

BANGLADESH UPDATE



698

New cases in 24hrs



7,80,857

Total cases



12,181

Deaths



7,23,094

Recoveries



3,400,581

Deaths



164,127,680

Total cases

No one can distort history now: PM

Bss, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said she firmly believes that no one can erase the country's real history now.

"History had been erased and changed completely. Now I am confident that no one can distort or erase the real history of Bangladesh," she said.

Presiding over a weekly cabinet meeting virtually from the Gono Bhaban yesterday, Hasina said Bangladesh has now become a developing country by overcoming many hurdles at home and abroad.

She vowed to take Bangladesh forward and change the destiny of its people by making the country a developed and prosperous one.

The PM's cabinet colleagues and secretaries concerned got connected to the meeting from the Cabinet Division.

Hasina, also the president of Awami League, said she had returned home facing numerous hurdles and conspiracies even after knowing that her life would be at risk as the then government released war criminals from jails and granted immunity to killers.

"I returned to the country under such



a situation without thinking anything as the independence of the country cannot go in vain. I have to make the independence a success."

The PM recalled the contributions of the then AL leaders and activists and the people who stood beside them (Hasina and her younger sister Sheikh Rehana) for their return home on this day in 1981 from forced exile for six years.

The premier said Obaidul Quader, now the AL general secretary, as the then president of Chhatra League had issued the first statement on their return home.

Then Jubo League chairman Amir Hossain Amu, now an AL advisory council member, also issued another statement in this regard while Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, who later left the party, first placed the matter before parliament, she added.

Hasina said she got a lot of love, affection and blessings from the people across the country upon returning home after losing her father, mother, and brothers.

She reiterated that the country would be a "Golden Bangladesh" as envisioned by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Vaccine drives

FROM PAGE 1

Serum was supposed to ship 50 lakh doses a month to Bangladesh over a six-month period starting from January. Serum delivered the first 50 lakh doses as per the deal, but shipped only 20 lakh in February. No other shipment has been made since.

The Indian government restricted export of the vaccine to meet the local demand.

Contacted, Nazmul Hassan Papon, managing director of Beximco Pharmaceuticals Limited, local agent of Serum, said, "We contacted Serum, but have not received any response regarding [when] the next consignment [might arrive]."

Bangladesh is also supposed to get 6.8 crore vaccine doses this year from Covax, a global alliance. The alliance earlier announced that Bangladesh would get 1.27 crore doses between May and June. But as of yesterday, the country has not heard from Covax about a shipment.

Amid such uncertainties, the government started looking for alternative sources and contacted Russia and China to secure supplies of their vaccines. But no considerable progress has been made so far.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday told reporters that the government is concerned over administering the second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

There are talks of co-production of vaccines in Bangladesh, but the government is more interested in purchasing the doses from different sources and continuing the inoculation campaign.

Vaccine production is a time-consuming process, the minister

said, "The drug administration will send a report to us regarding those [companies] who have applied [for vaccine production]... The final decision will come after the prime minister is consulted."

Those companies will need four-five months to start production, he said.

"Our focus is on purchasing the vaccine."

The government started mass inoculation on February 7 with a target of vaccinating 160 million people in phases.

Only 2 percent of the population have so far got both shots of the AstraZeneca vaccine and less than 4 percent got the first shot as of Sunday, according to the DGHs.

The World Health Organization (WHO) last month said that the wealthy countries have received the vast majority of the world's supply of Covid-19 vaccines, while poor countries obtained less than 1 percent.

Of the 700 million doses distributed across the globe, "Over 87 percent have gone to high-income or upper- and middle-income countries, while low-income countries have received just 0.2 percent," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

SINOPHARM FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS, NURSES
The five lakh doses of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine Bangladesh received on May 12 as a gift will be administered among medical students and nurses.

"We have to ensure that the medical students, especially the ones in the 5th year, are inoculated. We cannot disrupt medical education in the pandemic because they are the frontline heroes," said Khurshid Alam.

Mamata's 2 ministers

FROM PAGE 1

Palace in south Kolkata earlier in the evening and were granted bail.

The CBI then moved to the Calcutta High Court, challenging the move. The bail orders were then stayed.

Earlier in the day, soon after the arrests took place, hundreds of TMC activists took out protest rallies in the city and elsewhere in West Bengal, flouting Covid lockdown guidelines.

In a sharp escalation in the face-off between BJP-led central government and Mamata Banerjee's dispensation in West Bengal, the CBI arrested the four in connection with a five-year-old case relating to a news portal's sting operation on alleged bribery.

A CBI team, along with central security forces, picked the four up from their homes.

According to the CBI, Firhad Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee and Madan Mitra were caught on camera accepting wads of currency notes in the sting operation conducted by the news portal's Editor-in-Chief Mathew Samuel from New Delhi in 2014. The video tapes were released ahead of assembly elections in the state in 2016.

Infuriated, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee reached the CBI office in Kolkata's Nizam Palace and reportedly said, "The way they have been arrested without due procedure, the CBI will have to arrest me also."

Mamata also held a six-hour sit-in in front of the CBI DIG's office on the 14th floor of Nizam Palace.

As Mamata staged the sit-in, hundreds of TMC workers gathered at Nizam Palace in South Kolkata, despite the ongoing state-wide lockdown due to the rising Covid cases, and hurled stones and bricks protesting against the arrest of three senior TMC leaders.

The TMC activists, many without masks, also staged protests outside the Raj Bhavan, the official residence of Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankar, in Dalhousie Square in central Kolkata, protesting the arrests of Hakim, Mukherjee and Mitra. Reports of street protests by TMC workers also came in from several other parts of Bengal.

Dhankar earlier this month gave permission to CBI for prosecution of Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee, Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee.

Referring to the street protests shown on TV channels, Dhankar accused Kolkata Police and West Bengal police of being "mute onlookers" and appealed to them to act and restore law and order.

"[This is] total lawlessness & anarchy. Police and administration are silent.

Hope you [they and the people] realise the repercussions of such lawlessness and failure of constitutional mechanism. Time to reflect and contain this explosive situation that is worsening every minute," Dhankar tweeted.

Hakim and Mukherjee are currently ministers in Mamata's cabinet with Transport, Urban and Housing and Panchayati Raj portfolios respectively. Mitra was not included in the cabinet of ministries after the TMC had a landslide victory in the recent assembly poll.

Sovan Chatterjee snapped his ties with both the TMC and Bharatiya Janata Party, which he had joined in 2019.

All four arrested yesterday were ministers in the previous Mamata Banerjee government, when the Narada sting operation was taped in 2014.

Mathew Samuel, a journalist from Delhi came to Kolkata, posed as a businessman planning to invest in Bengal and gave cash to seven Trinamool MPs, four ministers, one MLA and a police officer as bribe and taped the entire operation.

West Bengal Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee said the arrest of Hakim, Mukherjee and Mitra in the Narada case on the basis of the Governor's sanction was "unlawful."

"I have not received any letter from the CBI, nor has anybody sought permission from me as per the protocol... I do not know for what unknown reason they went to the Governor and sought his sanction."

The CBI filed the charge sheet against five accused, including three TMC leaders arrested earlier in the day, in the Narada sting case wherein politicians were purportedly caught taking money on camera, officials said.

The sting operation was allegedly conducted by Mathew Samuel of Narada TV news channel in 2014 wherein people resembling TMC ministers, MPs and MLAs were allegedly seen receiving money from representatives of a fictitious company in lieu of favours.

The tapes were made public just before the 2016 assembly elections in West Bengal.

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

Samuel yesterday said he was happy that the four politicians were arrested in the case relating to his sting operation but questioned why Suwendu Adhikar was spared by the CBI because he too figured in the case.

Suwendu, who was at that time in TMC, joined BJP in December last year and is now the leader of opposition in the Bengal assembly.



A streak of light appears as Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system intercepts rockets launched from the Gaza Strip early yesterday. Israeli warplanes bombarded the Gaza Strip overnight, said witnesses in the Palestinian enclave, from where armed groups have launched rockets into the Jewish state.

PHOTO: AFP

Israel continues pounding Gaza

FROM PAGE 1

Another Gaza resident, Mani Qazaat, said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "should realise we're civilians, not fighters".

"I felt like I was dying," he said about enduring a heavy aerial bombardment.

International calls mounted for a ceasefire, but there was no sign of any imminent end to the most serious hostilities between Israel and Hamas Islamists in years.

Israel's army said yesterday it had hit the homes of nine "high-ranking" Hamas commanders, a day after bombing the house of Yahya Sinwar, head of the group's political wing.

It gave no details of any casualties.

A senior Palestinian militant commander was also killed yesterday, a source within the group and the Israeli army said. The killing of Hussam Abu Harbeed, armed commander for north Gaza, was likely to draw a fierce response from the militant group that is fighting alongside Hamas, the Islamist

movement that governs the coastal enclave, reports Reuters.

Fighter jets also hit what the Israeli army calls the "Metro," its term for Hamas' underground tunnels, which Israel has previously acknowledged runs in part through civilian areas.

The renewed strikes come a day after 42 Palestinians in Gaza -- including at least eight children and two doctors, according to the health ministry -- were killed in the worst daily death toll in the enclave since the bombardments began.

In total, 200 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, including at least 59 children, and more than 1,300 wounded since Israel launched its air campaign against Hamas after the group fired rockets, according to the authorities there.

Israel says 10 people, including one child, have been killed and more than 309 wounded by rocket fire that has been the most intense to ever rain down on the Jewish state.

Islamic Jihad said it fired more rockets towards Tel Aviv, and air raids sirens

wailed across Israel again yesterday, especially near the Gaza border.

Israeli bombardment of Gaza has displaced 38,000 people and made 2,500 homeless, the United Nations said.

It has also battered crucial infrastructure, with the electricity authority yesterday warning it only had enough fuel left to provide power for another two to three days.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said yesterday he had requested "details" and a "justification" for the strike.

Press freedom watchdog Reporters sans Frontiers (RSF) on Sunday asked the International Criminal Court to determine whether Israeli air strikes on a Gaza building housing media outlets constituted war a crime.

India has condemned indiscriminate rocket firings from Gaza targeting the civilian population in Israel and the retaliatory strikes into Gaza and called for immediate de-escalation of tensions in the region, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

Banks see deposit surge

FROM PAGE 1

assets worth Tk 14,295 crore in the first nine months of this fiscal year by showing their wealth in the form of cash, fixed deposit receipts (FDRs), saving certificates and shares. The National Board of Revenue got Tk 1,439 crore in taxes, said tax officials.

Bankers and analysts see a correlation between the whitening of black money and the rise in funds in the accounts with deposits of Tk 1 crore and above each.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank Ltd (MTBL), said the provision for legalising undeclared income might have led to the increase in deposits in such bank accounts.

Mid Abdus Salam Azad, MD of Janata Bank Ltd, and Abul Kashem Md Shirin, MD of Dutch-Bangla Bank Ltd (DBBL), echoed Mahbubur's views.

Deposits in the accounts with Tk 1 crore and above each rose to a large extent in the second half of last year.

Between July and December last year, Tk 43,657 crore was deposited with such accounts, up by 330 percent from Tk 10,248 crore during the same period in 2019.

The overall deposit in the banking sector stood at Tk 13,79,250 crore as of December last year, up by 13 percent year-on-year. The deposit growth was 12 percent in 2019 and 10 percent in 2018.

This gives a clear indication that the deposit growth in such accounts last year was faster than the overall deposit growth in the banking sector.

Muhammad Abdul Mazid, ex-secretary and former chairman of the NBR, said a vested quarter had put huge pressure on the government to give the scope for legalising undisclosed wealth.

"Black money never brings anything good for the economy. They [holders of black money] usually buy land or shares in the capital market."

Whitening of undisclosed wealth

pushes up prices of shares and land in tandem, and this creates troubles for commoners in investing in these sectors, he mentioned.

A good number of delinquent individuals usually deposited their funds with banks in the name of their relatives. Now, they are transferring those funds to their own bank accounts, causing a surge in deposits in the accounts with Tk 1 crore and above each, Mazid said.

With the injection of undisclosed money into banks, the banking sector had excess liquidity of Tk 198,000 crore till March this year, according to BB data.

"An individual may have to pay as high as 25 percent income tax a year, but the vested quarters are legalising their illegal money by paying only 10 percent tax."

Mazid pointed out that the government measure has encouraged corruption, creating a disorder in the entire financial sector.

Nasiruddin Ahmed, another ex-chairman of the NBR, said that if the government rolled out automation on a massive scale ranging from the banking sector to the NBR, it would not have needed the provision for legalising undisclosed money.

Automation helps curb corruption and tax evasion simultaneously, he noted.

A section of the businesspeople, who hold key positions in the government, persuaded it to keep the provision to fulfil vested interests, he said.

Since undisclosed money is not legally earned, the government measure for whitening it should not be supported under any circumstances, he noted.

However, Manirul Huda, president of the Bangladesh Tax Lawyers' Association, is in favour of the scope for legalising untaxed money.

"The initiative has helped the government bring back money to the mainstream."

Journalist harassed at Secretariat

FROM PAGE 1

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, filed the case with Shahbagh Police Station last night.

Hanun Or Rashid, additional deputy commissioner (Ramna Division) of DMP, confirmed the development to The Daily Star. Talking to journalists around 11:00pm, the police official said Rozina was arrested in the case.

Rozina Islam has been charged under sections 379 and 411 of the Penal Code and sections 3 and 5 of the Official Secrets Act, he said. The officer also said she would be produced before court.

As the news that Rozina was harassed spread, journalists rushed to the Secretariat yesterday afternoon. They also started staging protests in front of the police station after 9:00pm, demanding Rozina's immediate release.

Different local and international organisations, including Committee to Protest Journalists (CPI) and Amnesty International, also issued statements protesting the incident.

Like any other day, Rozina went to the Secretariat yesterday to discharge her professional duties. Around 3:00pm, journalists on the Secretariat beat came to know that she was confined to the office room of health services division secretary's personal secretary.

The journalists tried to reach her but failed. They came to know that Rozina's cell phone was taken away. Later, police were called and they surrounded her. Rozina was confined there for more

than five hours. At one stage, she fell sick and collapsed on the floor. Journalists present said Rozina was harassed.

Although the media wanted to know why the journalist was confined to the room, health ministry officials did not say anything. Despite being approached repeatedly, Health Services Secretary Lokman Hossain Miah did not meet or speak to reporters.

Other journalists joined them, hearing the news, and protested the confinement. They also demanded that Rozina be taken to a hospital.

Amid this situation, Rozina was taken to Shahbagh Police Station around 8:30pm in a police vehicle.

Later, the health ministry's Information Officer Maidul Islam Prodhan came out of the secretary's room and told reporters that a complaint had been lodged against Rozina with the police station for taking pictures of some documents and taking some papers.

Police later said that journalist Rozina was brought to the police station following a health ministry complaint.

PROTESTS
Scathing criticism and protests followed the detention of the senior journalist.

Expressing protest, different local and international organisations, including CPI, Amnesty International (AI), Jatiya Press Club, Dhaka Reporters Unity, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, Dhaka Union of Journalists, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), and the Jatiya Party

and different dignitaries demanded her release.

CPI, a New York-based organisation working for the rights of journalists around the world, expressed deep concern over the arrest.

CPI said Rozina went to the Secretariat in Bangladesh to perform her professional duties. CPI called for her immediate release.

Human Rights group AI termed the arrest of journalist Rozina Islam while carrying out her professional duty a blow to freedom of the press. In a tweet, it called on the authorities to release Rozina unconditionally and quickly.

Jatiya Press Club President Farida Yasmin said Rozina Islam is unique in investigative journalism. She has international recognition. It is unjust for such a journalist to be confined for hours.

"There is a need for a proper investigation into the reason for her confinement and the fact that she was not taken to the hospital even after she fell ill. We need to find out who was responsible for harassing Rozina," she also said.

M Abdullah, president of a faction of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, said the way Rozina was treated was a heinous act. The journalist community is worried, angry and surprised by this incident. It is a reflection of the continuing aggression against independent and investigative journalism and free media.

Mursalim Nomani and Mosiur Rahman Khan, president and general

US looking into Bangladesh-made Covid shots

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US ambassador to Bangladesh Earl R Miller yesterday said the US is exploring the possibilities of producing vaccines in Bangladeshi pharmaceutical companies.

He said this at a meeting at the Foreign minister with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam.

They discussed the ongoing cooperation between the two countries in combating the Covid-19 pandemic, including providing vaccine for meeting Bangladesh's immediate needs.

Miller informed that the US government is working on the issue of vaccine supplies and has recommended having a regional approach in South Asia in distributing vaccines from the US.

Bangladesh had requested the US to provide vaccines after it said it would start sharing up to 60 million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine with other countries over the next few weeks.

"He [Miller] also told us that the US government is exploring the possibilities of producing US vaccines in Bangladeshi pharmaceutical companies," Shahriar Alam told reporters after the discussion.

The announcement came at a time when many countries are struggling to obtain vaccines amid a huge global demand, with India witnessing record cases of infections and deaths.

Bangladesh is going to run out of its available vaccines brought from the Serum Institute of India, who, in March, halted export of vaccines due to massive domestic needs.

Bangladesh is also in talks with Russia and China for co-production of their vaccines in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, State Minister Alam also urged the US to take up a proactive role to immediately stop the bloodshed in Palestine, while reiterating Bangladesh's support for the two-state solution.

He also urged the provision of interview slots on time for Bangladeshi students applying for visa with the intention of higher studies in the US, as several thousand Bangladeshi students, who have been trying to go to the US for education, have been stuck here due to the lockdown.

Miller assured that they are working on resolving the backlog created by the lockdown situation.

He also said the US would continue its support to Bangladesh in bearing the burden of the Rohingya as they spoke of launching the Joint Response Plan (JRP) in this regard.

About the US government's "2020 Report on International Religious Freedom", released on May 12, Alam said it did not properly reflect the scenario at home, as the Bangladesh government is giving utmost efforts to ensure communal harmony and non-discrimination in the country.

He added that the government is gradually implementing the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Treaty signed by the Awami League government in 1997.

The report said communal attacks on religious minorities in Bangladesh are on the rise, and it emphasised on the importance of their (minorities') protection. It said that the government often remains ineffective in preventing forced evictions and land seizures stemming from land disputes, as alleged by religious groups.

Dhaka signs

FROM PAGE 1

in principle local co-production of the vaccine involving Bangladeshi drug makers.

Early last year, Beijing Institute of Biological Products developed an inactivated coronavirus vaccine called BBIBP-CoV. On December 30 last year, China's state-owned company Sinopharm announced that the vaccine has an efficacy rate of 79.34 percent. The Chinese government then approve it.

China, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Pakistan and some other countries are currently using it.

The vaccine has already been given to millions of people in China and elsewhere in the world. It is administered in two doses 28 days apart.

On May 7 this year, World Health Organisation granted emergency approval to the Sinopharm vaccine, the first one developed by a non-Western country to have got WHO backing.

secretary of Dhaka Reporters' Unity, strongly condemned and protested the harassment of Rozina. They demanded her immediate release and called for an investigation to find out those responsible for the incident.

Sajjad Alam Khan, general secretary of Dhaka Union of Journalist, said the government should ensure that no innocent journalist is harassed.

Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader has strongly condemned the arrest and harassment of Rozina Islam.

In a statement, he said an impartial investigation was needed in this regard.

"The harassment she faced is very shameful. It is the responsibility of the state to ensure independent journalism and the safety of journalists."

Dr Fauzia Moslem and Maleka Banu, president and general secretary of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad strongly condemned harassment of journalist Rozina while carrying out her professional duty.

ASK condemned the confinement and harassment of Rozina Islam. In a statement, ASK said Rozina Islam was working to ensure the people's right to information through objective news coverage. In her reports, she highlighted various corruptions and irregularities of the health ministry. Undoubtedly, these reports have played an important role in ensuring good governance and accountability in the health sector. It is not acceptable to detain such a journalist in the course of her professional work.