

'Syria-trained IT expert' of Ansar Al Islam held in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

Members of Counter Terrorism Division of Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP) claimed to have arrested the "IT expert" of banned militant outfit Ansar Al Islam from port city's Khulshi area on Friday night.

The arrestee is Shakhawat Ali alias Lalu (40), a resident of Wasa area under Khulshi.

According to investigators, the alleged militant operative trained in Syria from Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams (HTS) in 2017.

Hasan Md Shawkat Ali, deputy commissioner (DC) of CT division, said Shakhawat was arrested in front of Central Ahle Hadith Jame Mosque of South Khulshi.

They also seized some books and documents

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Right at the entryway to Hatirheel from Rampura, these sculptures were erected to beautify the area. But after months of neglect, they are now getting covered in growing shrubbery. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Writing was on the wall

Authorities' delayed decision behind spread of Indian variant in Rajshahi and beyond, says RMCH director

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Most of the patients who started overwhelming the coronavirus unit of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital in the third week of May were from the frontier district of Chapainawabganj.

RMCH director Brig Gen Shamim Yazdani sensed the imminent danger as he knew their treatment capacity was limited compared to the suspected spread of the Indian variant of coronavirus.

He continued to insist local authorities to impose a lockdown in Rajshahi city and other districts of the region in this regard.

But they waited till Friday to pay heed to his recommendations.

From Friday afternoon, more than two weeks after the recommendations, the district administration in Rajshahi started imposing a seven-day "all-out lockdown" closing all markets, shopping malls and restricting all types of vehicular movement.

Railway authorities too suspended its services.

But by this time, the Indian variant has spread into communities, not only in Rajshahi, but also to different districts

across the country.

Since May, the death toll due to this variant continues to rise.

On Friday, at least 15 people, including seven Covid-19 positive and eight suspected patients, died, raising the toll to 157 since May 24.

The report of two RT-PCR laboratories in Rajshahi on Thursday found that the coronavirus infection rate in Rajshahi district was 38.34 percent. In Natore the rate was 60.28 percent, in Naogaon 50 percent and in Chapainawabganj 39 percent.

Though the authorities continued to add more wards and beds to its corona unit, they were getting occupied by patients in no time.

"We tried our best to prevent the virus, but failed. It's too late now," Brig Gen Yazdani told The Daily Star on Saturday.

"There's no doubt now that it's the deadly delta variant and it has its grip on the communities," he said.

In the middle of May, when the virus gripped its hold on India, the RMCH director heard of "illegal intrusions" across the border.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

UP, POURASABHA ELECTIONS

Barishal polls officials voice worries to CEC

SUSHANTA GHOSH, BARISHAL

Field-level election officials have expressed fear of chaos at the upcoming Union Parishad and Pourasabha elections, stemming from confrontational local politics and factional feuds.

At a views-exchange meeting with Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda yesterday, they requested to assign magistrates for each union. Not only that, election officials also wanted sufficient number of magistrates and law enforcement personnel at violence-prone and remote polling centres.

The meeting was held at the city's circuit house, ahead of the upcoming first phase of the 173 Union Parishad and one municipal election in the division.

Deputy Commissioner Md Jasimuddin presided over the meeting where the divisional commissioner and representatives from divisional and district level police administration were present.

Field-level officials stressed on the need for special measures for centres that have a prevalence of violence during polling.

The CEC assured them that untoward situations will dealt with by the local administration. "They have promised to provide additional magistrates, law enforcement personnel, and vehicles in violence-prone areas," he said.

The CEC said when it comes to perpetrators of poll-time violence, one's party affiliation will not be considered, and directed strict action against violators of electoral code of conduct.

Addressing the concern surrounding elections during the pandemic, the CEC

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Govt must prepare for possible massive earthquake: experts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh may face a massive earthquake in the very near future. Therefore, the government should take necessary preparations like building awareness among citizens, monitoring and maintaining building code, and assessing existing buildings with collaboration of private sector, said speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

The Daily Star and GPH-Ispat jointly organised the virtual roundtable titled "Earthquake Risks in Bangladesh and Our Preparedness". On this day in 1897, about 1,600 people died in different places -- including Sylhet, Sunamganj and Dhaka -- in the "Assam earthquake".

Prof Syed Humayun Akhter of geology department at Dhaka University (DU) said a seismic gap, a part of an active fault that may produce major earthquakes but has not experienced much seismic activity for a long time, is present from Chattogram to Sylhet.

This can result in an 8.2 to 9 magnitude earthquake and be the main source of a massive earthquake in Bangladesh. Another danger zone is in Dauki fault, which runs through the north-eastern part of Bangladesh. It can be a reason for 7.5-8 magnitude earthquakes, he said.

"Earthquakes had not occurred in this area for hundreds of years, and that is the biggest fear for us. Because lots of energy is saved there at this moment," he said, adding that this is only scientific data for people to take necessary preparation, not to spread panic.

Speakers said both sources of earthquakes are near Dhaka, which is an unplanned city. People need awareness about earthquakes and have to maintain building codes. Old buildings should be rechecked to see whether they have earthquake-resistant construction, and the government should have a proper plan, which includes pre- and post-earthquake moments.

Prof Mehedi Ahmed Ansary of civil engineering department at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology discussed the building assessment process and conceptualising the possible threat.

"We have some awareness, but we don't have experience of facing a 7 or 8 magnitude earthquake. So, we need to

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Rafiq Azam wins int'l accolade for DSCC project

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A landscape design project based in Dhaka city has bagged the prestigious 'DNA Paris Design Award 2021'.

The "Shahid Haji Abdul Alim playground" project in Old Dhaka received honourable mention in the 'parks and public spaces, educational, community and recreation facilities' sub-category for transforming a dilapidated public space into a greenery.

Architecture firm Shatotto implemented the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) project as lead designing body, while two other organisations -- JPZ (JV) and Cubeinside Design Ltd -- were also involved.

Rafiq Azam, chief architect at Shatotto, told The Daily Star yesterday that they got an email from the France-based organisers citing the award's announcement on Friday night.

"The recognition will

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

SURGE IN COVID-19 CASES

Patients struggle as KMCH at capacity

DIPANKAR ROY, KHULNA

Poritosh came to Khulna Medical College Hospital's dedicated Covid-19 unit all the way from a Moheshkura of Bagerhat's Morelgong upazila on Thursday morning. He came to the hospital with the help of his wife and son, who told this correspondent that he has been unconscious the whole time.

However, unable to find a bed, they had to make a makeshift bed and stay on the floor of the unit in a miserable condition.

They were not alone as many Covid-19 patients were staying on the floor of the unit, unable to find an empty bed.

This is the kind of pressure Khulna region's only "Dedicated Corona Hospital" has been dealing with.

In fact, the situation has got so out of hand that Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) authorities have stopped admitting new patients, as they have run out of beds and space.

Though the total number of beds in the hospital is 100, as of Friday afternoon, it had 143 patients admitted.

Of them, 61 have tested positive, 30 are symptomatic, and 32 patients are in the High-Dependency Unit (HDU). Twenty patients are also being treated at the ICU.

"After Eid, the upward trend in the rate of infection and patients started. The rate is higher in border areas including Satkhira, Khulna, Bagerhat, Jashore, Chuadanga, and Meherpur, all of which are dependent on KMCH's dedicated coronavirus unit," said Dr Mehedi Nawaz, vice-principal of Khulna Medical College and convener of the district's coronavirus prevention committee.

Dr Suhash Ranjan Halder, resident medical officer of KMCH and focal person of the dedicated Covid-19 unit, told The Daily Star that the unit currently has more patients than capacity. As such, the authorities have suspended patient admission until the beds are vacated.

"As it is, doctors and nurses are already struggling to handle the pressure. If we admit new patients, we won't be able to care for them properly," he added.

Asked about where newly infected or symptomatic

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Allocate Tk 15,000cr to protect coasts

Lawmakers, experts urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Participants including a number of lawmakers at a virtual seminar yesterday urged the government to allocate at least Tk 15,000 crore from revenue in the 2021-22 national budget for coastal protection, particularly for climate-resilient embankment construction.

They suggested that the government develop an embankment maintenance strategy and ensure effective involvement of local government in the process.

The seminar was organised jointly by Coast foundation, Center for Sustainable Rural Livelihood, Center for Participatory Research and Development, and Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network on "National budget 2021-22 and Coastal Protection Issues".

Addressing as chief guest, Dhaka-9 lawmaker Saber Hossain Chowdhury proposed for adopting a new "embankment policy" and move forward.

The kind of developed country Bangladesh is dreaming to be will not be fulfilled if protection of coastal population is not ensured, said Saber, also chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.

About 2.5 crore people live in the country's coastal areas, he said.

Lawmaker Narayan Chandra Chanda of Khulna-5 constituency said lawmakers can consolidate their opinions regarding coastal protection before presenting those to the parliament.

He said natural calamities in coastal belt

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



A SHAME IN THE MAYOR'S NAME

The road that connects Tejgaon Satrasta intersection to Karwan Bazar and Farmgate is named after late Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Annisul Huq. The reason? In 2015, he almost literally fought off a syndicate to free the road that had become an illegal truck stand choking traffic, to free up a vital road link in the busy area, widened and renovated it. Only a few years after his demise, the road has been overtaken again, with vehicles coming in at night and docking for the day. Not only has it shrunk the road, but damaged the adjacent footpath (above). File photos from 2015 (left) after the reclamation and 2016 (right) after renovation shows what the road was -- and could have been even today, with enough sincerity from the authorities.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN, RASHED SHUMON, STAR FILE

