

Mamata's cabinet sworn

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The School and Higher Education portfolio this time has gone to actor Bratya Basu.

Mamata's trusted lieutenant Firdah Hakim, the MLA from Kolkata Port Trust locality, with the key portfolio of Transport, once held by Suvendu.

Amit Mitra, who did not contest the recent elections recently, citing ill health, has been retained in the cabinet with Finance portfolio.

As per the Indian constitution, Mitra will have to get elected in a by-election within six months, like Mamata, who lost in Nandigram.

In forming her new ministry, Mamata drafted in 16 new faces, including former cricketer Manoj Tiwari and ex-police officer Humayun Kabir. The 17 others included women and Muslims.

In the new ministerial council, comprising 24 cabinet ministers and 19 state ministers, Mamata has retained almost all the senior ministers in her previous government like Subrata Mukherjee, Partha Chatterjee, Firdah Hakim, Amit Mitra, Sobhandeb Chatterjee, Jyoti Priya Mallick, Moloy Ghatak, Aroop Biswas, Shashi Panja, Javed Ahmed Khan and Bratya Basu.

A notable absentee in the new ministry is that of Madan Mitra, who was Transport Minister in Mamata's 2011 government. Madan won this time from Kamarhati constituency after having lost there in 2016.

The unveiling of Mamata's new ministerial council came on a day when West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, upon a request made by the Central Bureau of Investigation, sanctioned the prosecution of four senior TMC leaders -- Firdah Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee, Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee -- in connection with purported Narada sting tapes that showed the TMC leaders allegedly accepting money in return for favours.

"The honourable governor is the competent authority to accord sanctions in terms of law as he happens to be the appointing authority for such ministers in terms of Article 164 of the constitution," a statement, issued by the officer on special duty (communication) at the

Raj Bhavan, said on Sunday night.

The Narada sting tapes, made public before the 2016 assembly elections in West Bengal, were claimed to have been shot in 2014 by a news portal.

Hakim, Mukherjee, Mitra and Chatterjee were ministers in the Mamata cabinet when the tapes were allegedly made in 2014.

All of them, with the exception on Chatterjee, have been re-elected as TMC MLAs in the just-concluded assembly elections, while Chatterjee, who left the TMC to join the BJP, has severed links with both the camps.

The Calcutta High Court had ordered a CBI probe into the sting operation in March, 2017.

Besides Mamata, Shashi Panja is the only other woman member of the new cabinet.

Another veteran Manas Bhuniyar, who was a minister in Mamata's first cabinet in 2011, has been brought back this time following Trinamool Congress' impressive show in Purbo Medinipur district. Manas is a legislator from Sabang.

A prominent new face is Akhil Giri, district president of Purbo Medinipur where Nandigram is located, who has been included as a junior minister with independent charge for his loyalty in a region where Suvendu's defection to BJP had dealt Trinamool Congress a blow.

In Bengal's neighbouring Assam, astute strategist Himanta Biswa Sarma, who is credited with BJP's return to power in the state and the party's rise in north eastern region, today took his oath as Chief Minister, along with 13 other ministers.

Addressing his first press conference, 51-year-old Sarma appealed to fugitive United Liberation Front of Assam chief Paresh Baruah to come overground and join the peace process and demanded reverification of 20 percent of the names included in contentious NRC list in Assam's districts bordering Bangladesh and 10 percent of names in other areas.

The controversial final National Register of Citizens in Assam was published on August 31, 2019, by excluding 19.6 lakh people. A total of 3,11,21,004 names were included out of the 3,30,27,661 applicants.

Home rush set to get madder

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dangerous once the India variant made its way here.

Yesterday, Health Minister Zahid Maleque termed the decision to travel home for Eid as "suicidal".

PRESSURE INCREASED ON HIGHWAYS
In 24 hours, 31,899 vehicles crossed the Bangabandhu Bridge, the gateway to the northern districts, between 6:00am Sunday and 6:00am Monday.

On Sunday, it was 26,223 and the previous day's number was around 25,000.

This day-on-day increase reflects the increase in number of homebound people on the highways, despite a ban on inter-district buses and restrictions on movement.

Traffic congestion on the Dhaka-Tangail highway increased yesterday.

Due to the pressure of extra vehicles, there was slow movement over an area of about 13 kilometres from the east bank of Bangabandhu Bridge to Elega of Kalihati Upazila, reports our Tangail correspondent.

Home-goers faced immense difficulty as long-haul buses were not operating on the road during day-time. Although the more fortunate could afford seats in private cars, low-income people were taking the risk of boarding the backs of trucks, small pick-up trucks and motorcycles.

Mozaffar Hossain, officer-in-charge of Gora Highway Police Station, told The Daily Star, "Pressure of vehicles increased sharply. The flow of home-goers will increase from tomorrow [today] as the garment factories will be closed ahead of Eid," he added.

Meanwhile, like the previous three days, people in their thousands thronged the capital's inter-district bus terminals in Gabtoli and Sayedabad yesterday.

From Gabtoli, many went to Amin Bazar on foot to take a bus and other transports like private cars, microbuses, CNG-run auto-rickshaw, motorcycles, trucks and pick-up trucks.

Amin Bazar has turned into a makeshift transport hub as all kinds of vehicles were taking on passengers. A tailback was created from Gabtoli to Hemayetpur due to the rush.

Talking to this newspaper, many passengers said they were being charged almost double the usual fare.

Mamun Ali, who worked at an

RMG factory in Keraniganj, came to Amin Bazar with his son to go to their hometown in Rajbari.

His journey back was not just due to Eid, but because he had lost his job in April as the garment factory he worked for was facing losses. Keeping his wife and daughter at his in-laws in Keraniganj, Mamun was going back home.

"I only have Tk 2000. I don't know whether I can complete the journey," he said.

Transport workers however said they charge hiked fares to "manage" police. Whoever does not pay is caught and fined by the law enforcers, they alleged.

Around 12:30pm, this correspondent saw a passenger bus, which was heading out of the capital, disobeying a police signal to stop. A few metres ahead, police stopped the bus and the on-duty officer was handed a phone to talk to someone.

After a "negotiation" over phone, the officer let the bus to go.

FERRY RUSH
Authorities have suspended daytime ferries and deployed BGB troops, but the surge could not be stopped.

Ferry services on the Paturia-Daulatdia and Shimulia-Bangla Bazar roads, gateways to the 21 south and southwestern districts of the country, have seen a massive rush for the last four days.

When ferries anchored at the terminals to take ambulances and vehicles carrying dead bodies, hundreds of people forcibly boarded them. Six ferries were seen leaving Shimulia terminal after such a scene during daytime yesterday.

Safayat Ahmed, manager (commerce) of BIWTC Shimulia terminal, said people cannot be barred from coming to the terminal. If the ferries are not operated, there would be even bigger crowds at the terminal.

Hundreds of passengers and also goods-laden vehicles were seen waiting at the terminal in the afternoon.

At Paturia, pressure of homebound passengers increased as the day progressed. Multiple ferries operated to transport hundreds of passengers along with ambulances.

[Our correspondents in Munshiganj, Manikganj and Tangail contributed to this report]

Cases hold close to record

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United States, said on Twitter.

Sonia Gandhi, the chief of the main opposition Congress party, blamed the government for abdicating its responsibility by leaving vaccinations to states, Reuters partner ANI said on Twitter.

Delhi's health minister said the city was running out of vaccines, with just three to four days of supplies remaining of AstraZeneca, made by the Serum Institute of India and branded Covishield, the NDTV news channel reported.

By yesterday, the world's largest vaccine-producing nation had fully vaccinated just over 34.8 million, or about 2.5%, of a population of about 1.35 billion, government data shows

Dozens of bodies believed to be Covid-19 victims have washed up on the banks of the Ganges river in northern India, officials said yesterday.

Local official Ashok Kumar said that about 40 corpses washed up in Buxar district near the border between Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, two of India's poorest states.

"We have directed concerned officials to dispose of all bodies, to either bury or cremate them," Kumar told AFP.

Some media reports said the number of corpses could be as high as 100.

SHUT DOWN NEEDED

On Sunday, top White House coronavirus adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci said he had advised Indian authorities they needed to shut down.

Ansar Al Islam leader had links with Hefajat

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contacts" between a Pakistani militant outfit and Hefajat former joint secretary general Mamunul Haque.

On April 25, while addressing reporters, Harun-Or Rashid, deputy commissioner of Tejgaon (division) police, disclosed the findings.

Harun said Mamunul and his brother-in-law Niamatullah visited Pakistan in 2005 and stayed there for around 45 days.

A CTTC official said a close relative of Mamunul is still in Pakistan and the relative maintains close connections with the militant outfit in the country.

The official, requesting anonymity, said, "We have also discovered a suspicious transaction of around Tk 6 crore in Mamunul's account and a significant portion of that money came from Dubai."

Regarding Mamunul's links with the Pakistani militant outfit, Md Asaduzzaman, the CTTC unit head, on Sunday said, "We have come to know that Mamunul Haque had militant links. We are working on it and he would be interrogated on the issue."

However, Zafarullah Khan, nayeb-e-ameer of the now defunct Hefajat committee, told this correspondent yesterday that "Hefajat did not have any connection with any militant outfits."

"We do not believe in any kind of jihad. The country's people believe in democracy, so there is no need for

jihad," he added.

INDIA LINKS

CTTC officials said arrested Ansar Al Islam leader Osama had a close contact with a group of militants in India.

Osama visited India several times and held meetings with the militants hiding in the neighbouring country, a CTTC official, involved in interrogation, told this paper.

One of his close associates in India -- Nazibullah -- was arrested by the Special Task Force in India for his alleged militant links in December last year, said the official, wishing not to be named.

"We have so far found that around 10 people hiding in India had links with Osama," said the official, adding that Osama is also believed to have connections with Al Imran, the head of Ansar Al Islam.

DC Saiful said Osama was giving misleading information during interrogation. "But we have got some information and we are now analysing it," he added.

CTTC officials are also quizzing Al Sakib, 22, a member of Ansar Al Islam, who is on a five-day remand. Sakib was arrested in the capital on May 5. Sakib was inspired into militant activities and he plotted to create anarchy in the country listening to Osama's speech, they said.

ROKOMARI UNDER WATCH

CTTC officials said Osama has written

40 to 50 books, some of which have instigating speeches and contents inspiring people to militancy.

The online platform, rokomari.com, was allegedly selling those books, which are instigating militancy, they added.

"We have got some other writers' books on the online platform, which are instigating militancy. We have kept the online platform under surveillance and we may interrogate the responsible person," said DC Saiful.

Asked about it, Mahmudul Hasan Sohad, chief executive of the platform, told this paper that Rokomari is an online platform, where any publishers and writers can post their books after opening an account.

"We have no relations with any of the books," he said.

"We only take action and form a team to scrutinise the books whenever a controversy arises. We have removed a number of books earlier," said Sohad.

Regarding the books on militancy, Sohad said, "We had no idea about it, but we removed all the books soon after we learnt about it. There are over two lakh writers' books on the platform and we have no idea whether there are any other such books."

He further requested people to provide them information if anyone has information about any books instigating militancy, so that they can take action.

5.92m students at risk of learning loss

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rest from urban areas. It was carried out between March 11 and 31.

Based on the survey findings, the PPRC and the BIGD claimed that 5.92 million primary and secondary students in the country were at risk of facing learning losses as a result of the closure.

The term learning loss refers to any specific or general loss of knowledge and skills or to reversals in academic progress, most commonly due to extended gaps or discontinuities in a student's education, according to education and development forum UKFIET.

The government closed schools and other education institutions across the country on March 17 last year as part of its efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19.

A minimum of 19 percent primary school and 21 percent secondary school students surveyed are at risk of learning loss. This translates into 3.42 million primary students and 2.50 million secondary students, said the study.

The researchers said the learning loss was caused as students were not studying at all, they were not studying without supervision and they became irregular in their studies.

"The actual learning loss is likely to be even severe ... Because of the learning loss, students face higher risks of dropping out without the issue being addressed," PPRC Executive Chairman Hossain Zillur Rahman said at the press conference.

He said the learning loss was causing students to lose their skills, eventually making it difficult for them to become human resources in the future.

BIGD Executive Director Imran Matin said, "A significant portion of the school-going children are at the risk of facing learning loss. So, schools should be reopened after ensuring several measures to cover the loss and help children cope with the situation."

This risk of learning loss is more prominent among students of secondary schools in urban areas.

'Cyber-bullying must end'

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were some who expressed their surprise over their "discovery" of Chanchal's religion and made aggravating comments, abusing Chanchal and his mother.

The event escalated to a point where the actor had to address the commenters.

"Brothers and sisters, why does my being Hindu or Muslim concern you?" commented Chanchal. "Above all, I am human. Let these awkward questions regarding religion stop. Let us all be human."

On Monday, Chanchal Chowdhury shared a clip reciting his Bangla poem "Dhormo" on his Facebook page.

An excerpt from the poem says, "Who has given you the right to 'save' religion? Why do you commercialise

religion? All religions speak of serving humanity. Do you feel superior after commercialising yours?"

Many stood in solidarity with Chanchal, also protesting the frequent incidents of cyberbullying of celebrities and public figures with the #stopcyberbullying and #hokprotibad (let's protest) hashtags.

"Chanchal Chowdhury is my brother, our brother," wrote director Chayanika Chowdhury. "I am seriously having doubts about our conscience as a nation. This is enough."

Actor Rawnak Hasan wrote, "I condemn those who make these radical and obscene comments. I demand exemplary punishment of these cyber criminals."

Popular actor Fazlur Rahman Babu wrote, "Ignorant fanatics always go

too far in the name of religion."

Ashna Habib Bhabna, also a victim of such frequent cyber-attacks, wrote, "Our silence has been their strength."

Filmmaker and music director Masud Hasan Ujjal's post was one of the most notable on Facebook -- "Our mental deterioration and jealousy is alarming...Most big-time artistes I know have lost motivation to do work because of people's tendencies to bring others down. There is only one way out -- another renaissance. We need to keep doing tasteful work to block out the distasteful."

Many other artistes, including Tahsan Khan, Moushumi Hamid, Richie Solaiman and Zakia Bari Mamo, also stood in solidarity with Chanchal Chowdhury on social media.

Weekly Jai Bangla launched

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world opinion in favour of the liberation of Bangladesh, and thereby enlisting international support in favour of the cause.

The Jai Bangla was sponsored by the Department of Publication, Information, Radio and Cinema of the Bangladesh government in exile.

Abdul Mannan MNA in charge of the department was vested with the responsibility of overall management and publication of the paper.

BANGLADESH ENVOY ON WORLD MISSION

An envoy of the Bangladesh government today left Calcutta on a tour of Europe, the Soviet Union and the US to represent the cause of the newborn republic. The envoy, who would first attend

the International Peace Conference at Budapest, would visit London and Moscow before going to New York to meet delegations of different countries at the United Nations. The envoy carried a special message from Bangladesh Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad and acting president Syed Nazrul Isalm to heads of different states. He also carried photographs and films on military atrocities in Bangladesh. The tour was expected to last about a month.

RELIEF AIRLIFT PROPOSED

Senator Edward M Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, called today for an immediate international "mercy mission and airlift" to Bangladesh. He warned that within a month the condition of about 72 million Bangladeshis would become "acute."

Edward Kennedy was the lead off witness at a two day hearing on Pakistan before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs.

UN RELIEF TEAM VISITS REFUGEE CAMPS

The three-member team of UN refugee relief organisation visited Agartala today to assess the needs of the refugees from Bangladesh who had taken shelter in Tripura. The mission would visit Sabroom tomorrow where about 150,000 refugees are concentrated from the Chittagong area. About 500,000 refugees so far arrived in Tripura.

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Cops detain

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said Mohammad Touhidul Islam.

The 10 patients were admitted to the hospital between April 18 and April 24 with Covid-19. Seven of them had just returned from India. But soon afterwards, they sneaked out of the isolation ward where they were being treated.

Law enforcers caught them and brought them back to the hospital on April 26 and 27.

Meanwhile in Maheshpur, Jhenaidah, border guards yesterday arrested 27 people, including women and children, for entering the country illegally through Matila and Samanta areas, reports UNB.

A team of Border Guard Bangladesh Khalishpur-58 Battalion, raided the areas and arrested them.

The government closed the borders with India on April 26 amid a devastating surge of the pandemic in the latter.

[A correspondent from Jashore contributed to the report]

38 more die

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2,115 patients recovered in 24 hours, taking the recovery rate to 91.90 percent.

The country reported its first coronavirus cases on March 8 last year and the first death on the 18th of that month.

10 RMG workers

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workers gathered on the streets in Tongi yesterday morning and started marching towards the highway.

Policemen told our correspondent that they were trying to stop the workers when the latter started throwing brick chips at them.

Photos of the injured workers obtained by The Daily Star showed that some of them were peppered with over 50 projectiles. Worker leaders said police shot from up close.

At least 22 injured workers were taken to Tongi Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master General Hospital. Of them, 13 were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital as their physical conditions kept deteriorating, said Khairul Kabir, a medical officer of the Tongi hospital.

Jalal Hawlader, additional superintendent of Gazipur Industrial Police, said, "They kept the main road blocked for around 15 minutes. The police then lobbed tear gas shells to disperse the workers. At one stage, police shot rubber bullets to calm the situation."

Normally returned around 3:00pm, said locals and police.

Garment workers' associations severely criticised the police actions.

"Police shot the workers at point-blank range, which resulted in serious injuries. Incidents like these keep happening because the police shoot at workers with absolute impunity whenever they protest," said a statement by the GWTUC.

Most of the workers have been giving up their weekends to be able to see their families during the Eid, said Bangladesh Garments Shramik Samhati in a statement.

"It is quite normal for the workers to work overtime to meet production goals before Eid. Then they enjoy a substantial break," it added.

Contacted, AK Azad, managing director of Ha-Meem Group, said, "The workers demanded a 10-day break. We agreed to seven days... The workers did not even give us time to negotiate... and vandalised the factory."

Mexico City

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underneath the bustling travel destination.

However, the lake bed had become so dry that clay sheets are cracking and compressing, causing it to decompress.

If the rate of sinking continues, it will end up contaminating drinking water for millions. Metropolitan Mexico City is the largest city in North America, with a population of over 21 million people.

More than three-quarters of its drinking water comes from wells that extract water from the ground and continue to deplete the area's aquifers.

Experts first noticed the city was sinking in 1900, when it was recorded at a rate of about 3.5 inches a year.

Drilling for groundwater wasn't capped until the late 1950s, by which time Mexico city was sinking at a rate of 11 inches a year.

Scientists from the US and Mexico analyzed more than a century of data, including more recent information from GPS and Interferometric Synthetic Aperture Radar (InSAR).

According to their findings, the level of subsidence in Mexico City is no longer even affected by how much water is being removed from the ground.

"Instead, it reflects the steady compacting of the ancient lake bed on which the city was built," reports the American Geophysical Union.

Rwandan 'genocide financier' unfit for trial: lawyers

AFP, Nairobi

Lawyers representing the alleged financier of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, Felicien Kabuga, have requested that charges against him be dropped on the grounds he is unfit for trial.

In a May 6 filing to the UN court's branch in Tanzania, lawyer Emmanuel Altit said that medical reports prove that his 84-year-old client could not withstand trial.