

BANGLADESH
UPDATE1,383
New cases in 24hrs15,42,683
Total cases27,225
Deaths15,01,541
Recoveries4,703,348
Deaths229,156,219
Total cases

Probe if Pir has links to militancy

HC asks CTTC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the Counter Terrorism and Transitional Crime (CTTC) Unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police to find out if Rajarbag Darbar Shareef Pir Dillur Rahman had any connections with militancy.

The court also ordered the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to enquire into the assets of Pir Dillur Rahman and his disciples. Both the CTTC and ACC were asked to submit reports in 60 working days.

Meanwhile, Pir Dillur Rahman and his followers allegedly filed false cases against the writ petitioner for harassing and humiliating them.

Thus, the court directed the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to identify those who filed false cases against the writ petitioner and submit its report in 60 working days.

At the same time, the HC asked the inspector general of police to provide proper security to the victim writ petitioners.

Besides, the court issued a rule asking the authorities to explain in

four weeks why they should not be directed to take appropriate legal action against Pir Dillur Rahman and his disciples for filing false cases against the writ petitioners.

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman came up with the directives and rule after hearing a writ petition that sought its order on the authorities to take appropriate actions against Pir Dillur Rahman and his disciples for filing vexatious cases against them.

On Thursday, eight victims, including a seven-year-old child, collectively submitted the petition to the HC through lawyer Mohamad Shishir Manir mentioning that Pir Dillur Rahman has filed several false, misleading and defamatory cases against them through his disciples.

Lawyer Shishir Manir told The Daily Star that he annexed a report of the National Human Rights Commission in the writ petition saying that the Rajarbag Darbar Shareef Pir Dillur Rahman and his disciples who filed the false cases against the petitioners may have a connection with the militants.

Twice a week at unions

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Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of the health directorate, said in an online briefing after the meeting.

He did not mention when this special campaign would start.

On August 6-12, the government inoculated around 34 lakh people through special campaign in around 6,000 centres in rural and urban areas.

However, the government backedtrack from its decision to continue the special campaign due to the shortage of jabs.

There are 1,005 Covid-19 vaccination centres for regular campaign across the country.

During yesterday's briefing, Prof Khurshid said schools can no longer be used as vaccination centres as classes have resumed.

"At upazila level, we have planned to use the upazila auditoriums or any large halls alongside the upazila health complexes as vaccination centres," he said.

At the union level, the union health sub-centres and the union health and family welfare centres will be used as vaccination centres.

"People willing to get vaccinated will register online at the upazila health complexes and will go to the designated vaccination centres after getting texts. The ICT division will arrange mechanism to send texts mentioning the centres' names," Prof Khurshid said.

About vaccinating children, he said, "This is a sensitive issue. We are trying to bring children under vaccination as

per directives from the prime minister. We will start this campaign based on specific data in future."

Health Minister Zahid Maleque had said inoculation of children 12 and above will start in 15-20 days.

The health DG also said migrant workers will get vaccines as required by the countries they work in.

According to health officials, the DGHS has taken necessary steps to deliver Pfizer shots in 22 districts, including Dhaka.

Asked, Prof Khurshid said, "We have planned the campaign in a way so that certain people can get the certain vaccines. The migrant workers will get priority always."

43 DIED, 1,383 NEW CASES
Forty-three more people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, said a press release issued by the DGHS.

The total number of Covid-19 deaths in the country now stands at 27,225, and the death rate at 1.76 percent.

At least 1,383 new infections were recorded during the period, taking the total number of people infected to 15,42,683, added the release.

The positivity rate was 5.62 percent against a total of 24,623 samples tested across the country in the 24 hours.

At least 2,887 Covid-19 patients have recovered during the period.

The total number of recoveries is now 15,01,541, and the recovery rate 97.33 percent.

Among the 43 deceased, 22 were men and 21 women.

JS body's no to civil service

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Protection Act, it is prohibited to build any kind of installation in the ecologically critically forest.

Later in 2018, the DoE had issued the clearance.

"We think the respective department and the prime minister's office were not properly informed about the type of the land it was while giving permission to the construction of the training centre there. We are trying to understand how it happened."

According to a report submitted by the ministry to the parliamentary committee, the land has 100 acres of orchards created through social afforestation under the afforestation project in the coastal areas to address the adverse effects of climate change.

There are hills of different heights up to 20-200 feet, different species of trees as well as elephants, monkeys, wild pigs, various species of snakes and birds.

If the project is set up in the area,

the environment and ecology in the surrounding area would be severely damaged.

Subsequently, the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry of environment, forests and climate change has recommended that the government take steps to stop the project and relocate it to other areas to save the environment.

It has also asked the DoE to withdraw the clearance.

The ministry of environment, forest and climate change will also send a letter to the land ministry, which gave the plot to the public administration ministry, on the issue.

According to the direction of the court, there is no opportunity to allocate such land.

"We support the enhancement of efficiency and capacity of government officials. But not at the cost of damaging the environment. This is unconstitutional. It can be constructed somewhere else."

Ex-Algerian president Bouteflika given state funeral

ALGIERS, Reuters

Former Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, ousted in 2019 after mass protests, was given a state funeral on Sunday attended by senior officials but received little of the attention given to such occasions in the past.

Bouteflika died on Friday, aged 84. An armoured vehicle decked with flowers pulled his coffin, covered with the national flag, on a gun carriage from his home in Zeralda, west of the capital, to the el-Alia cemetery in Algiers where five of his predecessors are buried.

Bouteflika was first elected in 1999, and is widely credited with a national reconciliation policy that restored peace after a war with armed Islamists in the 1990s killed an estimated 200,000 people.

But many Algerians blame him for the economic stagnation of his latter years in power, when he was rarely seen in public after suffering a stroke, and widespread corruption led to the looting of tens of billions of dollars from a state that depends heavily on its large gas and oil reserves.

He stepped down in April 2019 after mass demonstrations to reject his plan to seek a fifth term, and demand political and economic reforms.

As well as Bouteflika's family, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who laid a wreath of flowers on the tomb, and many ministers of the current government and military officers, including army chief of staff Lieutenant-General Said Chenegriha, were among the mourners.

Attendees also included foreign diplomats in Algiers.



A policeman putting a lock on a battery-powered rickshaw for using the Dhaka-Chattogram highway in the capital's Matuail area. Witnesses said police let the rickshaws go after realising a certain amount of fines. Initiatives to keep such three-wheelers off the highways have borne little fruit.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Customers, sellers seek legal recourse

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taka, are uncertain whether they would get back the money.

On Friday, a seller sued Evaly CEO Rassel, his wife and Chairman Shamima, and 12 officials of the company with Dhanmondi Police Station on charges of embezzlement and threatening the plaintiff.

Dhanmondi police then filed a prayer with a Dhaka court to place Rassel and Shamima on a seven-day remand each.

In the case statement, seller Kamrul Islam Chakdar, who has four businesses in the capital's Paltan, alleged that he supplied goods worth around Tk 35 lakh but Evaly did not pay him since January.

It gave him a post-date bank cheque in May, but it bounced twice as the company didn't have enough money in their account in June, added the case statement.

"Evaly had signed an agreement that it would pay the money within 30 days of delivering products. But it didn't abide by that even after I filed a general diary in January in this regard," he wrote in the complaint.

Hours after filing of the case, Evaly authorities shut down its head office in Dhanmondi until further notice and said that its employees will work

from home.

"The office will reopen with permission following the completion of investigation by authorities," read a notice hung at the entrance of the Evaly headquarters on Dhanmondi road 14.

Earlier, a customer named Arif Baker filed a case against Rassel and Shamima for not delivering products worth Tk 3.10 lakh.

Following the case, Rapid Action Battalion arrested the duo at their Mohammadpur residence on Thursday.

They are now on a three-day remand each.

Meanwhile yesterday evening, a group of sellers and customers staged a protest in front of the Evaly office, demanding release of the Evaly CEO and the chairman.

They urged the government to release Rassel and his wife so that Evaly can run the business and pay back the money.

They started collecting mass signatures in support of their demand. 'STERN ACTION IF THEY FAIL TO PAY BACK'

At the secretariat, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday told reporters that stern action would

be taken against Evaly and other e-commerce platforms if they fail to keep their commitments to the customers.

"Evaly has taken a lot of money from people. I don't know how they [Evaly] will fulfill their commitment. [But] If they cannot pay back the customers' money, law enforcement agencies will take stern action."

He also warned people not to make transactions without knowing about the business.

"I mean, the tempting offers...For example, a car that costs Tk 100 is being offered at Tk 50. Make sure you know how much risk there is and what kind of [money or product] you will get and whether there is any chance of being deceived... If you are not sure, you should refrain from investing in such companies."

Talking to The Daily Star, Aminul Islam, inspector (investigation) of Gulshan Police Station, said they appealed to a Dhaka court, seeking information on the bank accounts and assets of the Evaly CEO and chairman.

"Rassel told us that most of the money was spent on discounts. Besides, they also spent a lot on advertisements and promotions," he said, adding that they were verifying those.

Apathy eats away vote

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polls today. In the 27 remaining UPs, most of the AL nominated candidates will have to face challenges from party dissidents.

Other than three mayoral candidates of nine municipalities, which is going to vote today, the rest were elected unopposed.

The same scenario was seen in the earlier portion of first-phase UP polls. Voting in 204 UPs were held on June 21, when 28 chairmen were elected unopposed.

The presence of voters has also declined in recent years.

Experts said people believe that the victory of a ruling party nominee is inevitable.

The Sylhet-3 by-polls, which were held on September 4, only saw 34 percent voter turnout. The picture was grimmer in the Dhaka-10 by-polls on March 21 last year, which saw a turnout of only around five percent.

Hafizuddin Khan, president of Sushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan), said, "The number of candidates elected unopposed are on the rise as many are unwilling to take part in the election considering that the ruling party ticket-holder will win in the polls."

He said people consider taking part in elections a waste of time and money.

The "elected unopposed" phenomenon is not limited to local bodies' polls; two members of parliament (MPs) were elected unopposed through by-polls in recent months, and one is set to be elected unopposed soon.

Former Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University vice-chancellor Pran Gopal Datta is set to be announced the MP from Cumilla-7 as all contenders in the by-polls have withdrawn from the race.

Dulal Talukder, regional election officer in Cumilla, on Saturday told The Daily Star that AL nominee Prof Pran remains the only person running for membership in parliament

after NAP nominee Monirul Islam withdrew his candidature on the day.

On Thursday, Jatiya Party nominee Lutfar Reza withdrew his nomination paper.

Contacted, NAP nominee Monirul said he withdrew his candidature due to a family issue, while Lutfar's phone was found switched off.

The seat fell vacant on July 30 after Ali Ashraf, then MP of the constituency, died at a hospital in Dhaka. The by-poll was scheduled to be held on October 7.

AL-nominated candidates Aga Khan Mintu, for the Dhaka-14 by-polls, and Abul Hashem Khan, for Cumilla-5, were elected unopposed on June 26.

In Dhaka-14, three candidates -- Mostakur Rahman of Jatiya Party, Abu Hanif of Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal (Inu), and AYM Kamrul Islam of Bangladesh Nationalist Front -- withdrew their nominations.

The three cited the Covid-19 pandemic as the reason for withdrawal, said an official of the returning officer's office.

In Cumilla-5 by-polls Jatiya Party nominee Jashim Uddin withdrew his candidature.

Both by-polls were set to be held on July 28.

Jatiya Party expelled both Lutfar Reza and Jashim Uddin, citing the reason of "violating the party charter".

But insiders said both the party leaders withdrew their candidatures in exchange for money.

"We don't know anything about them withdrawing in exchange for money. But they said they withdrew their candidacies due to pressure from various quarters," Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader said yesterday.

He said the party instructed the leaders and activists to stay in the election race till the end of the elections. "We are trying to make elections meaningful."

"We are also observing the activities of the EC as they have to ensure a

conducive environment for candidates during an election," he added.

In elections of 456 upazilas, held between March and June 2019, 94 chairman candidates were elected unopposed. Of the 94, 93 were AL-backed.

In the 2014 national polls, the country witnessed the ominous phenomenon when 153 MPs out of 300 constituencies were elected unopposed.

In all the elections mentioned above, most political parties, including the BNP boycotted, saying they did not see any prospect of a free and fair election.

BNP candidates did participate in municipality elections that took place between December 2019 and February 2021. Even so, 10 mayoral candidates were elected unopposed in the 230 municipality elections.

In May 2019, AL mayoral candidate Ekramul Haque Titu was elected unopposed in the maiden election to the Mymensingh City Corporation.

Local government and election expert Professor Tofail Ahmed said there has been a general reduction in participation, of candidates and voters alike, in all elections.

"They think the election result is predetermined," he added.

"The country is witnessing a suffocating period. The voting system and culture has been damaged.

Political democracy is already demolished. Politics is a profitable business now so there is no place for democracy there."

Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam, however, said the Election Commission has nothing to do with the political parties' decisions to withdraw candidatures.

"It is unfortunate that many are not taking part in elections," he said.

Asked what the commission is doing to bring all political parties to elections, Rafiqul replied, "What can we do if a party decides to skip elections?"

Vaccine bookings spike after Italy extends Covid pass

AFP, Rome

Bookings for coronavirus vaccines in Italy spiked this week after the government said all employees must show proof of a job, negative test or recent recovery from Covid-19, authorities said.

"On a national level, there was a generalised increase in bookings

for the first dose of between 20 and 40 percent compared to last week," coronavirus commissioner Francesco Figliuolo said in a statement late Saturday.

Reservations for the first dose of the vaccine on Saturday were up 35 percent on the same time a week earlier, he added, without giving the actual figure.

Almost 41 million people in Italy have so far been fully vaccinated, government data shows -- close to 76 percent of the population over the age of 12.

But authorities remain concerned about the hold-outs ahead of the winter flu season, and this week extended the so-called "Green Pass" to all public and private workplaces.

59 unlicensed

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channels operated from abroad. These include US-based Time Television, Total Cable, Radiant IPTV, Millenium TV and Biswa Bangla 24; Canada-based DesheBideshe, NRB TV, Jhankar TV and Azan.tv; UK-based channels like Iqra Bangla TV, iOn TV UK and TV One UK; Singapore-based Joy TV; and Australia-based JonmoBhumi TV.

The rest of the channels listed are located in Bangladesh.

Information Minister Hasan Mahmud said last Tuesday that the ministry has already started many activities including providing registrations to IPTV services to bring discipline.

The Deputy Secretary (TV-2) of the information ministry Ruzia Sultana said right now around 600 applications for IPTVs are pending with the ministry.

None of the IPTVs have been given licenses to operate yet.

"We have no knowledge of the decision by BTRC," said Sultana.

Suspended

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(1) of Code of Criminal Procedure. According to the notification, Khaleda will receive treatment staying at her residence in Dhaka and she will not be allowed to travel abroad during the jail suspension period.

The government through an executive order released her for six months which has been extended four times.

Khaleda's physicians said she was suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, ophthalmological and dental complications.

Her family has long been seeking permission from the government to allow her to go abroad for treatment.

However, Law Minister Anisul Huq on September 12 said she has to return to jail first to submit a new application seeking release on condition and permission to go abroad.

On March 25, the government extended the imprisonment suspension of Khaleda for six months.

The 76-year-old BNP chief was released from jail on September 25 last year for six months upon an executive order considering her age and humanitarian grounds, following an application by her family.

On February 8, 2018, Khaleda was sent to the Old Dhaka Central Jail after a lower court had sentenced her to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case.

The High Court later doubled her jail sentence.

She was found guilty in another corruption case the same year. Her party, however, claims both the cases are politically motivated.

Govt mulls new

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stakeholders to identify, locate and communicate with every individual for administrative and legal purposes, he said in a presentation.

The database will ensure proper distribution of social services and safety net programmes in the most efficient and cost-effective way, and it will offer a single window for personal identity verification, he added.

The NPR will help detect and eliminate corruption and it will ensure security for all, he said.

It will be continually updated and the record will be permanent.

The data to be stored in the NPR will include name, sex, education, date of birth, place of birth, marital status, religion, duration of stay at present address, permanent address, and details of the NID, passport, mobile phone and birth registration.

Information of each individual's family members, employment, health, economic status, nationality, citizenship, and residence would also be stored in the NPR.

Biometric information will include prints of 10 fingers and data needed for IRIS and face recognition.

Shahadat told The Daily Star that the project was still being conceptualised and opinions of the stakeholders were being collected at yesterday's event.

Once the NPR is developed, there will be no need for a population survey every 10 years, he said, adding that it will integrate databases of the NID, passport and driving licence.

The NPR would accumulate all sorts of data in one place to be monitored by the government, he said.

India seizes \$20m heroin haul in drug bust at sea

AFP, Ahmedabad

Indian authorities seized over \$20 million of heroin and detained seven Iranian men in a deep-sea drug bust off the country's western coast, officials said yesterday.

Officials intercepted messages sent to the boat's crew and apprehended the vessel -- travelling from Iran to Sri Lanka -- 180 nautical miles off the coast of Gujarat, the state's anti-terror squad chief, Himanshu Shukla, told AFP.