Deaths

BANGLADESH
UPDATE5,358
New cases in 24hrs5,11,295
Total cases9,046
Deaths

5,42,399

GLOBAL

Recoveries

MAYHEM IN BRAHMANBARIA

Hefajat men did it dividéd in 7 groups

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

2 | The Baily Star

Hefajat men unleashed mayhem in Brahmanbaria during their hartal on Sunday after being divided into seven groups, according to locals and police sources.

Five of the groups damaged and carried out arson attacks on establishments, including the land office, police lines, Alauddin music academy, municipality office and public library. They also attacked a Hindu temple and the press club in the district.

All these establishments are situated at the northern side of the Brahmanbaria town.

The other two groups carried out attacks on establishments at the southern portion of the town. They ransacked the district council building, torched vehicles and houses of some Awami League leaders.

One of the groups blocked rail tracks in Dakshin Poirotola area of the town around 10:00am on Sunday, forcing Sonar Bangla Express to stop.

Later, the Hefajat men attacked the train, leaving at least 10 passengers injured, said locals and railway sources.

The Hefajat supporters damaged the locomotive, broke 117 windows, and vandalised 15 coaches of the train, said Brahmanbaria Station Master Md Shoyeb Ahmed.

Police have collected CCTV footage. After analysing the footage, they believe Hefajat men carried out the attacks in a planned way after being divided into seven group.

A police officer in Brahmanbaria also showed this correspondent some of the footage.

of devastation by Hefajat Trail activists could be seen everywhere in the town. The burnt smell was still in the air.

over attacks on policemen, vandalism

number of the total accused but it is

Assistant Commissioner (AC Land)

office in Hathazari upazila also filed

office and setting one of their vehicles

Patiya Police Station, said they filed a

case accusing at least 700 unidentified

people under the Anti-Terrorism Act

None of the above-mentioned

with the police station.

Rezaul Karim, officer-in-charge of

Meanwhile, members of the

not less than 1,500," he said.

at police stations, and other charges.

FROM PAGE 1

on fire.

cases.

The music academy, founded in memory of the subcontinent's top most music maestro Sur-Samrat Alauddin Khan, and its instruments were completely destroyed. The establishments that suffered

the brunt of the Hefajat mayhem also include the bungalows of the district judge, deputy commissioner, and superintendent of police, railway station and rail police outpost, civil surgeon's office, fisheries office, circuit house, sadar upazila land office, Water Davelopment Board office Water Development Board office, zilla parishad and municipal office, Ansar and VDP office, Khatihata Highway police station, Ashuganj's Syed Nazrul Islam Bridge toll plaza and it's police outpost, Muktijodhha Sangsad building, fire service office and Directorate of Education Engineering office, said the district police in an email to journalists.

Besides, police issued a statement on Tuesday afternoon, saying 23 vehicles, including microbus and motorcycles, were burned in the SP office's garage and police outpost-2.

In the fire, a machine of the NID server office was also badly damaged. On Sunday, Brahmanbaria turned

into a battle ground. A train and a temple where Dol Purnima puja was being held couldn't escape Hefajat's wrath.

activists attacked and Hefajat Brahmanbaria's biggest ransacked temple Sree Sree Anandamayee Kalibari Mandir. They trashed and broke the idols of Krishna and the Goddess Kali. The donation box for the temple was looted, while the artifacts used for ceremonies were ransacked and strewn about.

Nine cases have so far been filed over the violence in the district. A total of 16,500 people have been accused in the cases.



The spike in new cases of Covid-19 have resulted in long queues of people waiting to get tested for coronavirus. The photo of people sitting on a footpath near Mugda General Hospital in the capital was taken yesterday.

Enforce partial lockdown FROM PAGE 1

yesterday, the highest daily figure since August 26 when 54 deaths were recorded.

Prof Iqbal Arsalan, president of Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad and also a member of the technical committee, said that strategic plan and actions based on the government directives should be devised immediately.

He also said the committee advised the government to replace the words "limited" and "discourage" mentioned in two directives with "specific number" and "stop" respectively.

Contacted, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said, "I also agree with the

experts' views. I think if we cannot he said. control the situation right now, the casualties will be high. Once it gets out of

control, it would be difficult to contain. 'Now it is the time to be strict to curb the transmission," he said, adding that the existing directives will be reviewed soon if they do not bring the

desired outcome. Prof Nazrul Islam, another member of the NTAC, said the directives were basically "directives in principal" but how those would be implemented is not clear.

"So, the meeting decided to formulate an implementation strategy soon and implement it accordingly,"

The former vice-chancellor of BSMMU said that immediate actions are needed before the situation gets out of control.

PHOTO

ANISUR RAHMAN

Mohammad Mushtuq Husain, consultant at Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control & Research (IEDCR), said it was about time to go for a targeted approach.

Effective and timely intervention is required in the areas where transmission rate is high. Shutdown is the last weapon. If we fail to contain the transmission with the existing directives, we will be left with no other option but the last weapon."

BBC reporter leaves China, says 'too risky to carry on' AFP, Beijing

Y Total cases

2,820,199 📑 129,077,376

A senior BBC correspondent yesterday said he had left China, after facing legal threats and pressure from authorities over his reporting on Xinjiang rights abuses and the coronavirus pandemic.

John Sudworth told BBC Radio 4 in an interview that he had relocated to Taiwan after nine years in Beijing as it was "too risky to carry on".

Threats from Chinese authorities had "intensified" in recent months, he added.

At least 18 foreign correspondents were expelled by China last year, during a tit-for-tat row with the US that decimated the international press presence in the country.

Press freedom groups say the space for foreign reporters to operate in China is increasingly tightly-controlled, with journalists followed on the streets, suffering harassment online and refused visas.

"The BBC has faced a full-on propaganda attack not just aimed at the organisation itself but at me personally across multiple Communist Partycontrolled platforms," said Sudworth, who will continue to work as China correspondent from Taiwan.

"We face threats of legal action, well as massive surveillance now, obstruction and intimidation, whenever and wherever we try to film, he added, reporting that he had even been "followed by plainclothes police" during his departure from China.

In recent weeks, Chinese state media and officials have repeatedly attacked Sudworth for his reporting on alleged forced labour practices targeting Uyghur Muslim minorities in Xinjiang's cotton industry in particular.

Not named

of Bangladesh's independence, he opined.

Hefajat leaders used thousands of nnocent madrasa students to attack government facilities.

"All the records of a land office were burnt ... People of the region will suffer for years."

The IGP said several policemen were critically injured in the attacks in Brahmanbaria and Hathazari of Chattogram.

A team of officers from Police Headquarters led by the IGP will visit Brahmanbaria today.

Hefajat-e-Islam activists were demonstrating at Baitul Mukarram in the capital on Friday against the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi when a clash occurred between them and police and ruling party men.

As soon as the news spread, the students of Hathazari madrasa in Chattogram began a demonstration during which four students were shot dead by what Hefajat said was police

3,000 accused "Among the 15 accused, president of Sirahdikhan unit of Hefajat-e-Islam Mohammad Obaidullah Kashemi, "I cannot accurately say the exact 40, and Abdullah, 35, were made accused," he said.

However, Abdul Hamid, Nayebe-ameer of the central committee of Hefajat-e-Islam, known as "Madhupur Pir", who was also injured during two cases over vandalism at their the strike on March 28, was not made accused in the case. He is also the superintendent of Madhupur Madrasa.

Mahfuz Mohammad Afzal (administration and crime), said, police officials, however, confirmed if in the attack on police during the any Hefajat leaders were named in the strike."

Meanwhile, talking to The Daily Meanwhile, accusing 15 leaders of Star, Syed Nurul Islam, deputy commissioner (Motijheel zone) of police, said no fresh arrest was made in his area but they were trying to find the accused.

additional superintendent of police "Police did not make Madhupur Pir an accused as he was not involved

US slates wide use of DSA FROM PAGE 1

in managing Covid-19. On April 23, Health Minister Zahid Maleque banned all health officials from speaking to the media," the report documented. "On October 13, the Ministry of

Home Affairs issued a press release restricting "false, fabricated, misleading and provocative statements" regarding the government, public representatives, army officers, police, and law enforcement through social media in the country and abroad," said the report.

The report pointed out that the ministry said in the interest of maintaining stability and law and order in the country, legal action would be taken against individuals who did not comply.

Without mentioning names, the report came down heavily on the prosecution of writer Mushtaque Ahmed, cartoonist Ahmed Kishore, and the others implicated in a DSA case.

Media accounts of a police case, involving 11 accused, detailed Rab's search of mobile phones of two accused and finding "anti-government" chats with other accused. "According to the police, these "anti-government" chats sufficed as evidence to charge and detain the individuals under the DSA," said the state department report.

opposition figures and members of civil society

It documented the prosecution of Prof Sirajum Munira by Begum Rokeya University authorities and Prof Kazi Zahidur Rahman by Rajshahi University, under DSA.

It detailed that Munira was arrested for a Facebook post that the university authorities claimed mocked the late Mohammad Nasim, a former senior government official in the health ministry. "Although Munira apologised and deleted the post, police used a screenshot of the deleted post as evidence to arrest her," it added.

The report furthermore included how journalists faced targeted physical assaults during the pandemic. "According to the RSF [Reporters

Sans Frontières], 10 men beat journalist Shariful Alam Chowdhury with steel bars, machetes, and hammers. During the beating, Chowdhury's arms and legs were broken. Chowdhury's family told RSF they believed local village council authorities called for this attack," said the report.

press that Kajol was 'rescued' near the border with India and detained him on trespassing charges. Kajol's family told the press they believe Kajol was forcibly disappeared and held in government detention from March through May. Kajol spent 237 days in prison on defamation charges and was released on bail on December 25," it narrated.

Along with freedom of expression, media and press, the report also documented the increased, and arbitrary surveillance faced by citizens and journalists.

Between March and September, the government became increasingly active in monitoring social media sites and other electronic communications in order to scan public discussions on Covid-19 and the government's handling of the virus. In March the information ministry announced the formation of a unit to monitor social media and television outlets for 'rumors' related to Covid-19," it said.

Hafaiat and 600 unnamed persons, police filed another case in Sirajdikhan upazila of Munshiganj district over clashes and violence during the countrywide strike.

Kamruzzaman, Mohammad (investigation) inspector of Sirajdikhan police station, said eight persons were arrested in connection with the case.

Shah Iftekhar Ahmed, deputy commissioner (Wari zone) of police, said 10 persons were already arrested in four cases.

"We did not arrest anyone new in connection with the cases," he added.

Are we doing our part? FROM PAGE 1

strains, threatening lives, livelihoods, and our vulnerable public health system again.

Yesterday, the health directorate reported the highest number of infections recorded in a single day, 5,358, with a positivity rate of 19.90 percent. The number of deaths rose too. Yesterday, 52 deaths from Covid-19 were reported, the highest in seven months. The death toll is now 9,046.

The government and health experts alike have been sounding alarm for quite a while. They have been urging people to maintain health safety guidelines, wear masks and maintain social distancing and hygiene.

To curb the spread, the government, albeit late, has come up with 18 instructions on people's movement that will remain in force for at least for two weeks.

This begs the question: Have the authorities created enough public awareness about the virus and its impact on people's lives and livelihood?

The answer is no.

For example, the UK variant was detected in January and disclosed by the media in March.

The mandatory quarantine for returnees, contact tracing, rigorous testing were never in place to contain the new threat.

The government seemed to have had its priorities mixed-up.

It needed to build its capacity – more ICUs, oxygen supply -- and re-energise its frontlines ahead of a fresh battle. But that was not done.

The people will hold the government responsible if it fails to ensure the measures, be it healthcare services or financial assistance, required to tackle the situation.

But as citizens, we have our part to play to suppress this pandemic too. Are we doing those? Are we, the people, heeding to the advice seriously?

A few people are following the guidelines religiously, but the majority don't even think twice before flouting them. It is as if the fear has gone and

everything is back to the pre-pandemic time.

Events like mass congregations, parties or social get-togethers are being held like they used to before the pandemic. Or in other words, we have become too careless to take the matter seriously.

Even at this crucial juncture, we are unfortunately seeing a lack of social responsibility among all sections of our society, illiterate, semi-literate, educated and highly skilled professionals. Ask anyone about the refusal to follow health guidelines and you will hear: "I don't need a mask as I've already had Covid" or "It's not going to make much of a difference' or "Covid only infects rich people".

The most worrying of the excuses is: "I already got the vaccine, so I don't need a mask"

There have been other disturbing reports like people escaping from quarantine in hospitals.

Even when things are normal, we tend to flout laws and social norms, be it traffic or others, without thinking about the consequences or inconvenience caused to others.

In this crucial time, we need to understand the consequences of our actions. It is not only for us, but for others as well. We have a huge number of senior citizens and middle-aged people vulnerable to Covid-19 as they have comorbidities like cardiac conditions, diabetes, and asthma.

And a single instance of irresponsible behaviour could not only cost us our loved ones, but also take a heavy toll on our fellow citizens, our neighbours, and our country.

With the government immunisation programme going slow, we must understand that it will take many months to inoculate everyone eligible for the shots.

This new crisis requires us to reset our expectations and make behavioural changes. The government is doing what it can, but in the given situation we, the citizenry, should also understand our roles and responsibilities to stop the transmission

The report continues on to say that media outlets that criticised the government were pressured by the government.

"Libel, slander, defamation, and blasphemy are treated as criminal offenses, most commonly employed against individuals speaking against the government, the prime minister, or other government officials," noted the report, adding that the law referring to defamation of individuals and organisations was used to prosecute

The enforced disappearance of photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol was also mentioned in the report as an exemplary incident of the violation of human rights.

"On March 10, photojournalist and news editor Shafiqul Islam Kajol disappeared after leaving his house for work. The previous day a member of parliament filed a case against Kajol and 31 others, claiming a media story covering a crime syndicate involving drugs, money, and prostitution defamed the member of parliament," drugs, said the report.

"On May 3, police in the border town Benapole confirmed to the

Intelligence and law enforcement shooting

agencies may monitor private communications with the permission of the Ministry of Home Affairs, but police rarely obtained such permission from the courts to monitor private correspondence," added the report.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken while launching the report said, "The pandemic impacted not only individuals' health, but their abilities to safely enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Some governments used the crisis as a pretext to restrict rights and consolidate authoritarian rule.

"Human rights are interdependent, and the deprivation of one right can cause the broader fabric of a society to fray."

Around the same time, another activist got killed in a clash with law enforcers in Brahmanbaria.

The Islamist organisation then called for demonstrations on Saturday and hartal on Sunday protesting the deaths.

Hefajat activists vandalised vehicles, blocked roads and attacked government facilities in different districts in the following days. But only a handful of people from the Islamist organisation were accused in cases filed over the violence.

The reported death toll reached 13 in three days. Hefajat claims at least 17 of its members got killed, and over 500 injured.

Commuters suffer for transport curbs

FROM PAGE 1 **PEOPLE'S SUFFERINGS**

Commuters, especially office-goers, faced difficulties since morning as public transport has started operating at 50 percent occupancy in Dhaka and adjacent areas.

Long queues were seen at bus stops in different parts of the capital, including Shewrapara, Mirpur, Kazipara, Shyamoli, Banglamotor, Topkhana Road, Asadgate, Farmgate and even in Savar.

Many were seen walking to their destinations, as buses were saying no seats were available. Using loudspeakers, transport workers were asking passengers to wear masks and maintain other health guidelines.

But in many buses, passengers were seen sitting side by side, posing a serious risk of coronavirus infection. Some of the buses were also seen plying over 50 percent passengers.

Sabur Mia, conductor of Vision Paribahan operating on Dhaka Zoo to Motijheel route, said they tried to follow the government directives to carry half passengers of their capacities.

"But many forcibly got into the bus, and two persons sat in a seat. We faced this problem severely between 9:00am and 11:00am," he told The Daily Star.

"Many passengers, who boarded bus first, asked me not to allow anymore passengers as they paid 60 percent increased fare. On the other hand, passengers who could not avail the bus forced us to allow them," he explained the problem.

Munshi Sabbir Hossain, officer-inharge of Khilkhet Police Station, said hundreds of commuters gathered at Khilkhet bus stop yesterday like any other days.

But as no buses were taking passengers

from there as they have already filled up with 50 percent passengers from Uttara areas, commuters demonstrated there.

In this situation, police had to intervene to control the situation, he added.

Later, some buses took passengers over 50 percent and the situation returned to normalcy around 11:00am, locals said.

This correspondent observed bus service at Farmgate bus stop, one of the busiest stops in the city, for half an hour from 3:00pm and found most of the buses were carrying passengers over 50 percent.

Many BRTC buses were even running with standing passengers.

When this correspondent was taking video of a crowded bus of Ayat Paribahan, at least seven passengers were forced to leave the bus.

Whenever a bus reached the stoppage, many passengers gathered before the bus door, even before the passengers left buses. While some bus staffers were seen asking people not to get into buses, some others were taking passengers beyond their 50 percent capacity.

A middle-aged woman was seen waiting for a bus for more than 20 minutes. When this correspondent approached her, she said after admitting her mother to Combined Military Hospital, she could have reached Farmgate by a Trust bus to go to her

Mugda house. "I am trvi "I am trying to catch a bus of Labbayek Paribahan. I approached three buses, but failed to get into," she said, wishing not be named. Later, she boarded another company bus that would take her near Mugda area. WHY THE PROBLEM?

According to Monday's directives,

government and private offices, establishments and factories should be managed by 50 percent of their manpower, except for emergency service providers. Pregnant and ill officials or those above 55 should stay at home and steps have to be taken so that they can work from there.

But many of the offices, including government ones, did not implement the directives yet, so their employees have to go to office using public transport. But cutting 50 percent capacity of buses and minibuses causes huge problem in the seating capacity of the public transport.

reached their Many people destinations on foot, while many others take bike and CNG-run auto-rickshaw rides, giving extra money.

Meanwhile, Farhad Hossain, state minister for public administration, said the directives would be implemented fully within a day or two.

Besides, the number of buses was less in the morning, a transport leader told is correspondent.

He said many operators did not run their vehicles on the street, fearing that they may face punishment for not following health safety guidelines properly, he said, wishing not be named.

Contacted, Abdur Razzak, deputy director (enforcement) of BRTA, said their mobile courts were on the roads to execute the directives, but firstly they mostly motivate people to follow the guidelines.

In another development, the BRTA yesterday banned operation of motorcycles under ride-sharing services to ensure health safety guidelines and social distancing.

A circular was issued in this regard and the directives were sent to the

service-providing companies, a BRTA official told The Daily Star.

The ban will be effective until further notice (two weeks for now), according to the BRTA order.

Other vehicles operating under ridesharing services were also asked to follow the government directives, it said.

A total of 23,493 vehicles were so far enlisted with the BRTA to operate under the ride-sharing service, of which 80 percent are motorcycles, BRTA sources said.

The authorities imposed the ban on motorcycle operation as it is not possible to maintain physical distancing and health safety guidelines, they said. The BRTA took similar steps last year, they added.

LAÚNCH FARE TO RISE

The BIWIA yesterday proposed 60 percent hike in launch fare following launch owners' demand as the authorities instructed them not to take over 50 percent passengers of their capacities.

"We have sent the proposal to the shipping ministry and hope to get a directive in this regard within tomorrow [Thursday]," BIWTA Chairman Commodore Golam Sadeq told The Daily Star.

As per the existing rate, launch fare for one kilometre is Tk 1.7 within 100km and Tk 1.4 after 100km. The minimum fare is Tk 18.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Railway has directed its officials not to sell tickets of inter-city trains after April 11.

The authorities made the decision as the government's directives to halve train capacity are applicable for two weeks and further decision may be made after the stipulated time. This decision was made so that future decision can be implemented properly, an official said.