

BANGLADESH UPDATE



397
New cases in 24hrs



15,84,023
Total cases



28,062
Deaths



15,48,062
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



5,425,840
Deaths



282,045,899
Total cases

PM urges judges to ensure justice for all

Bss, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon the judges to ensure justice for all, reassuring them of every required support from her government to this end.

"We know the pain of getting no justice as 23 are the victims of it," she said at the unveiling of the covers of a research-based Mujib memorial book titled "Bangabandhu and the Judiciary" and a Mujib Borsho souvenir "Nyay Kontho" (Voice of Justice) published by the Bangladesh Supreme Court.

Cases filed against the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and their verdicts alongside the laws enacted by the Bangabandhu government were incorporated in the book "Bangabandhu and the Judiciary".

A brief biography of Bangabandhu and his measures taken for the development of the judiciary were



also included in the book, which has been published both in English and Bangla.

Getting justice is people's rights, she said.

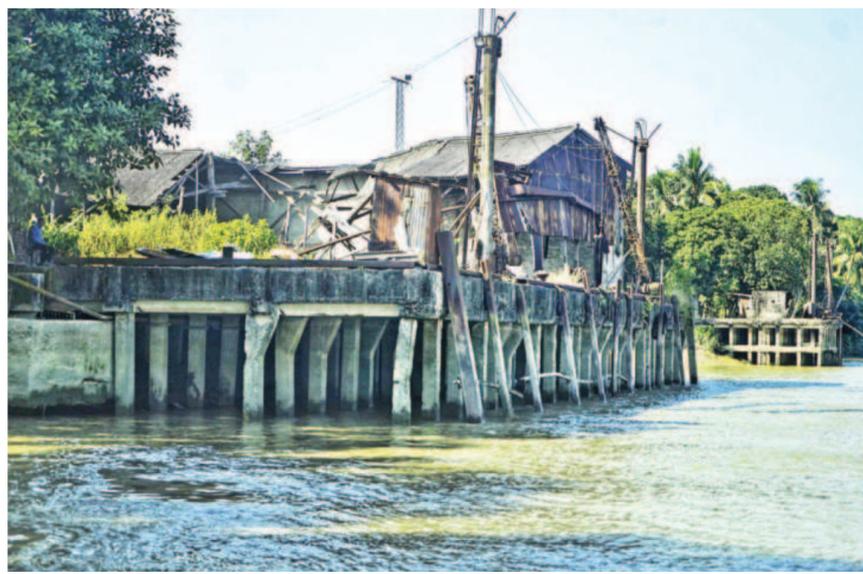
"None would have to shed tears like me losing a father-mother. So, we want to make sure that people will get justice,"

she said.

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Anisul Huq spoke on the occasion while the Appellate Division Justice and editor of the book and the souvenir Md. Nuruzzaman gave the welcome address.

An audio-video documentary on the book and the souvenir was screened on the occasion.

At the outset of the programme, a one-minute silence was observed to pay respect to the memory of August 15, 1975, and Liberation War martyrs.



A partly collapsed structure of the state-owned Khulna Newsprint Mills on the Bhairab river in the southwest of Khulna city. The mill has been shut for two decades as it incurred heavy losses after the demand for its newsprint decreased. However, the authorities are still paying different bills of over Tk 14 lakh a month. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

No way to send her

FROM PAGE 1

On Monday, the law ministry forwarded its opinion to the home ministry on an application seeking permission to allow Khaleda Zia to go abroad for treatment.

Khaleda, a 76-year-old former prime minister, has been receiving treatment at Evercare Hospital for various health complications since November 13.

The BNP chief's medical board members on November 28 said she immediately needs to go abroad for better treatment as she was diagnosed with liver cirrhosis.

On behalf of her family, Khaleda's younger brother, Shamim Iskander, submitted an application to the home ministry on November 11 seeking permission to take her abroad for treatment.

Though the government earlier twice turned down such applications, it is taking time to dispose of the fresh plea.

On November 28, the Law Minister Anisul Huq told parliament that Khaleda is now free as she is not in government custody.

He also said as Khaleda was temporarily released under Section 401 of the Criminal Code of Procedure based on some conditions, including not leaving the country, there is no provision in the law to allow her to go abroad now until she submits a fresh petition after returning to jail.

BNP leaders and pro-BNP lawyers, however, have long been arguing that the government has the unlimited authority to take any decision in this regard under Section 401.

The party has also been observing various programmes since November 25 demanding that the BNP chief be allowed to go abroad as there is no advanced centre in Bangladesh to treat her liver cirrhosis problem.

BNP decides not to join

FROM PAGE 1

The president on December 20 opened the talks with the registered political parties. The Jatiya Party, the main opposition in parliament, was the first party to join the dialogue.

Hamid has so far invited 14 parties to the dialogue.

A total of 39 political parties are registered with the EC and only nine of them have representation in the current parliament.

The tenure of the incumbent EC will expire on February 14 next year. According to the constitution, the new EC must be formed before the current one expires.

Asked why the party decided against joining the talks, BNP standing committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said, "You will get the answer if you ask anyone on the street. The whole exercise of holding talks is a project of the government to snatch people's voting rights. Any democratic party fully aware of the government's intention cannot join the talks."

In 2017, President Hamid held talks

with 31 political parties before forming a search committee, headed by Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, on January 25 that year.

The committee had asked the 31 political parties to recommend five names each for the posts of CEC and commissioners. The panel then shortlisted 20 names from 128 suggested by 26 political parties. Hamid then appointed KM Nurul Huda as chief election commissioner and four other commissioners.

In 2012, then president Zillur Rahman held talks with 23 political parties. Five of them had proposed forming a search committee, while four suggested enacting a law that could be followed for such appointments.

Zillur later appointed a judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court as the head of a four-member search committee to recommend names for the posts of CEC and commissioners.

That committee shortlisted 10 individuals. Later, Zillur picked five and formed the EC, led by Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad, on February 9, 2012.

Another rail project taking

FROM PAGE 1

It is hopeful that the project will progress briskly now that it is close to signing all five contracts.

The fifth contract -- which is for procuring 420 broad-gauge (BG) wagons from the Kolkata-based Hindusthan Engineering and Industries -- will be signed early next month, according to Rahman.

Yesterday, it signed a two-and-a-half-year contract with Chinese CRRC Shandong Company to procure 580 metre-gauge (MG) wagons for Tk 318.6 crore.

CRRC Shandong, which is also supplying 71 freight trains to London Underground, will deliver the wagons within 27 months from the effective date of the contract and complete all procedures within 30 months.

The contract is expected to be activated within 15 days, Rahman said.

The fourth and fifth contracts were scheduled to be signed last year.

But the concurrence did not come in time, so the tendering process had to be started afresh, Suján said.

Asked why MG wagons are being procured when the BR will convert all tracks to BG as per its 30-year master plan to 2045, he said: "We have to use MG for the next 10 to 15 years, so we need wagons and locomotive to provide service on those. A major portion of the railway network is still

MG tracks."

In January 2019, the BR struck a deal with US-based Progress Rail for purchasing 40 BG locomotives.

In August 2020, it signed another contract with a Chinese joint-venture firm to procure 125 luggage vans (75 MG and 50 BG vans under two packages) to boost the transportation of agro-based products.

As of October, the project has witnessed 8 percent physical progress and 12.5 percent financial progress.

SSC results

FROM PAGE 1

education minister Dipu Moni will give details about the results, he added.

This year, the exams took place between November 14 and 23 -- nine months after the scheduled time due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Examinees sat for tests in only three optional subjects, apart from compulsory subjects like Bangla, English and Mathematics, with shortened syllabuses. The total marks for the exams were also lessened.

The results of the three optional subjects and the grade point average of the students' previous public examinations, including Junior School Certificate, will be taken into consideration while preparing the final results.

Around 22,27,113 students sat for this year's SSC and equivalent exams.

AL sinks in its strongholds

FROM PAGE 1

SM Anisuzzaman, AL candidate for Lahuria union under Lohagara of Narail, got 118 votes out of a total 20,689 votes.

AL leaders, while talking to The Daily Star, said the results of the fourth phase UP polls is totally unexpected at a time when many political parties are not participating with their electoral symbols.

Providing nominations to candidates chosen by influential MPs and leaders, anti-AL sentiments, ignoring candidates' lists proposed by party grassroots and conflict between local AL leaders and MPs were the major reasons for such a debacle, according to party sources.

Most importantly, they pointed out, fighting in grassroots units and picking up many incumbent chairmen as candidates backfired once more.

"Many incumbent chairmen became unpopular in their respective unions because of their misdeeds during their five-year tenure," said an AL central leader, preferring not to be named.

Besides, AL failed to contain its rebel candidates despite taking measures such as issuing show-cause notices, warnings of punitive actions and expulsions from the organisation. Party leaders think victory of rebel candidates are encouraging the party's grassroots leaders to contest against party nominees.

The results released on Monday showed that ruling party candidates performed poorly in the fourth phase compared to the previous three phases.

In Sunday's polls, independents fared well, winning 49 percent of the

chairman posts while AL candidates won 49.74 percent.

In the first phase held in June and September, AL candidates won 76 percent chairman posts, in the second phase they won 56 percent and 53 percent in the third phase, before dipping below 50 on Sunday in the fourth phase.

Talking to The Daily Star, AL presidium member Abdur Rahman termed the fourth phase election result "unexpected". He, however, said the party will move forward and act accordingly after learning lessons from the fourth phase.

Elections held in 10 unions of Faridpur's Boalmari upazila, where nine AL candidates were defeated and of them five candidates lost their security money.

Locals said conflict between local MP Manjur Hossain and former MP Abdur Rahman was responsible for this humiliating result.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Boalmari upazila AL General Secretary Pikul Mirdah said, "We sent a list of probable candidates to the AL central committee mentioning their contribution to the party and their role in previous elections."

"But candidates that were our top choices did not get party nominations. Instead, candidates who were our third or fourth choices got party nominations and thus our candidates were defeated," he said.

In the third phase UP polls, AL's poor results in Bhanga and Charbhadrans upazilas were also due to the conflict between incumbent MP Mojibur Rahman Chowdhury Nixon and former MP Kazi Zafarullah Chowdhury, locals said.

Porous, powerless

FROM PAGE 1

The fortune was made by forging documents between 2001 and 2009, according to Rab. During the period, the government earned Tk 320 crore from the land port.

The corrupt practices have been going on for a long time in connivance with a section of corrupt customs officials and dishonest traders, The Daily Star learnt after speaking with people in Teknaf.

In the absence of any automatic scanner machine, customs officials only check at best 2 percent of the goods by random sampling and that too manually, which is not sufficient to detect illegal goods inside any import consignment, they said.

Several traders said some dishonest traders import falsely declaring high tax items as low taxable goods.

The rackets including that of Islam's used to help release those, bribing a section of corrupt customs officials.

For instance, it is not possible to identify coffee in the pickle bag without a scanning machine, said a trader wishing anonymity. The tax on pickles is only Tk 5 per kg while the tax on the same amount of coffee is Tk 500, he said.

As far as security measures are concerned, the correspondent found cargo boats from Myanmar were entering the port without any checking by the port authority. The staffers of the boats were seen roaming freely in the markets surrounding the port.

Local traders, clearing and forwarding agents and port workers were also walking into the boats from Myanmar unrestricted.

Most of the workers of the port are Rohingyas, who have been sheltering in various camps in Bangladesh for a long time, said Nazrul Islam, the proprietor of Teknaf Trading, which provides all the labour at the port.

The locals did not want to work as labourers in the port, where onions, wood, fish, shoes, betel nuts, rice and cosmetic items come through.

"It is very surprising that no Yaba consignment has so far been seized at Teknaf land port, which is believed to be the major route for its smuggling

in Bangladesh," Ehteshamul Haque, technical officer (customs) of the World Health Organisation, told The Daily Star recently.

It is not possible to separate Yaba from other goods by checking manually, said Haque, who previously worked at the National Board of Revenue, the Bangladesh Customs and the World Customs Organisation.

Scanner machines or dog squads are needed to check such smuggling through the Teknaf port, he said, adding that both are becoming a mainstay at borders and ports across the world to prevent smuggling.

Abdun Noor, revenue officer of Teknaf Land Port Custom, said that they weigh all imported and exported goods.

If there is any irregularity, it will be caught by weighing scale, he said.

Jasim Uddin, general manager of the port, denied any irregularities.

"We are ensuring maximum security here. No one can enter or exit without our concern. As far as I know, no Rohingyas work here," he said.

Usually, a trader needs multiple documents -- a letter of credit, packing list, bill of lading, general manifest (IGM) copy by the shipowner and others -- for importing or exporting goods.

But Teknaf Land Port -- where about 4.15 lakh tonnes of goods worth about Tk 3,400 crore were imported between 2017 and 2020 -- is an exception, said customs officials.

Unlike any other port, traders can import goods through Teknaf showing only a single document: the bank draft.

Sonali Bank and Myanmar Economic Bank are nominated to issue bank drafts on border trade by their respective governments under an agreement signed on May 18, 1994.

The bank draft only mentions the name of the importing company and the dollar amount.

In the absence of standard documents, customs duty is levied based on the information given by the traders after import.

There is no opportunity for the customs authority to verify the

Election to 22 UPs were held in Hossainpur, Katiadi and Bhairab upazilas under Kishoreganj, which is also considered a stronghold of AL, on Sunday and of them AL sponsored candidates were defeated in 13 UPs.

In Katiadi, AL candidates won in only two out of nine UPs.

Voting was held in 21 unions under Sunamganj district where nine AL sponsored candidates lost their security deposit. Ruling party candidates won in seven UPs while party rebels achieved victories in six.

Sherpur is also known as an AL bastion. Elections to nine UPs were held in Sreebardi upazila of the district and AL candidates were defeated in seven of them.

Independent candidate Abdul Karim, also a local BNP leader, won as chairman in Bhelua union where ruling party sponsored candidate Rezaul Karim, union unit AL president, finished fourth.

In Gauripur upazila of Mymensingh, also a stronghold of AL, elections to 10 UPs were held where AL candidates achieved victory only in two while independent candidates won in four and AL rebels in three. The result of one UP has been postponed.

At least six AL candidates lost their security deposit in 21 UPs under Dinajpur while AL nominees won in a single UP out of 10 in Rangamati.

Although BNP is not participating in the ongoing UP polls, party leaders independently won in 75 UPs, local sources said.

Meanwhile, main opposition Jatiya Party candidates won in six UPs. Besides, Islami Andolon bagged two chairman posts and Zaker Party and Jatiya Party (Manju) won one each.

authenticity of the document with the institution or bank of the exporting country, according to Noor.

Manpower shortage is also handicapping the land port, customs officials said.

There are only seven government staff at the port against a sanctioned headcount of 19, said a customs official seeking anonymity.

The National Board of Revenue has already been asked to install the scanner machine, said Shahin Akter, revenue officer of the port, adding that an initiative is underway to make the identity card compulsory for entry to the port.

"The situation in the port has improved a lot in the last few months," he added.

The government has a plan to set up scanner machines in all land ports of the country including Teknaf, Zakiya Sultana, member of the NBR's customs audit, modernisation and international trade, told The Daily Star at the end of October.

She, however, could not say how long it would take to implement the plan.

In the first 11 months of this year, about 53,000 tonnes of goods worth about Tk 812 crore were imported through the Teknaf Land Port.

US President Biden signs \$770 billion defense bill

REUTERS

US President Joe Biden signed into law the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, for fiscal year 2022, which authorizes \$770 billion in defense spending, the White House said on Monday.

Earlier this month, the Senate and the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly for the defense bill with strong support from both Democrats and Republicans for the annual legislation setting policy for the Department of Defense.

STUDENT'S DEATH

PBI given time again to finish probe

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday asked police to submit the probe report by January 16 in a case filed against Bashundhara Group Managing Director Sayem Sobhan Anvir.

Anvir and seven others were accused in the case filed over the rape and murder of a college student in the capital's Gulshan.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Begum Yasmin Ara gave the order to Golam Moktar Ashrafuddin, inspector of Police Bureau of Investigation, who is investigating the case.

Yesterday was the fifth time the PBI failed to submit the probe report, court officials said.

On December 8, the same court asked PBI to submit the report by yesterday.

Anvir is the prime accused in the case and Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan alias Shah Alam and six others are accused of assisting Anvir.

The other accused are Shah Alam's wife Afroza Begum, Anvir's wife Sabrina Sayem, model Faria Mahbub Piyasha, Saifa Rahman Mim, Ibrahim Ahmed Ripon and his wife Sharmin.

The High Court on September 29 refused to grant anticipatory bail to Anvir in the case.

On April 26, police recovered the body of a 21-year-old college student in a Gulshan flat. Her elder sister then filed a case with Gulshan Police Station, accusing Anvir of abetting suicide.

On July 19, Abul Hasan, officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station, submitted the final report in the case to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka.

On August 18, a Dhaka court accepted the final report and relieved Anvir from the case.

However, the victim's elder sister on September 6 filed the another case with the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-8 of Dhaka, making allegations of rape and murder.

Dhaka wants

FROM PAGE 1

Law that governs the nation's funding to foreign security forces.

Officials from the home and law ministries and law enforcement agencies were present at the meeting. The law will be effective from January 2022.

In a letter to Dhaka on December 1, Washington said Dhaka needs to inform in writing the consent to the Leahy Law for assistance on security cooperation.

The US will need the consent of the countries where the US cooperates on security issues. Bangladesh will need to inform the US government of the security forces that receive the US security assistance and how it will be used.

Bangladesh was asked to respond to the letter by December 15 but Dhaka has now sought until December 31 to give feedback.

"Earlier, we discussed. We did it again today and will do some more work before informing our consent on the law by December 31," Masud Bin Momen said.

"We are reviewing the benefits of Bangladesh if we endorse the US law. Also, we are checking if any policy of our law enforcers contradicts the US law," the foreign secretary said.

Bangladesh maintains a "zero tolerance" policy in terms of human rights violation, militancy and other serious crimes, and there is a commonality between that of the US and other development partners, he said.

"We will hold one more meeting on it before communicating our consent to the law to the US," he said, adding that Bangladesh values the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and the US.

Asked if any of the Leahy Law provisions contradict Bangladesh laws and context, he said Bangladesh's law and situation would surely get priority.

He said the security assistance that Bangladesh got from the US in the past was not coming under the purview of the law.

"We are working on the language aspect of the law so that our interests are protected," the foreign secretary said.

"The US wants general consent to the law, but we want to respond by making sure that our interests are protected at the same time," he said.

Responding to a question, he said there was no link between the security cooperation and the US sanctions imposed on Rab and seven of its former and current officials.