BANGLADESH UPDATE 215 New cases in 24hrs | 15,71,228 Total cases | 27,901 Deaths | 15,35,034 Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE 5,067,707 Deaths | 250,759,508 Total cases

PM's Visit to France

Focus on trade ties, defence cooperation

Porimol Palma

Bangladesh wants to develop political and trade relations with France while the latter is keen to improve defence cooperation with Dhaka.

The matters will be discussed during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's five-day visit to Paris which will begin today.

Hasina, who is going to Paris at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Jean Castex, will hold bilateral meetings with both of them separately.

At a briefing, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam said the prime minister's engagement in Paris would be very "extensive and engaging".

A diplomatic source said three deals on security, trade and business are likely to be made with France.

"We are seeking to improve our political relationship with France, as well as Europe. France is an important country in the European Union and G-20. It is also a permanent member of the UN Security Council," said a foreign ministry official.

Bangladesh has become an important country on the global stage, he said.

"We are not an aid-dependent country anymore. We are also contributing to global development and policy. We also have issues, including the Rohingya crisis, that need to be addressed globally. So, we are striving for more global engagement. We need political allies," he said.

Besides, Bangladesh is seeking more trade partnership with France. Bangladesh's export to France was worth about € 2.76 billion last year and import from France was about € 240 million.

"As Bangladesh is focusing on economic diplomacy, we would seek to export more commodities and bring investments," a diplomatic source in Paris told this correspondent yesterday.

At a briefing on Oct 30 in Dhaka, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam said many French companies want to invest in Bangladesh, and there are interests from both sides to boost trade relations.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said a number of French ministers and lawmakers and heads of French companies were scheduled to meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in Paris.

On the other hand, France will propose selling defence equipment including Rafale fighter planes, a diplomatic source said without going into further details.

According to French newspaper La Tribune, French Minister of the Armed Forces Florence Parly during a meeting with PM Hasina in Dhaka early March last year had proposed to sell Rafale manufactured by Dassault Aviation.

"This contact between Florence Parly and the Bangladeshi politicians is the beginning of a long process of discussions initiated between France and Bangladesh," the newspaper reported on March 10 last year.

Florence Parly also spoke about French strategy in the Indo-Pacific region and prospects for defence cooperation. In 10 years until 2018, French manufacturers exported goods worth 25.7 million euros to Bangladesh.

The latest visit by Hasina is likely to yield concrete decisions regarding the defence purchase, the source added.

Enamul Haque, founder director general of Bangladesh National Museum, receives the Padma Shri award from Indian President Ram Nath Kovind at a function at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi yesterday. *Right*, Tufah Zaman Ali, wife of career diplomat Syed Muazzem Ali, receives the Padma Bhushan award posthumously conferred upon him. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri

Awards handed over to 2 noted Bangladeshis

Our Correspondent, *New Delhi*

Two Bangladeshis -- career diplomat Syed Muazzem Ali and scholar Dr Enamul Haque -- were yesterday honoured by Indian President Ram Nath Kovind with two highest civilian awards of India.

Kovind awarded Padma Bhushan to Muazzem, a former high commissioner to India, in the public affairs category (posthumously). Muazzem's wife Tufah Zaman Ali received the award from the Indian president during a ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi.

A member of Bangladesh foreign service, Muazzem was associated with the initiation of energy cooperation and land connectivity between Bangladesh and India, the Padma Bhushan citation said.

Kovind also presented Padma Shri to Enamul, founder director general of Bangladesh National Museum.

Enamul "is a distinguished archaeologist and a highly respected cultural activist in Bangladesh," the official citation of Padma Shri said.

Muazzem and Enamul were chosen for the honours for the year 2020, but the presentation of the awards, which are usually held in March-April, was delayed due to a severe second wave of Covid-19 pandemic this year.

Among the dignitaries present at the ceremony were India's Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.

Muazzem, who was an envoy to India for five years, had worked hard to bring about greater political, economic, and security cooperation between the two countries. He died on December 30, 2019, about two weeks after returning to Bangladesh on completion of his diplomatic assignment in New Delhi.

He was among eight people who were presented with Padma Bhushan. Four persons were awarded Padma Vibhushan and 61 got Padma Shri Award for the year 2020.

Muazzem and Enamul were honoured in a year when India and Bangladesh are celebrating the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's liberation and the 50th year of diplomatic ties with India as well as the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Local companies to produce

FROM PAGE 1

Molnupiravir, the first and only specific drug developed to treat Covid-19 patients, will be given twice a day to vulnerable patients diagnosed with the disease.

In clinical trials of the pill, originally developed to treat flu, the risk of hospitalisation or death was cut by about 50 percent and during the trials only 7.3 percent of the patients who were given this medicine needed to be hospitalised.

The trials were done in 23 countries, including the UK, US, Canada, France, Germany, Japan and the Philippines.

On November 4, the United Kingdom Medicine and Healthcare Products Regulatory Authority (UK-MHPRA) approved the medicine for therapeutic use.

Meanwhile, the European Medicine Agency and the Food and Drug Administration of the US are considering approval.

While a number of foreign pharmaceuticals have been trying to develop medicines to treat Covid-19, Merck and the Ridgeback Biotherapeutics have come ahead in the race. Another drug developed by the Pfizer company has also shown promising results in preliminary trials, reports global media.

This development will create interest among people on Covid-19 medicines, in line with vaccines.

Medicine experts observed the initiative to produce Covid-19 drug locally as an important event.

"This is a big event at the time of a pandemic. We could not produce Covid-19 vaccines locally, but will be able to produce the medicine soon. We have the capacity to produce it. Once it is in the market, controlling Covid-19 will be easier," said Sitesh C Bachar, a professor of Dhaka University's pharmacy department.

An official of a pharmaceutical company said any adult Covid-19 patient has to take four Molnupiravir capsules twice a day. The cost of each capsule may be around Tk 70.

This will help prevent the severity of the illness and hospital admission.

A DGDA official said several companies have applied for the approval of the drug's recipe and the directorate has already approved a few of those.

Due to the global trade policy and laws, Bangladesh can produce medicines developed by other countries or companies, irrespective of copyright.

On paper 28pc on roads 50pc

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Avenue Paribahan Ltd" that charged his Tk 15 for the trip, up 50 percent from the previous rate.

When some other passengers pressed the conductor of the bus why he was charging more than the government-fixed rate, he said: "Every bus is doing the same."

Yesterday, the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority's mobile courts conducted a drive against a total of 220 vehicles and held at least 67 buses in Dhaka and Chattogram charging an extra fare.

Of the 220 vehicles, 29 CNG-run buses and 38 diesel-run buses were found taking extra fare from passengers, a BRTA official told The Daily Star last night.

"Since it was the first day, our mobile courts did not take harsh action; rather, they asked the bus operators to return the extra fare to the passengers," said the official requesting anonymity as he is not authorised to speak with the media.

Some of them imposed a fine, he said, adding that harsher action would be taken from today against overcharging. The BRTA realised Tk 1.54 lakh in fine.

Contacted, BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder said strong steps would be taken so that none can charge extra.

"Our mobile courts have already fined several buses for collecting extra fare," he told this newspaper yesterday.

Khondaker Enayet Ullah, secretary-general of the Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, acknowledged that some "irregularities" have taken in Dhaka on the first day.

"We hope things will settle down once the fare chart will be provided to the bus operators within a day or two," he told The Daily Star last night.

Asked about the CNG-run buses charging the new rate, he said only 200 buses among 5,000-odd buses in the capital are running on CNG and the association has already asked the vehicle operators to not collect the increased fare.

"However, we will give a letter to all our members with strong words tomorrow [Tuesday] so that they do not charge extra," he added.

Contacted, Manjurul Alam Manju, president of the Chattogram Road Transport Owners' Association, said: "We have also received some complaints of overcharging from passengers. We will sit in a meeting today to fix the issue."

Ali Hossain, the deputy commissioner of Chattogram Metropolitan Police (traffic), north zone, said police officials were deployed on different areas to look into the irregularities over transport fare.

Legal action is being taken against the irregularities, he said.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday warned that the government would take stern action if the transport owners and workers realise extra fares from passengers, reports BSS.

"If addition fares are realised from passengers breaking the pledge (of transport owners), the government will take stern action against them," he told a press conference at his official residence.

BNP fighting for existence

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"We have been able to bring home some smuggled money from abroad."

Referring to the lavish lifestyle of Tarique Rahman in London, Hasina said they (Khaleda and her sons) did not have patriotism as they treated power as a tool of pleasure and place for looting.

The premier said the AL always stands beside people and thinks about their welfare.

The people of Bangladesh had plunged into an era of darkness after the assassination of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, she said. "But when Awami League came to power, people started availing of services from the government."

The PM said she had started moving the country towards prosperity after forming the government in 1996. "Today, Bangladesh doesn't live on begging! Today Bangladesh has learned to stand on its own feet. Some 90 percent financing of our development projects comes from our own resources. We've attained that capability."

Talking about the Padma Bridge, Hasina said a vested quarter had tried to stigmatise the government, especially the prime minister and her family members linking them to corruption cases. "I issued a challenge to the World Bank. They have failed to prove that. There was no corruption in the Padma Bridge project."

The premier urged the expatriate Bangladeshis to invest in the 100 economic zones being built across the country. "If you [expatriates] want to invest, you'll get special facilities. We will ensure that."

She said the government has taken steps to solve the expatriates' problems, and urged them to inform her about investment in Bangladesh assuring that she would solve every problem.

Hasina said the government will pave the way so that Bangladeshis can invest in other countries as well.

UK AL President Sultan Mahmud Sharif presided over the programme.

Charges in 3 cases framed in 1 day

FROM PAGE 1

Nagar, Hazaribagh and Kamrangirchar police stations on March 9, 10 and 11 last year.

DB police Sub-inspector Mohammad Russell Mollah, the investigation officer, submitted charge sheets in the three cases to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka on April 8, February 4 and March 14 this year.

Kajol went missing on March 10 last year, a day after the first case was filed. Members of Border Guard Bangladesh found him roaming around the Benapole border area on May 3 and detained him.

His family said he was innocent and that he became a victim of enforced disappearance.

A Jashore court sent him to jail the same day under section 54 of the Code of the Criminal Procedure (CrPC). He was later shown arrested in the cases.

The lower court denied him bail for seven months until the High Court on November 24 granted him bail in one of the cases. The HC on December 17 granted him bail in two other cases after Kajol's lawyer argued that probes had to be complete within 75 days of filing of the cases, and the investigators failed to do so.

The photojournalist walked out of jail on December 25 last year.

CHARGES IN THREE CASES

Lawmaker Shikhor had filed the case against Kajol, Bangla daily Manabzamin Editor-in-Chief Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, and 30 others over publishing "false news and circulating it on social media".

The investigation officer did not include the names of Matiur and the 30 others accused in the charge sheet because although a news report by the daily referred to an MP from Magura, it did not name the lawmaker or the constituency, according to the charge sheet.

The charge sheet stated that Kajol posted defamatory, objectionable and indecent writings on his Facebook profile against several leaders and activists of Awami League and Jubo Mahila League.

Kajol's purpose was to deteriorate law and order through aggressive intimidation and posting defamatory photos and writings on Facebook, the charge sheet said.

According to the charge sheet, the Manabzamin published the report on March 2 last year under the headline "Papia names 30 including bureaucrats, MPs and businessmen". The report was on Jubo Mahila League's Narsingdi district general secretary Shamima Nur Papia who was arrested by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) over her involvement in different crimes.

After the publication of the report, writings were posted on Facebook from various IDs. The lawmaker filed the case after scrutinising those Facebook posts, the charge sheet added.

In the charge sheet of the case filed by Usmin Ara Bally, the investigator said Kajol published fake news on his Facebook page regarding the arrest and alleged crimes of expelled Jubo League leader Papia.

Kajol also allegedly tried to extort the female leaders of Jubo Mahila League by coming up with indecent posts and fake photographs, and threatened to cast aspersions on their character through his Facebook account, the charge sheet also said.

The investigation officer claimed to have found information on Kajol's chat history with Usmin Ara Bally on Facebook between March 10 and 17 last year. Moreover, on March 3 that year, Kajol sent six photographs to Usmin's messenger; of them, one photograph was indecent, the charge sheet added.

In the charge sheet of the case filed by Sumaiya Chowdhury Bonya, the investigator said Kajol's main purpose was to tarnish the images of ruling party leaders and activists and extort money from them by uploading fake information.

The charge sheet said that Kajol made a Facebook post, saying that Bonya [complainant] was one of Papia's accomplices" in her illegal business of women and drugs".

He sent vulgar texts and pornographic images to various Facebook IDs, the charge sheet said.

Kajol also uploaded indecent, defamatory, and objectionable information about the complainant's husband Asaduzzaman Nahid, the charge sheet added.

The investigator stated in the charge sheets of Jubo Mahila League leaders' cases that Kajol uploaded indecent, defamatory, objectionable and fake information about Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, AL General Secretary and Road Transport Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, several other ministers, AL leader and lawmaker Amir Hossain Amu, others lawmakers, Jubo Mahila League President Nazma Akhter, General Secretary Apu Ukil and several other female leaders and activists.

Goods carrying

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including reduction in hiked prices of diesel and kerosene and withdrawal of "additional" toll money at Bangabandhu Bridge and the Mukterpur Bridge. The meeting began around 8:00pm.

Talking to The Daily Star, Mokbul Ahmed, president of the Bangladesh Covered-Van Truck Prime Mover Goods Transport Owners' Association, said the meeting recommended that top business bodies, including the BGMEA, would sit with them and set fares rationally.

Both Majumder and Mokbul claimed that the meeting recommended withdrawal of the "additional" toll imposed recently on vehicles crossing the Bangabandhu Bridge and the Mukterpur Bridge.

Contacted, two top government officials, who attended the meeting, however, said no decision on the toll was taken at the meeting. The Daily Star could not reach the home minister for comments in this regard.

The owners and workers were also assured that steps would be taken to address some toll-related issues with city corporations, meeting sources said.

The government on Wednesday hiked the price of each litre of diesel and kerosene by 23 percent or Tk 15 to cut losses of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) following the rise in fuel prices in the international market.

Road transport associations, mostly those of the owners, started an indefinite strike of public transport, trucks and lorries from Friday morning. Later launch owners joined in the strike from Saturday, intensifying people's sufferings.

Both bus and launch owners withdrew their strike on Sunday evening after the government decided to rise bus fare up 28 percent and launch fare up to 43 percent. But, the strike of goods laden vehicles continued till the meeting ended last night.

Meanwhile, activities at the Chattogram port and 19 private inland container depot's (ICDs) started to return to normalcy after around 88 hours following withdrawal of the country-wide strike enforced by the goods-carrying transport owners and workers.

Firearms factory

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presence, the criminals opened fire, forcing the Rab members to retaliate, the official claimed.

After a four-hour "gunfight", the Rab team managed to take over the factory, the Rab official said, adding that they then arrested the three from the spot while the others managed to flee.

The official said they were interrogating the arrestees and looking for other criminals and arms factories inside Rohingya camps or in the area.

Meanwhile, in reply to a query at a press briefing at Rab media centre in the capital, Commander Khandaker Al Moin, legal and media wing director of the force, said they would continue the drive to curb crimes in the Rohingya camps.

On October 22, six people were killed and over a dozen injured in a gun attack in Ukhiya's Balukhali camp.

The attack took place 23 days after Muhibullah, former chairman of Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights, also an avowed supporter of the repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar, was assassinated at his office in Ukhiya's Kutupalong camp.

Following the incident, Bangladesh expressed concern over the increased crimes and unrest in the Rohingya camps as tensions between criminal groups are active across 34 refugee camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf.

According to officials of different law enforcement agencies, at least 10 Rohingya groups are involved in at least 12 types of crimes, including killing, abduction, rape, drug trafficking and robbery.

Since August 2017, at least 226 Rohingyas have been killed and some 1,298 cases filed accusing 2,850 individuals, mostly in connection with possession of drugs and firearms.

2 more killed in pre-polls clashes

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This newspaper could not contact Atiar Rahman over the phone for comments as it was switched off.

According to locals, both Ajmain and Atiar are pro-Awami League men.

Gangni Police Station OC Bazlur Rahman said additional law enforcers were deployed in Dhala village to avert any further deterioration in law and order.

No case was filed in connection with the incident till last evening. Police detained 12 people from the area for interrogation, the OC added.

Ajmain alleged that his younger brother Enamul Hossain Nailu was hacked to death by Atiar and his associates a few years ago. A case in this connection is now under trial.

In Pabna's Sujanagar upazila, at least 10 people were injured, three of them by bullets, in a gunfight between supporters of Awami League and party "rebel" chairman candidates in Manikhaat union on Sunday night.

AL chairman nominee Shafiul Alam said he along with his supporters went to Bonkola Bazar area around 8:00pm on Sunday for campaigning.

At that time, followers of party "rebel" candidate Abbas Ali Mollik attacked them and opened fire, Shafiul alleged.

Abbas and Shafiul are the president and general secretary of Manikhaat union AL.

Refuting the allegations, Abbas said Shafiul's followers attacked his men during electioneering.

Sujanagar Police Station OC Md Mizanur Rahman said Shafiul yesterday filed a complaint with police in connection with the incident.

Police were investigating the incident and additional law enforcers were deployed in the area, he added.

In Ishwardi upazila of Pabna, at least 10 people were injured in another clash in Lokhmikunda union yesterday afternoon.

Locals said supporters of AL chairman nominee Anis Sorif and party "rebel" candidate Anish Mollah were carrying out electoral campaigns in Nabinagar village around 4:30pm.

At one stage, they came face to face and clashed, causing injuries to supporters of both the candidates, said locals.

Ishwardi Police Station OC Md Asaduzzaman said additional policemen were deployed in the area as tension was prevailing there.