

# Internet was shut down on Hasina's orders

## Palak confesses at ICT

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Zunaid Ahmed Palak, former state minister for posts, telecommunications and information technology, has confessed to deliberately shutting down the internet nationwide during the July uprising on former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's orders.

His testimony was recorded by the International Crime Tribunal's investigation agency following a questioning session held on Wednesday, said Chief Prosecutor Md Tajul Islam while addressing journalists at the tribunal yesterday.

"They [Hasina and Awami League lawmakers] wanted to ensure that Bangladesh was disconnected from the rest of the world to hide the instances of mass killings during the protests," Tajul said.

According to the chief prosecutor, Palak also said he had lied by saying that the internet blackout was caused by a fire incident in data centres in Dhaka's Mohakhali and destruction of telecommunication infrastructure by protesters.

"A WhatsApp group was created with International Internet Gateway service providers. A direct order was

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Environmental activists, under the banner of the "Bangladesh Tree Protection Movement," demonstrate at the Panthakunja Park in the capital's Panthapath area yesterday, demanding an end to pollution and tree felling in the name of development projects.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

# 'Improve within a month, or face consequences'

## Adviser says 'heads will roll' if BRTA doesn't upgrade services

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will take action against Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) officials, including its chairman, if the authority fails to improve its services within a month, Road Transport and Bridges Ministry Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan announced yesterday.

He also suggested that BRTA could seek assistance from private service providers for vehicle fitness verification and driving licence issuance if necessary.

The adviser briefed the media on a series of decisions made at a meeting held at Bidyut Bhavan aimed at bringing discipline to the

### DECISIONS FROM MEETING

- Remove buses over 20yrs old
- Remove trucks over 25yrs old
- Police to identify traffic congestion areas
- Tow illegally parked vehicles
- Loan assistance for new buses
- Encourage school buses for transport
- Company-operated buses on 9 routes

road transport sector, reducing traffic congestion, and curbing air pollution. The meeting was attended by four advisers and senior officials from police and other government agencies.

During the meeting, the police were instructed to identify congestion-prone areas and take immediate action to improve traffic conditions, with a visible improvement expected within a week.

The adviser said that vehicles parked illegally, causing traffic congestion, will be towed as a punitive measure.

In line with a previous decision made in October, all buses over 20

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## NIPAH VIRUS IN 2024

# Five cases, five deaths!

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All five people identified to be infected with the Nipah virus in Bangladesh so far this year have died, according to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR). The victims include four men and one woman, with two of them being children.

The IEDCR revealed these findings yesterday during a view-exchange meeting titled "Spread and Risk of Nipah Virus" at its auditorium.

In her keynote speech, Prof Tahmina Shirin of the IEDCR said that while winter brings seasonal delicacies, such as raw date palm sap, many remain unaware of the risks associated with consuming it. The sap, potentially contaminated by bats, is a primary transmission route for the virus in Bangladesh.

Highlighting surveillance data, Prof Tahmina said Nipah virus was first detected in the country in 2001. Since IEDCR began its surveillance in 2006, 334 cases have been reported, resulting in 245 deaths—a fatality rate of 71 percent.

This year's deaths include two individuals from Manikganj, while the others are from Khulna, Shariatpur, and Naogaon.

Prof Tahmina said Nipah virus was first identified in Malaysia in 1998-99, spreading

to Singapore and later becoming endemic in Bangladesh and India from 2001. In 2023, 13 cases were reported across eight locations in the country, with the virus now detected in 34 districts.

"Raw date palm sap remains the primary vehicle of transmission in Bangladesh," she said. Twelve tertiary hospitals have observation centres for monitoring Nipah virus patients, she added.

Symptoms of Nipah infection include fever, which may appear within eight days of consuming contaminated sap. The virus can also be transmitted to infants through breastfeeding, and neurological complications may persist in survivors for extended periods.

Prof Tahmina advised, "Before consuming fruits and vegetables, they must be washed thoroughly. Any fruit bitten by bats, animals, or birds should be avoided." She called for heightened awareness, particularly in upazila and district-level hospitals, where testing facilities remain unavailable. With no vaccine currently available, the Nipah virus continues to pose a significant health risk nationwide.

- Overall case fatality rate 71pc
- Since 2001, 343 patients identified, 245 died
- Cases found in 4 districts this year

# A dream trip ends in tragedy

RAFIUL ISLAM

Kamrul Hasan, 23, stepped off a bus on the Mayor Hanif Flyover on Wednesday night, eager for a long awaited trip to Cox's Bazar with friends.

As he made his way to the Sayedabad Bus Terminal to meet them, his life was tragically cut short.

Unknown assailants attacked Kamrul, stabbing him repeatedly in the chest before fleeing with some of his belongings. A passerby later found him lying on the street and gasping for air, and contacted his family using a phone number Kamrul provided.

Kamrul's father, Imam Hossain, rushed to the spot after being informed, only to find him in a critical state.

"My son left the house excited for a trip to Cox's Bazar with his friends... but he came back to us as

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# Continue struggle to safeguard independence

## Tarique urges party activists

BSS, Dhaka

BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman has urged party activists to continue their struggle to safeguard the country's independence and sovereignty.

"Today's war is to protect independence and sovereignty, and we are all fighters in this war. To win this war, we must continue our struggle relentlessly," he said while virtually addressing a workshop titled "31 points for repairing the state structure and public involvement".

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# MJF condemns systematic failure to end child abuse

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) has expressed outrage over the ongoing incidents of child sexual abuse in Bangladesh, particularly girl children.

The organisation said so in light of the recent death of the 10th-grade madrasa student in Nandail upazila, who endured months of continuous rape and physical torture before succumbing to her injuries.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of MJF, condemned the incident as a reflection of systemic failure in protecting children.

"This incident is not just a singular tragedy; it reflects systemic negligence and a failure to protect our children," Shaheen Anam said.

"Children, especially those from low income families, are disproportionately vulnerable to such atrocities. The lack of accountability and urgency in addressing these issues is appalling," she added.

Referring to a report by Ain O Salish Kendra which states that over 222 children were raped from January to November 2024, she said, "The justice system and preventive mechanisms are failing our children. This is unacceptable."

"Child abuse is not an isolated issue -- it is a societal crisis that requires urgent and concerted efforts. We owe it to our children to act now," she added.

MJF has long been advocating for stronger measures to combat child abuse. Their recommended measures include strengthening child protection systems, increasing the accountability of law enforcement agencies, and enhancing judicial responsiveness.

The organisation has called on the government, civil society, and all stakeholders to collaborate in ending the culture of impunity surrounding child abuse and to prioritise the safety and well-being of children across the country.

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