

**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**



1,684
New cases in 24hrs



3,82,959
Total cases



5,593
Deaths



2,97,449
Recoveries

**GLOBAL
UPDATE**



1,093,355
Deaths



38,549,780
Total cases

COVID VACCINES

Bangladesh to get top priority: Indian envoy

Bss, Dhaka

Newly appointed Indian High Commissioner Vikram Kumar Doraiswami yesterday said Bangladesh would get top priority in trial, distribution, delivery, and partial co-production of the potential Indian Covid-19 vaccine.

He gave the assurance during a meeting with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam at the foreign ministry in the capital, said a press release.

During the meeting, the state minister recalled the decision of the last Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) meeting over holding the virtual summit between the prime ministers of Bangladesh and India.

The Indian envoy assured that the upcoming summit was not being seen as a substitute for an in-person visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, rather it would be a complementary summit.

The state minister and the high commissioner agreed to hold the

long-pending meeting of the Joint Rivers Commission at the ministerial level soon.

Shahriar hoped that normal people-to-people connectivity between the two countries would be restored soon.

In this regard, he appreciated the Indian side for reopening people-people movement and requested the envoy to ease their visa regulations.

Doraiswami assured that the “air bubble” arrangement between Bangladesh and India would convene soon and other regulations would also be eased eventually.

Both sides stressed the need for creating an easy and sustainable mechanism for bilateral people-people movement, with ease of travel and exchange of currency.

Some other issues, including restoration of Chilahati-Haldibari rail link, connectivity with North-East India and Bangabandhu-Bapu Digital Museum, were also discussed yesterday.

Lagging behind

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access to Covid-19 vaccines worldwide.

The second option is deals with pharmaceutical companies or governments.

Experts said the first option was complicated due to the number of countries in queue and massive global demand.

COVAX currently covers nine vaccine candidates and its aim is to secure supply and delivery of two billion shots by the end of 2021 to the over 170 countries that sign up.

There is no visible effort by the government for going into deals with companies or countries but it has been making arrangements for funds.

Officials said the government has communicated with US companies Moderna, Pfizer, UK's AstraZeneca, India's Bharat Biotech Ltd, and Russia and China.

Moderna has a vaccine candidate but the company is yet to put any product in the market.

Details of the communications with the companies and countries could not be known.

“We have enough funds. If we see the need, we will buy vaccines on top of the supply from GAVI ... we will buy [from other sources],” Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

He said there was an allocation of \$150 million under a project and the government has allocated additional funds from revenue. Besides, it has also sought funds from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank.

Prof Khurshid said, “We are waiting ... the ministry will give us a directive about to whom to make an advance payment.”

A DGHS official said the issue of vaccines was being handled by government high-ups and that was why officials at the DGHS could not

say anything concrete.

“The government has allocated funds, which is good. But we do not know the exact progress made in getting the vaccine,” Prof Nazrul Islam, member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC), told The Daily Star.

“The government is not saying anything clearly. They say they have been communicating. But have they disclosed in what quantity we will get the vaccine?” he said.

The government should not sit idle with funds, he said.

Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of Pharmacology at the BSMMU, said, “We have to select the vaccine which is suitable for our existing cold chain. We should not go for something that requires elaborate arrangements to preserve and carry.”

Cold chain is the refrigerated delivery and preservation system of vaccines.

However, Prof Sayedur said the government should be more careful and should wait until a sustainable and affordable vaccine is developed.

The experts suggested continuing the communication with multiple potential vaccine sources and keeping all channels open.

DAILY BRIEFING
Sixteen people died from Covid-19 in the country in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, taking the death toll to 5,593, according to a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The death rate stood at 1.46 percent.

A total of 1,684 new infections were recorded during the time, taking the total number of people infected to 3,82,959, it said. The labs across the country tested 14,411 samples.

Yesterday's positivity rate was 11.69 percent while the total positivity rate was 18.13 percent.

Bangladesh is currently 16th on the list of worst affected countries in terms of the number of cases.

All those involved to be brought to justice

Home boss says on Sylhet man's death in police custody

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

People involved in the death of Rayhan Uddin, who died in police custody at Bandarbazar Police Outpost in Sylhet, will be brought to book, said Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal.

He made the statement at his secretariat office yesterday as journalists asked him about the death of 35-year-old Rayhan.

Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) was investigating the death. They will check the autopsy report and probe the allegations brought against police by the victim's wife, he said.

“If found guilty, all of them will be brought under trial,” the minister said.

Meanwhile, a PBI team yesterday visited Bandarbazar Police Outpost, the crime scene, and also Kashtoghar area, from where Rayhan was reportedly detained by the outpost's police personnel.

Muhammad Khaled-uz-Zaman, special police superintendent of PBI in Sylhet, said, “We've received all related evidences of the primary internal probe body and previous investigating officer of the case; we've started our investigation with visiting all spots involved with the case.”

Meanwhile, M Kazi Emdadul Islam, deputy commissioner of Sylhet, also the district magistrate permitted to exhume the victim's buried body and assigned a magistrate to look after the matter.

The order was given upon an application filed by the case's previous investigating officer and sub-inspector Abdul Baten and to conduct autopsy

again, Rayhan's body will be exhumed today, PBI special superintendent in Sylhet said.

Rayhan, a resident of the city's Neharipara area, died at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital at 7:50am on Sunday, around an hour after he was admitted there by police.

His wife, Tahmina Akhter Tanni filed a case with Kotwali Police Station accusing several unknown people mentioning that his husband was tortured inside Bandarbazar Police Outpost.

As the internal probe team found involvement of the outpost's police personnel, four including the outpost in-charge, were suspended on Monday along with three others were withdrawn from the outpost.

Meanwhile, in the evidential video footages captured in a CC camera installed by the office of superintendent of Sylhet police near the outpost, it is seen that Rayhan was brought to the outpost at 3:10am on Sunday when we was not found injured and at around 6:30am, injured Rayhan was seen taken out of the outpost, and put in an auto-rickshaw.

Moreover, prime suspect of the case Akbar Hossain Bhuiyan, in-charge of the police outpost, has been untraceable since Monday night.

Muhammad Khaled-uz-Zaman, special police superintendent of PBI in Sylhet, said, “The untraceable situation of the prime suspect is in our knowledge and we are looking into the matter. No minor details of the case will be ignored anyway and will find anyone who is involved.”



A section of Chandpur fishermen on their boats, while others line the riverbank, during a gathering organised by the fisheries ministry in Matlab Uttar upazila's Mohanpur area to spread awareness on hilsa conservation.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bangladesh to resume flights to India Oct 28

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operate flights on Dhaka-Delhi, Dhaka-Kolkata, Dhaka-Chennai, and Dhaka-Mumbai routes, the sources added.

Speaking to this correspondent, CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman said around 5,000 passengers from both the countries would be able to fly each week.

Sources at CAAB and Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh said around 20 lakh Bangladeshis visit India every year by air and many of them go there for treatment.

On August 27, the immediate past Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh Riva Ganguly Das had proposed resuming air travels which remain suspended since March 15 due to Covid-19 pandemic.

During a meeting with State Minister for Civil Aviation Mahbub Ali at the secretariat, she had invited Bangladesh to join Indian air bubble -- an exclusive arrangement between

neighbouring countries to reestablish air connectivity and allow people to travel freely within the zone.

Senior Secretary Mohibul, who chaired the meeting yesterday, said air communications between the two countries would be operated under the “air bubble” arrangement.

He said under the arrangement, India would allow more than one attendants with each patient from Bangladesh to visit the country.

Earlier, India had said it would allow only one attendant.

CAAB Chairman Mafidur said passengers from Bangladesh and India would be able to fly only between the two countries under the arrangement. They won't be able to fly to a third country.

Mohibul said India has also agreed to complete visa processing of Bangladeshi passengers within seven working days.

Under the air bubble arrangement, passengers from both the countries

will have to undergo Covid-19 testing before flying.

The Indian High Commission in Dhaka on October 9 announced resumption of online visa services for Bangladeshi citizens.

For now, visas will be issued under nine categories. These include medical, business, employment, journalist, diplomatic, official, UN official and UN diplomatic.

India stopped entry of all foreigners by halting visa approvals since March 12 following the spread of novel coronavirus.

Indian High Commissioner to Dhaka Vikram Doraiswami on Monday said it would take more time to issue Indian tourist and student visas due to the pandemic.

“We have already resumed visa processes. We encourage our Bangladeshi partners to resume their applications. Almost all visa categories are covered... I am pressing very hard to reopen all visa services,” he said.

EC to sue Faridpur-4 MP

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And police will investigate the matter and we will take necessary action,” the CEC said.

The CEC said the EC has formed a three-member committee, led by an additional secretary, to probe whether Nixon Chowdhury has done anything wrong apart from flouting the electoral code of conduct.

The EC is filing the case as local lawmaker Nixon Chowdhury after Charbhadrans upazila election on October 10 allegedly hurled abuse at the Faridpur deputy commissioner and other local admin officials during phone conversations with them.

On Monday, a letter was sent to the EC, among other authorities concerned, from the Cabinet Division seeking action against the violation of the electoral code of conduct.

At a press conference next day, Nixon Chowdhury sought legal action against Faridpur Deputy Commissioner Atul Sarkar, claiming that the DC acted in

favour of BNP candidate KM Obaidul Bari in the recently held election for the chairman post of Charbhadrans upazila.

The MP, however, claimed the phone conversations were heavily edited.

Meanwhile, the CEC said they do not see any big challenge in holding the Dhaka-5 by-polls on Saturday and Dhaka-18 by-elections on November 12.

The two parliamentary seats fell vacant after the deaths of Habibur Rahman Mollah and Sahara Khatun.

“We had a fruitful meeting with law enforcement agencies. We hope that they will successfully perform their duties during the two by-polls.

“We have seen that these two constituencies are ready for by-elections. There are no major problems in holding the elections in the two constituencies.”

He said the by-elections will be held following health guidelines.

Law enforcement agencies will ensure safety of all polling agents after

they come to polling stations to do their duties, said Nurul Huda.

The CEC said if the by-elections are not competitive, voters might lose their interest about elections. “But this is unfortunate that many elections remain non-competitive.”

He said many say that voter turnout of the elections held during the pandemic was low, but it was not true.

The CEC claimed that the voter turnout of those elections was about 60 percent.

Four election commissioners, EC senior secretary, public security division senior secretary, top officials of Border Guard Bangladesh, police, and Rapid Action Battalion attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Administrative Service Association (BASA) President Helal Uddin Ahmed and General Secretary Shaikh Yusuf Harun in a statement yesterday demanded trial of Nixon Chowdhury, who had allegedly hurled abuse at government officials in Faridpur.

BR for change of China firm's representative

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enough cooperation from the current representative, he added.

Wang Kun could not be contacted for comments.

The BR is implementing PBRLP to connect the capital with Jashore with a 169km rail line for Tk 39,246 crore, with Exim Bank of China providing Tk 21,036.70 crore as loan.

Apart from the minister, Railways Ministry Secretary Salim Reza, BR Director General Md Shamsuzzaman and officials involved in the projects took part in the virtual meeting from the Rail Bhaban in the capital.

REDUCING PROJECT COST
On September 30, the PMO formed a committee to review negotiated contract costs of three railways projects and whether those projects should go as per the existing plan. The projects were supposed to be implemented with Chinese finance and by Chinese companies.

Conversion of metre-gauge rail line into dual-gauge between Akhaura and Sylhet; construction of dual-gauge double line between Joydebpur and

Ishwardi; and construction of dual-gauge double line between Joydebpur and Mymensingh and Jamalpur are the projects in question.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) has approved the first two projects, Chinese companies have been selected and contract costs have also been negotiated. However, final loan and commercial deals have not been signed yet.

Railways sources said the committee, led by Shamima Nargis of the physical infrastructure division of the Planning Commission, has already submitted its report, with recommendations on cutting a “significant amount” of the negotiated costs, and the PMO was now working on it.

The railways minister said there was a huge discussion on “high cost” of projects like Akhaura-Sylhet dual-gauge line and Joydebpur-Ishwardi double line. “After taking charge of the ministry, I also came to know about this but could do little as those were already approved by the Ecneec.”

But, as the PMO has taken an

initiative to review the costs, he also discussed the matter with the Chinese ambassador, the minister said. “We talked about how the projects can be taken forward quickly.”

The Ecneec in April last year had approved the project to convert the metre-gauge railway line into dual-gauge from Akhaura to Sylhet for over Tk 16,104 crore. The contract cost negotiated with China Railway Construction Bridge Engineering Bureau Group Co Ltd is Tk 12,079 crore.

The government took up a Tk 14,250 crore project in January last year to turn Joydebpur-Ishwardi section into a dual-gauge double line. It is scheduled to be completed by December 2024. The negotiated contract cost for this project is Tk 9,839 crore and the selected company is China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation.

The tentative negotiated cost for constructing dual-gauge double line alongside the existing Joydebpur-Mymensingh-Jamalpur section is Tk 8,808 crore and the selected company is China Railway International Group.

US to engage afresh

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minister and the foreign minister. He is expected to visit Kurmitola General Hospital and hand over some medical equipment to treat Covid-19 patients and hold a roundtable with journalists.

“The US deputy secretary said they have already imposed some sanctions. Now that there is a national election on November 8 in Myanmar, they will engage after the election on Rohingya repatriation,” he said.

Beigun also expected that the neighbouring countries would engage more in addressing the Rohingya crisis in a sustainable way. The more than an hour long meeting over dinner touched on various issues, including trade and investment, the state minister said.

Bangladesh has invited US companies for offshore gas exploration in the Bay of Bengal.

Beigun said a US company was already supplying LNG to Bangladesh and he would look into how more energy companies can work here.

“It [selection of companies] happens through open bidding. It even happens through direct negotiation. If we get that sort of a company, we can go for that as well,” Shahriar said.

“They are more interested on free trade agreement,” he said.

He said the US would also look into how Bangladesh's private sector could be engaged in vaccine production and that when US companies can produce Covid-19 vaccines, Bangladesh would be sold those with priority.

Covid puts global progress against TB at risk: WHO

REUTERS, London

The Covid-19 pandemic is derailing global efforts to tackle tuberculosis (TB), the world's deadliest infectious disease, with cases likely to rise without urgent action and investment, the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday.

The WHO's annual TB report found that tuberculosis killed some 1.4 million people in 2019, little changed from the 1.5 million deaths it caused in 2018. It warned that many countries are not on track to meet targets for successfully diagnosing and treating cases to try to stop the disease's spread.

FAHIM SALEH MURDER

Accused pleads ‘not guilty’ before US court

AGENCIES

The former executive assistant of Fahim Saleh, co-founder of Pathao, pleaded not guilty yesterday to charges of first-degree murder for allegedly decapitating and dismembering the tech entrepreneur in his luxury New York condo in July.

Tyrese Haspil, 21, entered his not guilty plea via Skype before a state court judge in Manhattan after a grand jury indicted him on upgraded charges of first- and second-degree murder, second-degree grand larceny, second-degree burglary, concealment of a human corpse and tampering with physical evidence, reports CNN quoting the Manhattan District Attorney's Office.

Saleh, 33, who had most recently founded the Manhattan venture capital firm Adventure Capital, was killed in his Manhattan apartment on July 13.

Haspil handled Saleh's finances and personal matters, a law enforcement official with knowledge of the investigation said at the time. The assistant allegedly owed Saleh tens of thousands of dollars and was on a repayment plan, according to the official.

Fahim Saleh was an entrepreneur who launched successful tech start-ups in Bangladesh, Nigeria and North America.

Saleh “was a witness to a crime committed on a prior occasion and the death was caused for the purpose of preventing the intended victim's testimony in any criminal action or proceeding, whether or not such action or proceeding had been commenced,” read the indictment.

The indictment charges Haspil with three grand larceny counts for allegedly stealing tens of thousands of dollars from Saleh through PayPal and Intuit transfers.

Court documents said a Makita saw, scissors, a knife, gloves and a mask were found in Saleh's apartment, along with bags containing a head and limbs.

“We're contesting everything here, including the circumstances of the death and whether or not they can prove that this young man had anything at all to do with it,” said Neville Mitchell, an attorney with the Legal Aid Society's Homicide Defense Task Force, who is representing Haspil.

“This is going to be a vigorous defense for this young man. There are a lot of things that we're investigating that you know we're not prepared to offer at this time in terms of the defense, but there will be a vigorous defense.”

Haspil is being held at Rikers Island, according to Mitchell.

The case was adjourned until January 11.

Saleh was found dead the day after he was killed in the living room of his condo on the Lower East Side, police said. His cousin had gone to check on him. His head and limbs were severed.

HSC results

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More than 13.65 lakh students were expected to sit for the exams.

The government postponed the exams following the closure of all educational institutions on March 17. They are to stay closed until at least October 30.

Prof Dil Afroza Begum said that in normal times, universities took the GPA of SSC and HSC exams into account, alongside admission tests. But this year is different, so they are looking for some alternatives.

She said as one of the alternatives, UGC will propose that HSC results should not carry any weight in the admission process.

“Another option will be that SSC results will carry more weight than that of HSC exams,” she added. “But all these will be finalised if public universities VCs and teachers accept the proposals.”

Many were uncertain about whether admission tests would be held after the government's cancellation of the HSC exams, but Dil Afroze and other UGC members said they were strongly in favour of taking the admission tests.

“We can hold exams like SAT or GRE or GMAT. We will set questions in such a way that none can raise questions about the process,” she added.

Dil Afroze and another UGC member, Muhammed Alamgir, both said they are going to introduce centralised admission tests at public universities this year.

It would help them reduce the number of exams for candidates, said Alamgir.

UGC in February decided to introduce the new system titled “Central Admission Test” for the 2020-2021 academic year to reduce the hassle of admission seekers.

Five universities – Dhaka University, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), Rajshahi University, Jahangirnagar University and Chittagong University – have not shown any interest in the new system.

Top UGC officials said they hope that these universities will join the system considering the situation created by the pandemic.

When contacted DU Pro-vice Chancellor Prof Muhammad Samad and JU Professor Md Amir Hussain both said they need to discuss the matter with their academic council and other forums before finalising anything.