

BANGLADESH UPDATE



268

New cases in 24hrs



15,83,253

Total cases



28,060

Deaths



15,47,827

Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



5,415,283

Deaths



279,960,768

Total cases

LAUNCH FIRE TRAGEDY

3 on life support in Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three people, who suffered burns in the fire inside MV Abhijan-10 on early Friday, were on life support at the capital's Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery yesterday.

Another passenger of the launch was at the ICU there.

Eleven other victims in the incident were receiving treatment at different units of the burn institute. They were also not out of danger, its Coordinator Dr Samanta Lal Sen told The Daily Star last night.

It is important that the patients get enough fluids. The next course of their treatment would depend on that, he said.

The tragic fire at MV Abhijan-10 claimed at least 41 lives. Around 100 others sustained burn injuries in the incident. Of them, 21 were taken to the burn institute. One of them was

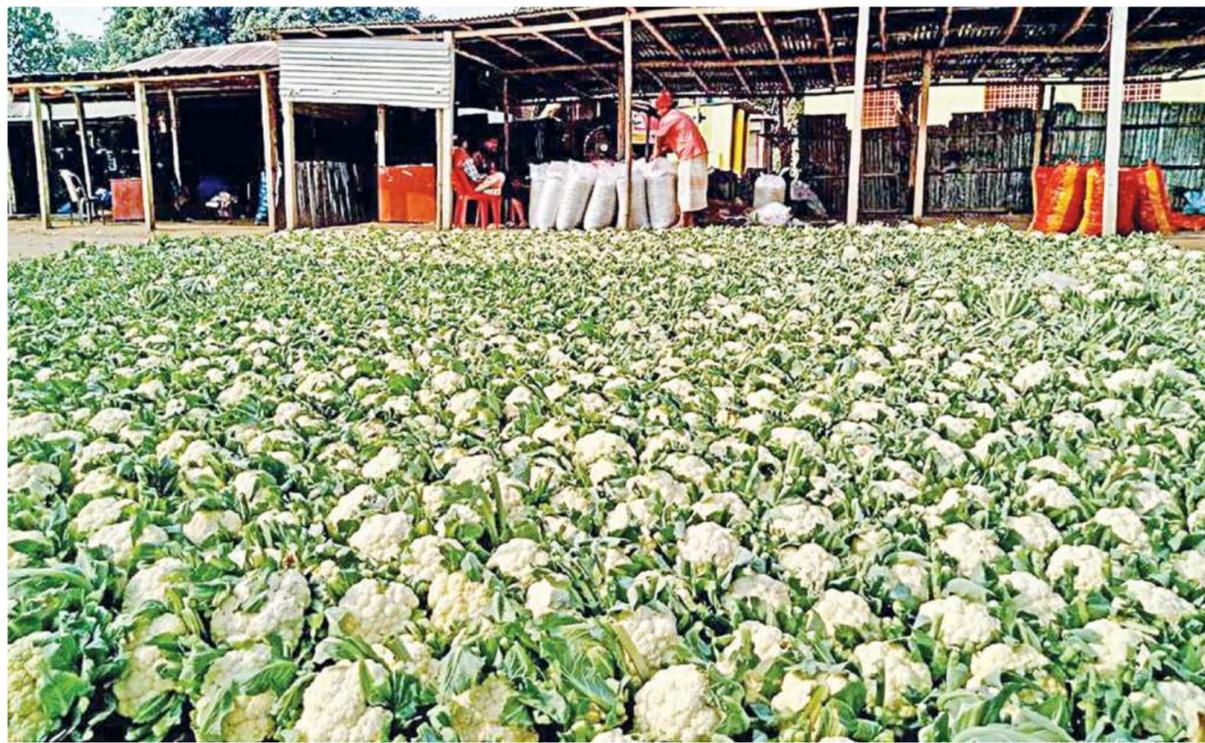
referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital while five others were given first aid.

Besides, a seven-member team from the hospital is providing treatment to many other victims in the incident admitted to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in Barishal.

AHM Saiful Islam, director of the hospital, said 39 fire victims were taking treatment there yesterday. Of them, two were at the ICU.

Dr Masrur-ur-Rahman, a member of the team from the burn institute, said most of the patients were out of danger. "We have already shifted almost all the patients to the ophthalmology department from the surgery unit," he added.

The government has taken responsibility for the treatment of all those injured in the launch tragedy, Sheikh Selim, presidium member of Awami League, said at an event on Saturday.



A yard full of cauliflower at Albaz market of vegetables in Ishwardi, Pabna. Traders from faraway districts buy truckloads of the vegetables from this market. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

3 killed in violence

FROM PAGE 1

According to media reports, at least 67 people were killed and several hundred injured in the pre- and post-polls violence this term.

Ahead of the fourth phase, seven people were killed in violence.

In Chapainawabganj's Bholahat upazila, voting was suspended in three centres as some outsiders entered those and cast votes openly.

In Munshiganj's Sirjadikhan upazila, outsiders entered the polling station of Khaskandi High School centre of Balurchar Union and forcibly sealed on the boat symbol.

Akhter Hossain, an agent at that centre, alleged that Shahadat Hossain, Awami League candidate for the post of chairman, had his men stuff ballot boxes by occupying the centre along with outsiders around 11:30am.

Police fired eight rubber bullets to bring the situation under control. The outsiders threw brickbats at the policemen and at the vehicle of the additional superintendent of police.

Rashedul Islam, additional superintendent of police (Sirjadikhan and Tongibari Circle), said, "Some 200-250 of the outsiders were chased away from the centre. They became enraged and threw brickbats at the police. At one point, the police fired eight rubber bullets in self-defence and to bring the situation under control. Then they all fled."

In Thakurgaon, police fired 15 shots in the air at Jhargaoon Rahmania Dkhakil Madrasa polling centre in Akhanagar union of Sadar upazila when a group of supporters of the "boat" symbol attempted to snatch the ballot papers. The voting was suspended from 10:30am to 11:00am there.

Later, police arrested Kabul Hossain, 35, general secretary of ward-3 unit Awami League of Akhanagar union.

In Dinajpur, vote casting at a centre of Morneya union under Gangachara upazila of Rangpur remained suspended for two hours when a man had attempted to leave the centre with three ballot papers. Police detained the man.

Akhtar Hossain, the presiding

officer of Talpatti Dakhil Madrasa Centre in Morneya Upazila of Rangpur, said that his centre's voting was suspended for two hours from 9.00am.

In Pabna, at least 10 people were injured in a clash between the AL candidate's men and the independent candidate's men at the Ghoshpur centre in Hemayetpur union.

Police took the situation under control firing shots in the air.

AL candidate Monjurul Islam Modhu alleged that the men of independent candidate Alauddin Malitha attacked the polling centre.

Independent chairman candidate Alauddin Malitha, also the incumbent chairman of the union, claimed the AL men led the attack to foil the peaceful environment of the election.

In Brahmanbaria, an agent of a chairman candidate was jailed and the assistant presiding officer was withdrawn as an envelope with money was found on an agent.

Rumana Aktar, UNO of Akhaura upazila, said one Habibur Bashar agent of a chairman candidate, was found with money in the polling centres and he was jailed for six months.

She said the cover of the envelope containing money had the assistant presiding officer's name written on it and the assistant presiding officer was withdrawn.

In Tangail, two independent candidates boycotted the polls alleging election rigging.

In Gazipur, Patuakhali, Jhenaidah, Gaibandha, Shariatpur and Narayanganj, correspondents reported that voting was largely peaceful. Election Commission's Secretary Humayun Kabir Khandaker said more than 70 percent vote was cast in the fourth phase of the UP election.

Talking to journalists at the EC secretariat media centre, he said voting was held in a free and festive manner and expecting voters' presence to be more than 70 percent.

He said out of 9,244 voting centres, voting was suspended in 15 centres and a total of 29 were injured in clashes between the supporters of the candidates while 62 were arrested by the law enforcers.

'My powers limited'

FROM PAGE 1

[recommendations of] the search committee didn't do anything good for the people. They couldn't hold a free, fair and neutral election," said Kazi Siddiqur Rahman, a presidium member of Bangladesh NAP who was present at the meeting.

Several leaders of the party said, in reply, the president told them that he agreed with their opinion but mentioned his limitations in light of the constitution.

"You are aware of my power. I will try to materialise your demand with all these limitations," Ivy Ahmed, executive president (in charge) of Bangladesh NAP, quoted the president as saying while talking to reporters after the meeting.

The party's acting general secretary Ismail Hossain said the delegation did not discuss the search committee with the president or submit names for the committee, which other parties had done while meeting the president.

"Instead, we stressed the need for enacting a law in line with the constitution to form the next EC," Md Abdur Rahman, a presidium member of the party, said.

In the statement placed before the president, the party said, "In every election, incidents of using black money, power of muscle and arms, grabbing of polling centres are taking place and the election commission has failed to prevent this."

The NAP leaders also said in the statement that despite all of this, the government is still talking about formation of the election commission

through a search committee.

"But we don't want election commissions like the ones formed earlier through the search committee," the party said.

The statement added that the party wants a competent, honest, dutiful and accountable EC for holding free, fair and acceptable elections, because otherwise democracy would not be meaningful and sustainable development not possible.

NAP also said the formation of EC through law would lead to free and fair elections, adding that it is the demand of the time that people's right to cast votes without influence is restored.

According to a press release issued by the Bangabhaban, the president said the formation of the EC is a constitutional responsibility. The main purpose of this discussion is to form an acceptable election commission.

President Hamid hoped that the formation of an acceptable, independent, impartial and strong election commission will be possible on the basis of discussions with political parties.

Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) was also invited to the Bangabhaban yesterday, but the party declined to attend, saying such dialogue was meaningless.

According to the Bangabhaban press wing, Bangladesh Tarikat Federation and Khelafat Majlish will participate in the discussion today at 4:00pm and 6:00pm respectively.

The tenure of the current EC is to expire on February 14.

Each tragedy exposes their incompetence

FROM PAGE 1

The tragic incident happened in the Sugandha river as MV Abhijan-10 was on its way to Barguna from Dhaka.

Preliminary investigation later revealed that the owner changed two engines of the launch without taking permission from the authorities, violating the rules.

A shipping ministry probe committee also found faults in the engines.

The launch authorities modified the engine room to install a larger-than-approved engine. The master and drivers who were operating the vessel at the time of the incident were not authorised for the job either, according to investigation.

Although two government authorities -- Department of Shipping and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) -- were supposed to check such illegal practices, both of them have failed to do their job, said transport experts.

This is not an isolated incident.

On 29, 2020, Mayur-2 hit a smaller vessel and caused it to sink in the Buriganga, leaving 34 people dead. Investigation later found that a novice, not the designed driver, was at the helm.

A BIWTA probe body held two masters and two drivers of Mayur-2 launch responsible for the accident and made 16 recommendations, including providing training to launch masters and drivers properly, installing modern technology in launches to prevent such accidents in future.

But after the MV Abhijan-10 incident, it has been learnt that its staff members did not know how to use fire extinguishers.

The crew members simply abandoned the vessel, letting it drift downstream for over half an hour as the inferno on the Sugandha lit up the night sky.

On October 27, a ferry carrying several vehicles tipped over at Paturia Ghat in Manikganj and laid half submerged in the Padma for over a week.

A shipping ministry investigation found that the ferry, named Shah Amanat, had no updated fitness clearance. Its economic life had expired

too.

It was also found that 50 out of 53 ferries, operated by the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) at that time, had not updated their fitness clearance. Most of their economic life was also over.

Similar examples of mismanagement, irregularities, and the authorities' lax monitoring are abundant in the road transport sector, leading to frequent loss of lives.

Deaths of two college students in a spate of a week triggered another major movement for road safety in the country late last month.

Documents of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) show that the Anabil Paribahan bus that ran over and killed SSC examinee Mainuddin Islam in the capital's Rampura on November 29 had neither a route permit nor an updated tax token.

Five days earlier, a Notre Dame student, Nayeem Hasan, was killed in another road accident. Later it was found that a part-time cleaner of Dhaka South City Corporation was driving the garbage truck which killed Nayeem.

The BRTA in July 2019 said 4.79 lakh vehicles were operating without fitness clearances at that time. More than eight lakh vehicles are eligible for annual fitness tests, but around two lakh of them did not take the test last fiscal year, show documents.

Many might question the standard of the manual tests because those are taken by only 109 inspectors.

BRTA is responsible for issuing fitness certificate, registration, driving licence and is supposed to ensure it through its mobile courts drive.

'THINGS NOT WORKING PROPERLY'

Prof Moazzem said BIWTA earns a huge amount of money as it gets allocation from the government, takes different fees from launch owners and charges everyone who enters the Sadarghat terminal Tk 10.

"So, passengers' safety must be its top priority. The authorities should deploy at least 40 inspectors at the Sadarghat terminal to ensure safety," he said.

In reality, BIWTA has only 25 traffic

inspectors across the country and seven of them are deployed at Sadarghat. The shipping department has 18 inspectors in total and only one of them works at Sadarghat, said sources.

When BIWTA Chairman Golam Sadeq was asked whether they have adequate traffic inspectors, he did not give a clear answer.

"We are going to appoint some more traffic inspectors. But it is the launch owners who need to be more serious about passengers' safety," he said.

Replying to another question, he said the launch authorities must take permission for changing their drivers and masters if their names are not mentioned in the yearly declaration papers of drivers and masters.

"We will take action if any irregularities are found in this regard," he said.

The BIWTA chairman also said the owners are supposed to ensure fire safety inside their vessels. "However, we will arrange a meeting in this regard tomorrow [today] with launch owners," he said.

The owner of Abhijan-10 Hamjalal admitted that they changed the engine of the launch without informing the shipping department about it. He told this correspondent on Saturday that they were supposed to inform the department during a survey in February next year.

Shipping department's Chief Engineer and Ship Surveyor Manjurul Kabir said it was difficult for them to know about such changes in engine's design unless they are informed by the owners. Otherwise, they get to know these during the annual survey.

"Inspectors are supposed to check these matters, but they don't have the technical know-how to find these things properly," he said.

Besides, there are only six surveyors in the shipping department to survey around 14,000 registered vessels across the country. They have to check 51 elements of a passenger vessel.

"We give our best to check all passenger vessel," a surveyor told this correspondent, indicating that it is almost impossible for them to survey all vessels thoroughly.

13 to walk the gallows for murdering AL leader

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced 13 men to death and eight others to life imprisonment in a case filed over the murder of a local Awami League leader in Brahmanbaria five years ago.

Zahirul Haque, general secretary of a ward unit AL, was killed on November 14, 2016, when he was returning home from Brahmanbaria town in a three-wheeler.

Judge Abu Zafar Md Kamruzzaman of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 yesterday delivered the verdict in presence of 16 accused, said Special Public Prosecutor Abu Abdullah Bhuiyan.

Those sentenced to death are: Bosu Miah, Kabir Miah, Moxhles, Sacchu Miah, Jahangir Miah, Shohibur Rahman Shukki, Liaquat Ali, Younus Miah, Rahmat Ullah alias Fariq Miah, Shithil Ahmed alias Fahim Ahmed, Saiful, Pavel, and Ali Miah.

Those sentenced to life imprisonment are: Nurul Islam, Habibur Rahman, Rasel, Maju Miah, Golap Miah, Sohel Miah, Shahjahan, and Borhan alias Ruhana. They were also fined Tk 50,000 each, in default of which they would serve an additional year in jail.

Rahmat, Shithil, Saiful, Pavel and Ali are now on the run, while the rest are behind bars.

According to the case statement, the accused, in collusion with each other, attacked Zahirul and seriously injured him. The driver of the three-wheeler, in which Zahirul was travelling, was also injured by the accused.

Zahirul died at Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital soon afterwards.

Following the incident, Kabir Hossain, Zahirul's younger brother, filed the murder case with the Brahmanbaria Sadar Police Station.

Anti-apartheid hero Desmond Tutu passes away

FROM PAGE 1

faded from public life in recent years, was remembered for his easy humour and characteristic smile -- and above all his tireless fight against injustices of all colours.

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa, announcing the archbishop's death yesterday, called him a man of "extraordinary intellect, integrity and invincibility against the forces of apartheid".

"The passing of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu is another chapter of bereavement in our nation's farewell to a generation of outstanding South Africans who have bequeathed us a liberated South Africa," he said, weeks after the death of FW de Klerk, the country's last white president.

Former US president Barack Obama, the country's first Black leader, hailed Tutu as a towering figure and "moral compass".

"A universal spirit, Archbishop Tutu was grounded in the struggle for liberation and justice in his own country, but also concerned with injustice everywhere," Obama said in a statement.

Mourners gathered at his former parish in Cape Town, St George's Cathedral, while others massed at his home, some holding flower bouquets,

according to an AFP journalist.

"If it was not for him, probably we would have been lost as a country," said Miriam Mokwadi, a 67-year-old retired nurse, outside the cathedral.

The South African cricket team wore black armbands in his honour on the first day of the first Test against India in South Africa.

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta said Tutu had "inspired a generation of African leaders who embraced his non-violent approaches in the liberation struggle".

European leaders joined the chorus with UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson calling him a "critical figure" in the struggle to create a new South Africa and French President Emmanuel Macron saying Tutu had "dedicated his life to human rights and equality".

The Vatican said Pope Francis was saddened and offered "heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones".

A tireless activist, Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for combating white minority rule in his country.

He coined the term "Rainbow Nation" to describe South Africa when Nelson Mandela became the country's first black president in 1994.

And he retired in 1996 to lead a

harrowing journey into South Africa's brutal past as head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which lifted the lid on the horrors of the apartheid regime.

However, Tutu has also criticised the ruling African National Congress (ANC) -- the vanguard of the fight against white-minority rule.

He challenged Mandela over generous salaries for cabinet ministers and stridently criticised the corruption that mushroomed under ex-president Jacob Zuma.

Ordained at the age of 30 and appointed archbishop in 1986, he used his position to advocate for international sanctions against apartheid, and later to lobby for rights globally.

Tutu was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1997 and repeatedly underwent treatment.

His public appearances became increasingly scarce and, in one of his last this year, he emerged from hospital in a wheelchair to get a Covid vaccine, waving but not offering comment.

The archbishop had been in a weakened state for several months and died peacefully at 7:00 am (0500 GMT) yesterday, according to several of his relatives interviewed by AFP.

The Nelson Mandela Foundation

called Tutu "an extraordinary human being. A thinker. A leader. A shepherd."

"He was larger than life, and for so many in South Africa and around the world his life has been a blessing," it said in a statement.

Tutu was born in the small town of Klerksdorp, west of Johannesburg, on October 7, 1913, to a domestic worker and a school teacher.

He trained as a teacher before anger at the inferior education system set up for black children prompted him to become a priest.

He lived for a while in Britain, where, he recalled, he would needlessly ask for directions just to be called "Sir" by a white policeman.

Tutu relentlessly challenged the status quo on issues like race, homosexuality and religious doctrine and gave his pioneering support for the assisted dying movement.

And he did not shy away from his own end.

"I have prepared for my death and have made it clear that I do not wish to be kept alive at all costs," he said in an opinion piece in The Washington Post in 2016.

"I hope I am treated with compassion and allowed to pass on to the next phase of life's journey in the manner of my choice."