

SURGE IN MOSQUITOS

Health ministry to test insecticide effectiveness

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Amid a surge in mosquitoes over the past month, the health ministry has initiated a move to check whether the insecticide used to kill mosquitoes is effective.

The health minister and the state minister is expected to visit the storage facilities of the two Dhaka city corporations today, along with experts from the National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine (NIPSOM), to examine the efficacy of the insecticides, officials said.

The move came after the health ministry held a meeting with the city corporation and health officials yesterday on ways to control mosquitoes, they said.

Dhaka has seen a surge in Culex mosquitoes over the past month, as both city corporations have failed to adequately eliminate breeding grounds. Many have also questioned the efficacy of the insecticides used to kill mosquitoes.

A rise in mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue often puts pressure on health facilities, and the health ministry therefore emphasises mosquito control and disease prevention to avoid potential strain, officials said.

Jahirul Islam, chief executive officer of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), told The Daily

Star, "Experts will check whether the insecticide used by our workers is effective in killing mosquitoes."

Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain will visit the DSCC storage at Sayedabad, while State Minister for Health MA Muhit is set to visit the storage of Dhaka North City Corporation in Mirpur-2 today.

Jahirul said they have also conducted tests of the insecticide after a surge in mosquitoes in the capital, but are yet to get the test result.

Besides, he said, they also formed a ward-level team comprising their officials from different sectors to monitor the ongoing drive to control mosquitoes.

The meeting also discussed other steps the city corporations can take for mosquito control, a top health ministry official said. The meeting also talked about raising public awareness about cleanliness to destroy breeding grounds, he said, wishing not to be named.

The country recorded 413 dengue-related deaths last year, making it the third deadliest on record. Besides 1,02,861, people were hospitalised with dengue last year, which was the second-highest tally recorded in Bangladesh over the past 25 years.



PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Traders stacking watermelons from Kuakata at Barabazar Kadamtala in Khulna yesterday. Popular for iftar, the fruits were harvested early and are sold for Tk 15,000-Tk 25,000 per 100 pieces, depending on size and quality, at the wholesale market.

Evidence found against top military officials, politicians

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Commission, which submitted its final report in November 2025, contradicts the findings and said the massacre had direct involvement of the then-ruling Awami League leadership. It specifically named lawmaker Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, former defence and security adviser to the prime minister Tarique Ahmed Siddique, and former army chief General Moeen U Ahmed, among others.

The report, submitted to former chief adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, has not been made public, and details of the evidence against the accused have not been disclosed.

The Daily Star has seen the report, which gathered evidence against some of the top civil and military officials as well as politicians.

Meanwhile, on February 23, the newly formed BNP government announced that it would constitute another commission to reinvestigate the incident to ensure justice.

EVIDENCE AGAINST TARIQUE SIDDIQUE, MOEEN U AHMED

In the latest report, the most substantial evidence against Tarique Ahmed Siddique and General Moeen U Ahmed comes from the testimony of Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, who was present at the scene on the day of the mutiny.

Waker, then a major and second-in-command of the 17th East Bengal Regiment, arrived at the scene around 10:30am. He positioned troops from the 46th Independent Infantry Brigade near Gate 4 of the BDR headquarters and was prepared to intervene.

According to Lt Gen (ret'd) Abdul Mubeen, then the principal staff officer of the Armed Forces Division, he instructed Waker to take position on the rooftop of a building in Dhanmondi near the Pilkhana gate and fire several rocket shells targeting the gate.

Mubeen said Tarique later ordered him not to intervene. Tarique subsequently confronted Mubeen and questioned whether he had the authority to order such a move. Mubeen later became the Chief of army staff.

According to the report, Waker, unable to reach the commander of the 46th Brigade for orders, contacted Major General Tarique Siddique. The report says Tarique bypassed the chain of command and explicitly instructed him not to launch an attack, citing the government's decision to pursue a political resolution.

According to the report, Tarique was alerted to the massacre as early as 9:37am, when Major Md Zaedi Ahsan Habib, who was trapped in the Darbar Hall as the killings unfolded, called him seeking help. Tarique had previously been Zaedi's commanding officer. Zaedi survived and later testified before the Commission.

In his testimony, Maj Gen Rezanur Rahman Khan, additional director general (operations) of RAB, then a colonel, told the Commission that he received news of the mutiny around 9:30am from BDR officers and set out for Pilkhana with his forces.

He said he had already ordered RAB-2, RAB-3 and RAB-10 to proceed to Pilkhana and had authorised them to open fire if necessary.

On the way, Tarique called and instructed him to go instead to the state guest house Jamuna. Upon arrival, the then director general of RAB told him to cancel the order to fire and advised him to contact the appropriate authorities regarding army deployment.

Rezanur said he was also instructed by the then DG of the Special Security Force, Brig Gen Joyanal Abedin, and by Tarique not to intervene. He relayed those instructions to his forces on the ground.

According to his statement, he repeatedly sought permission to enter Pilkhana with RAB personnel but was not approved.

The report further said that on the morning of 27 February, when Brig Gen Abdul Hakim Aziz, then the director of Military Operations (DMO) at the Army Headquarters, entered Pilkhana in an armoured personnel carrier, Tarique allegedly verbally reprimanded him for bringing the vehicle inside.

It also says that on the evening of 25 February 2009, Major General Sultanuzzaman Saleh – then brigadier general at the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) – went to the National Monitoring Centre (NMC) to conduct mobile phone monitoring under Tarique's instruction, bypassing the chain of command.

The Commission noted that because Sultanuzzaman monitored networks on an extended period

46th Independent Infantry Brigade and instead spending critical hours at Jamuna.

Despite reports of officer fatalities by noon, the report says he supported political negotiations and ordered troops to withdraw to a position two miles away, a move that allegedly allowed the attackers to continue the killings and later escape.

EVIDENCE AGAINST TAPOSH AND SHEIKH SELIM

The Commission called Barrister Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh a key coordinator of the massacre.

One premise of this accusation is that Taposh had a close acquaintance with some of the sepoys and jawans convicted as primary conspirators of the BDR mutiny.

Sepoy Selim Reza, currently incarcerated, told the Commission that ahead of the 2008 general election, Taposh met several BDR personnel to discuss their grievances. The group was brought to him by Torab Ali, a ward-level Awami League leader in Dhaka.

Torab Ali later died in jail after being accused and convicted in the 2009 BDR carnage case, though he was subsequently acquitted of conspiracy charges.

Another incarcerated BDR member, Nayek Sheikh Shahidur Rahman, who was close to Torab, told the Commission that Torab had described a secret planning meeting at Taposh's residence. He claimed those

maintained command over the rebel factions.

Sepoy Selim Reza (now incarcerated), who was present at the meeting, said that Hasina had promised to make DAD Tawhid the director-general of BDR.

Major Sumon Ahmed of the 4th East Bengal Regiment told the Commission that during the mutiny, he saw Taposh, former police inspector general Nur Mohammed, Nanak, and Mirza Azam enter and exit the BDR HQ several times without hindrance, while others, including the army, were barred. He also said that around 11:30am, he saw Taposh distributing leaflets to the jawans.

Around midnight of the day of the mutiny, Taposh, former home minister Sahara Khatun, and the then IGP held a meeting with the mutinous jawans. Subedar Major Gofran, an eyewitness, said Sahara asked the jawans whether they wanted Taposh or Nur Mohammed as director-general.

The events following the mutiny brought further scrutiny to Taposh.

Five military officers who had been on duty during the mutiny, took action against the rebels, or were involved in post-event investigations, were forcibly disappeared, tortured in a joint interrogation cell, and imprisoned for five years through a court-martial.

They were accused of attempting to assassinate Taposh with a remotely controlled bomb on 21 October 2009, outside his law office in Motijheel. The officers named in the case were Major Helal, Capt Rezaul Karim, Capt Khondokar Rajib Hossain, Capt Md Fuad Khan, and Capt Subayel Ibne Rafique.

The Commission noted that all five were at their respective stations on the day of the attack and could not have been involved.

According to the report, Capt Rezaul had fired at rebels during the mutiny and later received a stand-down release for disobeying the army chief's order. Fuad had defied orders to keep the army out, seized weapons from the armoury, and launched a rescue operation into Pilkhana on 26 February to save surviving officers. Subayel had acted similarly, taking arms from the 14th Engineering Brigade to aid the rescue.

Capt Rezaul told the Commission that they were forcibly disappeared and framed to remove them from the investigation and destroy the evidence they had gathered. All five said they were tortured in the "Aynaghar"-famed Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC). Brigadier General Imamul Huda, who headed the court-martial, admitted that the officers appeared physically abused during their hearings.

The initial investigation could not prove the allegations. Yet, after the court-martial, the officers were taken to the AIC, tortured again, and forced to give confessional statements under duress. They told the Commission that Brig Gen Huda threatened them with prolonged torture if they did not sign a blank paper.

The Commission's review of the court-martial proceedings found gross discrepancies, indicating the officers had been deliberately framed.

Govt aims

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The draft, prepared by the social welfare ministry, envisions transforming the family card into a "Universal Social ID Card" for every citizen by 2030, while raising the social security budget to 3 percent of GDP by 2028.

At present, 95 social safety net programmes are run by 23 ministries. The allocation for these programmes in the current fiscal year is Tk 1.26 lakh crore, or 1.87 percent of GDP.

Under the new scheme, cards will be issued in the name of the mother or female head of household. Beneficiaries will be selected using Proxy Means Test (PMT) scoring, a scientific poverty assessment method.

Rural families owning 0.50 acres or less of homestead and cultivable land will be considered eligible, with income and assets also assessed to identify poor and ultra-poor households.

Families will be excluded if any member is a regular government employee or pensioner, owns a commercial licence or large business, or possesses a car or air conditioner.

Priority will be given to the landless, homeless, persons with disabilities, and marginalised communities, including hijra, Bede, and small ethnic groups.

Selection will be carried out by committees formed at the city, upazila, union, municipality, and ward levels.

The programme will be overseen by government officials under a two-tier checking system to minimise errors.

The draft states that existing TCB cards will be integrated into the family card's Dynamic Social Registry. Using the same smart card with OTP verification, beneficiaries will be able to buy essential food items at subsidised prices and, in future, access services such as education stipends and agricultural subsidies.

"The main philosophy of this programme is 'family is the core unit of development, not the individual,'" the guideline notes, adding that fragmentation and weak coordination among the 95 existing programmes have led to duplication, while 22-25 percent of the actual poor remain excluded.

"The aim of this programme is to build a human welfare state by eliminating discrimination," it says.

PILOT PHASE

Briefing reporters after yesterday's meeting, Social Welfare Minister

AZM Zahid Hossain said the pilot phase will be implemented in one ward of each upazila. It will then be expanded in stages to one union and eventually to entire upazilas to ensure universal access.

The 14 upazilas selected for the pilot phase are Banani (Korail, Sattala and Bhashantek slums) and Mirpur/Shah Ali (Oli Miar Tek and Baganbari slums) in Dhaka; Pangsha in Rajbari; Patenga in Chattogram; Banchharampur in Brahmanbaria; Lama in Bandarban; Khalishpur in Khulna; Charfesson in Bhola; Derai in Sunamganj; Bhairab in Kishoreganj; Bogura Sadar in Bogura; Lalpur in Natore; Thakurgaon Sadar in Thakurgaon; and Nawabganj in Dinajpur.

Over Tk 2.10 crore was earmarked for the pilot phase. The cash will be transferred directly to beneficiaries' mobile wallets or bank accounts through the government-to-person (G2P) system.

The first month's cash assistance will be credited to beneficiaries' accounts immediately after the inauguration.

For beneficiary selection, ward-level committees will conduct door-to-door data collection from February 26 to March 2, surveying at least 1,000 families in each selected ward.

After online data entry and PMT scoring, Department of Social Services staff will verify the information on the ground. Final approval is scheduled for March 8 and 9, after which QR coded digital smart family cards will be printed.

Zahid said beneficiary selection would be based strictly on field-level, door-to-door data collection.

"No one will be excluded, and there will be no involvement of intelligence agencies or party elements," he said.

The programme would target three groups: the ultra-poor, the poor, and lower-income families, according to him.

The mother, as head of household, will receive the benefit, Zahid said.

"If a woman becomes economically self-reliant, a family will become self-reliant, and the next generation will also benefit," he said.

As the second half of the fiscal year is already underway, initial funding will come from block allocations by the finance ministry, with plans to incorporate the programme into the regular national budget from the next fiscal year.

Safeguard nat'l interest: Tarique

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Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun, among others.

Speaking to reporters, Ashik said the prime minister emphasised that any agreement on the NCT must safeguard national interests.

Asked about the recently-dissolved interim government's stance on a possible treaty with DP World, he explained, "The position remains that if any agreement can be concluded safeguarding the national interest, only then will it be signed. Such a stance had been expressed during the interim period."

He added that as this was the first day's meeting, it would be premature to draw conclusions.

The prime minister was briefed on the overall operations of the NCT. He, later, provided initial guidance.

Ali Hossain Fakir made new IGP

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of Armed Police Battalion 3 during the then Awami League government.

The interim government reinstated him on August 27, 2024, along with four other officers. In August 2025, he was promoted from deputy inspector general to supernumerary additional inspector general of police.

Ali joined Bangladesh Police in 1995 as an assistant superintendent of police through the 15th BCS examination.

He obtained BCom (Honours) in Management, MCom, and MBA degrees from Dhaka University. Currently acting president of the Police Service

Association, Ali had been involved with Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal during his university years, according to student leaders of the time.

Over nearly three decades, he served as deputy police commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police and superintendent of police in Netrokona, Feni, and Magura, in addition to his roles in the Armed Police Battalion.

He had also taken part in United Nations peacekeeping missions in Kosovo and Ivory Coast and travelled to several countries, including the US and China, for training and official assignments.

Talks of contractual secys stir discontent in civil service

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This is creating new discrimination – we are not seeing a new culture then," he said on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.

Despite the BNP's election manifesto promising "meritocracy", the government is beginning its journey by making contractual appointments to the most crucial positions, said another additional secretary on the condition of anonymity.

Appointing one person on a contract at the top level blocks the promotion

and career progression of at least two or three talented subordinate officers, leading them to perform their duties half-heartedly, he said.

"Escaping the clutches of the bureaucracy is no easy task – contractual appointments do not align with the public support and positive image with which this new government has started its journey," said Badiur Rahman, a former secretary.

Citing examples of how both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina were

ultimately harmed by relying on contractual appointments in top administrative posts, he said: "The main architects behind the failure of the recent interim government were these contractual secretaries. If this government also chooses officers who retired years ago for contractual roles, then there is nothing more to say."

Although the contractual appointments of the nine secretaries were cancelled on Monday, there are more still in service, such as in the cabinet

division, the public administration ministry and the expatriate welfare and overseas employment ministry.

Meanwhile, the public administration ministry issued notifications yesterday regarding the transfer of two secretaries: Md. Abdur Rahman Tarafder, secretary of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission Secretariat, has been appointed as the secretary to the labour and employment ministry, while Md. Sanwar Jahan Bhuiyan is going the other way.