

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



3,587
New cases in 24hrs



5,84,395
Total cases



8,797
Deaths



5,29,894
Recoveries



GLOBAL
UPDATE



2,759,394
Deaths



125,601,278
Total cases

3 stabbed to death at arbitration

A CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Three people died after they were stabbed on Wednesday night during an arbitration meeting over stalking a girl in Uttar Islampur of Munshiganj town.

The dead -- Emon Pathan, 23, Mahbub Hosen Sakib, 19, and Awlad Hosen Mintu, 47 -- were residents of Uttar Islampur.

Emon and Mahbub were HSC students at Government Haraganga College. Awlad contested January 30 Munshiganj municipality polls as an independent ward councillor candidate.

Locals said Awlad called an arbitration meeting on Wednesday night outside his home to settle a feud between two groups of local youths over stalking a girl. More than 20 people joined the meeting around 11:00pm.

At one stage, the group, led by one Sourav, stabbed the three and fled the area.

Locals then rushed Emon to Munshiganj General Hospital where doctors declared him dead around

11:30pm.

Mahbub died of his wounds at Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 12:30am yesterday while Awlad breathed his last at the same hospital around noon.

Superintendent of Munshiganj Police Abdul Momen visited the houses of Emon and Mahbub yesterday. He said three people were detained in the town in connection with the incident.

Awlad was also a member of Mushiganj District Sports Association and treasurer of Mushiganj District Football Association. His elder brother Fazlul Haq Fazal said Awlad might have been killed over election rivalry.

Meanwhile, locals brought out a protest procession carrying Emon's body in Uttar Islampur area yesterday demanding exemplary punishment for the killers.

Additional policemen were deployed in the area to avoid any untoward incident.

No case was filed in connection with the incident till filing of this report last night.



University students march against the ongoing coup in Dawei, Myanmar, yesterday. Security forces yesterday opened fire on anti-coup protesters in Myanmar's eastern Karen state, as demonstrators took to the streets in nationwide dawn rallies to demand a return to democracy.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Empower kids with digital access: UN watchdog

AFP, Geneva

Proper digital access is no game for children, it is a right that each and every country should guarantee, a UN watchdog said Wednesday.

Images of children huddled in store parking lots to access the wifi needed for their online schoolwork have been common during the pandemic, while sexual predators have long stalked children in online chatrooms.

In its first such analysis, the Committee on the Rights of the Child found that countries are responsible for rectifying such situations by ensuring children have "meaningful" and safe access to digital technologies.

"Governments really need to think about giving as much access to the digital environment as possible to all children," committee member Philip Jaffe told AFP.

"Not only to protect them but to empower them."

"We are in a societal transformation phase," he pointed out, insisting that "we must make sure that the human factor doesn't get lost in these huge technological advances."

The committee highlighted the obligations of governments to ensure children have equal access to the digital technologies like those that over the past pandemic year have become vital to education.

"If digital inclusion is not achieved, existing inequalities are likely to increase and new ones may arise," it warned.

Jaffe acknowledged that currently at least, "a world standard is really impossible", since countries had different means to provide digital access to their children.

"But it is important that we keep promoting this non-discrimination approach worldwide."

Tasked with monitoring implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the panel's 18 independent experts spent two years consulting with governments, intergovernmental organisations, civil society and children.

They spoke with more than 700 children and young people, aged between nine and 22, across 27 countries, to get a feel for how digital technology was impacting their rights.

They concluded that states should take robust legislative

and administrative measures to protect children from "harmful and untrustworthy content".

Children, they said, needed to be protected from all forms of violence in the digital environment, including from child trafficking, gender-based violence, cyber-aggression, cyber-attacks and information warfare.

"It is a dangerous world in the digital world for many children. It is very unregulated," Jaffe said.

He lamented that there were relatively easy ways to ensure more digital safety for children, but that "nobody feels compelled to do so because there is no legal requirement to do it".

Countries should strive to introduce verifiable age requirements for different online content, in the same way as they have imposed age limits at movie theatres.

"That technology exists," he said. "These are easy things to do."

There should also be more monitoring of chat rooms frequented by youths and functions like direct messaging -- often used by sexual predators -- should be disabled for users under a certain age.

He stressed the need for more regulation to "nudge commercial entities and the business sector towards responsible content," including a requirement to conduct risk assessments whenever new websites or programmes are offered to children.

"The idea is to have regulator oversight to make sure that access is broad, that bad business practices are mitigated to a certain extent (and) that children are protected."

The committee also highlighted the growing importance of protecting children's privacy, urging countries to introduce laws barring private companies from making money from collecting children's digital data records.

Jaffe pointed to the dangers of all the data already accumulating about children well before they reach adulthood.

"Some companies may have data on their sexual development, on their masturbation habits or health issues .. that will hinder their capacity to find jobs or get healthcare."

"Privacy of the data is really paramount."

Forget all divisions to build

FROM PAGE 1

by taking up the role of vigilant watchmen."

The premier said, "We are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of Independence. But the celebration should not be only a formality. We have to take oath on the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation and the Golden Jubilee of Independence that we will take the country to a new height."

Narrating the sacrifices made by country's people during the Liberation War in 1971, the PM said people had expectations that the country would get liberated and they would live in peace. "Today, we have been able to fulfill their expectations to some extent."

The premier greeted all Bangladeshis living in and outside the country on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Independence.

She also remembered with gratefulness the roles of the friendly states, institutions and individuals who extended their support to Bangladesh during its extremely bad times in 1971.

Hasina said, "Sheikh Mujib is the creator of a country and a nation state. That's why we are celebrating together his birth centenary and the Golden Jubilee of Independence."

Presenting various statistics on the country's development, she said, "This achievement is the achievement of the common people of the country.... My government created a congenial environment providing only policy support. You [people] proved that if people of Bangladesh get a favorable environment, they can make any impossible thing possible."

She concluded her speech reciting a few lines of the lyrics of a song of Rabindranath Tagore.

FROM PAGE 1

Aid-dependence significantly declined from 14 percent of the GDP in the 70s to less than 1.5 percent now.

Life expectancy is 72 years, much higher than neighbouring Pakistan and India. People can now send their children to schools and access primary health care.

With policy support of the government, Bangladesh has become a key supplier of readymade garments worldwide. Major brands of the world have their products made here.

This industry alone brings in about \$34 billion a year and employs millions, the lion share of which are women.

Another key driver of the economy was manpower export. Around 10 million Bangladeshis are abroad seeking their fortune in countries in need of workers.

They send in around \$15 billion every year and that amount is ever increasing. This allowed Bangladesh to have a huge foreign currency reserve.

More than one crore people took shelter in India to flee the genocide committed by the Pakistan Army in 1971. Now Bangladesh, with its economic might, is able to open its doors to nearly a million Rohingyas escaping persecution in Myanmar.

Bangladesh has met all three conditions for graduating from the grouping of the least-developed countries twice. The United Nations Committee for Development Policy has already recommended the country's graduation in 2026.

Bangladesh's economy was one of the few economies that posted positive growth in 2020 when growth went south for most because of the pandemic.

The secret of Bangladesh's success was its education and girls, as

American journalist and political commentator Nicholas Kristof put it.

"Bangladesh invested in its most underutilised assets -- its poor, with a focus on the most marginalised and least productive, because that's where the highest returns would be."

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said the central bank did not have a machine to print money after independence. The geopolitical situation was not in favour of Bangladesh as the new country was aligned with the left-leaning bloc.

Since the severe famine of 1974, Bangladesh has not faced any major food crisis, greatly aided by the green revolution that was sweeping across the world at the time.

"This has been a major achievement," he said.

A major paradigm shift was moving away from a nationalised economic policy stance perceived in the 1970s to a private-sector-led economy with liberalisation, deregulation and denationalisation in the 80s and 90s, according to Manzur Hossain, research director of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).

"Bangladesh has disproved all predictions and progressed at a good pace," said AB Mirza Azizul Islam, a former bureaucrat and finance adviser of the government.

Muhammad Abdul Mazid, a former chairman of the National Board of Revenue, said all governments took note of the importance of the agriculture sector to feed the growing population amid shrinking land. The sector gave the much-needed resilience to the economy.

"Our people are resilient and proactive in driving the economy forward. And they have been

supported by appropriate policies," said Prof Shamsul Alam, member of the General Economics Division under the planning commission.

Zaid Bakht, a former research director of the BIDS, credited public expenditure and investment for the surprising turnaround.

"All countries do this. But ours was more focused and intense. Governments have given emphasis on rural infrastructural development. This has a tremendous impact on the economy."

There has been economic diversification. Cropping intensity has been increased. Non-farm activities have gone up, he said.

He said microcredit organisations and NGOs have worked in empowering women. Governments set up roads and bridges, kept the labour market flexible, gave mobility and education to women and girls, and made some improvements in the health sector.

"All these created a virtuous cycle," Bakht said.

Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka Office, gave credit to the steady economic growth, social policies aimed at population control, rural roads, education and electrification, primary education, female education, local low-cost health solutions for immunisation and communicable diseases, access to finance through microcredit, last-mile service delivery by NGOs, and demographic dividend for the turnaround of the country.

The latest testimony to Bangladesh's astounding achievement came when Nicholas Kristof advised US President Joe Biden to look to Bangladesh to find the answer to how to bring down the rate of poor children.

The naysayers got the answer.

Abdul Hamid at the Bangabhaban before flying back to India tomorrow evening.

Asked about Modi's visit, Dhaka University International Relations Prof Imtiaz Ahmed said this is truly a joyous occasion for Bangladesh and India, and the Indian PM's main purpose is to join the celebrations.

"I don't think issues like the Teesta water sharing deal or border killing will come up during the meeting this time," he told The Daily Star.

He, however, said as the main occasion is golden jubilee of independence, it also reminds people of the genocide in 1971.

"Now that there is an issue of Rohingya genocide, and that Aung San Suu Kyi has been ousted by the military, we can expect Narendra Modi to take a stand for the Rohingyas," Imtiaz added.

Meanwhile, in a statement yesterday, Modi said he was happy to visit Bangladesh with which India shares deep cultural, linguistic and people-to-people ties.

"I will be having substantive discussions with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, following our very productive virtual meeting in December last year. I also look forward to my meeting with His Excellency President Abdul Hamid, and to interactions with other Bangladeshi dignitaries," he said in the statement.

"My visit will not only be an occasion to convey appreciation for Bangladesh's remarkable economic and developmental strides under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visionary leadership, but also to commit India's support for these achievements."

"I will also express India's support and solidarity for Bangladesh's fight against Covid-19."

He also said Bangabandhu was one of the tallest leaders of the last century, whose life and ideals continue to inspire millions.

Forests, soil may not keep pace with CO2 emissions

Warn experts

AFP, Paris

The world is counting too heavily on soil and plants to soak up planet-ravaging carbon pollution, researchers cautioned Wednesday.

Climate projections mistakenly assume that land and what grows on it draw down with parallel efficiency the CO2 humanity loads into the atmosphere, they reported in the journal Nature.

In reality, there's a trade off. "Either soil or plants, but not both, will absorb more CO2 as carbon levels rise," lead author Cesar Terrer, a researcher at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, told AFP.

It is tempting, he said, to hang hopes on supercharged plant growth and massive tree-planting campaigns to reduce CO2 produced by burning fossil fuels, agriculture and destroying forests.

But researchers said that when elevated carbon dioxide levels boost forest and grassland growth, the accumulation of CO2 in soil slows down.

"Soils store more carbon worldwide than is contained in all plant biomass," said senior author Rob Jackson, a professor at Stanford's School of Earth, Energy and Environmental Sciences.

So far, Earth's terrestrial ecosystems have kept pace with rapidly increasing CO2 emissions, consistently absorbing some 30 percent even as those emissions have more than doubled over the last 50 years.

Oceans have also syphoned off a steady 20-odd percent of CO2 pollution during the same period.

Without these natural sponges, the amount of CO2 in the atmosphere today might be double preindustrial levels, enough to heat up the planet's surface by four to six degrees Celsius, according to a new generation of climate models.

With only 1.1 degree Celsius of warming so far, the planet has seen a crescendo of deadly heatwaves, flooding and other extreme weather.

The new study adds to growing evidence that the terrestrial carbon sink is weaker than once thought.

Terrer and colleagues analysed data from more than 100 published experiments on soil carbon levels, plant growth and CO2 concentrations, which have risen by half since pre-industrial times.

They were surprised by the results.

"It proved much harder than expected to increase both plant growth and carbon soil," said Jackson.

Researchers found that soils only accumulated more carbon in experiments where plant growth remained fairly steady, despite high levels of CO2 in the air.

The findings highlight a key difference between two types of ecosystem, and suggest that grasslands may turn out to be more important than long assumed when it comes to stocking away carbon.

"In forests, additional CO2 mainly increases above-ground carbon storage," Terrer explained.

Pro-Iran group stages armed Baghdad rally

AFP, BAGHDAD

Masked gunmen in a convoy of pick-ups drove through the Iraqi capital yesterday staging a show of force against Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi who has proposed a new dialogue with Washington.

Militants of the Rabaa Allah group brandished mocking portraits of the prime minister, who is seen as pro-American, and other government officials showing their faces trampled underfoot.

Rabaa Allah is the newest and most powerful of a myriad of pro-Iran groups in Iraq.

It is seen by experts as a cover for Kataeb Hezbollah which has been integrated into the Iraqi security forces, giving it leeway to oppose the official line.

"We've brought out our men and our guns to send out a message of warning... to the American occupiers and the collaborating (Iraqi) government," a Rabaa Allah militant said in a statement read out at the rally.

On Tuesday, a government official announced that Baghdad has requested a "strategic dialogue" with US President Joe Biden's administration.

The two countries have yet to reach an accord on the 2,500 US troops stationed in Iraq.

The Iraqi parliament called for their withdrawal following a US drone strike near Baghdad airport in January 2020 that killed top Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani.