

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,292
New cases in 24hrs



7,94,985
Total cases



12,480
Deaths



7,35,157
Recoveries



3,515,656
Deaths



169,262,151
Total cases

Agri project director killed in road crash

Driver lost control of the vehicle that hit a tree in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A project director of Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation was killed in a road accident in Sirajganj yesterday morning while on the way to a meeting in the capital.

Another BADC official and the driver of the vehicle were injured in the incident.

The deceased, Sazzad Hossain Bhuiyan, was the executive engineer of BADC Pabna and also the project director of an irrigation and agriculture development project in Pabna, Natore and Sirajganj districts.

He was coming to the capital in his official vehicle to join a meeting.

Officer-in-charge of Shahzadpur Police Station Shahed Mahamud Khan said when the vehicle reached Parkola area around 9:00am, the driver lost control and the vehicle ran into a tree.

Sazzad Hossain Vuiya died on the spot while his deputy, ABM Mahamud Hossain, superintendent engineer of BADC and driver Md Saidul Islam were injured, said the OC.

The injured were taken to Khwaza

Yunus Ali Medical College and Hospital.

Md Sajahan, officer-in-charge of Hatikumrul Highway Police Station, said highway police recovered the body from the spot and sent it to the Sirajganj General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

The official vehicle was taken to Hatikumrul Highway Police Station and a general diary was filed in connection with the incident.

Talking to The Daily Star, Md Rakib Al Kadir, assistant engineer of BADC, Pabna said the project director and the additional engineer were going to Dhaka to join an official meeting at the BADC headquarters.

The project director was going to the capital through Sirajganj so that he could visit BADC's Sirajganj project on the way.

After autopsy, his body will be taken to the Sirajganj BADC office, from where the body will be sent to BADC headquarters in the capital, Rakib said.

The body will then be taken to his village in Narsingdi Sadar upazila, Rakib added.



The wreckage of a vehicle which had an accident in Sirajganj Parkola area around 9:00am yesterday. Sazzad Hossain Bhuiyan, executive engineer of BADC Pabna, was killed in the incident.

PHOTO: STAR

50 officials transferred from Rab to police units

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Police Headquarters yesterday transferred 50 officials, including 10 of the rank of additional superintendent of police, from Rapid Action Battalion to different units of police.

According to the transfer order, signed by Inspector General of Police Benazir Ahmed, the officials have to hand over charges by June 3, else they will be considered stand released the following day.

The 50 have been transferred to various units of district police, Police Bureau of Investigation, and metropolitan police.

The transfer order came two days after the home ministry on May 25 suspended two police officials of the ranks of superintendent of police and assistant SP following the leak of their alleged phone conversation regarding police and Rab.

The suspended officials are: SP SM Fazlul Haque of Rab-5 and Assistant Commissioner Nazmul Hassan of

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SEXUAL ASSAULT ON GIRL

5 Bangladeshis arrested in Bengaluru

Say Indian police; video clip of the incident went viral on social media

MUNTAKIM SAAD

Police in the Indian city of Bengaluru said they arrested five Bangladeshis, four men and a woman, yesterday over the rape and torture of a young woman who they also believed to be from Bangladesh.

Footage of the incident has gone viral on social media over the last few days.

Police in Bangladesh said they identified the victim and one of the perpetrators as Bangladeshi and that they were not officially told about the arrests.

Mohiul Islam, assistant inspector general of National Central Bureau (NCB) told The Daily Star last night that they could not confirm if the rest were Bangladeshis.

Two cases under the human trafficking act and the pornography act have been filed with Hatirjheel Police Station over this incident, Tejaona Division Deputy Commissioner Md Shahidullah said.

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Covid cases fall for 2nd straight day

1,292 infected, 22 die in a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of Covid-19 cases continued to decline for the second consecutive day yesterday.

In the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, a total of 1,292 people were tested positive for the viral infection in the country.

On the previous day, a total of 1,497 new cases were detected, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With the latest figure, the total number of Covid-19 confirmed cases rose to 794,985 in the country.

In the same 24 hours, a total of 22 people have died with Covid-19, up from 17 deaths of the previous day.

With this, the total number of deaths reached 12,480, and the death rate at 1.57 percent.

Meanwhile, the positivity rate has also continued to decline for the second consecutive day yesterday.

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Coastal region still reeling

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Different rivers were flowing 10 to 111 centimetres above the danger level at different points.

Over 2,535 tonnes of fish were washed away as 17,209 ponds were flooded in different districts of the division, causing an estimated loss of Tk 82 crore to fisheries, said Anisur Rahman, deputy director of the Department of Fisheries in Barishal.

In Pataukhali, over 600 tube-wells became unusable due to the tidal surge, said Fayed Ahmed, executive engineer of the Public Health Engineering Department.

Around 92km of village roads and 20 bridges and culverts were damaged in the district, according to the Local Government Engineering Department.

In Cox's Bazar, over 2,570 houses have been damaged. Embankments in Matarbari, Chowfaldondi, Kutubdia and Moheshkhali have been damaged, officials said.

Besides, over 2,000 tonnes of salt worth Tk 85 lakh were damaged, said Zafar Iqbal Bhuiyan, deputy-general

manager of Cox's Bazar Salt Industries Development Project.

Noor Ahmed, chairman of Saint Martin's union parishad, said the island suffered severe erosion.

In Bagerhat, seven roads were damaged by flood, said Farid Uddin, executive engineer of Roads and Highways Department (RHD) in the district.

The roads between Baruikhali and Morrelganj and Carebazar and Sannasi Bazar became unusable.

"People of three unions regularly use the roads. We are suffering a lot. Locals are trying to partially repair it for the time being. We urge the government to repair the road immediately," said Nurul Islam, a resident of Chaltabunia area in Morrelganj.

In Khulna and Satkhira, coastal embankments were breached at 30 places, leaving over 100 villages waterlogged, according to WDB officials.

Koyra upazila is the worst affected area in the region, locals said.

[Our correspondents from the districts contributed to the report]

Govt steps in to ease their plight

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find jobs. This is good for us."

Sources in the expatriates welfare ministry said they have decided in principle to prove cash support to the migrants and that they would have an inter-ministerial meeting on the issue on May 30.

The Daily Star talked to at least 40 migrant workers at Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia) office in Karwan Bazar yesterday. They said they and about 1,000 others missed their flight over the last three days.

Several hundred migrants gathered at Saudia's office in the morning and waited until evening to see if anyone would help them.

They said as per Saudia's instructions they talked to their travel agents and their employers in Saudi Arabia for hotel bookings, but that was of no use.

They blamed Bangladesh government's failure to ensure hotel bookings for them and were frustrated and afraid that they would not be able to go to Saudi Arabia in time as visas of many only had a few weeks left.

Saudia on May 25 said the migrants themselves would have to book hotels, deviating from KSA government's instruction that travellers must book listed hotels through their airlines.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines, which is scheduled to resume flights to Saudi Arabian destinations tomorrow after nine days of suspension, also said passengers would have to book hotels on their own.

According to the travel advisory issued by the Saudi government that came into effect on May 20, reservation of hotel for quarantine was mandatory for people who have not been vaccinated for Covid-19.

Saudia helped migrants with hotel bookings until May 24.

Fonu Mollah, who missed his flight yesterday, said officials of Saudia told him to go to its Karwan Bazar office the day before his departure with around Tk 60,000 for his hotel stay.

"After coming here on Wednesday, I found no one here to help me with hotel booking. The airlines officials at the Dhaka airport said that I won't be able to fly as I don't have hotel booking," said a disappointed Fonu of Savar.

"After missing my flight, I came to Saudia's office. I have been waiting for six hours here but not a single official talked to me. What will we do now?"

At least 20 others, including Belal

Hossain, who was to fly with Fonu on the same flight, said they needed to know what they ought to do.

Aminul Islam, who too was to leave on the same flight, said, "What will be our fate? Where will we go now? How more will we have to suffer to get the information?"

Imam Hossain said he went to Saudia's office thrice from Chandpur in one week.

"Every time, the Saudia officials told me to come the day before my flight with the money. On Tuesday, they changed their mind and said they won't be able to help me. Finally I missed my flight on Wednesday," he said.

He claimed that at least 100 migrants failed to leave on his flight alone.

Kamruzzaman, who missed his flight on May 25, said, "My visa will expire within 10 days. I will be in serious trouble if I can't return to Saudi Arabia before that."

Md Jibon, who missed his Wednesday's 2:15am flight, said, "No one will be understand our sufferings and agony. The government says we are the remittance earning fighters. But there is no one to hear our cry and sufferings."

Despite repeated attempts, The Daily Star could not reach Saudia Country Manager Tarik A Alowaidi for comments.

Foreign Minister Momen told reporters at his office yesterday that only 13 Bangladeshis were found with the Indian variant of Covid-19 and only one person was said to have died from black fungus. But these stories got a lot of media traction.

Therefore, many countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, UAE, Bahrain, UK, South Korea, suspended flights fearing the spread of the Indian variant.

"We will do all we can to reduce migrants' trouble."

He said the government was considering vaccinating migrants with priority.

Those going to the Middle East are mostly aged 20-40 years. Currently, people above 40 are eligible for vaccination. The government is considering a special vaccination programme for those aged between 20 and 40 years, Momen said.

"One dose of Johnson & Johnson is enough... we will discuss it in the inter-ministerial meeting [Saturday]. If that is done, hassles will be reduced," he said.

Price disclosure sparks confusion

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agreement that included \$1.5 per shot as service charge for Serum's local agent Beximco Pharmaceuticals Limited.

According to the agreement, Beximco will carry the vaccine from India and transport it to the government designated district centres at its own expense.

Serum delivered the first 50 lakh doses in January, but shipped only 20 lakh in February. No other shipment has been made since then as the Indian government banned export of vaccine to meet its domestic demand.

Bangladesh is also supposed to get 6.8 crore doses of vaccines from Covax, a global vaccine alliance, this year. But the government has got a response from the Covax that it will give 1.06 lakh Pfizer vaccine on May 30.

Covax had earlier announced that Bangladesh would get around 1.27 crore doses in the first quarter (May-June).

Faced with uncertainty over getting vaccines from Serum, the government started exploring alternative sources and communicated with Russia and China in particular to secure their vaccines.

Bangladesh gave emergency use

authorisation to both Russia's Sputnik V and China's Sinopharm vaccine last month.

The Sinopharm vaccine is produced by Beijing Bio-Institute of Biological Products Co Ltd, a subsidiary of China National Biotec Group (CNBG).

The World Health Organization has listed the Sinopharm vaccine for emergency use on May 7.

The Chinese government gave 5 lakh doses of Sinopharm vaccine to Bangladesh on May 12 as gift and has also pledged to donate another six lakh doses of vaccine for second dose administration. It is now being administered to medical students and healthcare professionals.

The government started the mass inoculation against Covid-19 on February 7 with a target of vaccinating the country's 160 million people in phases.

However, only 2 percent of the population have so far got the double-dose of AstraZeneca vaccine while less than 4 percent got the first shot, according to DGHS data updated till Thursday.

The WHO last month said the wealthy countries have received the

vast majority of the world's supply of Covid-19 vaccine doses, while poor countries have obtained less than 1 percent.

Of the 700 million vaccine doses that have been 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," said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

PFIZER VACCINE GETS APPROVAL Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) has issued emergency use authorisation to the Pfizer mRNA Covid-19 vaccine in the country yesterday, said a press release signed by Maj Gen Md Mahabubur Rahman, director general of DGDA.

Produced by Pfizer Manufacturing Belgium NV, this is the fourth Covid vaccine approved for emergency use in Bangladesh after AstraZeneca's Covishield, Russia's Sputnik V and Sinopharm's BBIBP-CorV.

Health officials said they were planning to use the Pfizer vaccine in Dhaka city considering the storage capacity.

Narcos now out to create LSD market

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Dulal said the drug is expensive, highly stimulant and hallucinogenic. People lose control on themselves after taking LSD and it causes lethal and suicidal tendencies, he said.

DNC officials said after the first seizure, they believed it was brought into Bangladesh for individual consumptions and never realised that it might become widespread.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Muzibur Rahman Patwary, additional director of the DNC, said, "We have so far come to know that a narcotic smuggling syndicate is trying to create a market for LSD in Bangladesh."

"We have already sent a red alert to all our offices across the country to remain vigilant and take action immediately whenever any information regarding LSD is found."

LSD KILLS This newspaper managed to talk to an LSD user, who witnessed one of their friends suffering from depression commit suicide after consuming LSD.

"We would take the drug in groups. One group member would not take the drug and be in charge of the others in case anyone went out of control," said the user.

"One day, a friend who had been suffering from depression took the drug with all of us. Before we could do anything, he suddenly screamed,

ran and jumped out the window, ultimately taking his own life."

SMUGGLED FROM THE NETHERLANDS

DB chief Hafiz Akter said that during primary investigation, they have come to know that the arrestee Rupol was involved with the business for the past one year, and Turjo and Ashraf for last couple of months.

The arrestees used to receive the drug from an unknown person they called "Team" through postal service from the Netherlands, he said.

"The young boys communicated with the supplier in the Netherlands through Telegram, a cloud-based instant messaging app, and used to send money through paypal. They used to buy each of the blot at Tk 800-1,000 from the Netherlands."

Asked about increasing vigilance on postal service to stop narcotics smuggling, the DB chief said they would definitely propose it to the higher authorities as it needs multilevel engagement.

He further said they would seek assistance from Interpol to take action at the source of the drug export.

The DMP also got information of other groups selling LSD in the country through a social media group.

"We have collected details of the members who founded the social media group. We are also collecting information about the users," he said.

Monsoon nears, projects nowhere

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BWDB is currently carrying out more than 100 projects worth around Tk 42,868 crore mainly for the protection, dredging and excavation of rivers and canals in the country.

The two dozen projects which are getting delayed were undertaken 2016 onwards.

UNTOLD DAMAGE LAST YEAR During the rainy season last year, the fury of the Arial Khan river caused massive damage to croplands and homesteads in Shibchar upazila of Madaripur.

In January last year, long before the floods hit during the monsoon, the BWDB had undertaken a Tk 394.47 crore project for dredging and protecting the river banks. However, as of this month, the authorities are yet to appoint a contractor due to bureaucratic tangles.

"Had the project been implemented on time, the flood wouldn't have caused that much harm to us," said Akhteruzzaman, chairman of Shibchar's Sannasirchar union.

The floods last year severely damaged four unions in the upazila situated on the banks of the Arial Khan.

"Many people of the area who lost their land and homes in the floods are still struggling," said Akhteruzzaman.

Kuddus Daroga, a UP member of Duttapra union, said around a hundred houses were eroded and thousands of people went through untold sufferings last year.

"Another monsoon is only a month away. If a flood hits again, more people will become homeless," he said recently.

Contacted recently, BWDB's Executive Engineer and Project Director Partha Pratim Saha said, "The board opted for Direct Procurement Method for the work [on the Arial Khan river]. It is currently pending approval from the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase."

He added they have to go through many procedures that delay most of these flood management and control projects.

Work to protect both banks of the Dharla river in Kurigram district from flooding was scheduled to start in March last year. But BWDB only floated the tender recently.

Mistakes in assessment by BWDB officials also caused delays in the project to protect the banks of the Ichhamati river in Karnaphuli upazila of Rangamati.

The two-and-a-half-year-long project, supposed to end this June, was divided into 15 packages. One of the packages was to protect the right

side of Ichhamati whereas the work needed to be done on the left side of the river.

"The matter [mistake] came to the fore at the time of floating the tender. It was later revised," said Project Director Nurul Islam, adding that it was one of the reasons for the delay.

Re-excavation of the Kumar river in Faridpur was a Tk 250.81 crore project, which was started in 2016 with the project completion date fixed at December 2020. The deadline was later extended.

At a project evaluation meeting on October 27 last year, it was identified that the contractor had not mobilised enough dredgers to complete the work on time.

BWDB Additional Chief Engineer and Project Director Abdul Helkim told the meeting that despite his repeated correspondence with the contractor on adding another six 16-inch suction dredgers, he did not see any progress.

Contacted, BWDB Director General AKM Waheduddin Chowdhury said they have extended deadlines of the Kumar river's excavation without extra costs.

FUNDS CRUNCH

In regards to the overall situation, the DG said BWDB needs money to complete 40 projects by June but

the government's recent decision to conserve spending has created uncertainty.

"If we do not get money, I am afraid that these projects might be delayed."

He added that last year during the Covid-19 closure, they could not mobilise workers and equipment -- which slowed the progress of many projects.

"Once again, we've been trapped by Covid-19. The deadline of many projects will be extended but we'll try to complete our job without escalating costs."

Dr Ainun Nishat, water resources and climate change specialist, said delays not only escalate costs but also cause great suffering for people.

He held the fiscal year system as one of the major reasons for project delays.

Most of the time projects are adopted one or two months before the beginning of a fiscal year in June and when funds are allocated, the rains start. Therefore, BWDB fails to carry out the work and projects are delayed, he said.

"If we can begin our fiscal year in March or April, money will be allocated in October and they will be able to do work in the dry season in December or January," Nishat added.