

BANGLADESH UPDATE

3,724
New cases in 24hrs

14,97,261
Total cases

26,109
Deaths

14,21,883
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,520,118
Deaths

217,544,609
Total cases

SCHOOL, COLLEGE REOPENING

Delhi issues guidelines

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Delhi Disaster Management Authorities yesterday announced guidelines including setting up of quarantine room for emergency use and staggered lunch-break as schools, colleges and coaching centres across Delhi resume in-person classes from September 1 after a nearly five-month hiatus.

Under the guidelines, students and teachers living in Covid containment zones will not be allowed to go to schools and colleges.

Lunch breaks in schools will be staggered to avoid crowding and should be held in open areas, according to DDMA guidelines.

A maximum 50 percent of students per classroom should be called depending upon capacity, said the guidelines, adding that schools should prepare timetable as per occupancy limit of classrooms following Covid norms.

The Delhi government has announced schools and educational institutions can resume in-person classes in a phases from September 1 when all government schools will open for classes 9 to 12 and private

schools can resume classes for 9 to 12 standards.

Coaching centres can also start classes for students of 9 to 12 standards while no decision has been taken on reopening junior classes yet.

The decision to allow resumption of physical classes in a graded manner has been taken in view of a marked improvement of the Covid situation in Delhi which added 32 fresh cases of the virus and zero fatality for the fourth consecutive day on Sunday.

The positivity rate in the national capital is 0.04 percent and it has remained below one percent for more than three months. Delhi has added a daily average of 32 cases over the past seven days.

Schools in Delhi have been shut since March last year when Covid-19 cases first started rising in the country. Classes resumed for a brief period in January and February this year before a devastating second wave of Covid-19 put the healthcare infrastructure under heavy stress.

India reported 42,909 new Covid-19 cases for the past 24 hours, a government statement said yesterday, taking the total to 32.74 million. Deaths rose by 380 to 438,210.



Devotees offer prayers before the idol of Lord Sri Krishna at the Dhakeshwari National Temple on the occasion of Janmashtami yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

A magician of words for all

FROM PAGE 1

Tagore's immortal words "phirey chal maatir taaney."

Guha's travel through Bengal countryside come out so vividly in his "Rivu" series of books some of which are dedicated to friends from his youth. It was a chapter in the 85-year-old author's life that left an indelible imprint on his evolution as a novelist and gave him a distinct place in contemporary Bangla literature.

Rivers and forests were a recurrent theme in Guha's works and his writings on travel in Bengal are considered among some of the most highly readable stuff. It also gave his novels and short stories a dreamy and romantic layer.

Buddhadheb Guha's love for nature makes him count among a handful of post-Tagore Bangla writers who have carved a niche for themselves in a way reminiscent of Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay. But the approaches to nature by Bibhutibhusan and Guha are starkly different. While there is more of mysticism and metaphysical in Bibhutibhusan's eyes to nature, Guha's handling of the subject sees him virtually looking at nature and women as interchangeable. For Guha, nature and women cannot be segregated.

Not many Bangla writers had the same felicity as Guha to straddle seamlessly between the three genres of writings—for children, "young adults" and for all others. He was the creator of Rijuda and his sidekick Rudra who roam the jungles mostly in eastern part of Bengal.

It would be an incomplete

assessment to view Guha as a writer only of rural life. He was equally at home in portraying life, relationships and emotions in suave urban settings. The writer's books like "Ektu Ushnotar Jonno" and "Babli" appealed to the yearnings of teenaged boys and girls for love as they prepared to step into the twenties of their life. There was a time when these two books were a craze with the readers of Bengali novels.

Since his first book "Jangal Mahal," Guha reeled off a series of works like "Madhukari," a seminal work in Bengali fiction, Kojagar, Ababahika, Changhare Gaan and Holud Basanta which fetched him Ananda Puroskar in 1976. Guha was far from being content with just wielding the pen. He was an accomplished classical singer and a fairly good painter, a trait not often seen in writers.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed profound shock and sorrow at the death of noted writer.

In a statement, she prayed for salvation of the departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family of Buddhadheb Guha.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed deep grief over the passing away of Buddhadheb Guha and said it was a "big loss" to the literary world. In a tweet, Modi said "Buddhadheb Guha's writings were multifaceted and displayed great sensitivity to the environment. His works were enjoyed across generations, particularly among youngsters. His passing away is a big loss to the literary world. Condolences to his family and admirers. Om Shanti."

Int'l rights body calls on UK

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operational control for all Rab battalions, it said.

As senior Rab officers, they were responsible for hundreds of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture, said the submission from the London-based legal chambers.

"Due to the frequency and pervasiveness of the abuses, public comments by Bangladeshi officials and the widespread media attention they garnered, the officials knew, or should have known, that Rab officers under their command have perpetrated serious human rights abuses," the submission said.

"There is no evidence of credible investigations or actions taken by them to stop the abuses and ensure

meaningful accountability."

The sanctions, which would bar the Rab officials from entering the UK, will send a clear message to the Bangladesh government that the UK does not tolerate serious human rights abuses, even from a partner, the submission said.

Asked about the press release, Commander Khandaker Al Moin, director of Rab's legal and media, said, "We can't comment on something that we haven't seen yet."

"This will be relayed to us via the foreign ministry," he said.

On its website, Guernica 37 said it made the same request for sanctions against "six leading members of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh" without mentioning who they were.

US drone attack 'arbitrary'

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government... we will deal with them," he added.

Pentagon officials said the suicide car bomber had been preparing to attack the airport in Kabul, where US troops were in the final stages of a withdrawal from Afghanistan, on behalf of ISIS-K, a local affiliate of Islamic State that is an enemy of both the West and the Taliban.

US Central Command said it was investigating reports of civilian casualties from Sunday's drone strike.

"We know that there were substantial and powerful subsequent explosions resulting from the destruction of the vehicle, indicating a large amount of explosive material inside that may have caused additional casualties," it said.

Meanwhile, US anti-missile defences intercepted as many as five rockets that were fired at Kabul's airport early yesterday.

The Islamic State claimed

responsibility for the attack, the group's Nasher News said on its Telegram channel.

Afghan media said the rocket attack was launched from the back of a vehicle. The Pajhwok news agency said several rockets struck different parts of the Afghan capital. Initial reports did not indicate any US casualties.

Having evacuated about 114,400 people, including foreign nationals and Afghans deemed "at risk", in an effort that began a day before Kabul fell to the Taliban on August 15, US and allied forces are set to complete their own withdrawal by today's deadline agreed with the Islamist militants.

The number of US troops at the airport had fallen below 4,000 over the weekend, as departures became more urgent after an Islamic State suicide bomb attack outside the gates on Thursday killed scores of Afghans and 13 US troops.

Traffickers target slum women

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trafficking ring.

The mother of the trafficking victim and the returnee mother filed two cases with Pallabi Police Station on August 16 against the ring. On the same day, Rab arrested accused Iqbal Hossain Kalu, Sohag alias Nagin Sohag, and Billal Hossain from the capital.

Investigators said some 15 to 20 people are involved in the racket which is trafficking women from slums in Dhaka, Gazipur, and Narayanganj.

Following the arrests of Kalu and Sohag, victims have started contacting police and Rab, said officials, adding that the accused syndicate alone trafficked over 15 women in the last one year.

Some victims alleged that police were not taking any action against the traffickers as they were influential people. Even after the arrests of some accused, the details of the syndicate are not being made public by the investigators. There is no initiative to bring back the victims from India.

Refuting the allegations, Parvez Islam, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, said they were investigating the cases.

"Two cases have already been filed regarding the incidents and three accused have been arrested. Two of them have confessed in courts," he said.

"We have identified some other members of the trafficking ring and also got information about their victims. We are now verifying the information," added the OC.

WOMAN BECOMES VICTIM WILLINGLY

The grandmother of the four-year-old learnt the state of her daughter from a woman who voluntarily became a victim so that she could rescue her own daughter.

She returned home on June 23 after rescuing her daughter from a brothel.

Speaking to this correspondent, she said the trafficking syndicate had brainwashed her daughter by saying that she should not spoil her life in the slum as she would have a better future if she took a job in a beauty parlour.

"My daughter fell into the trap and left home on January 17 when I was

away. The following day, she informed me over the phone that she was cheated and was being sold to traffickers in India," she said.

A month later, her daughter called her again from India and gave details about her whereabouts.

The mother said she then contacted police and filed a complaint, but did not get any response. Later, she hid her identity and contacted the same trafficking ring seeking a job.

The traffickers later sent her to India and took her to a brothel in New Delhi.

"I had to endure unbearable torture in the brothel for four months. While being transferred to another place by traffickers, I jumped off a running train. I ran towards the road and took an auto-rickshaw to escape the syndicate," the woman told The Daily Star.

She later reached the brothel in Kishanganj. She met a local political leader who agreed to help her get her daughter freed.

But the brothel owners said they "bought the girl" for Tk 2.5 lakh and they would not allow her to return home unless they received the amount.

The political leader helped the woman get her daughter out of the brothel. Finally, the mother and the daughter tried to cross the India-Bangladesh border in June, but the Indian Border Security Force detained the duo.

However, BSF officials, after hearing the ordeal of the two, called a flag meeting and handed them over to Border Guard Bangladesh.

After returning home, the woman filed one of the cases against the trafficking syndicate.

"I am now passing days in fear as the arrestees threatened to kill my family members after coming out of jail," said the woman.

She said she saved two more women from being trafficked by the same syndicate after returning from India.

SATKHIRA, A MAJOR ROUTE

A rickshaw puller from Kalshi slum alleged that the same ring might have trafficked her wife to India. "Kalu and Sohag were luring my wife with a good job. One day, my wife went out of home without informing me anything. I suspect that she became the victim of

the same syndicate."

Victims and law enforcers said the syndicate first takes the victims to Satkhira and keeps them in "safe houses" there. Later, it traffics the victims to India after crossing a small river.

Rab Director (legal and media wing) Commander Khandaker Al Moin said the syndicate has small "safe houses" in the bordering districts.

"The syndicate has members in both sides of the border. Members are often arrested, but they come out of jail on bail and again get involved in the same crime," he told The Daily Star.

The syndicate members use to torture the victims, force them to have drugs and harass them sexually, he said.

"We have already arrested a number of syndicate members. The law enforcement agencies' wings, who generally maintain contact with India, are also getting updates on the syndicate members active across the border. We have vigilance so that they cannot traffic more victims," the Rab official said.

The Bangladesh government prosecuted 517 suspects (184 for sex trafficking and 333 for forced labour) in the last one year, according to the Trafficking in Persons Report 2021 released in June by the US State Department.

"The government convicted seven traffickers, including one for sex trafficking, two for labour trafficking, and four for undefined trafficking crimes," reads the report.

In March this year, law enforcers detected a trafficking syndicate, who were trafficking young girls using the social media app TikTok.

They allured the girls with better careers and then trafficked them to India, where the victims ended up in brothels. These syndicates were also found using "safe houses" in Satkhira and then trafficking victims in name of sightseeing in the Bangladesh-India border.

According to Rab and police, at least 50 girls were trafficked by the "TikTok rackets". Law enforcers have so far arrested around 20 people of the syndicate and 11 of them gave confessional statements in courts.

Desperations of father trying to free son

FROM PAGE 1

"On July 25 this year, Rabbi met three youths in Iraq, including one named Shihab. They lured my son with a promise of a lucrative job in Europe. My son told me that they would take Tk 10 lakh from him only after he gets the job in Europe," Badal said in the case document.

Contacted, Shohiddullah, deputy commissioner of police (Tejgaon Division), told The Daily Star that they identified eight members of a transnational human trafficking racket involved in the crime.

Four of them are in Iraq, he said. They are Johrul Islam, 30, Habib Fakir, 22, Ziaur Rahman, 25, of Faridpur, and Shihab Uddin, 23, of Sunamganj.

"We are investigating the case. We have communicated with the National Central Bureau at the police headquarters to take action against the culprits and rescue the victim," the DC added.

THE MONEY TRAIL

Talking about how the ransom was channeled, investigators said Johrul called a youth named Rony over phone and asked him to give him a bank account number. Rony lives in

Faridpur. He and Johrul are from the same village.

Rony gave Johrul the account details of his sister-in-law Shahnaz Begum. It is the same account where the ransom money was deposited.

Shihab, tortured Rabbi and demanded the Tk 10 lakh from Badal. Shahnaz, a nurse at Rajarbagh's



Prashanti Hospital, went to the bank on August 9 and transferred Tk 5 lakh to another account of a bank in Faridpur, investigators said examining CCTV footage of the bank in Khilgaon and citing bank officials.

The next day, Rony went to the bank in Faridpur and transferred Tk

2.60 lakh to Johrul's account with another private bank. Rony withdrew the remaining Tk 2.40 lakh.

Rony then gave Tk 1 lakh to Johrul's cousin Murad Fakir, 24. Of the money, Murad gave Tk 90,000 to Johrul's wife Atia Sultana Nipa. Investigators said, adding Murad, who was in Iraq, came to Bangladesh a month ago.

Investigators said Rony gave Tk 1 lakh to expat Ziaur Rahman's father Lal Mia and Tk 30,000 to Habib's father Younus Fakir. Rony sent Tk 3,000 to Shahnaz via mobile banking services and kept Tk 7,000.

Of the Tk 2.60 lakh deposited to Johrul's account, Tk 2.06 lakh was transferred to one AH Rubel's bank account in Habiganj, Sylhet, according to investigators.

Hafiz Al Faruq, additional deputy commissioner of Tejgaon police, told The Daily Star that they arrested Rony and Shahnaz in this connection and were looking for Nipa and Murad.

"The arrestees gave us vital information about the racket. They were involved in similar crimes before. We are verifying the information and will arrest everyone involved in this," he said.

Russian cosmonauts find new cracks in ISS module

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian cosmonauts have discovered new cracks in a segment of the International Space Station that could widen, a senior space official said yesterday, the latest in a series of setbacks.

"Superficial fissures have been found in some places on the Zarya module," Vladimir Solovoyov, chief engineer of

rocket and space corporation Energia, told RIA news agency. "This is bad and suggests that the fissures will begin to spread over time."

He did not say if the cracks had caused any air to leak.

The space official has said previously that much of the International Space Station's equipment is starting to age

and has warned there could be an "avalanche" of broken equipment after 2025.

The space station has suffered several recent incidents. Russian officials last month said a software glitch, and a possible lapse in human attention, were to blame for throwing the ISS out of control.

Hindus celebrate Janmashtami

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Janmashtami, the celebration of Sri Krishna's birth and one of the major festivals of the Hindu community, was celebrated yesterday in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country.

The day was a public holiday. President Md Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in separate messages greeted the Hindu community on the eve of the occasion and wished success of the programmes arranged for the day.

As part of celebrations, devotees performed rituals at different temples across the country.

Bangladesh Puja Uddhayan Parishad (BPUP) and Mohanagar Sarbojanin Puja Committee (MSPC) organised daylong programmes at Dhakeshwari National Temple to mark the day.

The programmes began with Geeta Jogo at 8:00am seeking blessing for the country and the nation.

Besides, a virtual discussion was held in the afternoon organised by BPUP and MSPC.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister and also Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader, Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Vikram Kumar Doraiswami and other dignitaries joined the discussion.

However, traditional procession of Janmashtami from Dhakeshwari National Temple was not brought out due to the pandemic.

In a statement, BPUP and MSPC said the essence of the day will inspire all to work for establishing a society free from injustice and discrimination.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON) has also arranged a six-day programme, starting yesterday, at the capital's Swamibagh Asram.

Special Sri Krishna Puja was held at Ramna Kali Temple in presence of several hundred devotees.

National dailies published special articles while Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television, private TV channels and radio stations aired special programmes highlighting different aspects of the eventful life of Sri Krishna.

According to Hindu mythology, Sri Krishna was born on the eighth day of a dark fortnight in the Bangla month of Bhadra and he takes birth in ages in the world to safeguard the good and pious people from the hands of malevolence by establishing truth, justice and beauty in society.

Return them to us

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"Either return them to us, or acknowledge that they have been forcefully disappeared," was the common refrain of family members speaking at the event organised by Mayer Dak, a platform of families who lost their loved ones to enforced disappearances.

Rights bodies say the government does not recognise enforced disappearance as a phenomenon. Such instances are relegated to being missing or abduction cases.

"The Bangladesh government has repeatedly denied involvement in hundreds of enforced disappearances of activists, critics, and opposition members, and has taken no steps to investigate them," Human Rights Watch, Robert F Kennedy Human Rights, and the Asian Human Rights Commission said in a joint statement yesterday.

On Sunday, Ain o Salish Kendra circulated a statement demanding that a specific law be crafted to recognise enforced disappearance as a crime, instead of simplifying it as abduction.

"Tears will only take us so far. Let the tears give us the strength to build a defence," said Faizul Hakim Lala, secretary of Jatiya Mukti Council.

The leaves of every tree around Shaheed Minar, the Jatiya Press Club and nearby areas (where Mayer Dak has been protesting for a decade), are witnesses to the volume of tears shed under them, but the government is not listening, said Afroja Islam Akhi, one of the conveners of Mayer Dak, and the sister of Sajedul Islam Sumon, who became a victim of enforced disappearance in 2013.

He was the general secretary of ward-38 of BNP's Dhaka city unit.

"Many families of victims of enforced disappearances in Bangladesh feel helpless in the face of the authorities' repeated denials, and the world should act and use the tools at their disposal to spur accountability and stop these abuses from continuing," said Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman, liaison officer at the Asian Human Rights Commission in the joint press statement.

Mia Seppo, UN resident coordinator in Bangladesh, tweeted yesterday: "All allegations of #EnforcedDisappearances in Bangladesh must be investigated impartially and those responsible should be brought to justice. 63 nations have ratified the Convention on Enforced Disappearances but only 4 in Asia - it's time for Asia and Bangladesh to ratify."

She was replying to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres's tweet on the occasion of "International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances". The UN secretary general said enforced disappearance was used as "a method of repression, terror and to stifle dissent".