



The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

www.thedailystar.net

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SHAWWAL 7, 1442 HJRI

16 PAGES PLUS SHOUT PRICE : Tk12.00



"In a way, the health minister backed the ominous nexus of bureaucrats and businessmen."
WORKERS PARTY PRESIDENT RASHED KHAN MENON ABOUT HEALTH MINISTER'S STATEMENT ON PROTHOM ALO'S REPORTER ROZINA ISLAM



"Journalists need to be able to do their work free of any sort of harassment or physical threat anywhere around the world. And, obviously, that includes Bangladesh and every other country."
UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S SPOKESPERSON STÉPHANE DUJARRIC



"You have to learn from history, but we don't seem to."
WHO SENIOR SCIENTIST SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN ON COVID MANAGEMENT

Too frail to fight

The country's health sector still has a long way to go in combating worst Covid case scenario

MOUDDUD AHMED SUJAN

The country's health sector looks ill-equipped to tackle a massive surge in Covid cases or anything close to the situation in India.

Though there have been some improvements in management capacity over the last year, experts say it is far from enough.

The government is yet to set up ICU facilities in 29 district-level public hospitals while the number of daily Covid-19 tests is still inadequate.

Besides, most of the 421 upazila health complexes lack the necessary human resources and life-saving equipment like high-flow oxygen supply, crucial to treating critical Covid-19 patients.

Although the country has been experiencing a decreasing trend in daily infection rate and death since mid-April, it has started rising steeply again in the last three days -- 1,608 new cases yesterday from 261 on May 15.

Experts warned that there is no room for complacency as the four mutated coronavirus "variants of concern" -- especially the Indian one -- have already spread in the country.

Besides, any new mutated variant can turn deadly in the days to come while the uncertainty over the mass Covid-19 vaccine inoculation drive has left the nation barely

"It was the duty of the health ministry to take initiatives at the right time but they didn't."

FINANCE MINISTER
AHM MOSTAFA KAMAL
YESTERDAY

protected, they said.

"We are still almost there where we were a year ago," Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist told The Daily Star recently.

"Many district-level hospitals are yet to get a central oxygen supply system. The antigen-based testing has not been introduced massively. The daily number of tests is too little yet," he also said.

Prof Dr ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), however, said otherwise.

"While we had nothing at the beginning, we have 7,000 beds for Covid-19 patients right now. If the number of patients rises to 21,000, then what can we do? So, we have to take customised preparations -- measures based on the situation," he said.

When the World Health Organisation (WHO) advised countries to take steps after Covid-19 cases first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019, DGHS kept 15 beds preserved at the Kurmitola General Hospital.

By the end of February 2020, the government turned the Kuwait-Bangladesh Friendship Hospital in Dhaka into the first Covid-19 dedicated hospital in the country. Besides, the health directorate directed all

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Children find joy as they enjoy a much-needed respite from the sweltering heat at the fountain on Bijoy Sarani intersection in the capital. A mild to moderate heat wave is sweeping over different regions of the country and it may continue.

PHOTO:
PALASH KHAN

Court to hear Rozina's bail petition today

DB to probe case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court fixed today to hear the bail petition of Prothom Alo Senior Reporter Rozina Islam after hearing part of the petition yesterday.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Jashim, on Tuesday, rejected a police plea for placing the senior reporter on a five-day remand.

Rozina is in jail now in a case filed by the health ministry under several sections of the Official Secrets Act and penal code. She is accused of stealing and taking photos of "highly sensitive" government documents.

She was taken to Kashimpur Central Women's Jail after a Dhaka court rejected the remand plea.

Rozina wrote several in-depth reports on corruption in the health sector amid the pandemic.

Her family members and her colleagues refuted the allegations and said she was framed while discharging her professional

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Health ministry's ad and freedom of press

MAHFUZ ANAM

It is not often that the government spends public money (does it have the right to do so?) to vilify a senior journalist who has established her credentials as a bold, effective and highly competent investigative journalist. It is mainly due to her work that many corruption cases stand revealed. All stories are solidly sourced and based on official documents, letters of complaint by responsible officials and findings by officially constituted bodies. These reports show that conscientious officials were informing higher officials about huge corruption and demanding action.

It is not surprising that nothing much has happened in terms of investigating those corruption that involved hundreds of crores of taka. And again it is not surprising that instead of the corrupt, the journalist who revealed the corruption stands accused today and is in jail who, we hope, will get bail today.

The health ministry in an advertisement, published yesterday, in this paper and many others, tried to prove that Rozina Islam had wrongfully entered the office of the Private Secretary (PS) to the health secretary, took photographs of some official documents by her mobile phone and also tried to "steal" some documents.

For this alleged action, Rozina was confined to the PS's office for nearly six hours -- from 3:00pm to 8:30 pm (approximately) -- and harassed physically and mentally during this period. She had to suffer verbal abuse and humiliating utterances made by staffs of various levels at the ministry.

On the basis of information provided in the advertisement, several issues that need to be raised are extremely important for the future of journalism in Bangladesh.

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UN concerned over arrest of Rozina Islam

Protests keep pouring in

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN expressed concerns over the harassment and arrest of journalist Rozina Islam in Dhaka.

"Look, I've seen... we've seen the press reports on the journalist that was arrested in Bangladesh. It is, obviously, something that we are looking at. It is something that's concerning," said Stéphane Dujarric, spokesperson of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, in response to a question at a briefing Tuesday.

Prothom Alo Senior Reporter Rozina Islam, who wrote several in-depth reports on corruption in the health sector amid the Covid-19 pandemic, was sued by the health ministry on charges of stealing and taking photos of "highly

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OPINION

Govt shoots a messenger

Safety for public interest journalism should be there under 2011 law



SYED ASHFAQUL HAQUE

She wasn't handcuffed. Yet, she was indeed guarded by hordes of police personnel all the time: from custody to court. Following an overnight stay in custody, she was taken to court with a "guard of dishonour" and then hauled on to a prison van to jail on Tuesday.

But who's this woman, one of the most wanted criminals? No. She is Rozina Islam, a competent reporter from the country's leading Bangla daily, Prothom Alo. Then, why was a journalist treated like a dangerous criminal?

From the footage and cell-phone clicks going viral in the

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Noab expresses dismay over harassment of Rozina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab) has expressed dismay at the physical harassment of daily Prothom Alo senior reporter Rozina Islam at the secretariat and the handover of the journalist to police on Monday.

Rozina, who was on professional duty at the secretariat, was confined to a room for five hours and she suffered physical harassment and verbal intimidation with her mobile phones being searched, said a statement, signed by Noab President AK Azad and Vice-President ASM Shahidullah Khan (Badal).

"Noab observes that Rozina Islam is known for her honest investigative journalistic practices and

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NID services going to Home from EC

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

All services relating to National Identity (NID) cards are set to be shifted from the Election Commission to the home ministry.

The Prime Minister's Office has instructed the cabinet division to take necessary steps to shift NID-related services to the Security Services Division under the home ministry.

Security Services Division Secretary Mokabbir Hossain and Election Commission Secretary Humayun Kabir Khandaker yesterday confirmed to The Daily Star that they have received the copy of the PMO letter issued on Monday.

"The PMO instructed the Cabinet Division regarding the matter. Many laws and rules will need to be changed and after that the responsibilities will be shifted to us," Mokabbir Hossain said yesterday.

Humayun Kabir said he received the copies of the letter on Tuesday afternoon. "We will review the matter soon."

About whether the EC was informed about the shift, Humayun said, "I was not aware of the matter before [receiving the letter]."

Currently, NID-related services are being provided under the Election Commission, which has developed the NID database containing information on 100 million citizens aged above 18.

The NID services include issuing secure national identity cards to citizens, administering all related activities,

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Since buses are not operating due to coronavirus restrictions, many people, like the ones seen here on the back of a truck, have been finding other means of travelling as they return to the capital from their home towns after the Eid holidays. The photo was taken in Elenga area on Dhaka-Tangail highway on Tuesday.

PHOTO:
SK ENAMUL HAQ

LEGALISING UNDISCLOSED ASSETS

Scope to stay next year

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and DWAIPIYAN BARUA

The government will continue to offer the scope for legalising undisclosed money in the upcoming budget, Finance Minister AHM Mostafa Kamal said yesterday.

He said this scope would remain as long as undisclosed money stay undisclosed.

The minister made the comment while replying to queries from journalists at a virtual press briefing following the meeting of the cabinet committee on government purchase.

The government in the current fiscal year gave a wholesale opportunity to legalise black money in a bid to accelerate economic growth during the pandemic.

It introduced a provision that no authority, including the National Board of Revenue (NBR) and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), could question the sources of assets once legalised.

People were allowed to disclose any undisclosed homes, land, buildings, or flats by paying taxes as per the size of the property.

They were able to legalise cash, bank deposits, saving certificates, shares, bonds or any other securities by paying 10 percent in taxes.

They were also allowed to invest in the capital market for at least a year and show the investments in their tax returns.

The minister yesterday said if undisclosed money was not regularised or not brought to the mainstream, the economy would not get proper treatment.

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