

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



2,639
New cases in 24hrs



15,19,805
Total cases



26,684
Deaths



14,60,754
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



4,594,202
Deaths



222,305,422
Total cases

Student ‘taken’ on arrival at HSLA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladeshi student of Egypt’s Al-Azhar University has been traceless for over a month since he landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka on August 4.

Rizwan Hasan Rakin, 22, landed at the airport at 8:30am and informed his father-in-law about his safe arrival over the phone, his family members said.

But when he was carrying out immigration formalities, some people took him to a corner and interrogated him for a long time before shoving him into a microbus blindfolded, they alleged quoting Rakin’s brother-in-law Mahfuzur Rahman, who was travelling with him.

Rakin’s father Abu Zafar, a Saudi expatriate, suspects his son may be a victim to “enforced disappearance”.

“Does Bangladesh have any law under which a person can be kept confined for over a month?... If my son has committed a crime, produce him before a court and take legal action,” said Abu Zafar, who lives in Saudi Arabia with his family.

Rakin’s brother-in-law Mahfuzur Rahman, also a student of Al-Azhar University, travelled back home with Rakin.

At one stage, they took Rakin and Mahfuzur out of the airport blindfolded in a microbus, said a relative of Mahfuzur.

Wishing anonymity, the relative said Mahfuzur could not say where they were taken and kept.

The next night, Mahfuzur was dropped, blindfolded in front of the residence of his brother-in-law in Jatrabari area, he added.

Rakin’s father Zafar filed a general diary with Airport Police Station on September 3 after he and his wife return from Saudi Arabia on August 23.

In the GD he mentioned that Rakin has been traceless since he passed immigration at the Dhaka airport.

Sub-Inspector Azizur Talukder, who is investigating GD, said he is trying every possible way to trace the victim.

He was supposed to go to his

grandfather’s home in the capital’s Turag.

Rakin’s grandfather Selim Sarwar said, “I stood outside one of the two terminals at the airport that remained open after the Covid-19 pandemic from morning till evening to receive my grandson, but he did not come out.”

Rakin’s mother Shirin Akhter said, “My son was friendly with me. He always speaks the truth. He was memorising the Quran with tafsir so that he can spread the lesson of the holy book among the general people.”

Asked whether her son had any link with militancy, she said he did not.

Rakin studied up to grade two in Rifles Public School in Dhaka. In 2007, he and his mother moved to Saudi Arabia, where his father had been living for the past 30 years.

He studied at Riyadh International School, run by the Bangladesh Embassy in Saudi Arabia, from grades three to eight. Rakin then came back to Bangladesh and was admitted to Uttara High School from where he completed his SSC in 2016 and then completed his HSC from Notre Dame College in 2018.

In October 2019, he left the country and got admitted to Cairo University. Then he got a scholarship in Al-Azhar University for his bachelor’s, where he was supposed to begin classes soon, his father said.

He said Rakin got married to a Bangladeshi girl online. He came from Cairo on an Emirate’s flight on a two-month vacation and was planning to arrange a post-marriage ceremony.

“All our joy has vanished. I am breaking down every day as my beloved son remains traceless for over a month,” she said.

Rakin’s family went to rights body Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) with a complaint.

Senior Coordinator of ASK Abu Ahmed Faijul Kabir said they advised the family to seek cooperation from law enforcement agencies and take legal steps.

People don’t have to call you

FROM PAGE 1

public], then that is corruption.”

He advised the government officials of different levels to talk politely. “It [talking politely] does not mean you cannot show your power or you are losing. Your attitude should be [geared towards] providing best services within the legal jurisdiction,” said Farhad.

Quoting Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the state minister said service seekers should be considered as government officials’ kith and kin.

He said officials at the field level, including AC Land and UNOs, have at different stages given directives to officials under them in this regard.

The state minister however said many talented people are now joining government service and sometimes they are given chances to correct their behaviour.

“When they continue to commit offence, we take action,” he said.

Sometimes, field-level officials lose their tempers for various reasons but

they are suggested to control their emotions, said Farhad.

Replying to another question, he said public servants must submit their wealth statements every three years to ensure accountability and transparency.

Mentioning that it can be applicable for the ministers also, he said, “Since we’ve pledged, we must disclose our tax return every three years.”

He however said one can obtain tax return of the ministers by applying under the right to information act.

Farhad said around 3,85,000 posts at various government organisations were now vacant as the recruitment process in the public service was stalled following the Covid-19 outbreak in March, 2020.

He said the agencies concerned were asked to resume recruitment process and the government had already decided to extend the age limit considering the coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent shutdown, which imposed restrictions on businesses and public movement.

Enthusiastic response

FROM PAGE 1

the regular programme in 1,005 centres.

At that time, many people returned barehanded due to the shortage of vaccine supply, resulting in a mass outcry for the vaccine.

On the contrary, yesterday’s campaign was comparatively smooth except for the violation of health safety guidelines in many vaccination centres.

“I have received my second dose without any hassle. The vaccinators and the volunteers are doing their jobs perfectly,” Kamrul Islam, inhabitants of Belgharia area of north town in Natore, told The Daily Star.

In Dhaka city, however, many had to return without taking vaccines from the centres as the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) rescheduled the dates for many in Dhaka city at the last minute on Monday.

On the official Facebook page of the DGHS, Prof Khurshid Alam announced that those who received their first jabs on August 7 and 8 in Dhaka city, they would receive their second jabs only yesterday.

As a result, many who received their first jabs on August 9 or later, but were asked to come for their second jabs yesterday, returned barehanded.

In Rajshahi city, as many as 27,000 people received their second jabs of Moderna’s Covid-19 vaccine, reports our correspondent.

The campaign was carried out

simultaneously at 84 centres of 30 wards of the corporation between 8:00am and 3:00pm.

Anjuman Ara Begum, the city corporation’s chief health officer, said they would jab the second dose to some 1.25 lakh people of the city in four days till September 12.

In Munshigonj, the campaign for the second dose was carried out without any chaos, but the health safety guidelines were not maintained properly, reports our correspondent.

Munshiganj Civil Surgeon Abul Kalam Azad said, “The second dose of the Sinopharm vaccine was started in 47 unions and one municipality. We will carry out a campaign in the remaining 22 unions tomorrow.”

A total of 41,621 people received their first dose in the Munshiganj during the last month’s special campaign.

Quoting Cumilla’s civil surgeon Mir Mubarak Hossain, our correspondent reports that a total of 173,480 people will receive their second jabs in three days under the campaign.

In Natore district, a total of 24,975 people will get their second jabs under the mass vaccination programme, reports our correspondent, quoting Dr Kazi Mizanur Rahman, civil surgeon of Natore district.

The first day of the second dose vaccination campaign also marked people’s enthusiasm in Khulna, Dinajpur and Sylhet, report our correspondents from those districts.



India’s Chief of Army Staff General Manoj Mukund Naravane, left, shakes hands with his Bangladeshi counterpart Chief of Army Staff Gen SM Shafiuddin Ahmed prior to a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Syndicate finds mines of money

FROM PAGE 1

additional deputy commissioner, former UNO, four former and current officials of PBI Cox’s Bazar unit, including the SP and ex-additional SP. The gang also includes 23 surveyors, seven kanongos, six additional land acquisition officers and two sub-registrars.

In addition, the list names seven political leaders, including Cox’s Bazar district Awami League president and secretary, detailing the scale of their involvement and share of responsibility in the fraud.

The ACC office in the port city received the report on June 30. Usually, an official submits his report to a deputy director, who then forwards it to the director general (investigation) of ACC.

Afterwards, the report is sent to the ACC chairman for approval. Subsequently, it comes back to the investigation officer who then submits it to the court as part of the charge sheet.

As of yesterday, the report was still sitting at the desk of Mahbubul Alam, the deputy director at Chattogram ACC office.

“We are reviewing it. As the report is too long, it will take time [to be forwarded],” said the deputy director when asked about the status of the report a few days back.

THE LONG CON

The government has undertaken 73 mega projects in this coastal district worth Tk 3.5 lakh crore, and decided to acquire land worth Tk 25,000 crore for the purpose.

In its investigation, the ACC found evidence of graft from the very start of three projects involving the construction of a PBI administrative office, a surface water treatment plant for Cox’s Bazar Municipality and a Single Point Mooring for Eastern Refinery.

For the PBI office and the water treatment plant, the District Land Acquisition Committee (DLAC) led by the deputy commissioner chose disputed sites, overlooking legal barriers.

The DLAC acquired 100 decimals of land for Tk 29.29 crore at Kolatoli for the PBI office and two acres at Tk 36 crore for the municipality water treatment plant last year.

With proper procedures, the total land would have cost a little over Tk 17 crore, the investigator stated in his report.

It was a violation of the guidelines under the law for land acquisition and requisition. The guidelines state that the land-requiring body and DLAC representatives must look for an alternative cost-effective site and check whether the land was already acquired by any other government body.

As it was later discovered, another government body already acquired parts of the land years ago.

And, when it came to compensating the landowners, the syndicate defrauded ordinary people, the ACC investigation found.

The graft watchdog found that 15 fake owners received over Tk 29 crore in the name of land acquisition for the PBI office last year.

Similarly, posing as landowners, Cox’s Bazar Municipality mayor’s family members pocketed Tk 36 crore from the water treatment plant project, documents obtained by The Daily Star show.

Md Kamal Hossen, former deputy commissioner of Cox’s Bazar, now posted at the Local Government Division, and Ashrafur Afsar, former additional deputy commissioner (revenue), now posted at the Ministry of Science and Technology, facilitated the payments, the investigator found.

In the process, thousands of landowners were denied their rightful compensation. Victims held press conferences and lodged complaints with the land acquisition (LA) office, but nobody paid heed to them.

Nazim Uddin, one such victim, said he did not receive any notice for land

acquisition, as is the law. When he came to know about it, the acquisition process was already underway.

“As I am the owner, I applied for compensation. But the land acquisition office behaved so rudely that at one stage I lost all hope. Later, in the middle of last year, my caretaker told me that a team of PBI officials led by its high-ups took the land under their control,” he told this paper.

Three top police officials, who supervised the PBI construction project in phases, were fully aware that all the land documents submitted to DLAC were fake, the ACC investigator mentioned in his report.

They are Sarwar Alam, current superintendent of police of Cox’s Bazar PBI, Md Moniruzzaman, ex-additional SP of the PBI unit now posted in Khagrachhari, and Abdullah Al Mamun, ex-additional SP of the unit now serving at the headquarters of the Bureau.

The DLAC, responsible for verifying land-related papers, certified fabricated documents and authorised payments to fake owners, according to papers obtained by this correspondent.

GRAFT IN LAND REQUISITION

From the Single Point Mooring project, local public representatives and land officials embezzled Tk 30 crore in the name of land requisition, the report said.

A Chinese company won the contract to build a depot on 191 acres of khas land requisitioned for this project in Kalamarchara area.

Tarek Bin Osman Sharif, chairman of Kalamarchara Union Parishad, and Mosharraf Hossen, chairman of Kutubzum Union Parishad, made a “deal” with the company to remove houses and other structures from the land and took Tk 10 crore for the job.

They forcibly demolished the houses and evicted the poor people who used to live on the land, though the task of eviction lies with the district administration, according to the ACC investigator.

When any immovable property is required temporarily for public purpose or in public interest, the district administration may requisition it in accordance with the law.

In case of requisition of immovable property, compensation shall be paid to the rightful owner or owners.

But thanks to the collaboration of surveyors, kanongos and land acquisition officials, Tarek pocketed Tk 20 crore, originally allocated by the government for farmers who used to cultivate the 144 acres of land on which the Chinese company built its office, the investigation found.

The land officials dropped the real farmers from the government list, thus depriving them of their rightful dues.

Contacted, Tarek said, “I have given my statement to the ACC when they called me. I don’t think there was any chance to siphon off money from this project.”

Mosharraf said Tarek and representatives from the Chinese company used to determine the compensation.

“As per the deal, he [Tarek] used to receive 10 percent from the total compensation. I have a business partnership with him. The ACC might have found my name this way. Beyond business relations, I don’t have any collaboration with him.”

ARRESTEES SPILL THE BEAN

The Rapid Action Battalion arrested a surveyor named Md Washim in Cox’s Bazar on February 18, 2020, and the ACC Chattogram office filed a case two days later.

Three middlemen -- Sala Uddin, Kamruddin and Selim Ullah -- were arrested by the ACC separately later that month. They all “confessed” that they had paid commission to LA office staffers.

The trio admitted to bribing Tk 10,123,000 to two land acquisition officers alongside dozens of surveyors and kanongos.

Eleven sacks of documents,

including applications of people seeking compensation, cheques and award books, which were supposed to be preserved at the additional deputy commissioner’s office, were seized by Rab from their apartments.

Their diaries have details of the commission they paid to the LA office staffers.

The ACC came to know details about the graft in the three projects after quizzing the arrestees and analysing the seized documents.

It found that a surveyor used to work as the “commission collector” for the then DC Kamal Hossen and ADC Afsar.

Mohammad Edris, an arrested syndicate leader who is also a commercially important person (CIP), confessed to handing over Tk 40 lakh to a PBI inspector for forwarding it to ex-additional SP Moniruzzaman, according to ACC sources.

NO ONE DID ANY WRONG!

Denying any wrongdoing, SP Sarwar Alam said he had found some discrepancies in the papers.

“I wrote to the district administration to fix the discrepancies. Then representatives from the Roads and Highways Department and the district administration conducted a digital survey and corrected those,” he claimed.

But the ACC did not find any such letter when it analysed land documents relating to the PBI project.

Asked about it, Sarwar said he submitted the letter himself and when the investigation officer came to him for land-related documents, he provided him with a copy.

But the investigation officer told this paper that he did not get any such letter.

Moniruzzaman, ex-additional SP of Cox’s Bazar PBI, neither received calls nor replied to the text messages requesting his comments. Another ex-additional SP of the unit, Abdullah Al Mamun, also could not be reached.

Documents show that Moniruzzaman submitted the proposal to the administration for land acquisition for the PBI project on March 14, 2018. The proposal included wrong plot numbers and concealed the fact that parts of the proposed site had been acquired by Roads and Highways in 1992.

After the proposal was submitted, a joint feasibility report prepared on November 18, 2018, led by the then UNO AHM Mahfuzur Rahman and a police inspector on behalf of PBI, overlooked these issues and certified the papers as genuine.

The DLAC led by the then DC Kamal Hossen approved the joint feasibility study and decided to acquire the land bypassing legal issues on January 1, 2019, the investigation officer found.

Kamal Hossen, now posted at the Local Government Department as deputy secretary, rejected the ACC findings. “I know nothing about the allegations. I did everything adhering to the law,” he told The Daily Star over the phone.

Former ADC Afsar, now posted at the Ministry of Science and Technology, said the land selection was solely the business of the acquiring body. They selected the land considering their “strategic requirement,” he claimed.

“Land acquisition law has been followed in full while acquiring land for the PBI project,” he said in a text message to this correspondent.

Mahfuzur Rahman, former UNO of Cox’s Bazar Sadar upazila, now posted as the ADC of Sylhet, claimed he did not remember anything “as the land acquisition happened a long ago.”

Shamim Hossain, the land acquisition officer, who released the compensation cheques to fake owners in the PBI project, also denied being involved with any syndicate.

Cox’s Bazar Municipality Mayor Mujibor Rahman, also general secretary of district Awami League, could not be reached for comments over the phone.

Momen calls for rehabilitating climate migrants

Bss, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has called upon major carbon emitting countries to rehabilitate the climate migrants displaced from their homes and traditional jobs due to climate change.

“It is the responsibility of the international community, particularly the major carbon emitting countries, to rehabilitate the climate migrants,” he said.

The minister was addressing the meeting of the Global Center on Adaptation (GCA) in Rotterdam of the Netherlands on Monday, said a press release issued in Dhaka yesterday.

The GCA is Dutch initiative to develop and share knowledge and best practices for climate change adaptation.

During the meeting, Momen stressed the need for ambitious nationally determined contributions (NDCs) in the area of climate change by the major polluting countries.

The Bangladesh foreign minister also highlighted the importance of ensuring the climate finance of at least \$100 billion every year, with equal importance given to mitigation and adaptation.

Momen is a board member of the GCA, while Ban Ki-moon, the immediate past UN secretary-general, is the chairman of the organisation.

The floating office of the GCA Headquarters, the largest floating office in the world, was inaugurated in Rotterdam by King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands in presence of board members, ministers from different countries, and several heads of international organisations.

Earlier, Momen chaired a meeting of the Ministers of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), the platform of 48 countries severely affected by climate change.

In the meeting, the recent CVF activities were reported, and also the possible actions leading up to the 26th UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP26) were discussed. The COP26 is scheduled to be held in Glasgow, UK in November.

56 more die, 2,639 get Covid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country logged 56 deaths from Covid-19 in 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services.

With this, the total number of Covid deaths in the country now stands at 26,684. The death rate is 1.76 percent.

A total of 27,233 samples were tested at laboratories across the country during the 24 hours and at least 2,639 new infections were recorded, taking the total number of infected people to 15,19,805, added the release.

The current positivity rate is 9.69 percent while the overall positivity rate stands at 16.67 percent.

At least 5,567 Covid patients have recovered during the 24-hour period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 14,60,754 and the recovery rate is 96.11 percent.

Among the 56 deceased, 19 were men and 37 women.

Three of the dead were aged between 31 and 40, six between 41 and 50, 20 between 51 and 60, 11 between 61 and 70, nine between 71 and 80, six between 81 and 90, and one was aged between 91 and 100 years.

89 officials promoted to additional secy

Bss, Dhaka

The government has promoted 89 officials of the administration cadre, who were performing duties as joint secretaries, to the post of additional secretary.

The public administration ministry yesterday issued a gazette notification in this regard, said an official press release.

According to the gazette, the newly promoted officials have been made officers on special duty (additional secretary) to the public administration ministry.

Deputy Secretary to the Public Administration Ministry ABM Iftekharul Islam Khandker signed the gazette notification.

Another notification issued by the ministry said two joint secretaries were promoted to additional secretary.

Israel strikes Gaza after incendiary balloon attacks

AFP, Gaza City

Israel launched airstrikes against Gaza on Monday night, the army said, retaliating after incendiary balloons launched from the blockaded Palestinian enclave had started fires.

Blaming Hamas for the balloons, the Israeli army said it had targeted locations belonging to the militant group that controls the Gaza Strip.