said that newspaper ads will be published soon, urging people to follow the health guidelines.

The daily positivity rate remained low for a while after the first Covid-19 cases were detected on March 8, 2020.

It started rising from mid-May last year when the positivity rate climbed to above 20 percent and stayed there until the third week of August. Then the rate started dropping. The country recorded the lowest daily infection rate of 2.26 percent on February 13.

But from March, it started rising and on March 9, the daily infection rate crossed the 5 percent mark, according to DGHS.

ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of the DGHS, said people's carelessness was really frustrating.

After taking their first shot of the vaccine, many people may have been thinking they are safe, he said. But that is not the case, he added.

"If people are not aware of the danger, what can we do?" he asked.

The government started its mass inoculation on February 7 and have so far administered over 40 lakh doses of the Oxford vaccine.

Asked whether the more lethal UK variant of the coronavirus, detected in the country in January, has anything to do with the recent rise, the DG said, "It is difficult to say whether the UK variant is the reason."

People arriving from abroad should strictly follow the quarantine rules. Otherwise, the situation will go out of hand, he added.

Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) at the DGHS, said the government must ensure strict

quarantine and isolation of the people coming from abroad, especially the UK.

"If needed, air travel can be suspended from certain countries," he said.

There is no scientific proof of whether the virus spreads faster in winter or summer in a country, he said.

"There was an apprehension that the Covid-19 virus would spread more severely in the winter, but fortunately, it had not. With the summer approaching, we are seeing that the germ is spreading. But it has more to do with how strictly we are enforcing the health guidelines."

Mushtaq Hossain, an adviser to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), stressed on the need for finding the source and cause of infections.

"We have to analyse whether the infection positivity rate increases in a specific area or across the country. We have to find out the reason before things go out of control. If we are complacent, there will be a disaster," he said.

One group is led by Quader Mirza and another by Companiganj upazila AL Organising Secretary Mizanur Rahman Badal.

The clash broke out when Quader Mirza's supporters allegedly attacked a rally organised by Badal's supporters to protest an attack on Khizir Hayat Khan, former president of Companiganj upazila AL.

Khizir was assaulted reportedly by Mirza's men.

Badal was the chief guest of the programme held at Rupali Chattar.

Both the groups chased each other and threw brick chunks, exploded crude bombs, and fired shots for over two hours, witnesses said.

At least 30 people, including six police personnel, were injured. Twelve of them sustained gunshot wounds.

The local administration imposed section 144 in Basurhat for 18 hours from 6:00am yesterday.

The man killed in the fresh clash was identified as Alauddin, 22, of Charkali village in the same upazila. He was a driver of CNG-run auto-rickshaw and was carrying passengers in the area while the clash ensued, said locals.

Madrasa teacher

FROM PAGE 1

Maulana Yahya was seen dragging him by the neck into a room. Later, he starts violently beating the student with a cane, asking why he went outside the madrasa.

The little boy cried his heart out but was not spared.

The incident happened at Markazul Islami Academy Hafezia Madrasa in Hathazari Sadar upazila of Chattogram.

The upazila administration, after being informed of the matter, rescued the boy and detained the teacher yesterday morning.

Following the incident, the madrasa authorities sacked the teacher from the institution.

However, the parents decided not to lodge a complaint or take legal action against the teacher.

"After the video of the beating went viral on social media, we immediately went to the madrasa with police and rescued the boy around 12:45am today [Wednesday]. We also detained the teacher," said Ruhul Amin, upazila nirbahi officer of Hathazari, yesterday.

"Yasin's parents also came to the madrasa last night [Tuesday]. But after meeting the madrasa authorities, they decided not to lodge any complaint and requested not to take any legal action against the teacher."

"It was his [Yasin's] birthday yesterday [Tuesday] and we gave him some toys," the UNO said.

"We will hold a meeting with all the teachers of the madrasa so that they follow the ministry's instructions [on corporal punishment]. If anyone violates the order, action will be taken."

A 2011 circular by the education ministry banned corporal punishment in educational settings, and the draft Education Act, currently in its final stage, also seeks to impose a ban on corporal punishment and mental torture by teachers.

Police are preparing to file a case against the madrasa teacher for his unruly act, said the duty officer of Hathazari Police Station.

The teacher is in police custody, he added.

Rainforest vanishing

FROM PAGE 1

"Uncontrolled forest harvesting is the key reason behind the degradation of rainforest in the country. The degraded area is expanding day by day though afforestation is also going on. But it will take time to get results," said Ishiaq Uddin Ahmad, former chief conservator of forests.

"The main danger of rainforest degradation is that it puts wildlife in peril. Loss of habitats hampers breeding of wild animals..."

"This is a severe threat to wild animals and biodiversity," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Contacted, Md Rakibul Hasan Mukul, deputy chief conservator of forests at the Department of Forest, said deforestation or degradation takes place mainly in the Sal forest and hilly areas.

"Every year, around 9,000 hectares of forest are degraded in the country, but at the same time, we afforest many areas... People's massive participation is needed to keep the forests intact."

Hasan said the government has already taken up a number of projects for afforestation and also to stop deforestation.

The RFN report said 3,024 square km of tropical forest were degraded in India, 99 square km in Sri Lanka, 67 square km in Bhutan and 36 square km in Nepal between 2002 and 2019.

According to it, just 36% of global rainforest -- from the Amazon to Sumatra to the Congo Basin -- remains

fully intact.

The ongoing loss of rainforest and tropical ecosystem threatens the stability of the climate, food system, water supply and biodiversity, warns the report published on Tuesday.

"Humans are chopping these once vast and impenetrable forests into smaller and smaller pieces, undermining their ability to store carbon, cool the planet, produce rain and provide habitats," Anders Krogh, the author of the report and special adviser at the RFN, said in a statement.

"The world depends on tropical rainforests to provide these services."

The report said in this age of climate change and species loss, protecting rainforests is more than a matter of preserving beautiful landscapes.

"Rainforests provide food, water and medicine. They regulate the climate, act as a carbon sink and buffer communities from flooding and extreme storms."

It also noted that momentum is building for the protection of biodiversity worldwide. More than 50 countries have pledged to support the UN's call to protect 30% of land and marine spaces from exploitation by 2030.

Krogh said that while the world has lost a staggering area of rainforest, the remaining rainforest can be protected and allowed to grow.

"The good news is that we have an area half the size of Europe that is still completely intact," he added.

10 days of festivity planned

FROM PAGE 1

security on the occasion of the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation at the secretariat.

The events will be graced by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sri Lankan President Nandasena Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, and Nepali President Bidya Devi Bhandari, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam said.

Foreign ministry officials said the Maldives president would visit Bangladesh on March 17-19, Sri Lankan president on March 19-20, Nepal president on March 22-23 and the Indian premier on March 26-27.

Besides, other high-profile guests are expected to issue video messages on the occasion.

Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury, chief coordinator of the Birth Centenary Celebration National Implementation Committee, said they were avoiding large-scale public gatherings because of hygiene rules.

He said the invited guests at the in-person events have to undergo Covid-19 testing and carry a negative report to attend the event. The certificate of the test will remain valid for 48 hours.

"We must maintain hygiene rules strictly and prove that we have the ability to perform [a programme] in such a situation," he said.

About 500 guests from home and abroad will be invited to the event, which will also be broadcast live so that people across the world can see it.

The invitees will attend the

programme in-person on four days, while the events of the other six days will be broadcast live.

Special arrangements will be made for the heads of state and governments attending the celebrations.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said the government has planned to impose tight security measures on the occasion.

Apart from ensuring security at the National Parade Ground, necessary security measures would be taken during the movement of foreign dignitaries, diplomats and other eminent personalities from home and abroad, and also at the installations where they would stay, the minister said.

"There will be intelligence surveillance during all the occasions. A control room will be set up to coordinate security measures. Moreover, 999 services will be available round the clock to prevent any untoward incidents. All utility services will be provided at the venue," said Asaduzzaman.

On the occasion, security arrangements would also be made during the year-round programmes at the divisional, district, upazila, municipality and union levels.

Asked about the government's plan to manage traffic during the movement of foreign guests, the home minister said the security forces and the police chief would work on the issue.

"Everyone will be informed precisely about how the traffic will move and for

Kishore goes to court for redress

FROM PAGE 1

death of a person in the capital's Pallabi, recorded Kishore's statement for about half an hour.

After recording the statement, the judge said he would pass an order on the matter within a day or two.

In the statement, Kishore said contrary to what was said in the First Information Report (FIR) filed by Rab-3 in the DSA case, he was picked up on May 2 last year by 16-17 people in plainclothes.

The FIR Rab-3 filed records Kishore being arrested on May 5 at 2:30am.

Kishore stated that he was kept in an unknown place between May 2 and 4 last year and tortured.

On May 2 around 5:45pm, Kishore woke up to a loud knocking on the door of his Kakrail home, according to his statement, a copy of which was obtained by The Daily Star.

"When I opened the door, an unknown person yelled at me saying, 'Why are you not opening the door? Change out of the lungi and wear a clean shirt.'"

"They searched my room but could not show me any arrest warrant. They took all my digital devices, including

mobile phone, computer CPU and portable hard disc illegally," reads Kishore's statement.

He also mentioned that he was handcuffed and a hood was put on his head so that he could not see while the unidentified men forcibly took him to an unknown and secluded place.

At that place, Kishore was shown on a projector cartoons he had drawn and asked what they meant.

"At one stage of the interrogation, one of the men got up and slapped me on my ear so hard that I lost my consciousness for a while," the statement quotes Kishore as saying, adding that soon after he felt blood coming out of his ear.

They also repeatedly tortured Kishore with steel-plated sticks, according to the statement. He said he lost consciousness.

Kishore said he was tortured like this several times till May 4 after which he found himself in a Rab office, where he saw writer Mushtaq Ahmed.

"Mushtaq told me he had been electrocuted while being tortured," the cartoonist said.

Both the men were handed to Ramna Police Station on May 6, he added.

how long a particular road will remain closed," he said.

Replying to a query, Asaduzzaman said he does not expect that an untoward situation will arise centring the arrival of Indian PM Modi.

"We have no information in this regard. We think everyone loves Bangladesh and the Father of the Nation. We don't think anyone will disturb the celebration of the Father of the Nation's birth centenary."

He said Bangladesh is a democratic country and everyone here has freedom of speech. "Many people say many things which make no sense. I don't think there will be any such situation. We want cooperation from all to celebrate the festival."

State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain, Inspector General of Police Benazir Ahmed, Rab Director General Abdullah Al Mamun and other high officials were present at the meeting.

Meanwhile, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Earl R Miller yesterday said a high-level delegation from the US government might visit Bangladesh in the near future to attend the year-long celebrations.

Besides, there is a possibility of receiving video messages from US leadership on the occasion of the upcoming 10-day celebration programme this month, he added.

The US envoy said this when he met Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen at the latter's office in Dhaka.

Why no dedicated rail carriages for women

HC asks govt to explain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court, in a rule, yesterday asked the authorities why a special compartment should not be allocated for female passengers and separate reserved seats for children, physically challenged passengers, and senior citizens in every train for ensuring their privacy and security.

The bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice SM Maniruzzaman came up with the rule following a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Mamtaz Parvin seeking necessary directives on this issue.

Mamtaz's lawyer Ajmol Hossain Khokon earlier told The Daily Star that a special compartment for female passengers is supposed to be arranged in every passenger-train as per sections 64 and 119 of the Railway Act, 1890.

But the provisions of the law were not implemented and therefore female passengers face different problems in the trains, he added.

Secretaries to the ministries of railways and home affairs, and the director general, manager, and inspector of the railway department were made respondents to the rule.

The HC bench asked them to show cause in four weeks.

Mamtaz submitted the petition as public interest litigation on January 13 to the HC seeking its directive on the government to arrange a special compartment for female passengers in every train for ensuring their security and privacy.

248 people sued

FROM PAGE 1

General Secretary Obaidul Quader.

Police have arrested 28 people in connection with the violence, said Mir Zahidul Haque Roni, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Crude bombs, iron rods and other local weapons were recovered from the arrestees. Police are raiding to arrest all the accused, the OC added.

A deadly clash took place between two factions of ruling AL in Basurhat on Tuesday evening, around within three weeks of the killing of local journalist Borhan Uddin Muzakkir, 30, during a clash between the same groups.

One group is led by Quader Mirza and another by Companiganj upazila AL Organising Secretary Mizanur Rahman Badal.

The clash broke out when Quader Mirza's supporters allegedly attacked a rally organised by Badal's supporters to protest an attack on Khizir Hayat Khan, former president of Companiganj upazila AL.

Khizir was assaulted reportedly by Mirza's men.

Badal was the chief guest of the programme held at Rupali Chattar.

Both the groups chased each other and threw brick chunks, exploded crude bombs, and fired shots for over two hours, witnesses said.

At least 30 people, including six police personnel, were injured. Twelve of them sustained gunshot wounds.

The local administration imposed section 144 in Basurhat for 18 hours from 6:00am yesterday.

The man killed in the fresh clash was identified as Alauddin, 22, of Charkali village in the same upazila. He was a driver of CNG-run auto-rickshaw and was carrying passengers in the area while the clash ensued, said locals.

Doctors of Noakhali General Hospital said Alauddin was dead on arrival.

He was shot and stabbed.

Badal claimed that Alauddin was his supporter and a Sramik League activist.

Alauddin was shot dead by supporters of Quader Mirza, alleged Badal while talking to The Daily Star over phone yesterday.

But Quader Mirza denied the allegation and said Alauddin was killed by Badal's followers.

Meanwhile, law enforcers yesterday handed the body to the victim's family after an autopsy.

The family did not file any complaint with police till filing of this report around 6:00pm yesterday, this newspaper learnt after talking to Alamgir Hossain, superintendent of Noakhali police.

Additional law enforcers have been deployed in the area to fend off further any untoward incident, the SP added.

On February 19, journalist Muzakkir was shot in Companiganj upazila during a clash between the two groups. He died a day later.

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.