

## 116 ISLAMIC SPEAKERS ACC to decide on enquiry after review of ‘white paper’

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday said it is reviewing the “white paper” that named 116 religious leaders and Islamic speakers for their “involvement in laundering money, funding militancy and spreading communal hatred”.

“After the review, the commission will take measures ... no decision has been made for launching an enquiry,” said ACC Secretary Mahbub Hossain yesterday at a press briefing at the ACC headquarters, hours after some media outlets reported that the anti-graft body is enquiring into allegations against the 116 religious leaders.

On May 11, the People’s Inquiry Commission on Fundamentalist and Communal Violence – widely known as Gono Commission – submitted the white paper titled “2,000 days of Fundamentalist and Communal Violence in Bangladesh” to the ACC.

The 30-member commission was formed in February last year comprising members of the Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous and Minorities and the Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee.

The commission on June 21 issued an order, a copy of which The Daily Star obtained.

“Decision has been made to give approval to an enquiry into the allegations through a three-member team of special enquiry and investigation – Director Sayed Iqbal Hossain, Deputy

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## 1,319 Covid cases logged in a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 1,319 new Covid-19 cases were recorded, against the 9,214 samples tested, in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, while one death was reported during the period.

The positivity rate stood at 14.32 percent, up from yesterday’s 13.3.

With the latest, the death toll has risen to 29,135 since the pandemic hit the country, according to the data of the Directorate General of Health Services.

It’s the fourth consecutive death in a week.

The latest death was of a woman, aged 61-70, from Dhaka division.

Of those who died in the past week, one was vaccinated with a single dose, while three were inoculated with two doses.

The number of daily Covid cases crossed the 1,000-mark after nearly four months on Wednesday.

Earlier on February 25, it recorded 1,409 cases with 11 deaths.

The country’s total caseload rose to 1,960,528, according to DGHS data.

At least 127 patients have recovered from Covid-19 in the last 24 hours, with the total number of recoveries now at 19,06,232.

The recovery rate stands at 97.23 percent.



Afghan men look for their belongings amid the ruins of a house damaged by an earthquake in Bernal district, Paktika province, Afghanistan yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# ‘Nothing is left here’

Thousands left homeless; rescuers struggle to reach remote quake-hit zone in Afghanistan; death toll crosses 1,000

AGENCIES

Organised rescue efforts are struggling to reach the site of an earthquake in Afghanistan that has killed more than 1,000 people, as survivors dig through the rubble by hand to find those still missing.

Wednesday’s 5.9-magnitude quake struck hardest in the rugged east, downing mobile phone towers and power lines while triggering rock and mudslides which blocked mountain roads. Heavy rain and poor communication were also preventing rescuers from reaching to the most affected areas.

The quake was Afghanistan’s deadliest in two decades and officials said the toll could rise. An estimated 1,500 other people were reported injured, the state-run news agency said.

Entire villages have been levelled in some of the worst affected districts, where survivors said they were struggling to find equipment to bury their dead.

“When I came out of my house it was quiet because all the people were buried under their homes. Nothing is left here,” said 21-year-old Zaitullah Ghurziwal.

“There are no blankets, tents, there’s no shelter. Our entire water distribution system is destroyed. Everything is devastated, houses are destroyed. There is literally nothing to eat.”

The disaster poses a huge logistical challenge for Afghanistan’s new Taliban government, which has isolated itself from much of the world by introducing hardline Islamist rule that subjugates women and girls.

“Getting information from the ground is very difficult because of bad networks,” Mohammad Amin Huzaila, head of information for badly hit Paktika province, told AFP yesterday.

“The area has been affected by floods because of heavy rains last night... it is also difficult to access the affected sites.”

The aid-dependent country saw the bulk of its foreign assistance cut off in the wake of the Taliban takeover last August, and even before the earthquake the United Nations warned of a humanitarian crisis that threatened the entire population.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the global agency has “fully mobilised” to help, deploying health teams and supplies of

medicine, food, trauma kits and emergency shelter to the quake zone.

Afghan government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid yesterday tweeted that aid flights had landed from Qatar and Iran, while Pakistan had sent trucks carrying tents, medical supplies and food across the land border.

The UN said its World Food Programme (WFP) was sending food and logistics equipment to affected areas, with the aim of initially supporting 3,000 households.

The UN humanitarian coordinator for Afghanistan, Ramiz Alakbarov, told reporters nearly 2,000 homes were likely destroyed – a huge number in an area where the average household size is more than 20 people.

The healthcare system in Afghanistan was already on the verge of collapse. Even before the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan’s emergency response teams were stretched to deal with the natural disasters that frequently strike the country.

But with only a handful of airworthy planes and helicopters left since they returned to power, any immediate response to the latest catastrophe is further limited.

## Man arrested over rape of co-worker

A CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

Police yesterday arrested a man for his alleged involvement in the rape of his co-worker at a restaurant in Narsingdi.

The arrestee is Asraful Islam alias Shah Alam, 25, of the district’s Sadar upazila, said police.

The teenage victim filed a case with Narsingdi Police Station yesterday morning.

According to her complaint, Asraful first raped her on June 15 when she was resting at a room adjacent to the restaurant.

On June 18, she was raped again at a hostel at Hazupur union in the district, the complaint added.

The victim was sent to One Stop Crisis Centre of Narsingdi Sadar Hospital for medical tests, said Firoy Talukdar, officer-in-charge of Narsingdi Police Station.

## BNP leader hacked to death in Narsingdi

A CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

A BNP leader was hacked to death in Narsingdi’s Kath Bazar area on Wednesday night.

Sujith Sutradhar, 55, a carpenter by profession, was a former vice president of Hazipur union unit BNP and a former member at ward-2 of the same union.

Two others – Sujon Sutradhar, 30, the victim’s son, and their employee Dina, 55 – were injured during the attack. They received primary treatment.

According to Sujon, some 10-12 men, led by Hazipur Union Parishad Chairman Yosuf Khan Pinto’s brother Monir Hossain, attacked them with sharp weapons over previous enmity.

Kazi Ashraful Islam Azim, superintendent of Narsingdi police, claimed an ex-employee Masum Mia and his fellow men carried out the attack.

## Census deadline extended by 7 days for 4 flood-hit dists

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics has extended the time of the ongoing population and housing census by seven days for four flood-hit districts.

The districts are Sylhet, Sunamganj, Moulvibazar in Sylhet division and Netrokona in Mymensingh division.

Dilder Hossain, project director of the census, told The Daily Star yesterday.

“We completed our countrywide census within the deadline of June 21. But we have extended the time until June 28 to include all the people of the four flood-hit districts,” Dilder said.

Asked, he said, “We have circulated several emergency contact numbers in online platforms and through posters, so that they can call us and we can include them.”

## A leap for Asian connectivity

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links: one is the Padma Bridge and another Kalna Bridge in Narail.

Of the two, the 690m bridge construction in Kalna was comparatively easier, but the 6.150km bridge over the mighty Padma was always a massive task in terms of the magnitude of the work.

With the opening of Padma Bridge tomorrow and Kalna Bridge’s expected inauguration by September, those two missing links will disappear.

The Padma Bridge, longest in Bangladesh, will also pave the way for putting in place a new route for the Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) network, another UN initiative aimed at creating an integrated railway network across Asia.

It would be the fourth and the shortest TAR route, which would link India and Myanmar via the country and ultimately become a part of a network comprising 125,500km of railway lines serving 28 countries.

Apart from contributing to poverty reduction for the south-western region, the opening of Padma Bridge will help turn Kuakata into a major tourist destination.

The nation will also be able to make the most of Mongla port and under-construction Payra seaport, taking the burden off the Chattogram port, which often struggles to serve the fast-growing economy owing to inadequate facilities.

**AH-1 & PADMA BRIDGE**

The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) conceived the Asian Highway project and adopted

an Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network in November 2003.

The aim was to establish regional cooperation among the mainland countries of Asia, based on road transport linkages, according to the Road Transport and Highway Division’s documents.

A cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina approved the accession of Bangladesh to the Asian Highway network on June 15, 2009. The government signed the Instrument of Accession on July 5 the same year.

The route of AH-1 is Guwahati in Assam-Tamabil-Sylhet-Shaistaganj-Narsingdi-Kanchpur-Dhaka-Mawa-Charjanaj-Bhanga-Bhatiapara-Kalna Ferry Ghat-Narail-Jashore-Benapole-Petrapole in West Bengal. Its length is 492km.

The route of AH-2 is Guwahati-Tamabil-Sylhet-Narsingdi-Dhaka South (Jatrabari)-Dhaka North (Banani Rail Crossing)-Joydevpur-Elenga-Hatikamrul-Bogra-Rangpur-Panchagarh-Banglabandha-Fulbari in West Bengal. Its length is 517km, excluding the 294km common part of AH-1 and AH-2.

The route of AH-41 – Teknaf Cox’s Bazar-Feni-Moinamoti-Dhaka-Joydevpur-Hatikamrul-Banpara-Dasuria-Kushtia-Jhenaidah-Jashore-Khulna-Mongla – is limited within the country for now. Its length is 762km, excluding the 162km common part of AH2 and AH-41.

“With the opening of Padma Bridge and Kalna

Bridge by September, there would be no missing links and thus an uninterrupted connectivity would be established [on AH-1 route], which is a significant development,” Shishir Kanti Routh, an additional chief engineer of Roads and Highways Department (RHD).

The most portion of the AH-1 route is two-lane and also it has four-lane stretches in urban areas and market places.

The RHD is implementing two projects involving Tk 20,500 crore to turn Kanchpur Sylhet and Sylhet-Tamabil portions into four-lane keeping two additional lanes for slow-moving vehicles.

The physical work of the projects is expected to start this year.

Of the route, the portion from Kanchpur to Dhaka is now an eight-lane highway and Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga a four-lane expressway.

The RHD is going to take up a project to turn the 135km road from Bhanga to Benapole via Kalna, Narail and Jashore into a four-lane highway with Indian lines of credit.

Meanwhile, the department has almost completed construction of the 690m bridge over the Madhumati river at Kalna point with a cost of Tk 959 crore.

“Once all the projects are completed, the entire AH-1 route would be elevated to either primary [access-controlled motorway] or Class-I (four or more lanes highway),” said Shishir Kanti, also a member of RHD’s Thematic Group on Regional Connectivity.

**NEW TAR ROUTE**

The TAR network is aimed at enhancing the efficiency and development of the railway infrastructure in Asia, according to the UNESCAP website.

An intergovernmental agreement on the TAR network was adopted in April 2006. Signed by Bangladesh in 2007, it came into force in June 2009.

At the beginning, three routes of TAR had passed through Bangladesh.

The route of TAR-1 is Gede in West Bengal-Darshana-Ishwardi-Bangabandhu Bridge-Joydevpur-Tongi-Akhaura-Chattogram-Cox’s Bazar-Ghundhum-Myanmar.

It has two sub-routes – Tongi-Dhaka and Akhaura-Kulaura-Shahbazzur-Mahisasan of India.

The route of TAR-2 runs through Singabadi in West Bengal-Rohanpur-Abdulpur-Ishwardi to meet TAR-1.

The route of TAR-3 runs through Radhikapur in West Bengal-Birol-Dinaipur-Parbatipur-Abdulpur to meet TAR-1.

With the building of a double-decker bridge – roadway on the top and railway on the bottom – over the Padma river, the country enters a new era of railway connectivity.

Bangladesh Railway has already undertaken a project titled “Padma Bridge Rail Link Project (PBRLP)” to connect the capital and Jashore with a 169km rail line via the Padma Bridge at the cost of Tk 39,246 crore.

And, following BR’s request, UNESCAP agreed to incorporate the Dhaka-Bhanga-Jashore track as a fourth route of the TAR network in Bangladesh.

The route would

run through Petrapole-Benapole-Jashore-Narail-Bhanga-Mawa-Narayanganj-Dhaka-Tongi before meeting TAR-1.

Transport expert Prof Hadiuzzaman said the Padma Bridge has opened a new route for Trans Asian Railway, through which the railway would be connected with a big network.

“This will open a new window for Bangladesh Railway,” he told this correspondent recently, adding that the BR has to do a lot of things, including gauge conversions, to establish effective connectivity with TAR.

In Bogura, some 50

## Schools in the north

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fishing in the water on my school premises,” said Khalid Hasan, a class-4 student of Sardob Satkalua Government Primary School in Kurigram.

Saiful Islam, a fifth grader from Char Jatrapur of Kurigram, said floodwater swept away all furniture of his house along with his books, pens and school bag. “I am worried about how to resume studies after the reopening of my school.”

Water entered his house about a week ago, forcing his six-member family to take shelter on a nearby road.

In Bogura, some 50

primary schools have been shut for over a week due to flooding, said Thamina Khatun, the district primary education officer (DPEO).

Jahidul Islam, a resident of Khatiamari char in the district’s Sariaikhat upazila, said his two sons are class-5 and class-2 students in Biramer Pachgachi Primary School.

“Water has entered our house and the school nine days ago. My sons are now stranded at home,” he said.

In Gaibandha, flooding has caused the closure of at least 111 primary schools, said the local DPEO office.

In Sirajganj, water entered

84 primary schools, but the authorities concerned were yet to shut those.

“We are trying to shift academic activities to those school buildings which are not inundated,” said Aminul Islam Mandol, DPEO of Sirajganj.

Meanwhile, the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre yesterday forecasted that the overall flood situation in Kurigram, Gaibandha, Bogura and Sirajganj may improve today.

Our correspondents in Lalmonirhat, Bogura and Pabna contributed to this report.

## Inaccessible, in distress

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incredibly hard. We didn’t have a single meal,” Aytun said.

The strong flood currents had washed away all her possessions.

“I used to work as a day labourer. Until the waters go down, I will have no income.”

A boatful of aid came to the spot and gave her a bag. To her dismay, she found only a litre of bottled mineral water and some more chira.

In Pashchim Gardhana village of Darbast union, people flocked to a relief boat for rice.

They each came in their own dinghy boats, while those without vehicles called the relief boat from afar standing in chest deep water.

This was the first relief boat for them.

“I have two days’ worth of rice left, and a six-member family to feed,” said Faridun, sitting on a dinghy.

“This was the last of the rice I had bought. We have

set up the stove on the bed and that is why we are being able to cook.”

Meanwhile, flood-affected areas in Netrakona are also distressed as relief is still scarce.

Amzad Hossain, a resident of Lengura union in Netrakona, said, “At least 300 houses have been washed away since the flood hit the union last Friday. People here received no food aid till today [yesterday].”

Of all the 10 upazilas there, people in Komlakanda, Durgapur, Barhatta, Mohanganj and Khaliajuri were the worst affected.

In Khaliajuri, army personnel have been coordinating the government and non-government aid activities effectively, Roni, one of the locals, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Razib Sarker, a local journalist who has visited multiple flood-hit areas in the last six days, said, “The majority of the people have

been starving. The local administration could reach only the nearest areas. But the hard-to-reach areas have remained untouched.”

**ADMIN STRUGGLES**

Abdul Latif, member of the union parishad, said they got 24 sacks of rice for 1,100 families – meaning each family got enough to last a day.

Abul Kalam, a member of Pashchim Jallong area in Sylhet’s Gowainghat upazila, said, “We are trying to reach the people who are stranded in the village and in dire need of relief, as the snapped-off communications are being restored.”

Several local council representatives and volunteers confirmed they were struggling to reach many flood-affected people due to accessibility issues and the crisis of relief; administrative officials also admitted that the crisis is real.

Rozina Akter, upazila nirbahi officer in Sylhet’s Bishwanath upazila, said

“Boats are rare in the upazila while non-flooded roads are blocking the paths. Moreover, not many private efforts are seen in the upazila.”

Muntasir Hasan, UNO of Dharmapasha and Madhyannagar upazilas in Sunamganj, said, “The villages in deep haors are hard to reach. Due to accessibility issues, not much relief is reaching the flood-hit people in the upazilas.”

**DEATH TOLL**

The fatalities caused by the floods rose to 68 after 24 people died in 24 hours till yesterday morning, UNB reports citing the Directorate General of Health Services.

Of them, 23 are from Sylhet division alone, the report said, adding that 20 people have died by drowning in floodwater, two died in lightning strikes and one from diarrhoea.

The deaths were recorded from May 17 to June 23.