

BANGLADESH UPDATE

1,066
New cases in 24hrs

5,55,222
Total cases

8,515
Deaths

5,09,172
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

2,644,172
Deaths

119,252,340
Total cases

RAID ON COLLEGE

Nigeria gunmen abduct dozens of students

AFP, Kano

Gunmen raided a college in northwestern Nigeria and kidnapped at least 30 students, government officials and parents said yesterday, in the latest mass abduction targeting a school.

The kidnap gang stormed the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation in Mando, Kaduna state, around 9:30pm (2030 GMT) on Thursday, shooting indiscriminately before taking students.

The Kaduna college was said to have some 300 male and female students -- mostly aged 17 and older -- at the time of the attack.

Kaduna state commissioner for internal security Samuel Aruwan said 30 of the students were missing while the army was able to rescue 180 people after a battle with the gunmen.

"The troops successfully rescued 180 citizens; 42 female students, eight staff and 130 male students," Aruwan said in a statement.

"However, about 30 students, a mix of males and females, are yet to be accounted for."

The commissioner said some of the rescued students were injured during the operation and were being treated at a military hospital.

Police and military personnel stood guard around the college at the outskirts of Kaduna city yesterday afternoon as anxious parents and families waited for news. A fighter jet flew overhead.

Government officials said the students were unaccounted for after a

headcount at the college, and parents said they had been taken by the gunmen.

"We have confirmed from her colleagues our daughter Sera is with the abductors," Helen Sunday told reporters, tears rolling down her face. "I appeal to the government to help rescue our children."

"It is unacceptable for parents to send their children to school only to be kidnapped by criminal elements," said Denis John, who said his brother was among those taken.

Heavily-armed gangs in northwest and central Nigeria have stepped up attacks in recent years, kidnapping for ransom, raping and pillaging.

The bandits are recently turning their attention on schools where they kidnap students or schoolchildren for ransom -- Thursday's was at least the fourth such attack since December.

Mass kidnappings in the northwest are complicating security challenges facing President Muhammadu Buhari's security forces who are also battling a more than decade-long Islamist insurgency in the northeast.

Residents near the Kaduna college also heard repeated gunshots in the area late on Thursday.

"We kept hearing gunshots which we ignored as shooting drills from the Nigeria Defence Academy which is a stone-throw from the forestry college," said Mustapha Aliyu, who lives in the area.

"It was only when we came out for the morning prayers in the mosque that we learnt it was gunmen who took away students from the college," he said.



Victims gather around the burnt remains of a slum in the capital's Kathalbagan yesterday. A fire razed shanties at the slum on Thursday night.

PHOTO: STAR

UN will now see it first-hand

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The UN said it wanted to send one of its technical teams to the island to assess the housing facilities. Asked by the government, it even submitted the terms of reference for the visit in December 2019.

The move got stalled after that. Project officials said separate buildings for the UN and other international aid agencies have also been constructed in Bhasan Char.

After relocation of the first batch of Rohingya in December last year, some 22 NGOs volunteered to go there and started providing humanitarian assistance to the refugees.

Later, 20 more joined them, but all of them are using their own fund. There are concerns over how funds needed for 100,000 Rohingyas would be managed after their relocation.

The government has been urging the UN to begin its operations in Bhasan Char, but the UN as well as donor countries had been seeking an independent technical assessment of the facility.

The government, however, maintained no such technical assessment was necessary as Bhasan Char has been equipped with a well-built facility developed by maintaining international standards and addressing all risks involved.

Apart from having spent a huge amount of money for the housing project, Bangladesh faces enormous economic, political, environmental and

even security challenges because of the Rohingyas, though the country initially sheltered them solely on humanitarian grounds.

"The international community must consider the burden on Bangladesh and act accordingly," a foreign ministry official said.

During his visit to the US last month, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen requested the UN secretary-general to provide humanitarian assistance to the Rohingyas in Bhasan Char.

Following a meeting with UNHCR Representative Johannes van der Klaauw on March 8, Momen told this correspondent that he invited the UN to visit the island during the meeting.

At an event marking the International Women's Day at the Foreign Service Academy, the minister said the international community should sincerely work to create conducive conditions in Myanmar and repatriation of the Rohingyas, instead of paying "lip service" to anyone or expressing concern whether the Rohingyas live in Bhasan Char or in Cox's Bazar. UN Resident Coordinator Mia Seppo and some other diplomats were also present at the event.

The official said it was great that the UN has agreed to visit the island. "It is the UN Refugee Agency's mandate to take care of the Rohingyas wherever they are," he said, adding that the government does not think at this moment that any technical team needs to conduct any assessment of the

Bhasan Char facility.

Journalists, researchers and a delegation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), led by its Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs Dr Yousef Aldobeay, has recently visited the island. The delegation appreciated the facilities there, said the official.

The UN did not say if it was anymore considering technical assessment of Bhasan Char. A UN official, however, said the UN decision on it would come only after the visit.

Contacted, Brac Senior Director KAM Morshed said they began operations in Bhasan Char in February following an assessment.

"Initially, we provided some emergency support that included gas cylinders to the relocated Rohingyas. We are finding ways of providing education to Rohingyas and ensuring their livelihood," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The NGOs are now providing essential services, including food and medical supplies, with their own fund. This is possible now as the number of the Rohingyas there is only some 13,000. However, assistance from the UN and international aid agencies will be required once one lakh Rohingyas are relocated there.

It is a good move that the UN has agreed to undertake a visit to the project. If there is any gap in communication, it should be addressed at the soonest, added Morshed.

There may be crimes

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a civilian population, in a widespread and systematic manner, with the knowledge of the junta's leadership - thereby likely meeting the legal threshold for crimes against humanity.

Since the military coup on February 1, at least 70 civilians have been killed, and over half of those killed were aged below 25, Andrews said, adding more than 2,000 people have been unlawfully detained and violence is steadily increasing.

With the UN Security Council seemingly unwilling to invoke its authority, Andrews said Member States must rally together to take action.

"Today I am therefore urging that as many Member States as possible commit to taking strong, decisive and coordinated action as a coalition of nations -- an Emergency Coalition for the People of Myanmar."

Andrews outlined five actions that such a coalition could take immediately. They include stopping the flow of funds to the junta, including by imposing targeted sanctions on the junta's business enterprises and on Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, the single largest source of revenue to the State of Myanmar.

He also recommended imposing an international arms embargo, ensuring accountability for the crimes, through national courts using

universal jurisdiction if the Security Council is unwilling to refer the matter to the International Criminal Court, and working directly with local civil society and aid organisations to provide humanitarian assistance whenever possible.

Andrews called for denying recognition of the military junta as the legitimate government representing the people of Myanmar.

"I sincerely hope that the international community will rise to the occasion of this moment of history by following the lead and the inspiration of the people of Myanmar by coming to their aid as a coordinated whole, in this their moment of need."

Myanmar is already facing accusations of genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the top UN Court at the Hague for its persecutions of the Rohingyas.

Some 750,000 Rohingyas fled military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine State since August 2017 and took shelter in Bangladesh, joining the 300,000 others who fled previous waves of violence since the 1980s.

In response to the Gambia's case in November 2019, the ICJ issued orders asking Myanmar to prevent any possible genocidal acts against the Rohingyas and preserve the evidence of human rights violations during the military crackdown.

State of liberal democracy

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"The data also shows that populous, influential states such as Bangladesh, Hungary, Philippines, and Tanzania belong to this group of autocratisers, as does Hong Kong," reads the report.

Some of these are large, influential countries found across the major regions in the world, making it a truly global trend.

"Notably, the majority of countries with such substantial and significant declines on the LDI, no less than 15, are electoral autocracies where rights and freedoms are deteriorating," it says.

The report which compared status of democracy between 2010 and 2020 describes Bangladesh as an "Autocratising country".

Autocratisation typically follows a similar pattern across very different contexts. Ruling governments first attack the media and civil society, and polarise societies by disrespecting opponents and spreading false information, then undermine elections, says V-Dem Institute.

The global decline during the past 10 years is steep and continues in 2020, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America.

Bangladesh stood fourth among its neighbours -- India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka -- in terms of autocratisation.

India, which represents the world's largest democracy has turned into an "electoral autocracy" country and stood first among its neighbours, finds the report.

It says that the threat to freedom of expression and media intensifies. The condition is substantially declined in 32 countries, compared to only 19 just three years ago.

Saying that repression on the civil society is intensifying, the V-Dem data registered substantial deterioration in 50 countries over the past 10 years.

The opposition political party has also termed the country an autocratic one.

On Thursday, Jatiya Party Chairman and Deputy Leader of the opposition GM Quader said Bangladesh cannot be called a democratic state due to "autocracy" and lack of good governance.

"The imbalance of power has given birth to corruption and misuse in the country," he said while welcoming around 50 leaders and activists of different parties who joined the party at a programme at the JP chief's Banani office.

V-Dem's report is based on a dataset on democracy with almost 30 million data points for 202 countries from 1789 to 2020. Involving over 3,500 scholars and other country experts, V-Dem measures hundreds of different attributes of democracy.

China, Iran, N Korea seek support at UN to push back against unilateral force

REUTERS, New York

China, Russia, North Korea, Iran and others are seeking support for a coalition to defend the United Nations Charter by pushing back against the use or threat of force and unilateral sanctions, according to a letter seen by Reuters on Thursday.

The move by 16 countries and the Palestinians to create such a group comes as U.S. President Joe Biden's new administration boosts its multilateral engagement and with allies, reversing former President Donald Trump's favored unilateral approach as he focused on an "America First" policy.

The 2 had nothing to do with politics

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secretary of Companiganj upazila AL.

Hospital sources said Alauddin was hit by pellets from a shotgun.

Talking to The Daily Star on Thursday, Quader Mirza alleged that Alauddin was a victim of police action. Police denied the claim.

Alauddin's brother Emdad Hossain Raju went to Companiganj Police Station to file a case on Thursday accusing Mirza and 163 others. But police did not record the case.

Sources said Badal and Alauddin are neighbours in Char Fakira village and Badal's men might have convinced the family to accuse Mirza in the case.

A Qatar returnee, Alauddin had his own auto-rickshaw. But that rickshaw was burnt down by Mirza's supporters during a hartal on February 20.

He then took loans and bought a new one.

"How will we repay this loan now?" his mother Moriom Nesa asked.

Police picked up 28 people after Tuesday's clash.

It has been three weeks since the death of journalist Borhan Uddin Muzakkir.

The Police Bureau of Investigation on March 7 arrested a Jubo League activist

in connection with the killing.

"We don't know anything, except that one arrest. The PBI investigation has yet to reveal how Muzakkir got killed. The memory card of the camera he was using during the violence also went missing. We are waiting... What else can we do?" Muzakkir's elder brother Noor Uddin asked.

The 30-year-old journalist worked for online portal Barta Bazar. After the clash that left Muzakkir dead, at least four cases were filed accusing 142 named and 1,450 unnamed people.

Two of the cases filed by police are being investigated by the Detective Branch (DB), one is being probed by Companiganj police and the murder case is being investigated by the PBI.

Clashes between the supporters of Mirza and Badal in recent weeks left many others injured.

The situation in Companiganj changed on Thursday hours after the Awami League high-ups warned of action against people involved in the deadly clashes. Police were seen playing an active role after that.

On the same day, the DB in Noakhali arrested Mizanur Rahman Badal, the rival of Quader Mirza, in connection

Govt may rethink reopen decision

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be changed on the basis of our observation and consultation with the National Technical Advisory Committee," said Dipu Moni.

"If there is any change [in the date], we will inform you on time," she added. The country has been witnessing a rise in the number of new Covid-19 cases for a week.

A total of 1,066 new infections were recorded in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the highest in a 24-hour period in two months. The total number of people infected now stands at 555,222, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

In the meantime, the health officials told the media that the UK variant of novel coronavirus, also known as N501Y.V1, was found in Bangladesh in early January.

Given the situation, the question about reopening educational institutions has become pertinent.

Dipu Moni said there was a tendency among the people of not fully following the health safety guidelines because of the arrival of the Covid-19

vaccine.

"I hope everybody will be cautious and will strictly follow the health guidelines so that the infection rate doesn't go up."

She said the prime minister herself reminded the people of the fact that the country's first Covid-19 cases were detected in March last year and the virus spread rapidly in subsequent days.

A week after the first detection of Covid-19 cases, the government on March 17 last year closed all educational institutions aiming to contain the spread of the virus.

The closure led to cancellation of exams and left academic calendars in disarray.

After a year of closure, the government following an inter-ministerial meeting on February 27 announced that all schools and colleges would reopen on March 30.

As per the decision, in-person classes at all primary, secondary, and higher secondary schools would resume in phases.

On February 22, the government

with four cases. He was sent to jail yesterday.

On Thursday night, a large number of law enforcers surrounded Mirza's office in Basurhat. There was a rumour that Mirza might be arrested too.

Sources said Mirza talked to government high-ups around 10:00pm. The situation changed after that.

Police teams were seen guarding his office yesterday and people were restricted from meeting him.

Mizanur Rahman Munshi, superintendent of Noakhali PBI, told The Daily Star yesterday that officers made significant progress in the investigation into the Muzakkir murder.

"We got information on suspects by interrogating one arrestee and by watching video footage of the place," the SP said.

Habibur Rasul Mamun, former president of Noakhali Lawyers Association, said if police know that there is a chance of violence taking place in an area, they can prevent it.

"It is not understandable how these two killings took place in a similar fashion amidst the presence of law enforcement agencies. Police should not have allowed these two groups to clash," he said.

announced that in-person classes at all public and private universities would resume on May 24 after the Eid-ul-Fitr. All student dormitories of universities would reopen on May 17, it said.

Academic activities of around four crore students are being hampered due to the pandemic.

The government started TV education for primary and secondary students so that students could make up some of the losses.

Authorities of many schools, colleges and universities also started online classes, but many students could not access those regularly due to the lack of digital devices and internet facilities.

The pandemic led to the cancellation of the Higher Secondary Certificate and equivalent exams, originally slated for April 1, 2020.

The government also cancelled last year's Primary Education Completion, Junior School Certificate and their equivalent exams due to the pandemic.

Primary and secondary students were promoted to the next grade this year without any annual examinations.

Target \$250m

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export PET chips and PSF. We want to reap benefits of duty-free and quota-free access to European markets. We will also be able to get duty benefits in the US market," said Mostafa.

London-based Al Waseelah PLC, which is the issuer of the Sukuk bond offering, mandated Bedford Row Capital (BRC) for the offering of \$250 million.

A sukuk is an Islamic financial certificate, similar to a treasury bond, and is structured to generate returns in compliance with Islamic finance principles.

The BRC, alongside international lead manager BlueMount Capital, will structure the Sukuk to help Deshbandhu Group in its next growth phase, according to a BRC press release published on the Middle East North Africa Financial Network (MENAFN) website.

The Sukuk will finance the repayment of the current outstanding debt, invest in new technology and scale up capacity of the group's businesses. It will be listed on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, maturing in 2028.

The BRC and BlueMount Capital will assist Deshbandhu Group with the preparation of legal documents, structures, draft investment memorandum and comprehensive corporate presentation packs, which will be distributed among prospective institutional investors.

Mostafa said the Sukuk is expected to be listed on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange by June this year.

The Deshbandhu chairman said the group aims to fetch \$600 million through export of PET chips and PSF by 2023.

"We will invest in export-oriented industry. Our target is to be listed on New York Stock Exchange by 2023," he said.

In the press release, Scott Levy, CEO of the BRC, said, "Being awarded this Sukuk mandate is a significant achievement as it is the first corporate Sukuk out of Bangladesh and will be the blueprint for more issuance out of this region."

"We are devoted to providing our expertise to this growing market segment and to support issuers and investors with attractive options from this growing market."

Saliba Sassine, managing director of BlueMount Capital, said they are pleased to be part of the first international Sukuk issuance by a private corporation from Bangladesh, the next Asian Tiger economy and one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

"We are committed to providing innovative financing solutions for companies wanting to access the Sukuk market," noted Sassine.

30,000 homes for

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in distress. But now it has decided to construct homes for 30,000 insolvent war heroes under the project, said officials of the Liberation War affairs ministry.

The housing project, if approved by the Ecnc, will come less than a month after the PM announced that the government would increase the minimum monthly allowance of the valiant freedom fighters.

Speaking at a programme on February 15, Hasina said the minimum monthly allowance would be raised to Tk 20,000 from the existing Tk 12,000.

Currently, as many as 2,05,206 valiant freedom fighters are getting the allowance. Of them, the families of martyred war heroes are receiving Tk 30,000 each a month, while those of war-wounded ones are getting Tk 25,000 each.

The families of the seven Bir Shresthas, the country's highest gallantry award, receive Tk 35,000 each while recipients of Bir Uttam award get Tk 25,000, Bir Bikram Tk 20,000, and Bir Pratik Tk 15,000. The rest of the valiant freedom fighters get Tk 12,000 each.

Wounded valiant freedom fighters get free medical care and those without homes get housing. They also receive five festival bonuses from the government.

Earlier, the government gave over 2,900 houses to valiant landless freedom fighters to rehabilitate them.

13 more die

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authorised laboratories across the country during the period.

Of the total sample tested in the past 24 hours, 6.62 percent tested positive, while 13.12 percent cases were detected from the total tests conducted so far, the release added.

Among the total infections, 91.71 percent patients have recovered, while 1.53 percent died so far since the first Covid-19 positive cases were reported in the country on March 8.