

BANGLADESH UPDATE

1,568
New cases in 24hrs

4,09,252
Total cases

5,941
Deaths

3,25,940
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

1,202,905
Deaths

46,594,901
Total cases

US elections could see record turnout

PORIMOL PALMA

The US presidential election is expected to see a record turnout, with polls analysts attributing this to the Americans' bid for a change.

More than 91.6 million Americans have already voted, mostly through mail-in ballots, which faced unproved accusations of fraud by President Donald Trump but got strong support from the Democratic Party candidate Joe Biden.

These votes represent about 43 percent of registered voters nationwide, according to a survey of election officials in all 50 states and Washington, DC, by CNN, Edison Research, and Catalist corporation.

David J Becker, executive director and founder of the Center for Election Innovation & Research, Washington, DC, says they estimate turnout of 150 million in total out of about 240 million eligible American voters.

"This means 20 million more Americans will be voting this election than that of 2016," he said during an interaction with a group of journalists virtually participating at the 2020 US Presidential Election Reporting Seminar (Oct 25-Nov 7) organised by the Hawaii-based East-West Centre.

Referring to voting data, he said on Friday that 50 million mail-in ballots have already been returned to the election office and about 40 million others are expected to be returned by November 3. Besides, 40 million Americans have cast ballots in person during the early voting period. The rest are expected to vote on the Election Day on November 3.

"We don't see the high voter turnout to keep the thing same. That's not a thing in American society. This means they want a change," said David Becker.

In some of the elections with lowest turnout, the presidents were reelected. One of the examples could be reelection of Bill Clinton in 1996 with low voter turnout of 49.2 percent. Voter turnout in the last few US presidential elections ranged between 55-60 percent, but analysts say it is likely to be beyond 70 percent this time.

Analysts say mail-in voting saw a significant surge this year. Such voting in 2016 was only 25 percent or roughly 32 million, so far the highest in US history though the US has the mail-in voting system for 200 years.

They say the pandemic, democrat supporters' more enthusiasm against

Donald Trump's attack against mail-in vote and expansion of voters' education for months led to the surge in mail-in voting.

Christian Ulvert, a Democratic strategist, and founder and president of EDGE Communications LLC, Miami, Florida, says voting pattern appears to have a shift during this election.

Usually, the senior citizens, especially the White male Republicans, go for mail-in voting because of their old-age complication. This year, however, they are voting mail-in in less numbers, he said.

Ulvert said on the other hand, the Democrat supporters have opted for mail-in voting in much higher numbers -- first because they are more aware of Covid-19 and second because they want to prove wrong Trump who questioned the integrity of the mail-in voting system. Also, many of the Latino people and African Americans are opting to vote early and in higher numbers compared to that of 2016.

Apart from the mail-in voting, he said, long lines of voters are being observed in the competing states for early voting, he said.

"Probably, we are going to see about 80 percent of voter turnout this election," Christian Ulvert said.

Analysts say US elections depend on electoral votes, not the national popular votes. That means, in the states, people vote the electors who form Electoral College of 535. Including three additional electors from the District of Columbia, a total of 538 electors elect the president. Any party having majority electors in a state means all the electors will vote for the winning party.

Republican and Democrats know for sure some states where they will surely win or lose. However, some states are swing states. In this election, Joe Biden remains ahead in the opinion polls in some of the swing states -- Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Arizona, Wisconsin, and Iowa.

Democrat candidate Hillary Clinton too was ahead in most polls before the 2016 election and got 2.9 million more national popular votes. Yet, she was defeated by Trump as he received 304 electoral votes when he needed 270.

"No matter who the president is, we are going to see high turnouts of voters. I hope this stays for decades. Hopefully, the Democrats as well as the Republicans will appreciate this," said Christian Ulvert.

Bids to silence journos

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for a Facebook post he had made about the lawmaker.

"It is clear from the way that police and the government have created a situation of impunity for crimes against journalists, that journalists can now easily be silenced. Not just state actors, but non-state actors have realised this," said Faruq Faisal, regional director at human rights organisation Article 19.

Kajol was denied bail a total of 13 times, according to Article 19.

The first occasion was on May 18, when Kajol's lawyer sought bail from Jashore District Chief Judicial Magistrate Court. Kajol was then under arrest under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which allows the police to arrest a person, without a warrant, suspected of being involved in a crime. The court's judge Sahadat Hossain rejected the bail petition.

The next instance was on June 14 when three separate virtual courts in Dhaka refused to hold hearings on bail petitions placed by his lawyer because he had not yet been "shown arrested" in the three cases filed under the Digital Security Act.

At that point, Kajol had been in judicial custody since May 3. A month and a half had gone by with Kajol waiting in prison but the police had not even formally processed arrest charges against him. So, without an arrest, there could be no bail.

On June 24, by which time Kajol had been formally arrested, Metropolitan Magistrate Dhiman Chandra Mondol of Virtual Court-4 denied him bail.

Then again on June 28, Metropolitan Magistrate Debdash Chandra Adhikary rejected Kajol's bail petition and placed him on a two-day remand in the case filed with Hazaribagh Police Station.

On July 29, Metropolitan Magistrate Baki Billah of Virtual Court-6 rejected his bail petition and on August 24, Judge KM Emrul Kayesh of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka denied him bail.

On September 9, Judge Kayesh again denied Kajol bail and the same judge followed that up with yet another bail denial on September 14.

"During the pandemic, hardened criminals were given bail to ease overcrowding in the prisons, but Kajol was denied bail. This is impunity," said Faruq Faisal.

Time and again, lawyers and leading journalists have pointed out that the sections under which journalists are being prosecuted are non-bailable. These include Section 21, 25, 28, 29, which punish activities ranging from defamation, "hampering religious sentiments", publishing "offensive" information, publishing "propaganda" against the Father of the Nation, the Liberation War, the national anthem or the national flag.

"We always say that defamation cannot be criminalised. The person can be brought to court, questioned by the Press Council, reprimanded or fined. These have to be civil lawsuits, not criminal cases. What is the job of the Press Council if journalists are being taken to prison and denied bail?" said Faisal.

Statistics obtained from the police states that 53 journalists, five teachers and eight students were prosecuted under the DSA between January and June 2020.

This newspaper, tallying up numbers from media reports, found that 38 journalists were arrested between January and October this year. It is unknown just how many journalists are languishing in prison like Kajol after being denied bail.

The majority of arrests happened during the lockdown, creating alarm among the journalist community and leading the Sampadak Parishad to issue a statement of concern on June 30.

"The Bangladeshi media is playing a vital role in keeping the people informed, publishing news of successes and hope, pointing out inadequacies of our pandemic response, and facilitating public dialogue to map out our course for rebuilding. An attack on the media at this time is to endanger our possibility of stable recovery," said the statement.

The statement added that DSA has become a plaything in the hands of a vested quarter who uses this anti-press and anti-freedom of expression law whimsically to harass and intimidate journalists and to prevent them from exposing corruption and misuse of funds that the government was allocating for the people, especially the poor.

For the last few months, updates about his father's bail has formed the crux of the text messages between this correspondent and Monorom Polok, Kajol's son.



PHOTO: AFP

Former US President Barack Obama introduces Democratic Presidential candidate and former US Vice President Joe Biden during a mobilization event at Belle Isle Casino in Detroit, Michigan, on Saturday.

Trump launches campaign blitz

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determines the overall victor.

The race remains a toss-up in Florida, North Carolina and Arizona, according to Reuters/Ipsos polls, while Trump trails by 5 percentage points in Pennsylvania and 9 percentage points in Michigan and Wisconsin.

Anita Dunn, a Biden campaign adviser, said on CNN's "State of the Union" program, "We feel confident about where we are."

There already has been a record-setting number -- 92 million -- of early votes cast around the country, either in-person or by mail, a phenomenon expected to boost Biden's chances.

The Trump campaign indicated it is banking on in-person voting on the election day to push the president over the top. Campaign adviser Jason Miller said Democrats have spent months stressing the threat posed by the coronavirus pandemic and telling people it is not safe to go to the polls in person.

"Well, guess what? President Trump's supporters are going to show up on Tuesday. Nothing is going to stop them," Miller told ABC's "This

Week" program. "I think Democrats are going to look in the rear-view mirror and say, 'This is probably what cost us the election.'"

Dunn dismissed Miller's argument and said the record early voting numbers reflect enthusiasm not fear.

Biden, who has made hammering the president's response to the pandemic a main theme of his speeches, was scheduled to campaign again in Pennsylvania, one of the most critical of the battleground states that Trump won in 2016.

On Sunday and Monday, Trump is due to stage 10 rallies -- five a day -- making it the campaign's busiest stretch. On Monday his campaign has events planned in North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, and two in Michigan.

Trump will close out the two-day swing with a late-night rally on Monday in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the same location where he finished his campaign in 2016. In his unexpected victory four years ago, the wealthy businessman-turned-politician took Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, three

states that for decades had gone in the Democratic column.

He offered a note of optimism early on Sunday, writing on Twitter, "Our numbers are looking VERY good all over."

Weighing down Trump is a rising number of coronavirus infections in many parts of the country. The United States has recorded more than 9 million cases, with nearly 230,000 people dying from Covid-19. Trump, who withstood a personal bout with COVID-19, has played down the virus and has said his opponents are using the pandemic against him.

At a rally on Saturday in Newtown, Pennsylvania, Trump seemed to lament his close race with Biden, who he considers a weak opponent.

"This could only happen to me," Trump said. "How could we be tied?"

Using some of his most urgent language yet, Trump warned of "bedlam in our country" if no clear winner emerges quickly in the election, saying, without evidence, that it could take weeks to sort out a result and that "very bad things" could happen in the interim.

Govt spent Tk 15k-47k for each

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services during the pandemic. Our efforts will continue ... the [Covid-19] dedicated hospitals will be kept functional as usual," he said.

He then claimed that there was no crisis of personal protective equipment in the country.

Mentioning that the government has recently announced the "No Mask, No Service," policy, he said soon there would be a massive campaign on raising health awareness to fight the outbreak.

Secretary at the Health Services Division Abdul Mannan, director general of the health directorate Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, and other high-

ups of the ministry were present at the meeting among others.

18 DEAD, 1,569 NEW INFECTIONS
Eighteen people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, according to a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With this, the death toll rose to 5,941, which is almost 1.45 percent of all confirmed cases in the country -- 4,09,252.

In the same 24 hours, 1,568 new infections were recorded after 12,549 tests were conducted at 113 laboratories, said the press release. The positivity rate stood at 12.50 percent.

Bangladesh is currently the 20th in

the list of worst affected countries in the world in terms of number of total cases. It is one step behind Indonesia and one step ahead of Ukraine, according to worldometers.info.

Meanwhile, 1,795 Covid-19 patients recovered in the same 24 hours, taking the total number of recovery cases to 3,25,940, which is nearly 80 percent of all confirmed cases.

Among the 18 deceased, 15 were males and three females.

One was aged between 31 and 40, two were between 21 and 30, six between 51 and 60, and nine others were above 60 years, added the release.

Not enough overpasses

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The government would ultimately have to construct overpasses at the intersections to avoid traffic congestion in future but it would then cost more money and in many cases, it may not be at all possible, said the transport expert.

Referring to the Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga expressway, he said the government should not expand national highways anymore without keeping facilities of expressway.

THE PROJECT
The Dhaka-Sylhet four-lane highway expansion is one of the 26 projects for which China had committed a \$21.5 billion soft loan. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Dhaka and Beijing was signed during the Chinese president's Dhaka visit in 2016.

But the government later decided to do the work using own resources, following failed negotiations with a Chinese company.

Besides, there was an allegation against the Chinese company of offering bribe to a top government official to green-light the work at an inflated cost. At that time, the estimated cost of the project was Tk 11,412 crore.

However, the government finally decided to implement the project with ADB fund. The RHD in 2018 took a separate project at Tk 3,885 crore for land acquisition and utility shifting for expansion of Dhaka-Sylhet and Sylhet-Tamabil highways.

Meanwhile, the consultant firm, which has prepared the design for the Dhaka-Sylhet highway expansion, suggested keeping 23 overpasses at all major intersections to ensure free flow of traffic, a RHD official said.

Md Waliur Rahman, an additional chief engineer of RHD, who is looking after the project, said construction of 23 overpasses will increase the project cost and as ADB found it economically

non-viable, they have dropped 17 overpasses for now.

However, there would be six more railway overpasses.

"As ADB declined to fund an economically non-viable project, we have to drop some overpasses for now. These [overpasses] can be constructed later," he told this correspondent on October 24, replying to a question.

Waliur Rahman, who is also the project director of SASEC-2, said the ministry held several meetings on the DPP and it is expected to be sent to the Planning Commission soon.

After necessary scrutiny, the DPP would be then sent to Ecneq for approval, as per the usual practice.

Replying to another question, he said they were hopeful about starting the project work in the middle of next year after completion of all other procedures.

DON'T MAKE SAME MISTAKE AGAIN

The government in March 2013 undertook SASEC Road Connectivity Project-1 to expand 70km road from Joydevpur to Elenga into four-lane, with a provision of only three overpasses and two railway overpasses.

Later, the authority had to revise the project adding four more overpasses and 11 underpasses, which not only escalated the cost but also the duration.

South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) project-2 was undertaken in September 2016 for upgrading 190km highway from Elenga to Rangpur to four-lane at the cost of Tk 11,899.01 crore.

In the original DPP, it had three overpasses, 39 underpasses and two railway overpasses. In the revised DPP, three more overpasses have been added.

The original cost of SASEC-1 was Tk 2,788.45 crore, which rose to Tk 6,214 crore after several revisions.

On the other hand, the cost of

No mask

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February 29."

He promised to put up placards in front of markets and ask guards not to allow anyone inside malls without masks.

However, in many places, many customers were seen purchasing items in different markets without wearing masks.

Asked, one such customer of Dhaka New Market named Amina Khatun said she was not aware of the announcement.

Iman Ali, a sales staff of Madina Trading at the New Market, said they could not force customers to wear masks. "It might create unpleasant situation," he added.

Same was seen while different markets in the capital's Dhanmondi area.

Several customers welcomed the Dokan Malik Samity's initiative saying this would create conscious among people to wear masks.

Some people, however, questioned who would implement the decision and who would monitor this?

On October 25, the government asked all organisations not to provide services to people without a face covering as it aims to curb a possible second wave of Covid-19.

A "no mask, no service" policy will be implemented and all organisations will be monitored because the government made masks mandatory in all institutions, markets, schools, social and religious gatherings.

The directives came during a virtual cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

PM for testing

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was arranged at Osmani Memorial Auditorium while she attended it from her official residence the Gono Bhaban.

The prime minister said that anyone coming from abroad has to go through this check for ensuring the safety of the people. She also asked the authorities concerned to take steps.

In this connection, she mentioned that at the initial stage of the outbreak, the government had issued 21 directives to keep the people of the country safe from Covid-19 infection.

She said that COVID-19 has been spreading around the world again on a massive scale and many countries in Europe, including the UK, have announced fresh lockdowns.

"We have to remain safe [and] must use masks whenever we go out in public," she said. "Use masks, keep yourself and others safe."

The first November's youth day has been named Bangabandhu National Youth Day on the occasion of the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russell presided over the programme where Youth and Sports Secretary Mohammad Akhter Hossain also spoke.

Earlier, Russell handed over Bangabandhu National Youth Award (cash, certificate and crest) to 21 successful self-employed youths and five successful youth organisers in recognition of their exemplary contribution in setting up self-employment projects.

3 to walk

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higher courts.

According to the prosecution, Payel, a BBA fifth-semester student of North South University, went missing while returning to Dhaka from Chattogram on a bus of Hanif Paribahan on July 21, 2018.

On July 23, his body was recovered from the canal under Bhatarchar bridge in Gazaria upazila in Munshiganj.

Golam Sorwardy Biplob, uncle of the victim, filed a murder case with Gazaria Police Station the next day.

Police arrested three employees of that bus from the capital.

One of them later told a Munshiganj court that there was traffic jam near Bhatarchar at Gazaria on Dhaka-Chittagong highway, where the bus that carried Payel got stuck. Payel got off the bus to relieve himself, and before he could board the bus, the vehicle set off as traffic started moving again. He ran behind the bus. The bus stopped but he injured himself badly when the bus's automatic door opened on him. He fell unconscious.

The supervisor informed the matter to the driver. Driver Jamal Hossain, helper Faisal and supervisor Johny together decided to not take Payel back on the bus. Instead, they carried the bloodied youth and threw him into a canal from over the Bhatarchar bridge. It was about 4:00am and the passengers were sleeping.

Inspector Mamun Al Rashid of Gazaria Police Station pressed charges against the three on October 24, 2018.

Following an appeal by Payel's family, the case was moved to the Speedy Trial Tribunal of Chattogram on December 24 that year.

The tribunal framed charges against them on April 2 last year.

Later, the case was moved to the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 of Dhaka for judgement.

Fourteen prosecution witnesses gave their depositions before the tribunal in the case.

Earlier, the tribunal fixed yesterday for delivering the judgement on completion of the arguments from both prosecution and defence.