

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



481

New cases in 24hrs



15,62,357

Total cases



27,688

Deaths



15,23,833

Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE



48,64,454

Deaths



238,426,520

Total cases

## SINHA MURDER

# Army camp CO testifies before court

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

After killing Major (ret'd) Sinha Rashed Khan, police took away his body quickly from the spot and kept Sinha's associate Shahedul Islam Sifat confined in a nearby police camp, said a witness of the incident.

Lt Muntasir Arefin said this while testifying before the Cox's Bazar District and Sessions Judge's Court yesterday, said a court source.

Arefin, a witness of the murder, was the then commanding officer of the army camp in Teknaf's Shamlapur where the murder took place.

"On that night, I got the information through my walkie-talkie that a former army person was killed in Shamlapur area. I discussed the issue with my higher authorities and rushed to the spot. But I found none there," he said.

"I came to know that Sinha was shot dead there and his body was taken away. Later, I went to Shamlapur Police Investigation Centre. Despite identifying myself, I was not allowed to enter inside the centre," he said.

"After waiting for a long time, I was allowed to go inside where I saw some ID cards, CDs, camera, camera stand and

other equipment for recording video and photoshoots were lying in a scattered manner on the floor," he added.

"A few moments later, I saw Sifat was kept confined in a room. I wanted to talk with him but the former officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station Pradeep Kumar Das barred," said Arefin.

Judge Mohammad Ismail of Cox's Bazar District and Sessions Judge's Court yesterday recorded the statement, said the court's Public Prosecutor Faridul Alam.

The court began recording statements of witnesses in the fifth phase yesterday and it will continue till tomorrow. A total of seven witnesses, six of them army men, yesterday placed their testimonies.

Earlier a total of 18 witnesses have so far placed their testimonies in four phases from August 23 to September 29.

Sinha, 36, was killed in a police firing at a checkpoint of the Armed Police Battalion (APBn) in Teknaf's Shamlapur area on July 31 last year.

Later on August 5, Sinha's elder sister Sharmin filed the murder case with Cox's Bazar Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court.



Last-minute preparations for the Durga Puja in the capital's Tanti Bazar yesterday. The five-day-long religious festival, the biggest of the Hindu community, begins today through the Mahashashthi puja amid festivity and religious fervour.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Durga arrives to fight evil

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touches to the idols, and organisers are completing last-minute decorations on the mandaps.

According to Hindu mythology, the demon Mahishasura had received a boon of invincibility from Lord Brahma, which meant that no man or god could kill him.

The demon attacked gods and chased them out of heaven. All the gods then came together to worship Adi Shakti and the divine light emanating from them during the puja created Goddess Durga.

The fight between Goddess Durga and Mahishasura lasted for 10 days. Goddess Durga slayed the demon king on the 10th day, and the day is celebrated as Vijaya Dashami, symbolising the victory of good over evil.

Hindus believe that Durga descended to earth following prayers by King Kansa. Marking the occasion, the first Durga worship was held at Taherpur of Rajshahi by Raja Kangsharanayan in the month of Aswin (autumn) around 1606.

Rama, elder son of king Dasharatha, had earlier offered the puja in autumn to seek the deity's blessings to save

people from the repression and misrule of Lanka Raj Ravana. With her blessings, Rama destroyed the Ravana's kingdom.

This year, Goddess Durga will arrive riding on a horse and depart by palanquin.

Durga Puja will be celebrated at 32,118 puja mandaps across the country, and in the capital it will be arranged at 238 mandaps, according to a statement of Bangladesh Puja Uddhayan Parishad.

President M Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday felicitated the Hindu community in separate messages on the occasion of Durga Puja.

Bangladesh Puja Uddhayan Parishad leaders urged all devotees to properly maintain health guidelines and directives issued by the government during the Durga Puja celebrations to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

The Mahashashthi puja begins at 5:00pm across the country, following Bodhon preparations.

The goddess descends on earth today -- the sixth day of the full moon phase -- accompanied by her children Ganesh, Kartik, Lakshmi and Saraswati, at the invocation and supplication of the devotees and stays for the next four days.

## Children aged 12-17 to get

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supply for this, the minister said. Till Thursday, around 1.79 crore people received both doses of the vaccines, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The minister, however, did not mention when the child vaccination will start.

"We have asked the ICI ministry to arrange this [registration process]," the minister said. "A protocol is being prepared in this regard."

Earlier in his speech, before the question-answer session, the minister said he had discussed the child vaccination issue with Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of the World Health Organization, during his visit to Geneva last week.

"He [WHO DG] has agreed saying that we can vaccinate children, especially those with comorbidity, with Pfizer or Moderna vaccine to prevent transmission," Maleque said.

He added that the WHO DG has assured him of supplying more vaccine shots free of cost in future upon availability.

Under the Covax facility, Bangladesh has received an allocation of 6.8 crore vaccine jabs, equivalent to 20 percent of the target population for vaccination.

"The WHO DG has assured that they will increase the allocation by 35-40 percent based on availability," Maleque said.

The WHO director has also assured necessary support to produce Covid-19 vaccines in the country.

"We hope we will vaccinate eight crore people with double-dose by December-January," the health minister said.

Bangladesh will get over 16 crore vaccine jabs by January from different sources, including Covax, Sinopharm and the Serum Institute of India, the minister mentioned.

So far, the government has received 7.22 crore jabs of Covid vaccines, while 5.20 crore people have registered so far, said the minister.

Currently, the government has 1.88 crore jabs of different Covid-19 vaccines in stock, which will increase to more than three crore by this month, the minister added.

The government will receive a total of 3.75 crore jabs in November, five crore in December and 3.75 crore in January.

Currently, around four-five lakh people are being vaccinated daily on average.

"We will vaccinate 10-15 lakh people daily. If necessary, we will arrange special campaign," Maleque said.

The DGHS reported 14 more deaths from Covid-19 and 481 new cases in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

After the record-breaking daily deaths and new cases of Covid in July, the virus transmission has come down below three percent in the last one week.

The minister, however, urged people to maintain health safety guideline to prevent any fresh wave of virus transmission.

## Taiwan won't bow to China

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Kong, but all major Taiwanese parties have rejected that, especially after China's security crackdown in the former British colony.

Tsai repeated an offer to talk to China on the basis of parity, but Beijing, responding some nine hours after she spoke, offered condemnation, saying the country must be "reunited" and that seeking independence closes the door to talks.

"This speech advocated Taiwan independence, incited confrontation, cut apart history and distorted facts," China's Taiwan Affairs Office said.

"The independence provocation by the Democratic Progressive Party authorities is the source of tension and turbulence in cross-strait relations and the greatest threat to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," it added, referring to Tsai's ruling party.

**'COMPLEX' SITUATION**  
Beijing has refused to deal with Tsai, calling her a separatist who refuses to

acknowledge Taiwan is part of "one China", and does not recognise Taiwan's government.

She says Taiwan is an independent country called the Republic of China, its formal name, and that she will not compromise on defending its sovereignty or freedom.

Still Taiwan's goodwill will not change, and it will do all it can to prevent the status quo with China from being unilaterally altered, she said.

Tsai warned that Taiwan's situation is "more complex and fluid than at any other point in the past 72 years", and that China's routine military presence in Taiwan's air defence zone has seriously affected national security and aviation safety.

She is overseeing a military modernisation programme to bolster its defences and deterrence, including building its own submarines and long-range missiles that can strike deep into China.

## A Scourge returns on tiptoe

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They think the government now needs to take aggressive measures to ensure children who were married off during the pandemic could come back to schools.

**SHOCKING NUMBERS**

The Daily Star collated information from 41 upazilas of 13 districts and found around 10,741 girls and at least two boys were illegally married off during school closures. The exact number, however, could be much higher if a proper survey is done.

Khulna is one of the districts where a huge number of underage girls were made child brides.

Authorities of Belpulia Islamia High School in the district's Rupsha upazila said that at least 70 students -- all aged between 14 and 17 -- have been married off during the lockdown.

Md Moniruzzaman, headmaster of the school, told The Daily Star that when they contacted the students' families, they said the girls were now married and would not continue with their education.

"In fact, these marriages were arranged by stealth. I am still learning about new child marriages. I am trying my best to bring these students back to school," he added.

According to Khulna District Education Office (DEO), around 3,000 students from 420 secondary schools and 125 madrasas became victims of child marriage during the pandemic.

Speaking to The Daily Star, one victim's father said, "I could no longer bear the expense of my daughter's education as I lost my job during the pandemic."

In Bagerhat, the number of victims exceeds that of Khulna.

As per the report prepared by District Education Officer Md Kamruzzaman, 3,178 child marriages took place in the district during school closures.

Satkhira's DEO said they have so far come to know about 500 child marriages that took place during this period. However, unofficial sources said the number could be as high as 5,000.

Almost all 177 schools of Kaliganj upazila in Satkhira have students who are now victims of child marriage.

"At least 25 girls of grade 10 at my school were married off," said Shampa Goswami, a teacher from Mozher Memorial High School.

She had conducted a survey across 35 schools on behalf of Prerona Nari Unnayan Sangathan, a non-government organisation working to prevent child marriage, and found that at least 20 to 30 girls from each school were married off.

At least 50 girls of Alipur Girls' High School in Satkhira Sadar upazila were such victims.

Shakibur Rahman Babla, administrative officer of Satkhira's Child Marriage Resistance Committee, said that according to their list, over

3,000 children were illegally wedded.

Sharmeen Nilormi, a researcher on climate-vulnerable women and girls, said many of the victims were from southern climate-vulnerable districts as there are many destitute people in those areas and there is a deep-rooted link between poverty and child marriage.

"But the case is not the same in all regions. So, we need more research to understand the factors behind this sudden surge in child marriage... Over the last few years, the government has invested so much in girls' education. So, it is necessary to find the root causes to take up a proper policy to curb child marriage."

Besides the southern districts, Tangail saw a spike in child marriages. As per data from the district's secondary education office, 1,242 students, including two boys, of 12 upazilas became victims of child marriage during the pandemic.

"We did not know about it due to the school closure and there was no guideline for any monitoring in this regard," said Firoz Al Mamun, assistant headmaster of the Geramara Gohailbari Sabuj Sena High School in Mirzapur, who confirmed that at least 41 of his students were married off.

In Chapainawabganj, 439 students were married off, and the number is 417 in Dinajpur's Nawabganj upazila.

At least 29 students from a single school in Pabna and 31 from one school in Narayanganj were married off.

Also, 35 in Munshiganj, 178 in Barishal, some 700 in Rajshahi, 45 in Mymensingh, 500 in Kurigram and 500 in Natore fell prey to child marriage, respective DEOs said, adding that the numbers could be way higher.

In two schools, one in Kurigram and one in Pabna, all the girls except one of a single class, were married off.

"Before closure, there were 30 students in grade 10, who were going to sit for SSC exams this year. Unfortunately, 29 of them were married off," said Moslem Uddin, Pabna's district education officer.

Shamim Al Mamun, headmaster of a Tangail school, said, "Sometimes teachers could help stop such marriages, but due to a long break in communication between teachers and students during the school closures, we could not do much."

**LAW GLOSSED OVER**  
Salma Ali, president of the National Woman Lawyers' Association, said, "We have a certain law [the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017] to curb child marriages, but there is no strict enforcement. The government also does not have any proper monitoring mechanisms to prevent child marriage."

Section 9 of the child marriage prevention law also states that if any person solemnises or conducts a child marriage, it shall be an offence for which they shall be punished with imprisonment for a maximum of two

years, and a minimum of six months, or with a fine of maximum Tk 50,000 or with both.

And in default of payment of fine, they will be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three months, it mentions.

More often than not, these marriages take place in kazi offices. Legally speaking, kazis are the "nikah registrar", appointed by the government.

Kazi Selim Reza from Moghbazar kazi office told The Daily Star that the government has formulated a law, but many kazis tend to ignore the law as there is a lack of enforcement.

"And in most cases, parents come up with fake birth certificates from notary publics to marry off their children. The government needs to take action against them in this regard."

**HEALTH IMPACT**  
According to the International Council of Research on Women (ICRW), children who are married off with low levels of education are at higher risk of domestic and/or sexual violence, which can have lasting psychological implications.

As most of the girl children are married off to older men and there is an imbalance of power, they may describe their first sexual experience as forced. Unicef's report stated that child marriage increases the risk of early and unplanned pregnancy, in turn increasing the risk of maternal complications and mortality.

Dr Andrew Rozario, a psychologist based in Dhaka, said, "Through the ages of 14 to 18, children go through many changes -- both psychologically and physically. Their minds and bodies are not prepared for the kinds of responsibilities that come with marriage."

"What happens when a child gets married is that, first and foremost, their minds and bodies face confusion. They have to face pressure and carry out tasks that they are not prepared for in any way, which results in long term psychological and physiological traumas."

According to a 2020 survey by Manusher Jonno Foundation, in collaboration with UNFPA, Unicef and Plan International, 13,886 girls were married off in 84 upazilas in 21 districts.

But things look even bleaker now. Kashfia Feroz, director of Girls Rights, Plan International, said, "Nobody could predict this Covid-19 pandemic situation. So, there was no preparation for this [child marriages during the pandemic] by the government."

"We now have to envision more ways to resist child marriages. We have to bring the victims back to school."

(Our correspondents from Tangail, Lalmonirhat, Khulna, Chapainawabganj, Bagerhat, Dinajpur, Pabna, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Barishal, Rajshahi, Mymensingh and Natore contributed to this report.)

## Physicist Prof Harun no more

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dr AM Harun-ar-Rashid, eminent physicist and "Bose Professor" of physics at Dhaka University, died at a hospital in Dhaka on Saturday. He was 88, said a press release.

Dr Rashid had been suffering from various old-age complications.

Dr Rashid served as the director of Computer Center (now the Institute of Information Technology) at DU. He was a visiting professor at the Institute für Theoretische Kernphysik, International Center for Theoretical Physics, Imperial College London, University of Texas, Austin, and University of California, Los Angeles.

He received Ekushey Padak in education in 1991 and Independence Award in 1999.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed profound shock at his death.



## Cinematographer Samir Kushari passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent cinematographer Samir Kushari, who was involved in hundreds of memorable television projects since BIV's golden era, passed away yesterday at a hospital in the capital due to post-Covid complications.

He was 71 years old. His wife, Jaya Kushari, confirmed the news to The Daily Star. She said that the cinematographer was diagnosed with Covid-19 at the beginning of September.

Born in 1951 in Dhaka's Armanitola, Samir Kushari's father, Ronen Kushari, was an Ekushey Padak awardee and an esteemed radio personality. Samir was the brilliant hand responsible for the cinematography of legendary productions like "Bahubrihi", "Sangsaptak", "Ayomoy", "Eishob Din Ratri", "Sat Samuddur" and "Pathor Shomoy" among many others.

He started his career in 1969 with the film "Jolchobi", as Sadhon Roy's assistant cinematographer. He also played the same role in Ritvik Ghatak's "Titash Ekti Nodir Nam".

He joined Bangladesh Betar during the 1971 liberation war. However, he is most remembered for his stint in BTV after he joined in the late 70's, having spent more than three decades there.

He was involved in BTV's first ever 45-minute-long drama, which he finished in just one shot. He had also captured the fearsome Ramna Batamul bombings in 2001 with his camera. In 2009, he retired as director of photography for BTV.

"He was always smiling and radiant", said eminent actress Ferdousi Majumdar, who had worked with him in the "Sangsaptak".

"I had never seen him lose his cool, he loved taking photographs. I will always remember him as a great human being."

Samir Kushari's last rites took place last night at Rajarbag's Kali Mandir, after an official guard of honour. He is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.

## Country to get

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If electricity reaches every household and industry, then the country's overall socio-economic development will be possible, she said.

The latest and modern technologies have been used in the Rooppur plant to ensure safety and stop environmental pollution there, she added.

## It's akin to law

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to the Election Commission be made according to provisions of a specific law, no government has taken such an initiative in the last 50 years, the statement said.

"We urge the government to take urgent steps in this regard to enable the Election Commission to take the necessary lawful steps for conducting elections independently and without any external influence," the statement added.

Anisul said there is no scope to create controversy about forming a caretaker government during elections as there has been a Supreme Court verdict declaring it illegal.

Asked about BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's permanent release, he said the matter is not under the jurisdiction of the government; the case against her is under trial.

The law minister also said the government has decided to form a probe commission to identify the masterminds behind the murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family members on August 15, 1975.

About the Digital Security Act, the minister said the DSA was formulated to combat cybercrimes and that it is not the objective of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government to curb freedom of speech and press freedom.

The programme was organised by the Dhaka Reporters Unity and its President Mursalin Noman and Secretary Moshir Rahman Khan also spoke during the event.