

BANGLADESH UPDATE

154
New cases in 24hrs

15,70,835
Total cases

27,891
Deaths

15,34,635
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

5,057,629
Deaths

250,079,129
Total cases



Left, pro-transport strike activists assault a BRTC bus driver behind the wheel and force a tanker truck driver out of the cab at Tigerpass Circle, Chattogram, yesterday morning. The almost total absence of public transport caused immense suffering to people who don't have private vehicles. Middle, large crowds waiting for boats at Sadarghat Launch Terminal in the capital; right, winding queues for train tickets at Kamalapur Railway Station and a family disembarking from a lorry after reaching Khulna from Dhaka.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN, PALASH KHAN, HABIBUR RAHMAN, COLLECTED

Workers Party man stabbed to death

Came under the attack for filing case against muggers, say police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

An activist of the Workers Party of Bangladesh was stabbed to death allegedly by muggers at his home in Hadi area of Rajshahi city last night.

Nibaran Chandra Burman, officer-in-charge of Boalia Police Station, said Piarul Islam, 32, was an auto-rickshaw puller.

"He died on the spot as the muggers stabbed him several times on his chest," the officer said, adding that a suspect named Shimul has been detained.

"We have identified the key suspects. They were accused in mugging cases and were out on bail."

The incident happened around 9:00pm when three muggers, led by Shimul, and several other unidentified

persons broke into Piarul's house. They stabbed him in the chest and fled the scene.

Police recovered his body and sent it to Rajshahi Medical College morgue for autopsy.

Police and eye witnesses said the same attackers assaulted and injured Piarul one and a half years ago when the latter rebuked them for being involved in criminal activities.

Piarul then filed a case against the muggers with Boalia Police Station. The accused were intimidating Piarul to withdraw the case.

On Saturday evening, Piarul and one of the suspects exchanged heated words publicly. He was attacked a few hours later.

Bangladesh to buy

FROM PAGE 1

"The negotiation went on for a long time. This time, we agreed in principle to buy five naval ships. Three of those will be imported from the UK and the two others will be built in our dockyard in Chattogram."

The minister said the final deal on the procurement is yet to be signed. "Our Ministry of Defence will be working on it. We will surely buy the ships at a competitive price."

The development comes at a time when the Indo-Pacific region is drawing more global attention.

There is already the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, known as the QUAD, a strategic dialogue between the United States, India, Japan and Australia, which analysts say is aimed at countering China.

Moreover, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States announced on September 15 a security pact called AUKUS for the Indo-Pacific region. Under the pact, the US and the UK will help Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines.

Momen said Bangladesh and the UK have a solid relationship which is growing day by day -- be it in the areas of development, trade and politics.

Earlier on October 14, Type 23 frigate HMS Kent of the UK's Carrier Strike Group deployment (CSG21) sailed to the naval base in Chattogram

marking the celebration of Bangladesh's Golden Jubilee of independence and highlighting the historic bilateral defence connections and people-to-people relationship between the UK and Bangladesh.

HMS Kent engaged in a series of events with the Bangladesh Navy and the local administration in Chattogram to maximise bilateral relations benefiting both countries' military, trade, and political alliances.

"This year, with the spirit of Brit Bangla Bondhon, the UK is demonstrating the depth and significance of UK-Bangla ties through its commitment to engage more with Bangladesh as a partner of sustainable peace and growth," the UK High Commission in Dhaka said in a statement on October 18.

British High Commissioner Robert Chatterton Dickson said the welcoming of the frigate builds on a long history of defence cooperation that the UK is extremely proud of.

"We are committed to deepening our cooperation as a key part of the enduring relationship between our two countries."

According to the statement, a significant number of Bangladesh Navy personnel have trained alongside the Royal Navy in the UK, including at the Royal College of Defence Studies.

Minorities attacked in 27 dists

FROM PAGE 1

AK Abdul Momen and announced protest processions -- Dhikkar Michil -- across the country for November 12.

Momen had said some "enthusiastic" media outlets and individuals were spreading cooked-up stories about the deaths and rapes of members of religious minorities.

"No one was raped and not a single mandir was torched or destroyed. However, a couple of [idols of] deities or Goddesses were vandalised," he had said.

The minister also said six people died during the recent religious violence, including four Muslims. "Two Hindus died -- one was a normal death while the other died by drowning."

The Parishad said the violence began in Cumilla on October 13 and spread to Noakhali, Chattogram, Barishal, Cox's Bazar, Sylhet, Chapainawabganj, Moulvibazar, Habiganj, Bhola, Natore, Kishoreganj, Munshiganj, Feni, Laxmipur, Bandarban and Gazipur within October 13 night.

Attacks were carried out in different places of those districts. Later, similar attacks took place in Kurigram, Rajbari, Rangpur, Gaibandha, Bagerhat, Jhalakathi, Panchagarh, Kushtia, Bagura and Naogaon.

On October 20, The Daily Star reported that 101 religious sites

including temples and mandaps were attacked in 13 districts in the previous six days. Besides, 181 homes or shops were also vandalised.

"The attack has not stopped. It is taking place in a few spots," Rana Dasgupta said at the press conference yesterday.

"Political parties always deny the existence of communal attacks on religious and ethnic minorities. It is going on... they [political parties] are trading blame over the matter.

"A culture of impunity is at the heart of such repeated attacks."

Rana Dasgupta said the victims of the Ramu and Nasirnagar communal attacks were yet to get justice. Culprits behind similar incidents between 2001 and 2006 have also not been tried.

"The double standards being employed by the government are fuelling mistrust among the minorities," he said.

Former parliament member Ushatan Talukder, president of the platform, demanded a neutral investigation into the incidents. He also demanded enactment of a law for the protection of the religious minority community people.

Irrespective of their political affiliations, attackers should be punished under the speedy trial and the special powers acts," he added.

Power, gas up for hike next

FROM PAGE 1

Now, Tk 1,250 crore is needed. "Managing such huge amounts of additional funds is now a big concern," he said, adding that the ministry has written to the finance division seeking funds for a cargo of LNG scheduled to arrive next month.

The import cost of LNG is now Tk 56 per cubic metre, so the average cost per cubic metre of gas has jumped to Tk 23 from Tk 12 previously.

The government may need to give about Tk 20,000 crore as an electricity subsidy if the price is not adjusted, Rahman said.

"We must remember that the government is providing Covid-19 vaccines free of cost. If the fuel price is not raised, there would be an adverse impact on the budget," said a finance ministry official on condition of anonymity.

Economists criticised the government move, which comes at a time Bangladesh is emerging from the throes of the pandemic.

"Many sectors are still struggling and we do not know definitively yet that there won't be another Covid-19 wave," said Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling.

Hiking the electricity and gas tariffs along with the prices of diesel and kerosene would increase the production costs and fuel inflation

further.

But the finance ministry official, quoting an internal macroeconomic study, said the impact of the fuel price hike on both food and non-food inflation may last only three months.

Raihan though maintains the government could have put off the decision by several months.

"Our recovery process would get hurt from inside -- at a time when the government support is badly needed," he said.

The government presented the losses the state-run Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation would be racking up as its rationale for raising the prices of diesel and kerosene by 23 percent -- and piling up the sufferings of the poor and the middle-classes, still reeling from the blow of the pandemic.

In the five and a half months to October, the government agency has incurred losses of Tk 1,147.60 crore for the surge in crude oil prices in the international market, according to the energy and mineral resources division.

The converse, however, did not hold for the BPC.

When the price of diesel was low in the global market, multilateral lenders like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and local think-tanks like the Centre for Policy Dialogue requested the government to reduce the fuel price

accordingly.

But the government resisted. Between fiscals 2014-15 and 2020-21, the state-run corporation had logged in profits of Tk 43,136 crore.

When prodded on the matter, the energy secretary said the government reduced the diesel price by Tk 3 per litre in April 2016 but at that time the transport owners did not bring down the fares.

"We will surely reduce the price of diesel if the price comes down in the global market in the coming months," Rahman said.

Nasrul Hamid, state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, echoed the same yesterday.

Asked whether the government would consider bringing down the tariffs on fuel imports like in India instead of going for a price hike, Hamid said the National Board of Revenue can take such a decision and not his ministry.

The government could have considered the loss from not hiking the diesel and kerosene prices as one form of stimulus, Raihan said.

Since many failed to get the earlier stimulus packages, the benefits of this round would have reached all.

"My hunch is that the government will backtrack from its decision," Raihan said, adding that the energy ministry's move on Wednesday was taken in a rushed manner.

Sufferings on for slow govt response

FROM PAGE 1

Road Transport and Highway Association leaders told journalists that they would enforce an indefinite strike from Friday. The announcement came from the Bangladesh Truck, Covered Van, Tank Lorry, Prime Mover Owners and Workers Coordination Council.

On the same day, Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association applied to the road transport and bridges ministry to raise bus fares.

Meanwhile, a government committee led by the chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) will discuss bus fares today and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) will also hold a meeting today to discuss the fare-related issues.

Obaidul Quader, also the general secretary of the ruling Awami League, yesterday once again requested transport leaders to withdraw the strike.

He and some of his cabinet colleagues were rather busy justifying the government decision to hike the fuel price. They cited the fuel price in India and the global market.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan held a meeting with a group of transport leaders around noon yesterday, but the meeting ended inconclusively.

"So, the transport strike is not going to be withdrawn for now," Talukder Mohammed Monir, one of the top leaders who met the home minister at latter's Dhanmondi house, said.

"The home minister asked us to meet him. We raised our points before him and he heard our points. Now, he will talk with the high ups [of the government] and may call us again," he added.

The home ministry said the meeting was an informal one.

Mozammel Hogue Chowdhury, secretary general of Jatri Kalyan Samity, said coming to a resolution would not take this long if the government was eager to solve it.

"People's suffering intensifies due to the delay of the government," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Khandaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of the Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said, "We hope the problem will be solved at tomorrow's [Sunday] meeting."

Road Transport and Highway Division Secretary Nazrul Islam could not be reached over phone for comments.

Meanwhile, leaders of truck and lorry owners associations decided not to take part in today's meeting as it's solely for fixing bus fares.

They will continue the strike until the government cuts fuel prices to some extent and cut the additional toll for Bangabandhu Bridge and Mukterpur Bridge, association leaders said.

"We hope the government will hold a meeting with us tomorrow. We will not call off the strike until our demands are met," a leader said.

LAUNCH STRIKE
Launch owners suspended launch operations across the country from yesterday to press home their demands: either cancel the fuel price hike or increase the launch fares.

Although their association did not give any formal direction about the strike, launch owners moved their vessels from the terminals, including Sadarghat in Dhaka, around noon yesterday.

The development came a day after Bangladesh Inland Waterways (passenger carriers) Association demanded the government to double launch fares.

"We did not declare a strike, but the owners can't afford the operational cost after the fuel price hike. They stopped operating the launches," Mahbub Uddin Ahmed, president of the association, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Contacted, Rafiqul Islam, director (traffic) of BIWTA, said his office planned to hold a meeting over the fare on Monday, but later decided to do it today.

He added that the meeting could not be held earlier because it was a weekend.

City dwellers had to depend on rickshaws, CNG-run three-wheelers and motorcycles paying exorbitant sums for commuting on the second day of the strike yesterday. There were a few state-owned BRTC buses.

People were seen walking to their destinations in most of the areas.

Candidates of the admission test of the seven Dhaka University-affiliated colleges, Buet and some recruitment

tests struggled to reach their exam centres on time.

Piklu Chakrabarty came to Dhaka from Shayestaganj, Habiganj, yesterday to take part in a recruitment exam.

"After failing to get a train ticket, I travelled in a microbus, spending Tk 1,000 to reach Mohakhali. Then I spent Tk 200 to reach Tejoan College to take part in the exam," he said.

"I am unemployed, I wanted to complete the trip with Tk 1,000; but now I have to borrow Tk 5,000," he added.

Trains and flights faced unusual pressure from passengers throughout the day. Airfare of different domestic routes increased two to three times.

In Cox's Bazar, police yesterday made arrangements to take tourists to Chattogram after several thousand tourists got stranded there.

Chinese spy convicted of trying to steal US aviation trade secrets

REUTERS

A spy for the Chinese Ministry of State Security has been convicted by a federal jury of plotting to steal trade secrets from several U.S. aviation and aerospace companies, the Justice Department said on Friday.

Yanjun Xu, the first Chinese operative extradited to the United States for trial, was convicted of two counts of conspiring and attempting to commit economic espionage, in addition to a count of conspiracy to commit trade secret theft and two counts of attempted theft of trade secrets.

The ruling means Yanjun could face up to 60 years in prison total for all violations and fines totaling more than \$5 million, according to a press release. He will be sentenced by a federal district court judge.

In a statement, FBI Assistant Director Alan Kohler Jr. said the bureau was working with dozens of U.S. agencies to share information and resources to combat operations by the People's Republic of China.

Misery piles up

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have shot up in the kitchen market in the last one month.

The sugar was being sold still at Tk 80 per kg, Tk 5 higher than the government-fixed rate of Tk 74-75 a kg.

Consumers have been spending more on edible oil, and flour.

Coarse flour (ata) and fine flour are available at Tk 38-40 and Tk 48-52 a kg, which is 4 percent and 5 percent higher than a month before respectively. Onion was being sold at Tk 52-65 per kg, according to the state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB).

A litre of bottled Soybean oil was being sold at Tk 150-160, around 48 percent high in a year, while the price of 5-litre bottle of soybean oil is about Tk 700-760.

Broiler chicken was being sold for Tk 150-170 a kg and Sonali variety for Tk 300-340 at different kitchen markets.

Shefali Begum, who works as a housemaid in Rajabazar area, said "I can no longer run my family with the money I get from working in people's homes. To survive in this situation, I have reduced the intake of all kinds of foods."

Several traders said if the ongoing transport strike is prolonged, the prices of the daily essentials will go beyond the reach of even middle-class people.

Ghulam Rahman, president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said in fact, as the supply of vegetable increases in November, prices fall and the prices go within the reach of the common man in December every year.

But the recent rise in fuel prices has created an increased risk in the market. As the cost of transportation will increase, there are doubts as to whether consumers will get the benefits of winter vegetables this time around, he said.

"Rising oil prices will have a huge negative impact on commodity prices due to rising transport and production costs. And people will continue to suffer," he added.

Cracked before

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Asked, ER Enterprise authorities that the previous project was completed as per the government design. "If the design had some flaws, we cannot do anything about it."

Later, the UNO said it was government work and the government would decide what to do about it. "Nobody has the right to interrupt in the construction work."

China's Xinhua lauds Xi ahead of key Communist Party meeting

REUTERS, Shanghai

China's state news agency Xinhua lauded President Xi Jinping on Saturday as a tireless, selfless and scholarly servant of the people, ahead of a key meeting of the ruling Communist Party that is expected to further cement his authority.

Xi is "a man of determination and action, a man of profound thoughts and feelings, a man who inherited a legacy and dares to innovate, and a man who has forward-looking vision and is committed to working tirelessly," Xinhua said.

The party's 300-plus member Central Committee, meeting Monday through Thursday, is expected to pave the way for Xi to secure an unprecedented third five-year term as president at the 20th Party Congress next year.