

DEAL FOR ROHINGIYA REPATRIATION UN signs up for 3rd year extension

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN yesterday signed for the third year extension of a tripartite deal with Myanmar on creating conditions conducive to Rohingya return to Rakhine.

The signing of the deal comes at a time when the ongoing armed conflict in Rakhine and Chin states has deepened the operational challenges faced by aid agencies.

Representatives of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and Myanmar's ministry of labour, immigration and population signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) extension documents in Naypyidaw for a year.

"The MoU aims at helping create a conducive environment for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh as well as supporting recovery and resilience-based development for the benefit of all communities living in the three northern townships of Rakhine State," said a statement of UNHCR in Myanmar.

The deal was initially signed on June 6, 2018, more than a year after some 750,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military crackdown in Rakhine state, while thousands were killed and their houses and properties burnt.

Initially, Bangladesh and Myanmar signed an MoU on repatriation of the Rohingyas, but repeated attempts of Rohingya repatriation failed as both the UN and Rohingyas say the situation in Rakhine is not conducive to their return. Rohingyas say there is no guarantee of freedom of movement, citizenship and safety in Rakhine.

Following a case filed by the Gambia, the International Court of Justice on January 23 this year ordered the Myanmar government to take provisional measures to prevent crimes of genocide against Rohingyas

in Rakhine and submit reports relating to those within four months.

However, there is no progress. Independent human rights expert of UN, Yanghee Lee, in late April said war crimes and crimes against humanity were still going on in Rakhine and Chin states as Myanmar military has ramped up attacks in recent weeks against civilians, displacing more than 157,000 people.

The UNDP and UNHCR in a joint statement said the environment in Rakhine is not yet conducive to the voluntary repatriation of refugees, but the MoU has allowed UNHCR and UNDP teams to assess the immediate needs in over 120 villages in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships.

Since the initial MoU was signed in 2018, a total of 75 quick impact projects have been approved, including for community infrastructure such as water improvement, school and road rehabilitation, skills training and income-generating projects, as well as projects targeting persons with specific needs.

A seventh round of assessments is now proceeding, but constrained due to the Covid-19 situation.

The statement said consistent access for UNDP, UNHCR, and their partners is essential to ensure expanded implementation of the MoU.

The two UN agencies said they remain committed to supporting Myanmar's work to improve the conditions in Rakhine for voluntary return of Rohingyas.

They called on Myanmar to address the root causes of the crisis by fully implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, including those on freedom of movement, a clear and voluntary pathway to citizenship and increased access to public services and livelihoods.

WHO suspends staff activity in Yemen's Houthi-held areas

REUTERS, Dubai

The World Health Organization (WHO) has suspended staff activity at its hubs in Houthi-held areas of Yemen, a directive seen by Reuters showed, in a move sources said aimed to pressure the group to be more transparent about suspected coronavirus cases.

War-ravaged Yemen, one of the countries most vulnerable to disease, is divided between the internationally recognised government temporarily based in the south and the Houthi group that ousted it from power in the capital, Sanaa, in late 2014.

The Saudi-backed government has so far reported 34 cases of the novel coronavirus with seven deaths in territory it controls, while the Houthis, who hold most large urban centres, have recorded just two cases with one death.

The WHO directive issued late on Saturday notified staff in Sanaa, the Red Sea port of Hodeidah, the northern province of Saada and central province of Ibb that "all movements, meetings or any other activity" for staff in those areas were paused until further notice.

The WHO has temporarily paused its movements in northern areas due to "credible threats and perceived risks which could have an impact on staff security", it said in response to a Reuters' query, adding that operations have not been suspended.

The United Nations is operating

under the assumption that there is now full-blown transmission in Yemen, it said.

"We are competing for resources and supplies in the global market - and a country's 'priority status' in terms of who receives what for Covid-19 is directly linked to how many cases are in country and the need - it is the numbers," it said.

The UN has "systematically for weeks now" advised on case declaration and reporting, but the decision to do so rests with local authorities, the WHO added.

Three sources told Reuters the WHO had taken the measure to press Houthi authorities to report results of tests for Covid-19, the respiratory disease caused by coronavirus.

The Saudi-backed government has accused Houthi authorities of covering up an outbreak in Sanaa, a charge the group denies.

The WHO says it fears Covid-19 could rip through Yemen as the population has some of the lowest levels of immunity to disease compared with other countries. Minimal testing capacity has added to concerns.

The five-year war between a Saudi-led coalition and the Iran-aligned Houthi movement has shattered Yemen's health system and left its population weakened by hunger and disease.

Around 80% of the population, or 24 million people, rely on humanitarian aid and 10 million are at risk of starvation.

Infections creep up

FROM PAGE 1

Seeking anonymity, a senior executive of the BGMEA said they have been instructing the factories to run operations following the health protocols such as measuring body temperature of workers and keeping information on the health status of the staffers.

Designated health workers at Ashulia Health Complex are collecting samples from garment workers with Covid-19 symptoms, added the executive.

The BGMEA website showed that a total of 461 factories were audited till May 10, and the health-safety measures and working conditions in 447 of those were found satisfactory.

The remaining 14 factories, which required improvement, were asked to come up with immediate corrective action plans to continue operation. Otherwise, those would be reported to the authorities concerned, it mentioned.

The Georgia state attorney general has asked the US Department of Justice to investigate the killing of an unarmed black jogger whose death sparked outrage across the country.

Ahmaud Arbery, 25, was killed on February 23 as he ran on a sunny day in a residential neighborhood in the town of Brunswick. Two white men were arrested and charged for his shooting just last week.

"I have formally requested US DOJ (@SDGAnews) to conduct an investigation into the handling of the case," Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr tweeted Sunday, linking to an official statement.

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A shopper, left, buying a pair of gloves from a hawker, while security guards in PPE wait to spray disinfectants on her hands at the entrance to a shopping centre in Bangabazar area of the capital around 11:00am yesterday. The authorities reopened such shopping malls on a limited scale on Sunday amid growing number of coronavirus cases in the country.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Crowded barracks put cops at risk

FROM PAGE 1

"We have tried to provide all protection equipment to officials, brief them daily to follow health directives properly. We have tried to ease their crowd by shifting them in different schools and residential hotels," said the commissioner.

"But one or two may not follow directives and spread the virus to their colleagues while living in the barracks. It is totally impossible for us to check every ones activities individually," he explained.

The DMP boss further expressed hope that necessary steps have been taken and created a roster system for their force, in which only half of its members will be out on the field at a time for a week.

"We hope the infection rate will start to reduce now," he added.

On the other hand, police has already booked Impulse Hospital to treat its infected members in Dhaka as the Central Police Hospital is struggling to deal with the increased number of Covid-19 positive police personnel.

Instruction have already given to unit chiefs and specially range

deputy inspector general (DIGs) to book a hospital in every division of the country for treatment of police personnel, said PHQ officials.

Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general of PHQ, told The Daily Star yesterday that their officials have to attend a huge number of public order situations daily, which include taking the sick to hospitals and the burial of Covid-19 victims.

"Police often did not get the chance to arrange a PPE in an emergency and get into close contact with people, which is a big reason behind this high infection rate," he said, adding that they have to live messes and barracks with a number of their colleagues, for which the virus spread among force officials so rapidly.

"But we have now taken steps, including better treatment facilities, which is police officials are recovering fast than before," the AIG said.

COVID-19 IN PRISONS Meanwhile, the Covid-19 infection rate was also found to be increasing in the overcrowded prisons. On May 9, only 98 jail staffers and inmates were in quarantine. The number rose to 317

yesterday.

Meanwhile, 23 prison guards and two inmates have tested Covid-19 positive till yesterday, Monzur Hossain, assistant inspector general (admin) at the Department of Prisons, told The Daily Star.

The two infected inmates are from Panchagarh district jail, he said, adding that another inmate of Dhaka Central Jail, who tested positive earlier, was released from jail yesterday after the end of his term.

The prisons department earlier arranged isolation units for inmates inside jails in Kishoreganj, Madaripur, Pirojpur, Sylhet, Feni and Dinajpur districts, according to a home ministry report.

Sources at the prison department said there are around 85,000 prisoners against the capacity of 41,244 in the country's 68 jails.

The home ministry, after taking opinions from the law ministry, recently ordered the prisons authorities to release 2,884 inmates, who were jailed for one year or less for minor offences, to ease the accommodation crisis.

Test rate still very low

FROM PAGE 1

"As the virus has spread to all parts of the country, the more tests are done, the more [coronavirus] cases are likely to come to light," he said.

Echoing a similar view, Prof Nazrul Islam, member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19, said, "It's not possible to any take decision based on the data currently available. We will need at least 10,000 tests per day immediately."

"On Sunday, some 15.4 percent of samples tested turned out to be coronavirus positive. Today, the rate is 14.3. It suggests that the transmission rate did not change," he said.

If test numbers are increased, case detection will also increase, he added.

Both experts pointed out that the number of detected cases had started to go up after the authorities began

expanding the testing facilities in the first half of last month.

They stated that there were many hidden cases and unreported deaths caused by the deadly virus.

They also claimed although the ongoing countrywide shutdown helped bring down the transmission rate, proper benefits could not be reaped due to the failure to ensure contact tracing of infected patients.

They warned that the country would have to pay a heavy price if the situation worsened further.

RECORD SURGE

During a daily briefing on the coronavirus situation, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) at the DGHS, said the total number of confirmed Covid-19 patients stood at 15,691 yesterday.

She said 252 patients recovered in

24 hours till 2:30pm, taking the total number of recovery cases to 2,902.

"The recovery rate now stands at 18.52 percent and mortality rate at 1.53 percent," said Prof Nasima.

Of the 11 deceased, six were female and five male. Eight of them died in Dhaka Division, two in Chattogram and one in Rangpur Division, which saw the first such death.

One of the deceased was aged between 21 and 30, two between 31 and 40, two between 41 and 50, four between 51 and 60, one between 60 and 70 while the other between 71 and 80.

So far, the highest number of detected cases -- around 60 percent -- are in Dhaka city, shows DGHS data.

The authorities reported the first three cases on March 8 and the first death from Covid-19 on March 18.

345 admitted to CMH so far

FROM PAGE 1

good condition, it added.

"There are three RT-PCR machines at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology [AFIP] and 10 RT-PCR machines at CMHs in other cantonments for testing coronavirus of authorised members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and their

family members," the press release said.

Till date, 3,194 samples have been tested at AFIP under its own management. All CMHs also have adequate stock of medical equipment, including PPE, masks, gloves and necessary medicines. Besides, the presence of full-time trained

physicians in CMHs is being ensured in a planned way, the release said.

It also stated that the army has taken adequate measures to provide medical care to Covid-19-infected members of the Armed Forces. In this context, necessary steps have been taken in the CMHs in all cantonments, including that in Dhaka.

Georgia asks US justice dept to probe killing of black jogger

AFP, Washington

The Georgia state attorney general has asked the US Department of Justice to investigate the killing of an unarmed black jogger whose death sparked outrage across the country.

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captured the shooting.

In the footage, Arbery is seen running down a residential street and approaching a white pickup truck stopped in the right lane with a man standing in the back.

As Arbery tries to get around the vehicle, he is confronted by a second man holding a shotgun. An altercation between the two ensues and the firing of three shots can be heard.

The two white men were identified by police as Travis McMichael, 34, and his father Gregory McMichael, 64, who both live in Brunswick. They were arrested on Thursday and charged with murder and aggravated assault.

According to the February police report, Gregory McMichael told officers he thought Arbery was a suspect in a series of area burglaries and that he had seen the young black man "hauling ass" down the street.

McMichael said he went inside his home and got his .357 Magnum while his son grabbed a shotgun. When they finally caught up with Arbery and Travis McMichael got out of the truck with the shotgun, Arbery began to "violently

attack" him, the father said, according to the police report.

The father said he saw his son shoot Arbery and the jogger fall to the ground.

The footage of the killing sent shockwaves across the United States and prompted a number of celebrities to call for action, including basketball star LeBron James and actress Zoe Kravitz.

Some people drew parallels with the shooting death of another unarmed young black man, Trayvon Martin, by a neighborhood guard in Florida in 2012.

Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms described Arbery's killing as a "lynching."

"It's heartbreaking that it's 2020 and this was a lynching of an African American man," Bottoms told CNN's Jake Tapper on "State of the Union" Sunday.

In an advertisement in Sunday's Atlanta Journal-Constitution newspaper, rapper Jay-Z and singer Alicia Keys appealed to Georgia's governor and attorney general to "ensure a fair trial is conducted, as that can only lead to the appropriate felony convictions of both McMichaels."

2 die after showing Covid-19 symptoms

STAR REPORT

At least two people died after showing Covid-19 symptoms in Chandpur and Manikganj on Sunday night.

The victim of Chandpur was a 60-year-old woman. She breathed her last at her house at Randhonimur of Haziganj municipality.

She had been suffering from fever, diarrhoea, and breathing problems for last couple of days. She was admitted to the icddr, in Matlab around noon on Sunday as she had diarrhoea.

Doctors referred her to Chandpur Sadar Hospital as she had coronavirus symptoms. But her family members took her to house instead of admitting her to the hospital.

The woman died at night, said the family members and locals.

On information, a medical team rushed to the house and collected her samples, said HM Soyeab Ahmed Chisti, Haziganj upazila health officer.

In Manikganj, a 35-year-old man died at his village home in Manikganj Sadar upazila.

The victim used to work at a brick kiln in Narsingdi. He was suffering from cold and fever for the last few days. The man who returned home around noon on Sunday perished around 11:00pm, said Lutfar Rahman, Sadar upazila health and family planning officer.

His samples were collected for tests. Samples of other family members will also be tested, he added.

Houses of the victim and two of his neighbours have been isolated following the death, said Iqbal Hossain, Sadar upazila nirbahali officer.

Our Chandpur and Manikganj correspondents contributed to this report.

Nine die in care home fire outside Moscow

AFP, Moscow

A fire broke out in a retirement home in the Moscow region, killing at least nine people, local authorities said yesterday.

The blaze in the privately-owned care home in the town of Krasnogorsk started at around midnight Sunday and was extinguished within an hour, emergencies services said.

"Nine people died on site and nine more were rushed to hospital in serious condition and are being treated in intensive care," the Krasnogorsk municipal government said in a statement.

Tk 10 a kg rice

FROM PAGE 1

Amid the allegation of misappropriation of the government subsidised food, the ministry formed committees to scrutinise the lists to check whether the needy are getting the food, said Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder.

"We formed committees at union level to check the lists of beneficiaries under the Food-Friendly Programme. The committees comprised of a government officer, an elected representative, an Imam of a local mosque, a college teacher, and a schoolteacher have completed their work," said the minister while talking to this correspondent yesterday.

Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Food launched a Special OMS programme on April 5 so that the poor can get rice at Tk 10 a kg amid the countrywide shutdown enforced to contain the spread of Covid-19.

But over allegations of rice embezzlement, the government suspended the programme on April 15 and decided to issue cards for the poor across the country so that they can buy rice for Tk 10 a kg.

After a pause, the government resumed selling rice under the programme from last month and sold rice among 12.81 lakh listed people so far, the food secretary said.

The number of beneficiaries under the programme may increase once they get an additional allocation from the finance ministry, the secretary added.

Father passes away

FROM PAGE 1

Dhaka but they refused to admit him because of his coronavirus-like symptoms, Masum alleged.

Later, Rimon was taken to DMCH, where he breathed his last around 6:00am, he said.

Sheikh Mostafa Ali, chief medical officer at Narayanganj City Corporation, told The Daily Star Rimon had been suffering from fever, cold and respiratory problems for the past few days.

Rimon's samples were collected to be tested for coronavirus in Dhaka and he was waiting at home for the report, said Mostafa, also a member of the district coronavirus prevention committee in Narayanganj.

Mostafa said as Rimon's condition deteriorated, he was taken to DMCH in the early hours yesterday. Later, emergency doctors at DMCH declared him dead.

Hearing the news, Yar rushed to DMCH where he suffered a cardiac arrest and subsequently died, Mostafa added.

He said Rimon's family did not communicate with health officials or hospitals in Narayanganj for his treatment.

Mostafa added that the process was underway to bury the dead body with help from Narayanganj City Corporation.