

BANGLADESH  
UPDATE



2,316  
New cases in 24hrs



4,71,739  
Total cases



6,748  
Deaths



3,88,379  
Recoveries

GLOBAL  
UPDATE



1,504,073  
Deaths



65,093,104  
Total cases

## Cyclone hits Sri Lanka as southern India hunkers down

AFP, Colombo

Cyclone Burevi hit Sri Lanka overnight, rattling the island nation but leaving it relatively unscathed on its way to southern India, officials said yesterday.

Burevi, the second cyclone in the southern Bay of Bengal in a week, slammed into north-eastern Sri Lanka just before midnight (1830 GMT).

Packing winds up to 100 kilometres (60 miles) an hour, it soaked parts of the country but caused no casualties and less devastation than feared.

“There was rain and strong

winds, but the cyclone did not cause any major damage in our area,” Mangalanath Liyanarachchi, a local reporter in Trincomalee, 260 kilometres (160 miles) from Colombo, said by telephone.

Thousands of people living along the coast had been asked to seek temporary shelter inland, but they have now moved back to their homes, Liyanarachchi said.

Sri Lanka’s Disaster Management Centre (DMC) had issued a red alert and asked fishermen not to venture out to sea.

## 1,036km to pave way

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largely unguarded hilly borders with India’s Mizoram and Myanmar’s Chin states.

Of late, an armed group called the Marma Liberation Party has been active in these border areas, they said.

“The Marma Liberation Party has been active in Bandarban border for the last three years. Sometimes it is tough to reach remote areas,” Superintendent of Rangamati Police Alamgir Kabir told The Daily Star.

According to officials of law enforcement and intelligence agencies, several hundred armed youths are operating in the rugged hills for four factions of two well-known organisations -- Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS Santu Larma faction), PCJSS (MN Larma faction), United People’s Democratic Front (UPPDF) and UPPDF (democratic).

Mathew (not his real name) is a case in point. He joined the PCJSS in 2013 but now realises that he is on the wrong path and wants to return to

normal life.

He shared his story of joining the force.

Mathew went to attend a PCJSS discussion with his friend and joined, being motivated by the speeches of the leaders.

He was moved to a border area for training and can now operate heavy guns.

He received a monthly salary of just Tk 500 and was tasked for collecting extortion money.

“If there was any big operation, only then was I assigned to go,” he said in an anxious tone.

Mathew said the groups have weapons like machine guns, self-loading rifles, M16, AK-47s, AK-22s, AK-56s and even rocket-propelled grenades.

No one, however, could estimate the number of illegal firearms the groups have in their arsenal.

“Once the border road is constructed, the trespasses will stop and the illegal arms trading too,” SP Kabir said.

## Rights groups call

FROM PAGE 1

Destruction of forests and hills and risk of landslides in Cox’s Bazar prompted the authorities to choose the temporary housing site on the island, which is around 37 miles off the coast of Bay of Bengal.

UN and aid agencies were opposing the relocation plan, saying the island was flood-prone and could get submerged during tidal surges. Bangladesh officials, however, said the houses have been built four feet above the ground with concrete blocks and the entire housing site is protected by a 13km-long flood embankment.

On Wednesday, the UN in a statement said it was still waiting for the government to allow its technical team to visit the island and assess the feasibility of the Bhasan Char project.

In a statement yesterday, Human Rights Watch said the Bangladesh government should commit to a transparent relocation process, fully informed consent of transferred refugees, freedom of movement on and off the island, and heed the UN call for a prior independent technical and protection assessment.

“The Bangladesh government is actively renegeing on its promise to the UN not to relocate any refugees to Bhasan Char island until humanitarian experts give a green light,” said Brad Adams, Asia director of HRW, in the statement.

“If the government were genuinely confident in the habitability of the island, they would be transparent and not hastily circumvent UN technical assessments.”

Though the government claims that any relocation will be voluntary, Human Rights Watch said it has recently spoke with 12 families who said their names were on the list for the relocation, but that they had not willingly volunteered to relocate.

## Charges pressed

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In the charge sheet, the police stated that the victim and her husband were forcefully taken into the hostel by the accused while the couple came to the college area to travel that evening.

Later the accused asked for Tk 50,000 as ransom and being denied, they raped the victim after tying her husband, snatched her gold jewellery and mugged Tk 2,000.

Victim’s husband filed a case with Shahporan Police Station that night accusing six named and three to four unnamed.

Police later arrested all six named accused along with two others and these eight are accused in the charge sheet.

Earlier, all eight accused confessed their crimes before the court under section 164 of penal code.

On November 30, the DNA reports of the accused were sent to the investigation officer via the Sylhet court where their involvement was proved.

Meanwhile, the police that night recovered several arms from a hostel room which was occupied by the prime accused Saifur Rahman. A case was filed accusing Saifur Rahman by police that night.

In the arms case, police also pressed charge sheet to the court along with gang-rape case charge sheet.

The investigation officer Indranil Bhattacharya accused Saifur Rahman and Shah Mohammad Mahbubur Rahman Rony in the charge sheet.

Meanwhile, three probe bodies -- one judicial probe body, one of education ministry and another of the college -- were formed and all of them submitted their reports to the authorities.

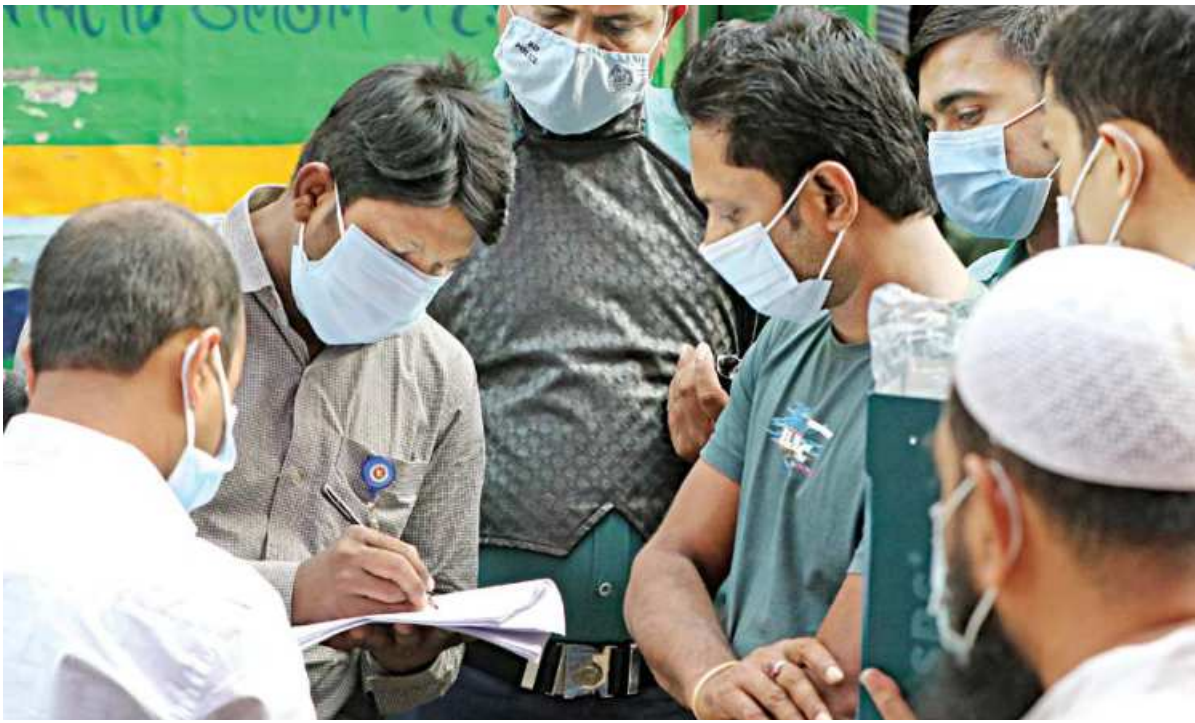
Moreover, National University suspended studentship of Saifur, Shah Mahbubur Rahman Rony, Mahfuzur Rahman Masum and Rabiul Hasan and cancelled their certificate.

The MC College authorities also suspended them from the college.

All eight accused are Bangladesh Chhtrata League (BCL) activists, but were not in any posts as there are no BCL committees at the college, Sylhet city and district.

They all are member of one fraction of BCL that follows Advocate Ranjit Sarker, former youth and sports affairs secretary of Sylhet district Awami League.

Ranjit Sarker, however, earlier denied of having any fraction of BCL under his influence and demanded justice for the accused.



Member of a mobile court of Dhaka district administration signs a receipt after a youth was fined for not wearing mask in the capital's Zero Point area in Gulistan yesterday. The mobile court was operating to raise awareness on health rules to curb the spread of novel coronavirus.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## First batch off to Bhasan Char

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Daily Star over the phone.

“No one has forced me to go to Bhasan Char. I am going voluntarily,” he said.

An official involved in the relocation process told The Daily Star that the first convoy of 10 buses with Rohingyas left for Chattogram at 11:30am and the second convoy of another 10 buses left at 12:45pm. Later in the afternoon, 18 more buses left with some 500 other Rohingyas.

Lt Col Ashique Billah, director of the legal and media wing at Rab headquarters, said two battalions of Rab-7 and -15 have been deployed on the Cox’s Bazar-Chattogram highway to ensure smooth relocation of Rohingyas to Bhasan Char.

Under heavy security, around 1,500 Rohingyas were taken to Chattogram by buses. From there, they were scheduled to be taken to Bhashan Char by 14 vessels. Noakhali Deputy Commissioner Khorshed Alam Khan said the Rohingyas are scheduled to arrive in Bhasan Char by 2:00pm today. Officials said some 2,500 Rohingyas would be in the first batch.

Bangladesh Navy has prepared the Tk 3,100-crore housing project, funded with public money, after some 750,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military campaign in Myanmar’s Rakhine state and took shelter in Cox’s Bazar in the months following August 2017. They joined some 300,000 other Rohingyas, who had fled previous waves of violence in Rakhine.

Violence between different groups of Rohingyas and drug trafficking has become a matter of concern, said a rights activist working on refugees. Destruction of forests and hills and risk of landslides in Cox’s Bazar prompted the authorities to choose the temporary housing site at Bhasan

Char.

UN and rights groups have been questioning the idea of relocation to Bhasan Char, saying it is a low-lying isolated island and has risks of flooding, but at a point last year agreed to send a technical team to assess the condition and requested the government to allow the visit before relocation.

In a statement on Wednesday, the UN said it has limited information on the relocation exercise and has not been involved in the preparation process. It said it is ready for the visit by a technical team and for consultation with the government. The UN also said any relocation should be voluntary and all protection measures must be in place.

Officials involved in preparing the housing project said it has 120 cluster villages that are capable of accommodating one lakh Rohingyas and there are livelihood options including fishing and livestock rearing.

The houses have been built four feet above the ground with concrete blocks. The entire housing site is protected by a 13km-long flood embankment. There are also 120 cyclone shelters, which are planned to be used as schools, medical centres and community centres.

The government arranged a “go and see” visit by a group of Rohingyas in September this year. The visitors later told journalists that the facilities there were far better than those at the camps, but they felt that they wouldn’t be able to see many of their relatives after moving there.

Representatives from at least 22 local NGOs also visited Bhasan Char last week. They lauded the project, but added that they were unsure how the critically ill people could be treated

there.

“The relocation of Rohingyas to Bhasan Char is happening on a voluntary basis,” Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told The Daily Star yesterday, trashing the rights groups’ statements that some of the Rohingyas were coerced into going there.

Responding to the UN statement, he said a technical team may visit Bhasan Char at any favourable time.

“They should first go to Rakhine and see how prepared it is for Rohingya repatriation,” Momen said, expressing frustration over the fact that not a single Rohingya returned to Myanmar in over three years.

Rohingyas refused to return to Rakhine despite two attempts in the last three years, saying there were no guarantee of citizenship, safety and basic rights in Rakhine although Myanmar had signed a MoU with UNDP and UN Refugee Agency for creating conditions for repatriation.

Rights groups said the situation in Rakhine has not improved, rather deteriorated amid increasing conflicts between Arakan Army and Myanmar Army in recent months, though Myanmar faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court has begun an investigation into the human rights violation of the Rohingyas.

Foreign Minister Momen said the actual pressure from the international community should be on Myanmar for creating conditions for repatriation, not on Bangladesh that has been bearing the brunt of the crisis for decades.

Rights activist Noor Khan Liton said, “Relocation to Bhasan Char without UN involvement brings the question: Who will feed them and manage them in Bhasan Char? Can the Bangladesh government alone do it? We don’t have the answers.”

## Two sent to jail for rape

STAR REPORT

Two local courts in Sirajganj and Gazipur yesterday sent two arrestees to jail over the rape of a schoolgirl and a woman respectively.

The accused in Sirajganj is Yusuf Ali, 18, a resident of Porjana village in Shahjadpur upazila. He landed in jail in a rape case filed by the girl’s father.

Quoting the case statement, police said the girl, 14, was returning home from school in the same village on a day about a month ago. Yusuf, along with his two associates, intercepted the girl and forcibly took her to a nearby jungle where he raped her.

One of Yusuf’s associates filmed the incident. Yusuf threatened the girl that he would release the footage on social media if she disclosed the matter.

Neither the girl nor her family filed any complaint with the police until Wednesday, said Shahed Mahamud Khan, officer-in-charge of Shahjadpur Police Station.

The accused again attempted to rape her in Porjana village on Wednesday. At one stage, locals caught Yusuf and later handed him to police. However, his two associates managed to flee.

At night, the victim’s father filed the case with Shahjadpur Police Station accusing Yusuf and his two associates.

The two other accused are on the run.

The victim was sent to Sirajganj General Hospital for medical tests, said the OC.

In Gazipur, a woman filed a case with Gazipur Metropolitan Sadar Police Station yesterday accusing one Md Abu Hanif of raping her several times while promising to get her a job, said police.

The case was filed a day after the Rab detained Hanif in Rajendrapur.

Quoting the 23-year-old victim from Gazipur Sadar upazila, Rab officials said she became acquainted with Hanif about seven months ago.

Hanif, a mechanic at a motor garage in Gazipur city’s Itahata area, developed a friendship with the woman. At one stage, the accused raped her.

He also warned the woman that he would not get her a job if she disclosed the matter.

The accused later raped her several times. The woman then realised that Hanif was abusing her on the false promise of a job.

The victim lodged a verbal complaint with Rab on Tuesday.

The following day, Rab detained Hanif in Gazipur. He was handed to police yesterday, said Rab Company Commander Abdullah Al Mamun.

## Georgia official says Trump rhetoric fueling threats

AFP, Washington

A senior Republican official in the US state of Georgia said Wednesday that President Donald Trump’s unfounded claims of election fraud were fueling threats against poll workers.

Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger was the second state official in as many days to urge Trump to tone down his rhetoric.

Trump has repeatedly alleged there was election fraud in Georgia but has presented no evidence to back up his claim, and a recount confirmed that President-elect Joe Biden won the southern state by some 10,000 votes.

## Incidents of 71

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called on her at the Gono Bhaban.

Referring to the volumes of the book titled “Secret Documents of Intelligence Branch on Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman”, Hasina said all can learn many historical facts from 1948 to 1971 from the books.

Noting that the book “Unfinished Memoirs” (Urdu version) written by Bangabandhu is one of the best sellers in Pakistan, she said it is also well read in Pakistan apart from other countries.

The PM extended greetings to her Pakistan counterpart Imran Khan when the envoy conveyed the premier’s good wishes to her.

The high commissioner said the Pakistani PM advised them to learn about the development miracle of Bangladesh.

Mentioning that different bilateral and regional forums have remained inactive, he sought help from Hasina to activate foreign office consultations between the two countries.

The PM said there was no bar to continuing activities regularly.

Imran Ahmed said Pakistan wants to boost relations with Bangladesh without any obstruction.

Referring to Bangladesh’s foreign policy “Friendship to all, malice to none”, the PM said she believes in regional cooperation.

The Pakistan envoy lauded Hasina for her statesmanship in the global arena.

The PM welcomed the high commissioner and assured him of all cooperation.

PM’s Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus and Military Secretary Maj Gen Naqib Ahmed Chowdhury were present.