

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**

**5,181**  
New cases in 24hrs

**6,00,895**  
Total cases

**45**  
Deaths

**5,38,018**  
Recoveries

**GLOBAL UPDATE**

**2,808,398**  
Deaths

**128,494,178**  
Total cases

# Temples, Hindu houses attacked in several dists

STAR REPORT

Multiple Hindu temples and homes have come under attack since Sunday in different districts.

In almost all the incidents, the perpetrators have remained unidentified.

The recent spate of violence against the Hindus started with Sunday's attack on a Brahmanbaria temple launched from a Hefajat-e-Islam procession.

Members of the minority religion were targets of violence after the Qawmi madrasa-based organisation unleashed havoc in many areas on Sunday during their dawn-to-dusk countrywide hartal.

Our correspondents from different districts reported the attacks on the minorities.

In Brahmanbaria on Sunday, around 200 Hefajat activists ransacked the district's biggest temple Sree Sree Anandamayee Kali Mandir around noon when Hindu devotees were observing the Dol Purnima festival there.

The attackers trashed and broke the idols of Krishna and Goddess Kali. The donation box for the temple and ornaments of idols were looted, while the artifacts used for ceremonies were ransacked and strewn about.

"We were performing prayers for Dol Purnima, when 200-300 armed men broke the temple gate and barged into our ceremony. We tried to protect the idol of Goddess Kali, but they shoved us aside and vandalised the idol," said Ashis Paul, president of Anandamayee Kalibari Temple Festival Celebration Committee.

The temple's priest Jibon Chakroborty said the attackers damaged everything and looted money and ornaments within 10 minutes.

In Magura, some unidentified attackers set fire to a cremation ground and its adjacent temple in Astogram area under Mohammadpur upazila on

Sunday night.

Three rooms of the cremation ground, known locally as Shita Pagoler Ashram, were burnt to ashes, said Swapna Rani Biswas, former vice chairman of Mohammadpur upazila parishad and organising secretary of the upazila unit of Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Unity Council.

Contacted, the district's Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ashrafur Alam said the reasons could not be known immediately.

No one was arrested in this connection as police could not find any clue behind the incident, said Tarok Biswas, officer-in-charge (OC) of Mohammadpur Police Station.

In Bogura, attackers vandalised an idol of Hindu goddess Saraswati at a temple at Tengrakhal village in Dhunot upazila early yesterday.

"I went to the temple around 4:00am today [Tuesday] for performing a ritual. At that time, I found a fire at the temple's fence. Then, I rushed inside where I saw the Saraswati idol was beheaded," said Sumoti Rani, a priest of the temple.

Contacted, the district's Additional Superintendent of Police Gazir Rahman said, "We have already visited the spot. After talking to locals, we have kept some people under surveillance as we suspect they might be involved in the incident. The process of filing a case in this connection remains underway."

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Puja Uddjan Parishad in a statement yesterday said a Hindu temple was vandalised at Bhabokhal village in Mymensingh's Sadar upazila and a Hindu home was set on fire at Monobhuyyan Para of Chattogram's Mirsarai upazila.

These attacks took place within the past two or three days, claimed the statement.

The parishad also demanded immediate identification of the attackers and their trial.



Labourers carry watermelons from boats to wholesale shops in the capital's Sadarghat yesterday. Brought from differing districts across the country, wholesalers sold the summer fruit for Tk 200 each.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Response delayed

FROM PAGE 1

Rajshahi, Rajbari and Narsingdi -- have been classified as "medium risk" zone and 27 more as "low risk zone".

Besides, gatherings must be at a limited scale at entertainment venues and tourist destinations while all kinds of fair and exhibition will be discouraged.

Public transports cannot carry passengers more than 50 percent of their capacity and have to follow Covid-19 guidelines while doing so.

Inter-district transport services must be kept at a limited scale in areas seeing high infections. If necessary, such services have to be suspended, said the directive.

About the directives, Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist, said, "Science is absent in the government directives. It will have no effect on the Covid transmission.

"While the government has banned mass gatherings, the Sadarghat launch terminal, the book fair venues, and tourist spots in Cox's Bazar, Rangamati [and other areas] are open. Transmission will not decline this way. It will keep rising," he told this newspaper.

He recommended full lockdown in the capital and Chattogram city immediately.

"We need a full lockdown right now in Dhaka and Chattogram cities but there will be some exemptions only to continue economic activities. And the first and foremost task must be to conduct a huge number of tests daily to isolate the cases. Otherwise, the infected ones will keep spreading the virus."

The government should take every effort to keep the infected people in quarantine or at hospital, he noted.

Prof Nazrul Islam, member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19, however, said the directives could help curb the virus transmission.

"But it is not clear how those measures will be implemented. The directive on tourist spots is incomplete. Besides, there is no action plan on how to implement those directives... It may create a chaos," he mentioned.

As per the directives, the local administration will decide on the scale of measures to curb the virus.

Seeking anonymity, a Dhaka district administration official said they were yet to decide on the action plan.

"There is no plan to enforce lockdown in Dhaka. But we will run mobile courts and campaigns to enforce health safety guidelines from tomorrow [today]," said the official.

In Cox's Bazar, the district administration has started conducting mobile courts as well as awareness campaigns.

"We already had meetings with different stakeholders -- hotel and transport owners and others -- to make them prepare that new directives were coming. We have asked them to suspend hotel booking online and reduce different amusement services at the sea beach. Our target is to discourage tourists from visiting Cox's Bazar," Zahid Iqbal, additional deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar, told this newspaper yesterday.

About the fresh measures, Dr Mushtaq Hussain, consultant at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), said, "Though there is a need for lockdown, we will also have to consider the socio-economic reality.

"Current measures are target-based. If these do not work, we will suggest the government new measures. But hopefully this will help reduce transmission," he added.

Meanwhile, the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh announced that all passengers from any European country, including UK, will have to go through 14-day mandatory institutional quarantine.

The same quarantine guideline will be applicable to the passengers with covid-19 symptoms coming from any other country.

## Hardly any Hefajat

FROM PAGE 1

people were picked up from the spot on Friday, he said.

Meanwhile the Ashuganj Police Station's OC Javed Mahmud said that two cases were filed for vandalism and arson of a police range and a toll plaza, where 1200 unnamed people were made accused.

A total of nine people were killed in clashes in Brahmanbaria, including a 14-year-old boy, but neither the law enforcers nor the family members filed any cases.

In Hathazari, where four people were killed after Hefajat men attacked a police station, no cases were recorded, said police sources.

In Habiganj, around 20 people, including seven cops were injured, in clashes between law enforcers and Hefajat in Jhingri area of Ajmeriganj on Ajmeriganj-Baniachang road where Hefajat activists also set fire to two police motorcycles.

Officer-in-charge Md Nurul Islam of Ajmeriganj police station said that a case was filed by the police and over 400 unnamed people were accused in the case. "We also named 23 men in the case but they were all hartal supporters, they do not have any political affiliations," said OC Islam.

Narayanganj had turned into a veritable battlefield on Sunday for a better part of the day when the Dhaka-Chittagong highway was barricaded by hartal supporters, journalists were hunted down and attacked, the road was littered with burning rubber tires, and Hefajat men locked in clashes with Border Guard Bangladesh members, leaving two men bullet-ridden.

A total of 7 cases were filed across Narayanganj where 3,900 unnamed people and 166 named people were accused, but not a single Hefajat man was named.

Six of the cases were filed with Siddhirganj Police Station, while one was filed with Rupganj Police Station.

However, the district BNP secretary, joint-coordinator, several Mohanagar Jubo Dal and Chhatra dal leaders, several BNP leaders, a BNP councillor, a Jamaat leader and a Shibir leader were included in the cases.

When asked why the names of Hefajat men were left out, Narayanganj police superintendent Zayedul Alam said, "We have named the people who we saw were present on the spot that day. We have specific information on who patronised the mayhem and gleaned evidence from photos and videos. We did not accuse people based on their political identity."

"We have arrested 4 BNP men and are working to arrest the others," he added. He also claimed that Hefajat men did not get out onto the streets on that day. "They had given us their word that they would not cause mayhem on the streets and they kept their word."

In Dhaka, a total of eight cases were filed over the hartal by Hefajat and only one named Hefajat men as accused.

Shah Iftekhar Ahmed, the police deputy commissioner of Wari Division said, "Four cases were filed in our division over vandalism, sabotage, violence and obstruction in the carrying public duty, as well as causing to deteriorate law and order. The cases were filed in Jatrabari, Gendaria and Demra."

"In Demra, six people were arrested

from the spot and were named in the cases as accused. For the rest of the cases filed in our division, there are no named accused. We are investigating to see who else was involved," said DC Ahmed.

Jatrabari Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mazharul Islam said, "Two cases were filed -- one on Friday and one on Sunday. The charges include torching of vehicles, assault on police officers, vandalism and sabotage. One of the cases was filed by the police, while in another case, a victim of the mayhem filed the case. One of the cases named 3000-4000 unnamed people, while the other case does not have any specific number of accused."

Demra Police Station OC said 1,500 unnamed people were accused in one case. He said, "Six people were arrested on the day from the spot," he said. Neither the 6 people caught from the spot in Demra, nor the 4 people caught from the spot in Jatrabari were put on remand by court.

"We sought 7 days of remand for the 6 accused, but we were not granted anything. The accused were sent straight to jail."

Gendaria Police Station's OC Shaju Miah said, "On March 28, we filed a case accusing 600-700 unnamed people. We do not know who they are."

Syed Nurul Islam, deputy commissioner of police, Motijheel Division, said, "Two cases were filed with the Palton Police Station. One of the cases was lodged against unnamed accused. Yesterday a case was filed where there are 32 named accused."

The case against 32 accused filed on March 29 was the only one where Hefajat Dhaka unit's leadership, including the general secretary Mufi Munir Hossain, Maulana Kefayatullah, Maulana Jalaluddin Ahmed and others were named."

In addition, another case was filed with the Hazaribagh Police Station following Hefajat's hartal where Nipun Roy Chowdhury, a member of BNP's central executive committee, was accused of instigating vandalism. She was arrested on March 28.

## Institutional

FROM PAGE 1

will be allowed to leave if the results come out to be negative, it said.

Passengers from other countries will have to be in home quarantine for 14 days. They must follow this rule strictly, the statement said. "They will be screened at the airport. If any Covid-19 symptoms are suspected or detected, they too will have to stay at the government facilities or government-approved hotels for the 14-day quarantine period," it said.

Caab also said whether or not passengers got vaccine shots, they must show the airport authorities PCR-based Covid-19 negative certificates while arriving or departing from the country.

The test must be done within 72 hours of the flight's departure.

On December 28 last year, the government had decided that all UK returnees must be in a 14-day institutional quarantine in the wake of the spread of a new variant of Covid-19 in the United Kingdom.

Later, the duration of quarantine was reduced to seven days.

## A wake-up call for AL, for us all

FROM PAGE 1

Following on the big showdown in May 2013, the government developed a close relationship with HI high-ups especially with its late chief Shah Ahmad Shafi, who termed the PM "Qawmi Ma" (Mother of the Qawmi) at a rally on November 4, 2018, after her government recognised the highest degree given out by the Qawmi Madrasas as equivalent to post graduate degree.

The ostensible reason for the recognition was that the government could not leave out of the "mainstream" the thousands of students who pass out from the Qawmi system. The real reason was to gain political favour. This decision becomes highly questionable in the face of the facts that the government has no say over Qawmi madrasas' curriculum, teaching methods, subjects to be covered, qualification of the teachers, etc. Compared with the Alia-Madrasa system over which the government has full control, as it should, it has none over the Qawmi system. Yet the official recognition came. This was HI's most persistent demand and the most coveted victory. In return, it remained docile and silent as Sheikh Hasina ramrodded her brand of politics down the throat of the rest of the society.

Awami League and Sheikh Hasina thought that they had a winning formula of politics -- divide the Islamic forces, replace the traditional opposition with a domesticated one and suppress the independent media and rule happily. It did not work, as it never did in the past, anywhere in the world. For fundamentalist forces political alliances are always a matter of convenience and thus temporary, and never a matter of principle.

Whatever may have been its original aim HI has become today a political party for all practical purposes. According to a report by our senior correspondent Rashidul Hasan, published on 9th December 2020, "Hefajat-e-Islam is now more than a political party with the strategic disclaimer of having no political agenda." "About one-third of its leaders of the new committee who seized control come from political parties who are part of a 20-party alliance led by BNP.

HI was formed in 2010 comprising teachers of several Madrasas in Chittogram and it was triggered by the draft "Women Development Policy" of 2009 that advocated equal inheritance of property for men and women. However, the real emergence can be said to have occurred in 2013 after the "Shahbagh movement" of students demanding death penalty for all war criminals of 1971. The HI countered by holding a militant demonstration at Shapla Chatter (in front of Bangladesh Bank) placing a 13-point demand that included, among many others, the introduction of a Blasphemy Law, punishment of atheists, changes in school curriculum, etc. Who were its targets? Free thinkers, liberal forces and advocates of inclusive values and culture.

Following the frontal confrontation between law enforcement agencies and HI activists leading to several deaths, the government went for a serious behind-the-scene negotiations and with the acceptance of several of their 13-point demand, maintained a fragile peace between the two sides till the death of its leader Shah Ahmad Shafi that tilted the balance of power within HI towards the more anti-government faction of.

Sheikh Hasina's government is a victim of the classic notion of "Being too clever for its own good". The "know-all" and "have all the answers" attitude blinded them to the obvious faults and closed their minds to alternative suggestions. The fact that appeasement never works, especially against faith-based extremism, is a universally proven lesson that seem to have escaped this government.

On the other hand, for reasons that we know, AL went after BNP which, with all its faults, was not a faith-based organisation. In its determined effort to destroy BNP it destroyed a secular alternative in our political spectrum whose secular credentials, however, were considerably damaged by its alliance with Jamaat -- which officially still exists - and its ambiguous stance and ambivalent attitude towards the war crimes trial.

At the same time the ruling party went against the civil society, mocking them and denigrating them in various ways and even calling them "dustbins" who carry the sign "use me", meaning that they were such an unethical and

unprincipled bunch as to be open for use by anybody willing to pay them for their services.

It was a similar story for the NGOs whose foreign funding was held up as their main identity and the fact of their several-decades-long contribution in the crucial social sectors -- like education, health, child mortality, etc -- being completely ignored. Their particular contribution in transforming lives at the grassroots level and also acting as a vital force for women empowerment and strengthening democratic and secular values were never given the credit that they deserved. Micro-credit which has been globally accepted as an effective method, albeit with some limitations, of poverty alleviation was literally mocked at as a method of entrapment of the poor into greater debt. Everything the NGO's achieved was questioned.

The independent media and voices of secular democratic dissent were shut with one singular step -- enactment of the DSA. Interestingly none of the hate-speech makers and the constant haranguing by the faith preachers of the supporters of the ideals of the Liberation War were ever brought under DSA. It was only as if to throttle the independent media and critics of the government that DSA was instituted and not for those whose politics, speeches, every utterance were directed at the fundamentals of our constitution.

All the above -- the civil society, the NGOs and the independent media -- were part of the secular and democratic forces that contributed to Bangladesh's globally praised journey towards advancement that we just celebrated with a 10-day gala function. It is these very forces that the government either ignored, denigrated or suppressed and who now, collectively, could have greatly strengthened the government's hands in its present and upcoming fight against forces whose ugly manifestations we just witnessed.

Just as the darkest spot lies where the light shines brightest, so also at the very moment of our most brilliant success we stand bare of a very serious vulnerability.

If there was ever a need for a wake-up call for the ruling party to re-examine its brand of politics, it is now. It must also serve as a wake-up call for us all.

## Buses, trains to ply at half capacity

FROM PAGE 1

weeks unless the government issues any further directives, officials said yesterday.

The government took similar measures last year to contain the spread of the pandemic. But there were allegations against bus and launch owners to carry over 50 percent passengers at that time.

A passenger's platform said it would be difficult to implement the decision of carrying 50 percent passengers of buses, especially in city buses, when most of the offices, companies and factories are still open.

"The decision would rather increase passengers' sufferings," Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, secretary general of Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, told The Daily Star yesterday.

**BUS SERVICE**  
A special committee to fix public transport's fare proposed a 60 percent

hike in bus fare on Monday and sent it to the road transport and bridges ministry.

The committee, led by Nur Mohammad Mazumder, chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, made the decision at an emergency meeting when transport owners proposed either giving subsidies or increasing bus fare like before in the light of the new directives.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said 60 percent hike in bus fare will come into effect from today on condition that buses would carry 50 percent passengers and follow the health safety guidelines.

The minister said this at a regular media briefing from his residence.

The hike in the fare will be applicable for a certain period and the previous one will be reinstated once the coronavirus situation is under

control, he added.

The government in June last year increased 60 percent bus fare when the operation of public transport resumed after more than two months' suspension to curb the Covid-19 infections.

But the authorities reinstated the previous bus fare in September last year when the restriction was withdrawn.

The government last increased the inter-district bus fares in May 2016 at Tk 1.42 a kilometre.

With the new hike, it will cost a passenger Tk 700 (excluding tolls) to travel to Barishal from the capital's Gabtoli via Faridpur. The existing fare is Tk 438.

Bus fares on routes inside the capital were last increased in September 2015 at Tk 1.70 a km.

Now, one has to pay Tk 53 instead of Tk 33 to travel to the Mirpur Zoo from Notre Dame College.

## Only 2 oxygen

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vacant at the hospital, they referred all those patients to other public hospitals in the city.

Monir Hossain was one of them. A Titas Gas employee, Monir was carried to the hospital in an ambulance from Homna in Comilla.

"We have come all the way from Homna. But doctors here said they don't have vacant beds to admit my husband. They have referred us to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. But we are not sure if we can get a bed in DMCH," said Halima, Monir's wife.

"We requested the doctors to give him oxygen support till we find a suitable transport. But the doctors said that they won't be able to continue the support for long since they have already referred the patient to another

hospital," said Halima.

Contacted last night, Halima said they eventually got a bed for her husband at Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital.

Jamaluddin was another patient who came to Mugda with severe respiratory problems. The 60-year-old was referred there after he was taken to Police Hospital in Rajarbagh.

Jamaluddin's daughter Kohinoor was facing a different kind of problem. The driver of the ambulance on which the 60-year-old patient was brought to Mugda Medical College Hospital was in a hurry to leave.

"The driver is repeatedly saying that I will have to get my father out of the ambulance. But if we do that, he won't have oxygen support. We also could not admit him at Mugda hospital. It

is really a scary situation for us," said Kohinoor, before leaving with her father on the same ambulance in the hope of better luck at Suhrawardy or DMCH.

"Recently we have been facing a rush in the emergency unit. It happens often and it is normal. This time, too, we are facing a rush as Covid-19 transmission is rising in the country," Dr Asim Kumar Nath, director of Mugda Medical College Hospital, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He added, "We have only two oxygen support devices in the emergency unit. With limited logistics, it is tough to give emergency support to the patients. The situation becomes tougher when the patients' rush increases."

## Govt moves

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Maleque said it would take 10-15 days to make the DNCC market functional as a healthcare facility.

The minister also said the ministry would hold a meeting with the owners of private medical college hospitals today to discuss increasing the number of beds at their facilities too.

"We would request them to raise their number of beds though they are already crowded with patients," he added.

The minister also asked people to take patients to district hospitals having facilities for Covid-19 patients so that pressure on Dhaka is reduced.

"There are some medical facilities in Cumilla, Tongi, Gazipur, Manikganj and some other districts around Dhaka. Patients should be admitted to those hospitals and they should not come to Dhaka."

He also said containment of the virus is the most important factor. "Everyone has to follow the health guidelines. Otherwise, the situation would go out of control. Besides, people have to understand that the resources are limited."

Contacted, Dr Farid Hossain Miah, director (hospitals and clinics) of the Directorate General of Health Services, said they were expecting to add another 2,000 Covid-19 beds in Dhaka in around two weeks.

"We are also expecting to add about 100 ICU beds in Dhaka," he added.

Farid said apart from 51 ICU beds at the makeshift hospital at DNCC market, Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital, Kurmitola General Hospital and Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital would have 10 ICU beds each.

Asked about the additional workforce, he said it needed, they would mobilise resources from districts around the capital.