

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



1,470
New cases in 24hrs



502,183
Total cases



7,312
Deaths



439,694
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,705,222
Deaths



77,499,642
Total cases

TELECOM NETWORK IN MYANMAR

Two UK banks under pressure for lending money

STAR REPORT

Two of Britain's biggest banks are under pressure for lending tens of millions of pounds to a technology company building a telecoms network that is part-owned and used by the Myanmar military, which is accused of committing genocide against the Rohingyas.

Human rights groups are demanding that the banks explain why they lent the money to such a company. The Observer, a sister concern of The Guardian, reported on Sunday.

HSBC and Standard Chartered have loaned \$60m (£44.5m) to Vietnamese telecom giant Viettel in the last four years, a period when the Myanmar military has been accused of committing war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity, said the report.

About 750,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military campaign in Myanmar's Rakhine state and took shelter in Bangladesh in 2017. Myanmar now faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice.

According to a report by the campaign group Justice For Myanmar (JFM), Viettel is a major investor in Mytel, a Myanmar mobile network that, since its launch in June 2018, has grown to become the second-biggest operator in the country with over 10 million users.

A Myanmar state-owned enterprise, Star High Co Ltd, a subsidiary of the military-operated Myanmar Economic Corporation, has a 28pc stake in the network; Viettel's international telecommunications investment subsidiary, Viettel Global JSC, controls 49pc; and Myanmar National Telecom Holdings, representing a group of Myanmar companies, owns 23pc.

The shareholding structure, which confirms Mytel is a major revenue generator for the Myanmar military, has been revealed by the JFM in a report, says The Observer.

JFM says Viettel units, under the Vietnamese Ministry of National Defence, are mining user-data for analysis in Vietnam. It alleges that the Myanmar military has access to the data, opening up the possibility it could be used for military purposes.

JFM has established that HSBC loaned

\$40m (£29.7m) to Viettel Global JSC between 2016 and 2020, while Standard Chartered's UK arm loaned just over \$20m (£14.8m) over the same period.

"The report sets out very well the position of Mytel in relation to the Myanmar military and the position of Viettel in relation to Mytel," said Christopher Sidoti, a former member of the UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar.

"The facts establish that Mytel plays a vital role for the military and that Viettel makes Mytel possible."

JFM says businesses with interests in Myanmar have responsibilities under UN human-rights principles and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development guidelines to uphold international standards on human rights. It also questions whether HSBC and Standard Chartered may be in breach of EU restrictive measures on Myanmar.

"The report reflects where the money trail leads," Sidoti said. "Among other places, it leads to HSBC and Standard Chartered. The report does this very cautiously, conservatively, not asserting that HSBC and Standard Chartered are liable for prosecution for crimes under international law or that they are directly aiding and abetting the commission of such crimes. Rather, the report puts these companies into a third category of entities that have human-rights due-diligence responsibilities that they have breached. That is a conclusion with which I agree."

Yadanar Maung, a spokesman for JFM, said: "HSBC and Standard Chartered should be transparent and show exactly how they monitor and prevent their loans from financing human rights abuses."

HSBC told The Observer: "HSBC complies with sanctions, laws and regulations in all the jurisdictions in which we operate and strongly supports observance of international human rights principles as they apply to business. We do not comment on client relationships, even to confirm or deny that a relationship exists."

Standard Chartered declined to comment.

UK isolated over virus variant

FROM PAGE 1

more lethal or will affect the impact of vaccines, it may be up to 70 percent more transmissible, according to early data from the UK.

The European Union's crisis team was set to meet yesterday to discuss a coordinated response to the new virus strain -- just as the bloc's health agency is set to decide whether to authorise the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

A German government source said restrictions on air travel from Britain could be adopted by the entire 27-member EU and that countries were also discussing a joint response over sea, road and rail links.

The rapid response thwarted travel around the world just as families were preparing to unite for Christmas.

"Please help us leave!" said one British traveller who was among dozens held overnight in German airports, unable to leave until virus tests come back negative.

The flow of goods from France was also disrupted after Paris imposed a 48-hour blockade on people and lorries crossing the English Channel -- just as companies are racing to shift merchandise before Britain finally quits European Union trade structures.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was set to hold a crisis meeting about the situation yesterday to discuss "in particular the steady flow of freight into and out of the UK", a spokesman said.

The country's critical south coast port of Dover said late Sunday it would close to all accompanied freight and passengers due to the French border restrictions "until further notice".

Yet the Netherlands, another key sea route from Europe to Britain, confirmed its freight routes to the UK remained open despite banning all passenger

ferries.

While India and Hong Kong joined the move to suspend travel from the UK, US officials signalled they were holding off for now while Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said he was confident existing 14-day quarantine rules for arrivals were sufficient to handle the threat.

'REDOUBLE CONTROL'

The coronavirus has changed into many different variants as it has spread around the world, an expected result of interacting with different hosts with different biological responses.

UK scientists first discovered a particularly fast-spreading new variant in a patient in September.

By the week beginning December 9, the new strain was accounting for 60 percent of cases in London, said Patrick Vallance, the government's chief scientific adviser.

Its emergence comes as Europe is trying to clamp down on winter surges fuelled in part by the cold weather that has pushed gatherings inside and enables respiratory diseases to flourish.

A WHO spokeswoman told AFP that "across Europe, where transmission is intense and widespread, countries need to redouble their control and prevention approaches".

In response to data about the new strain, the UK imposed tough new stay-at-home orders on parts of the country including London and announced news curbs around Christmas gatherings.

At the weekend Italy announced a new regime of restrictions until January 6 that include limits on people leaving their homes more than once a day, closing non-essential shops, bars and restaurants and curbs on regional travel.

contributions of the mills at the local level are not recognised. Education, medical care, and housing for the families of state-owned jute and sugar mills workers ensure their human and social development."

Jyotirmoy Barua said, "Section 32 of the labor act clearly states that a worker cannot be evicted from his or her home without paying his or her dues. But we see that the government itself is violating the labor law."

"If the sugar mills had to be closed, then why did the government killed three people at Rangpur sugar mill in 2016 and burnt the houses of two-and-a-half-thousand people? The state has to be held accountable for this."

In his speech, Anu Muhammad said, "When eco-friendly industries are being inspired all over the world, the jute industries with huge potentials are being shut down in Bangladesh through coercion, deception and lies."

Sugar industries are being destroyed paying the ways for importing sugar. It is being done for the interests of the businesspeople, he alleged.

The speakers also placed a seven-point demand that include taking necessary steps to reduce the losses by increasing the production capacity, immediately opening the mills, identification of those involved in irregularities and corruption at the mills and taking legal action against them, and modernisation of the mills equipment.



Two workers trying to give a used excavator a new coat of paint at one of many workshops in City Gate area of Chattogram yesterday. Earth movers used in Japan, Korea, Taiwan are imported, refurbished, and sold between Tk 15 lakh and Tk 2 crore.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

Bangladesh up two notches

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"Bangladesh is on the right track, but there should be steps to stop the growing disparity. Disparity can harm society," he told The Daily Star.

Planning Minister MA Mannan said, "Many people are living under the poverty line due to unacceptable levels of disparity. We need to reduce disparity. We will continue our efforts to make an equity-based society."

In the Human Development Index, Sri Lanka was ranked 72, the best among the eight south Asian countries.

Maldives was the second best, ranking 95. Bhutan ranked 129, India 131, Bangladesh 133, Nepal 142, Pakistan 154, and Afghanistan 169.

Only Afghanistan was categorised as having low human development.

Bangladesh has significantly reduced the gap with several other South Asian countries including India, said Sudipto, adding that Maldives, Bhutan were smaller countries that faced fewer challenges.

Those two countries do not face recurrent disasters and the impacts of climate change like Bangladesh does, he added.

'IMPRESSIVE STRIDES'

Bangladesh has made impressive

COUNTRY	HDI RANK
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Sri Lanka	72
The Maldives	95
Bhutan	129
India	131
Bangladesh	133
Nepal	142
Pakistan	154
Afghanistan	169

strides in human development, the report said.

Between 1990 and 2019, Bangladesh's HDI value has increased by 60.4 percent. The country's 2019 HDI score is above the average for countries in the medium human development group.

Life expectancy in Bangladesh at birth increased by 14.4 years, mean years of schooling (average number of completed years of education of people aged 25 years and older) increased by 3.4 years, and expected years of

schooling increased by six years.

Bangladesh's GNI per capita also increased by about 220.1 percent between 1990 and 2019.

Bangladesh will have to adopt inclusive growth which will not leave anyone behind, said Sudipto.

Planning Minister MA Mannan said there is no doubt that Bangladesh has done well.

"But it is also true that we couldn't reach the level we desired. We have to continue working," he added.

"These types of reports help us understand the reality...find our weaknesses, and set our focus."

The UNDP report usually measures a nation's health, education, and living standards. This year's 30th Anniversary Edition includes a country's carbon dioxide emissions and its material footprint.

These show how the global development landscape would change if both the wellbeing of people and the planet were central to defining humanity's progress. For example, more than 50 countries dropped out of the very high human development group, reflecting their dependence on fossil fuels and material footprint.

A strange scheme to steal NID info

FROM PAGE 1

her NID, but police did not investigate the incident at that time.

Now more than two years later, six more victims of the Jaladas community yesterday submitted a memorandum to the Chattogram superintendent of police, detailing mobile SIM forgery against them by one Kefayat Ullah Khan of Sandwip.

Fisherman Sunil Chandra told The Daily Star, "Kefayat Ullah in the middle of October came to our area and said we would be given aid from the government and asked us to be present at Belal master's yard along with our NID cards."

"The next day, we went there and Kefayat took copies of our NIDs and fingerprints in an electronic device and then gave us a token and asked us to collect the aid from Jahir Sowdagar's grocery."

Krishnapad said, "Like us, people from Dirghapar, Unirchar, and Gachhu unions also gave their fingerprints and NIDs to them and withdrew the aid. Three family members provided NID and fingerprints at that time."

"Back then, we had no idea what was

waiting for us. After one year, we came to learn that using our fingerprints mobile SIMs were withdrawn."

"Against my NID and fingerprints, a total 14 SIMs were withdrawn which all are active. I came to learn that when I went to a local mobile shop to buy SIM cards for my family members."

Sunil said, "We failed to get the money which was disbursed earlier from the PM office during Covid-19 pandemic due to the SIM complications. Apart from that, opening bKash accounts to receive stipends for our children has also been halted."

Nikhil, another victim, said, "We don't know who is using the SIMs and for what purpose. We have assumed that the SIMs might have been used for anti-state conspiracies, so we came to the police for a solution."

Most of the victims said sometimes their used SIMs have also been inactive at times after the incident.

Local and political sources of Sandwip confirmed that Kefayat Ullah Khan alias Kefayat Khan introduced himself as the president of "Nowkar Notun Projonmo" of Chattogram city unit. But he is now in Sandwip and has

no post in local politics in the area.

The sources also said Kefayat ran the syndicate in the name of giving aid to underprivileged people in remote areas.

Mosharraf Hossain Imrul, Union Parishad member of No.2 Sontoshpur Union Parishad, told The Daily Star, "After the incident, the victims came and informed us. I informed police but nothing was done."

Sunil said, "We are feeling insecure as we don't know who is running the SIMs, especially since Rohingya refugees recently moved to Bhashan Char near Sandwip from Cox's Bazar. In case of any criminal allegation by those using our information, we would be the ones accused."

Chattogram's SP SM Rashidul Haque told The Daily Star, "After learning about the incident, I have ordered the Officer-in-Charge of Sandwip Police Station to take action in this regard after investigation."

"It's a very sensitive issue and criminals will be brought to book if we receive a written complaint."

This correspondent tried to reach the accused Kefayat but could not despite repeated attempts.

6cr Covid shots expected by June

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it will be available to the general public in India in March-April, while UK's Guardian newspaper reported that the vaccine's approval may be delayed until the beginning of January.

WHEN WILL THE VACCINE ARRIVE? Pune-based Serum has an agreement with AstraZeneca to manufacture the vaccine, ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, being developed by Oxford University. The vaccine has been named Covishield in India.

While the Bangladesh government has been saying the country will start getting Covishield vaccines by early January or late February, Indian media reported that it may be available by March-April for use by the general public.

On December 7, the Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer in terms of volume, applied to the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for emergency use authorisation for the Oxford-Astrazeneca vaccine, reports Hindustan Times newspaper.

During a Hindustan Times Leadership Summit on November 19, Adar Poonawalla, chief executive officer of SII, said, "Emergency use authorisation will be for healthcare workers and other frontline workers, and by March-April, the vaccine should be available to the general public."

He said emergency use licensure is based on the positive UK results. "[In the UK] There is a good T-cell and antibody response but nobody at this

stage can answer whether these vaccines can protect in the long-term."

The UK's Guardian newspaper said in a report on Saturday that authorisation of the Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine in the UK could be delayed until the beginning of January.

Results from global studies have shown that it can be 90 percent effective in preventing an infection when a person receives a half dose and then a full dose.

Abdul Mannan, secretary of the health services division, said the timeline the government is talking about is based on what Beximco said in a meeting in presence of the representatives of SII.

"What sir [cabinet secretary] said is based on the information we [health ministry] have... Beximco said, in presence of Serum [SII] representatives, that they will supply vaccines to the market by February. As Serum has not told us there will be a delay, we have to stay on the February deadline."

Asked again about the condition of approval of the Oxford vaccines from the World Health Organization, Mannan said, "If that [WHO approval] does not happen, it will not happen anywhere in the world; not just here [Bangladesh], but also in India."

Meanwhile, when a safe and effective vaccine is found, COVAX -- a global initiative coordinated by WHO, GAVI and CEPI -- will facilitate equitable access and distribution to protect people in all countries.

It aims to distribute 2 billion doses

of Covid-19 vaccines from several manufacturers by the end of 2021, according to the WHO.

Replying to a question, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam also said the government is now thinking only of the Oxford vaccine, but would not be rigid about any other vaccine that gets WHO approval.

During the briefing, the cabinet secretary also said the prime minister had directed to implement the "No Mask No Service" policy strictly.

VACCINE STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION

The training for vaccination has been started and Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) vaccination chain will be engaged massively for the Covid vaccination, Khandker Anwarul Islam said, adding that the vaccine issue was raised during the unscheduled discussion at the cabinet meeting.

To distribute vaccines, the government is close to finalising the National Vaccine Deployment Plan, according to officials.

Dr Shamsul Haque Mridha, director of the EPI, told The Daily Star yesterday, "Currently we have stored 3.5 crore doses of measles-rubella vaccine which is additional to the capacity for the regular vaccines. We will not have any problem in vaccine storage. We are also working to arrange additional back-up storage."

Experts, however, warned that there may be chaos if the plan is not consistent with field-level realities.

China aircraft carrier sails through Taiwan Strait raising alarm

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

An aircraft carrier group led by China's newest carrier, the Shandong, sailed through the Taiwan Strait on its way to routine drills in the South China Sea, China's navy said yesterday, after Taiwan mobilised its forces to monitor the convoy.

The Shandong sailed through the Taiwan Strait a day after a US warship passed through the same stretch of sea.

China's navy said the Shandong and its accompanying ships had "smoothly" travelled through the sensitive Taiwan Strait on Sunday, heading for exercises in the South China Sea, where China has made extensive territorial claims in the disputed waters.

The drills are part of "normal arrangements made in accordance with annual plans", it said. "In the future, we will continue to organise similar operations based on training needs."

The carrier's move through the strait comes amid rising tension between China and Taiwan, which Beijing sees as part of its territory. The democratically ruled island says it has recorded almost daily incursions into its airspace by the Chinese armed forces in recent months.

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense said the Shandong was accompanied by four warships and had set out from the northern Chinese port of Dalian on Thursday. In a statement on its website, it said the convoy continued to move south.

Taiwan said it sent six warships and eight military aircraft to monitor the Chinese ships' movements.

"The military has the confidence and ability to protect its homeland, ensure national security and maintain regional peace and stability," the statement said.

The Shandong is China's second carrier, and was formally commissioned almost exactly a year ago.

Since then, it has successfully completed tasks such as carrier-based aircraft take-off and landing and use of its weapons, the Chinese navy said.

"The combat capability of the formation system has been continuously improved in experimental training," it added, referring to the group of warships which accompany the Shandong.

China has been working to hone its carrier operations but has little experience compared to the United States, which has operated integrated carrier battle groups with multiple vessels for decades.

Saudi Arabia

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The Gaca said the suspension can be extended for another week and the instructions will be reviewed and updated in accordance with coronavirus-related developments.

Meanwhile, Biman Bangladesh Airlines yesterday in a release said all flights of the national flag carrier to and from Jeddah, Riyadh and Dammam have been canceled for a week from December 21 due to the suspension imposed by the Saudi authorities.

Passengers of canceled flights will be allotted seats on a priority basis after resumption of flight operations, subject to availability of seats, said the circular.

Biman operates seven flights a week on Dhaka-Jeddah, Dhaka-Riyadh and Dhaka-Dammam routes while Saudia operates 10 flights a week between Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia.

A huge backlog of Saudi-bound Bangladeshi passengers was created a few months ago as air travel between the two countries remained suspended for over six months since March due to the pandemic. The backlog was almost cleared recently after resumption of air travel in September, a Saudia official said wishing anonymity.

The fresh suspension of flights might again create uncertainty over the return of Bangladeshi workers to Saudi Arabia, he added.

List money

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Chattogram, and MAG Osmani International Airport in Sylhet -- in the country.

The bench said Bangladeshi nationals, who have dual citizenships and dual passports and built and purchased residences in different foreign countries by laundering money, have been going abroad and returning to the country through these three international airports.

Therefore, the airports must have some records about the people who built.

Lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan appeared for the Anti-Corruption Commission while Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik represented the state during yesterday's hearing.

Earlier on November 22, the same HC bench issued an injunction to restrain people from laundering money abroad and directed intelligence agencies to take appropriate steps to stop money laundering.