

Jashore BGB arrests man with 14kg of gold

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Border Guard Bangladesh members yesterday recovered around 14.5kg of gold, worth over Tk 10.11 crore, while it was being smuggled to India through Chougachha border in Jashore.

A patrol team of Shahjadpur border outpost arrested Shah Alam, 35, with 124 gold bars. He was on a motorbike.

The team also seized the motorcycle and his mobile phone.

Shahed Minhaj Siddique, commanding officer of 49 BGB Battalion in Jashore, said the recovery was the outcome of increased border patrolling and intelligence activities to stop smuggling of gold, narcotics and other illegal activities in the bordering area.

He added that the arrestee admitted that he had so far smuggled six such consignments and yesterday's consignment was probably the biggest.

For each consignment, he was supposed to get Tk 12,000, but he had so far received Tk 30,000, said the BGB official, quoting the arrestee.

The official said Shah Alam, who is a farmer, received the gold bars from a person at a bazaar just one and a half kilometres away from the border. Shah Alam's task was to take the consignment to a crematorium on the bank of Kobadak river where people usually do not visit, he added.

Later, some Indians came there by boat at a convenient time and collected the gold bars.

UN alarmed as 18 million face Sahel food crisis

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations yesterday warned that up to 18 million people in the Sahel face severe food insecurity, with rations being cut due to funding shortages.



Residents buy goods at a car used as a mobile market in Staryi Saltiv, a village retaken by Ukrainian forces, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kharkiv region yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Donbas 'destroyed'

Claims Zelensky as Russian artillery, aircraft step up strikes in east; G7 mobilise \$19.8b for Ukraine

AGENCIES

Russian forces bombarded areas of Ukraine's eastern Donbas region from land and air yesterday, destroying houses in residential districts and killing a number of civilians, Ukrainian officials said.

"The Donbas is completely destroyed," President Zelensky said. "It is hell there - and that is not an exaggeration."

In the southern port city of Mariupol, scene of the war's bloodiest siege, the last heavily wounded fighters from hold-out Ukrainian units had been evacuated from their bastion, the Azovstal steelworks, their commander said.

The Kremlin meanwhile said it was bolstering its forces on Russia's western border, saying that moves by Finland and Sweden to join Nato were part of an increase in military threats.

As the war neared its three-month mark, the Ukrainian military said massive artillery barrages, including from multiple rocket launchers, had hit civilian infrastructure in the Donbas region bordering Russia.

"The Russian army has started very intensive destruction of the town of Sievierodonetsk, the intensity of shelling doubled, they are shelling residential quarters, destroying houses by house," Luhansk governor Serhiy Gaidai said via

his Telegram channel.

"We do not know how many people died, because it is simply impossible to go through and look at every apartment," he said.

Earlier reports had put the civilian death toll in the Luhansk area of the Donbas at 13 in the past day, with 12 of them in Sievierodonetsk, which lies on a river about 110 km northwest of the regional capital.

In Moscow, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said the "liberation of the

"The Donbas is completely destroyed," President Zelensky said. "It is hell there - and that is not an exaggeration."

Luhansk People's Republic" would be completed soon.

According to the British military intelligence, Russia is likely to further reinforce its operations in the Donbas once it finally secures Mariupol.

A senior Pentagon official said that the war could continue for a long time despite Kyiv's forces recapturing the Kharkiv region and their use of substantial US artillery supplies.

Western powers, who have strongly

condemned Russia's actions and sought to isolate Moscow with an array of sanctions, were stepping up support for Ukraine.

Finance ministers and central bank governors of the Group of Seven wealthy democracies said yesterday they have mobilised \$19.8 billion for Ukraine and pledged to give more financial support if needed.

The US Senate approved nearly \$40 billion in new aid, by far the largest US aid package to date, reports Reuters.

The White House is also working to get advanced anti-ship missiles to Ukraine to help defeat Russia's naval blockade, which has largely stopped Ukraine's food exports.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said he will speak to Finland today, while maintaining his opposition to Finnish and Swedish Nato membership bids over their history of hosting members of groups Ankara deems terrorists.

Finland and Sweden formally applied to join Nato on Wednesday, following Russia's February 24 invasion of Ukraine.

Almost a third of Ukraine's people have fled their homes, including more than 6 million who have left the country, while others remain trapped in cities pulverised by Russian bombardments.

50 get Covid in a day

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh registered 50 new Covid cases in 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, taking the country's total caseload to 1,953,188, health authorities said.

With no new Covid death reported for the 29th consecutive day yesterday, the total fatalities from the virus so far remained at 29,127.

The daily test positivity rate slightly increased to 0.79 percent from Thursday's 0.60 percent during the 24-hour period as 6,313 samples were tested, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

On Thursday, 35 cases were reported. The mortality rate remained unchanged at 1.49 percent. The recovery rate rose to 97.31 percent as 221 patients recovered during this period.

In April, the country reported only five Covid-related deaths, 1,114 new cases and 14,100 recoveries, according to the DGHS.

Among the five dead, two were unvaccinated Covid patients.

The country reported its first zero Covid death in a single day on November 20 last year since the pandemic broke out here in March 2020.

Man, grandson killed in train accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

An elderly man and his grandson were killed after being hit by a train in Sirajganj's Kamarkhand upazila yesterday afternoon.

The victims, Abdul Mannan, 72, and Jubayer Hossain, 7, were from Kazipura village of the same upazila.

The Chilahati-bound Nilsagar Express hit the duo near Jamtoil Railway Station around 1:00pm while they were crossing the rail line, said Atau Rahman, sub-inspector of Sirajganj Government Railway Police.

The two died on the spot, the SI added.

5 transferred over black-marketing of train tickets

UNB, Khulna

Five railway officials in Khulna have been transferred over allegations of selling tickets on the black market.

Train Examiner Baitul Islam, Zafar Mia and Tota Mia of the Inspector of Works (IW) office, and assistant station masters Asheque Ahmed and Zakir Hossain were transferred to different districts.

Shahedul Islam, divisional railway manager of Pakshi, issued the transfer orders on Thursday afternoon.

He also issued a show cause notice to Station Master Manik Chandra Sarker of Khulna Railway Station for lodging a complaint with the police against the five officials without informing the higher authorities.

EC targets more women enrolment

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districts asked them to ensure that no women is left out.

"We do not want any eligible voters, especially women, to remain out of the voter list," Alamgir said.

Immediate past election commissioner Rafiqul Islam, also joint secretary at the EC in 2008, said many women are unwilling to take photos on religious ground, while many others have migrated internally.

These are the two vital factors behind the falling number of female voters.

Ahead of the 2007-08 voter list upgradation, EC officials launched a very strong awareness campaign saying photos are also needed to perform Hajj.

This worked very well back then and led to remarkable rise in the female voter enrolment. The absence of such awareness campaigns is

another reason, he added.

EC data show there were 8,10,58,698 voters ahead of the 2008 elections. Of them 4,12,36,149 were women and 3,98,22,549 men.

Rafiqul Islam said door-to-door visit could not be done in 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-19 situation. Usually, the EC gets information on eligible voters by going door-to-door.

Nationally, there are 1.84 percent more male voters than female. In Cox's Bazar and Rangamati, this figure is 5 percent, EC officials said.

Male voters lead their counterparts by 4 percent in Chhattogram, Feni, Noakhali, Shariatpur, Madaripur and Bhola, and by 3 percent in Dhaka, Brahmanbaria, Chandpur, Lakshmipur, Munshiganj, Sylhet and Bandarban districts.

The EC last collected information of eligible

voters in 2019 of those born between January 1, 2001, and January 1, 2004.

VOTER LIST UPDATING STARTS

Enumerators of the EC will visit households for three weeks from May 20 to collect information on prospective voters in 140 upazilas of 64 districts, SM Asaduzzaman, joint secretary of the EC, told The Daily Star.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal, who inaugurated the voter updating work in Savar yesterday morning, said all political parties, including the BNP, will soon be called for a dialogue on the elections.

"Today, the work of preparing the voter list begins. There's a lot of work to do. Soon all parties, including the BNP, will be invited for talks. It will happen in the next one

or two months," he told reporters there.

Asked what the Election Commission is doing to further increase the EVM capacity, he said they would hold some seminars on the issue before making any decision. "I can't take any decision alone."

This time, EC representatives would collect data about citizens born on or after January 1, 2005, January 1, 2006 and January 1, 2007, and they would gradually be included in the electoral roll when they turn 18, he said.

Talking to this correspondent last night, EC Secretary Md Humayun Kabir Khandaker said this campaign would ensure that no eligible voter is excluded from the list. "Special measures will be taken to include those from Bede community and red-light areas."

not taken against them."

He also blamed resource constraints and lack of technical expertise for pollution prevention.

The latest study found that over 90 percent of pollution related deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries. The US ranked seventh with 142,883 deaths in 2019 while China reported almost 2.2 million deaths.

Globally, air pollution -- both ambient and household -- was responsible for 6.7 million deaths in 2019. Water

pollution was responsible for 1.4 million deaths and lead pollution caused 900,000 premature deaths.

"The health impacts of pollution remain enormous, and low- and middle-income countries bear the brunt of this burden. Despite its enormous health, social and economic impacts, pollution prevention is largely overlooked in the international development agenda," said Richard Fuller, lead author of the study.

Now rice prices are soaring

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in prices. They, however, insisted that there was no shortage of the staple in the market now.

A week ago, the price of wheat, the second-most consumed grain in Bangladesh after rice, went up in the local market after India slapped a ban on the export of wheat.

People on fixed income are finding it difficult to run their families as the prices of almost all commodities have risen in the last five months.

"Can you name any essential commodity whose price has not soared? There is nothing for the people like us to buy at a reasonable

price," said Nasir Ahmed, a resident of the capital's Adabar area.

Mohammad Firoz, a grocer at Mirpur-12, had to return from the Mirpur-12 kitchen market without buying all the items on his list.

"I went to the market with Tk 1,000 and sept the entire amount for buying chicken, soybean oil and vegetables. I could not buy eggs," he said.

Firoz said he expected that prices of commodities would come down after the Eid-ul-Fitr, but the prices rather went up.

According to traders, the demand for fine rice is comparatively higher than

coarse rice in Dhaka.

The prices of essentials started to rise in November last year after the government hiked diesel price by about 23 percent, which led to the rise in transport costs. This had a domino effect on the market.

The war between Russia and Ukraine began in February this year, which caused another round of price hike, particularly of the imported items as the supply-chain was severely disrupted.

Mohammad Nizam Uddin, general secretary of Badamtali Rice Arot Owners' Association, said

the wholesale price of Miniket and Najirshal rice increased by Tk 2 to Tk 3 per kg in the last four or five days.

He said flash floods in Sylhet division caused the latest rise in prices.

"Besides, there is a competition among some big companies for procuring rice. They buy rice in bulk, triggering the price hike."

Nizam said paddy now sells for Tk 1,100 to Tk 1,200 per mound. "Before the buying competition began, the price was Tk 600 to Tk 800 a mound."

SP fired

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the home ministry order. An investigation by PHQ found allegations to be true and on March 4, 2019 it sent the investigation report to the home ministry's public security division requesting it to take departmental action against Altaf.

The ministry then called him to a hearing and reviewing everything, it decided to investigate the allegations, appointing Atau Kibria, additional deputy inspector general of the PHQ, as the investigation officer.

As the investigation found the allegations to be true, the home ministry decided to sack him as per the Bangladesh Government Employees (Discipline and Appeal) Rules-2018. The decision was forwarded to Bangladesh Public Service Commission, which gave the same advice on April 4.

The president also gave his consent.

Despite repeated attempts to reach Altaf on his personal mobile number for comment, he could not be reached.

2.15 lakh lives lost in Bangladesh in 2019

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said the average annual PM 2.5 concentrations in the country was 77.1 micrograms per cubic metre, which was more than two times the WHO recommended limit.

The entirety of Bangladesh's population was in areas that exceeded the annual WHO limit for the least stringent interim target of 35 micrograms per cubic metre, it said.

Abdullah Harun Chowdhury, professor of Environmental Science Discipline at Khulna University, said heavy

metal pollution in recent years has become a serious concern as it is hazardous for the environment and human health.

Clinics and hospitals are mushrooming across the country and the queues of the patients are getting longer, he said. "All the people of the country are exposed to pollution. Those who tolerate it can survive and those who can't die."

"We know the sources of the pollution. We know the polluters, but in some cases, the polluters are so influential that actions are