

BANGLADESH UPDATE



2,588
New cases in 24hrs



15,24,890
Total cases



26,794
Deaths



14,68,211
Recoveries



4,614,389
Deaths



223,732,236
Total cases

DB PROBING OWN OFFICIAL

Independent body should do it

Rights defender say

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Detective Branch of police will investigate a leaked phone call in which a former CID official's wife allegedly offered a "senior DB official" a bribe of Tk 1.42 crore so that her husband is absolved of a robbery.

After DB's announcement yesterday that it would investigate the call, rights defenders said such a probe by the DB to investigate allegations against its own officials would only create mistrust. Instead, they said, an independent body should probe it.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Nur Khan Liton, a noted rights activist, said, "This is not the only case, such allegations are frequent nowadays. To restore trust among people, the allegation should be investigated by an independent body like the Anti-Corruption Commission or other agencies for a fair probe."

CID sub-inspector Aksaduzzaman was arrested on Wednesday morning, nearly 11 months after he was found involved in leading a gang to rob a migrant worker who was on his way to the Dhaka airport to go to Dubai.

On Tuesday, several media outlets including The Daily Star reported on the leaked phone call, containing negotiations allegedly between the family of the offending CID officer and a "high-ranked DB official".

The incident took place on October 19 last year, when migrant worker Md Roman lost different currencies worth Tk 4.78 lakh in the robbery near the capital's Kawla area, according to a robbery case the victim filed with the Airport Police Station against unnamed accused the next day.

Following investigation of the robbery case, the DB yesterday said they arrested Aksaduzzaman from Mithapukur area in Rangpur on Wednesday after he went into hiding. He was placed on a five-day remand yesterday.

In the leaked phone call, which The Daily Star has heard, a person identifying herself as the wife of the SI alleged that she gave Tk 1.28 crore to a certain senior DB official and that she personally gave Tk 14 lakh to DB's

Additional Deputy Commissioner Kaysar Rizvi Korayshi.

When asked about the matter on Wednesday, Korayshi said the audio clip was fabricated and the man speaking on the phone was not him. He said the SI's wife had been requesting them to give Aksaduzzaman clearance, and that they were trying to frame Korayshi.

"An audio has been leaked. There is a conversation about hefty sums of money. In addition to investigating the case, we will look into all the issues -- where the money came from, whether any of our officials are involved -- so that merit of the case is not hampered," AKM Hafiz Akter, Additional Commissioner (DB) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told a press briefing yesterday.

Asked why Aksaduzzaman's arrest came so late, the DB official said, "Aksaduzzaman was dismissed earlier. He was not accused in the case filed in connection with the robbery. His name came out later in our investigation. We needed some more information to arrest him. Besides all the accused in this incident have not been arrested yet."

The DB so far arrested seven people including the former CID officer and a former officer of a security force, in connection with the robbery.

The other six arrestees are -- Mosharrif Hossain, 45, Selim Mollah, 42, Ripon Morol, 55, Amir Hossain Talukder, 56, Rizu Mia Sikder, 25 and Hasan Raja, 38. Some of them are currently out on bail.

One of the arrestees and two witnesses gave statements before a Dhaka court under Section 164 at different times after the robbery case was filed.

One of the arrestees -- Amir Hossain Talukder, who is now out on bail, told The Daily Star that his wife had given Tk 16.5 lakh to Aksaduzzaman's wife to facilitate Amir's release.

"My brother sold a shop in Shariatpur and arranged the money. My wife gave the money to the CID officer's wife to get me released. When I wanted proof, she played a phone conversation between her and a DB official," Amir told The Daily Star.

Amir claimed that he was framed in the case.



Ignoring physical distancing, people wait in a long queue to get their second dose of Covid-19 vaccine at a vaccination centre at Shaheed Sheikh Abu Naser Specialised Hospital in Khulna yesterday. A few in the line were not even wearing masks.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Prize, not penalty for top grabber

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against the shipbuilder or done anything to reclaim the grabbed portions of the rivers.

Meanwhile, the shipbuilder continued grabbing more lands belonging to the waterbodies.

During a recent visit to the area, it was seen Three Angle Marine has set up a shipyard at the confluence of the Meghna and the Fuldi. The two rivers flank the triangular yard.

The company has filled up land into the Meghna and put up a fence inside the Fuldi, making the narrow river even narrower.

At one corner of the shipyard along the Fuldi, it has set up a farm, rearing a few hundred ducks.

Of the vessels moored at the yard, at least nine are of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authorities (BIWTA) and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC), both agencies are under the shipping ministry.

Contacted, Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, state minister for shipping, said Three Angle Marine is a good shipbuilder.

"I wasn't aware of the allegation of river grabbing against them. Only lately, I came to know about it and took it seriously. We will definitely look into the matter," he told The Daily Star.

Three Angle Marine website mentions that it is currently building a tug boat, five crane boats, one crew houseboat, five barges, six aluminium boats and one training vessel for BIWTA and BIWTC. It is also repairing rescue vessels Hamza and Rustom, multiple 700-passenger capacity vessels and two ferries of the two agencies.

Interestingly, the BIWTA itself formed a committee to investigate the grabbing of rivers by Three Angle Marine in 2020.

The probe committee headed by Saiful Haque Khan, the then joint director (taskforce), mentioned Three Angle Marine filled up 6.72 acres of the Fuldi causing obstacles to the waterflow, which may eventually kill the river.

It also grabbed 120 decimals of the foreshore, 13.48 acres of low-lying land and 30.52 acres of private land.

"It should be treated as a criminal offence," the report observed.

As per the Bangladesh Inland Shipping Ordinance, 1976, the BIWTA has powers to take measures against encroachers to protect the waterways.

On February 2 this year, the Cabinet Division directed the BIWTA chairman to recommend what actions can be taken against Three Angle Marine. It asked the BIWTA to draw a line on the foreshore of the Meghna and the Fuldi. But nothing has been done.

Meanwhile, the shipping ministry awarded more shipbuilding and repair contracts to Three Angle Marine.

On August 12, the Cabinet Division directed the BIWTA chairman to act on the matter but to no avail.

This correspondent called the chairman several times for comments, but he did not respond.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (BELA), said, "They filled up the Meghna right under BIWTA's nose. How could BIWTA officials allow this when they were supposed to protect the inland water transport route?"

'GRABBING OF LAND AND CANALS' The company has also filled up two canals named Borochak and Komoria and arable lands.

The shipbuilding yard currently has 110 acres of land in its possession. It purchased 50 acres of that from locals and filled up with sand more than 60 acres of land belonging to farmers, locals said.

The land belonged to around 100 farmers of Nayanagar, Balurchar, Gosairchar and Daulatpur villages in Gajaria upazila, they added.

In 2020, four villagers filed a writ petition (petition number 8,668) with the High Court regarding river grabbing and forcibly filling up of their land.

On April 5 this year, the HC issued a rule asking the local authorities to respond within four weeks, said Abdus Sattar, a teacher from Daulatpur village.

"But no one has responded yet." Villagers lodged multiple written complaints with the deputy commissioner and superintendent of police and also formed human chains several times.

Nur Mohammed, an elderly farmer, alleged Three Angle Marine has grabbed 46 decimals of land he got from the government as a landless farmer.

"They have filled up my land with sand. And there is nobody to see to it," he said.

Jamshed Pradhan, president of Daulatpur ward Awami League, said, "A few years ago, Three Angle Marine started filling up my land with sand." They have also occupied rivers and canals forcibly.

"We have lodged several written complaints with the local authorities, but they have done nothing."

Gajaria Upazila Agriculture Officer Toufik Ahmed Nur said a portion of the land where the company set up the shipbuilding yard used to be arable land. Farmers used to grow Boro rice, potatoes and maize.

Not only did the villagers lose their land, they saw their livelihoods affected in many other ways due to the shipbuilding yard.

Amir Hossain, Arafat Sarker, Aman Ullah, Shahid Ullah, Emon Ali and many others who are fishermen said since the yard was set up, the quantity of fish they catch has been decreasing.

The color of the water has also changed.

Anisur Rahman, chief scientific officer at Chandpur Fisheries Research

Institute, said the Meghna has been badly affected due to the establishment of the dockyards that have been an impediment to the free movement of fish.

Amirul Islam, chairman of Gajaria Upazila Parishad, said he had spoken against the encroachment in several meetings of the Upazila Development Committee and other bodies. He added that he received death threats everytime he raised the issue.

Ziaul Islam Chowdhury, upazila nirbahi officer, also the convener of Upazila River Protection Committee, said a notice had been issued to Three Angle Marine over its illegal occupation of land and rivers.

Initially, some evidence of the occupation of rivers, canals and lands has been found. Meanwhile, he said, the company has applied for a lease of government land.

"They have purchased some land... Since there is an ongoing lawsuit, a mobile court cannot take any action."

Sheikh Masud Kamal, joint director of BIWTA's office in Narayanganj River Port, said actions would be taken against illegal river occupants if recommended by the Munshiganj district administration.

Kazi Nahid Rasul, deputy commissioner and convener of District River Protection Committee, said the UNO has been asked to investigate and report on the allegations against Three Angle Marine.

He said the cabinet has also given instructions to take action in this regard.

They are now waiting for the investigation report, he said.

Kamrun Nahar Ahmed, a permanent member (additional secretary) of the National River Protection Commission, said a letter was sent, asking the local administration to take action against Three Angle Marine.

Lokman Hossain, one of the directors of Three Angle Marine, said the allegation of occupation of Fuldi and Meghna rivers is false. Someone has listed Three Angle Marine Limited among the river grabbers on purpose. A letter was sent to the National River Conservation Commission in August, requesting the officials to inspect the site.

He also denied the allegations of grabbing local farmers' land. "There are several cases pending regarding the land."

Meanwhile, in an advertisement published in a local daily on September 5, managing director of Three Angle Marine said as the company is engaged in work for the water transport sector of the government, it needs to expand its yard. So, the directors have decided to purchase land adjoining the yard at current market price. If somebody stakes claim over the land in the company's possession, that too would be purchased at current rate if they can produce necessary papers, the advertisement said.

Positivity rate drops under 9pc

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The transmission of novel coronavirus continues to decline as the health directorate reported 8.76 percent positivity rate yesterday.

The previous day, the positivity rate was 9.07 percent, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

As the second wave of Covid-19 raged through Bangladesh from the second week March this year, the country logged the highest 33 percent positivity rate on July 24.

Since August 2, the positivity rate has been declining steadily.

Meanwhile, the number of new cases and deaths increased in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, compared to the previous day.

Yesterday, the DGHS reported 58 deaths from Covid-19 and detection of 2,588 cases.

The previous day, the number of deaths from coronavirus was 52 and the number of fresh cases 2,497.

With the latest count, the total number of deaths reached 26,794 and the total positive cases 15,24,890.

The death rate was 1.76 percent of all cases detected.

Of yesterday's deceased, 35 were men and 23 women.

Of them, 22 were in Dhaka division, 19 in Chattogram, eight in Sylhet, five in Khulna and three in Rajshahi divisions and one was in Rangpur division.

Sick students

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campus, if the health guidelines were not strictly maintained," said Jamal Sarkar, guardian of an HSC candidate of Mirpur Girls' Ideal Laboratory Institute.

He said that usually school-age children do not want to wear a face mask for a long period. Students would meet with each other after many days they would mingle with their peers and play with each other.

"If any family member of a student is infected with Covid-19 and the pupil misses classes for that he or she will also be counted as absent", said Secondary and Higher Education Division Secretary Mahubb Hossain.

"But students and their guardians will need to submit the proofs as they were or their families were infected with Covid-19 to the school authorities," he told The Daily Star.

The covid-19 positive report will be accepted as proof, he said.

The government on September 5 decided to resume in-person classes at school in phases.

According to the decision, Higher Secondary Certificate, Secondary School Certificate of 2021 and 2022 and candidates of this year's Primary Education Completion Exam (PECE), would attend classes every day after schools and colleges reopen.

Students of classes 1 to 4 and 6 to 9 will have in-person classes once a week.

The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education yesterday sent a standard operating procedure (SOP) of health guidelines to follow when schools resume classes, to all headteachers.

It asked headteachers to ensure all students, teachers and staff wear masks and that physical distancing at the classroom. Taking immediate measures if any Covid-19 symptoms were found with student's, teachers and staff.

Allowing a student to go for quarantine or isolation for 14 days without counting them as not absent.

It asked teachers to give a motivational brief to students at the beginning of class. And ensure that no student leaves the classroom until the next teacher enters the class.

The SOP instructed students to inform any unwellness immediately to parents and teachers. Not to go outside the classroom without any valid reason.

The SOP urged guardians to inform headteachers if any of their family members were infected with Covid-19. It also urged parents to discourage their children not to take food from outside.

While unveiling the government's reopening plan, Education Minister Dipu Moni on September 5, said that the government will monitor the Covid-19 situation closely after reopening and whether the health guideline was followed properly or not.

Educational institutions were closed across the country on March 17 last year to curb the spread of Covid-19. The closure led to the cancellation of classes and examinations, throwing the academic lives of more than four crore students of around 1.5 lakh educational institutions in disarray.

Covid-19 infection started galloping in the second wave started in mid-March this year and it reached its highest on July 24 with an all-time highest positivity rate of 33 percent on that day.

From the beginning of August, the positivity rate started declining steadily with 8.76 percent yesterday.

Some broke houses

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places after seeing the pictures of the houses.

"Some people in certain areas have broken the houses and took their photos. The names of such people have been unearthed through investigation and I have the full report," she said, mentioning that around one and a half lakh houses were built in different areas under the Ashrayan-2 project.

"The houses were being constructed for the poor people. From the photos it is easily understood that the houses were intentionally damaged. The media captured their photos and published them without digging out how it happened."

The PM said as many as 600 houses were built in one place and a few of those developed cracks due to landslides caused by heavy rainfall. "And we found nine places where there were some allegations of corruption. That is only in nine places but elsewhere I have seen that everyone has worked sincerely," she added.

The head of the government said upazila nirbahi officers, deputy commissioners and other government employees were given the responsibility to oversee the work and many of them came forward to help build the houses. There were many who supplied bricks at a very low cost, she said.

A more nuanced

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the case five years ago during the announcement of the squad for the previous edition of the T20 extravaganza.

That squad had a few surprise inclusions, exclusions and even players taken based on performances in a few practice games. Mohammad Mithun's inclusion at the time was a prime example of a snap judgment from the BCB's end.

In that sense, things have changed over the years and the BCB now has a clearer vision, at least in wanting to form the best squad for the World Cup. That was evidenced by how the BCB put their trust in those players who have been regular performers over the last three series.

Eight players are set to play in their first T20 World Cup, including all-rounder Shamim and pacer Shoriful, who were members of the World Cup winning Under-19 side last year.

However, none of their inclusions could be termed a surprise. In fact, it was expected given their performances in the Tigers' recent series successes, including a tour of Zimbabwe in July, T20Is against Australia last month and the ongoing New Zealand series.

In 2016, Bangladesh were still finding their feet in the T20I format and had not yet familiarised themselves with how to win games on a regular basis.

The way the Tigers faltered in a one-run defeat against India -- arguably the

most agonising defeat that Bangladesh has endured till date -- despite having the game in their grasp at Bangalore in the Super 10 stage of the World Cup only reflected the importance of being familiar with the idea of winning T20Is.

It is not that the Tigers have made themselves familiar with winning T20Is away from home, but at least now Bangladesh go to the mega-event after having registered their most successful run in the format by winning nine of 15 T20Is played this year, the most number of wins for the Tigers in a calendar year and including three series wins on the trot.

Although most of those wins came in favourable conditions in Mirpur, winning momentum, as the selectors mentioned, could indeed give the Tigers the edge and confidence that they missed last time around. Also, Bangladesh are expected to have a preparation camp in Oman, where they will play a couple of practice matches ahead of the showpiece event.

The T20 format still remains in Bangladesh cricket's Achilles heel and those wins certainly do not change that fact, but now the Tigers will know how to line up a commendable T20 side.

The only thing that remains to be seen, and which will probably be the greatest challenge in the coming World Cup, is whether this group of cricketers can carry on with their winning form when playing in conditions away from home.

Probir gets justice

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In the judgement, the judge said Probir sustained severe injuries due to publishing newspaper reports against the Razakars between 2000 and 2001.

He had been victim of Molotov cocktail attacks which left him crippled, so it was not unnatural for him to continuously fear for his life, the judgement said.

In Probir's Facebook post on August 10, 2015, he said his life was under threat and the then Local Government and Rural Development Minister Khandkar Mosharrif Hossain, businessman Moosa Bin Shamsar and condemned fugitive war criminal Abul Kalam Azad would be responsible if he was killed.

The journalist was arrested on August 16, 2015, soon after Faridpur Awami League leader Swapan Kumar Paul filed a case against him under section 57(2) of the ICT Act over the Facebook post with Kotwali Police Station in Faridpur.

Probir Sikdar did not use any slang or any obscene words against any victims, the judge said, adding

that the alleged victims did not feel it necessary to react or protest through their comments.

Any of the three alleged victims of defamation of Probir's post or their relatives did not file a case, the judge said in his judgement.

The judge termed "defamation" as very much a personal injury. Instead, the case was lodged by a highly politically ambitious person in August 2015 though he did not sustain any injury due to Probir's post, the judge added.

Probir, editor of Daily Bangla 71, who was out on bail in the case after spending two days in jail following his arrest, appeared before the tribunal yesterday.

He was accompanied by his elder son Suprio Sikdar. The journalist was in the dock when the judge announced the verdict at 12:30pm.

In the verdict, the judge said the prosecution failed to prove the charges against the accused.

On March 16, 2016, investigation officer Monir Hossain, also a sub-inspector of the same police station, filed the charge sheet of the case with

the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court in Faridpur.

Later, the case was transferred to the Cyber Tribunal for disposal.

On August 4 that year, the tribunal framed charges against Probir Sikdar. Ten prosecution witnesses gave their depositions before the tribunal.

PROBIR'S REACTION ON JUDGEMENT

Probir Sikdar expressed satisfaction over the judgement in the case.

"I am grateful to the journalist community as well as others for their support," he said while talking to the journalists after the judgement at the court premises yesterday.

"I'll continue to protest any wrongdoing in this country, even if I'm alone in doing so," he said.

The journalist said that the court's verdict had boosted his courage.

"I have won this six-year legal battle, but my personal life has been devastated. I had to sell land in the village to pay legal fees," he said.

"Nobody gives me any work... I run a newspaper, but no one gives any advertisement," Probir said, adding that truth has triumphed in the end.