

BANGLADESH UPDATE

1,354
New cases in 24hrs

7,89,080
Total cases

12,376
Deaths

7,3,697
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

3,475,685
Deaths

167,403,743
Total cases

MITU MURDER

Handwriting experts called into service

They are to see if Babul wrote on 2 books presented by person he was "having an affair with"

MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Cg

PBI officials probing the Mitu murder case will send the two books, seized from her husband and ex-police official Babul Akter as "evidence of his extramarital affairs", to the CID for forensic examination.

Babul got the two books -- "Taliban" written by Ahmed Rashid and "Best Kept Secret" by Jeffrey Archer -- as gifts from a woman in 2013, and he reportedly wrote about his extramarital affairs on different pages of the books, said sources in the Police Bureau of Investigation.

The books were seized from Babul, now in jail, after his father-in-law Md Mosharraf Hossain on May 12 filed the case with Panchlaish Police Station against him and eight others over Mahmuda Khanam Mitu's murder in 2016, they said.

In the case statement, Mitu's father mentioned that her daughter found the books on Babul's bookshelf and a brawl had taken place between the two when she asked about the writings in those.

Inspector Santosh Kumar Chakma, investigation officer of the case, said "We found in the books Babul's writings about several events in 2013."

"We will send those to handwriting experts at CID's forensic lab to confirm whether it's Babul who wrote those..." he told this newspaper yesterday.

The IO also mentioned that the books also contain writings of a woman with whom Babul, ex-superintendent of police, reportedly had an extramarital affair.

Meanwhile, a Chattogram court yesterday ordered the Chattogram jail authorities to take necessary steps to ensure Babul's treatment inside the prison as per the jail code.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mehnaz Rahman passed the order following a plea from Babul.

Arifur Rahman, counsel for Babul, said, "Babul is ill. We appealed to the court to send him to hospital for treatment. After the hearing, the court directed the senior jail super to take steps to provide him with treatment as per the jail code."

On June 5, 2016, Mitu was stabbed and shot dead while she was taking her son to his school-bus stop at the port city's GEC intersection. After the murder, Babul filed a case against three unidentified men with Panchlaish Police Station.

On May 11 this year, the Chattogram PBI summoned Babul to its office for questioning over the murder. He failed to give satisfactory answers to the detectives and was taken into PBI custody.

The following day, Mitu's father filed a murder case against eight people, making Babul the prime accused in the case.

Curbs extended but relaxed

FROM PAGE 1

prolonged closure of schools is causing an education crisis that may cost Bangladesh and other South Asian countries over \$1 trillion in lost earnings in the long run.

The report titled South Asia Economic Focus, Spring 2021: South Asia Vaccinates also said that many of these students will find it harder to return the longer they are away from school.

YESTERDAY'S ORDER

All public transports will resume operation from today maintaining the health guidelines.

Nur Mohammad Mazumder, chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), confirmed to The Daily Star that movement of long-haul

buses will be on the roads today.

Also, 56 intercity trains and 18 local ones will resume operation from today, Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujon said during a deal signing ceremony yesterday at the Rail Bhavan.

Launch services will also resume today, said Commodore Golam Sadeq, chairman of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority.

"Wearing a mask is a must for all. Violation of the directives will result in cancellation of route permit of the launch," he added.

The government first imposed a weeklong restriction on transport services on April 5 to contain the second wave of the pandemic.

The authorities later extended the restrictions in phases to May 23.

All hands on deck

FROM PAGE 1

"What if we face a similarly dire situation as in Delhi, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal over the next 2-3 weeks once the lockdown is lifted?" asked Binayak Sen, director-general of BIDS.

Bangladesh's health system might not be able to face the onslaught of in-patients.

"If we need to go for a hard lockdown option for another 2-3 months, can we sustain it? What is the cost of guaranteed social protection for the poor and the vulnerable non-poor for the next 2-3 months especially in large cities?"

Subsequently, he went on to call for a realistic revision of the growth targets.

"If we can achieve even a 5 percent GDP growth rate, that would be a great achievement in a COVID year. But, we need to support agriculture and health sectors along with remittance and exports."

The health sector is a particular concern, as it was not able to absorb even a significant fraction of the earmarked resources, Sen added.

Planning Minister MA Mannan echoed the same as Sen.

"Simply allocating money is not enough."

Last year, the planning ministry had hastily approved two health-related projects with support from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

But the health ministry could not complete the projects.

"You cannot consider a point with still picture," Mannan said, adding that damage control is the government's main strategy at present.

The government is trying to take steps coordinating between saving both lives and livelihoods, he added.

It has been alleged that poor people are not getting government assistance, said Moshir Rahman, economic affairs

advisor to the Prime Minister.

The major problem in reaching assistance to the poor and low-income people, especially in rural areas, is the difficulty in getting information on those who need the assistance.

"Many low-income people who are suffering from a financial crisis do not even express it," he said, adding that the government can centrally fix the allocation.

Similarly, ensuring the informal sector workers are getting the aid from the stimulus packages has proven to be a tricky affair, Rahman added.

Meerjady Sabrina Flora, additional director general at the DGHS, said, "If a working person, who could have contributed to the government's revenue earning, dies, livelihood would be affected permanently."

Underscoring the need for arresting the spread of the virus, she urged for coordinated efforts as the government cannot do it all alone.

Regarding the fragile health sector that came to the fore after the onset of Covid, she said: "The progress made in the public health sector before Covid was praised globally."

Not only Bangladesh but many developed countries faced difficulty in providing health services after the arrival of coronavirus, nobody had experience in this regard and thus it would not be wise to blame Bangladesh alone.

Anir Chowdhury, policy advisor to the a2i Programme of the Prime Minister's Office, made a presentation on the government's use of technology and big data in containing the damage of the first wave of coronavirus cases last year and in Covid-related service delivery.

The government has been able to slow the spread of the virus by going for zone-based lockdown, enabled by mobile signal.

Tigers return to winning ways

FROM PAGE 1

runs defending a total of 257.

Off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz was instrumental in the bowling department, bagging four wickets for 30 runs in his 10 overs, taking the game away from the visitors. The inexperienced Sri Lankan side kept losing wickets at regular intervals and at one stage were 102 for six inside 28 overs.

However, Wanindu Hasaranga resurrected the visitors' chances smashing five sixes and three fours in a counterattacking knock, but his departure for 74 off the bowling of Mohammad Saifuddin ended their brief hope.

Mustafizur Rahman took three wickets while Saifuddin bagged two wickets as Bangladesh earned 10 crucial points in the ICC ODI Super League.

Earlier, half-centuries from three of their most experienced batsmen -- Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad -- propelled Bangladesh to 257 for six after the hosts

had elected to bat.

Liton Das continued his poor form and was dismissed for his third duck in his last five innings, putting Bangladesh under some early pressure. Shakib Al Hasan went for 15 while Mohammad Mithun bagged a golden duck as Bangladesh struggled at one point on 99 for four.

But Tamim remained compact and registered his 51st ODI half-century before departing for 52 off 70 deliveries. Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah, though, ensured Bangladesh posted a challenging total with a 109-run fifth-wicket stand.

Mushfiqur got himself dismissed for 84 while playing a reverse-sweep against Lakshan Sandakan in the latter stage of the game while Mahmudullah got out for 54. Afif Hossain added 27 runs off balls late in the innings as the hosts scored 24 of the last two overs.

Off-spinner Dhananjaya de Silva was the pick of the bowlers for the Lankans with three wickets for 45 runs.



Members of Chhatra Union push a barricade at the Secretariat in the capital around noon yesterday. The students were demanding the resignation of the health minister and the health secretary in connection with journalist Rozina Islam's confinement at the Secretariat and subsequent arrest. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Rozina walks out on bail, finally

FROM PAGE 1

Earlier, at 10:30am in the morning, the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Baki Billah passed the bail order freeing Rozina Islam from prison and allowing her to fight the legal charges levelled at her without having to undergo detention.

She was granted ad-interim bail till July 15, the date of the next hearing of the case filed under the Official Secrets Act-1923 and Penal Code.

Magistrate Mohammad Baki Billah granted her bail on a bond of Tk 5,000 with two guarantors -- one of whom must be a lawyer, and the other a local guardian.

Her bail also came with the condition that she must surrender her passport.

Unlike last Thursday, the prosecution yesterday did not oppose Rozina's bail. "We have no objection to Rozina getting bail," said Public Prosecutor Abdullah Abu.

During the previous hearing, the prosecution had repeatedly insisted that Rozina should not be granted bail because she "stole" state secrets.

After delivering the order, Magistrate Billah also said, "It is the duty of journalists to protect the image of society and state. I hope that from now on, we will all act responsibly."

As a journalist, Rozina has

uncovered corruption and won a multitude of national and international awards, including one presented by the Anti-Corruption Commission called "Media Award on Corruption Prevention in Bangladesh".

After the hearing on Thursday, Magistrate Billah had postponed making a decision about Rozina's bail till yesterday to give the prosecution more time to submit evidence.

The prosecution had said they would submit a leaked video to the court that was circulated by the Health Ministry Media Cell Facebook page the night before the journalist's bail hearing.

The seven-minute video shows ministry officials and on-duty police interrogating and manhandling the journalist. At one point during the interrogation, she said, "I made a mistake and I would be willing to give a written undertaking."

Although the plea for more time to submit the video had kept Rozina imprisoned over the weekend, Nizamuddin Fakir, general recording officer of Shahbagh Police Station, said no such evidence was given to the court.

Instead, the investigation officer (IO) of the case, Inspector Moshed Hossain Khan of the Dhaka

Metropolitan Police's Detective Branch (DB), requested the court to grant him permission to conduct a forensic analysis of two cellphones that were seized from Rozina.

The nature of Rozina's work was such that it relied on government whistleblowers who she protected under the cloak of anonymity, and the upcoming forensic analysis raises questions about whether their identities would now be revealed.

For example, in one of the several videos leaked regarding the incident at the health ministry last Monday -- where Rozina was confined for more than five hours -- she insisted that she was invited into the room by a source, but refrained from divulging any identities.

Jyotirmoy Barua, one of Rozina's lawyers, said, "The investigators should make sure the privacy of Rozina's sources are not breached. They cannot communicate with the whistleblowers without permission from the court. It should be remembered that Section 5 of the Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act 2011 gives protection to Rozina's sources."

He added that they will approach the court with this matter to ensure that sources and whistleblowers are protected.

It's rare in case of journo

FROM PAGE 1

Monday under the Official Secrets Act-1923 and the Penal Code on charges of stealing and taking photos of "highly sensitive" government documents.

She was arrested after being confined for more than five hours at the Secretariat earlier that day.

Yesterday morning, the court of Metropolitan Magistrate of Dhaka Mohammad Baki Billah granted ad-interim bail to Rozina on the condition that she surrender her passport on a bond of Tk 5,000 with two guarantors -- one of whom must be a lawyer, and the other a legal guardian.

Supreme Court lawyer and Editor of Dhaka Law Reports (DLR) Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star that he does not know whether any journalist has earlier been ordered to surrender his or her passport while being granted bail in a case.

He however said there is no illegality in the court order, and no question will be raised against the

order.

If Rozina submits an application to the court concerned for getting her passport back to go abroad for any urgent tasks, the court will order that her passport be returned, Khurshid Alam Khan.

Public Prosecutor for the Anti-Corruption Commission Mir Ahmed Ali Salam told The Daily Star that 18 former and current high-placed officials of AB Bank had surrendered their passports before a Dhaka court last year while securing bail in a Tk 126 crore money laundering case.

"I don't know whether any journalist has been ordered to surrender his or her passport previously to secure bail in any case," he said.

Additional Public Prosecutor of Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court Tapash Kumar Pal told this newspaper, "As far as I know, the court orders high-profile persons accused in graft, money laundering, political and murder cases to surrender their

passports while granting bail.

"But such orders are not usually issued in cases against journalists," he said.

Supreme Court lawyer Manzill Murshid, who has moved more than 400 public interest litigations, said instances of court orders on journalists to surrender their passports while being granted bail are not ordinarily found.

He added that the conditional bail is illegal.

Lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir, head of Law Lab which conducts research on laws and the constitution, told this newspaper, "Our criminal jurisdiction does not allow conditional bail. Under Article 36 of the constitution, it is the fundamental right of a citizen of Bangladesh to have a passport and leave and return to the country. Journalist Rozina Islam will not be able to enjoy this fundamental right at this moment due to the imposition of the condition on her."

Youth 'beaten to death at rehab'

A CORRESPONDENT, Jashore

A boy was beaten to death allegedly by staffers of a drug rehabilitation centre in Jashore.

The victim was identified as Mahfuzur Rahman, 20, from Chuadanga.

His father Moniruzzaman said Mahfuz had gotten addicted to some drugs, and so, on April 26, they admitted him to the rehabilitation centre -- "Madokasokti Niramoy O Punorbashon Kendra" -- in Jashore's Rail Road.

"On Saturday [May 22] evening, we got information that the rehabilitation centre's staffers had beaten my son to death and sent the body to Jashore General Hospital as an 'unidentified' body..We rushed to the hospital and found my son's body in the morgue."

Contacted, the hospital's emergency doctor Tanmoy Biswas said the body was brought from the rehabilitation centre. But those who brought it fled the hospital quickly without registering any of their names or addresses.

Sankar Biswas, sub-inspector of Jashore Kotwali Police Station, said injury marks were found on different parts of the body.

Tajul Islam, the police station's officer-in-charge, said police have scrutinised the rehabilitation centre's CCTV footage and found that Mahfuz was beaten to death.

Police have detained 14 staffers, including the centre's directors, for interrogation. However, the process of filing a case is still ongoing, the OC added.

Guideline

FROM PAGE 1

press conference yesterday.

Black fungus, scientifically known as Mucormycosis, is a rare but deadly infection. It is being increasingly reported in parts of India in patients who have had the coronavirus.

The condition causes discolouration of the eyes and nose, blurred vision, chest pain and breathing difficulties. In some cases, doctors have had to remove one or both eyes, or part of the jaw to stop the disease from spreading.

People with diabetes, those who have taken steroids and humidified oxygen for a long time, and Covid-19 patients with a pre-existing comorbidity are the most at risk, experts said.

Different Indian states also ordered emergency measures to counter a surge in the rare infection among Covid-19 patients.

As per data available thus far, Indian media reports that mortality rate from black fungus infections is as high as 80 percent if a patient goes untreated, or remains untreated long. If treated, it is still 40-50 percent. In cases where the infection is caught at the sinus stage, patients mostly completely recover.

No unusual black fungus infection has been reported in Bangladesh yet, officials said, adding that some precautionary measures should be taken nevertheless.

The Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) has one of the country's top laboratories, testing numerous samples for different reasons.

No case of black fungus has been detected there in the last three months. "The Birdem Hospital gets two or three cases of black fungus infection each month. It is normal. But we have to stay alert," Prof Ahmed Abu Saleh, chairman of the department, told The Daily Star.

Black fungus exists naturally in the environment, he said. "I do not think it will cause too much of a problem for us. But it turns out to be dangerous for immunocompromised people. We have to ensure that there is a stock of necessary drugs to treat it in case of an emergency."

Abu Zamil Faisal, member of the public health advisory committee of the DGHS, said the indiscriminate use of steroids to treat Covid-19 patients is making the people vulnerable.

"Physicians have not yet reported such cases. But as we have no strong surveillance system, we cannot dismiss the threat. We have to stay alert," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Black Fungus is affecting Covid-19 patients more due to prolonged administration of steroids and certain other drugs. Patients should not use steroids outside of the hospitals."

"We are discussing the issue. We hope there will be a guideline on black fungus soon."

Both the experts stressed on maintaining proper hygiene at the hospitals to prevent black fungus infections.

At yesterday's press conference, Dr Nazmul also said different health bodies of the government have been discussing the issue.

"The National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19 has been preparing a set of recommendations while the Public Health Advisory Committee [at the DGHS] is also working to set a prevention protocol. A prevention and treatment protocol on black fungus infection will be out soon," he added.

Cyclone Yaas

FROM PAGE 1

cyclone as it may change its direction at the last moment after gaining pace," he said.

The Met Office have advised all fishing boats and trawlers over the North Bay to come close to the coast and proceed with caution and not venture into the deep sea.

The Water Resources Ministry has set up a control room to monitor the cyclone and collect information.

The phone number of the control room is 01318234560, said an official release signed by the ministry's deputy secretary SM Sarwar Kamal yesterday.