

BANGLADESH
UPDATE518
New cases in 24hrs15,64,019
Total cases27,730
Deaths15,25,673
RecoveriesGLOBAL
UPDATE4,886,184
Deaths239,752,032
Total cases

SHERPUR GANG-RAPE

Prime accused, five others on the run

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Mymensingh

Law enforcers could not arrest Omar Ali, prime accused in the mother-daughter gang rape case in Sherpur's Nalitabari, and five of his cohorts even four days after the incident.

The victims' family is now worried about justice.

Bashir Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Nalitabari Police Station, said since the incident, the six have been on the run. Police are using technology and conducting drives and he hopes the perpetrators would be arrested soon.

A 40-year-old mother and her 13-year-old daughter, both intellectually impaired, were raped by a gang early Sunday.

The woman filed a case with Nalitabari Police Station the same day, accusing eight people. Police have so far arrested two, including Abdus Sattar, 45, a cattle trader, and Sadek Mia, 30, a dredger operator.



The six other accused are Omar Ali, Osman Ali, Jahangir Alam, Tara Mia, Mofiz Uddin and Ahmed Ali, said Bashir Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Nalitabari Police Station.

According to locals, the perpetrators and the victims are from the same village -- Palashikuri.

The victim woman's elder sister said she visited the police station to urge them to arrest the six remaining accused as soon as possible.

She said, "My sister is suffering a lot. Her husband is mentally challenged and her 22-year-old son runs their six-member family by driving a CNG-run auto-rickshaw."

Omar Ali was a garments worker in Dhaka and lost his job during the pandemic. He came back to the village and started working as a farm labourer on his own and hired land, said Fazlul Haque, senior vice chairman of Poragon union Awami League.



The queues before the trucks of the state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) are getting longer by the day as the prices of essentials are going up in kitchen markets. The photo was taken in the capital's Khamarbari area yesterday.

PHOTO:
RASHED SHUMON

India resumes vaccine exports

Say officials as domestic stocks build up, most of its population inoculated

REUTERS, New Delhi

India has resumed a small amount of exports of Covid-19 vaccines and will increase exports significantly in the next few months as domestic stocks build up and most of its own large population is inoculated, officials said yesterday.

One million shots of Covaxin produced by Indian company Bharat Biotech were shipped to Iran last week, the Indian embassy in Tehran said.

Vaccines have also been sent to Nepal, a government source said, adding that the effort is focused on neighbouring nations.

So far about 4 million shots have been exported, the source said, a small amount in proportion to the expansive vaccine diplomacy Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government launched this year before a second wave of infections forced a halt.

But now that three-quarters of the adult population have had one shot and a third have had both shots, India is poised to play an important role in meeting foreign nations' vaccine requirements, said VK Paul, who heads the government's task force on Covid-19.

"As India's needs are met, going forward there will be a generous stockpile of vaccines," Paul told reporters.

The Serum Institute is producing 220 million shots of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine per month, up from 150 million in August, and Bharat Biotech is supplying 30 million shots of its home-grown vaccine which is set to rise to 50 million next month, he said.

With a few other locally developed vaccines moving closer to production or clearing regulatory approvals, India is expected to be producing 300-320 million shots a month by early next year -- more than the average 210 million doses it administers to its people each month, the officials said.

"A huge, huge availability of vaccines can be visualised for next year, we expect vaccines made in India to play a significant role in dealing with the pandemic across the world," Paul said.

India is the world's biggest maker of vaccines. Paul said it would in the next two or three days pass the 1 billion mark for vaccine doses administered since the start of its mass campaign to vaccinate all adult Indians.

6 Bangladeshi militant groups on FB blacklist

One individual also included, Intercept reveals

STAR REPORT

Facebook has developed a secret blacklist of over 4,000 individuals and organisations across the world that it considers "dangerous" as a part of its Dangerous Individuals and Organizations (DIO) policy, according to internal Facebook documents.

This was revealed by The Intercept, an American news organisation.

The list, including militant organisations, hate groups and politicians, also names six militant organisations and one individual in Bangladesh.

These are: Al Mursalat Media; Islamic State Bangladesh; Harakat ul-Jihad I Islami - Bangladesh; Ansarullah Bangla Team; Jamaat Ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB); Saham al-Hind Media, and Tariqul Islam, who is also affiliated with Jamaat Ul Mujahideen Bangladesh.

The Intercept published a full

snapshot of the complete list containing the names of the organisations and individuals. All the blacklisted entities are currently banned on the social media platform.

Users who discuss these groups or individuals on Facebook may be penalised by the social media platform according to a three-tiered system.

Those who commit "serious offline harm", such as terrorists and militant organisations, are placed in Tier 1. Tier 2 includes "Violent Non-State Actors", such as armed Syrian rebels, according to Facebook. Tier 3 consists of people and organisations that Facebook says violate its hate speech and dangerous organisation policies, but who "haven't necessarily engaged in violence to date or advocated for violence".

All the Bangladeshi names fall under Tier 1, meaning discussing them on Facebook may result in heavy penalties.

Ex-minister's APS arrested

FROM PAGE 1

The authorities concerned to publish advertisements in two national Bangla dailies asking Khandaker Mohtesam Hossain Babar, brother of former AL minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, and five others to appear before it by October 31 in a Tk2,000 crore money laundering case.

The five others are: AHM Fuad, Faridpur district Swachhchhabak League General Secretary Fahad bin Wazed Fahim, former Faridpur town Jubo League joint convener Kamrul Hasan David, district Jubo League Joint Convener Mohammad Ali Minar, and Faridpur town Jubo League Joint Convener Tariqul Islam Nasim.

The judge passed the order after receiving reports that arrest warrants against the six were forwarded for execution from the officer-in-charge of Faridpur Sadar Police Station, court sources said.

After accepting the charges, the same judge on September 30 issued arrest warrants against the six since they were shown "fugitive accused" in the charge sheet.

Four other accused -- Faridpur

town AL's former general secretary Sajjad Hossain Barkat and his brother Imtiaz Hasan Rubel, also former president of Faridpur Press Club; former Faridpur town Jubo League president Khandaker Nazmul Islam Levi and its former general secretary Ashiqur Rahman Farhan -- are behind bars.

On March 3, Uttam Kumar Biswas, assistant superintendent of police of the CID and also the investigation officer of the money laundering case, submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka.

SM Miraj Al Mahmud, a CID inspector, lodged the case with Kafur Police Station against the two brothers -- Sajjad and Imtiaz -- under the Money Laundering Act on June 26 last year.

According to the case statement, they amassed huge amounts of wealth after winning contracts from various government departments in the district through manipulation since 2010. They were allegedly involved in drug smuggling and land grabbing. The two became owners of around 23 buses, several trucks, and private cars.



AHM Fuad

Wanton neglect, irreversible loss

FROM PAGE 1

Also, chromium-mixed water, which was supposed to be treated separately, is going to the river untreated.

Another problem with this CETP is it cannot treat salt as well though the tanneries use a huge quantity of salt to process rawhides.

BSCIC officials say that due to non-cooperation of tanners, the CETP is not working properly.

"They [tannery owners] actually don't want the CETP to run smoothly," said BSCIC Chairman Mostaque Hassan.

Shahin Ahmed, president of Bangladesh Tannery Association, however, dismissed the BSCIC chairman's allegations as baseless.

"BSCIC is to blame for the malfunctioning of the CETP," he said.

And meantime, the Dhaleshwari and the communities living around it bear the brunt of it all.

During a visit last week, it was seen the CETP was releasing untreated black liquid waste through its main channel.

Asked, an official who would not speak on the record but introduced himself as an engineer, said they were releasing untreated waste as they were cleaning the CETP.

But locals say they see it happening every day.

Mongol Mia from Jhauchar village who was trying to catch fish from a small boat said how could fish survive here as they release waste water into the river every evening. Sometimes they release it in broad daylight.

"Even last year I could catch some fish, but this year there are almost no fish. Many people used to fish during the monsoon, but that doesn't happen anymore," he added.

CETP SAGA

According to a 2003 memorandum of understanding between the government and tannery owners and footwear exporters, the government was supposed to set up a CETP by 2005 at a cost of Tk 175 crore.

But nothing happened in the next few years.

Then in 2006, the caretaker government re-examined the cost of the proposed CETP putting it at Tk 350 crore and asking the industry owners to share the burden. But the tannery owners balked at the suggestion.

In 2009, the High Court directed the government to ensure the tanneries were relocated from the city's Hazaribagh area by February 2010 or the industries would face closure. The HC also ordered the DoE to have the industries set up ETPs by June 2010.

After coming to power in 2009, the Awami League government moved to relocate the tanneries to Savar. The industries ministry kept seeking time extensions from the HC as negotiations with the tanners dragged on.

Although the work for the CETP project was supposed to start in 2003, it actually began in 2012, almost a decade later.

A Bangladesh-China joint venture was awarded the construction of the CETP through a bidding process in 2012. But due to bureaucratic tangles and non-cooperation of the tanners,

the work got delayed.

In its second revision in August 2013, the project's tenure was extended to June 2016 and the cost hiked to Tk 1,078 crore.

Later, the Executive Committee on National Economic Council (Ecnc) approved the extension of the project in its fourth revision, where the expenditure was cut by Tk 63.15 crore to Tk 1,015.56 crore in 2016.

The tenure was extended for the third time in January 2017 to June 2019, keeping the cost unchanged.

The deadline passed many times as the tanners were not ready to move to Savar yet.

In 2016, the government gave them a 72-hour ultimatum, but only a few complied and most of them stayed put.

In January 2017, Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, senior secretary to the industries ministry, said the government would prevent tanners from transporting rawhides to Hazaribagh after January 31, 2017.

They fixed March 31 as the deadline for shifting. And finally, the tanneries moved to Savar from Hazaribagh.

Asked about the unprecedented delay in project implementation, Jitendra Nath Paul, former project director of the Savar tannery estate, said it was mainly because of legal complexities.

The construction work of the tannery estate was completed in last June.

On June 27 this year, the government terminated the contract with the Bangladesh-China joint venture and handed over the responsibilities of the CETP to Tannery Industries Estate Wastage Treatment Plant Company Ltd, a newly formed company managed by tanners and BSCIC officials.

But the Department of Environment said the CETP has never been fully functional, and tannery industries have been polluting the Dhaleshwari since the beginning.

Although the CETP has been running for some time now, the online monitoring system has not been installed as per the agreement and testing facilities at its laboratory are inadequate.

Only four of eight kinds of testing facilities were installed in the laboratory, and a mini workshop was not constructed at the CETP site.

Jitendra Nath Paul, former project director of the Savar tannery industrial estate, said there are some components of the project that were not implemented.

So, the government may now take up a Balancing, Modernisation, Rehabilitation and Expansion (BMRE) project to make the CETP fully operational.

Regarding the Bangladesh-China joint venture company, he said the government has deducted Tk 26 crore (32 lakh USD) from the total payable amount of Tk 492 crore to the construction company as penalty, as per the agreement.

DOE OBSERVATIONS

Recently, after visiting the tanneries and testing the water quality of the Dhaleshwari, a group of experts from the Monitoring and Enforcement

of the DoE prepared a report where they recommended shutting down the tannery estate until the CETP is not fully functional.

The report, which was sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the environment ministry, mentioned the BSCIC authorities have been polluting the Dhaleshwari with liquid waste since 2016.

The BSCIC is releasing waste water into the river through three pipe lines. Besides, it could not take any measures to manage solid waste generated in the tanneries.

"Many times, the DOE tested sample from the CETP-treated water, and found the parameters higher than standards allowed by Bangladesh Environment Conservation Rule 1997."

The report mentions, "The authorities have violated the directives of the High Court about not polluting rivers with industrial waste."

In August, the parliamentary standing committee, on the basis of this report, recommended that the environment ministry shut down the tannery estate.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury, chief of the JS body, said they will hold a meeting to get an update about BSCIC measures on closure of the tannery estate.

"If they fail to do it, the standing committee will come up with its next course of recommendation," Saber, a ruling Awami League MP, said.

BLAME GAME

BSCIC Chairman Mostaque Hassan said tanners are using two to three times more water in their tanneries.

Also, the tannery owners throw all types of effluent including solid waste inside the CETP, which is totally unacceptable.

"By throwing all types of effluent including chromium into the pipe line of the CETP, they are polluting the environment to an alarming extent."

The BSCIC chief also alleged the tanners were not supposed to drain out the chromium-mixed water to the main channel of the CETP. But they are doing it.

He said tannery owners are out to make sure the CETP fails in a planned manner.

Mostaque said around Tk 36 crore is needed to run the CETP, but the tannery owners are not willing to pay the money.

He, however, opposed the recommendation that the tannery estate be shut down until the CETP functions properly. Rather, he said, he wanted the tannery owners to cooperate properly and make the CETP functional.

Shahin Ahmed, president of Bangladesh Tannery Association, rejected all the allegations made by the BSCIC chairman.

Talking to The Daily Star, he said tannery owners do not have any power to bring change in any establishment of the CETP.

"BSCIC will have to shoulder the responsibilities for the non-functioning CETP. Because it's their project and they are yet to hand over the responsibility to us," he also said.

BTRC shuts 178 unauthorised news portals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has shut down 178 unregistered news portals.

The process of shutting them down began on Tuesday.

Mustafa Jabbar, post and telecommunications minister, told The Daily Star, "We received a list of unregistered news portals from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting last night [Tuesday night]."

"We've been instructed by the High Court to shut down unregistered portals."

Only those on the list given to them by the information ministry were shut down, he added.

3 killed

FROM PAGE 1

where Hindu idols and temples were vandalised as the country observes Durga Puja. At least 50 people were injured in the clashes in Cumilla.

The administration in Chattogram deployed eight BGB platoons in six upazilas of the district last night, after several temples of the Hindu community were reportedly attacked in Banshkhal and Kamaphuli upazilas.

Talking to The Daily Star around 1:40am today, Nazimuddin, sub-inspector of Hajiganj Police Station, said three people were killed in the clash in the upazila.

"There are injury marks on the bodies but I cannot say what caused those," he said, adding that at least 15 police personnel were injured. Of them, eight were admitted to hospital.

Dr Mohammad Shakhawat Ullah, civil surgeon of Chandpur, also confirmed that three people were killed in the clash.

Local media outlets reported that at least 60 people, including journalists, police and common people, were injured in the clash.

Superintendent of Police in Chandpur Milon Mahmud said a procession was brought out from Hajiganj Biswaroad intersection area after Esha prayers last night.

Encircling the main road near Hajiganj Bazar twice when the procession was crossing the eastern side of Hajiganj Bazar, a sudden attack was launched on the Lakshmi Narayan Akhra (Trinayani) Puja Mandap.

Police fired teargas shells and shots in the air to bring the situation under control. The police action led to the clash.

According to sources at Hajiganj Upazila Health Complex, the deceased were Alamin, 18, of Barakul union of the upazila, Yasin Hossain Hridoy, 15, of Randhumimura area and Bablu of Chapainawabganj.

Earlier yesterday in Cumilla, at least 50 people were injured as a group of religious extremists clashed with law enforcers in Nana Dighirpar area over reports of "demeaning the Holy Quran" at a Puja Mandap.

The government asked local administration to investigate the incident that created a tense situation in the district, and urged all to maintain religious harmony. BGB members have already been deployed there.

The religious extremists started rushing to the Mandap area around 9:00am after a video went viral on social media. Members of law enforcement agencies arrived within a very short time at the Mandap where Hindu devotees were celebrating Durga Puja, said police.

"We informed our higher authorities immediately about the matter and beefed up security there," said Anwarul Azim, officer-in-charge of Cumilla's Kotwali Model Police Station.

To quell the situation, the deputy commissioner and superintendent of police in the district held a meeting with the local Hindu community and others around 10:00am.

By then, several groups under banners of different Muslim religious organisations gathered in Nana Dighirpar. As the meeting was ongoing, the mob attacked the mandap around 10:30am, said locals and police.

Contacted, Cumilla DC Kamrul Hasan said all necessary measures would be taken to investigate the matter and punish the culprits.

In Chattogram, BGB was deployed from 9:00pm, Omar Faruk, staff officer of the Chattogram deputy commissioner's office, told The Daily Star.

Police and administration sources confirmed three incidents of attack in Banshkhal's Chambal area, Kali Mandir municipality and Kamaphuli upazila.

"There were some incidents at Banshkhal and Kamaphuli upazilas but the situation is now under control," said Chattogram DC Md Mominur Rahman.

Omar Faruk said, "In Banshkhal, Hathazari, two platoons of BGB have been deployed while one platoon BGB has been deployed for each of Fatickhari, Sitakunda, Patiya, and Chandanaish upazila each."

"Apart from that, two executive magistrates were also sent to six upazilas to take necessary actions," said Omar Faruk.

DC Mominur Rahman said, "several more platoons of BGB will be deployed in the district and Metro area by morning."

Chattogram Metropolitan Police commissioner Saleh Mohammed Tanvir told "police are on alert in the temple so that no one can fish in troubled water destroying the harmony."

In Kurigram's Ulipur upazila, several temples were vandalised and one was even set on fire.

Fresh fighting in Ethiopia's Afar as army mounts 'offensive'

AFP, Addis Ababa

Fighting has resumed in northern Ethiopia's Afar region after a month-long lull, humanitarian and rebel sources told AFP yesterday, as the government appeared to be pressing a new offensive.

There were reports of an armed clash Tuesday in the town of Awra, in Afar's Fenti zone, including use of heavy weapons by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) that killed

multiple civilians, the humanitarian sources said.

The reports could not be independently verified and officials in Afar could not be reached for comment.

TPLF spokesman Getachew Reda denied claims the rebels had used heavy weapons against civilians but confirmed there had been fresh hostilities in Afar.

"Enemy forces are crumbling and in disarray in parts of Afar," he said,

describing fighting along the border between Afar and Amhara regions.

"We do not target civilians and the alleged artillery attack is yet another [fictitious] accusation to tarnish our forces' reputation."

For nearly a week humanitarian and rebel sources have been reporting signs of a government offensive that could potentially mark a new phase of the 11-month-old war in northern Ethiopia.