

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,705
New cases in 24hrs



3,50,621
Total cases



4,979
Deaths



2,58,717
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



966,348
Deaths



31,335,438
Total cases

Not charged, yet in jail

FROM PAGE 1

Agents charged them Tk 4-5 lakh each on promises of regular jobs with a monthly salary of \$500-600 plus overtime and other benefits.

However, after their arrival in Vietnam, their passports were confiscated, they were not arranged work permits and were employed in temporary jobs and paid low wages. Many remained jobless, and complaints to the Vietnam authorities were in vain.

Finally, they were repatriated on August 18. After their 14-day quarantine, Turag police produced them before a metropolitan magistrate, showing them arrested under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). The court sent them to jail.

Police said the returnees were sentenced abroad for their involvement in criminal activities that have tarnished the country's image and affected overseas job market. Besides, during the quarantine period, they were planning subversive activities against the government. If released, they can engage in various crimes.

Officials and returnees rejected the claim that the 81 were jailed in Vietnam.

Apart from them, between July 4 and September 1, 293 other migrants returning from the Middle East were also sent to prison. They had been in jail in the Middle East countries and their sentences were forgiven.

Police cited the similar reasons for showing them arrested.

Supreme Court lawyer Syed Sayedul Haque Suman said as per the law and the SC directive, a person can be arrested under the Section 54 only if there is any specific allegation, but there is nothing specific about the migrant workers.

The law enforcers have identified several recruiting agencies and manpower brokers, but they are yet to come under law.

The expatriates' welfare ministry's investigation into how the BMET issued clearance for those going to Vietnam without verification is still going on. It seems lenient with the perpetrators. Minister Imran Ahmad said he does not want to be so harsh on the agents as it is a pandemic time.

Migrant rights activists and families of the returnees wonder why the government is so harsh on the migrants and their families.

Shirina said her husband Rubel, who was a sharecropper, had a few maunds of paddy before he left for Vietnam in December. That was the food stock they relied on for several months. Her husband sold land and borrowed Tk 3 lakh to go to Vietnam, but he could send only about Tk 20,000. The lenders

are repeatedly asking her to repay the loans -- in instalments or just give them the interest against loans.

"Where do I get money? The loan amount, including interest, has already gone up," Shirina said. She also requested village broker Asad to give her some money, but was not only rejected but also threatened that Rubel could not walk out of jail if she demanded money.

Selina (not her real name), 25, wife of another returnee Sohel from Bahrain, said Sohel went to Bahrain in mid-June last year, two weeks after their marriage. A business graduate from a private university used to work at a money exchange house in Manama, but was jailed for a Tik Tok video during Eid-ul-Fitr this year.

"He was forgiven after serving one month in jail. He might not have known that making a Tik Tok video could end him up in prison. He has no criminal records... why is he jailed in Bangladesh?" she said.

When the pandemic began, his salary was slashed and he had no savings to send money home, said Selina of Narayanganj. It was said that he had to stay in jail and return empty-handed.

Sohel's parents are above 70 and both are suffering from diabetes and high blood pressure. Their health situation has worsened amid this pandemic and for the continuous tension about Sohel, she said.

"How is it possible that one is punished so harshly for no reason? Don't we have the right to get justice in our own country?" Selina questioned.

Progress made

FROM PAGE 1

The prime ministers of the two countries are very cordial about improving the relations between the governments and the people," he said.

Quader, also the general secretary of Awami League, said it is possible to resolve any problem if there is mutual understanding between the neighbours. He cited border issues and exchange of enclaves as examples of resolving outstanding problems.

On March 2, visiting Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla had said Bangladesh and India were working to finalise an agreement on sharing the water of seven common rivers within this year.

"We agreed to expedite harmonisation of this data so that water-sharing agreement can be finalised as early as possible, possibly within this year," he said.

To focus on vaccine

FROM PAGE 1

She will also highlight steps taken by the government in addressing people's sufferings and protecting them from Covid-19 and the importance of working together to ensure availability of a vaccine for all.

She will also deliver pre-recorded speeches at a number of programmes.

The first one is scheduled to be broadcasted at 4:00am today at the high-level event to mark the 75th anniversary of the United Nations.

Hasina, like other global leaders, is joining the 75th UN General Assembly virtually due to Covid-19 pandemic. She will also talk about climate change, migration, women empowerment and child rights, exchange of technology and gender balance.

Momen said Bangladesh will take up the Rohingya issue in the UNGA like previous years, especially ongoing legal procedures at the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice.

Bangladesh will raise the Rohingya issue for the fourth time and reiterate the five-point proposals placed by Hasina earlier seeking solution to the crisis.

The minister said he would attend a number of events virtually apart

from representing the PM at some programmes.

PM'S HIGH-LEVEL EVENTS

Momen said issues related to international community's support, especially development partners, for keeping the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) unhurt and giving equal attention to overcoming Covid-19 challenges and SDGs will be discussed at the UNGA, which began on September 15, this year.

Hasina will attend high-level dialogue on "Digital Cooperation: Action Today for Future Generations" tomorrow. The following day, she will deliver speech at the high-level roundtable on Climate Action and will highlight climate issues as the chair of Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF).

On September 29, the PM will virtually attend the high level event on Financing for Development in the era of Covid-19 and beyond.

She will address a summit on biodiversity on September 30.

The premier will also deliver speech at the high-level meeting on October 1 to mark the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for action (Beijing +25).

Public hospitals

FROM PAGE 1

was looking for a suitable device with better efficacy.

"Antigen-based testing will help detect Covid-19 patients everywhere easily. Because there is no PCR lab in many districts," he told this correspondent.

According to the DGHS, there are 94 Covid-19 RT-PCR labs across the country.

With the approval for use of antigen-based testing kits, the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) will now decide which companies' kits will be imported, sources said.

Rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs) are easy-to-use paper tests to facilitate testing outside of laboratory settings within a timeframe of a few minutes to half an hour. There are two types RDTs -- antigen-based and antibody-based testing.

The antigen-based rapid testing is a molecular test -- alternative to the sophisticated RT-PCR test -- which detects the presence of the virus itself, while the antibody tests look for past presence of the virus and a possible immune response to the infection.

The antigen test involves taking a saliva sample and can usually determine whether a patient is acutely infected and contagious within 15 minutes.

Although an antigen test is less accurate than a complete PCR analysis, the major advantages are quick results and the possibility to use it directly on

site.

Although the World Health Organization has not also given nod to use of rapid testing for Covid-19, many countries are using it to cope with the pressure on the RT-PCR based lab testing.

Experts since June have been suggesting the government introduce it in Bangladesh.

In June, the NTAC had recommended use of rapid testing kits to ease the pressure on pathology services. The exercise of introducing the antigen test started in early July.

On July 5, the DGHS sent a letter to the secretary of Health Services Division, mentioning the urgency for forming a Covid-19 sample testing expansion policy.

The letter said the DGHS had already prepared a draft policy and it could be approved with necessary guidelines on an emergency basis.

On July 7, the draft of the policy was submitted to the director general of DGHS. The directorate sent the draft policy to the health ministry on July 9.

Later, the ministry formed a committee of experts to prepare a sample testing expansion policy. The committee on August 4 finalised its report incorporating opinions and sent it to the Health Services Division.

At the end of last month, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said the government was going to take an initiative to start rapid antigen testing in public Covid-19 labs.



Workers of an RMG factory in Dhaka EPZ in Savar stage sit-in in front of Jatiya Press Club in the capital, demanding pay and arrears of eight months. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Brace yourself for second wave

FROM PAGE 1

During an unscheduled discussion over the Covid-19 at the weekly cabinet meeting, the PM instructed the authorities to take precautions for dealing with different cold-related diseases as the winter is set to arrive at the end of October or mid-November.

"She especially gave instructions to take precaution in case the country witnesses a second wave of Covid-19 transmission," said Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam while briefing reporters at the secretariat after the meeting.

The prime minister gave utmost importance on ensuring use of face masks, he said, adding that they have already passed on some instructions in this regard.

The cabinet secretary said punitive actions would be taken against the authorities of shopping malls and restaurants if people were found without masks there.

On the other hand, the religious affairs ministry was asked to take steps through Islamic Foundation so that every mosque comes up with announcements twice a day about the necessity of wearing face coverings.

WHAT IS A SECOND WAVE?

A "second wave," in the context of a viral pandemic, does not have a formal scientific definition or a distinctly defined stage. It is generally taken as a stage when an outbreak appears to be receded almost entirely before returning or when it ebbs and flows on a seasonal basis.

And in order to say one wave has ended, the virus would have to be brought under control and cases have to fall substantially.

A number of countries like France, Spain, the UK, and Austria are witnessing a resurgence in Covid-19

cases after having brought the number of cases falling and the curve of infections flattening.

Prof Nazrul Islam, a member of the NTAC, however, said the first wave of the Covid-19 infections was yet to be passed.

"We did not cross the first stage yet. If we can bring the transmission rate below 5 percent, then we will be able to say that we have crossed the first phase. If the transmission rate rises again, then we will be able to say that we have entered the second phase," he told The Daily Star.

The noted virologist said the positivity rate was around 13 percent as of Sunday and if the rate was brought under 5 percent then it could be said that the first phase of infections was under control.

"It is possible to enter the second phase even if we cannot bring the first phase under control. If the positivity rate starts to rise again, we can tell we are entering the second phase."

Prof Nazrul, also a former vice chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said it did not matter whether the country was in the first stage or was entering the second one.

Taking precautionary measures is the most important thing right now, he said.

He also said if proper precaution was not taken for the second wave, then more people would die, the progress in different sectors gained would be halted again and reopening of educational institutions would be delayed further.

"The prime minister has given directives on taking precaution for a possible second wave and she has rightly done it. It's because we had many shortcomings while dealing with the first stage. The directives have been given so that the mistakes are not

repeated," he said.

The NTAC at Sunday night's meeting said the country still needed isolation centres for suspected coronavirus patients and those who have tested positive for the virus.

More tests were needed to be carried out to detect the second wave as well, it said, recommending strengthening screening and isolation measures of travellers at airports and borders and issuing travel advice as many Bangladeshis are returning home amid the pandemic.

CAPACITY TO TACKLE SECOND WAVE

After the warning of a possible second wave came, Health Services Division Secretary Abdul Mannan yesterday held a discussion with officials of his ministry and different agencies concerned to get an idea about their capability to tackle the possible second phase.

Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of Directorate General of Health Services, said the expert group, namely Public Health Expert Divisional Advisors' Group, at a meeting on Thursday gave several suggestions on how to tackle the possible second wave.

"We are working following their suggestions," he told The Daily Star last night.

Experts' suggestions included raising awareness, keeping the hospitals, including those which have been decommissioned recently as Covid-19 dedicated hospitals, ready; increase the number of tests and tackle the situation with vaccines, which are yet to come, said the DG.

The Cabinet Division has meanwhile convened a meeting over the Covid-19 situation and possible second wave today. Secretaries of different ministries concerned are expected to attend it.

A failure yet trust is in him

FROM PAGE 1

meeting in the absence of a Wasa chairman. The government is yet to appoint a new chairman after the former chairman Prof Abdur Rouf died earlier this month.

According to the rules, one representative each from the two Dhaka city corporations, one representative each from the LGRD and finance ministries, one representative each from lawyers' association, diploma engineers' association, journalist community, engineers' association of Bangladesh, Chartered Accountant association, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industries and Bangladesh medical association form the board.

Although the Wasa board consists of representatives of different professional groups, nominations for those posts are mostly based on loyalty to the government, according to a source close to the ruling party.

Besides, Taqsem maintains a very good relationship with key policy makers of the government, the source said.

And it was reflected among the board members who voted for Taqsem and found many successes of Dhaka Wasa during his tenure.

One of their arguments was that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on different occasions expressed her satisfaction over the work of Wasa with Taqsem at its helm, said one of the board members, Shaban Mahmood, leader of a journalists' union.

"There is no scarcity of water in Dhaka city and there are many other successes of Wasa, for which most of the board members proposed extending his term for three more years," he told The Daily Star on Sunday.

"We have given approval to the person who was praised by the prime minister for his work. I believe the prime minister cannot make wrong decisions," said the secretary general of a faction of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists.

The argument of the board members who voted for Taqsem was almost identical.

The prime minister recently praised Wasa services and there is no scarcity of water in the city, said another board member AKMA Hamid, president of central executive committee of Institute of Diploma Engineers.

"There are some big projects which are being implemented. The government high-ups also desire to complete those projects and that's why we were in

favour of his reappointment," he told The Daily Star.

Taqsem has been appointed as the MD for five consecutive terms of varying lengths. His current term will expire on October 14.

The proposal to reappoint him will now be sent to the LGRD ministry and then to the prime minister for final approval, said an official of the Local Government Division.

According to Wasa Act-1996, the managing director is appointed by Wasa board which will have to be approved by the government. An MD is appointed for three years on a permanent basis and is eligible for reappointment.

WHO OPPOSED TAQSEM

Md Waliullah Sikder, former chairman of Engineer Institution of Bangladesh Dhaka; Selina Akhter, additional secretary of finance ministry and Hasibur Rahman Manik were the three members who voted against Taqsem.

Talking to the newspaper, Sikder said he told in the previous meeting that a probe committee should be formed by the board to investigate the allegations of corruption against Taqsem before discussing the proposal of his reappointment.

"I said that the probe body should include a specialist from Buet and a member of the judiciary. If Taqsem gets a clean sheet, his reappointment can be discussed," he said.

"Otherwise, I am against it, I told the board meeting."

Sikder, also a freedom fighter, raised questions about convening the meeting online suddenly although the previous board meeting decided that the next meeting would be held in presence of all members in person.

In Saturday's meeting, Taqsem's reappointment was the only agenda, he said, adding that there were no minutes of any previous meetings.

"Our prime minister has time and again spoken about zero tolerance against corruption. Why will we stand beside a controversial person?" he asked.

Another board member also raised questions of Taqsem's presence in the meeting, Sikder said.

Councillor Manik said he refused the proposal as he found that the rules for appointment were not being followed.

The appointment will have to be made following due procedures like giving advertisements in the media, he said. "The appointment could be given if the person became eligible in due process. That's the reason I did not

DGHS driver

FROM PAGE 1

Apart from these, Malek also owns several plots in different parts of the capital. One of his buildings is under construction on a four-and-a-half katha land in Dhanmondi. He has a dairy farm on a 15-katha land in Dakkhin Kamarpura.

Sources said Malek not only manipulated the recruitments and promotions of DGHS officials, but he also managed jobs for his daughter, son-in-law, brother and nephew at the health directorate.

His youngest daughter Nourin Sultana Beli, brother Abdul Khalek and nephew Abdul Hakim are the office assistants at DGHS.

His son-in-law Ratan is a manager of DGHS canteen and another nephew is the driver of a DGHS official.

Sources said Malek even influenced the promotions and transfers of doctors at DGHS.

After arresting Malek, Rab held a press conference, where Lt Col Ashique Billah, director of Rab's legal and media wing, said Malek was a "reliable person" for DGHS high officials.

MALEK AND OTHERS ALSO UNDER ACC SCANNER
The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) began an enquiry against Malek in 2019.

It has found that Malek owned four houses.

Upon the findings, on September 15, the ACC asked Malek and his wife to submit their wealth statements to unearth their sources of income.

Yesterday, ACC's Secretary Dilwar Bakht said the commission has been carrying out enquiries against 45 officials and staffers of DGHS, including Malek, since 2019.

Of them, 12 have already been facing graft cases filed by the ACC, he said.

"During the primary investigation, the ACC has found Malek owns four houses," he said.

The ACC Secretary said they would file a case against Malek if he is found to have amassed wealth beyond his known sources of income.

WEALTH STATEMENT SUBMISSION NOTICE

In separate letters signed by ACC's Director Sayed Iqbal Hossain, notices were issued against 20 people, including 12 officers and staffers at DGHS, on September 15.

Recipients of the notices are accountant of Expanded Programme of Immunisation (EPI) Mujibul Haque Munshi and his wife Rifat Akter, data entry operator of EPI Tofael Ahmed Bhuiyan and his wife Khadiza Akter, DGHS driver Malek and his wife Nargis Begum, administrative officer of 250-Bed General Hospital of Gopalganj Obaidur Rahman and his wife Bilqish Rahman, staff nurse of Faridpur Medical College Rehana Akter, accountant of Rangpur Medical College Hospital Imdadul Haque and his wife Umme Ruman Fency, administrative officer of National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases Mahmuduzzaman and his wife Sabina Yeasmin, store officer of Shahid Tajuddin Medical College Hospital Nazim Uddin and his wife Feroza Begum, office assistant of DGHS Kamrul Hasan and his wife Dr Umme Habiba and stenographer of Sheikh Sayera Khatun Medical College Saiful Islam, assistant chief statistics officer of Barisal Divisional Health Office Mir Raihan Ali and accountant of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital Anwar Hossain.

They were asked to submit the wealth statements of themselves and their dependents within 21 working days after receiving the notice.

Ducusu VP Nur

FROM PAGE 1

Asked, he said there is a case filed against Nur and that they were verifying details about the other detainees.

Before his arrest, Nur was in a procession at Dhaka University to protest the case. When the procession came in front of Matsya Bhaban, a scuffle broke out between police and the protesters around 8:30pm.

Earlier, a DU student filed a rape case against Nur and five others, around eight months after the alleged incident.

The student filed the case on Sunday night with Lalbagh Police Station, KM Ashraf Uddin, officer-in-charge of the police station, confirmed.

The other five accused are Hasan Al Mamun, convener of Bangladesh Shadharan Chhatra Odhikar Sangrakshan Parishad, Nazmul Hasan Sohag and Saiful Islam, joint conveners of the platform; Nazmul Huda, vice-president of the platform and Abdullah Hil Baki, a DU student.

According to the case statement, the incident took place on January 3. Mamun is the main accused in the case, and Nur and the others were accomplices, OC Ashraf said.

In the statement, the victim said that on January 3, Mamun called her to his home in Nababganj and raped her.

She fell sick the next day. A week later, she got admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, she mentioned in the case statement.

On June 20, she sought Nur's help in this regard. After four days, they met in Nilkhet area where Nur allegedly threatened her not to move further regarding the matter, she alleged, adding that he threatened to shame her on social media.

The woman claimed she was sick both physically and mentally, and that was why it took time to file the case.

In a Facebook live video, Nur, however, said the allegations were baseless and a conspiracy against him.

This correspondent called Mamun over the phone, which was found switched off.