

**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**



2,955
New cases in 24hrs



7,58,614
Total cases



11,305
Deaths



6,72,319
Recoveries

**GLOBAL
UPDATE**



3,157,768
Deaths



149,999,469
Total cases

Tk 1604cr purchase proposals okayed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase yesterday approved five proposals for procuring services involving Tk 1604.76 crore.

The approval came just two days after the government has asked all ministries, except health and agriculture, not to issue work orders for any physical work during the remainder of the current fiscal year.

As a result, implementing agencies may not be able to issue work orders to contractors even after the purchase committee approved the proposals, officials said.

The finance ministry issued a circular in this regard on Monday and forwarded it to all ministries and government agencies concerned, as the government sticks to austerity policy in the face of the pandemic.

The directive came into effect immediately, according to the circular.

Asked about the matter, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, who presided over the virtual meeting of CCGP, said he was not aware of any such circulars.

“I think there is a misunderstanding here. I will clear it later,” he said.

The finance ministry circular reads no “Notification of Award” can be issued for any physical work (construction/structure) under the revenue and development budget in the remainder of the current fiscal year.

The fiscal year ends on June 30. However, work against orders already issued will continue as usual.

After the bidding process completion, the CCGP approves the proposal of the successful bidder. Then the project implementing authorities issue “Notification of Award” to the successful bidder and then signs relevant contracts with it.

Each proposal, submitted by the

contractor, has a validity period. However, it can be extended with approval from the authorities concerned.

THE PROPOSALS

The committee approved a proposal for extending the tenure of consultancy services for a railway project.

The project is for constructing third and fourth dual-gauge line from Dhaka to Tongi of Gazipur and constructing a second dual-gauge line from Tongi to Joydebpur.

An Indian joint venture firm was supposed to give consultancy services for two years, but now they would provide one more year’s service at the cost of Tk 16.3 crore, shows document.

One project proposal is for building a jail in Narsingdi by the Public Works Department (PWD). The first phase of the project will be implemented by Noorani Construction Ltd. It will need Tk 67.30 crore, shows document.

As per another proposal, Wahid Construction will do the package-1 work of the project titled “Expansion of National Institute of Neuroscience and Hospital” for Tk 124.31 crore.

The committee also approved a proposal for building a power plant in Noakhali.

The committee yesterday cancelled the work order of a PWD project for constructing 104 large buildings in Uttara’s B and C blocks in capital.

A Malaysian company was supposed to carry out the work at the cost of Tk 5,097.97 crore through public-private partnership under government-to-government initiative.

But after the change in the government of Malaysia, the present government declined to own the company and the authorities concerned could not reach the company, said Sahida Akter, an additional secretary of Cabinet Division.

Her diaries hold

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Sudip Chakrabarty said, “... she [the victim] wrote [in the diary] about their relationship, the social barriers to recognition of the relationship, her expectation of a happy conjugal life with the accused and the barriers from his family.”

She detailed her serious frustration in her diaries and these will be the key to establishing the case, he said.

Police collected CCTV footage from the building, information from the victim’s phones, and other circumstantial evidence.

“Through proper analysis of the evidence, we will be able to create an important dimension in the investigation,” the DC said.

Police are looking forward to receiving the post-mortem report as early as possible because it might determine the cause of death, the DC said, adding that officers were also awaiting the results of the DNA and forensic tests.

“We need all the evidence to prove the case when we submit the investigation report to court.”

The police will think about arresting the accused after getting all the necessary evidence, he said.

“We are all trying to ensure justice for the victim and there is no pressure on police about the investigation.”

The incident caused a stir in the country and Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday told reporters at his Dhanmondi residence: “Whoever commits a crime will face the law. The incident is under investigation. We will share the details after the investigation is complete.”

A Dhaka court issued a travel ban on Anvir after the police submitted a petition seeking a directive in this regard.

Police on Monday night recovered the body of the college student of Cumilla at a rented flat in Gulshan.

The following day, her sister sued the Bashundhara Group MD Anvir for abetting her death by suicide.

According to the complaint, Anvir developed a relationship with the victim, aged 21 at the time of her death, and promised to marry her.

Security guards of the building in Gulshan told police that the accused used to visit her flat, where she lived by herself.

The complainant told The Daily Star yesterday that her sister called her in tears on April 25, saying that Anvir would not marry her and that she was in trouble and an accident could happen any time.

The victim’s elder sister said after arriving in Dhaka from Cumilla the following day and breaking the lock on the door of the flat, she found her sister’s body hanging from the ceiling fan.

“I filed the case over instigating suicide against Anvir based on what I saw and what my sister had told me. Whether it was a murder or an instance of abetting suicide will be revealed by the law enforcement agencies after a proper investigation,” she said.

According to the complaint, in 2019, Anvir took the victim to a rented

flat in the capital’s Banani where they started living together.

Last year, Anvir’s family came to know about his relationship with the woman and his mother threatened the victim with dire consequences, asking her to leave Dhaka, the complainant said in the FIR.

THREATS

The victim’s elder sister, who filed the case, told The Daily Star yesterday that she received several calls from various unknown numbers since Tuesday night.

“Some of the callers threatened me with similar consequences faced by my sister if I didn’t withdraw the case,” she said.

She provided two of the phone numbers from which she received the threatening calls. These correspondents called the numbers several times yesterday but found both switched off.

According to the complainant, the callers used abusive words and told her that she had filed a case against the Bashundhara MD for monetary gains.

The complainant said she informed the matter to the police station of her hometown.

Meanwhile, Sharun Chowdhury, son of Awami League lawmaker and parliament whip Shamsul Haque Chowdhury, told The Daily Star that a screenshot of his conversation with the victim that has gone viral on social media was fake.

“It’s a fake screenshot. There was no date in the conversation. I requested the law enforcement agencies to conduct a digital forensic examination of the screenshot. I never met her [the victim] or had any conversation with her,” he said over the phone, adding that he had not been contacted by law enforcement about the issue.

“Anvir has a personnel enmity with me... Bashundhara Group is trying to divert the issue by spreading the fake screenshot. I urge the law enforcement agencies to do a proper probe,” he said.

ANVIR SEEKS ANTICIPATORY BAIL

Anvir sought anticipatory bail from the High Court through his lawyers, Supreme Court lawyer Sayed Ahmed Raza told The Daily Star.

The bail petition has been included as item No 14 in the cause list of the bench of Justice Mamnoon Rahman and Justice Khandaker Diliruzzaman for hearing today.

Contacted, Deputy Attorney General Md Tahirul Islam said his office was yet to receive a copy of the petition as of 8:25pm last night.

Anvir must appear before the HC bench for anticipatory bail during the hearing, he added.

PROTESTS

The central committee of Amra Muktiyoddhar Shantan in a statement yesterday demanded a judicial probe into the incident to find out whether it was a suicide or a planned murder.

Signed by the organisation’s President Sazzad Hossain and General Secretary Rashedul Shahin, the statement demanded fair trial and punishment of the culprit.



Two men moving a loaded rickshaw van across a trench using precariously placed planks near Postogola fire station in the capital yesterday. Residents and businesses said the trench, dug for the maintenance of utility pipes about seven months ago, has made it difficult for them to use the road.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Risking own lives to save lives

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and involvement in high-risk procedures while treating Covid patients, according to studies.

Suman Kundu is one such physician. The doctor, who has been working at the ICU unit of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital since April last year, said he was living in constant fear.

“For the time-being, going through this horrible situation and surviving are the biggest challenges for me and my colleagues,” he said.

After the first spell of the pandemic, Suman had a feeling that the storm might have been over as the infection and death rates subsided by the end of last year. But over the last few weeks, the situation turned dreadful.

“Now many patients’ condition deteriorates quickly leaving us absolutely clueless,” Suman said.

A recent study on the mental condition of doctors in the country paints a dismal picture.

The study, titled “Covid-19 Pandemic: Mental Health of Doctors in Bangladesh”, shows that 78.5 percent physicians are experiencing stress, sadness, inadequate sleep/sleeping problems, poor concentration, low self-confidence and/or difficulty in doing daily activities.

The study, published in the Acta Scientific Neurology journal, said those issues can affect their personal and professional lives and also their relationships with others.

It assessed the mental health of 358 Dhaka-based doctors applying the

“General Health Questionnaire-12” through an online survey.

“This psychological distress can turn into a mental disorder if it remains untreated,” Roufun Naher, who teaches educational and counselling psychology at Dhaka University, told The Daily Star. She also said in the study they found that female doctors were psychologically more distressed and vulnerable than their male counterparts.

Like the physicians, nurses are equally facing severe stress-related problems while treating Covid patients.

Kamrunnahar, a nursing officer at the Osmani Medical College and Hospital, said she never had Tachycardia (when the heart beats over 100 times a minute), but she is now taking medicines for it. She is also relying on pills for sleep.

Nahar said she has been taking antidepressants and sleeping pills for the last six months. “Still, I can’t sleep at night.”

Such cases were also evident in a study titled “Mental health symptoms among the nurses of Bangladesh during the Covid-19 pandemic”, published in international journal Springer.

“Among the 547 nurses included in the study, the prevalence of mild to extremely severe depression, anxiety, and stress was 50.5 percent, 51.8 percent, and 41.7 percent respectively, and 61.9 percent of the respondents reported mild to severe psychological impact due to Covid-19,” the study report said.

It also said that psychological symptoms were more prevalent among female nurses than the male ones.

The study, prepared on a web-based survey, collected data on the respondents between November 22 and December 6, 2020.

A total of 547 nurses participated in this study. The majority of the respondents were female.

This study revealed that 61.9 percent of the nurses suffered from some degree of mental distress during the pandemic.

Another significant finding of the study is that the nurses who faced any emotional abuse for being healthcare workers and working in the Covid-19 pandemic were associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and psychological impact.

Sabbir Mahmud Tihan, one of the authors of the study and general secretary of Society for Nurses Safety and Rights, said, “Nurses are exhausted both physically and mentally. They need immediate support.”

Tihan, also a nursing officer at the BSMU, said the government should fulfil its promise of providing incentives to nurses.

Iqbal Arslan, president of Swadhinata Chikitsok Parishad or Swachip, said healthcare professionals involved in treating Covid-19 patients have been under tremendous physical and mental pressure for the last one year.

He suggested that those who have been serving the Covid patients for the last one year should be given rest.

“They should be replaced with those who are treating other general patients. Otherwise, the system may collapse anytime,” he feared.

Govt struggles for lack of enough data

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have been prepared in formats that are not interoperable.

Cabinet Division officials said they made the proposal, keeping in mind the necessity to have a “combined data hub” to store information on NID cards, birth and death certificates, educational and professional records and other necessary data.

Once completed, this will allow all the officials concerned to collect necessary information from one place.

A number of experts say that had there been such a database, it would have been easier for the government to reach the poor people in need of financial aid amid the pandemic.

For example, the government in May last year decided to provide Tk 2,500 each as cash incentive to 50 lakh poor people who did not receive any support under the existing social safety net programmes.

The target beneficiaries included rickshaw-pullers, day labourers, construction workers, farmers, employees of shops, people employed at small businesses, poultry labourers and transport workers.

But the distribution of money was stopped midway following allegations of anomalies in the list of beneficiaries with names of solvent people also found in it.

The authorities cancelled transfer of money to 15 lakh people on the list as many of them were already getting benefits under social safety net programmes. Besides, information provided by many of them did not match that in their NID cards.

DATABASES WITHOUT INTEROPERABILITY

According to the CRVS website, different ministries and agencies have developed large electronic databases.

The EC has developed the NID

database containing information on 100 million citizens aged above 18 while the Local Government Division has registered 120 million people in another electronic database.

Besides, the health and family welfare ministry conducts a periodical health census covering nearly 100 million people. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has been tasked with developing a poverty database covering 160 million people.

But all these databases have been developed in different formats which are not interoperable, say Cabinet Division officials.

Moreover, there is no way to say who are being included multiple times in those databases, they pointed out.

Many citizens eligible for social safety net schemes are left out of the databases. This means they are being deprived of the benefits of programmes like vulnerability group development, widow allowance and disability allowance, they added.

Seeking anonymity, a finance ministry official said, “A comprehensive database can also be useful in helping the genuine beneficiaries in crunch time.”

Sultan said the media on many occasions reported incidents of lack of proper data and misuse of government funds. Some of those are true, some are not, he said.

“If a separate body is formed, these types of problems can be addressed easily.”

NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE DATABASE

Noted economist Binayak Sen, director general of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), said that if there is a comprehensive database of citizens, it will be easier to stop misuse of funds.

There have been some issues

regarding selection of the beneficiaries of social safety net programmes, and also some problems cropped up when the government wanted to provide financial aid to 50 lakh poor people.

A recent BIDS study titled “Poverty in the Time of Corona: Trends, Drivers, Vulnerability and Policy: Responses in Bangladesh”, submitted to the planning ministry, showed that a large part of monetary transfers under social safety net programmes end up in “non-deserving” non-poor groups.

Binayak also thinks that payment through digital platforms alone is not going to solve the problem of misuse.

A number of fake beneficiaries are already on the list but it’s not possible to track and drop them from the list for a lack of data. “So misuse will continue,” he said.

The economist suggested that the government introduce something like Aadhaar Card in India to solve the problem and exclude the fake beneficiaries from the list.

This database should have NID-related information as well as data on a person’s bank account, mobile number, and whether he or she is beneficiary of any social safety net programmes, he said.

Aadhaar is a one-time identity card issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India free of cost for all residents of India. It contains a 12-digit unique number and is registered by taking a person’s biometric details such as fingerprints and demographic data.

The card was initially issued to create a more rationalised and transparent process of allotting certain government benefits and subsidies for Indian citizens. Now, the benefits and usage have evolved as a payment system, tax regulator and much more, making it an essential document for all Indian residents.

products at exorbitant price, the finance minister said. “We also look after such issues.”

ADB TO LEND \$940 MILLION FOR VACCINE PURCHASE

Officials in the Economic Relations Division said the ADB board might approve the fund by the end of May.

“ADB’s money that is coming is to provide for those vaccines that are cleared by the WHO,” ADB Country Director Manmohan Parkash told a briefing yesterday.

Only the AstraZeneca and Pfizer/BioNtech vaccines have WHO approvals.

Several other pharmaceutical companies have sought for vaccine listing with the WHO, he said, adding that many of the potential vaccine suppliers were demanding almost full payment in advance. “We have to be ready for this.”

77 deaths, 2,955 new Covid cases in 24 hours

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh yesterday reported 77 more coronavirus-related deaths and 2,955 new cases as the country grapples with the second wave of the virus.

The daily infection rate dropped to 10.48 percent from Tuesday’s 12.51 percent, but the mortality rate rose to 1.50 percent.

So far 754,614 cases and 11,305 deaths have been recorded, the Directorate General of Health Services said in a handout.

The number of recoveries now stands at 672,319, including 5,392 new ones in 24 hours till yesterday morning. This means, 89.09 percent of the patients have recovered.

Bangladesh has so far tested 5,423,730 samples, including 28,206 in the same 24-hour period.

The country reported its first novel coronavirus cases on March 8 last year and the first death on March 18.

DEATHS, CASES SOAR

In the last 28 days, Bangladesh has seen 2,259 coronavirus-related deaths, making it the most fatal month since the outbreak began last year.

The virus claimed 568 lives in January this year, 281 in February and 638 in March.

Dhaka division remains the worst-hit region, registering most of the deaths -- 6,610 or 58.47 percent.

Forty-six of the 77 deaths reported yesterday are from Dhaka division and nine from Chattogram division.

Two garment worker raped in Sunamganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Two garment workers were raped while they were trying to get back to Dhaka from their village home in Sunamganj’s Jamalganj upazila on Monday.

A case was filed with Jamalganj Police Station on Tuesday night by one of the victim’s father accusing two persons -- Alamgir Miah, 25, and Abul Kalam, 26.

The victims, aged 21 and 18, are undergoing treatment at the One-stop Crisis Centre of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, said Mohammad Saiful Alam, officer-in-charge of Jamalganj Police Station.

According to the case statement, the victims were workers of a garment factory in Dhaka’s Kamrangirchar area and went to their village home before the current lockdown was imposed.

On information of their factory reopening, they decided to go to Dhaka. Thus, they reached Jamalganj upazila sadar and hired an auto-rickshaw to go to the boat dock.

Upon reaching the dock, they came to know that buses to Dhaka were not operating and they decided to return with the same autorickshaw, being driven by Abul Kalam while his associate Alamgir was also beside him.

Khaleda’s condition

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for her routine medical check-up which was due for more than a year and a half.

“As madam [Khaleda] was taken to hospital for CT scan, doctors suggested a comprehensive medical check-up as it was due for more than one and half years,” her personal physician AZM Zahid Hossain told The Daily Star.

Khaleda was admitted to Evercare Hospital in the capital on Tuesday night. She was admitted under cardiologist Shahabuddin Talukdar.

Zahid said to complete all the medical tests, it may need one more day of stay in the hospital.

A 10-member medical board was formed to treat Khaleda yesterday.

Zahid told journalists that some new medicines were added to treat her and her condition was stable.

“A medical board has been formed. This board examined the test reports and suggested some new tests,” he said.

Zahid said as per the medical board’s advice, the tests would be done and her treatment will be planned accordingly.

He said Khaleda’s lungs are good and she does not have any cardiological problems.

The physician said she was undergoing treatment in the non-Covid-19 unit of the hospital as she does not have any Covid-19 symptoms.

Asked when Khaleda will return home, he said, “It is tough to say but she will return soon once her tests are completed.”

He said the BNP chief has been suffering from arthritis, diabetics and ophthalmological issues.

Khaleda tested Covid-19 positive on April 11 and in the follow-up test on April 24, she tested positive again.

Amid the coronavirus outbreak, the government on March 25 last year freed Khaleda from jail for six months through an executive order suspending her jail sentences in two graft cases.

She was released from the prison cell at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University the same day. Since then, she has been staying at her Gulshan residence.

On August 27 last year, the government extended Khaleda’s release period for six months. It was extended for another six months on March 15 this year.

On February 8, 2018, the BNP chief was sent to the Old Dhaka Central Jail after a court sentenced her to five years’ imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case. The High Court later doubled her sentence.

Khaleda was found guilty in another graft case the same year. Her party, however, claims both the cases are politically motivated.