

BANGLADESH UPDATE



5,717
New cases in 24hrs



14,67,715
Total cases



25,399
Deaths



13,72,856
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

4,449,880
Deaths



212,939,216
Total cases

MAJOR SINHA MURDER

'Liaqat shot him at Pradeep's directive'

Sinha's sister testifies in court

OUR CORRESPONDENTS, Cox's Bazar

Major (ret'd) Sinha Rashed Khan was shot dead by now suspended police inspector Liaqat Ali as per instructions from Pradeep Kumar Das, former officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, said the victim's elder sister.

"I filed a murder case with a court on August 5, 2020, five days after the incident, after talking to eye witnesses and collecting information from them."

Sinha's elder sister, Sharmin Shahriar Ferdous, made the statement while placing her deposition before the Cox's Bazar District and Sessions Judge's Court yesterday.

Judge Md Ismail Hossain yesterday started recording the depositions of witnesses in the Sinha murder case.

As the plaintiff, Sharmin was the first to place her deposition.

The recording of her statement began around 9:45am and continued till around 1:00pm, said the court's Public Prosecutor Advocate Faridul Alam.

There are 83 witnesses in this case.

The court summoned 15 of them to place their depositions in the first phase between August 23 and August 25.

It recorded only Sharmin's deposition yesterday, said Faridul Alam.

Two other witnesses, Md Abdul Hamid and Mohammad Yunus,

who are residents of Teknaf upazila's Shamlapur area, yesterday appeared before the court, which decided to record their statements today.

Earlier, the dates for recording witness statements were fixed for July 26, 27 and 28. But it was not possible as they followed High Court directives given due to the lockdown, said Faridul Alam.

On June 27, the court framed charges against 15 accused.

Of them, 12 are policemen, including suspended OC Pradeep Kumar Das, police inspector Liaqat Ali, sub-inspector Md Shahjahan and assistant sub-inspector Liton Mia.

The others accused are suspended police sub-inspector Nandadul Rakshit, and suspended constables Sagar Deb, Kamal Hossain, Abdullah Al Mamun, Safanur Karim, Rubel Sharma, Md Abdullah and Md Rajib.

The remaining three accused are Nurul Amin, Nezam Uddin and Ayaz Uddin - close aides of the accused policemen.

All the accused are now in jail.

On December 13, the investigators submitted the charge sheet of the case against the 15, about five months after Sinha was killed in police firing at a check post in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf upazila on July 31 last year.

Citizens' coalition

FROM PAGE 1

"He [Mahfuz Anam] is not connected in any way with the coalition and he has no involvement with the issue," said the statement.

"Besides, Shaheen Anam is the executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, but she is not connected with the formulation of the law either.

"A propaganda is being spread against them and we are expressing our sadness over this and protesting it."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called for the formulation of a Hindu inheritance law while addressing a programme on the occasion of Janmashtami festival in 2016.

She also mentioned about equal rights of men and women on Jatiya Aingoto Sohayota Dibos (National Legal Aid Day) in 2019. Later, the

Hindu Ain Pronoyon e Nagorik Udyog Coalition formulated a draft of Hindu inheritance law, aiming to ensure equal rights of Hindu citizens to the property of their parents.

Those who signed the statement on behalf of the coalition are Aroma Dutta, MP; Nina Goswami, Ain O Salish Kendra; Dipabali Chakrabarty, Hindu Bouddha Christian Oiky Parishad; Advocate Ramlal Raha, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad; Rina Roy, human rights activist; Arpita Das, Manusher Jonno Foundation; Advocate Tajul Islam, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST); Rita Das Roy, Naripokkho; Sabrina Sultana, RDRS; Kalpana Basu, human rights activist, Banche Shekha; Ruma Halder, teacher; and Krishna Chanda and Sanchita Talukder, development activists.

Top bureaucrats disagree

FROM PAGE 1

The development came hours after the local administration, the BCC and leaders of the Awami League at a meeting decided to settle the dispute.

At least 50 people were injured on August 18 in a clash between BCC staffers - reportedly followers of the BCC mayor and members of local AL units -, and police and Ansar members over removal of banners from UNO's office in Barishal Sadar.

Later, Upazila Nirbahi Officer Munibur Rahman and police filed two cases over the incident, naming BCC Mayor Semiabat Sadiq Abdullah as the prime accused for instigating the violence. Local AL men were also accused in the cases.

On the other hand, two cases were filed against the UNO - one by Barishal city AL member and Councillor Rafiqul Islam Khokon and the other by BCC Revenue Officer Babul Halder.

In a statement on August 19, the BASA demanded immediate arrest of the BCC Mayor and legal action against him.

The association also said it thinks the incident took place at the behest of the BCC mayor.

Asked, Anwarul said, "I don't know what had actually happened. We've asked the mayor, [divisional] commissioner and law enforcement

agencies to sit and find out the reason behind it. Why would such an embarrassing incident take place?"

"We've sought time to sort it out... We're observing the situation closely... In most cases, we find that such untoward incidents occur due to miscommunication.

"The Cabinet Division and the LGRD ministry have already instructed the administration, law enforcement agencies and public representatives in Barishal to stay in touch regularly," added the cabinet secretary.

On Sunday night, top officials of Barisal Division administration, the BCC and AL leaders held a meeting and decided to settle the dispute.

Talking to our Barishal correspondent, Divisional Commissioner Saiful Islam Badol said, "The problem has been resolved in a befitting manner."

In a press release yesterday, the BCC said the unfortunate incident took place due to misunderstanding between the BCC cleaning staffers and the UNO.

The misunderstanding has been resolved, and the city administration and the district administration will work unitedly, it mentioned.

Contacted, Barishal City AL President AKM Jahangir said the cases would be withdrawn and a settlement over the issue would be reached soon.

Vaccinate industrial workers

FROM PAGE 1

"A special discussion was held over the industrial workers today [in the meeting].... Since Bangladesh would get six crore doses of vaccine from Sinopharm as per an agreement signed by the health ministry, the prime minister gave the instruction to vaccinate the workers quickly bringing them under a separate programme," said the cabinet secretary.

Besides, Hasina said she would herself oversee the matter.

"The prime minister has given instructions to vaccinate not only the workers but also their family members as forerunners," said Anwarul.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said there would be no more special campaign for mass Covid-19 vaccination due to the shortage of vaccines.

Besides, there will be no on-the-spot registration facility to take Covid-19 vaccines.

"No one will get vaccines without registration," the minister said while talking to journalists at the secretariat yesterday.

He said, "More than three and a half crore people have registered and [of them] more than two crore have been vaccinated. Registration will be based

on the amount of vaccine available."

On August 15, the health minister said the government was not able to carry out the special vaccination campaign due to shortage of Covid-19 vaccine shots.

From August 6-11, the government carried out a special vaccination campaign countrywide under which around 34 people were inoculated through on-the-spot registration.

Meanwhile, those waiting for long for the second dose of AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine have been asked to contact the nearest vaccination centres as early as possible for getting the shot.

In this regard, Directorate General of Health Services posted an announcement on its verified Facebook page yesterday.

Bangladesh received 7,81,440 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine from Japan on August 21.

From Japan, under the Covax facility, Bangladesh also received 2,45,200 AstraZeneca doses on July 24, and 7,81,320 doses on July 31, and 6,16,780 doses on August 3.

At a vaccine handover programme, Japanese Ambassador to Dhaka, ITO Naoki, said they have plans to deliver 6,34,920 more AstraZeneca jabs to Bangladesh on August 28.



A huge tailback of buses, trucks and other vehicles leading up to Paturia ferry terminal. A variety of reasons -- strong current on the Padma river slowing ferries' passage, bar on heavy vehicles on the Shimulia-Banglabazar route -- has resulted in heavier than usual traffic towards Paturia. The photo was taken yesterday.

Families go broke at pvt hospitals

FROM PAGE 1

her condition deteriorated further.

"We took her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College, Mugda Medical College Hospital and DNCC hospital, but could not find a vacant bed at those hospitals," Mamunur said, adding that they had to pay around Tk 30,000 in ambulance fare for carrying her from Cumilla and looking for beds in different hospitals.

"We eventually got a bed at the DNCC hospital, but we were already financially devastated."

Like Rokeya's, many poor and middle class families of Covid-19 patients are going broke and bankrupt as such patients are forced to take treatment at private hospitals due to the unavailability of beds in the subsidised government hospitals.

These correspondents visited five prominent private hospitals in Dhaka and talked to over a dozen family members of Covid patients. Most of them said they sold their last belongings and fell into a debt trap to fund the treatment.

The family of Monowara Begum, a woman in her 60s, is another family with a similar tale.

Monowara was admitted to the ICU of a private hospital in Mirpur on July 28. She was put on life support a few days later.

She died on August 20. Her family had to spend around Tk 50,000 every day when she was on life support. They spent the last of their

savings to continue the treatment. There is hardly anyone of their relatives from whom they did not take loans.

Her husband, Jahangir Alam, said, "We completely depended on our only son's income. He is a graphics designer and earns around Tk 25,000 per month. We had to sell all our ancestral land in our village for the treatment."

An acute shortage of space is also widespread in the private hospitals, which has exacerbated the situation for patients with financial limitations.

Sania Akhter, 23, mother of a five year old son, desperately needed a Covid bed with uninterrupted oxygen supply at the rate of eight litres per minute. However, the woman from Savar could not get any bed in public hospitals.

"When she was turned away by all the hospitals, I thought my sister would die in the ambulance. At that time, the ambulance driver took us to an under-construction hospital in Shyamoli, which had just installed some ICU beds but did not open its general wards yet," said her brother, a day labourer.

"Since then, I had to pay for all the ICU services. Seeing my helpless situation, the hospital authorities were kind enough to give us a discount of Tk 50,000," said her brother Mohammad Ibrahim.

Nevertheless, he had to pay Tk 2 lakh for her treatment.

"I am happy that we got our sister back. But I am now totally entangled in debt as I had to borrow money with high interest rates. I do not know how I'll repay these loans," he said.

A Covid-19 patient receiving treatment at a private hospital has to pay at least double than that in the government hospitals despite the fact that the duration of the stay is much shorter in private hospitals, says a recent study of the health economics unit (HEU) of the health ministry.

The average daily cost is Tk 37,128 for a general bed and Tk 68,885 for an ICU bed in private hospitals, the report said.

Md Mainul Ahasan, secretary general, Bangladesh Private Clinics and Diagnostic Owners' Association, said, "Covid treatment is expensive. We can't give patients much discounts as Covid units have high operating costs."

Moreover, the number of non-Covid patient has reduced drastically. Because of the pandemic, people don't come to hospitals and diagnostic centres unless it is an emergency," he said.

"If we give too many discounts to Covid patients, we won't be able to run our facilities."

Md Nurul Amin, deputy director (deputy secretary) of HEU who led the study, said, "The cost of treating coronavirus patients is comparatively high all over the world due to the high cost of medicines, elevated expenditure relating to manpower and facility maintenance. But that does not mean that these hospitals will be off limits to patients with financial challenges."

He said that the government can financially assist these people or pay for their treatment if they have to be hospitalised in private clinics.

It's possible to walk across the Padma now

FROM PAGE 1

So far, the Tk 30,193 crore project has witnessed 87.25 percent overall progress. The main bridge is 94.25 percent complete and river training works 84.25 percent, according to a press release from the road transport and bridges minister's office yesterday.

However, some other works including constructing railing, carpeting of the road and installing lighting facilities are yet to be completed.

In October, once the rainy season is over, the placing of a 2-millimetre waterproof membrane and then carpeting would begin, said Dewan Md Abdul Quader, project manager (main bridge) of the Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project.

"We hope we will be able to complete all works before the deadline," Quader told The Daily Star yesterday.

Meanwhile, the authorities have started the installation work of the gas pipeline on the low deck of the Padma Bridge at Jajira point in Shariatpur from August 19.

The exercise is likely to be completed within January next year, an engineer said.

One of the major features of the bridge would be a 169-km rail line connecting the capital with Jashore. That is being done under a separate Tk 39,246 crore project by the Bangladesh Railway.

The rail tracks are yet to be laid, and for that, the Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA), which is executing the Padma bridge project, has to hand over the structure to the BR.

No date has been set yet by the BBA for the handover, said Afzal Hossain, director of the Padma Bridge Rail Link

Project (PBRLP).

"We have requested them [BBA] to hand over the bridge to us in December this year. But the date has not been finalised," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

There is a meeting with the BBA and Padma bridge project authority next month.

"We hope to get a timing from the meeting. We hope they may hand over the bridge partially in December."

Vehicles would still be able to operate through the roadway of the bridge if the works for the installation of rail tracks remain incomplete.

"However, it would create a disturbance for our work. So, we want to complete the works simultaneously," he added.

[Our Munshiganj correspondent also contributed to the report]

No extension to deadline

FROM PAGE 1

Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen told Sky News yesterday.

Staying beyond the agreed deadline would be "extending occupation", he added.

Two Taliban sources meanwhile told AFP the group would not announce the makeup of its government or cabinet until the last US soldier has left the country.

The rush to leave Kabul has sparked harrowing scenes and killed at least eight people, some crushed to death while at least one person died after falling from a moving plane.

One Afghan was killed and three others were injured in a dawn firefight yesterday that according to the German military erupted between Afghan guards and unknown assailants.

German and American troops "participated in further exchange of fire", the German army said in a statement.

The Taliban, infamous for an ultra-strict interpretation of sharia law during their initial 1996-2001 rule, have repeatedly vowed a softer version this time.

'PAIN AND LOSS'

President Biden has insisted he wants to end the US military presence and the airlifts by August 31.

But with the European Union and Britain saying it would be impossible to get everyone out by then, Biden is under pressure to extend the deadline.

Speaking at the White House on Sunday, Biden said talks were under way to explore the possibility of extending the deadline.

He also acknowledged the tragic

scenes at the airport, which have included babies and children being passed to soldiers over razor-wire fences and men clinging to the outside of departing planes.

But he said they were part of the cost of departure.

"There is no way to evacuate this many people without pain and loss and heartbreaking images you see," he said.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said yesterday that Paris believed it necessary to continue Afghan evacuations beyond Washington's August 31 deadline.

"We are concerned about the deadline set by the United States on August 31. Additional time is needed to complete ongoing operations," Le Drian told reporters at the UAE's Al-Dhafra air base, where France has set up an air bridge for people evacuated from Kabul.

In the streets of the capital, the Taliban have enforced a calm of a kind, with their armed forces patrolling the streets and manning checkpoints.

Visually, they have also been looking to stamp their authority, ensuring the tri-coloured national flag is replaced with their white banner.

At a roadside in Kabul at the weekend, young men sold Taliban flags, which bear in black text the Muslim proclamation of faith and the regime's formal name: "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan".

"Our goal is to spread the flag of the Islamic Emirate throughout Afghanistan," said seller Ahmad Shakib, who studies economics at university.

RESISTANCE

Outside of Kabul, there have been flickers of resistance against the Taliban.

Some ex-government troops have gathered in the Panjshir Valley, north of the capital -- long known as an anti-Taliban bastion.

The Taliban said yesterday their fighters had surrounded resistance forces holed up in the valley, but were looking to negotiate rather than take the fight to them.

Taliban fighters "are stationed near Panjshir", spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted, saying they had the area surrounded on three sides.

"The Islamic Emirate is trying to resolve this issue peacefully," he added.

The announcement follows scattered reports of clashes overnight, with pro-Taliban social media accounts claiming gunmen were massing, and Afghanistan's former vice president Amrullah Saleh saying resistance forces were holding strong.

One of the leaders of the movement in Panjshir, named the National Resistance Front (NRF), is the son of famed anti-Taliban commander Ahmad Shah Massoud.

The NRF is prepared for a "long-term conflict" but is also still seeking to negotiate with the Taliban about an inclusive government, its spokesman Ali Maisam Nazary told AFP in an interview on the weekend.

"The conditions for a peace deal with the Taliban are decentralisation, a system that ensures social justice, equality, rights, and freedom for all," he said.

Lowest single-day Covid deaths reported in 55 days

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh logged 117 more Covid-related deaths in 24 hours till yesterday morning, the lowest in 55 days.

The country last saw 115 coronavirus-related deaths on June 30 and the upward curve of the fatalities reached its peak on August 5 and 10 with 264 deaths.

Besides, 5,717 more people came out positive for the virus after 26,789 samples were tested during the 24-hour period, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

The fresh number pushed the country's total fatalities to 25,399 while the cases reached 1,467,715.

Meanwhile, the daily case positivity rate rose to 15.54 percent from Sunday's 15.16 percent, said the DGHS.

The recovery rate rose to 93.54 percent, but the case fatality rate remained unchanged at 1.73 percent compared to the same period.

Among the new deaths, 40 died in Dhaka division, 29 in Chattogram, 13 in Sylhet, 11 in Khulna, 10 in Rajshahi, nine in Rangpur, four in Mymensingh and one in Barishal divisions.

Of them, 53 were men and 64 women.

5 sent to jail for gang-rape of woman

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A Dinajpur court sent five men to jail in a case filed for gang raping a woman after tying her husband to a tree in the district's Bashbaria village on Friday night.

Quoting the couple, police said the victims left their home in Dinajpur's Birampur upazila the same night for their relatives' home in nearby Nawabganj upazila for an emergency reason. As a battery-run three-wheeler carrying them reached Bashbaria village around 9:30pm, the five accused ambushed them.

The accused beat up the driver, tied up the husband to a tree and forcefully took the woman, 30, to a nearby jungle, where they raped her, said police.

The attackers left around 1:00am on Saturday.

Later, the woman managed to call 999 and a team from Birampur Police Station rescued the couple.

The victims were sent to Birampur Upazila Health Complex.

Based on the woman's statement, police later raided different places of the upazila and arrested the accused, said Suman Kumar Mohanta, officer-in-charge of the police station.

The woman filed a case with the police station against the arrestees, he said.

On Saturday, the accused were produced before a Dinajpur court, which sent them to jail.

The victim underwent medical examination at M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital in Dinajpur, said police.

The arrestees are: Sirajul Islam, 35, of Kanikathal village, Abdur Latif, 36, of Bagharpara village, Shuvo Mia, 20, Abu Raihan, 40, and Moinul Islam, 20, of Babaritol village of Dinajpur, police sources said.

Covid booster shots should be delayed

Says WHO chief

REUTERS, Budapest

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said yesterday that Covid-19 booster shots should be delayed as priority should be given to raising vaccination rates in countries where only 1% or 2% of the population has been inoculated.

If vaccination rates are not raised globally, stronger variants of the coronavirus could develop and vaccines intended as booster shots should be donated to countries where people have not received their first or second doses, he said during a visit to Budapest.

"In addition, there is a debate about whether booster shots are effective at all," Ghebreyesus told a news conference with Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto.

Those whose immune system is compromised should get a booster shot, though they represent only small percentage of the population, he added.

The WHO said last week current data does not indicate that Covid-19 booster shots are needed and that the most vulnerable people worldwide should be fully vaccinated before high-income countries deploy a top-up.

The United States announced last week it plans to make Covid-19 vaccine booster shots widely available starting on September 20 as infectious rise from the coronavirus Delta variant.