

BANGLADESH UPDATE



5,343
New cases in 24hrs



6,78,937
Total cases



9,661
Deaths



5,72,378
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

2,934,601
Deaths



135,791,710
Total cases

'Modi govt mismanaged Covid situation: Sonia

Says decision to export vaccines allowed shortage at home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Congress President Sonia Gandhi yesterday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi government of mismanaging the Covid-19 situation in India and said India must focus on its own vaccination drive first before exporting them.

"The (Narendra) Modi government has mismanaged the COVID situation. It has exported the vaccines and allowed a shortage to be created in India," she said while addressing a virtual meeting with Chief Ministers of Congress-ruled states and ministers of the party in states where it is in power in alliance with others.

"We must focus on India's vaccination drive first and foremost and then only export vaccines and gift them to other countries," Sonia said.

She also reviewed the efforts to fight Covid situation, including the availability of vaccines, access to medicines and ventilators, chief spokesperson of the party Randeep Surjewala said.

"Mass gatherings for elections and religious events have accelerated COVID for which all of us are responsible to some extent. We need to accept this responsibility and keep the interest of the nation above our own," Sonia said and wanted all poll rallies to be cancelled.

Her remarks about cancellation poll rallies came four days after assembly elections in Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry came to an end.

Congress is a key player in Assam and Kerala seeking to return to power in the two states.



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

People, who struggle to make ends meet, sitting on a footpath under a scorching sun as they wait for a truck of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh to arrive with essential goods that will be sold at prices lower than that of the kitchen markets. The photo was taken yesterday near Badda Government Primary School in the capital.

Trader ends up dead

FROM PAGE 1

wife Beethi Begum, 35, went to the police station on March 6 and filed a complaint. She demanded Hasan be rescued from Rana's home.

"Police rescued Hasan from Rana's home on March 12 and kept him in custody for that night. The following day, police asked us to go to the police station with Tk 2 lakh to free Hasan," said Kollol.

"On March 13, my wife Lipi and Beethi went to the police station where ASI [assistant sub-inspector] Md Mossaraf and inspector [investigation] Mojibur Rahman demanded the money be paid to Rana. But they had no money.

"Lipi and Beethi wanted to bring Hasan home but the police did not let him go."

Kollol alleged that police later handed Hasan over to Rana.

Beethi claimed that Rana, aided by police, put pressure on her to sign a blank cheque and a blank piece of paper to have Hasan released.

"As I refused, police handed my husband over to Rana again," she added.

Inspector Mojibur refused to talk

about the matter. He suggested this paper contacts OC Mahfuzar.

OC Mahfuzar refuted the allegation.

He said they held a meeting with Hasan, his wife, and Rana at the police station. During the meeting, the couple failed to pay the debt and all of them left the police station, he said.

"We did not hand Hasan over to Rana," he said.

Md Elius Ziku, additional superintendent of police (Gaibandha sadar circle), told The Daily Star yesterday that police tried to broker a settlement at the police station.

Regarding the allegation, Ziku too said police did not hand Hasan over to Rana.

"Police wanted to hand Hasan over to his wife Beethi but she did not take him. Later, Hasan went out of the police station and we do not know where he went after that," said the additional SP.

Kollol said that they would file an abduction, torture, and murder case against Rana and another case against ASI Mossaraf and Inspector Mojibur for harassment.

IEDCR finds 17 high-risk

FROM PAGE 1

The data was collected and then the residents of the areas were reconfirmed via phone calls.

"Analysing the information, it was found that Dhaka's Rupnagar and Adabar thanas are the riskiest. Positivity rate was 46 and 44 percent respectively," the IEDCR report said.

"It is tough to enforce zonal lockdown in Dhaka but we have good examples of Tolerbagh and Razabazar. Those two were successful.

"Seeing the data, the authorities can think of taking special measures in those areas," Mushtaq Hossain, an adviser to the IEDCR, told The Daily Star.

He also said community mobilisation can play a vital role in tackling transmission in any specific area.

"Local lawmakers and ward councilors can take action based on this information," he suggested.

A total of 14,332 tests were conducted in the Dhaka South City Corporation area where 5,103 were

infected. The infection rate was 36 percent.

On the other hand, a total of 36,771 tests were done in the Dhaka North City Corporation area where 10,483 were tested positive. The infection rate was 29 percent.

Places with a positivity rate above 30 percent included Rupnagar, Adabar, Shah Ali, Rampura, Turag, Mirpur, Kalabagan, Tejgaon, Mohammadpur, Mugda, Ganderia, Dhanmondi, Hazaribagh, Newmarket, Chawk Bazar, Sabujbagh, Motijheel, Darus Salam, and Khilgaon.

Places with an infection positivity rate above 20 percent included Shabbagh, Bangshal, Lalbagh, Shahjahanpur, Ramna, Kamrangirchar, Shyampur, Badda, Banani, Uttarkhan, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Sutrapur, Jatrabari, Pallabi, Kafur, Demra, Wari, Bhatar, Dakkhin Khan, Khilkhet, Kadamtali, and Paltan.

The current positivity rate is 20.49 percent while the total positivity rate stands at 13.65 percent.

Confusion reigns supreme

FROM PAGE 1

commodities from shops or to go to offices and businesses. People began to hangout at neighbourhood tea-stalls. Very few steps by the authority were visible to enforce the restrictions.

Experts wondered whether the half-hearted enforcement of restrictions would be effective at all.

Then two ministers on Friday announced that the country will be under a strict lockdown for a week from April 14.

Except for emergency services, all government and private offices and factories will remain closed during the lockdown and public transport services will be suspended, said State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain.

CONFUSION OVER APRIL 12 AND 13

As per the April 4 circular, the current restrictions will end today.

A government official on Friday night called this correspondent asking about the government decision for April 12 and 13 and wanted to know whether long-haul buses would operate.

Many members of the popular Traffic Alert page on Facebook also asked whether public transport would resume for the two days.

Contacted, Khondaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said the association had yet to receive any directive in this regard.

"I have talked to the BRTA chairman,

but he could not give any decision either. Transport association leaders from different districts are also asking me about the decision," Enayet told The Daily Star yesterday.

Contacted, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder said a circular regarding restrictions is likely to be issued following a meeting today.

"I think everything will be clear once the circular is issued," he added.

Commodore Golam Sadeq, chairman of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), said, "We did not get any directive [about April 12 and 13]. However, I think restrictions on [long-route] public transport will remain in force."

"We may know about it tomorrow [today]," he told this correspondent.

Jahangir Hossain, general manager (east) of Bangladesh Railway, said passenger trains were unlikely to operate in the two-day period. "We are expecting to get the directive tomorrow," he said.

State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain said, "I have no idea about any decision about the two days."

"Our main goal is to reduce the infection rate. So, I think there is no scope to relax the restrictions. So, the restrictions may remain unchanged [in the two days]," he told The Daily Star. "However, the prime minister will give a directive tomorrow [today]," he added.

Ruins offer trip deep into Old Dhaka history

FROM PAGE 1

archaeological evidence from the Mughal, Sultanate and Sen eras or before these can be found at the old central jail.

Chawkbazar itself is archaeologically significant among other places in Old Dhaka, researchers say.

For example, an ancient Basudev statue was recovered during an excavation on the Churikhatta Mosque premises in the area in 1906.

An inscription about the renovation of Urdu Road Mosque was found in the late 19th century. According to the inscription, this mosque in Chawkbazar was built in 1459.

In 2011, a Nateshwar statue was recovered at Sarangodhor monastery in the area, opening up a new horizon of research. The Daily Star ran a report on this last year.

According to different books, Chawkbazar was the political and commercial hub during the Sultanate, Mughal, and Nawab periods.

The Chawkbazar Fort was constructed during the rule of the Bengal Sultanate between the 14th and 16th centuries. Besides, palaces, treasury, courts and administrative offices were constructed in this region from the Sultanate-Nawab period.

The area's political and commercial importance started to decline with the beginning of East India Company rule. The office of the then nayab-e-nazim, who was the administrative chief of Dhaka, was relocated to Nimtoli Palace from Chawkbazar Fort.

The fort eventually became a mental asylum and prison. The mental asylum was shut after a certain time but the prison was in operation till 45 years after Bangladesh's independence.

This jailhouse has a significant place in history -- it bears memories from events of the anti-British

movement, Language Movement, and the Liberation War.

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and many key important figures in the country's politics served time here as political prisoners. The assassination of four national leaders took place here in 1975.

After July 2016, inmates were shifted to the newly built jail in Keraniganj and the government then took initiatives to preserve this historic site.

The government formed a technical committee comprising representatives from the home ministry, the prison authorities and Department of Archaeology of Bangladesh, architects, planners, and historians in 2016. It is now overseeing the work of converting the old prison into an urban oasis.

The committee organised an open competition to draft a design for preserving the history structure, landscape design, and overall development and three architects ranked top in this competition.

The old prison stands on around 38 acres of land. The urban oasis has been designed to be built on 25 acres of the southern part.

The whole place will be divided into three zones -- A, B, and C. Bangabandhu Memorial Museum, memorial museum for national four leaders, a prison museum, and a library will be set up in Zone C.

Some 35 old structures, which have much historical significance, will be preserved and 95 other old and semi pucca structures, which have comparatively less historical significance, will be demolished.

The technical committee has approved a proposal to preserve the Sultanate-era structure. Its members, including eminent historian Muntasir Mamun and architect Prof Abu

Sayed M Ahmed, visited the spot in 2017 to chalk out a conservation plan.

"We proposed to preserve the wall and an adjacent building," said architect Prof Abu Sayeed.

"Normally, the age of an object containing organic material can be determined through a scientific process called radiocarbon dating. But the process is not applicable in case of bricks. Rather, the age of bricks and brick-built walls can be determined by examining its design and bonding patterns. After examining bricks of the wall, it can surely be said that the wall was constructed in the Sultanate era," he added.

Prof Muntasir Mamun said, "We have come to know about the existence of a fort in Chawkbazar during the Pathan [Sultanate] era. Many wrote about the fort in books. The wall might be part of that fort."

Prof Abu Sayeed opined that more ancient archaeological evidence could be found in the area if the excavation could be done properly.

"Any kind of new construction is not allowed in the proposed design of the central jail area, as the foundation of new construction work might affect and destroy the archaeological evidence."

The technical committee proposed the name of Sufi Mostafizur Rahman, a professor of the archaeology department at Jahangirnagar University, as the supervisor of the excavation and it was approved.

Contacted, Prof Sufi said he conducted the excavation for around three months at four spots in the prison between 2017 and 2018.

"I have got some significant ancient archaeological evidence there. But the technical committee asked me not to publish my findings. Even, they are now barring me from

Three died

FROM PAGE 1

toll increased by 45 percent, while 488 people died last week.

With the latest death count, the total number of casualty due to Covid-19 reached 9,661, which was 1.42 percent of all detected cases in the country.

From March 10 to 16, there was a 271 percent increase in the death rate.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, the number of new Covid-19 cases has risen by more than 26 percent.

In the previous week, a total of 38,471 people were detected as Covid-19 patients, while the number of detection was 48,660. Experts apprehended that the number of new cases, as well as deaths, will continue rising for next few months unless physical distancing is ensured.

Incidentally, during the same week, the number of people recovering has also increased just as much as the death rate. Meanwhile, the number of recoveries has risen by more than 42 percent.

In the previous week, 38,471 Covid-19 patients recovered while this figure was 22,603 last week till yesterday.

Meantime, the number of total confirmed cases has reached 6,78,937. During the past 24 hours, the number of tests has decreased to 26,077 and of those, 20.49 percent were positive.

4 were hired to kidnap

FROM PAGE 1

Mobarak of operation wing of Rab HQ, in the incident, said police sources, adding the two were on the run.

A high official at the Rab HQ said Tamzid borrowed money from many and never paid them back. Ranu was one of them.

Unable to get her money back, Ranu sought help from Rony, a man she knows. Rony contacted Dulal, who planned the abduction and realise money from Tamzid, said the official, wishing not to be named.

On Friday, police arrested the three Rab members and the member of the air force on charges of abducting, torturing, and demanding ransom from Tamzid. Ranu got arrested as well and is now on remand.

Police later handed the three arrested Rab officials to the elite force. Rab will now primarily investigate the allegations, said Rab officials.

The air force member was handed to the force concerned as well.

"You have heard it ... we also got to know many things. Our officials are verifying those information. The investigation is at a preliminary stage...We can't say anything conclusive now," Rab Legal and Media Wing Director Commander Khandaker Al Moin told The Daily Star yesterday.

About the investigation against the Rab official, he said, "The force currently employing the accused will investigate the incident on its own. If the investigation finds them guilty, they will be sent to their main forces for further probe. Based on the probe findings, legal action will be taken against them."

Rab members are drawn from police, army and other forces.

Meanwhile, the victim Tamzid gave a statement under section 164 of the CRPC before a Dhaka court yesterday evening. According to court sources, Tamzid gave a description of the abduction before the court. He described how he was held inside a

vehicle that roamed around various parts of the city.

On Friday, the victim's sister Rayana Hossain filed a case with Hatirjheel Police Station. However, she didn't mention the names and designations of the accused.

According to the First Information Report (FIR), Tamzid went out of their Mirbagh residence around 9:00am on Thursday for Uttara. Around noon, a man called the victim's sister from an unknown number and introduced himself as a senior Rab official and told her that her brother was in their custody. The caller also threatened to kill her brother if they informed police about the matter.

The caller called again around 1:30pm on Thursday and informed Rayana that her brother was being interrogated at Rab office by senior officials and that he might be killed in "crossfire" if they did not pay Tk 2 crore.

The man on the phone also let the plaintiff hear her brother's screams as he was being tortured. Tamzid then told her that he was blindfolded right after he was picked up. Later, two-three other men called her from the same number and wanted to know whether she had the cash.

Finally, they agreed to let Tamzid go for Tk 12 lakh. They told the victim's sister to go to Jamuna Future Park with Tk 12 lakh, according to the FIR.

Although the Rab has been successful in apprehending several high-profile criminals, the allegation of various abuse of human rights against the elite force is nothing new.

Earlier, the Rab found involvement of 21 of its staff including its former Commanding Officer Lt Col Tareque Sayeed and Maj Arif Hossain in the sensational seven murders of Narayanganj. The top officials were expelled from respective positions in the elite force and armed forces concerned.

Limon Hossain, a college student at Jamaddarhat at Rajapur Upazila in Jhalakati, was shot at

by Rab personnel near his house on March 23, 2011, triggering local and international outcry. His left leg had to be amputated as a result. The battalion filed two cases that day with the Rajapur police implicating Limon in an arms case and accusing him of obstructing police duties. In the face of protests at home and abroad, the government in July 2013 withdrew the two cases.

TAMZID'S STATEMENT

In his statement at the court, Tamzid Hossain said he met Ranu Begum last year. They later met three times and discussed starting a business of garment products. Around a week before the incident, he told Ranu that he would buy garment products worth Tk 25 lakh. On Wednesday, Ranu called him and asked him to be in front of Rajlaxmi Market in Uttara on Thursday morning.

Tamzid said Ranu called him when he went in front of the market around 10:00am and she went there with a man named Rakib. A little later, another man named Iqbal went there. Rakib then said they should sit and talk at a nearby hotel called the New VIP.

Tamzid said Ranu then asked him if he would buy the goods that very day. Tamzid replied, "Yes, you will get the money as soon as you deliver the goods." Right after that, six or seven men in Rab uniform appeared with handcuffs and walkie-talkies. They wanted to know who Rakib was. As Rakib raised his hand, the Rab men grabbed Tamzid and Iqbal by the collar and asked Ranu and Rakib to come with them.

"We were handcuffed and blindfolded. They slapped us and threatened to kill me if I said anything. They took us into a microbus which drove for one and a half hours. A Rab officer then told Ranu to get down. After five-six minutes, they got on the vehicle again. Someone told me that they will file an arms and narcotics case against me. He demanded money from my father. I asked how much. He

working there."

However, Prof Muntasir Mamun, a member of the technical committee, denied the allegation, and said Prof Sufi personally published a brochure containing information on the excavation.

Prof Sufi wanted to hold a press conference to disclose the findings without taking the consent of the technical committee, he added.

"We repeatedly asked him [Sufi] to submit a report with the findings before the technical committee. But it is a matter of great regret that he did not do it."

Prof Muntasir added, "The old prison area is historically significant. That is why, I emphasised on the importance of excavation. The technical committee approved my proposal and subsequently the excavation began.

"But it is a matter of great regret that the task is half-done. The next step may be taken after getting a report of the excavation."

But Prof Sufi said a complete report cannot be published without further excavation. It needs more funds to conduct further excavation and research. The funds are yet to be allocated.

Talking to The Daily Star, Prof Sufi admitted that he published a brochure that was submitted to a government department.

He, however, did not make any comment over his alleged attempt to hold a press conference.

Asked about this issue, Inspector General of Prisons Brig Gen Md Mominur Rahman Mamun called the issue an "unsolved problem" and said they were trying to solve it.

He declined to make any further comment.

[Taru Sarkar is a freelance researcher and journalist who writes for The Daily Star]

said Tk 2 crore.

"They called my father's number from my phone. My father asked whether I was okay. I said I was okay, but I got in trouble. They demanded Tk 2 crore. Then a man took the phone away and beat me up. I came to know that they had spoken to my sister. They settled for Tk 12 lakh and asked my sister to go to Jamuna Future Park. He threatened that he would put me in a crossfire if the money didn't appear.

"Just before the evening, two of them named Rokon and Rony got out of the vehicle. After a while, two more people got down. Then Ranu's phone rang and she gave the phone to me. A man named Dulal said my sister had got two of their men detained. If they didn't release the two in five minutes, they would kill me and throw the body in the Turag river.

"Then I told my sister about it... When she asked where I was, I said -- 300 feet [road]. Then they took away the phone and drove to Uttara. Once there, all of them got down, except the driver, Ranu, Iqbal and me. I opened my eyes. A boy came and picked up the Rab equipment and left. Then a man named Mubarak came and said that there was no point in keeping these two alive. After that, I was taken to Hatirjheel where police rescued me."

Police sources said the microbus driver was in their custody and he may testify in the case.

Rights activist Nur Khan Liton told The Daily Star that this was not the first such incident. Among the sensational cases, he said there were the seven-murder case in Narayanganj in 2014 and embezzlement of over Tk 2 crore at a Chattogram shrine in 2011.