



The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION



REGD. No. DA 781 | Vol. XXXI No. 80 | CHAITRA 21, 1427 BS | **Your Right to Know** | SHABAN 20, 1442 HJRI | 16 PAGES PRICE : Tk12.00



"The government should handle them with an iron hand. If necessary, a tribunal should be formed to try them."
AL PRESIDUM MEMBER SHEIKH FAZLUL KARIM SELIM ABOUT HEFAJAT



"BJP wants to divide Bengal ... These people want to end Bengal, its language, its culture."
MAMATA BANERJEE AS POLLS CAMPAIGN HEATS UP IN WEST BENGAL



"This madness must stop. Sanctions and an arms embargo must be imposed to cut their [the junta's] access to revenue and weapons."
UN RIGHTS RAPporteur TOM ANDREWS AS DEADLY CRACKDOWN CONTINUES IN MYANMAR

'Lockdown' looms

Proposals sent to PM for approval as pandemic takes deadly turn



PROPOSED CURBS

- Restriction on public movement between 8:00pm to 6:00am countrywide
- No travel from one district to another
- Maximum 5 people allowed for daily prayers at every mosque, 10 for Juma
- Tourist spots closed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to impose a countrywide "lockdown" for a week from tomorrow in a desperate bid to contain the rising number of new cases of Covid-19 and deaths from it.

"Coronavirus is spreading rapidly. Infection and death are jumping up. In the given situation, Sheikh Hasina's government has decided to impose a one-week lockdown across the country from Monday," Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said yesterday.

Production facilities might be allowed to

remain operational on certain conditions, he told a briefing from his official residence.

According to Quader, also the Awami League general secretary, the public administration ministry was to issue a circular detailing the new restrictions by yesterday evening. But it wasn't issued until late last night.

State Minister for Public Administration Forhad Hossain also commented about the possibility of a "lockdown" and said organisations providing emergency services will not be restricted.

Employees will work in shifts and follow

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RELATED STORY ON PAGE 2, 12



Bus ticket sales at Gabtoli terminal spiked hours after the news spread that the government might enforce a week-long lockdown across the country amid a surge of Covid-19 cases. Transport associations said many people were buying tickets so that they can be in their hometown during the lockdown.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

People rush to get out of the capital

Panic buying at the kitchen markets

STAR REPORT

A sudden rush of people in kitchen markets and a growing number of passengers at inter-district bus terminals in Dhaka was seen after the news of a possible lockdown from Monday onward was announced in the media yesterday.

The Karwan Bazaar kitchen market in the city saw an influx of customers from around 12 noon, which continued till evening. Traders said people were focused on buying sanitizers and daily essential commodities like lintel, sugar, wheat, potato and onion.

"The flow of customers started to increase around one hour after the lockdown was announced. Normally, we don't see such an influx of customers even before Eid," said Gorfan, owner of a grocery store in one of the biggest kitchen markets in the city.

He said that he had not even seen such an influx of buyers during the first lockdown in March last year, adding that the rush yesterday was probably a combined effect of three factors -- the beginning of a month, the holy Ramadan just over a week away and the

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RELATED STORY ON B1

The poor brace for bleaker days

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

One thing from the lockdown last year still etched raw in the collective memory of the city is hordes of hungry people coming out onto the streets.

The scenes were straight out of a Dickensian nightmare -- hungry people standing beneath the tall unyielding buildings of the city, imploring food, hungry people stampeding each other while running after relief trucks that held far too less rice for far too many people. Those who could not bring themselves to beg on the streets, went to bed hungry night after night.

Now, the government's announcement of imposing social restrictions beginning tomorrow sends a strong message to the general public -- the situation is going from bad to worse and it is time to go back inside. This time last year, the Covid-19 positivity rate was 2 percent, yesterday it was 23.1 percent.

It is those people who are once again looking at the skyrocketing positivity rates with a dread. They are more worried about surviving than getting Covid-19.

Mohammed Alam, a rickshaw puller from the capital's Abuler Bosti has been a resident of the city for the last 23 years, but he never experienced a year like the one which has gone by. Now he faces the weeks ahead of him with the fear of starvation. Alam lives with his nine-year-old daughter and elderly mother.

"I had to take loans of Tk 25,000 last year just to survive. Things were so bad that I was eating rice and dried chili, which gave me ulcer. Even potatoes were too expensive. Now, we are finally able to afford potatoes and onions.

"If people go back inside, which one do we cut back on? How much less can we eat than what we are eating right now?" asked Alam.

Rubina Begum is a domestic helper employed at two houses in Benarasi

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MAYHEM IN B'BARIA Blame game at full throttle Intelligence says it was mainly Hefajat's doing

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MASUK HRIDROY

A week after the Brahmanbaria mayhem, Hefajat-e-Islam, the ruling Awami League and the BNP are trading blame for the widespread violence and damages in the town.

There are signs of destruction in many areas of the town. At least two dozen government and non-government installations, including temple, music academy, land office, district council office, municipality office, police outpost and houses of Awami League leaders, were destroyed during the March 26-28 mayhem.

Hefajat, who had called the protest programme and enforced a hartal for March 27 over police actions on demonstrations and death of their supporters, now claims that a "third party" carried out the violence to take advantage of the situation.

The AL, however, is pointing finger at its rival group in Bramanbaria and also at the BNP-Jamaat while the BNP says the violence took place due to the "rivalry between two factions of the ruling party".

However, intelligence agency officials, who visited the district after the mayhem,

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HEFAJAT, LIKE-MINDED GROUPS BFIU seeks bank info of 24 leaders

Also wants details of 30 madrasas' accounts over terror financing suspicion

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) of the government has sought the bank account details of 24 leaders of different organisations, including Hefajat-e-Islam and 30 madrasas.

The BFIU issued the notice on March 31, asking the banks to send the information within five working days.

The move came right after the recent mayhem by activists of Hefajat-e-Islam that killed 13 people since March 26.

Hefajat had been protesting the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi upon the invitation of the Bangladesh government to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the country's independence.

Officials said the BFIU, the central financial intelligence agency, has taken the initiative to look into the sources of funds of the Islamist organisations.

"Banks have been asked to give details of all accounts belonging to the [specified] persons and madrasas as part of a BFIU investigation to detect whether they have been involved in money laundering and terrorist financing," an official told The Daily Star yesterday.

Those named in BFIU report includes Hefajat-e-Islam Ameer Junayed Babunagari, Secretary General Nur Hossain Kasemi, Vice President Mahfuzul Haque, Finance Secretary Monir Hossain Kasemi, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Ameer Moulana Islami Nurpori and Secretary General Mamunul Haque.

Mamunul is also the joint secretary general of Hefajat-e-Islam while Nur Hossain Kasemi had passed away in December last year.

The BFIU also asked the banks to submit account details of Islami Andolan Bangladesh Ameer Syed Mohammad Rezaul Karim, Secretary General Syed Faizul Karim and Bangladesh Imam and Musolli Oikya Parishad Secretary General at Demra Mahmudul Hasan Siraji.

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BANGLADESH UPDATE



5,683
New cases in 24hrs



6,30,277
Total cases



9,213
Deaths



5,49,775
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



2,855,315
Deaths



131,222,773
Total cases

Covid deaths increase 71pc in a week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Compared to the previous week, deaths due to Covid-19 has increased by around 71 percent and transmission of novel coronavirus continued to surge.

To stop the upsurge, experts said there was no alternative to ensuring everyone wears a mask and maintains physical distancing.

At least 58 Covid-19 patients died yesterday, taking the death toll of the week to 344, up from the previous week's (March 21-27) of 201 patients.

The number of new cases has also risen by more than 66 percent during the same period, according to a Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) press release.

This week, a total of 38,471 patients were detected while, in the previous week the detection was 23,100.

In the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, a total of 5,683 people tested positive after testing 24,548 samples.

The positivity rate was 23.15 percent.

The positivity rate is an important parameter to measure the level of virus transmission.

According to the World Health Organization, the transmission will

be considered under control if the positivity rate remain stagnant below five percent continuously for at least two weeks.

After the second spike in November and December last year, the positivity rate started to going down from January. Throughout February, this rate was below three percent, but started rising in early March.

For nearly one month, the hospitals, especially in Dhaka city, have been struggling with the rising number of critical patients.

As of noon yesterday, only three ICU beds out of 118 in Dhaka's Covid dedicated public hospitals were vacant.

Only 105 general beds in those hospitals out of 2,511 were vacant.

With the latest counts, the total number of deaths due to Covid-19 rose to 9,213 while the number of confirmed cases to 6,30,277.

In the 24 hours, 2,364 patients recovered from their illnesses, raising the number to 5,49,775, which is more than 87 percent of all cases detected so far.

On March 8 last year, the DGHS reported the first three cases while the first death was reported on March 18.

Of the yesterday's deceased, 38 were males and 20 were females.



Three wheelers running on the eastern channel of the might Jamuna river at Char Gopal in Tangail. The channel has completely dried up allowing people to use vehicles to go from one place to the other instead of using boats.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

'Lockdown' looms

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the health guidelines in the industries, he told reporters.

The move came as the Covid-19 positivity rate reached 23.15 percent yesterday. The average positivity rate was less than 3 percent in February.

Besides, the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 last week recommended "partial or modified" lockdown in "high-risk" areas. The government issued an 18-point directive, including restrictions on offices and public transport.

Covid-19 cases began to rise again from March 9.

On August 3 last year, the positivity rate was 31.91 percent, the highest seen in the country. The number of daily cases remained high between May and August last year, and stayed low in September and October.

There was a little spike in November and the first half of December. Confirmed cases fell below 1,000 on December 26 and the trend continued until the first week of March.

The government shut down public and private offices and suspended public transport operations from March 26-May 30 last year. The authorities later imposed restrictions on specific areas with high infection rates.

But the shutdown was not properly implemented, especially during the Eid festivals when tens of thousands people left Dhaka for their village homes. Besides, the garment factories were allowed to operate.

Labourers and low-income people were forced to come outdoors to earn

a living.

After the announcements yesterday, people rushed to the bus and launch terminals in the capital to leave for their hometown. Many people said the one-week restriction was likely to be ended later.

People also rushed to kitchen markets and grocery stores to stock up on the essentials.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan yesterday said train services will be suspended "once the lockdown is imposed". However, there will be no restrictions on freight trains.

The authorities have cancelled exams and shut down tourist destinations like Cox's Bazar and the Sundarbans.

Besides, Boisabi Utsab, the biggest traditional festival of the indigenous communities of the hill tracks, has been cancelled, reports UNB.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh yesterday suspended all domestic flights from tomorrow.

POSSIBLE STEPS
Sources said the Cabinet Division sent a proposal to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recommending a ban or limit on public movement and other activities.

It said the law enforcers should strictly enforce travel restrictions between districts while the general public would not be allowed outdoors between 8:00pm and 6:00am, unless there is an emergency.

Public and private offices would remain open on a limited scale, but the employees would not be allowed to leave the city where they work. Rally, mass gathering, and social

programmes should be banned, it said.

Only five people would be allowed inside a mosque at a time. For Juma prayers, no more than 10 people should be allowed, it added.

Markets of daily necessities would be moved to open spaces.

Fertiliser, insecticide, food, essential goods, medical equipment, daily essentials, kitchen markets, restaurants, drug stores, hospitals and the media would also remain out of the purview of the shutdown.

Infectious diseases specialist Prof Ridwanur Rahman said, "I would say we need a complete shutdown for two weeks as hospitals are at capacity."

"This [complete shutdown] is scientific and the best approach now. But considering livelihood, the new measure is not too bad. It will partially contribute to slowing down the transmission."

He told The Daily Star yesterday that the success would depend on how effectively the measures were implemented. "In the past, we have seen such measures exist only on papers."

NTAC member Prof Nazrul Islam said, "I do not see any scientific basis in the government decision. Be it lockdown or movement restriction, it must be for 15 days, considering the incubation period of the virus. Otherwise, those infected will spread infection after seven days."

Mushtuq Hussain, consultant of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, said, "The decisions can be revised based on its effectiveness."

France urges Iran to be 'constructive' at nuclear talks

AFP, PARIS

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian yesterday called on Tehran to be "constructive" during talks with world powers next week in Vienna.

The European Union is pushing to bring US President Joe Biden's administration back into the nuclear

accord to limit Tehran's ambitions.

The United States will not take part directly in the discussions also involving China, Germany, Russia, and Britain.

But for the first time since former leader Donald Trump pulled out of the Iran agreement in 2018, a US delegation will be present.

People rush to get out

FROM PAGE 1

announcement of the lockdown.

Mohammad Sabuj, a potato seller, said that his stock of the key food item was supposed to last three days but had been exhausted in just an hour and half.

"I have sold 250 sacks of potato in just an hour and half. I have never sold such a huge amount in such a small time ever before," said Sabuj, who has been involved in this business for 40 years.

He said that his average daily sale was around 60-80 sacks (each containing 50-60 kg of potatoes).

Due to the buying spree, the price of potatoes and onions also saw a rise in wholesale markets. Potatoes, sold at Tk 13 per kg in the morning, had risen to Tk 18, while the local variety of onions, sold at taka Tk 28-30 in the morning, shot up to Tk 35-38 by the afternoon.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Amena Khatun, who lives in Moghbazar, said that she turned up in the kitchen market hearing the news of lockdown.

"I was supposed to come on Monday for the monthly purchase of essentials. But I changed my mind after hearing the news of lockdown," she said.

Mizanur Rahman, a resident of Kathalbagan area, echoed Amena.

Some super shops in Dhaka also witnessed an influx of customers.

Shaheen Khan, chief executive officer of Meena Bazar (a concern of Gemcon Group), said after the announcement of the lockdown, the flow of shoppers increased since noon, which went on till evening.

"But I wouldn't call it a panic buy. However, after the announcement [of lockdown], the number of customers increased a little. About 25 per cent more customers were seen today," he

added.

Meanwhile, many people also thronged the inter-district bus terminals and Sadarghat launch terminal in the city after the lockdown was announced.

Abul Kalam, president of bus owners' association of Mohakhali bus terminal, said the number of passengers increased a little in the afternoon.

"We think the pressure of passengers would increase tomorrow [Sunday]," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mosharref Hossain, general manager of Hanif Paribahan, said a huge number of passengers started gathering at Gabtoli since yesterday noon.

"We were asked to keep 50 percent of the seats vacant but we are facing a tough challenge to maintain health safety guidelines due to the huge pressure of the passengers," he said.

Zainal Abedin, joint director (Dhaka river port) of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority, told this correspondent at 4:49pm that although they are yet to see a rise in passengers, it may change later in the day.

Shahidul Alam, sub inspector of River Police at Sadarghat outpost, said the number of passengers had increased in the evening.

At Kamalapur, there were also reports of increased passengers.

However, Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan said they will shut down passenger trains and operate freight trains once the lockdown is imposed.

"Rail is a public transport run by the government. So, we will take steps as per the government's decision," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"However, everything would be cleared after the circular [of lockdown] is issued," he added.

The poor brace for bleaker days

FROM PAGE 1

Polli. She only got the work towards the end of the last year after the pandemic restrictions eased. Now with the restrictions coming down hard again, she is fearing unemployment.

"I used to work six days a week at a house, but just this week my employers told me to come only twice a week from now on. I am afraid I will get fired soon," said Rubina. She has her orphaned nephew and niece depending on her.

"We need relief. There is no other way we can survive," she said.

An economic think tank called South Asian Network for Economic Modelling found that once the coronavirus-driven social restrictions ended last year in December, the poverty rate stood at 42 percent, up from 21.6 percent in 2018.

Abdur Rahman 41, a hawker selling baby clothes at Mirpur-10 intersection had loaned Tk 1 lakh to invest in clothes keeping Pahela Baishakh and Eid in mind.

"We mostly see sales happening during Pahela Baishakh, the two eids and winter," said Rahman. "I cannot sell anything during Pahela Baishakh, I will be in deep financial trouble."

He said that the government needs to give relief and it has to be enough to last the lockdown.

"Last year, we got 20kg of grains, which was supposed to last for as many as 6 months. It only lasted a month," he said.

During the pandemic, only 35 lakh poor were given a one-time cash incentive of Tk 2,500, leaving millions of other out of the purview of financial assistance. Relief distribution nationally was mired in well-documented corruption.

MaulanaAbdusSobhan, development committee president of Korail Slum Boubazar unit, said, "Last year, the blow left lakhs hungry in the slum. If this year is going to be a repetition, these people need relief materials. The relief can help them stave off the lenders at least."

Monu Miah is a footpath hawker at Bhashantek slum. "Last year during the lockdown, I had to take Tk 40,000 in loans. I am not even able to return the money I borrowed and there are eight lenders after me for the money. I was barely getting back on my feet and you are telling me that this year might be the same?"

[Zyma Islam contributed to the report]

Blame game at full throttle

FROM PAGE 1

said Hefajat started the violence and it was mainly responsible. But a rebel AL group, the BNP and its affiliated bodies, and Jamaat-Shibir also took part in the violence for their interests.

The three-day violence left nine people dead in Brahmanbaria. Of them, three were madrasa students and supporters of Hefajat and the rest were common people, including mason, rickshaw-puller and fisherman, according to the officials.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday on condition of anonymity, a top official of an intelligence agency said Hefajat is mainly responsible for the mayhem in Brahmanbaria.

"On March 26, leaders and activists of Hefajat carried out the violence protesting the Dhaka incident [police action on a Hefajat demonstration]," he said.

During the violence on the second and third day [March 27, 28], Hefajat was accompanied by AL rebels, BNP and Jamaat, the official added.

He said supporters of AL rebel municipality mayor candidate Mahmudul Haque Bhuiyan mainly targeted the houses of different ruling party leaders, who are close to the local AL lawmaker, as he sought revenge, added the official.

Mahmudul lost the February 28 Brahmanbaria municipality polls.

Contacted, Maulana Sajedur Rahman, president of Brahmanbaria district Hefajat, claimed that they were not involved in any kind of violence.

"We staged a peaceful protest, but supporters of Awami League and the local MP attacked us," he said.

Sajedur demanded a fair and an impartial probe into the violence.

Law enforcers said they have already started identifying the perpetrators of the violence by recording statements of witnesses and analysing video footage. They have launched drives to arrest those responsible.

Twenty cases have so far been filed with different police stations in the district over the mayhem.

Police said they have identified an attacker, Saiful Islam, a Shibir leader from the district. They claimed that Saiful played a major role in the attack on a Highway Police Station in Sarail and torching of an armored personnel carrier.

Sources said around 30 people, including Saiful, have been arrested so far in this connection.

RAM Obaidul Mukhtadir Chowdhury, lawmaker from Brahmanbaria-3, said the BNP and its allies had issued a joint statement saying that they would take to the streets as allies of Hefajat on the hartal day which proved that they were involved in the violence.

Mahmudul, the AL's rebel mayoral candidate, was involved in carrying out the violence, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mukhtadir, also the district AL president, said Mahmudul and his supporters might be frustrated that they lost the mayoral election. The MP said Mahmudul's men are not "politically conscious" and they see everything from a personal point of view.

Mahmudul, however, said the district AL failed to stop the violence even though the party has been in power for a long time. He told this newspaper that

allegations were being brought against him to avert the responsibility of that failure.

He further claimed that the situation in Brahmanbaria heated up after a procession, led by lawmaker Mukhtadir, attacked madrasa students.

Law enforcers said the BNP and its affiliated bodies joined Hefajat on the second day of protest to carry out violence. A number of BNP leaders were seen in CCTV footage attending processions with sticks.

Zahirul Haque Khokon, former general secretary of Brahmanbaria district BNP, alleged that opportunists in the AL went on the rampage in the name of Hefajat.

Earlier in 2016, there was a clash between the AL and madrasa students in the district and "they later reached an agreement and settled the issue," he said.

"But BNP and Chhatra Dal men were accused in cases filed over that incident and the same thing is happening again now," Zahirul said.

Delwar Hossain Dilip, convener of the district Swachhchasebak Dal, said their leaders and activists were not involved in the violence.

Despite repeated attempts, this newspaper could not reach district Jamaat leaders for comments.

Anwar Hossain, deputy inspector general (Chattogram Range) of police, said they were trying to identify those responsible by analysing video clips.

"We are going slowly as we want to be absolutely sure before issuing any statement and arresting anyone," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Hefajat men vandalise resort to 'rescue' Mamunul

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

A group of leaders and activists of Hefajat-e-Islam blocked Dhaka-Chattogram highway, staged demonstrations, vandalised some vehicles, and ransacked a resort yesterday evening after getting a top leader of the organisation "rescued from confinement".

All these happened in Narayanganj's Sonargaon upazila where Hefajat Joint Secretary General Mamunul Haque was allegedly kept confined to the resort by ruling Awami League men.

The AL men said Mamunul went to a room of the resort with a woman with whom he was having an affair, said witnesses.

On information, police went to the resort. But by the time they arrived, a large number of Hefajat men gathered there, broke the main gate and stormed into the resort. They took Mamunul with them, according to witnesses and locals.

At that time, the Hefajat men vandalised the resort and vehicles parked there.

Later, they blocked the highway at Mograpara.

Around 8:45pm, police fired shots in the air and drove away the Hefajat men.

Md Zayedul Alam, superintendent of police in Narayanganj, said police did not arrest Mamunul. Police went to the spot to calm the situation and to provide security to the Hefajat leader.

Legal actions would be taken against those involved in vandalism, the SP said.

Speaking to journalists, Mamunul claimed that the woman was his second wife. But some unruly people had harassed him. He would take legal action against them.

Meanwhile, some voice clips allegedly between Mamunul and his wife and a few other girls, and some photos of intimate moments reportedly of Mamunul and other girls went viral on social media.

The Daily Star could not independently verify the authenticity of those photos and clips.

Four UN troops die in major attack in northern Mali

AFP, Bamako

Four United Nations peacekeepers were killed Friday when suspected jihadists staged a major attack on their camp in Aguelhok, northern Mali, the UN mission said.

The peacekeepers "bravely pushed back a complex attack carried out by several heavily armed terrorists," MINUSMA said, adding the attackers had suffered heavy losses and had abandoned "several of their dead."

In a statement, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said he "condemns in the strongest terms" the assault, commending the bravery of those who repelled the attack.

The incident left 19 wounded, the statement said, in addition to the four troops who were killed.

A source in MINUSMA said the attack occurred around 200 kilometres (120 miles) from the Algerian border, targeting a contingent of peacekeepers from Chad.

A UN source described the dawn raid as of "very large magnitude" by about 100 attackers on motorbikes and in vehicles.

"The fighting lasted three hours... mortar shells, shooting exchanges... attempted suicide car bombing," the source said.

He added that about 20 assailants had been killed.

A Chadian military source said "two of our forces' positions were attacked. We lost four people, including our forces' detachment commander, and 16 were injured."

The UN force's statement called the attack another "attempt against the peace process" that will "in no way undermine its determination to continue the execution of its mandate."

It thanked "international forces for their aerial support".

The attack took to 10 the number of MINUSMA troops killed this year.

Also on Friday morning, two Malian soldiers were killed and around 10 wounded in an attack blamed on jihadists in Diarfarabe in the country's centre, Mali's army said in a statement.

Local resident Youssouf Aya told AFP that he had seen a line of armed men on motorcycles headed toward a military post, then heard gunfire.

He said the assailants had "briefly occupied" the military post before leaving along the Niger River.

Mali has been struggling to contain an Islamist insurgency that first broke out in the north in 2012 before spreading to the centre and neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger.

BFIU seeks bank info of 24 leaders

FROM PAGE 1

Account information of some 11 people, who are holding top administrative positions in 11 madrasas located in Narayanganj and Brahmanbaria districts, has to be sent to the BFIU.

In addition, the BFIU has also asked banks to send account details of 30 madrasas, including Al-Jamiatul Ahlia Darul Ulum Moinul Islam, popularly known as Hathazari Madrasa located in Chattogram.

Some other madrasas, located in Hathazari, Patiya and Fatikchhari, have also been mentioned in the BFIU

letter.

It also asked for the bank details of 11 madrasas in Narayanganj, in its bid to see whether these institutions have any involvement in money laundering and terrorist financing.

Contacted, Abu Hena Mohd Razeq Hassan, head of the BFIU, refused to make comments in this regard as an intelligence agency cannot reveal any information on any issue being investigated.

Hefajat men started the mayhem on March 26.

For three days straight, they ran amok vandalising and torching

establishments and properties in Dhaka, Brahmanbaria, Chattogram and other districts.

Clashes involving Hefajat left nine people, including a 14-year-old boy, dead in Brahmanbaria while four people were killed after the Islamist group attacked a police station in Chattogram's Hathazari.

At least 43 cases have been filed so far in connection with the violence carried out by Hefajat activists in Dhaka, Chattogram, Brahmanbaria, Kishoreganj and Narayanganj.

Over 20,000 people were made accused in the cases.

Extortion institutionalised?

Authorised by DSCC, 2 companies collecting tolls from commercial vehicles in name of non-existent terminals

HELEMUL ALAM

Donning vests that say "DSCC Toll Collector", they move around Gulistan, Jai Kali Mandir Road (between Thathari Bazar and Wari), Motijheel, Fulbaria, Azimpur and Laxmibazar (near Bahadur Shah Park) in the capital -- signaling commercial vehicles to stop.

Some of these toll collectors are quite energetic. Oftentimes they run behind vehicles whose drivers are mostly baffled to see the signal to stop in the middle of the road.

Though collecting tolls at a terminal or designated point may be a normal practice, many things are wrong in the abovementioned situation.

First of all, even though the toll is being collected in the name of terminals, there is none. Secondly, this collection is going on violating a government order. And lastly, it's being collected in the middle of the road in the name of road repair, as per the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC).

These tolls range from Tk 10 to Tk 60 and are collected from CNG-run auto rickshaws, human haulier, pickup vans, minibuses and buses.

DSCC introduced the levy on different modes of transports from terminals, a move that people involved in the sector have termed illegal and violation of a government order.

DSCC leased out the two "terminals" -- Gulistan-Jai Kali Mandir (Saydabad) bus terminal and Fulbaria bus terminal -- to Uttara Chaka and Minhaz Enterprise respectively, on November 11 and October 13 last year.

Mentionable, Uttara Chaka won

the bid at Tk 2.93 crore while Minhaz Enterprise secured the one-year contract at Tk 2.50 crore.

According to the one-year contract, the two companies have been authorised to collect tolls from commercial transports from the two terminals -- which do not exist.

The amount collected is kept by the companies.

DSCC also allowed the two companies to collect toll in the name of stopover terminals from over two dozen designated points of the city under its jurisdiction.

INSTITUTIONALISED EXTORTION? Transport insiders, however, said the two terminals do not fall in the category of bus terminals as those do not provide any amenities associated with one.

They said this "toll collection" is nothing less than an "institutionalised extortion". Besides, the companies seem to be in a mad race for making as much money as they can, they alleged.

They also said collecting tolls at different points on the street is a violation of a government order. The lessees even collect tolls from trucks and rickshaw-vans, violating contracts, they alleged.

Osman Ali, general secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Federation, said Fulbaria, Jatrabari, Ittefaq crossing, Demra and Natyamancha at Gulistan are not terminals.

"A terminal is a place where a restroom, washroom and some other facilities should be in place," Osman told The Daily Star recently.

He also said as per a contract between the LGRD ministry and bus



Stopping two goods-carrying vehicles in the middle of the road, a man collects toll from drivers in Wari's Jai Kali Mandir area, top. Even though these workers, wearing DSCC vests, continue to collect tolls from commercial transports for using "terminals", there is none in the area. The photos were taken last week. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

owners, the city corporations cannot collect tolls from roads.

DSCC has even authorised the two companies to collect tolls from vehicles at kitchen markets and from roads, alleged Osman, adding that some people are collecting tolls from truckers at night.

He said they have already raised the issue with DSCC authorities.

"The way the city corporation is collecting tolls, it might force the owners to stop operating their buses," he warned.

LGRD UNAWARE

The LGRD ministry in a letter issued on December 3, 2015, said collecting tolls from highways by setting up boxes and other means by the city corporations and municipalities instead of designated bus or truck terminals is illegal.

The letter also directed all concerned to refrain from such harassment.

Contacted recently, Mohammad Nure Alam Siddiqui, joint secretary of the Local Government Division, said they were not aware of the DSCC decision.

"They [DSCC] did not inform us," said Siddiqui.

He also mentioned that the LGRD directive on city corporations and municipalities is still valid.

Asked, Supreme Court lawyer Shafiqul Islam Babul said collecting toll from roads without providing any terminal facility is not logical.

"They [DSCC] should have held meetings with the home ministry, BRTA, Road Transport Owners' Association, Road Transport Workers' Association and other stakeholders before imposing it," he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

199 women, 153 girls suffered violence in March: Mahila Parishad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 199 women and 153 girls suffered different forms of violence over the last month in the country, says a report of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad.

Of 109 rape incidents, 70 involved children; 62 girls were raped, five were gang-raped, one was murdered after rape, and two died by suicide after rape, says the report, prepared based on news published in 13 national dailies.

The women's rights organisation sent its monthly report to the media yesterday.

The report also said seven women and 10 girls faced rape attempts in March.

Two women and two girls were sexually assaulted, and three women and seven girls were sexually harassed in the same period. Besides, 16 women and girls were abducted.

Also, two women suffered from acid attacks, and four succumbed to burn injuries.

At least 49 women and girls (12 girls) were murdered due to various reasons, while another 11 faced murder attempts.

Also, 20 women were tortured over dowry, and nine of them were killed.

Thirty-three women and girls were physically tortured, while 15, including eight girls, took their own lives due to torture.

Also, 43 women and girls (12 girls) died mysteriously.

There were five incidents of child marriage in the country last month. Besides, seven women and girls were victims of cybercrime.

Mahila Parishad regularly compiles the data to document incidence of reported violence against women and girls in the country.

Expressing serious concern over such incidents, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad General Secretary Maleka Banu said the statistics do not point to a society safe for women.

"Incidents of violence are not decreasing in any way, and the state is not being able to ensure justice for these offences. Mahila Parishad calls for justice for every single incident of violence against women and girls through impartial investigation," she said.

"We also urge the government to execute a zero-tolerance policy against all forms of violence against women and girls," she added.

Atiqullah a 'lighthouse' for the marginalised

Say speakers at memorial for the eminent journalist

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent journalist Atiqullah Khan Masud was a "lighthouse" for marginalised and disadvantaged people, while his lifelong struggle was that against fundamentalist groups, speakers said at a commemorative programme yesterday.

With his demise, the country has lost a valiant fighter and a man who believed in the spirit of the Liberation War, they said.

Janakantha Unit and Dainik Janakantha Shangbadik Karmachari Oikya Parishad organised the commemorative programme at the capital's Jatiya Press Club, said a press release.

Atiqullah, who was editor and publisher of daily Janakantha, passed away on March 22 at the age of 71. He was a valiant freedom fighter.

The commemorative programme commenced by observing a one minute silence in remembrance of the noted journalist.

Addressing the programme as chief guest, Awami League lawmaker and former president of Jatiya Press Club Shafiqur Rahman said Atiqullah created space at Janakantha for many, including those who believed in communal harmony, to practice free thinking and write on relevant issues.

Atiqullah was unshaken when taking a stand in the Liberation War, he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

'Ensuring the safety of helpseekers top priority'

The National Emergency Service-999 has been providing service to around 23,000 to 25,000 emergency help seekers daily. Capable of attending around 120 calls per minute, the service providers mainly connect with the police, fire control, and ambulance services. Recently, the government has given approval to turn the 999 service into a dedicated police unit. In this new arrangement, fire service and health ministry officials will work along with police to ensure better service. **Mohammad Tabarak Ullah, additional deputy inspector general and chief of the 999 service unit, recently sat down with The Daily Star's Mohammad Jamil Khan and Shaheen Mollah to talk about the new features and limitations of the unit.**

The Daily Star (DS): How many calls do you have to attend everyday? What is the most popular kind of service sought?

Tabarak Ullah: The 999-service started its journey on December 12, 2017. Till March 15 this year, we've received around 2.73 crore calls.

Among them, we managed to provide service to some 78.74 lakh calls. Of them, 78 percent were for police assistance, 11 percent for fire service, and 11 percent for ambulance service.

Although we provide emergency assistance for police, fire and ambulance services, a huge number of callers call on the toll-free number for other issues too, for instance over lost cell phones, information on how to file a general diary with police, request to arrest criminals or submit charge sheets.

DS: Where are most of these calls



from? Is there any specific time of the year when the number of calls increase noticeably?

Tabarak Ullah: Urban callers out number rural callers by far, and the majority of them is from Dhaka metropolitan area. Of them, 78 percent are male callers while 22 percent are female.

The number of calls increase during national programmes or natural disasters, and religious occasions

like Eid or Ramadan. Queries during these times are mostly related to information on the natural disasters or issues such as moon sighting (for Eid).

During these times, we sometimes receive up to 60 to 70 thousand calls a day.

DS: Is there any plan to increase capacity?

Tabarak Ullah: Initially, the only way to call the toll free 999 number was from T&T and cell phones. But now, citizens have the scope to communicate with us through our Facebook page, messenger, Twitter and WhatsApp.

We have around 100 stations to receive calls from T&T and cell phones and one station for the digital platforms. We have the capacity to receive around 120 calls per minute now.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



With the government announcing a weeklong countrywide lockdown -- starting tomorrow -- amid the surge of Covid-19 infection, the Amar Ekushey Book Fair was largely empty yesterday despite being a weekend. Smaller publication houses saw a particularly slow day, and even the food court, inset, which is usually bustling, was quiet.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



MBBS final examinations postponed

BSS, Dhaka

Dhaka University (DU) authorities have postponed all professional final exams of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS), which were scheduled to start today under DU-affiliated medical colleges.

The decision was taken amid the spike of Covid-19 across the country. The revised dates for exams will be announced later.

First and second professional MBBS practical and oral exams will be held on time maintaining health rules, said a press release.

Washington DC mayor declares March 26 as Bangladesh Day

UNB, Dhaka

The mayor of Washington DC has declared March 26, Independence Day of Bangladesh, as "Bangladesh Day."

Mayor Muriel Bowser congratulated the government and people of Bangladesh on the golden jubilee of the country's independence.

31 Hefajat men sued over Gazipur clash with police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

At least 250 people, including 31 Hefajat leaders and activists, were sued in a case filed over Friday's clash between police and Hefajat supporters on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Gazipur.

Sub-inspector of Bashon Police Station Kamrul Islam filed the case with the police station on Friday night, mentioning names of 31 Hefajat men.

They were made accused on charges of preventing police from discharging duties and for clash.

At least 21 people were detained from the spot during the clash that left at least 20, including seven policemen, injured.

The clash broke out as Hefajat men tried to block the highway near Chowrasta Jame Masjid area. As police went to clear the blockade, the protesters threw brickbats at them, leading to the clash, said witnesses.

Police later fired tear gas shells in a bid to disperse the crowd.

Today is the 10th Death Anniversary of Prof. Dr. M. Alauddin



We request all relatives, friends and well-wishers to remember him in their prayers and pray for the eternal peace of his soul

Alauddin family

<http://www.entbd.org/about/remembering-dr-alauddin>

Paying more for riskier journey!

Dhaka-Barishal launches not only charging more, but also boarding more than 50pc passengers

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

In line with the recent government mandate, launch fares on the Barishal-Dhaka launch route were supposed to increase by 60 percent. But much like the overcharging going on in land, passengers of the waterways say they are being charged at least twice the usual fare on the route.

Passengers say they are even more frustrated because while the fare has been ramped up, the launches are not complying with other pandemic protocols, like carrying no more than half their seating capacity and providing hand sanitiser at the entrance.

After visiting the Barishal River Port yesterday, this correspondent found that though launches were boarding passengers up to at least 80-85 percent of their capacity, there was no one from the authorities concerned of the government to check on that.

This means while passengers are paying more, they are actually travelling at great risk. Due to this, the launches have become host to endless altercations between passengers and

staffers over the last few days, port sources told this correspondent.

However, launch owners are justifying the fare situation through an earlier confusion over pricing on the route.

Saidur Rahman Rintu, owner of the Sundarbans Launch Company and vice-president of Launch Owners Association, said though passengers were charged Tk 200 on a one-way journey during regular times following a decision taken by the launch owners around two years back, the official fare was actually Tk 250.

Adding Tk 150 as sixty percent of Tk 250, the fare now stands at Tk 400, Rintu said. "But since customers were used to paying Tk 200, they're seeing it as a doubling of regular ticket price," he added.

But this reasoning is not sitting well with passengers, for whom the burden of the increased fare is too much.

Talking to this correspondent, a regular passenger of the route said he feels overwhelmed to have to pay Tk 400 on a single journey, that too when he has to travel at great risk since the

launch owners are not cutting down on the number of passengers or providing sanitiser, temperature checks or any other hygiene requirements.

Like him, a female RMG worker travelling from Barishal to Dhaka also told this correspondent of her suffering. "It used to cost Tk 800 to make the journey with a family of four. It's now Tk 1,600. Our limited income during the pandemic simply cannot afford it anymore."

Contacted, Mostafizur Rahman, Barishal River Port officer, said while they understand the situation and are planning to talk to owners about fixing the fare at around Tk 320, they cannot take action against the owners since they are only charging according to the previous official fare of Tk 250.

However, owners will be penalised for boarding additional passengers, he added.

According to port sources, at least six to eight passenger launches run daily on the Barishal-Dhaka route during regular times., carrying three to four thousand people on seats, cabins, and decks.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

With the sharp rise in Covid-19 infections across the country, many residents of the capital are taking extra precautions to make sure they are safe from the virus. This man was spotted carrying five containers fitted with spray nozzles, presumably to spray disinfectants, in the capital's Sabujbagh area earlier this week.



Dhaka-bound passengers from Barishal huddle into groups on the deck of a launch, with no regard to social distancing, exposing themselves to possible Covid-19 infection. This photo was taken yesterday from Barishal launch terminal.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Extortion institutionalised

FROM PAGE 3

COMPLAINTS POUR IN

Visiting different city points recently, this correspondent saw toll collectors at work.

At Jai Kali Mandir, a toll collector was seen running behind a pick-up van and stopped it near a filling station, around 200 metres away from the spot they were collecting tolls.

The driver Mohammad Aslam reluctantly paid Tk 30.

"I'm carrying goods from our factory to deliver it to Gulshan. I have not used any terminal... why should they charge me?" said a frustrated Aslam.

Kalu Sheikh, managing director of Moumita Paribahan, said they are operating around 150 buses from Chandra to Narayanganj.

"We pay parking fees at Gabtali Terminal and to Narayanganj City Corporation. But DSCC is now collecting Tk 40 from each bus from Bakshibazar point although we don't park our buses at Gulistan," he said.

Mohammad Barkat Ullah Bhulu, president of Dhaka Mahanagar Autorickshaw Behoshayee Malik Samity, said due to acute shortage of parking

facilities in the city, their drivers are already paying traffic penalty every day.

"We are already paying fines to police for illegal parking... now DSCC is taking terminal fees from us without even giving us any terminal facility," he said.

Khandaker Enayet Hossain, secretary general of Dhaka Sarak Paribahan Owners' Association, said they are not against paying tolls. "But DSCC will have to ensure that there are terminals for us," he said.

He expressed dissatisfaction over the rise in toll fees -- at Fulbaria from Tk 20 to Tk 40, at Gulistan from Tk 30 to Tk 60 and at Sayedabad from Tk 40 to Tk 60.

ALL IN NAME OF ROAD REPAIR

Contacted, ABM Aminullah Nuri, chief executive officer of DSCC, said they have introduced it to stop illegal toll collection and bring the system under discipline and a legal framework.

Asked why they are collecting tolls in the name of terminals when there are no proper terminals in the areas, and as well as from roads, Nuri said, "We are collecting tolls as vehicles are using DSCC roads and the city corporation

has to spend money to repair it. We are only collecting tolls from commercial transports."

Regarding the allegations of illegal and additional toll collections, the DSCC CEO said they have already instructed police to take necessary steps in this regard.

"We will also conduct mobile court drives to stop that," he assured.

Contacted, Md Altaf Masud, managing director of Uttara Chaka, said some people unbeknownst to them collected toll from trucks initially. "We have instructed our people not to take tolls from trucks," said Masud. He said they have also informed the police station concerned to take action against this illegal toll collection.

He said they are not charging extra money from vehicles beyond the DSCC assigned rate.

Md Shaifur Rahman, proprietor of Minhaz Enterprise, also said they do not take any extra money from vehicles.

He, however, alleged that they do not get tolls from many vehicles though they were supposed to pay tolls as per the contract. He said they are taking tolls from the designated places as per the contract with DSCC.

Atiqullah Ensuring

FROM PAGE 3

Even in adverse situations, Atiqullah did not compromise while dealing with issues against the spirit of the Liberation War, as well as issues related to communalism and fundamentalism, said Bhorer Kagoj Editor Shyamal Dutta.

It was a dire necessity to have a man like him to fight against communal forces, Shyamal said.

Former general secretary of Dhaka Reporters Unity Raju Ahmed, blogger Kabir Chowdhury, and Dhaka Union of Journalists Publication Secretary Asaduzzaman Asad, among others, spoke at the programme, which was chaired by Janakantha Unit Chief Rajan Bhattacharya.

FROM PAGE 3

Besides, two new apps of the 999-service will be launched soon. The police chief will inaugurate the apps soon. One is SOS, where a person can communicate with us just by pressing a single button. The other one is for ambulance service. Currently, we have 10,000 ambulances registered with our system.

DS: What is your response time now?

Tabarak Ullah: We are trying to minimise our response time. Currently, it takes around 15 to 20 minutes to respond to a call on average. This is mainly because police, fire service or ambulance services often face difficulty reaching destinations due to busy roads, narrow roads, or traffic jam.

For this reason, it is not possible to reach destinations or cross 20-kilometre distances within five or ten minutes.

Outside the city, police stations have to cover around 20 to 30 kilometres, which delays response time too. In addition, we are working to include the facility of automatic locations and caller identification with our systems so that we don't have to waste time on these simple questions.

DS: How do police stations deliver services through the 999-service?

Tabarak Ullah: We are installing Thana Disperse System (TDS) in every police station for the 999-service so that we can communicate with the police stations without delay.

TDS includes a separate telephone line,

computer and a desk. There's around 660 police stations across the country and we have already completed installing TDS in 315 of those. Besides, we have started installing "mobile data terminal" (MDT) sets in all police patrol cars to ensure quicker service. Once the MDS are installed, we will be able to monitor patrol car location from our office and direct nearby cars to rush to the aid of a support seeker.

MDT sets have already been installed in 275 patrol cars. The disperse system and MDT will also be installed in 350 fire stations and their vehicles in phases. Besides, police stations are already experts in dealing with the issues we receive calls for, so this will not be a problem for them.

DS: With all these planned expansions, what will your human resource situation be like?

Tabarak Ullah: We have around 450 staffers now, who are providing round the clock service in three separate shifts.

Besides, some 12 officials from the health ministry and six officials from fire service and civil defense are working with us. After a service seeker calls for fire hazards or ambulance service, these officials take charge of the issues and follow up on the incidents.

In the coming days, we have planned to increase our workstations to 500 so that we can receive over 500 calls in a minute. For this, we have already submitted a proposal to the Police Headquarters. The proposal asks for the staff pool to be increased to 2,888.

The cabinet has already approved 999-service

to turn into a separate police unit under the lead of a police officer, who is at least of deputy inspector general rank on November 30, 2020. The fire service and health ministry officials will work with the unit jointly under the DIG.

The unit office will be situated in Demra and a 22-storied building has been constructed there. On top of this, seven-bigha land has already been acquired there from the land ministry and the land filling process has been started.

DS: Though caller identity was not supposed to be disclosed, there has been some allegations related to this, with some support seekers allegedly facing problems due to this. What do you have to say about this?

Tabarak Ullah: We do not disclose any caller's identity. But if any caller's identity gets leaked from the local police then we can take necessary action through proper investigation. We do not want any help seeker to get into any sort of trouble related to their identity. Ensuring safety of service seekers is our top priority.

DS: What are the challenges to ensure a smoother 999-service experience?

Tabarak Ullah: Due to our limited workstations, callers sometimes find our numbers busy, especially during the peak hours of 2pm to 10pm.

Once the number of workstations here are increased, this problem will hopefully no longer be there. Besides, the number of staffers also needs to be increased for smoother service delivery as well.

Tour operator, daycare centre bills placed at JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"The Bangladesh Tour Operators and Tour Guides (Registration and Operation) Bill, 2021" was placed in parliament yesterday for making it mandatory for the tour operators and guides to get registered.

The proposed law was prepared aiming to bring the tour operators under the legal framework for ensuring the best services and thus give a boost to the tourism sector.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry M Mahub Ali placed the bill which was sent to the respective parliamentary standing committee for further scrutiny.

The committee was asked to submit its report by a month. As per the proposed law, a touring company will have to collect a licence. No company will be allowed to operate tours without having registration. If anyone does, it would be tried under the Code of Criminal Procedure.

According to the bill, there is a provision of handing over the registration to another tour operator in case of death, physical and financial incapability.

As proposed, the activities of tour operators, tour guides, general tour guides, cultural guides, nature guides and trekking guides will now be regulated. Now, there is no guideline and rule for tour operators in the country.

Meanwhile, Child Daycare Centre Bill-2021 was placed in the parliament to support the children of working women.

State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Fazilatun Nesa placed the bill, which was sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the respective ministry for scrutiny.

The committee was asked to submit its report before the House within two months. The proposed legislation was prepared as the number of working women is increasing.

According to the proposed law, there will be four types of child daycare centres in the country.

Registration will be required to set up child daycare centres and there would be a separate authority for their registration. The Women and Children Affairs Ministry will monitor the daycare centres.

According to the proposed law, the maximum punishment for failure to maintain proper safety and security of children in the daycare centres would be Tk 10 lakh fine.

If anyone runs any child daycare centre without registration, they would be fined Tk 50,000, said the bill.

TO-LET
A triplex individual house with 5 bedrooms and 2 garages. Foreigners preferred. H-5, R-9/A, Nikunja South. Contact: 01711111821

পদ্মা অয়েল কোম্পানী লিমিটেড
বাংলাদেশ পেট্রোলিয়াম কর্পোরেশনের একটি অঙ্গ প্রতিষ্ঠান।
Padma Oil Company Limited
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পদ্মা অয়েল কোম্পানী লিমিটেড এর বিভিন্ন পদে নিয়োগ সংক্রান্ত আপাতী ৯ এবং ১০ এপ্রিল ২০২১ তারিখে অনুষ্ঠিতব্য মৌখিক পরীক্ষা অনিবার্য কারণবশতঃ স্থগিত করা হলো।
মৌখিক পরীক্ষার পরিবর্তিত তারিখ ও সময়সূচী পরবর্তীতে জানানো হবে।
সবাই নিজে গড়বো দেশ,
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উপ-মহাব্যবস্থাপক (মানবসম্পদ ও প্রশাসন)
জিডি-৬৬৩

New Executive Committee of OGSB

President
Prof. Ferdousi Begum

Secretary General
Prof. Gulshan Ara
The New Executive Committee (2021-2022) of OGSB with President-Prof. Ferdousi Begum and Secretary General-Prof. Gulshan Ara has taken charge of office on 31st March 2021.



Trading Corporation of Bangladesh is stationing at different parts of Barishal city to sell daily essentials at affordable prices ahead of Ramadan. This photo was taken yesterday from Jaikhana Mor.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

TODAY MARKS THE 25TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF

Late Salahuddin Ahmad
(May 6, 1926-April 4, 1996)
Your memory has not dimmed, your presence felt evermore.....May Allah (SW) grant you Jannatul Ferdous and rest your soul in eternal peace.
We humbly request all our relatives, friends and acquaintances to remember late Salahuddin Ahmad in their prayers.
Wife, children and grandchildren

Indigenous village grieving for trees

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A memorial service for trees, held recently in Khadimnagar area of Sylhet city, might have aroused curiosity among a section of the city residents. But mourning for untimely deaths of trees is close to religious ritual for inhabitants of a remote indigenous village in Barlekha upazila. Bangladesh Poribesh Andolan (BAPA), Kapaeng Foundation and KUBRAJ Inter-punji Development Organisation jointly organised the programme on March 24. Green activists and members of the organisations at the programme expressed solidarity with the indigenous communities who have been in mourning after two age-old trees at Agar punji (village) in Barlekha were felled. The villagers said they consider trees to be their own children. Livelihoods of 48 indigenous families also depend on trees on which they grow vines of betel leaf -- their primary source of income. But on March 19, two such trees were chopped down along Chhotolekha-Bobarthal road, about a kilometre away from their village. The trees were part of the natural forestry in the area and each was about three to four feet in diameter and aged over 40 years. Sukmon Amse, headman of Agar punji, said around 20 to 25 people from Chhotolekha Tea Garden factory, set up on about seven kilometres away from the village, entered their betel leaf garden and started marking the larger trees with red paint. After marking 25 trees, they chopped down two of those. The tea garden men left after the villagers arrived at the scene and protested the felling of the trees. For their survival, the villagers need the trees for cultivating betel leaf. Besides,



Chopped up trunk of an age-old tree in a natural forest lie scattered as Father Joseph Gomes OMI, coordinator for JPIC in Bangladesh, inspects the site. The photo was taken near Chhotolekha-Bobarthal road, about a kilometre away from Agar punji in Moulvibazar's Barlekha upazila.

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

Since he took charge as headman of the village in 2005, a total of Tk 1 crore was paid to Chhotolekha Tea Garden authorities as lease payment. His father, as previous headman, had also made lease payments to the tea garden authorities, he added.

While visiting areas around the tea garden, established on 1964.50 acres of land allotted by the government, this correspondent sensed a pall of gloom hovering over Agar punji, although the Easter Sunday -- one of the major festivals celebrated by the communities there -- was only a few days away. Asked, villager Pius Sangma, said, "We are passing days in immense tension. We will simply die [without income] if the remainder of the marked trees are felled.

"We love trees like they are our children. Would there be any festivities when a

child dies? That's why I can't even think about the Easter Sunday." When this correspondent reached Shakil Alam, manager of Chhotolekha Tea Garden, over cell phone, he admitted that the land on which Agar punji and the trees are located had been leased out many years ago to the residents of the village by the Chhotolekha Tea Garden authorities.

He, however, claimed ignorance about the amount of the lease payment they had been collecting from the indigenous communities of Agar punji and about the identities of the ones involved in the tree felling on March 19.

Sekhar Ranjan Das, forest range officer in Barlekha upazila, said they confiscated the two felled logs of Chapalish trees, 57 feet of timber in total, from the area. Wild animals in the area, which is in close proximity to Patharia Reserve

Forest, feed on fruits fallen from naturally grown trees such as the Chapalish, he said, adding that he has heard that 25 such trees were marked by the Chhotolekha Tea Garden authorities. Sangkhudho Nagorik Andolan Coordinator Tofazzal Sohel said more than 90 percent of the vegetation in the area comprises different fruit trees -- including Chapalish, black plum or Jambolan (locally known as Kaalo Jaam), jackfruit, Awal, Cutguti, Haritaki and Bahera. Wild animals depend on the fruits of the trees for their food. Hence, wildlife in the area will be endangered if the fruit trees are destroyed.

Advocate Bimol Lyndohkiri, a law practitioner at Moulvibazar court, said land belonging to a tea garden has to be demarcated with boundary fence, which is absent in the case of the land where the trees were felled.

Furthermore, the authorities of a tea garden cannot lease out its allotted land. Therefore, the leasing of the land to the communities living in Agar punji would be illegal, he added. Contacted, Barlekha Upazila Nirbahi Officer Shamim Al Imran said prior to felling any trees at allotted land, authorities of a tea garden are required to obtain permission from Bangladesh Tea Board.

An investigation into the matter was underway, he also said. At the memorial service on March 24, Father Joseph Gomes OMI, coordinator for Justice, Peace and Integrity Creation (JPIC) in Bangladesh; Flora Bably Talang, indigenous rights leader; Abdul Karim Kim, executive member of BAPA; and Uzal Azim, land and law secretary of Bangladesh Adibashi Forum central committee; spoke among others.

The villagers said they consider trees to be their own children. Livelihoods of 48 indigenous families also depend on trees on which they grow vines of betel leaf -- their primary source of income.

they have usage rights on the land where the trees were felled because Chhotolekha Tea Garden authorities leased out the land to them in exchange for money, Sukmon said.

Tajuddin calls

FROM PAGE 12
2013, pp. 62-63]
STRATEGIC MEETING AT TELIAPARA

The first strategic meeting among the high-ranking Bangalee army officials were held today at the Bungalow of Habiganj's Teliapara tea garden. The meeting commenced from 10:00am as scheduled. Col Osmani and Brig Pandey, the then director-general of the Eastern command of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) attended the meeting. Among others Lt Col MA Rab, Lt Col SM Reza, Maj Quazi Nuruzzaman, Maj Ziaur Rahman, Maj KM Shafiullah, Maj Khaled Mosharraf, and Maj Shafayet Jamil were present at the meeting. They emphasised on formation of a government to seek global support. They also formed Mukti Fauz comprising all resistance forces, and Col Osmani was entrusted with commandership of the Mukti Fauz. They decided to seek immediate support from the Indian government regarding the supply of arms and ammunition.

US ARMS IN DHAKA

A report published in St Louis Post-Dispatch today stated that the United States must share the guilt in the atrocity committed in Bangladesh. It further reported that the tanks were American built, furnished as part of well over two billion dollars in military aid given to Pakistan in return for its willingness to ally itself with United States objectives. Giant transport planes supplied by the United States carried the troops used in the suppression, it added.

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Accident or murder

FROM PAGE 12
Golam Kuddus, a sub-inspector of Hatirjheel Police Station, said they went to Ambagan area around 8:45am upon hearing of an accident.

A private car was seen ploughing through a road divider and a woman was seen lying in the backseat of the car. Later, the woman and her husband were taken to the hospital where the on-duty doctor declared the woman dead, he said.

The body was sent to DMCH morgue for autopsy. Citing doctors at the hospital, inspector Bachchu Mia, in-charge of DMCH Police Outpost, said the body of the woman bore no injury marks that people usually get during accidents.

"There are injury marks in her leg, head and neck but those were not from accident... We are suspecting she was strangled," he said.

Talking to reporters at DMCH, Alam however claimed that his wife was unwell and he was talking her to the hospital when a tyre burst and he lost control over the wheels.

The car hit a road divider, he claimed, adding that his wife and he got injured in the accident and later Jhilik died at the hospital.

Jhilik's younger brother Jabir Hossain Khan "We could not communicate Jhilik for last two days. Her husband called us in the morning and he was in hospital as Jhilik died."

"He killed my sister and staged the accident to divert the murder," he said.

Jabir said his sister married Alam in 2018 with a family arrangement following love affair. The couple had an eight-month old boy.

Sakib was drug addict and for this his two legs were swollen. He used to torture the victim, the family members said.

Hefajat

FROM PAGE 12
vandalised and burnt properties, must face closure, he added.

He urged Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to be tougher against Hefajat and BNP-Jamaat clique.

"We have tolerated [their activities] due to observance of the birth centenary [of Bangabandhu] and the golden jubilee of the country's independence. Nothing will be tolerated now... This evil force cannot be spared."

On the birth centenary of Bangabandhu and the golden jubilee of independence, the BNP-Jamaat and anti-independence Hefajat engaged in mayhem because they are all part of a conspiracy, he said. Protesting Selim's comments, BNP MP Harunur Rashid said the BNP was not against Modi's visit and no anti-Modi slogan was uttered by the party.

Protesting Selim's comments, BNP MP Harunur Rashid said the BNP was not against Modi's visit and no anti-Modi slogan was uttered by the party.

Man sent

FROM PAGE 12
is a student of class five of a local primary school. On Friday morning, she was playing at the school's playground.

At that time, Touhidur took the girl to a nearby abandoned building lurking her to give gift and raped her. When the girl started screaming, locals rushed to the spot and rescued her. However, Touhidur fled the scene.

Returning home, the victim's mother filed a rape case with Fulgazi Police Station against Touhidur on Friday night. Hours later, police arrested the accused, said Mohammad Kutub Uddin, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Yesterday, the accused was produced before a court that sent him to jail. The victim was sent to hospital for medical test, said the OC.

Myanmar ethnic rebel groups condemn

FROM PAGE 12
groups and their militias, who control large areas of territory mostly in border regions. At least 5 people were killed yesterday.

Yesterday, 10 of these rebel groups met virtually to discuss the situation, condemning the junta's use of live ammunition on protesters.

"The leaders of the military council must be held accountable," said General Yawd Serk, leader of rebel group the Restoration Council of Shan State.

Last week, the junta declared a month-long ceasefire with ethnic armed groups, though exceptions might be made if "security and administrative machinery of the government... are encroached on".

The announcement did not encompass stopping lethal force against anti-coup demonstrations.

But Yawd Serk said the ceasefire required security forces to halt "all

violent actions", including against protesters.

The 10 rebel groups that met online are signatories to a nationwide ceasefire agreement that was brokered by Suu Kyi's government, which attempted to negotiate an end to the ethnic militias' decades-long armed struggle for greater autonomy.

But distrust runs deep for the ethnic minorities of Myanmar, and Yawd Serk said the 10 signatories to the nationwide ceasefire would "review" the deal during their meeting.

"I would like to state that the (10 groups) firmly stand with the people who are... demanding the end of dictatorship," he said.

Last week, a UN special envoy on Myanmar warned the Security Council of the risk of civil war and an imminent "bloodbath".

Despite the global condemnation, Myanmar security forces yesterday

opened fire on pro-democracy protests killing at least five people.

Security forces in the central town of Monywa, which has seen big protests day after days for weeks, fired on a crowd killing at least four people and wounding several, two media organisations said.

One man was shot and killed in the southern town of Thaton, the Bago Weekly Journal online news portal and residents reported. Police also fired in the central town of Bago, wounding one man.

The rebel groups' meeting comes a week after one of them, the Karen National Union (KNU), seized a military base in eastern Karen state, killing 10 army officers. The junta retaliated with air strikes.

The KNU has been a vocal opponent of the military junta and said it is sheltering hundreds of anti-coup activists.

India prepares for Covid curbs

FROM PAGE 12
country considered a high-risk "red zone" during a time when families usually hold reunions.

New curbs were also coming into force yesterday in France, where authorities are scrambling to deal with a dramatic rise in cases that has overwhelmed hospitals in Paris.

Restrictions had been already intensified in other European nations such as Belgium. In Germany, the government scrapped plans for a strict Easter lockdown, but Chancellor Angela Merkel urged people to limit their social contacts ahead of the break.

Across the Atlantic, fresh curbs were also imposed ahead of Easter in Ontario and Quebec, Canada's two most populous provinces.

And in the Philippines, a lockdown affecting more than 24 million people was being extended for another week as authorities deploy tents and health workers to overwhelmed hospitals.

The pandemic has claimed more than 2.8 million lives worldwide. But the United States, the hardest-

hit nation, became the first country to administer at least one shot to more than 100 million people -- around half of its adult population.

President Joe Biden has vowed to cover the vast majority within weeks. But infections remain on the rise in parts of the US, and Biden urged Americans to keep wearing masks and taking other precautions.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has updated its guidance to say that fully vaccinated people can travel without observing quarantines, although they should still wear masks.

One of the worst Covid-19 outbreaks is devastating Brazil, which has reported more deaths than any country after the United States.

It is the epicentre of an unfolding crisis in Latin America, where infections have soared past 25 million, likely fuelled by a more contagious variant first detected in Brazil. The devastation in Brazil has frightened neighbours already battling their own surging caseloads.

Seeks strong punishment for polluters

FROM PAGE 12
Conservation Act, 1995.

According to a provision of the proposed law, the punishment for dodging toll, fee and other charges of the port authority will be one-year jail sentence or a fine of Tk 1 lakh or both.

If anyone violates the proposed law, he will be sentenced to six month's imprisonment or fined Tk 2 lakh or

both. Under the existing law, the punishment for the offence is six-month jail sentence and a fine of Tk 50,000.

Besides, some new terminologies like "inland water vessel", "terminal", "berth", "container freight station" and "lease" have been incorporated in the proposed Bill.

It stipulates that there will be a seven-member board to run the port. Under the existing ordinance, there are four members in the board.

The aims and objectives section of the proposed Bill says it will create momentum for the import and export of goods in the country's northern region and pave the way for generating revenue.

Drug addict kills mother in Panchagarh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thalurgaon

A woman was stabbed to death allegedly by her drug addict son in Mithapukur area of Panchagarh municipality yesterday.

The deceased, Joytun Begum, 52, was wife of Abdul Majid of the area.

Quoting neighbours, Panchagarh Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) SM Shafiqul Islam said Shahidul, a drug addict, often used to put pressure on his mother for money.

As a sequel, Shahidul might have stabbed his mother at their courtyard before fleeing the scene yesterday noon, the ASP quoted the neighbours as saying.

Hearing her cry for help, locals took injured Joytun to Panchagarh Sadar Hospital where the doctors declared her dead.

Slain Joytun's neighbour Maleka Begum, 47, said about two to three years ago Shahidul stabbed his father for the same reason.

Redwana's killers still at large

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Police are yet to arrest the killer of Tangail District Cultural Officer Khandakar Redwana Islam Ilu even after a week of her sensational murder.

Earlier on March 27, Redwana, daughter of late Rafiqul Islam of Rangpur Sadar upazila, was found murdered inside a cabin at Kumudini Hospital in Mirzapur.

The following day, deceased's younger brother Arshadul Abid filed a murder case with Mirzapur Police Station against Redwana's husband Delwar Hossain Mizan, a bank officer currently serving in Bhola, who went into hiding after the incident.

Egypt

FROM PAGE 12
new National Museum of Egyptian Civilisation.

Dubbed the Pharaohs' Golden Parade, the 18 kings and four queens will travel in order, oldest first, each aboard a separate float decorated in ancient Egyptian style.

The interior ministry said both pedestrians and vehicles would be barred from Tahrir Square, site of the current museum, and other sections of the parade route, ahead of the 6:00 pm (1600 GMT) start.

"The whole world will be watching," said Egyptian archaeologist and former antiquities minister Zahi Hawass, who will commentate as the event unfolds live on state television.

"This is an important 40 minutes in the life of the city of Cairo."

Seqenre Tao II, "the Brave", who reigned over southern Egypt some 1,600 years before Christ, will be on the first chariot, while Ramses IX, who reigned in the 12th century BC, will be at the rear.

Ramses II and Queen Hatshepsut, the most powerful female pharaoh, will also make the journey.

Emblazoned with the name of their allotted sovereign, the gold-coloured carriages will be fitted with shock absorbers for the trip, to ensure none of the precious cargos are accidentally disturbed.

Discovered near Luxor from 1881 onwards, most of the mummies have lain in the Egyptian Museum since the early 1900s.

Fascinating new details of the pharaohs' lives are still emerging.

A recent high-tech study of Seqenre Tao II, involving CT scans and 3D images of his hands and long-studied skull fractures, indicated that he was likely killed in a post-battle execution ceremony.

For their procession through Cairo's streets, the mummies will be in special containers filled with nitrogen, under conditions similar to their regular display cases.

US lifts sanctions on ICC prosecutor

AFP, Washington

US President Joe Biden on Friday revoked sanctions imposed by Donald Trump on the top prosecutor of the International Criminal Court as the new administration seeks a more cooperative approach, resolving an intense disagreement with European allies.

Former secretary of state Mike Pompeo last year denounced the "kangaroo court" in The Hague and imposed both financial sanctions and a US visa ban on its Gambian-born chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda.

Pompeo acted after she launched an investigation into alleged war crimes by US military personnel in Afghanistan.

The court in The Hague further annoyed the United States by opening an investigation into alleged war crimes in the Palestinian territories by Israel, a US ally which rejects the authority of the court.

Biden said the United States still has concerns with the ICC. But "the threat and imposition of financial sanctions against the Court, its personnel, and those who assist it are not an effective or appropriate strategy," he said in a statement.

Pompeo's successor, Antony Blinken, said the United States continued to "disagree strongly" with the moves on Afghanistan and Israel.

Biden revoked an executive order by Trump on the sanctions, also lifting sanctions against senior ICC official Phakiso Mochoko and visa bans on other court staff.

Bensouda is leaving her job in June and will be replaced by British human rights lawyer Karim Khan, who now can open his work without the burden of looming sanctions.

France, which like other European allies had been aghast by the last administration's move, hailed the reversal and pledged support for the ICC. EU also welcomed the decision.



Demonstrators take part in a 'Kill The Bill' protest against the Government's Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, in central London, yesterday. The police, crime, sentencing and courts bill would give police in England and Wales more power to impose conditions on peaceful protests, including those they deem to be too noisy or a nuisance to the community. Critics argue this infringes on the right to free and peaceful expression.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Officer killed in US Capitol car-ramming attack

A US Capitol police officer was killed and a second injured Friday after a vehicle rammed through security and crashed into a barrier at the Washington complex, forcing it into lockdown less than three months after a mob assault on Congress. Capitol Police shot dead the driver after he jumped out of the car and lunged at them with a knife, Acting Chief Yogananda Pittman told reporters. US media said officials had identified the attacker as Noah Green, a 25-year-old Black man from Indiana and an adherent of the Black nationalist Nation of Islam movement. Pittman said there was no immediate indication of his motivation or police file on him. "It does not appear to be terrorism-related, but obviously we will continue to investigate," Washington Metropolitan Police Chief Robert Contee added. Some of Noah's online postings in March suggested a level of despair and paranoia. He said he was unemployed and had health problems, and made references to biblical concepts of the end of times.

LinkedIn gives staff week off for well-being

Professional social network LinkedIn is giving nearly all of its 15,900 full-time workers next week off as it seeks to avoid burnout and allow its employees to recharge, the company told AFP Friday. The Microsoft-owned firm said that the "RestUp!" week starting Monday is meant to give employees time for their own well-being. "There is something magical about the entire company taking a break at the same time," LinkedIn said in reply to an AFP inquiry. "A core team of employees will continue to work for the week, but they will be able to schedule time off later," LinkedIn said.

Argentine president tests positive for Covid-19



Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez, who has been vaccinated against Covid-19, announced late Friday that he had tested positive for the coronavirus. "At the end of today, after presenting a fever of 37.3 and a slight headache, I performed an antigen test, which was positive," he tweeted, adding he was waiting for the results of a PCR test to confirm the diagnosis. The president, who turned 62 on Friday, was in isolation as a precaution but said he was "physically well." Fernandez was inoculated with the Russian Sputnik V vaccine and had his second shot on February 11, sources in the presidency told AFP.

Al-Shabaab attacks two key Somali bases: army

Al-Shabaab Islamist fighters attacked two key military bases in Somalia yesterday, detonating car bombs at both locations before engaging in an intense gun battle, an army official and witnesses said. The attacks happened in the southern region of Lower Shabelle on bases in the towns of Awdheegle and Bariire -- some 30 kilometres (17 miles) apart. Both are forward operating bases in the fight against the Islamist group. Army chief General Odowa Yusuf Rage told reporters that the attacks were over with dozens of insurgents dead or injured. Al-Shabaab claimed it had killed dozens and captured military vehicles and supplies in the attacks.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Blinken seeks Israel's 'equal' treatment of Palestinians

AFP, Washington

Secretary of State Antony Blinken has called on Israel to ensure "equal" treatment of the Palestinians as the new US administration cautiously steps up efforts for a two-state solution.

In a telephone call with Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, Blinken "emphasized the administration's belief that Israelis and Palestinians should enjoy equal measures of freedom, security, prosperity and democracy," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

The Biden admin has in recent days made clear that it believes that Israel's control of the West Bank is "occupation."

Blinken's predecessor Mike Pompeo broke precedent by saying he did not consider Israeli construction on land seized in 1967 to be illegal.

Blinken has nonetheless made clear that the administration will not roll back some of Trump's signature moves, including recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

'Game on' vs 'Game over'

Mamata, Modi trade barbs in simultaneous rallies in Bengal



AGENCIES

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee took swipes at each other at simultaneous election rallies in Bengal yesterday as the election campaign for the state assembly heats up a notch further ahead of third-phase of voting in the restive state.

PM Modi added a twist to Mamata's "khela hobe (game on)" dig at him - he said it's "khela sesh (game over)" if players keep criticising "empires", alluding to the Trinamool's repeated criticism of the Election Commission.

Mamata, campaigning at North 24 Parganas district, just 58 km from Tarkeshwar, where PM Modi was giving an election speech, attacked the BJP using the Trinamool's main weapon - that of calling the BJP a party of "outsiders" in Bengal.

"BJP wants to divide Bengal... These people want to end Bengal, its language, its culture," Mamata, on a wheelchair nursing her plastered leg, said. "I request to all the minority brothers and sisters not to allow their vote division," she said.

Mamata on Thursday slammed the Election Commission (EC) over the "inaction to complaints" filed by her party even during the second phase of polling to the West Bengal assembly.

There had been reports of sporadic violence and minor clashes from various constituencies, including the high profile Nandigram, where Mamata locked horns in a high-stakes electoral



battle with her former lieutenant Suwendu Adhikari now with the BJP. Amongst the complaints were allegations of "booth capturing" and massive fake voting in Boyal.

PM Modi used his Lok Sabha constituency, Varanasi, to make the Trinamool's "outsider" comment at BJP rickshaw back to Mamata's party.

"Didi is now looking for a place outside. Welcome to Varanasi. There is a ship that goes from Haldia to Varanasi. One more thing, the people of my Benaras, they are so large hearted they won't call you a tourist or outsider. They are as large hearted as the people of Bengal," the PM said.

PM Modi has been taking a whirlwind tour of Bengal to add power to the BJP's campaign in its bid to dislodge the government run by Mamata's Trinamool Congress for 10 years.

"Didi says people take money to attend BJP rallies. Didi, Bengalis are self-respecting people. Didi, you have insulted the people of Bengal with this statement. Did anyone come here today for money?" PM Modi said in Hooghly yesterday.

"A major reason for Didi's bewilderment is her report card of 10 years. Old industries have been shut down. Possibilities of new industries, new investment, new business and employment have also been closed down," Modi said.

The third of the eight-phase election in Bengal's 294 assembly seats will be held on April 6. Results are expected on May 2.

BLOOD CLOT FEARS OVER AZ VACCINE

30 cases in UK as 18.1m inoculated

AFP, London

The UK medical regulator yesterday said that out of 30 people who suffered blood clots after receiving the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, seven have died.

The UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said that the 30 reports of thrombosis, submitted by medics or members of the public via a government website, came after 18.1 million doses of the vaccine had been administered in the country.

"The benefits of the vaccines against Covid-19 continue to outweigh any risks," MHRA said, urging the public to keep taking the vaccine.

The British acknowledgement of deaths comes as several European countries have paused the use of the AstraZeneca jab over a potential link to blood clots.

The Netherlands on Friday halted vaccinations with the AstraZeneca jab for people under the age of 60 after five new cases among women, one of whom died. Germany took a similar decision earlier this week.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA), which like the World Health Organization previously declared the AstraZeneca vaccine safe, is expected to announce updated advice on the issue on April 7.

The EMA said again on Wednesday it believes the vaccine is safe and that experts have found no specific risk factors such as age, gender or medical history.

AstraZeneca said last month following US efficiency trials that its vaccine is 79 percent effective at preventing the disease and does not increase the risk of blood clots.

The UK has administered more than 31 million first vaccine doses, using both the Oxford-AstraZeneca and the Pfizer-BioNTech jabs. People cannot choose which one they get.

The UK in June 2020 ordered 100 million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine and supported its development. It also ordered 30 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine the same year.



Taiwan mourns after deadliest train disaster in decades

AFP, Hualien

Grieving relatives of those who died in Taiwan's worst rail disaster in decades held prayers at the crash site yesterday as salvage crews worked to remove the tangled mass of wrecked carriages.

Officials said Friday's devastating collision, which killed at least 50 people and injured more than 170, was caused when a parked railway maintenance vehicle slipped down an embankment and onto the tracks.

A train packed with as many as 500 people at the start of a long holiday weekend then hit the truck just as it entered a narrow tunnel near the eastern coastal city of Hualien.

The truck driver -- who railway officials said may have failed to secure the parking brake properly -- has been released on bail after being interrogated by prosecutors and is barred from leaving Taiwan pending further investigation.

Around one hundred relatives held an emotional Taoist prayer ceremony near the crash site yesterday afternoon, shaded under a canopy of black umbrellas.

Many wept openly as they surveyed the scene, some holding makeshift shrines

inscribed with the names of those who died.

Some called out the names of their loved ones as other family members held their tight.

The Interior Ministry ordered all flags to be lowered to half-mast for three days while President Tsai Ing-wen visited the wounded in Hualien's hospitals.


Friday's crash took place at the start of the Tomb Sweeping Festival, a four-day public holiday when many Taiwanese return to villages to tidy the graves of their ancestors.

A French and an American national were among the foreigners killed, authorities said. The youngest victim was 4-years-old.

Friday's crash looks set to be one of Taiwan's worst railway accidents on record. The last major train derailment in Taiwan was in 2018 and left 18 people dead on the same eastern line.

That crash was the island's worst since 1991, when 30 passengers were killed. Other major crashes that killed dozens have taken place in 1981, 1978 and 1961.

Taiwan's most deadly rail disaster on record was in 1948 when a train caught fire and 64 people perished.



বাংলাদেশ মেডিকেল এন্ড ডেন্টাল কাউন্সিল
 ২০৩, শহীদ সৈয়দ নজরুল ইসলাম সরনী
 ৮৬, বিজয় নগর, ঢাকা-১০০০।
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 Email : info@bmdc.org.bd
 admin@bmdc.org.bd
 website : www.bmdc.org.bd

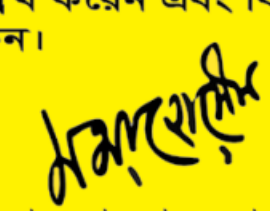
স্মারক নং-বিএমএন্ডডিসি/১৫৬৫ তারিখ : ৩১/০৩/২০২১

বিজ্ঞপ্তি

এতদ্বারা সকল নিবন্ধিত মেডিকেল/ ডেন্টাল চিকিৎসকদের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাইতেছে যে :-

১। কাউন্সিলের কার্যক্রমকে আরও গতিশীল করার লক্ষ্যে কাউন্সিল বিভিন্ন উদ্যোগ গ্রহণ করিতেছে। ইহার জন্য নিবন্ধিত চিকিৎসকগণের Profile Update করা প্রয়োজন। সকল নিবন্ধিত মেডিকেল/ডেন্টাল চিকিৎসকদের Profile Update করার জন্য কাউন্সিলের ওয়েবসাইট (www.bmdc.org.bd) এ (Update Registered Doctor Profile) নামে একটি Link দেওয়া আছে। উক্ত Link এ তাঁহাদের (১) পিতার নাম, (২) মাতার নাম এবং (৩) NID নম্বর, (৪) জন্ম তারিখ, (৫) ঠিকানা, (৬) বর্তমান মোবাইল নম্বর, (৭) বর্তমান ই-মেইল ঠিকানা লিখে Profile Update করা যাইবে। ইহার মাধ্যমে কাউন্সিলের সকল তথ্য আদান প্রদান করা সহজ হইবে। এমতাবস্থায় যথাশীঘ্র Profile Update করার জন্য সকল নিবন্ধিত চিকিৎসকগণকে অনুরোধ করা যাইতেছে।

২। সকল নিবন্ধিত চিকিৎসক/দস্তচিকিৎসক যেন তাঁদের প্রেসক্রিপশান প্যাড এবং সাইন বোর্ডে আবশ্যিকভাবে তাঁদের বিএমএন্ডডিসি এর রেজিস্ট্রেশন নম্বর উল্লেখ করেন এবং বিএমএন্ডডিসি কর্তৃক স্বীকৃত নয় এমন কোন ডিগ্রী ব্যবহার করা থেকে বিরত থাকেন।


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Is a lockdown inevitable in Bangladesh?

DR SHAHRIAR ROZEN, DR TAHMID KASHEM, DR JANNATUL MAWA

The new infectious variants of COVID-19 are menacing all around the world forcing many countries to impose lockdown-type measures. Although the pandemic was under control in Bangladesh a few months ago, the country is experiencing a sudden surge of infection in recent weeks, leading many to wonder if the government would be forced to impose lockdown-type measures in a desperate attempt to control the pandemic.

The alarming surge of new infection and hospitalisation is likely to continue in the coming weeks, due to the spread of the highly infectious new variants and reluctance of people to follow safety guidelines. According to the World Health Organisation, 62% of the dedicated ICU beds are occupied in Bangladesh, including 84% of the occupied ICUs in Dhaka city. The health system likely would be unable to serve the severely ill patients if the upward trend of infection continues for a few more weeks.

Data from different countries show that mass gatherings and indoor activities are among the major factors for spreading COVID-19. This is why all public gatherings and unnecessary movements should be prohibited immediately along with strict enforcement of laws. This should include a complete ban



on all gatherings, social and recreational activities, closure of parks, recreational and community centres. Such a ban at this point will reduce the upward trend of the infection, which is essential for the safe operation of businesses to keep the economy functional.

Simply put, partial operation of businesses and commercial activities would be possible if all mass gatherings and unnecessary movements are immediately prohibited. If strict targeted measures are not enforced immediately on mass gatherings and violating public health measures, there will be no option other than total lockdown on all workplaces and activities in the coming weeks.

Recently, the government of Bangladesh has announced an 18-point directive to control the spread of the virus, but a number of them are voluntary guidelines. The directives lack clear mandates for the local governing body in taking restrictive measures, which may make it challenging to implement the policy direction at the local level.

The government should develop a robust matrix with defined parameters and clear mandates to promote a consistent approach to implementing the restrictions all over Bangladesh. Local governing bodies can take uniform decisions on restrictive measures within their local area based on the mandates outlined in the matrix.

Based on the lessons learnt from other countries, the government can adopt a risk-based matrix with defined parameters to implement targeted restrictive measures. The matrix can use hospitalisation/ICU admission rates and test positivity rate as parameters, which will indicate the current burden of the virus on the health system, as well as, the current level of transmission respectively.

The following matrix may be proposed to inform decision-making to control the pandemic in Bangladesh:

- **Phase 1 (Restrict – 5-10% case positivity rate):** Allow outdoor gatherings of up to 100 people and indoor gatherings of

up to 50 people, allow businesses and commercial activities to operate with safety measures in place.

- **Phase 2 (Control – 60% occupancy of the dedicated ICU units and 10-20% case positivity rate):** prohibit all types of public gatherings, social and recreational activities; prohibit inter-district movement; allow businesses to operate under restrictions.

- **Phase 3 (Lockdown – 80% occupancy of the dedicated ICU units and more than 20% case positivity rate with an upward pattern):** Impose national lockdown for at least three weeks with a complete ban on non-essential travel, business, and public gatherings.

The government of Bangladesh has recently flagged 31 new districts as high contamination areas, which is undoubtedly worrying. Not prohibiting public gatherings and unnecessary movements will likely lead the country towards a complete lockdown. It is a great that the government has imposed a week-long lockdown. But the situation should be observed very carefully and law enforcement should be strict.

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COVID-19 RISKS

How does living with children affect adults' risk for COVID-19 and its outcomes?

During the second wave in England, SARS-CoV-2 infection and related hospital admission (but not ICU admission or death) were slightly elevated among younger adults who lived with children.

As children are less susceptible to SARS-CoV-2 infection, often are asymptomatic, and rarely develop severe COVID-19, their role in disease spread is unclear. Researchers in England analysed national data on COVID-19 and individual health status in a study involving >9.3 million adults aged 18 to 65 and almost 2.7 million aged >65. Linked data on household members showed that 37% of younger adults and 3% of older adults lived with children.

During the pandemic's first wave (February–August 2020), COVID-19–related outcomes (infection, hospital admission, ICU admission, and death) were not appreciably increased among adults living with children. During the second wave (September–December 2020), adults aged 65 and younger showed increases in risk for acquiring COVID-19 and COVID-19–related hospital admission. Risks for ICU admission or death did not increase. Among adults older than 65, living with children was associated with significantly elevated risks for COVID-19–related ICU admission and death.

These data indicate that during the second wave of the pandemic in England, children appeared to have a role in the transmission of SARS-CoV-2. However, the excess risk for COVID-19 among younger adults living with children could be related to other factors; furthermore, the absolute risk increase was modest, and severe disease and death did not occur more frequently than in the first wave. By contrast, older adults living with children were at higher risk for unfavourable COVID-19 outcomes, stressing the importance of their protection and vaccination.

HEALTH bulletin



How mental resilience can help through the pandemic

VIVIAN HUIZENGA

Resilience is the ability to stay strong during hard times. How are you doing this year? Looking back, what was the most difficult part? How did you handle that? Inner strength is good because then you can handle whatever problems come your way next time. There has been a lot of research about the benefits of building resilience in children and preparing them for a changing world.

In countries where children have everything, they never have to struggle, and others who take care of their problems for them are not equipped for handling life changes. Often parents do not want to see their child being hurt or struggling and feel better just 'doing it for them.'

This has 2 consequences – the child is denied the feeling of accomplishment and confidence in him/herself, and the child is not used to experiencing struggle, therefore enters adulthood with few tools to handle difficulties that are bound to come in life. They run to others for help or expect their partners to fix everything for them and blame them if they do not. Wise parents allow just the right amount of struggle to allow their children to build resilience.

Resilience is like a tree that has been beaten by strong winds year after year. Its roots grow stronger and hold the ground more firmly after every storm. It may be leaning and have lost a few leaves and branches, but it is still holding onto the ground with a new set of lessons

to cherish. People are like trees. We react and grow stronger under difficult times. The pandemic has been a difficult time. It has changed our entire daily lives, our way of interacting with family, friends, travelling, and the workplace. Some of us withered at first, appalled and fearful of all the freedoms we had lost. After a time, some became accustomed to the new routines, accepted limitations, and even found benefits within the 'new normal.' It is their deep, firm roots tied to the ground which gave them the confidence to hang on.

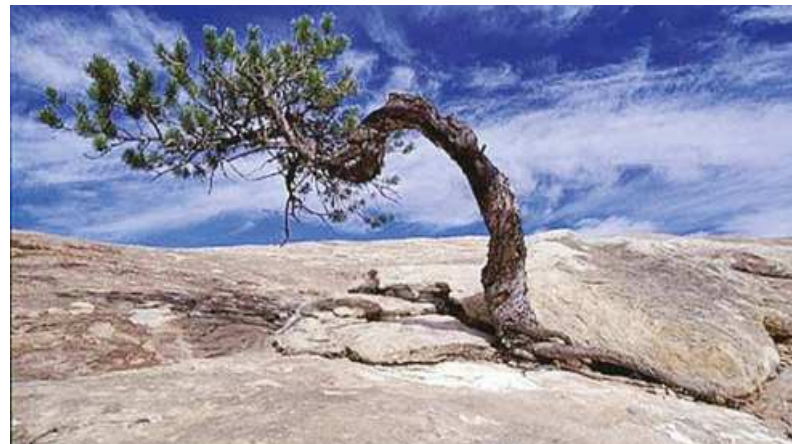
Keeping yourself calm with a cup of tea, yoga, going for a walk, listening to music, or anything that helps to divert the focus towards productivity is good. Only thinking about own self could be stressful and create anxiety. Taking care of others is also a good way to overcome self-obsession. It feels fulfilling to do something nice for others. Listen deeply to others. Realise that others are uncomfortable

and maybe afraid too.

Neurologically if you pull yourself out of the thinking mode and stay in your body, this balances the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. Things, like sensing physical feelings, listening to birds, enjoying flowers, feeling a warm breeze, and just being aware, are calming and centring. A few moments here and there add up to strengthening your inner self, and then your tree is even stronger!

Following the above advice, those who struggle may grow roots for you and prepare you and your children for the changes that come in the future. With technology and fast-paced changes in education, production, business, and jobs, we want to ensure our children are ready for anything that comes their way in the future.

Vivian Huizenga is a Counselor at the International School Dhaka. E-mail: vivianhuizenga@gmail.com



Miscarriage tied to increased mortality

Miscarriage is associated with increased premature mortality in mothers, suggests an observational study in The BMJ.

In the Nurses' Health Study II, researchers assessed over 100,000 women who had been pregnant. Just over a quarter said they had a pregnancy that ended in spontaneous abortion. During 24 years' follow-up, there were roughly 2,900 premature deaths (i.e., death before age 70).

After multivariable adjustment, women who had a spontaneous abortion had higher risk for premature death than those who did not (hazard ratio, 1.19). Risks were higher for women who had multiple miscarriages or had them at a younger age.

The risk appeared to be at least partly driven by increased risk for cardiovascular death. The authors speculate that there could be similar pathways — such as insulin resistance or chronic kidney disease — that could lead to both spontaneous abortion and cardiovascular disease.

The authors conclude: "Our results suggest that spontaneous abortion could be an early marker of future health risk in women, including premature death."

Mistakes even healthy people make



There are some mistakes that even the most health concerned people can also commit without knowing. Let us have a look at some of these and try to avoid as much as possible.

Too little sleep: Long-term sleep loss is linked to dementia, heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. You can also add problems with your immune system, depression and anxiety, and ongoing pain to that list. Talk to your doctor if you have trouble getting enough sleep.

Not drinking water first: Your body sends out signals when you are hungry or thirsty. But it is easy to confuse the two. Both sensations can give you a headache or make you feel tired and dizzy. The next time you feel like snacking, try gulping a glass of water first. Other signs you need more fluid include dry eyes or skin, dry mouth, dark pee, or not peeing very much.

Using a cotton swab in your ear: You may end up pushing wax deeper into the ear canal. And you could puncture your eardrum if the swab goes too far. That can cause hearing loss. Your ear is pretty good at cleaning itself. But it is possible to make more wax than normal. If that happens to you, ask your doctor what to do.

Not checking for drug interactions: Some things can change how your medication works. That includes food, supplements, and other drugs. Some of these interactions can make your medicine less effective or cause unwanted side effects. Always read the warning labels that come with prescription or drugs and ask your doctor.

Source: WebMD

Facebook /StarHealthBD

World Health Day 2021

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Faridpur criminal duo mere tip of the iceberg

Political backing of crimes and criminals must stop

FURTHER details have emerged of the operations of the notorious Faridpur criminal duo and their associates and patrons which, once again, put into sharp relief the enduring connection between politics and crimes in Bangladesh. The two brothers—Faridpur Awami League's suspended general secretary Sajjad Hossain Barkat and his brother Imtiaz Hasan Rubel—ran a criminal syndicate through which they would commit various crimes, including tender manipulation, extortion and land grabbing. In the process, they amassed a vast amount of wealth and money, a large part of which was siphoned off abroad. A new report by this daily highlights how they were enabled by influential ruling-party leaders, including a former minister's brother and assistant personal secretary—and how they would secure government contracts by ruthlessly eliminating competition even from Awami League-linked businessmen. One enlisted contractor disclosed to *The Daily Star* how he was mercilessly beaten just for submitting a tender.

A CID charge sheet submitted in connection with a money laundering case accused all the four mentioned above, as well as six others. While the story of how the brothers and their enablers ran the syndicate—using their political connections and muscle power, including through a "helmet gang"—is nothing new, it does show the enduring appeal of the political patronage of crimes. The question is: how could these criminals operate with such impunity, and for so long? Why did the administration do nothing to bring them to justice earlier? Whether or not the 10 will be punished for their crimes remains to be seen. But this can be said with certainty that only prosecuting the visible faces of such crimes, without addressing the real problem of the criminalised patronage culture, will not have much impact in the future.

Unfortunately, we live in a country where the check and balance system seems to have almost broken down, with near-zero accountability for the political actors and those in law enforcement. People like Barkat and Rubel often start as petty criminals, and it is only through political patronage and the tolerance of the administration that they are able to sustain and rise through the ranks. They are discarded only when they become an embarrassment for the powers that be. Unless we stop this culture of tolerance for crimes and stop political influences to get in the way of rule of law, the old players will only be replaced by emerging ones, and there will be no end to such crimes. The real criminals, those benefiting from their services, will remain outside of the law. All political parties, including the ruling one, as well as the administration must try harder to stop this from happening.

Govt wants to produce AstraZeneca vaccine locally

Must ensure effective planning before proceeding

THE government's recent request to British-Swedish pharmaceutical company, AstraZeneca, to authorise the production of its Covid-19 vaccine in Bangladesh, is a pragmatic one in the backdrop of vaccine manufacturing countries halting supplies to other countries in order to meet domestic demand. Specifically, the government has proposed to either import the vaccine in bulk amounts and repackage it, or manufacture it from the vaccine seed using AstraZeneca's technology. The reason AstraZeneca's vaccine in particular is sought-after by Bangladesh is because it is low-cost and more suitable to store and handle in the country's climate.

The health minister believes that Bangladesh has the capacity to produce the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from seed and host cell banks. While the chairman of the pharmacology department at BSMMU echoed this belief, he also thinks that we need to acquire the appropriate technology to accommodate vaccines which have been produced using newer techniques. Another hurdle, pointed out by an unnamed senior epidemiologist, is that the Directorate General of Drug Administration's (DGDA) biological lab is a Category-C one, and needs to be upgraded to Category-A after inspection by the World Health Organisation (WHO), if it is to meet global standards and be eligible for exporting vaccines.

We commend the government's initiative to take a more hands-on approach to fighting Covid-19 using the vaccine, especially when the country has just had the record high of 6,830 infections on Friday. However, we must also warn the authorities to not be hasty in its planning and execution, if AstraZeneca does allow the manufacturing of its vaccine locally.

With things changing rapidly, including the mutation of the virus into newer strains, it is important to not give in to panic and try to execute the plan as quickly as possible, while forgoing effectiveness, as seemed to be the case when the recent 18-point Covid-19 directive was issued last week. We would urge the authorities concerned to ensure that the vaccine can be produced, stored, and used effectively in the long term before committing to buying it or its seed in bulk amounts. Given the short shelf life of 6 months of the sealed vaccine doses, and the less than impressive turnouts at our vaccination centres (due to lack of promotion of the vaccine and the complicated registration process), thinking ahead is vital if we are to use our limited resources efficiently. Adding to the tens of lakhs of AstraZeneca vaccine doses we already have at hand would be of no use if people remain unaware and unvaccinated.



AN OPEN DIALOGUE

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

THE latest crisis surrounding the Suez Canal appears to have come to a favourable resolution, avoiding a full-blown disaster. The world was watching with bated breath for almost 10 days, as the Suez Canal drama was playing out last week. A Japanese container ship, on its way from Asia to the Dutch port of Rotterdam, got stuck diagonally in the Suez Canal on March 23, 2021, and traffic on the canal came to a standstill. The ship *Ever Given* was travelling north on the canal and turned right. Both its bow (the front) and the stern (the tail) hit the banks of the canal, leaving about 400 vessels stranded on the southern and the northern segments. A group of an international crew worked feverishly day and night to dislodge the container ship and succeeded in doing so on March 29 to refloat it. But the fallout is already starting to emerge. Some of the ships coming from Asia are going around the Cape of Good Hope to reach Europe. Others that were stuck in the Mediterranean turned around and are now heading for the Atlantic Ocean to reach the Asian destinations.

The rescue operation of *Ever Given* gripped the imagination of billions around the globe who were watching live on TV and the Internet as the leviathan, laden with 18,000 containers, was stuck for almost a week, and tugboats attempted to refloat it. The 1,312-foot, quarter-mile long, 200,000 metric ton container ship became the subject of wide-spread speculations. At one stage, Egypt's President, Abdel Fatah al-Sissi, stepped in and ordered a back-up plan, including preparations for removing containers from the vessel, according to news reports last Sunday.

The *Ever Given* episode reminded us of the story of Gulliver, who after a sea-borne disaster, found himself on the shores of the island country of Lilliput. In "Gulliver's Travels" written by Jonathan Swift, the protagonist finds himself in the midst of the tiny inhabitants of Lilliput, who tie him down with ropes and other types of fasteners on the beach to prevent him from leaving the seashore and causing harm to the 6-inch-tall humans. He is finally set free on the orders of the

King of the Lilliput after promising not to hurt his subjects. Jonathan Swift claimed that he wrote Gulliver's Travels "to vex the world rather than divert it". It appears that *Ever Given* which was driven by strong winds and possibly human error to be beached on the shores of the Suez Canal managed to take our eyes away from the pandemic and the other problems we face every day.

The Suez Canal is a vital conduit for the global supply chain, with 51 ships passing through the canal each day. It is a 120-mile-long shipping link between the Mediterranean and Red seas that carries 10 percent to 12 percent of commercial shipping and about 2.5 percent of the world's oil. A German insurer said delays could cost global trade USD 6 billion to USD 10 billion a week, Reuters reported.



A view shows *Ever Given* container ship in Suez Canal in this Maxar Technologies satellite image taken on March 28, 2021.

PHOTO: REUTERS

According to another estimate, the total value of goods that move through the Suez Canal daily is over USD 9.5 billion. Lloyd's values the canal's westbound traffic at roughly USD 5.1 billion a day, and eastbound traffic at around USD 4.5 billion a day. The ship completely blocked the canal disrupting much of the world's seaborne trade and caused a traffic jam with hundreds of ships waiting to enter the Suez.

The *Time* magazine was not exaggerating when one of its headlines proclaimed, "A Massive Cargo Ship Stuck in Egypt's Suez Canal Is Imperiling Shipping Worldwide". While the Suez Canal is just a link between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, it is also the

quickest, and most economical path from Asia and the Middle East to Europe and the east coast of the USA. Ships that ply this route haul cars, oil, livestock, laptops, jet fuel, scrap metal, grain, sweaters, sneakers, appliances, toilet paper, toys, medical equipment and much more.

The current stoppages and delays have already cost billions of dollars to the traders that use it, the shipping companies, as well as the Egyptian Government in terms of lost fees. Lloyd's List calculates the blockage, lasting 6 days, was costing USD 400 million an hour. Jon Gold, vice president of supply chain and customs policy for the National Retail Federation, said last week, "Many companies continue to struggle with supply chain congestion and delays stemming from the pandemic. There is

through it. Unfortunately, it now appears that the government of Al-Sisi was ill-prepared for the crisis and had neglected some of the basic aspects of disaster preparedness, including mitigation strategies, according to scholars at the Abu Dhabi Institute. It is the high tide that finally delivered the punch that helped the ship aided by tugboats to pull itself free of the sands of Sinai!

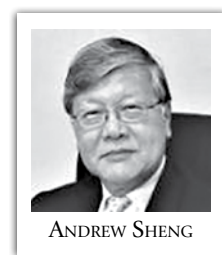
My last visit to the Suez Canal from the Egyptian side was less eventful. I was visiting Egypt with my family and staying with a Bangladeshi diplomat. Originally, my itinerary did not include the Suez Canal. However, after visiting all the major tourist attractions, including the Pyramids, Aswan and Alexandria, we had two days left before our departure. And then, we went to a dinner at the residence of the Bangladeshi Ambassador to Egypt, Serajul Islam, whom we called Sabuj Bhai. He suggested we could take a day-trip to the Suez Canal. So, the following day we drove from Cairo to the western banks of the Suez and crossed the canal on a ferry. We saw some of the remnants of the many wars that Israel and Egypt fought since the nationalisation of the canal by President Nasser in 1956. During our visit, things were calm and we walked around on a balmy day with admiration for this man-made Wonder of the World.

Since the War in 1973, the canal has stayed out of news headlines. Every nation in the world has a stake in ensuring that traffic is flowing since it is considered "strategically and economically one of the most important waterways in the world."

Now that the immediate crisis is over, it is time to understand why it happened and how to prevent it in future. The chairman of Egypt's Suez Canal Authority said that weather conditions "were not the main reasons" for the grounding, and that "there may have been technical or human reasons". An investigation is ongoing. The ship's owner, the Japanese company Shoen Kisen, has been forthcoming and fully cooperating with all the parties involved in damage assessment and post-disaster investigation. For now, the 360 ships, carrying everything from cars to oil to grain, are heading cautiously towards the canal's northern and southern entrances. It is not clear how many ships that were heading for the canal have been diverted to the African route.

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and has been working in higher education and information technology for 35 years in the USA and Bangladesh. He is also Senior Research Fellow, International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI), a think-tank in Boston, USA.

Why emerging markets must think for themselves



ANDREW SHENG

"April is the cruellest month", so said the poet TS Eliot in his 1920s poem, *The Wasteland*. The April Spring meetings of the IMF/World Bank will be held virtually this year, locked down by the pandemic that is raging into its third wave worldwide.

The world is in a cruel situation, because the uneven arrival of vaccines demonstrate that a few rich countries get them first, whereas the health and economic condition for the many are dire. The latest available OECD Economic Outlook suggested that the recovery in 2021 will be divergent, meaning that certain countries will do better, but others will continue to struggle. That is polite officialese for devastation.

When the pandemic hit, the rich countries spent roughly three times the stimulus package that was applied for the last financial crisis in 2008/9. The poorer emerging market economies (EMEs) could not afford to print money to the same extent, but they witnessed considerable capital outflows. According to the Institute of International Finance (IIF), emerging markets attracted USD 31.3 billion in portfolio flows in 2020, USD 48 billion less than the previous year. Furthermore, foreign direct investments (FDI) fell 42 percent from USD 1.5 trillion in 2019 to an estimated USD 859 billion, per UNCTAD Investment Trends Monitor.

With lower export income as commodity prices tumbled, many developing countries are facing debt distress. In the last decade, the external debt of developing countries doubled from USD 4.5 trillion in 2009 to USD 10 trillion or 29 percent of GDP in 2019. In 2020 and 2021, developing countries face repayments on their public external debt amounting to an estimated USD 700 billion to USD 1.1 trillion for low-income countries and middle-income countries.

Thus, when official forecasts preach recovery on an "average basis", we should have no illusions that from Mexico to South Africa, the decline in GDP last year was over 7-9 percent, so the situation for the bottom half of

society in many EMEs are deadly serious. The rich do not fear inflation, but when food and energy prices rise once again with massive monetary creation, the poor will be the major victims.

In the 1930s, the English economist John Maynard Keynes identified the liquidity trap where aggregate demand lagged aggregate supply. Put simply, too much savings was stuck in short-term liquid assets, and not enough money put into long-term investments to get jobs going again. Funding is available, but since no one is investing for the long-term and improving productivity, you get "secular stagnation", sliding into slow-growth depression.

We have a similar situation today. Since the 2008 global financial crisis,

percent of US GDP. The rest of the world is in effect funding their banker, who is not investing long-term in its own home market, let alone the rest of the world.

Here's how the global balance sheet looks like. The EMEs (including China) hold roughly USD 10 trillion out of total USD 12 trillion of global foreign exchange reserves, of which 60 percent is in US dollars. At the same time, the emerging markets owe roughly USD 10 trillion in foreign debt, mostly in US dollars. And since they pay a 4 percent margin (2 percent higher borrowing costs and 2 percent lower return on short-term investments and deposits), they provide global bankers and asset managers USD 400 billion revenue for not lending them money for long-term investments.



the invention of quantitative easing (QE) or increase central bank balance sheets and reduce interest rates) used painless short-term monetary policy to avoid painful fixing of long-term structural deficiencies. Since Wall Street controls Main Street through money politics, no one was willing to tax the rich to deal with the widening inequalities.

At the end of the Second World War, the US emerged as the strongest and richest country, and therefore acted as the world's banker, lending dollars to those who need them to recover, including creating multilateral development banks (MDBs) like World Bank to provide long-term development funds.

Today's situation has reversed. The US has become the world's largest borrower, with net foreign liability of USD 14 trillion as of September 2020 or over 60

Here's the irony. Since the global rating agencies define credit risks to rich countries as low and emerging risks as high, the EMEs are being starved out of their own money. There is no shortage of short-term money, since the top four reserve currency central bank balance sheets increased by USD 9 trillion in 2020 alone.

The MDBs have total assets of USD 1.6 trillion, when the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) investments have a financing gap of USD 2.5 trillion annually. The rich countries which have majority control of the MDBs refused to increase their capital to help meet this gap, asking the EMEs to resort to market funding. But the financial markets are only funding the rich. Indeed, stock markets fund have only 41,000 listed companies, whereas there are millions of small and medium-sized enterprises

The present global financial system is designed for the few and not the many. If the world's bankers refuse to think for their clients, it is time for the emerging markets to think for themselves.

(SMEs) which cannot access public capital.

The present global financial system is designed for the few and not the many. If the world's bankers refuse to think for their clients, it is time for the emerging markets to think for themselves.

The recent US and European support for USD 500 billion increase in Special Drawing Rights (SDR) issue by the IMF is a step in the right direction but does not address the structural liquidity trap of who will lead the investment in long-term green and inclusive infrastructure for the developing world.

The first thing to address is the massive implementation capacity gap. Too much short-term thinking has depleted almost all governments' operational capacity to design, execute and operate long-term infrastructure, with the exception of China. Many private-public partnerships (PPPs) have turned out to be opportunities for corruption or weak project designs. The MDBs complain but they lack today the effective advisory and implementation experience that used to exist before the 1980s, when project engineers dominated operations, rather than present-day macro-economists and MBAs who talk more theory than hard project skills.

Democracy is about the many for the many. Time for the many in EMEs to think and act for themselves.

Andrew Sheng is an honorary adviser with the CIMB Asean Research Institute and a distinguished fellow with the Asia Global Institute at the University of Hong Kong. He writes on global issues for the Asia News Network (ANN), an alliance of 24 news media titles across the region, which includes *The Daily Star*.



PLEDGE ON THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF INDEPENDENCE

Equal Rights of Women in Land and Agriculture for Sustainable Development

The Daily Star and Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) jointly organised an online discussion titled "Pledge on the Golden Jubilee of Independence: Equal Rights of Women in Land and Agriculture for Sustainable Development" on March 9, 2021. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



KHUSHI KABIR,
Chairperson, ALRD
and Coordinator,
Nijera Kori

The topic of today's discussion is critical. The majority of our population is still dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. In our journey towards self-sufficiency in food production and food sovereignty, agriculture will play a central role. Women's contribution to these sectors has to be recognised. Women have always had a role in agriculture, but they have never been given proper recognition. The male farmers I have spoken to before would always suggest that the women were not making any economic contribution. But this was a completely false presumption because the process of converting the paddy to rice to be sold in the markets was done entirely by the women. Women also play a significant role in rearing farm animals such as ducks, chickens, cows, and goats. They even cultivate vegetables and gather firewood. At present, the women farmers are also directly working in the fields, just like their male counterparts. Considering all of this, women's contribution to agriculture seems to be immense.

On this Golden Jubilee of independence, I'd like to remind everyone of some of the revolutionary steps taken by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1972. Several laws were enacted at the time, including the Alluvion-Diluvion Land Laws of 1972 that mentioned the need to distribute khas land to the landless people. As per the 1987 policies drawn up from this law, both the husband and the wife register along with their photos for identification to receive the khas land. But, the law has often been overlooked and instead, traditionally, after a divorce, the man tends to take hold of the land, and the woman is left deprived of her right to the land although it is registered under her name as well. For women-led households, only the women with an able-bodied son can own land. We must work to help bring change to these traditions and laws. Most importantly, the government must ensure that women receive their fair share of khas land during its distribution.

The parliament should truly work democratically and play its role properly. We can form strong unions to hold onto khas land and prevent it from being grabbed. If khas land falls in the wrong person's hands, the Right to Information Act can be used to reclaim it. Land grabbers must be resisted to allow cultivation on khas land.

Most of our laws are relics of the British period. We must completely discard these laws. Furthermore, there exist many complexities, and corruption is pervasive throughout the whole system. The Cooperative Act must be amended to make it appropriate for current times. But even before that, women's right to khas land has to be established. It must be ensured that women can use the khas land that is rightfully in her name.

In terms of the inheritance laws, whereas Ayub Khan successfully modernised the Muslim laws, we are still living in the past. We can create a parliamentary caucus on land ownership. Through this, we must establish women's equal land and agriculture rights.

Then, we will not only achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but also be able to uphold the principles with which we made the country independent.



ROWSHAN JAHAN MONI,
Deputy Executive
Director, ALRD

Over the years, women's participation has increased in almost every sector. But where we are lagging behind is their lack of authoritative power in decision-making in terms of their recognition as farmer, access to finance, and land ownership.

According to SDG five, for economic progress, poverty eradication, and social development, women's socio-economic, and political empowerment is extremely crucial. In order to fulfil this, women's economic independence is the gateway to empowerment. At the same time, the political empowerment of women is equally important to uplift women's position. Our government has greatly succeeded in fulfilling

SDGs and the government also implements SDG trackers. However, due to the existence of various discriminatory policies against women, progressing in gender equality still seems like a distant dream. A long-standing demand of "uniform family code" is to be adopted and enforced in reducing the gap.

For the rural women, who are deeply engaged in agriculture, at present, they constitute 72.6 percent of the total agricultural labour force of the country. But, they only have five to six percent of effective land ownership and due to that they are not recognised as farmer but instead as agricultural labourer. This poses as a huge hurdle for them in accessing necessary agricultural support services. Land ownership does not serve only as a means of economic empowerment; it also acts as social capital, a stepping stone towards achieving socio-political empowerment. Research showed that greater accessibility to land leads to increased financial and food security.

Regarding landless women who are single, widowed, or abandoned, their access to public (khas) land, is further constrained if they do not have an "able son". It is high time for the Government to remove this precondition from the Khas land management and distribution policy.

In terms of agriculture, women's involvement used to be mainly restricted to the post-harvesting procedure. But currently women are working at every level. In the past eight years, women's involvement in agriculture has seen an increase of eight

lagging behind. Without the involvement of more women in politics, it will not be possible to bring changes to the existing discriminatory laws.



DR. AINOON NAHER,
Professor, Department
of Anthropology,
Jahangirnagar
University

Historically, women have always been deeply involved in agriculture. At present, statistics show that 70 to 80 percent of the food production in the world is carried out by women. The various statistics at the government and private levels show that women's participation in agriculture is gradually increasing. We need to analyse this participation through various angles in order to fully understand it. Participation does not always have a positive effect and there might be much deeper socio-economic effects.

We can see that the whole agricultural sector is gradually starting to be controlled by a specific group of influential people. When this group of influential people take control of the land, the women involved in agriculture fall victim to class inequality and existing gender inequalities. Furthermore, there exist infrastructural issues as well which affect farmers and agricultural workers. As a

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Definitions of female farmer and agriculture labourer should be clearly written in the National Agriculture Policy
- Amend the Khas land distribution policy by removing the discriminatory clauses in it to ensure that all women receive their equitable share
- Amend the Cooperative Act and make it women and farmer-friendly
- Establish a uniform family code to battle discrimination within households and to secure women's property rights.
- Ensure fair and equal wages for women
- Provide more market accessibility to women so that they have more control in selling their produce
- Women's household work needs to be counted to evaluate their economic contribution and establish equity;
- Include development agendas for the people living in coastal areas in our national budget because the women living in these coastal areas face more discrimination
- Resolve the issues of indigenous women and ensure that their lands are not taken away in the name of development

percent. According to the government statistics, 72.6 percent of labour force in agriculture consists of women. Even with such increased participation, these women face challenges due to lack of control or ownership over the lands that they work on. These women also do not receive recognition as farmers but are instead called agricultural workers.

We must also strongly focus on the growing concern of everyday harassment and violence against women and must put coordinated efforts to ensure justice timely. The work towards inclusive development requires a comprehensive plan and we all need to work in enabling an inclusive environment in order to achieve women's equal rights in every sector.



ABU SAYEED KHAN,
Prominent Journalist,
Samakal

The awakening of women took place during the liberation war. During the British and Pakistan eras, women were kept confined but during the liberation war of Bangladesh, women were able to come out of that confinement. It was after the liberation war that women's involvement in the workplace started to take off and they also started getting more involved with agricultural work in the field which was not a common scenario back then. This involvement in agriculture has now increased to about 72 percent. Unfortunately, even though their involvement has increased to such a great extent, land ownership of women still remains at about four percent. This inequality in land ownership has a lot of contributing factors, with one of them being the Muslim Family Law which dictates that the daughters of a family shall receive half of that of the sons. Even here, women are restricted from inheriting property.

The women in our country have made tremendous progress but in terms of political decision-making they are still

result, the experiences and challenges of each woman differ significantly. A woman involved in fish cultivation faces different limitations than one working in the agricultural fields.

A labour survey carried out in 2017 showed that agricultural work accounts for 70 percent of women's employment. In recent times, the involvement of women in agriculture has increased further due to the ongoing pandemic. Statistics tell us that women's involvement in agriculture is on the rise while that of men is on the decline. This makes it all the more important for women to be given recognition as farmers.

The policies surrounding the distribution of khas land are infused with class and gender inequalities. We have yet to eradicate the inequalities present in the labour market. Although women's participation in the labour market has increased, their labour is not given the same value. This is evident in the existing wage gaps.

When it comes to land ownership, we observe the steepest inequalities with women owning two to four percent of the land. Here, we must look into which class of women comprise this percentage of landowners. Furthermore, we need to understand how much control these women, even as landowners, really have over their own land.



SHAMSUL HUDA,
Executive Director,
ALRD

Throughout history, women have always been the driving force of civilisation. As much as it is essential to establish equity and equality in land and property rights, it is also important to understand that the prejudice and discrimination towards women in our society is multi-dimensional. Women of every class face some sort of prejudice based solely on their gender.

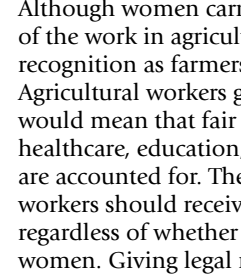
In terms of women's involvement in agriculture, at different stages of the production process, starting from decision-

making to monitoring and access to the market system, we have constantly observed women's deprivation. What's unfortunate is that there are only some small initiatives aimed at solving these issues, and the state or society has taken no broader initiatives. We need to shed more light on the areas of deprivation and discrimination, such as women's lack of recognition in land and agriculture and women's limited access to education. Almost 40 percent of the population is still illiterate, and a large portion of these people are women. The lack of education leads to the acceptance of discrimination among many of these women.

Women from marginalised communities face disproportionate levels of discrimination and lack of security. Moreover, their complaints are usually neglected by law enforcement, leading to a lack of justice. The state has to take the lead in working to eliminate these kinds of discrimination.

When we talk about farmers, we no longer mean only people who sow, harvest and process crops. In every stage of farming, women are contributing at increasing levels, not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. These aspects must be included in conversations involving farmers. We must promote the role of women in farming so that not only will discrimination be reduced but our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will also increase and improve the state of our economy.

The SDGs mention that no one shall be left behind. Historically, the people who have been left behind the most are marginalised communities and rural people. A large portion of these people are women. These women work for our safety, yet we don't try to provide them with any security. The only way to make development sustainable is by recognising dignity and contribution of women and their empowerment first.



SHIRIN AKHTER,
MP and Member,
Standing Committee
on the Ministry
of Primary and
Mass Education,
People's Republic of
Bangladesh

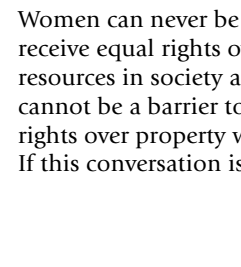
Although women carry out around 70 percent of the work in agriculture, they do not receive recognition as farmers or agricultural workers. Agricultural workers gaining recognition would mean that fair wages, benefits, food, healthcare, education, and accommodation are accounted for. Therefore, all agricultural workers should receive these same rights regardless of whether they are men or women. Giving legal recognition to women in agriculture is most important.

The participation of women in the distribution of khas land has to be encouraged by removing the barriers that prevent them from taking part. These barriers can be abolished by rethinking many of our existing laws.

When speaking about property rights, women's financial security, sustenance, and shelter will work as social capital. The One House One Farm project is excellent, and its loans are supposed to go to women mainly. However, in reality, the loans usually go to the men instead. Greater participation of women must be ensured.

Different categories of social security, such as maternal allowance, old age allowance, widow allowance, and husband-deserted allowance, empower women. A lot of corruption exists within this allowance system, but many of these issues will be solved once the system turns to mobile banking.

Women produce vast volumes of crops, but they do not have proper access to the market to sell these crops. Many municipalities have been instructed to have places designated for women in the markets. But, most of the time, men take over these spaces as well. Strict monitoring can ensure that these spaces indeed are reserved for and used by women.



FAZLE HOSSAIN BADSHA,
MP and Convener,
Parliamentary Caucus
on Indigenous Affairs,
People's Republic of
Bangladesh

Women can never be equal if they do not receive equal rights over property and resources in society and family. Religion cannot be a barrier to women having equal rights over property within their families. If this conversation is not included in the

broader discourse, women will not gain equal rights in society. Thus, women farmers will never gain access to khas land or gain recognition for their farming work. I am unsure when the right time to raise this issue is, but I believe women themselves can make this demand. People tend to worry about whether the land given to women can be considered effective ownership and hence bar women from having equal property rights. The state must create strong legislation protecting the property rights of women.

In villages where indigenous women have rights over land, they have to face unmatched levels of oppression and are often exiled. Maintaining their rights through just protests is extremely difficult. A lot more focus is required on this issue.

One crore people live on coastal lands. Whoever has power possesses these coastal lands. There is no legal rule in this regard. Do the women who live on these coastal lands have no rights? Do they not have rights over land? There are massive conflicts every year over these lands. Most of the time, people with political power possess the land. We need to talk more about the social, economic, and health security of the people, especially women, living on these coastal lands. Unfortunately, our national budget never includes development for the people living in the coastal areas.

Even today, women in our society feel unsafe and face various kinds of oppression and sexual violence, including rape. The courts are providing judgements but in a discriminatory manner. For example, a woman filing a rape case is asked by the court to marry her rapist to gain freedom. I cannot fathom why our legal framework would accept such settlements.



NIRUPA DEWAN,
Former Member,
National Human
Rights Commission of
Bangladesh

For generations, we, indigenous women, have worked just as hard, if not harder, than our male counterparts when it comes to earning a livelihood. However, due to the patriarchal society that we live in, we do not get any recognition for our work. Now, the issue is that we can only farm if we have land. But, in the name of development, roads, hotels, etc., are being constructed by evicting us and depriving us of our land and land rights. How can we think about farming when our land is being taken away?

I hope policymakers will keep the struggles of indigenous women in mind. Women farmers and women from any field of work belonging to indigenous communities face a variety of issues that must be resolved. Indigenous women are the most marginalised. We should try to stand by them in any way possible. If women are not legally recognised for their participation in agriculture and are not given their due land rights, we will always be discriminated against. Even though women's participation in farming and agriculture has increased, discrimination has not decreased. The discrimination is instead intensifying at different levels. We must work collectively to establish the basic rights of indigenous women.



SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN,
Commercial
Supplements Editor,
The Daily Star &
Moderator of the
session

The contribution of women to Bangladesh's independence and its development is immense. But throughout history, this contribution has not been given enough recognition. This lack of recognition of women's contribution is still prevalent in our modern society.

Agriculture is one of the major drivers of economic growth in Bangladesh, where women's contribution is equal to or greater than that of men. Even here, women farmers are not given any institutional recognition. One of the main reasons for this lack of recognition is the landlessness of women. The legal system in the country over the last 50 years has also failed to ensure land rights for women. If we want to fulfil all of the SDGs, ensuring gender equality on all fronts is a must.

SPORT

WHAT TO WATCH

STAR SPORTS 1

South Africa vs Pakistan
Second ODI
Live from 2:00 pm

T SPORTS & STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

English Premier League

Southampton vs Burnley

Live from 5:00 pm
Newcastle vs Tottenham
Hotspur
Live from 7:00 pm
Aston Villa vs Fulham
Live from 9:30 pm

Manchester United vs Brighton

Live from 12:30 am (Monday)
FACEBOOK
La Liga
Alaves vs Celta Vigo

Live from 6:00 pm

Elche vs Real Betis
Live from 8:15 pm
Cadiz vs Valencia
Live from 10:30 pm
Sevilla vs Atletico Madrid
Live from 1:00 am (Monday)



Ismail Hossain (L) and Shirin Akter continued their dominance in the 100m sprint by winning gold medals in the men's and women's events respectively in the Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Uncertainty overshadows achievements

SPORTS REPORTER

There were records set in various disciplines while sprint king and queen consolidated their thrones on the third day of the Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games yesterday, but all the joy and thrill were overshadowed by the impending restrictions on proceedings following a government declaration of nationwide lockdown.

High-placed officials of the government yesterday declared that a nationwide seven-day lockdown will come into effect from Monday, with a possibility of extension. The details of the lockdown, which are expected to be released through a circular today, will see movement of people across the country restricted to a great extent, putting serious question marks over the fate of the Games, which got underway on Thursday amid enthusiasm as well

as anxiety.

The Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) is awaiting the government circular before coming to a decision.

"Once we get the circular, we will have a clear understanding as per the extent of lockdown," Bashir Ahmed Mamun, the chairman of steering committee of the Games, said in a video message to media.

"Most of the body-contact events will be finished by April 4. We will decide on the remaining events after consultation among ourselves and with directives from the health ministry. For now, the events are on as scheduled till April 4," the message added.

Ismail, Shirin continue dominance

The king and queen of track continued their long dominance in the national circuit as Ismail Hossain and Shirin Akter - both Bangladesh Navy athletes - comfortably clinched the titles of men's and women's 100m sprint

at the Bangabandhu National Stadium's athletics track.

Ismail clocked 10.50 seconds to grab the gold - his fourth title at the national level - beating teammate Abdur Rouf by 0.10 seconds. The Navy athlete, who won a silver medal in long jump event during the last Bangladesh Games back in 2013, was happy to add another gold to his cabinet.

"I'm satisfied with my performance during this pandemic. There was less preparation so the timing was not good, but I'm happy to win the gold," Ismail said, whose timing in the last national event was 10.20 seconds.

Shirin, who finished second in the same event in 2013, was happy to extend her dominance with a 12th gold medal. "I have won a consecutive 12 gold medals in this event in the country, which is a record. Furthermore, this is my first gold in the Bangladesh Games hence it is special."

Meanwhile, Masud Khan of

Navy declared his retirement after retaining his gold medal in men's 110m hurdles. Tamanna Akter of the same team won the women's hurdles event in 14.50 seconds.

Three records in pool

There were three new national records set at the Syed Nazrul Islam National Swimming Complex in the first day of swimming events.

Jewel set a new record in 200m backstroke, clocking 16.12 seconds to beat his previous record by 0.01 seconds. "The gold was more important to me than the record. I'm happy to have started on a positive note," said the national champion.

Meanwhile, Nahid broke his own 100m butterfly record in men's event by 0.11 seconds with a 56.71 second dash while Sonia bettered the women's 100m butterfly record by 1.83 seconds with a timing of 1 minute 7.12 seconds.

There were five new records, too, in cycling events on the day.

Can 21 years of limbo lay a better blueprint for women?

MAZHAR UDDIN



Major headlines were made on Thursday when the International Cricket Council (ICC) decided that the Bangladesh women's team were to be awarded Test status.

The members of the women's team, who are preparing for their first series since the Covid-19 outbreak last year against South Africa Emerging team, were obviously overjoyed by the news. But it is a matter of fact that the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) will have to start from scratch when it comes to forming a cricketering structure for women, especially as female cricketers are yet to experience longer versions of the game, even in the domestic circuit.

According to the chairman of the BCB Women's Wing and board director Shafiqul Alam Nadel, the first task is to form a good

Tests have not been the focus in the worldwide context of women's cricket. England and Australia have played three Tests in the last five years while India and South Africa played their last Test in 2014. West Indies, Pakistan, and New Zealand have not played a Test match since 2004 while Sri Lanka played their only Test back in 1998, Ireland in 2000 and the Netherlands in 2007.

emphasise Test cricket. There are even a few teams who didn't play more than one Test. So, if we can target the number six spot in the rankings and work accordingly, I think it is possible to get there," said Fahim.

Apart from developing the structure, Fahim believes it is important to strengthen the women's wing and make it an independent body separate from the



cricketing structure.

"We were planning to start longer-version cricket for female cricketers through two-day competitions. But due to Covid-19 and our plans to host the ICC Under-19 World Cup, we were focusing more on T20 cricket. Although we are still waiting for an official email from the ICC about Test status, we obviously have to focus on our structure as a Test-playing nation," Nadel told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Bangladesh men's team is still struggling to form a settled domestic structure that emphasises the longest format and are yet to become a good Test unit despite entering the elite club 21 years ago.

However, according to veteran coach and former BCB women's wing development manager Nazmul Abedin Fahim, the Bangladesh women's team getting Test status has actually come as a blessing in disguise that will allow women's cricket to start from scratch.

"It's a good thing to start from scratch as there are very few women's teams, apart from England and Australia, who

men's team.

"Even the men's have a shortage of grounds and other facilities but if the women's cricketers can have exclusive grounds, facilities and selection policy, the board could give them the financial security by getting them under a salary structure. It will certainly boost the morale of the players. Even the guardians of the girls will be encouraged to allow them to play cricket. The women's team can have their own sponsors if they start to play well," he said.

"If we can also form four zonal teams and emphasise on age-level cricket, I am sure there will be many players coming into the system. Then we can think of having an A team and strengthening our pipeline. We could gradually increase from two-day cricket to three-day cricket because players have hardly batted for more than three hours while bowlers have not bowled more than ten overs in a game in the past."

According to the prominent cricketing brain, who has mentored the likes of Shakib Al Hasan, if women's cricket gets emphasis on the board, it will also have a good effect socially on Bangladesh overall.

IPL faces coronavirus threat

AGENCIES

Delhi Capitals spinner Axar Patel has tested positive for Covid-19 ahead of the start of their Indian Premier League (IPL) campaign next week, the team said on Saturday. Meanwhile, a week before the iconic Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai is to host the first match, eight groundsmen who work at the facility have tested positive for Covid-19.

According to reports, there are 19 groundsmen who work at the stadium and the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) last week had made their employees undergo the Covid-19 test. While three people tested positive for



England and Kolkata Knight Riders captain Eoin Morgan, who was ruled out of the final two ODIs against India in the recently concluded series due to a hand injury, appeared in relaxed mood at training in Chennai yesterday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Covid-19 on March 26, in another round of tests, five more people were found to be positive for the virus on April 1. A Chennai Super Kings member has also tested positive for the novel Coronavirus on Saturday in Mumbai.

The upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League will start from April 9, with defending champions Mumbai Indians taking on Virat Kohli's Royal Challengers Bangalore in the season opener at the M. A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai.

Delhi in a statement said the 27-year-old Axar had checked into the team hotel in Mumbai on Sunday with a negative report. "His report from the second COVID test, came positive," the 2020 IPL finalists said in a statement.

Salahuddin not pleased with Jamie Day

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Football Federation president Kazi Salahuddin has publicly expressed dissatisfaction over the performance of the national team and its head coach Jamie Day in the recently-concluded Three Nations Cup in Nepal, where Bangladesh finished as runners-up.

The BFF boss, following a meeting with Day and his deputy Stuart Watkiss, told media that he hoped the team would emerge as champions, adding that the BFF has asked for a written report on the performance of the team from the coaching staff.

"I am not entirely satisfied with his explanation, but he has his own arguments. He said the team conceded two goals in the final but did not concede any in the previous four or five matches. He will submit a written report within a few days," Salahuddin told media.

Bangladesh started the tournament with a 1-0 win over Kyrgyzstan U-23 and were then held to a goalless draw by Nepal in the last round-robin match before a 2-1 defeat against the hosts in the final.

As much as the performance, it was the coach's experimentation with the team which apparently irked the BFF higher-ups. Salahuddin, during the tournament, had repeatedly told media that he wanted his best team to play to win the title. Day, on the other hand, was intent on testing out youngsters with the squad till the last game.

"The coach claimed he played his best eleven in the final and the ones who did not get in were due to fitness. I said you couldn't bring the result, which he conceded. We argued over the points," Salahuddin said.

Day was given a two-year extension to his contract in August last year following a fairly satisfactory first two years in charge, during which time he saw Bangladesh through to the last 16 of the Asian Games before navigating the senior team through a difficult World Cup Qualifying playoff.

However, the team's failure to reach

the final in Bangabandhu Gold Cup, SAFF Championship and SA Games since then and the second-place finish in the Three Nations Cup has put his job on the line.

In reply to a question about whether the BFF was contemplating any change in that position, Salahuddin said: "If they don't perform, anything can happen. However, considering everything it (change) is not possible now. But I can't say what will happen after the World Cup Qualifiers (in June). Anything can happen. It all depends on result," Salahuddin said.

Football to be suspended?

SPORTS REPORTER

All football competitions in the country might remain suspended in light of the imposition of a weeklong lockdown in the country, according to Bangladesh Football Federation officials.

The federation's vice-president Kazi Nabil Ahmed said the second phase of the Bangladesh Premier League, which was supposed to resume on April 8, would be suspended.

"Since the nationwide lockdown by decree of the government will be in place from Monday, the (Bangladesh Premier) league will not start this week," Nabil told media at the BFF House yesterday.

According to BFF officials, the

other ongoing football events might be suspended once a gazette on lockdown is released by the government.

That would mean the ongoing Women's Football League and Third Division Football League could be suspended while the Bangladesh Championship League, which was scheduled to resume from April 12, might not resume in time.

The suspension will, however, not be applicable on ongoing Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games -- men's and women's events -- which are currently taking place. The decision regarding the Games events will be taken by the Bangladesh Olympic Association.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
মৎস্য ও প্রাণিসম্পদ মন্ত্রণালয়
মেরিন ফিশারিজ একাডেমি, মৎস্য বন্দর, চট্টগ্রাম-৪০০০

টেকসই উন্নয়নের জন্য সাগর, মহাসাগর ও সামুদ্রিক সম্পদের সংরক্ষণ ও টেকসই ব্যবহার (এসডিজি ১৪)

০৪ বছর মেয়াদী বিএসসি (অনার্স) ইন মেরিন ফিশারিজ কোর্সে ক্যাডেট ভর্তি বিজ্ঞপ্তি

মেরিন ফিশারিজ একাডেমির ৪২তম বাত (২০২০-২১ শিক্ষাবর্ষ) বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমান মেরিটাইম ইন্সটিটিউট, বাংলাদেশ এর অধীনে ০৪ বছর মেয়াদী বিএসসি (অনার্স) ইন মেরিন ফিশারিজ কোর্সে ক্যাডেট ভর্তি করা বাংলাদেশের বেঙ্গল স্ট্রী অর্বিটাল হিমালা ও পুষ্কর ন্যাচারালিস্ট নিকট হতে আবেদন আহ্বান করা হয়েছে। ভর্তি পরীক্ষার প্রবেশপত্র সংক্রান্ত তথ্য, লিখিত পরীক্ষার তারিখ ও সময় পরবর্তীতে প্রার্থী মেসার্সের ওয়েবসাইটে এবং মাধ্যমে জানানো হবে। ভর্তি প্রক্রিয়ায় নিম্নলিখিত যোগ্যতাসমূহ থাকতে হবে:

শিক্ষার্থী যোগ্যতা (মূলসমূহ):

- ১। মাধ্যমিক (বিজ্ঞান) বা ও গোল্ডেন (জীববিদ্যা ও রসায়নসহ) অথবা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় ন্যূনতম মার্কস ৩.৫০।
- ২। উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক (বিজ্ঞান) বা এ গোল্ডেন (জীববিদ্যা ও রসায়নসহ) অথবা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় ন্যূনতম মার্কস ৩.৫০।
- ৩। উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক বা সমমানের পরীক্ষায় অংশগ্রহণ করা প্রমাণ।

সামান্য যোগ্যতা:

- ১। বয়স ১০১ ডিসেম্বর ২০২১ ইং তারিখে সর্বোচ্চ ২১ বছর।
- ২। শারীরিক মন (ন্যূনতম) ৪ উত্তম শারীরিক পরামিত্র ও সুস্থতা।
- ৩। সাক্ষরিত উচ্চারণ ১১০২.৫ সে.মি (পুরুষ) এবং ১০৫ সে.মি (মহিলা)।
- ৪। গলক ১ উচ্চারণ অনুযায়ী হবে।
- ৫। নৃশিক্ষিত ন্যূনতম ৬/১২, কলার স্কিমের যথাযথ। (মহিলা প্রার্থীদের জন্য শিথিলযোগ্য)।
- ৬। সাক্ষর ১ সাক্ষর পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ (পুষ্কর প্রার্থীদের জন্য প্রযোজ্য)।

আবেদন ফিঃ ৬০০.০০ টাকা (আবেদন ফি আটসহ দেওয়া হয়েছে এবং অলাইনে আবেদন সম্পন্ন করার পর তা প্রত্যাহার করা যাবে না)।

অলাইনে ভর্তি আবেদন প্রক্রিয়া: অলাইনে আবেদন ও বিজ্ঞিত জনসংখ্যা <http://www.mfacademy.gov.bd> লিঙ্কে ভিজিট করুন।

অলাইনে আবেদনের তারিখঃ ০৪ এপ্রিল ২০২১ ইং হতে ৩১ মে ২০২১ ইং পর্যন্ত।

ভর্তি পরীক্ষার নিয়মাবলীঃ

ইংরেজি ও সাধারণ জ্ঞান, জীববিদ্যা, পশুচিকিৎসা এবং রসায়ন এই ০৪ টি বিষয়ের প্রতিটিতে ৫০ নম্বর করে মোট ২০০ নম্বরে ২ ঘণ্টা সময়ে লিখিত পরীক্ষা হবে। লিখিত পরীক্ষার প্রবেশপত্র ৬০% MCQ এবং ৪০% কলারফর্ম। লিখিত পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ প্রার্থীদের পরবর্তীতে সাক্ষর, স্বাক্ষর, চকু ও বিশেষ বা মর্শন পরীক্ষা এবং মৌখিক পরীক্ষার জন্য আহ্বান করা হবে।

সম্মান্য কর্মক্ষেত্রঃ

বিএসসি (অনার্স) ইন মেরিন ফিশারিজ কোর্সে সমাপ্তির পর পানপুকুর ক্যাডেটদের সম্মান্য কর্মক্ষেত্র হওয়া দেশী-বিদেশী মৎস্য, জাহাজ, মৎস্য ও চিত্রিত্তি প্রতিষ্ঠান/কর্মসংস্থান, সরকারি-বেসরকারি বিভিন্ন প্রতিষ্ঠান, দেশী-বিদেশী এনজিও ইত্যাদি।

বিশেষ প্রার্থীরাঃ

- ১) দিনের বা বাতের বে কোন সময় এমনকি বৃষ্টির দিনও আবেদন করা যাবে।
- ২) যে কোন বিষয়ে অসুস্থতার কারণে ০১৫৫/৭৬০৬৯০/৭৬০৬৯০ নম্বরে ইমেইল মাধ্যমে যোগাযোগ করা যাবে (বিশেষ দিন ব্যতীত সকাল ৯টা থেকে বিকাল ০৪:৩০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত)।
- ৩) লিখিত পরীক্ষার সময় দুই কপি সত্যায়িত পাসপোর্ট সাইজের ছবি পিছনে ভর্তি পরীক্ষার রোল নম্বরটি লিখে এবং ভর্তি পরীক্ষার প্রবেশপত্র সাথে আবেদন করা হবে।

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MONGLA PORT AUTHORITY BILL-2021 Seeks strong punishment for polluters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Keeping provisions of tougher punishments for polluting environment, the Mongla Port Authority Bill-2021 was placed in parliament yesterday. State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury placed the Bill which was sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Shipping for further scrutiny. The parliamentary watchdog was asked to submit its report before the House within two months. The Bill will replace the Chalna Port Authority Ordinance, 1976, which was promulgated during a military regime. The proposed Bill seeks to increase the punishment for damaging the environment by polluting water, land and coast to one year's imprisonment or a fine of Tk 5 lakh or both. The fine is now Tk 50,000. It also says if any individual or ship throws or grants permission to throw oil or oil-like material, waste, ash into water, beach, shore or land in the port area causing damage to water animals or pollution to water or environment, the person or vessel will be punished under the Environment

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3



Madhurjo, a seven-year-old boy, talking to her mother, a coronavirus patient, inside an ambulance in front of Mugda General Hospital in the capital yesterday. Using glasses and mask for protection, he is spending as much time possible with his mother before she gets admitted to the hospital and goes into isolation.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HUQ

Egypt gears up for pharaohs' 'Golden Parade'



AFP, Cairo

The mummified remains of 22 Egyptian pharaohs, including the most powerful ancient queen, were scheduled to be paraded through the streets of Cairo yesterday, in a procession to a new resting place. Under the watchful eyes of security forces, the mummies will be moved seven kilometres (four miles) across the capital from the iconic Egyptian Museum, where most have resided undisturbed for over a century, to the

SEE PAGE 5 COL 6

Accident or murder or death?

Woman dies after Hatirjheel car crash; cops smell foul play; husband held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mystery shrouds over the death of a housewife after a car driven by her husband hit a road divider in the capital's Hatirjheel area yesterday morning. Saki ul Alam claimed that his wife Arpita Jhilik, who was already unwell and being taken to hospital, died following the accident. But police suspected it was murder while the deceased's family claimed that her in-laws "tortured her to death" and "staged the accident to cover up the murder". Police detained Alam and the caretaker of his house in Gulshan for interrogation. A CCTV camera -- at the building -- footage shows Jhilik in an unconscious state being carried to the car by several persons, police said.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

ROAD TO FREEDOM THIS DAY IN BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR HISTORY

Tajuddin calls on Indira

APRIL 4, 1971 SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

INDIRA-TAJUDDIN MEETING

On April 4, 1971, Tajuddin Ahmad called on Indian PM Indira Gandhi at the office in her residence. The conversation started with Indira's question, "How is Sheikh Mujib? Is he alright?" Tajuddin said that he had no contact with Mujib since the night of March 25, but added that Mujib had proclaimed the independence of Bangladesh. He sought Indian government's support for carrying forward the Liberation War. [Barrister M. Amir-ul Islam, Muktiyuddher Sriti, Kagoj Prokashoni, 1991, pg. 31] Indira Gandhi offered support that included arms and ammunitions, communication facilities, civil supplies and



medicines, safe passage and transit arrangements. However, she didn't touch upon the question of recognition. Earlier a committee was formed by Indira Gandhi to consider the requirements of the liberation movement of Bangladesh. It was also decided that relationship at the political level would be handled only through the agency of R&AW, and, at this stage, BSF would be main executive agency. [Srinath Raghavan, 1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh, Permanent Black, SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

'Hefajat an anti-Islamic, militant outfit' Sheikh Selim at JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Senior Awami League MP Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim yesterday told parliament that Hefajat-e-Islam is anti-Islamic, anti-independence, and "they are the enemy of the country". Hefajat activists must pay for their recent rampage, he said. "The government should handle them with an iron hand. If necessary, a tribunal should be formed to try them," Selim said while speaking on a point of order. Those who do not acknowledge Bangladesh have no right to live here, he said. Madrasas from where Hefajat militants took to the streets, attacked and killed people, and

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

CRACKDOWN ON ANTI-COUP PROTESTERS

Myanmar ethnic rebel groups condemn junta

Five more killed as protests continue; military hunts critics

AGENCIES

Ten of Myanmar's major rebel groups threw their support behind the country's anti-coup movement yesterday, fanning fears that a broader conflict could erupt in a country long plagued by fighting between the military and the ethnic armies. Myanmar has been in turmoil since

the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from power on February 1, triggering an uprising that the junta has sought to quell with deadly crackdowns. According to a local monitoring group, more than 550 people have been killed in the anti-coup unrest, bloodshed that has angered some of Myanmar's 20 or so ethnic

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3



Amid a surge in the number of coronavirus infection and deaths in the country, people disregarding safety guidelines in markets and public gatherings regularly. The photo was taken yesterday at the fish market in Karwan Bazar in the capital.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Man sent to jail for rape of minor

A CORRESPONDENT, Feni

A court in Feni yesterday sent a youth to jail on charge of raping a minor girl in Fulgazi upazila. The accused is Touhidur Rahman, 26, of Uttar Sreepur village in the same upazila, said police. Quoting the victim's family members, police said the 10-year-old victim

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2



PRAYER TIMING APRIL 4

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4-40	12-45	4-45	6-21	7-45
JAMAAT 5-15	1-15	5-00	6-24	8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

বিজিএমইএ নির্বাচন ২০২১-২০২৩
"Made in Bangladesh with Pride"
বিজিএমইএ কমপ্লেক্স: বাজী # ৭/৭এ, রক # এইচ ১, সেক্টর # ১৭, উত্তরা, ঢাকা-১২৩০

আজ বিজিএমইএ'র নির্বাচন

এতদ্বারা বিজিএমইএ'র সকল ভোটারদের জ্ঞাতার্থে জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, আজ ০৪ এপ্রিল ২০২১ইং (রবিবার) বিজিএমইএ নির্বাচন ২০২১-২০২৩ অনুষ্ঠিত হচ্ছে। এ উপলক্ষে আজ সকাল ৯:০০ ঘটিকা থেকে সন্ধ্যা ৭:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত হোটেল রেডিসন ব্লু ঢাকা এবং চট্টগ্রাম আঞ্চলিক কার্যালয় কেন্দ্রে বিরতিহীন ভাবে একযোগে ভোট গ্রহণ চলবে।
বিজিএমইএ'র সম্মানিত ভোটারদেরকে নির্দিষ্ট সময়ের মধ্যে 'স' স' কেন্দ্রে উপস্থিত হয়ে করোনা প্রতিরোধে যত্নবিশিষ্ট কঠোরভাবে অনুসরণ পূর্বক ভোট প্রদানের জন্য বিনীতভাবে অনুরোধ জানানো যাচ্ছে।

সচিব, নির্বাচন বোর্ড

India prepares for Covid curbs

Nearly 90,000 cases reported in 24 hours

AGENCIES

India's biggest cities yesterday braced for stricter lockdowns and other Covid-19 curbs as millions of Christians around the world were facing another Easter weekend under restrictions because of coronavirus surges. There have been worrying spikes in infections in many parts of the world, even as vaccine rollouts gather pace, forcing the reimposition of deeply unpopular restrictions. India's richest state, Maharashtra, accounted for more

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3

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সুখবর! সম্মানিত বেসামরিক পেনশনারদের সেবা আরও সহজীকরণ

মুজিব শতবর্ষে প্রায় শতভাগ সম্মানিত বেসামরিক পেনশনারদের পেনশন ইএফটির মাধ্যমে সরাসরি তাঁদের নিজ নিজ ব্যাংক হিসাবে প্রেরণ করা হচ্ছে। সরকারের ডিজিটাইজেশন কর্মকাণ্ডের ব্যাপ্তি বৃদ্ধি, পেনশন ব্যবস্থাকে অটোমেশনের এবং অর্থ বিভাগের প্রতিশ্রুতি বাস্তবায়নের জন্য হিসাব মহানিয়ন্ত্রক এর কার্যালয় নিরবচ্ছিন্নভাবে দায়িত্ব পালন করে যাচ্ছে। কেন্দ্রীয় পেনশন ব্যবস্থাপনার আওতায় সম্মানিত পেনশনারদের সেবা অধিকতর সহজীকরণের লক্ষ্যে চীফ একাউন্টস এন্ড ফিন্যান্স অফিসার, পেনশন ও ফান্ড ম্যানেজমেন্ট কার্যালয়ের জন্য একটি ওয়েবসাইট (www.cafopfm.gov.bd) চালু করা হয়েছে। উল্লিখিত ওয়েবসাইট হতে সম্মানিত পেনশনারগণ নিম্নবর্ণিত তথ্য/সেবাসমূহ গ্রহণ করতে পারবেনঃ

১. Pension Payment Information (পেনশন পরিশোধের তথ্যাদি)
সিএফও/পেনশন ও ফান্ড ম্যানেজমেন্ট-এর ওয়েবসাইটের (www.cafopfm.gov.bd) এই মেন্যুর মাধ্যমে সম্মানিত পেনশনারগণ নিজ NID এবং মোবাইল নম্বর ব্যবহার করে পেনশন/ভাতাদি পরিশোধের সকল তথ্য জানতে পারবেন।

২. Grievance Redress System (অভিযোগ প্রতিকার ব্যবস্থা)
সিএফও/পেনশন ও ফান্ড ম্যানেজমেন্ট-এর ওয়েবসাইটের (www.cafopfm.gov.bd) এই মেন্যুর মাধ্যমে সম্মানিত পেনশনারগণ নিজ NID এবং মোবাইল নম্বর ব্যবহার করে সমস্যা/অভিযোগসমূহ দাখিল করতে পারবেন। অভিযোগটি সমাধানের পর 'Your Complaint no..... has been resolved by CAFO Pension & Fund Management' শীর্ষক এসএমএস সংশ্লিষ্ট সম্মানিত পেনশনারের মোবাইল নম্বরে প্রেরিত হবে।

৩. Pension Calculator
সিএফও/পেনশন ও ফান্ড ম্যানেজমেন্ট-এর ওয়েবসাইটের (www.cafopfm.gov.bd) নোটিশ বোর্ড মেন্যুর মধ্যে Pension Calculator সাব-মেন্যুটি সংযোজন করা হয়েছে। এই সাব-মেন্যুতে সম্মানিত পেনশনারের জন্ম তারিখ, অবসরের তারিখ এবং নীট পেনশন এন্ট্রি করলে সংশ্লিষ্ট সম্মানিত পেনশনার বিভিন্ন পে-স্কেলে প্রদত্ত সুবিধা অনুযায়ী তাঁর প্রাপ্য পেনশন নির্ধারণ সম্পর্কে নিশ্চিত হতে পারবেন।

এছাড়াও, বেসামরিক কর্মকর্তা/কর্মচারী এই ওয়েবসাইটের 'GPF Information' মেন্যুতে তার এনআইডি এবং মোবাইল নম্বর এন্ট্রি দিলে রেজিস্টার্ড মোবাইল 'OTP' প্রেরিত হবে। 'OTP' টি এন্ট্রি দিলে সংশ্লিষ্ট জিপিএফ হিসাবধারী তার হিসাবের ব্যালেন্স জানতে পারবেন।

মোঃ নূরুল ইসলাম
হিসাব মহানিয়ন্ত্রক

জিডি-৬৫৯