

BANGLADESH  
UPDATE



543  
New cases in 24hrs



15,63,501  
Total cases



27,713  
Deaths



15,25,168  
Recoveries

GLOBAL  
UPDATE



4,876,138  
Deaths



239,217,948  
Total cases

# 5 members of kidney trade gang arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

They used to contact patients needing kidney transplants and then find individuals in remote villages who would donate a kidney for money.

The tests to match the donor and the recipient used to be done in Bangladesh. Then the organised gang prepared forged documents vouching that the donor and the recipient are related.

Meanwhile, the gang took hefty sums from the patients and gave a lump sum to the donor. The actual kidney transplant procedure used to be done in India.

The gang amassed crores of taka in the process, Rab officers said yesterday.

Rab said they have identified 20 members of the gang, which has been running this racket for 10 years.

“Around 100 low-income and poor people became victims of the gang,” Khandakar Al Moin, Rab’s legal and media wing director, told a press briefing at Rab media centre yesterday.

Rab officers learnt about this after arresting five members of the gang in raids in Joypurhat and Dhaka. The drive was launched after receiving complaints from the victims.

In primary interrogation, the arrestees admitted that they used to take Tk 15-20 lakh from each kidney patient while they promised each donor Tk 3-5 lakh. But, after each successful transplant, they used to pay the donors even less, Moin said. Some were given only Tk 2 lakh, he added.

The arrestees are: Shahrier Imran Ahmed, 36, admin of two Facebook pages -- Bangladesh Kidney and Liver Patients Chikitsa Seba and Kidney Liver Chikitsa Seba; Mehedi Hasan, 24, Saiful Islam, 28, Abdul Mannan, 45, and Tajul Islam, 38.

Rab said gang leader Shahrier Imran takes Tk 5-10 lakh while key members Mannan, who lured the donors promising hefty sums of money, and Tajul, Mannan’s associate, take Tk 5 lakh and Tk 3 lakh respectively, Moin said.

Mannan was accused in at least

six cases of illegal transplantation of human organs and went to jail before.

One of the victims told Rab that he was forced to donate his liver in India.

A Rab officer said the gang used to arrange Bangladeshi donors for Indian nationals too.

“They also arranged several kidney transplants in Bangladeshi hospitals,” he said, preferring anonymity.

The gang used to find kidney donors by promising Tk 5 lakh to people in desperate need of money.

There was a group within the gang that arranged the medical tests, documents vouching for the kinship of the donor and the recipient, and passports and visas for the individuals involved.

The gang has close relations with another group operating in the neighbouring country. That group made arrangements in India and ensured the donors returned to Bangladesh after the transplant, the Rab said.

According to the Transplant of Human Organ Act (amendment) 2018, a patient can obtain a kidney either from a “close relative” or from a brain-dead patient, with consent from kin.

A victim of the gang, Sujaul Mondol, 50, filed a case with Kalai Police Station in Joypurhat on Sunday against Mannan and Tajul.

Contacted last night, Sujaul told The Daily Star that Mannan and Tajul approached him around six years ago when he was in serious need of money.

The duo convinced him to donate his kidney for Tk 3.5 lakh. He was taken to a Delhi hospital where his kidney was donated to a man from Cumilla, he added.

The duo, however, gave him Tk 3 lakh. “Now they say they will accuse me in false cases if I demand the rest of the money.”

Besides, Mannan and Tajul have recently been asking him to convince others to sell their kidneys to the gang, he said.

currently in jail. Hence, the court made the suggestion,” said AKM Badruddoza, the RJSC’s lawyer.

Evaly Chief Executive Officer Mohammad Rassel and Chairperson Shamima Nasrin are in jail since September 16.

According to Evaly’s own assessment, it has assets amounting to Tk 121 crore, while it owes customers and merchants more than Tk 1,000 crore.

The company took money in advance payments, luring people with massive discounts on products on its site and promising delivery within 7-45 days. However, many buyers are yet to receive the items they ordered even after the promised delivery deadline.

In some cases, Evaly offered refund cheques to customers following their failure to deliver, but in many cases, the cheques bounced because of insufficient funds in Evaly’s bank account. Subsequently, several cases have been filed against Rassel and Nasrin on allegations of embezzlement and cheque fraud.

a standstill due to the pandemic, but has now gone back to its pre-Covid condition.

“The standstill, which was seen even six months ago, is not evident now as dynamism has been infused in economic activities,” Mannan said quoting Asa as saying.

Asa also assured the minister that the operations of the UNFPA would increase in Bangladesh in the coming days and it will give more emphasis on education and research activities.

Responding to concerns expressed by the UNFPA representative over the prevalence of child marriage, Mannan informed her that the government has been making strong efforts to curb it.

“Hopefully the incidents of such marriages would come down in the coming days,” he added.

## Bangladesh fared better

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country representative for the last four and half years, Mannan told journalists after the meeting.

“Dr Asa said Bangladesh has a population at least 20 times bigger than Sweden but the death rates of both countries are almost the same,” he said.

People of Bangladesh have responded well to vaccination, Asa said, adding that many citizens of several countries around the world, including the US, are refusing vaccination.

“On the contrary, people of Bangladesh have shown keen interest in taking jabs.”

Bangladesh is an example in economic recovery, she said, adding that the country’s economy came to

## Khaleda Zia hospitalised

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Hospital with Covid infections. She received treatment there until June 19 for post-Covid complications and some other underlying health problems.

Amid the coronavirus outbreak, the government freed Khaleda from jail for six months through an executive order suspending her sentences on March 25 last year.

On September 19, the government extended for six more months the suspension of her jail term.

It was for the fourth time the government extended her release by suspending her jail sentences in Zia Orphanage Trust and Zia Charitable

Trust graft cases based on two conditions.

As per the conditions, she will not be allowed to go abroad for treatment as she will have to stay home and receive treatment there. She was released earlier on the same conditions.

The BNP chairperson’s doctors said she has been suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, ophthalmological and dental complications.

Her family applied to the government twice in May and August this year seeking permission to take her abroad for better treatment, but the government turned it down saying there is no scope for a convicted person to avail of such a scope.



Two devotees offer prayers at Ramna Kali Mandir at the capital’s Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday, the second day of the five-day Durga Puja. A large number of Hindu devotees visited puja mandaps in the city to have a look at Goddess Durga and seek her divine blessings.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Borrowing to send economy roaring

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huge amounts of money when it is still a developing country.

“We have decided not to borrow heavily and will always keep borrowing in line with the GDP.”

He went on to state that Bangladesh never failed to repay its loans.

“We always do the debt servicing timely. That is why the development partners have faith in us,” Kamal added.

Hussain said there is room for improving public debt management.

“There is the room because the opportunities for concessional debt financing, while waning, are not exhausted. This means we can reform the composition of debt to make it even less costly.”

There is a need for such reforms because interest expenditure constitutes 2.3 percent of GDP, which is higher than the expenditure on education relative to GDP and about one-fifth of total tax revenues, Hussain said.

Out of the domestic debt, 48 percent is thanks to the national

savings certificate, for which the interest rate varies from 10 to 11 percent.

In contrast, banking sources, whose interest rate ranges from 2 to 8 percent, account for 46 percent of the domestic debt.

For borrowing from foreign sources, the interest is still less than 2 percent with a repayment period of 20 to 30 years.

“There is an opportunity to build more fiscal space under the prevailing financing conditions. The latter cannot be taken for granted in a world vulnerable to disruptive changes,” Hussain added.

Kamal hinted that the interest rate on foreign loans would not increase in future even if the country graduates from the least-developed country bracket in 2026.

The government is negotiating with the development partners so that it could borrow at low-interest rates for a long period with the view to making the graduation to the developing country bracket sustainable following

the global coronavirus pandemic, he said.

In fiscal 2021-22, the government has allocated Tk 68,589 crore for loan repayment. In fiscal 2009-10, the amount was Tk 14,646 crore.

The amount of total foreign debt servicing also rose to \$1,900 million in fiscal 2020-21, which was at \$876 million in fiscal 2009-10.

There is also room for improving the return from debt-financed expenditures by improving the efficiency of public investment management, Hussain said.

Public investment projects take too long to complete and often exceed the budget by a multiple of the original budget, he added.

A total of 10 megaprojects, which would have a substantial impact on the economy and wellbeing of the population, were singled out for fast-tracking.

And yet, the projects, for which thousands of crores were diverted over the past decade, are behind on their schedule.

## Highwaymen now a headache

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Seeking remedies, leaders of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) sat with the home minister and top law enforcers in July.

BGMEA President Faruque Hassan said the minister assured them of taking measures and installing CCTV cameras on Dhaka-Chattogram highway within four months to prevent theft.

The Bangladesh economy relies heavily on apparel export. The market share of Bangladesh, the second largest RMG exporter after China, in the over \$400 billion global garment items is 6.8 percent, according to 2019 World Trade Organisation data.

RMG exporters say repeated thefts could lead to the loss of reputation of Bangladesh’s apparel sector and eventually cancellation of work orders, affecting the country’s export earnings.

THREATENED BY THEFT

The gangs have established such a foolproof system that exporters cannot even know about the theft until their buyers inform them of missing items, sometimes months after the shipment, causing embarrassment.

After a third-party inspection of quality and quantity, exporters contact transport agencies to send garment items for shipment through Chattogram Sea Port. The transport agencies then hire the lorries.

Once the loading at the factory is complete, the drivers, who are part of the gangs, pass the message to their partners in crime about the shipment, the route and the time, detectives said.

As per the plan, the vehicles stop on the highway and go to secret warehouses in Gazipur, Shiddirganj in Narayanganj, Chandina in Cumilla, Feni, Mirsharai and Sitakunda in Chattogram, a DB official said.

There, the gangs take off the seals of the padlocks on the cargo door, open the cartons, remove some garments items from the bottom of the boxes, refill the empty space with sand, rags or even mud, and then reseal the cartons and the padlocks.

The repackaging is done so smartly that it is difficult to spot any abnormality until the foreign buyers open the cartons, said a number of exporters who have been victims of such theft and faced angry reactions

from buyers.

In some cases, 30-40 percent of the total consignment are stolen and sold at much lower prices in the local market or to some unscrupulous foreign buyers, according to detectives.

For instance, a quality T-shirt is sold for around \$3 on the black market, much below the export value of around \$10, BGMEA Vice-president Shahidullah Azim told The Daily Star recently.

Detectives have identified at least eight such gangs and have arrested 10 people over their alleged involvement in the organised crime.

Police said one gang is led by a 20-year veteran in the business named Shahed, also known as Sayeed. He was arrested after two cases were filed over such theft in Dhaka on September 12 and 17.

“We are conducting drives to arrest the rest of the gang members,” said Shahadat Hossain Suma, additional deputy commissioner of Tejgaon Division of Detective Branch.

AKM Hafiz Akhter, additional commissioner of Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), said they have information that some foreign buyers visit Bangladesh and purchase stolen garment products.

ON THE RISE

BGMEA records show highway theft of garment products is on the rise – two incidents were reported in 2019, nine in 2020 and 22 until July this year.

Industry insiders say actual incidents of such theft would be higher, as many exporters do not report them for fear of losing buyers’ confidence and possibly work orders.

In May, Jayanti Knitwear Ltd of Ashulia sent 28,320 pieces of garments to Chattogram port by a lorry for shipment.

But the foreign buyer found 11,000 pieces were missing and slapped a fine worth \$28,908 for sending fewer items than agreed upon, said Bulbul Ahmed, manager (Administration and Human Resource) of Jayanti Knitwear.

The company filed a case against the driver and his associates last month. After his arrest, the driver confessed before a Dhaka court that he stole the items, Bulbul added.

On August 13, Rab arrested six members of another gang from an abandoned steel mills in Narayanganj and seized 41 sacks and 506 cartons

full of stolen garments worth around Tk 6 crore.

At the time, Rab director (Legal and Media) Commander Khandaker Al Moin had said the arrestees admitted that they were involved in stealing exportable garment items for a long time.

Earlier in February and March, Rab caught 16 people red-handed in two separate drives when they were allegedly stealing garments items in Narayanganj and Cumilla.

A ‘RICH THIEF’

While the exporters count loss, some gang members make their fortunes out of the stolen goods.

Shahed, the alleged ringleader, is one of them.

Also known as Sylheti Sayeed, he and his gang members have stolen garment items from 5,000 trucks and covered vans in the last 21 years, DB officials told a press conference after his latest arrest on September 17.

He has been sued at least 24 times over the years over such thefts. Last year, he was in jail for eight months in connection with six cases filed in the port city. But he returned to the old ways after being released on bail, said DB Additional Commissioner Hafiz Akhter.

One DB official said Sayeed owns two buildings and a brick kiln in Sylhet. A number of leaders of Truck-Covered Van Owners Association in Chattogram said Sayeed owns 29 lorries.

The proceeds from the theft are shared among all gang members. For each operation, the driver gets Tk 15,000, the helper Tk 12,000, while the kinkin pockets the majority of the booty, detectives said.

Chowdhury Zafar Ahmmed, Secretary General of Bangladesh Covered Vans, Truck and Prime Movers Panno Poribahan Malik Association, acknowledged that some drivers and truck owners are involved in stealing garment items on the highways.

In the July meeting with the home minister, police asked factory owners to carry goods by their own trucks, if possible, or send trucks by police escort. They also asked them to monitor vehicles by using Global Positioning System (GPS) trackers.

A committee headed by the additional inspector general of highway police has been formed to work out a plan to tackle the crime.

‘TERROR ATTACK PLOT’

## NRB gets 5-year jail in Australia

STAR REPORT

A Bangladeshi-origin man has been sentenced to more than five years in prison by an Australian court for planning a terror attack in Bangladesh, reports The Sydney Morning Herald.

Nowroz Rayed Amin, 30, was stopped at Sydney Airport in February 2016. Police seized camouflage gear, tactical boots, an electronic copy of the bomb-making manual “The Anarchist Cookbook”, and USB sticks containing terrorism-related material, including 10 issues of the Islamic State magazine from his possession.

There were also videos of executions and suicide bombings.

Amin claimed to Border Force officers that the material was to educate his cousin in Bangladesh -- his parent’s home country, and dissuade him from joining Islamic State, however he was not allowed to get on his flight and his passport was later cancelled.

More than two years later, in June 2018, he was arrested at his home at Ingleburn in Sydney’s south-west. He pleaded guilty this year to doing an act in preparation or planning for a terrorist act, and intentionally attempting to export goods that advocated the doing of a terrorist act.

On Monday, a Sydney court jailed Amin for five years and four months, with a non-parole period of four years.

NSW Supreme Court Justice Peter Garling said that Amin readily agreed that he was seeking to identify someone overseas who would teach him to use explosives, but had insisted the explosives were only to be used in Bangladesh and not Australia.

Justice Garling said Amin gave the impression in his online communications that “an attack of some sort was going to happen in Australia”, however Amin maintained that he was simply “boasting, trying to make a name for himself” so he would be recruited by a group in Bangladesh.

Prosecutors had argued Amin was planning for a terrorist act in Australia, Bangladesh or Syria, however Amin denied this. He said any such act was only planned for Bangladesh.

Justice Garling accepted Amin’s evidence. He said Amin was a relatively young man, aged 24, at the time of the offences and had now rejected Islamic State ideology, telling the court that his previous violent views were from being “an immature and irrational person”.

Amin’s adoption of the extremist ideology was driven by several factors, including how he was treated as a boy after the September 11 terrorist attacks, and being taught a conservative form of Islam at a youth centre at Campbelltown, the court heard.

Justice Garling said Amin had matured considerably since the offences were committed, and from the time he was stopped at the airport his criminal conduct ceased.

He jailed Amin for five years and four months, with a non-parole period of four years, noting that his offence was “a serious one” but he had not made any real arrangements for what was to happen in Bangladesh.

## Inoculation

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initially, 50 to 100 children will be selected for this,” he said.

He came up with this announcement two days after Health Minister Zahid Maleque said the government would start child vaccination soon.

At a press conference on Sunday in the capital, the minister also said the government has a stock of 60 lakh Pfizer vaccine shots and 30 lakh children will be inoculated with those initially.

Besides, another 70 lakh Pfizer vaccine jabs will come soon, the minister added.

Earlier this month, Education Minister Dipu Moni said preparations were underway to vaccinate school students who are above 12 years old.

On September 11, students of schools and colleges in Bangladesh returned to their classrooms after a prolonged closure due to the pandemic.

According to officials, there are around one crore students in this age group, 12-17 years.

Since the reopening of in-person classes, there have been no notable cases of infection among students yet.

However, Dipu Moni on September 26 said educational institutions will be closed if there is any possibility of Covid cases going up.

14.DIE, 543 NEW CASES

Fourteen more people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, said a DGHHS press release.

The total number of Covid-19 deaths in the country now stands at 27,713, and the death rate is 1.77 percent.

At least 543 new infections were recorded during the period, taking the number of people infected to 15,63,501, the release added.

The current positivity rate is 2.35 percent, while the overall positivity rate stands at 15.64 percent.

Some 23,155 samples were tested across the country in the 24 hours.

At least 701 Covid-19 patients have recovered during the period.

With this, the number of recoveries reaches 15,25,168.

The recovery rate is 97.55 percent.

Among the 14 deceased, 10 were men and four women.