

BANGLADESH UPDATE



2,159
New cases in 24hrs



4,84,104
Total cases



6,930
Deaths



4,05,966
Recoveries



1,567,461
Deaths



68,792,445
Total cases

Take action to prevent recurrence of genocide

PM urges global community

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the global community to undertake concerted action to address the root causes of genocide and ensure justice to the victims to prevent the recurrence of any future genocide in the world.

She said Bangladesh is among the few countries that have experienced one of the worst forms of genocide during the Liberation War in 1971.

The PM came up with the remarks in a message on the occasion of the "International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime" and the "72nd Anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide".

Hasina said Bangladesh parliament decided to observe March 25 as Genocide Day to pay deep homage to the victims of the genocide of 1971 and to uphold the country's commitment to prevent these crimes against humanity. The Day is observed every year.

She said the persecution of the Rohingyas in Myanmar is yet another

painful example of such crimes.

The premier said Bangladesh has been temporarily sheltering nearly one million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals for the last three years.

She urged the international community to help Rohingyas return to Myanmar at the earliest and ensure that they can live there in safety and security.

PM FOR GLOBAL ACTION TO SAVE PLANET

Addressing the "Thimphu Ambition Summit" virtually, Hasina yesterday stressed the need for robust international climate coalitions to reduce carbon emission effectively and save the future generations.

"I would like to underscore the significance of positive and robust international climate coalitions that can reduce the global carbon emission effectively to move towards carbon neutrality before the mid-century. So, I call for your urgent and decisive action to save our future generations," she said.

The government of Bhutan, the chair of the LDC Group in the UNFCCC, organised the summit on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the Paris Agreement.



Rubble and debris of concrete by the road at Phulbaria after Dhaka South City Corporation authorities demolished illegal structures in the area yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Manpower-starved railway hiring at last

FROM PAGE 1

The move to increase manpower comes at a time when BR is facing a huge shortage of workforce directly involved in train operations.

A total of 15,350, out of 40,275 existing posts, remained vacant till June this year. The operations of more than 100 stations cannot be resumed due to lack of manpower.

On the other hand, the recruitment of additional manpower will put more financial pressure on BR, which is continuing to incur losses -- Tk 1,738.37 crore in the 2018-19 fiscal year. Last fiscal year's data was not available.

NEW RECRUITMENT RULES

Until 2017, BR had been recruiting employees -- grade 10 to 20 -- under Bangladesh Railway Non-Gazetted Service Recruitment Rules-1985 though it was annulled in June 2013 following a High Court verdict, officials said.

The HC declared illegal the seventh constitutional amendment that had legitimised the military rule of Hussain Muhammad Ershad. The 1985 rules were cancelled as they were enacted during Ershad's regime.

Unaware of it, BR continued to recruit employees from June 2013 till 2017, and some 4,000 employees

were recruited during this period. Knowing about the order, BR stopped recruitment process, sources said.

The officials this correspondent talked to could not explain this "misunderstanding".

Later, following the direct intervention of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, BR and railways ministry prepared the new rules that already got final approval.

Jobs of the 4,000 employees were given retrospective validity under the new rules, the officials said.

The new rules say a committee led by a joint director general of BR will conduct the recruitment process. The five-member committee will have representatives from the railways ministry, public administration ministry, and Bangladesh Public Service Commission.

BR Director General Md Shamsuzzaman said the previous rules had some inconsistencies. "Now, Bangladesh Railway will follow the same recruitment process that other government agencies follow," he said recently.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujon said the new process will ensure transparency in railway recruitment. "We will start the recruitment process very soon," he told The Daily

Star on November 19.

ORGANOGRAM MYSTERY

In all recent documents, 40,275 posts were mentioned as BR's manpower.

Interestingly, when BR went to change the organogram, they found BR actually has 82,892 posts.

Two officials of BR and the railways ministry with knowledge of the matter said, in 1983, the Enam Committee report stipulated 68,524 posts for BR.

Besides, BR created 14,368 posts, mainly for its workshops in between 1983 and 1997, raising the total number of posts to 82,892, they said.

But in the late '90s, the World Bank suggested BR reduce its manpower significantly to get loans and since then, 40,275 posts were mentioned as BR manpower, one of the officials said.

"I think the organogram [of 40,275] was not approved maintaining all necessary procedure. So we have to follow the organogram of 82,892 when we went to revise the organogram," he told this correspondent recently, wishing to remain unnamed.

As a result, BR had to first cancel 40,728 posts and then it placed a new organogram incorporating some new posts, he said, adding that the finance ministry gave approval to 47,703 posts.

Now, there are two more steps

Australia orders extremism probe amid push to tackle far-right

AFP, Sydney

Australia yesterday ordered an inquiry into combating violent extremism, after a concerted push for the government to ensure it is equipped to face a growing threat from the far right.

The country's powerful parliamentary intelligence and security committee announced it will examine the spread of radical movements and the threat they pose to Australians.

Conservative Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton prevented the probe from focusing solely on emerging far-right terror, ordering it to instead broaden its focus to include Islamist groups.

The announcement came a day after a New Zealand inquiry into the massacre of 51 Muslim worshippers in Christchurch by an Australian white supremacist gunman called for sweeping changes to counter-terrorism operations.

Dense fog disrupts life

FROM PAGE 1

places in Khulna, Rangpur and Chattogram, fog has covered the entire country. The fog may prevail today too, it added.

There may be moderate to thick fog from midnight to morning, the Met office said in its bulletin published at 6:00pm yesterday.

Three flights of China Southern, Saudi Arabian Airlines and Malindo Air could not land at HSI on Tuesday night due to heavy fog, leaving several hundred passengers stranded.

China Southern flight CZ-391 was supposed to land at HSI at 11:20pm, but was forced to return back to Kunming due to heavy fog, said Md Doulotuzzaman, assistant director of air traffic control at HSI.

The Saudia flight, SV 804, from Riyadh was supposed to land at HSI around 11:30pm.

"After entering Bangladesh territory, the pilot saw bad weather and was forced to divert to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport in Kolkata due to poor visibility," Doulotuzzaman added.

Malindo Air's flight OD-162 from Kuala Lumpur, which was supposed to land in Dhaka at 11:50pm, was also forced to divert to Don Mueang Airport in Bangkok.

The situation was no better for those travelling by road.

In Manikganj, passengers of 21 south-western districts were stranded for around 12 hours since Tuesday night as ferry services on the Paturia-Daulatdia route were suspended due to thick fog.

The hardship was greater for women and children as over the period, they were unable to go to the toilet.

"I reached Paturia ferry terminal around 10:00pm on Tuesday night. I have been waiting here for over 12 hours. I don't know when my bus will be allowed to board the ferry," said SS Sourav, a Chuadanga-bound passenger.

"I have taken two days' leave from my office to visit my village home. But I have already spent one day here. I don't know when I can go home and when I will go back to work in Dhaka," said Al Wafiq, a passenger who claimed he had been waiting at Paturia terminal for around 12

hours.

Sabina Yasmin, a female traveller from Kushtia, said, "There is no toilet facility for women. How can we survive without using toilets for around 12 hours?"

Finally, services resumed around 10:00am when the fog started to clear, said Jilur Rahman, deputy general manager (commerce) of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation's Aricha ferry terminal.

Four ferries were forced to anchor in the middle of the Padma river, the BIWTC official said.

Over 500 vehicles, including more than 300 goods-laden trucks, were stuck on the Paturia side following the suspension of the ferry services.

In Munshiganj, ferry services were suspended for eight hours from around 10:00pm on Tuesday on the Shimulia-Banglabazar route due to heavy fog.

Over 400 vehicles were stranded on both sides of the river.

Finally, ferry operations resumed around 6:00am yesterday, said Shafayet Ahmed, BIWTC manager at Shimulia ferry terminal.

In Tangail, vehicular movement on Bangabandhu Multipurpose bridge was suspended twice early yesterday due to dense fog.

Hundreds of passengers and vehicle operators faced immense hardship as long tailbacks were created on both sides of the bridges.

The bridge authorities suspended vehicular movement for around one and a half hours in two phases -- around 1:10am and then around 3:30am -- to avoid accidents, said Kazi Aiyubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Bangabandhu Bridge East Police Station.

The tailbacks of numerous vehicles at one stage spread about 20km to Rabna bypass in Tangail from the east side of the bridge and 22km to Hatikumrul intersection in Sirajganj from the west side of the bridge, said passengers and transport workers.

The long tailback lasted for around 10 hours. Vehicular movement became normal around 12:00pm yesterday, said Kamal Hossain, in-charge of Elega Highway Police Outpost.

[Our correspondents from Manikganj, Munshiganj and Tangail contributed to this report]

The poor may face disparity

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potential doses. Canada is buying enough to vaccinate its population five times over, Oxfam said.

"By buying up the vast majority of the world's vaccine supply, rich countries are in breach of their human rights obligations," Steve Cockburn, Amnesty International's Head of Economic and Social Justice, said in a statement.

Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) officials, however, claim that Bangladesh will buy 68 million doses from vaccine alliance Gavi under a global arrangement called COVAX facility and another 30 million doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from Serum Institute of India.

Officials expect the country to receive the first shipment of the doses from Gavi between February and June 2021 while vaccines from Serum may arrive by February 2021.

However, the most pertinent question now is who will be vaccinated first as the government is yet to publish its vaccine distribution plan.

Officials said the priority is likely to be given to healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses, health management and support workers, and technicians directly involved in treatment and other Covid-related activities.

In the second phase, frontline professionals such as members of law enforcement agencies and journalists, and people aged above 60 with comorbidity are likely to receive the shots.

Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of the pharmacology department at the BSMMU, told this correspondent recently, "Concern remains as to when the vaccines would reach the country and whether those could be administered to the people timely and

properly."

Prof Nazrul Islam, member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19, apprehends that people living in the peripheries may not get vaccines timely, which will create a disparity in vaccination too.

"Have we arranged a separate capacity to store Covid-19 vaccines in upazilas? If not, how will people living in rural areas get vaccines?" he added.

TESTING DISPARITY

The death of 63-year-old Monowara Begum in an ambulance on June 2 after six hospitals in Sylhet refused to treat her fearing she had Covid-19 made headlines.

Like her, many patients seeking emergency treatment died simply because they did not have access to coronavirus testing facilities.

Prof Nazrul told The Daily Star, "When one is refused treatment without a Covid-19 negative certificate, the government has to take the responsibility."

As of December 3, a total of 2,203 people died after developing Covid-19 like symptoms, according to the centre for genocide studies at Dhaka University.

The total number of confirmed deaths due to Covid-19 is 6,930 as of yesterday, according to the DGHS.

Experts said the number of deaths due to Covid-19 is higher than the official figure as most people have no access to testing facilities.

Over the last 30 days, on an average 15,000 people were tested daily. The total tests conducted, as of yesterday, was 29,11,664.

According to ourworldindata.org, Bangladesh did around 0.09 tests per 1,000 people, one of the lowest in the

world.

Against this backdrop, the government has introduced antigen-based rapid testing in 10 districts after months of bureaucratic exercise.

Yet, the number of tests has not increased while the officials, including the health minister, blamed people "for not coming forward for the test".

According to the officials, the DGHS has eight teams for Covid-19 sample collection in Dhaka city who collect up to 150 samples a day.

TREATMENT FOR ALL, A FAR CRY

The Covid-19 treatment situation has not improved notably since the beginning of the pandemic and experts are saying that Covid-19 revealed the "discriminatory" nature of the country's health system, under which the poor and those living in the peripheries are deprived of access to proper health care.

"Before Covid-19, those who had no money were deprived of treatment. During the Covid-19 health emergency, even money can't guarantee treatment. Only the elites have the access," Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Quality treatment facilities are mainly in Dhaka and Chattogram and the tertiary hospitals in divisional headquarters have very little capacity to handle critical patients.

According to the DGHS yesterday's press release, 19 Covid-19 dedicated hospitals out of the 29 are in Dhaka city while the rest 10 are in Chattogram city.

According to last month's information obtained by The Daily Star, only 24 of these hospitals had a central oxygen supply system.

before getting final approval from the Prime Minister's Office and the process is expected to be completed within three months, another official said.

NEW WINGS

Currently, BR has five major wings -- each led by an additional director general (ADG).

BR will have another ADG post -- ADG (development) -- mainly to lead after all BR projects, sources said. There will be four posts of joint director general (JDG) under the ADG.

"There is an allegation that the traffic department has less involvement in development projects. This new wing will synchronise all departments," BR DG Md Shamsuzzaman said.

Besides, there will be an Information and Communications Technology Cell under a senior system analyst to deal with ICT-related issues, he said, adding that BR's public relations wing will also be strengthened.

Md Shamsuzzaman said they have already held a meeting about starting the recruitment process.

However, BR will not be allowed to fill all vacant posts at a time as per the conditions set by the finance ministry, he said. "We have to inform the ministry about our recruitment plan beforehand," he added.

"We had strongly recommended setting up a central oxygen supply system in all district-level hospitals months before. But we saw no progress yet. A Covid-19 patient with severe symptoms having to come to Dhaka cannot be a system," Prof Nazrul said.

He said, "People needing to go to tertiary level hospitals or needing to do everything themselves to get treatment means that those who have no money will die without treatment. This is not only a violation of human rights but also a violation of constitutional rights."

Based on discussion with families of several Covid-19 patients, per day treatment cost for a Covid-19 patient in private hospitals is between Tk 50,000 and Tk 70,000. The cost goes up multiple times in case of comorbidities.

It is not easy even at government hospitals in the capital.

The mother of Dr Ershadul Haque, registrar of National Institute of Kidney Disease and Urology, died from Covid-19 on November 24 at Dhaka CMH.

"When my mother developed severe symptoms ... We took her to BSMMU. As it had no ICU available, we took her to Bangladesh Institute of Health Sciences Hospital. To get better treatment, we took her to CMH. I can't describe how tough it is to arrange ambulances and look for better treatment. It was a nightmare," Ershad told this correspondent.

In addition to the incapacity of the healthcare system, unavailability of proper and real-time information about services available has made the situation even worse for the masses.

He had spent around Tk 4 lakh for her treatment in government hospitals, where she stayed only two weeks.

All set for installation of the last span today

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the secretary of Bridges Division, told The Daily Star last night.

Implementation of the project was possible due to a courageous decision by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, he added.

Replying to a question, Belayet said they were hopeful of completing the rest of the project works within 15 months, as the Covid-19 pandemic slowed down the pace of the works.

Once opened to traffic, the 6.15km-long bridge will connect the capital with 21 southwestern districts. It is expected to boost the country's gross domestic product by 1.2 percent.

Following the installation of the 40th span on December 4, discussions began about the installation of the last span. Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader on Monday said the last span would be installed by December 10.

The move to install the last span created much enthusiasm among the people as they are waiting with bated breath to see the completion of the span installation work.

The authorities, however, have cancelled their planned celebration of the installation of the last span due to the

Covid-19 pandemic.

Visiting the project site on Tuesday, this correspondent found the 150-metre-long span being shifted to a jetty from the shore in the morning. A national flag of Bangladesh was hanging from the frame of the huge steel structure.

"The dreamt Padma Bridge is now on the verge of becoming a reality with years-long efforts of the local and foreign workforce," read a festoon on the span.

The final span was also draped with several other festoons with a message written in a Chinese language.

Mamun, who has been working as a foreman of the project since 2015, said he had the privilege of watching the installation of the first span in September 2017.

"I was there when the first span was installed. Our national flag was there with the first span. Now the last span will also carry our national flag," he told this correspondent.

"When I started working here in 2015, there was no structure over the river. Now an entire bridge is going to be there. It gives me immense pleasure," Mamun said.

Although there was fog on the river yesterday, the span was taken near pillars

12 and 13 around 5:45pm, Dewan Md Abdul Kader, executive engineer and project manager (main bridge), told this correspondent.

"We have a plan to install the last span tomorrow [today] unless fog creates any problem," Project Director Shafiqul Islam told The Daily Star.

Railway and roadway slabs are being installed now and some others works, including installation of electricity and gas lines, have to be completed before the opening of the bridge to traffic.

Out of 2,917 roadway slabs, around 1,300 were installed till Tuesday while 1,930 out of 2,959 railway slabs were installed, officials said.

The current deadline of the fast-track project is June 2021, meaning the project is likely to see another extension of its deadline. The project cost rose to Tk 30,193 crore after several revisions of the deadline.

The Padma Bridge project is being implemented with the country's own funds after the World Bank and other international lenders had cancelled financing over allegations of corruption, which were later found to be not true.

ABC MOURNS



Mr. Zahidul Islam
(1954 - 2020)

With great sorrow, ABC Family mourns the sad and shocking demise of Mr. Zahidul Islam (66), Director of Associated Builders Corporation Ltd. and ABC Building Products Ltd. He breathed his last on Tuesday, 8th December 2020 at 7.20 PM in United Hospital (Inna Lillahi Wa Inna Illahi Rajeun).

Mr. Zahidul Islam, born in Jhenaidah in 1954, was the only son of ABC's Founder Director Late Engr. Amirul Islam.

The Management and the employees of all concerns of ABC Family are deeply saddened by this loss and convey deepest condolences to his bereaved family. May his departed soul rest in eternal peace.



ABC FAMILY SINCE 1972