

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1540
New cases in 24hrs



355384
Total cases



5072
Deaths



265092
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



983,686
Deaths



32,199,082
Total cases

Riyadh's pressure on Dhaka unfair

FROM PAGE 1
Riyadh also asked Bangladesh to take back 462 Rohingyas, now in jail for various crimes.

"We said we can bring back those who have Bangladeshi passports," Momen said.

A foreign ministry official said Riyadh indicated that the labour market for the Bangladeshis in KSA may be affected if Dhaka did not respond the way Riyadh wanted.

There are over 2 million Bangladeshis in the kingdom.

Momen said in the 1970s and 80s, when the Rohingyas were persecuted in Myanmar, the then Saudi Badsha had welcomed and sheltered them. The Rohingyas now have children and grandchildren who speak Arabic and are used to Saudi culture. They don't speak Bangla and do not know Bangladesh.

Prof Imtiaz Ahmed of Dhaka University's international relations department said it was understood that the KSA economy was under pressure due to a decline in oil price and the war in Yemen. Bangladesh and Turkey have good relations too. Turkey-Saudi relations are not ideal at the moment.

"However, that should in no way be linked to the Rohingya issue," Prof Imtiaz told The Daily Star.

If Saudi Arabia really wants to send back the Rohingyas, it should pressure Myanmar because Myanmar at the ICJ did not say that they were Bangladeshi citizens but that Rohingyas were the Muslims of Arakan, he said.

Rohingyas are facing genocide and Saudi Arabia, as a leader of the Muslim Ummah, should stand beside them and help them have justice instead of doing injustice to them, he said.

"I also think that our mission in Saudi Arabia should create more awareness about the Rohingya genocide among the Saudi people and the government."

The International Criminal Court is investigating crimes against the Rohingyas and the International Court of Justice is holding a genocide trial against Myanmar.

Nay San Lwin, co-founder of Free Rohingya Coalition, an alliance of

Rohingya worldwide, said as the genocide against Rohingyas began in 1970s, thousands of Rohingyas fled the country. They had no choice but to hold the passports arranged by smugglers.

Saudi kings had sympathy for them and had given them residency permits. Most of them do not have a passport.

"They all belong to Myanmar. They are Myanmar citizens although Myanmar hasn't considered them as citizens. Pressuring Bangladesh to issue Bangladeshi passports is not right."

The Saudi government must pressure the Myanmar embassy in Riyadh to issue them Myanmar passports instead of pressuring the Bangladesh government," he said.

"The genocide against the Rohingyas is ongoing and they cannot be sent back to Myanmar at this moment. They must not be sent back to Bangladesh as Bangladesh is not their country," Lwin said from Germany.

The Saudi government should mount pressure on Myanmar through all the 57 OIC members to issue passports to the Rohingyas, instead of threatening Bangladesh, he said.

Ending genocide should be the priority. All countries, including Saudi Arabia, should work hard to end the ongoing genocide against the Rohingyas, Lwin added.

"Once it ends, the Rohingya in exile will have a chance to go back to their homeland in Myanmar."

They should not be expelled from the country where they take refuge with a huge hope for survival, he said.

A Rohingya activist in Bangladesh said it was very disappointing that Saudi Arabia was showing inhumane attitude towards a small country like Bangladesh, which is sheltering about a million persecuted Rohingya, including some 750,000 who faced brutal military campaign in 2017.

As a leading and rich Muslim country, KSA should be more supportive to Bangladesh and work with other global powers to establish Rohingya rights, she said preferring anonymity.

"Saudi pressure on Bangladesh is illogical and unfair," she said.



Rail workers installing a drain between the lines near Malibagh Level Crossing in the capital yesterday. This section of the lines has been prone to waterlogging.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Possible, but not so soon

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Asked whether it will at all be possible for the country to become self-sufficient in onion, Dr Md Abdul Mueyed, director general of DAE, said, "It is very much possible. But for that we need some time, maybe a few years."

DAE officials said Bangladesh's current demand for onion is around 25 lakh tonnes. Though the country produced 23.30 lakh tonnes of onion last year, more than 10.91 lakh tonnes had to be imported because 30 percent of the produce either rotted or got damaged.

On September 14, as India banned onion exports, the market here became unstable and prices of the item skyrocketed, causing outrage among the people.

The same thing happened in late September last year.

"This year," Abdul Mueyed said, "we are trying to increase the production significantly."

He added, "We have set a target to produce 33 lakh tonnes of onion a year. But it will take a few years to reach that goal."

Asked how they are planning to fulfill this target, the DG said the first step is to increase the average production.

In the last season, the production of onion rose by 2.27 lakh tonnes and reached 25.57 lakh tonnes, which was 23.30 lakh tonnes the previous year.

Currently, farmers are cultivating onions in around 2.5 lakh hectares of land. On average, around 10 lakh tonnes is produced in one hectare.

"If we can increase the production by just one tonne per hectare, there will be additional 2.5 lakh tonnes next year," the DG said.

He noted that the global average of onion production is around 17 tonnes per hectare while it is 10 tonnes in Bangladesh.

"The production rate varies from one region to another, depending on soil quality and weather. But we have

YEAR	PRODUCTION (Lakh tonnes)	CULTIVATION (Lakh hectares)
2019-20	25.57	2.37
2018-19	23.30	2.07
2017-18	23.30	2.12
2016-17	21.53	2.13
2015-16	21.30	2.16
2014-15	19.30	1.92

the potential to increase the average onion production up to 12 to 13 tonnes per hectare."

He added that the land where farmers grow potatoes, tobacco, wheat or winter vegetables could also be suitable for onion cultivation and farmers will find it profitable.

Besides, the government is likely to provide seeds of high-yielding varieties of onion and fertiliser to farmers at subsidised prices so that they can shift to onion cultivation from other winter crops in the coming season.

The DAE control room sources said farmers last year cultivated onion in 2.37 lakh hectares of land, which was 2.07 lakh hectares in 2018.

For the last five years, Pabna, Rajshahi, Faridpur, Rajbari and Jhenaidah remain the top onion-producing districts.

SEED CRISIS
Every year, farmers need more than 1,100 tonnes of seed, of which around 1,000 tonnes are generated by farmers, while the rest is supplied by Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) and private companies.

"But this year, there is a crisis as seed production was low in the last season. Currently, we have around 700 tonnes of seed; we need to import the rest," said Shailendra Nath Mazumder, principal scientific officer and director, Strengthening Spices Crop Research in Bangladesh.

Govt decides to allow more flights

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should not be any problem for 35,000 Bangladeshis to reach their workplaces on time, the Caab chief told The Daily Star.

Before resuming its regular flights to Saudi Arabia on October 1, Biman will operate two flights on September 26 and 27, carrying those who had booked return tickets for March 16 and 17, but could not fly due to the coronavirus restrictions.

Saudi Arabian Airlines resumed its regular flights from Dhaka on Wednesday.

Apart from operating two flights a week, the airlines got permission to operate six special flights from Dhaka by September 30.

With the Saudi government agreeing to extend the visa and work permit deadlines by 24 days, about 35,000 Bangladeshi expatriates will now have to reach their workplaces by October 17.

The Bangladesh government on Wednesday said Saudi government had agreed to extend the iqama (work permit) and visas for the Bangladeshis who returned home on vacation but could not go back to the Kingdom because of the pandemic.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Wednesday said the migrants with expired visas could get those renewed at the Saudi embassy in Bangladesh from Sunday and their work permits would remain valid until October 17.

The validity of the permits might be extended further if need be.

The development came after hundreds of people demonstrated at Karwan Bazar in the capital for several days and laid siege to the expatriates' welfare ministry at Eskaton on Wednesday.

Yesterday, the foreign minister hoped that all Bangladeshi expatriate workers would reach Saudi Arabia before their iqama expired.

"The Saudi government has assured us that they would further extend the iqama validity for the rest of the Bangladeshi workers who are stuck here," he said.

The foreign minister also urged the Saudi bound Bangladeshi nationals to maintain discipline during the process of visa renewal and air ticket booking, so as to avoid giving a bad impression to the Saudi government.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam in a Facebook post said the Saudi government has permitted Biman Bangladesh Airlines to operate two flights a week each to Riyadh and

Jeddah.

Meanwhile, the expatriates started gathering in front of the Saudi airlines ticket counter at the city's Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel early in the morning yesterday to buy tickets.

A top official of the airlines said, "We will operate six special flights from Dhaka until September 30 to carry more Bangladeshi expatriate workers to their workplaces in Saudi Arabia."

Apart from the six special flights, the airlines will continue to operate their two regular weekly flights from Dhaka until September 30, he said requesting anonymity.

Asked how many flights they will operate from Dhaka from October 1, the official said they will inform the media after getting CAAB approval.

Home to more than 22 lakh Bangladeshis, Saudi Arabia is also the prime destination of Bangladeshi migrant workers and the biggest remittance-generating country for Bangladesh.

Around 35,000 migrants returned to the country from the Kingdom on vacation after late February but could not go back due to the suspension of flights in March, said sources at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport and at the expatriates' welfare ministry.

On September 13, the Saudi Ministry of Interior announced a partial resumption of international flights.

The Kingdom will lift all restrictions on air, land and sea transport after January 1 next year, according to Arab News.

OMAN OPENS BORDER

Bangladeshi expatriate workers stranded in the country since March due to the pandemic will be able to return to Oman from October 1 after the Middle Eastern country opens its border for Bangladeshi workers.

Talking to The Daily Star, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said, "Yet another good news for the country's expatriate workers: Oman has sent us a verbal note today stating that the Bangladeshi stranded workers will be able to enter into the country from October 1."

Earlier in the day, the foreign minister told reporters at his office that the Bangladeshi workers will need to have their valid passport, valid Oman residency ID and Covid-19 negative certificate through PCR tests, and agree to undergo a 14-day quarantine after entering Oman.

Wasa's move to reappoint

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by its board secretary on September 17 to appoint the MD and the meeting was held on September 19 in violation of the relevant provisions of the law.

Besides, a selection committee is supposed to be formed for the appointment of the Wasa MD and a gazette notification must be issued for constituting the selection committee as per the relevant rules.

None of these procedures, however, was followed to appoint Taqsem as the Wasa MD for the next three years.

He also said his client in the writ petition also prayed to the HC to issue a rule asking the board secretary of Dhaka Wasa to explain under what authority he convened the board meeting on September 17.

The HC may hold a hearing on the writ petition next week, Tanvir added.

Dhaka Wasa board on September

19 approved a proposal to re-appoint its Managing Director Taqsem A Khan for three more years.

The Wasa board made the decision in its 97th special meeting held online.

The special meeting's topic of discussion was to send a proposal to the Local Government Division regarding the appointment of Taqsem as Wasa MD for the next three years, according to a notice issued by Wasa on Thursday.

Taqsem has reportedly been the MD for the last 11 years. He was appointed for five consecutive terms of varying lengths. His current term expires on October 14.

When he took charge of Dhaka Wasa in 2009, most parts of the capital got flooded after heavy rains. The situation remains the same to this day, a report published on The Daily Star on September 20 said.

Gonoforum may split as rift widens

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Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Reza said, "They don't have any right to call a meeting. A meeting can be called with consent from the party president."

The decision of calling this meeting is unconstitutional and Gonoforum has nothing to do with it."

He also said anyone can hold a meeting anywhere and Gonoforum has no objection to it, but the party did not call any meeting amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Subrata, however, said Reza had no right to say anything and Dr Kamal would be invited to the meeting.

Talking to this newspaper, he alleged that Reza was not following Gonoforum's charter, which stipulated that the party would hold a secretary-level meeting every 30 days, a standing committee meeting every 60 days and a central committee meeting every 90 days.

"But Mr Reza Kibria did not call a single meeting since the full committee of the party was announced last year. The central committee leaders repeatedly asked him to hold meetings, but in vain," he said.

Subrata further alleged that "show cause" notices were served on a number of party leaders and four of them were expelled later.

"But according to our party charter, the president or the general secretary alone cannot make a decision. All

the decisions should be approved in a council or in a central committee meeting," he said.

Asked about the allegations, Reza said, "Yes, everything is subject to approval by the central committee, but the party president can make any decision and can have it approved in a meeting later."

Referring to the expulsion of former Gonoforum leader Sultan Muhammed Mansur Ahmed, Reza said the then general secretary Mostafa Mohsin Montu had expelled Sultan without issuing any show-cause notice to him.

"But when I took charge, I followed the party constitution. We first issued a show-cause notice and then the decision of expulsion was made."

Regarding the party meeting, Reza said a pandemic situation is prevailing in the country and the party has decided to stop its organisational activities for now.

"Before the pandemic, we visited a number of districts. But all the party activities have come to a halt due to novel coronavirus," he said.

Subrata said Dr Kamal was "held hostage" by a group of people and was being "misled" by them.

"We will try our best to bring the party on right track freeing it from the clutches of those people," he said, adding that Gonoforum as an organisation did not suffer so much since its inception in 1993.

'Situation now worse than during peak in March'

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people, who are less at risk of developing severe symptoms.

But these too are on a worrying path as older people are increasingly infected, the ECDC said.

Israel and France were among the latest nations to tighten infection control measures, shuttering restaurants, workplaces or gyms as businesses already hammered by lockdowns at the start of the year struggle to stay afloat.

France's health minister on Wednesday announced drastic restrictions in some particularly hard-hit areas of the country.

In the southern city of Marseille, bars, restaurants and gyms will close while bars in Paris and 10 other cities will close at 10:00 pm. Gyms will also

be shuttered in the capital.

Israel, which has the world's highest coronavirus infection rate as a proportion of its population, has gone even further.

Last week, it imposed a second nationwide lockdown that included school closures and restrictions on work and leisure.

But realising that wasn't enough, with some hospitals reaching capacity, it decided yesterday to toughen its measures still further. The new rules will close the vast majority of workplaces, shutter markets and further limit prayers and demonstrations.

Authorities are also considering closing Ben Gurion international airport outside Tel Aviv.

As restrictions are being imposed, so protests and anger are rising as

This year, the price of seeds is Tk 8,000 per kg, which was below Tk 2,000 last year.

Shailendra, who made the presentation at the agriculture ministry on Wednesday on how to increase onion production, said sandy char areas in the northern region have good potential to grow onion.

And farmers should grow onions with sugarcane, ginger, turmeric and maize and agricultural officials can train farmers about the method, he added.

Regarding new varieties of onion, he said, they have just developed high-yielding BARI-6. But it will take some time to produce seeds to start its cultivation at the farmers' level.

Regarding the summer variety BARI-5, he said, it was cultivated on only a few hundred acres of land last year.

"Even if we start producing the seeds now, it will take around six years to grow enough of the new varieties to meet our demand," he added.

Shailendra suggested that farmers, who usually plant homegrown and low-yielding seeds, should be provided with the new varieties.

Asked why seeds are not imported, he said, "Our winter is short compared to other onion growing countries. Seeds from those countries usually don't survive here."

Abdul Mueyed, director general of DAE, said the summer varieties BARI-5 and BARI-3 will play a big role in making the country self-sufficient in onion. Besides, the BADC will be directed to produce adequate seeds of summer onion.

When asked about the seed crisis issue, agriculture minister Abdur Razzaque said, "We will ensure supply of quality seeds to farmers before the season starts. I think farmers will show more interest in onion cultivation in the coming season."

N'GANJ MOSQUE BLAST

PM provides Tk 1.75cr to families of victims

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has given Tk 1.75 crore as financial assistance to 35 families of the victims of Narayanganj mosque blast.

An amount of Tk 5 lakh was given as cash support for each of the 35 families of the dead and injured people in the deadly incident, said PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim.

The deputy commissioner of Narayanganj was directed to hand over cheques of the donation to the families of the victims.

The blasts took place at a mosque in Fatullah on September 4. Thirty-four people were killed in the incident.

Taliban kill 28 police in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban have killed 28 paramilitary policemen in fighting in southern Afghanistan, officials said Wednesday, the latest losses in an ongoing siege of a government-controlled district that could tip into insurgent hands.

One local official said the Taliban executed the police after they had surrendered, but the insurgents denied this and AFP was not immediately able to confirm the claim.

If proven, a mass shooting of dozens of captives would mark a grim new low point in Afghanistan's recent violence, which has been worsening in recent weeks.

The incident occurred in the Gizab district of the southern province of Uruzgan, where intense fighting has raged for days as the Taliban besiege outmanned and outgunned Afghan police and army outposts.

ZelgaiEbad, a spokesman for the Uruzgan governor, said Taliban fighters offered 28 local and national police a chance to go home if they surrendered Tuesday night.

"But after taking their guns, the Taliban killed them all," Ebad said.

Provincial council head Amir Mohammad Barezkai confirmed the death toll and said heavy fighting was ongoing.

Barezkai would not say if the men had been killed before or after surrendering.

A third local official, speaking on condition of anonymity, put the toll at 28-30 police, adding that three policemen managed to escape.

No promotion

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"There is no scope of auto promotions. There should be some kind of assessment for eighth grade students at schools," Dhaka Education Board Chairman Ziaul Haque told reporters after a meeting at his board office yesterday afternoon.

Chairmen of all 11 education boards were present at the meeting.

Ziaul, also chairman of inter-education board coordination sub-committee, said the Bangladesh Examination Development Unit will formulate a guideline on the assessments, adding that school authorities, if possible, will hold physical exams or they can also hold online tests. "If neither of these options are available to them, teachers can have continuous assessment based on the performance of students."

Around two million students were expected to take the JSC and equivalent exams in November. He said the assessments, if taken on how much of the syllabi were completed till March 15, should be taken through television education via Sangshad TV and online classes taken by school authorities.

"If some chapters or topics of a subject remain uncovered during this year, those will be added to the class nine syllabi," Ziaul said.

Regarding exams of grades six and seven students, he said the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education and National Curriculum and Textbook Board will frame a guideline.

Several board chairmen, who attended the meeting, confirmed that no decision regarding postponement of Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and its equivalent examinations was taken.

The exams slated for April 1 were postponed on March 22 for an indefinite period due to the pandemic. About 13 lakh students are expected to take the exams.

"The decision regarding HSC exams depends on many factors and the government high-ups will take it," said a board chairman.

"We have discussed completing all preparations for HSC exams, so that we can take the exam as soon as the government makes a decision in this regard," said another.

Meanwhile, Ziaul declined making any comments regarding the HSC exams.