

BANGLADESH UPDATE

860
New cases in 24hrs

15,55,911
Total cases

27,510
Deaths

15,15,941
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,792,581
Deaths

234,374,977
Total cases

CUSTODY BATTLE Eriko to stay with the kids

Imran gets visiting rights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed Japanese national Eriko Nakano to stay with her daughters Nakano Jasmine Malika, 11, and Nakano Laila Lina, 10, at a Gulshan house and allowed her estranged husband Bangladesh-born US citizen Imran Sharif to visit the children during daytime.

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman said the order would be valid until October 21.

The bench also fixed October 21 for further hearing on the matter as the lawyers concerned failed to settle the custody feud between Imran and Eriko.

On September 16, the HC gave the responsibility to their lawyers for reaching an amicable settlement.

Imran's lawyer Rakanuddin Mahmud and Eriko's lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir had been asked to reach an agreeable solution through negotiation.

However, Rakanuddin has withdrawn himself as lawyer for Imran citing personal difficulties.

Another senior lawyer, Fida M Kamal, appeared for Imran during yesterday's hearing.

On September 16, the HC ruled that

Eriko and Imran will stay with their daughters at the Gulshan home on alternate days so that Eriko and Imran do not run into each other.

On August 31, the HC bench directed the authorities concerned to move the two children of Imran and Eriko to a residence in the capital's Gulshan from a victim support centre to ensure a family environment for them.

On January 18 this year, Imran submitted a divorce notice to a Japanese court, but did not appear before that court on scheduled dates for hearings, Eriko said in her petition.

He picked up his daughters from their school in Tokyo on January 21 and came to Bangladesh on February 21, Eriko's petition said.

Eriko, 46, a doctor based in Tokyo, came to Bangladesh on July 18 this year and filed a writ petition with the HC seeking a directive on Imran, 58, to hand over the children to her custody.

She feared that Imran may flee Bangladesh with her daughters.

In the petition, Eriko said she and Imran got married on July 11, 2008.

Lawyers Fawzia Karim Firoze also appeared for Imran during yesterday's virtual hearing.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina waters the sapling of a fringetree on the premises of "Bangladesh House" in the USA. She inaugurated the newly-constructed house on Wednesday.

PHOTO: PID

PM inaugurates Bangladesh House in Maryland

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, now in Washington DC, has inaugurated the newly-constructed "Bangladesh House" in Maryland, US.

She opened the house at 4:30pm on Wednesday (local time), said PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim.

The premier earlier planted a fringe tree on the premises of the house. She attended a prayer after the inauguration of the Bangladesh House.

Hasina later exchanged pleasantries with Bangladeshi diplomats in Bangladesh missions in the US and their family members.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen and Bangladesh Ambassador to the US M Shahidul Islam, among others, were

present.

The PM reached New York on September 19 to attend the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) after a two-day stopover in Finnish capital Helsinki.

During her stay in New York, she attended the UNGA at the UN Headquarters and took part in high-level events and meetings.

Hasina also planted a honey locust tree and unveiled a bench at the UN gardens in memory of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the occasion of his birth centenary.

The PM travelled to Washington DC on September 25.

She is scheduled to return home today.

Only two out of 668 disposed of

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common people remain pending.

Out of a total of 1,543 individuals accused, charges were pressed against only 1.17 per cent of them, shows data collected by the CGS.

This is in spite of the fact that the law stipulates an investigation report must be submitted within 60 days of filing of the case. The authorities might get another 15 days of extension. Another month can be granted if allowed by the cyber tribunal.

"But over the past three years, in many cases, the investigation report was not filed within the stipulated time. Yet the accused are still in custody and effectively being punished before the trial," pointed out CGS in a statement circulated to the media yesterday.

It said of the 499 people arrested in the cases studied, 42 were journalists, 55 politicians and 32 students. Similarly, of those whose professions could be ascertained, politicians were the most accused, followed by journalists.

Thirteen children, under the age of 18, were also prosecuted.

CGS points out that this includes a ninth-grade student who was arrested and sent to a juvenile correction centre on June 20 last year. The student was from Bhaluka of Mymensingh and he allegedly insulted the prime minister on Facebook while commenting on a decision to impose an additional tax on the use of mobile phones.

"An overwhelming majority of these cases are not filed by aggrieved persons but by others, often by ruling party activists on behalf of their leaders," said CGS.

Data on 577 cases logged by CGS shows that in 507 of the cases, those filing the cases were not the direct victims of the incidents.

Although the professional identity of the accusers could not be ascertained in a vast majority of the cases, the ones that could be identified were mostly politicians.

"The political identity of the accusers that we have been able to identify shows that 85 per cent belongs to the ruling Awami League. Law enforcement agencies have filed 76 cases," said the CGS statement.

"During the period under review, 74 cases have been filed for allegedly defaming Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina," it added. Thirteen of these cases were filed by law enforcement agencies.

Similarly, while 41 cases were filed for the alleged defamation of ministers, only four were filed by the aggrieved party or their family members.

The statement said these data were gathered from government-approved print and electronic media outlets, the accused or their family and friends, the lawyers for the accused, and police stations and other departments concerned.

"[The trend] reveals how a law

has become a tool of emergent authoritarianism. It is nothing short of criminalising dissent. The wanton use of the law has created a culture of fear in Bangladesh. Repealing the law has become necessary," said Prof Ali Riaz, principal investigator of the project and distinguished professor at Illinois State University in the US.

The DSA came into force on October 1, 2018 as a replacement for the Information and Communication Technology Act, which included the widely criticised section 57.

The DSA allows for search and arrest without a warrant, simply on suspicion that a crime has been committed using social media. Furthermore, out of the 20 provisions of the law that deal with offences and punishments, 14 are non-bailable. The lowest punishment is one year in prison and the highest is a life term.

In the past three years, the widespread use of the act, particularly against the critics of the government, has drawn condemnation from human rights organisations at home and abroad, said the CGS statement.

Due to the extensive use of this draconian act, the emergent situation has been described by the Editor's Council as the "nightmare-reality". The law has severely curtailed the freedom of expression in Bangladesh. Journalists and citizens of various walks of society have been victimised for speaking out in cyber space, the statement added.

A liberal voice for Rohingyas

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repatriation of the Rohingyas. His death will benefit the vested quarters, including armed traffickers' groups, extortionists and extremists, they added.

"State actors and vested quarters that do not want a smooth repatriation would benefit from this assassination. This is a message from the criminals to the liberal quarters in the camps," said Professor Shahab Enam Khan of international relations at Jahangirnagar University.

"It's not that the repatriation process would stop for his death, but it would definitely mean a setback," he observed.

Rohingyas willing to return to their homeland have lost their voice and Mohib Ullah has been a solid conduit among multiple actors involved in facilitating the repatriation, the experts said.

His death shows the deteriorating law and order in the camps, and the government needs to step up security immediately.

There are some other organised groups of the Rohingyas in the camps, but most of them have some kind of criminal agenda. Mohib Ullah believed

in non-violent and liberal ideals.

Rezauul Karim Chowdhury, executive director of Bangladesh Coast Trust, who has been working in the Kutupalong Rohingya camps, said, "A voice like Mohib Ullah was much needed to control mobs in a place like Kutupalong where 44,000 people live per kilometre."

He added that the government must take steps to protect positive and liberal voices among the Rohingyas; otherwise, it would only worsen the situation.

After the political development in Afghanistan, security measures in the refugee camps need to be even more stringent and vigilant so that militant groups cannot lure frustrated youths.

Rahman Nasir Uddin, anthropology professor at Chittagong University, who has been researching the Rohingya crisis for two decades, said, "Mohib Ullah played a vital role in organising the Rohingyas to go to Bhasan Char."

"They used to rely on him and he was taking the Rohingya cause to the global stage."

Mohib Ullah, who came to Bangladesh from Myanmar in 2017, was also the chairman of Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace & Human Rights.

Shots fired on farmers

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Villagers said the contractor's company, SS Dredger, kept dredging machinery on their agricultural land for months without their consent. The landowners, mostly farmers of the village, protested the move as it was disrupting farming. But the company allegedly did not pay heed to the protesters. Rather, it contacted local influential people to settle the matter.

On September 12, farmers submitted a memorandum to the Chattogram deputy commissioner demanding relocation of dredging machinery. Against this backdrop, the assistant commissioner (land) of the upazila was scheduled to visit the spot yesterday to discuss the issue with both sides, said local people.

When about 100 people, mostly farmers, gathered in the area around 10:30am, the "contractor's men" asked them to go away. As they refused to comply, the two sides got involved in a heated debate. At one stage, the "contractor's men", carrying firearms, chased the farmers and opened fire, leaving the seven injured, locals told this correspondent.

The seven were admitted to Chattogram Medical College Hospital, said Assistant Sub-Inspector Alauddin Talukder of CMCH Police Camp.

They are: Abdul Malek, 50, Nurul Hasan, 51, Abu Taher, 38, Md Manik, 20, Fayeze Ahmed, 62, Md Kawsar, 20, and Ruhul Amin, 60.

Doctors at the surgery ward of the hospital said all but Nurul Hasan was

out of danger.

Speaking to The Daily Star, injured Taher said the contractor's company did not talk to them before keeping their dredging machinery on their land.

"We protested, but the company officials did not pay heed to us. They contacted some local influential people to use our land forcibly," he said.

Preferring anonymity, another injured alleged that yesterday's attack was led by Ruhullah.

Anwar Hossain, officer-in-charge of Satkania Police Station, said police rushed to the spot upon receiving information and brought the situation under control.

Asked about Ruhullah's involvement in the incident, the OC said he received verbal complaints from some locals about it, but none filed any written complaint with police till yesterday evening.

"We are investigating the incident. Legal action will be taken against those involved in the incident," he said.

Fatema Tuz Johra, Satkania upazila nirbahi officer, said after the filing of the memorandum with the DC by farmers, she discussed the issue with both the contractor and locals on Wednesday.

"We expected that a solution would be reached following the talks, but an untoward incident took place today [Thursday]."

She said officials of the administration went to the spot after the incident occurred and instructed the authorities concerned to stop all activities regarding dredging of the

Sangu until further orders.

Meanwhile, officials of SS Dredger refuted the allegation of their involvement in the firing incident.

Mehedi Hasan, site supervisor of the company, said: "We were not involved in the incident. We had only 15 to 20 workers at the site when the incident took place."

Asked about farmers' allegation about using their land forcibly, he said, "We are ready to pay the locals for using their land, but they did not pay heed to us. They said they would not let us keep the machineries on their land."

Tayan Kumar Tripura, executive engineer of Water Development Board in Chattogram, said they awarded the contract to SS Dredger for dredging the river and the deadline for completing the work is June 22, 2022.

"When we issue a work order to a company for dredging, we mention in the terms and conditions of the contract that the owners of the land, where soil and dredging machinery would be kept, will be given compensations," he said.

Instead of consulting landowners about paying them, the contractor's company got some local influential people involved in the matter, which led to yesterday's incident, said the executive engineer.

Despite several attempts, The Daily Star could not reach Ruhullah over the phone for comments as it was found switched off.

AL lawmaker Nadvi did not receive calls from this correspondent.

Expressing opinion not a crime

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Jhomon, 25, from Naogaon village in Sunamganj's Shalla upazila, was detained by police on March 16 for criticising Hefajat-e-Islam leader Mamunul Haque and was in jail till Tuesday evening.

He was initially shown arrested under section-54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. "But I was shocked to find out that a police sub-inspector [on March 22] filed a case against me under the Digital Security Act."

"I have full faith in Bangladesh as a non-sectarian state. But as a cop filed the case against me, it became a case of the state against me."

"I believe an individual's views, be they of a cop, do not represent the state and my writing did not offend the secular nature of Bangladesh," he told The Daily Star.

Since his arrest, Sunamganj court rejected his bail plea four times, while the High Court rejected it once.

Finally, on September 23, a High Court bench granted him bail for a year.

About how the matter unfolded, he said, "After I criticised Mamunul Haque for his defamatory speech about Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's sculpture and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bangladesh tour, I realised that my Facebook post agitated Hefajat supporters."

"I also found out that a huge mob was gathering to attack our village and several fake accounts were created with my name, posting false statuses to agitate more people. My friends suggested that I turn myself in to police to pacify the situation. So, I called police and surrendered. I was first taken to Shalla Police Station and the next day, I was transferred to Sunamganj jail. There, I heard that my village was attacked. Then when I appeared in court, I came to know that there was a case filed under the DSA against me."

Several hundred Hefajat-e-Islam

supporters from nearby villages attacked Naogaon village the day Jhomon was sent to jail. They vandalised around 90 Hindu households, including Jhomon's, and four temples.

"Many of the accused attackers were also arrested and were sent to the same jail that I was in. They started taunting me and saying that I hurt religious sentiment by criticising Mamunul Haque. That created a security threat for me in jail. However, the jail super controlled the situation and ensured my safety."

"What hurt a lot was not being able to see my son, who was born just a few months before I was detained," he said, adding that he is very thankful to everyone who stood by his family in his absence and helped secure his bail.

"For around 10 years, I worked for many companies as salesperson in different districts. Recently, with the support of a cousin, I started a small business. Now, as the High Court ordered me not to go out of the district, I am not sure what to do for a living."

About his security, he said, "After my release, I met the superintendent of Sunamganj police, who assured me of my security. But he also asked me to inform the police about my whereabouts at all times -- even if I just step outside my village. I understand the security concern, but how can anyone start a new life while maintaining all this? I am living in constant fear."

About the freedom of speech, he said, "I've been using Facebook since 2013 and I mostly express my opinions regarding the Liberation War, the independence. I believe that Bangabandhu built a secular country and I've never posted anything that is anti-religious or anti-state."

"My Facebook post was criticising Mamunul Haque as an individual who was threatening the secular nature of the country by insulting the Father of the Nation and our neighbouring country's prime minister."

Russia blocking work of UN sanctions committees: diplomats

AFP, United Nations

The investigative work of several panels of experts tasked with monitoring compliance with UN arms embargoes and economic sanctions in conflict zones including Mali is being blocked, sometimes for months, by Russia, diplomats said Wednesday.

"The Russians argue there is a lack of geographic diversity" at the heart of the committees, and that they have a Western bias, one diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity.

All of the committees blocked are in the process of renewing their members.

The apparent obstacle comes as Moscow seeks to bolster its influence in Africa, notably in French-speaking countries which until now were seen as squarely in Paris's zone of influence.

The assignment of experts to the committee dealing with the Central African Republic has been stalled since August 31. The mandate for the committee on the Democratic Republic of Congo expired on August 1.

On Mali, the panel of experts will have to suspend its investigative work. For South Sudan, no work has taken place since July 1.

The committee tasked with monitoring the Central African Republic this year condemned "grave human rights abuses" attributed to paramilitaries from the controversial Wagner group, a Russian private security firm.

ACC charges

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ACC Deputy Director Farid Ahmed Patwary, also the investigation officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Senior Special Judge's Court of Dhaka, court sources said.

Azad's name was not in the first information report of the case, but he has been included in the charge sheet as his involvement in misappropriating the government funds was found during investigation, the IO said in the charge sheet.

Of the accused, Shahed is in jail, while Aminul, Younus, Shafiqur and Didarul are on bail.

Azad has been shown "fugitive" in the charge sheet.

The IO appealed to the court to issue an arrest warrant against Azad as he did not get bail from any court in the country.

The charge sheet said the accused, in collusion, embezzled the government funds in the name of coronavirus sample collection and treatment.

The ACC filed the case against Shahed and four others, excluding the name of Azad, on September 22 last year.

Despite much discussion and criticism, Azad was not made accused in the case previously.

According to the case statement, the accused converted Regent Hospital, which was closed, into a dedicated Covid-19 hospital without renewing its licence and abused power as they wanted benefit by illegal means.

They embezzled over Tk 1.37 crore through testing samples of Covid-19 patients in a government-run lab Nipsom, the statement said.

JS body wants

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He made the remarks while exchanging views with journalists in the meeting room of his ministry.

A few days ago, several online news portals, including state-run news agency BSS, were temporarily shut down.

Asked, the minister said it happened due to a misunderstanding, which was resolved quickly.

"We will send a list of the unregistered news portal that are to be shut down."

He said online portals that do not act with honesty or spread rumours and false news will be targeted.

"As part of that ongoing process, we are trying to send the list to BTRC soon -- by today [yesterday] or tomorrow [today] morning. They will shut down the web portals after they receive it."

Speaking to The Daily Star about the outcome of the JS body's meeting, Inu said, "We often see fake news, propaganda, misinformation and character assassination in news on social media, which confuses or hurts people."

He added that different countries like Australia and Singapore have laws placed in order to stop the spread of fake news and propaganda on social media.

"But we don't have any such law in our country."

"That's why we have asked the ministry concerned to set up a fact checking and counter narrative of the fact cell under PID to prevent the spread of fake news and character assassination on social media platforms."

For example, Inu said, the fact checking and counter narrative of the fact cell will identify fake news, mark it with a seal that says it is fake and provide the real news.