

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



1,517
New cases in 24hrs



4,14,164
Total cases



6,004
Deaths



3,31,697
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,223,401
Deaths



48,053,630
Total cases

Dropped calls irk phone users

FROM PAGE 1
over 48 crore call drops were experienced by the subscribers in the eight months, according to the BTRC.

However, Md Quamruzzaman Ripon, a Robi subscriber who lives in the capital's Lalmatia, said he experienced fewer call drops this year compared to last year.

"Robi's call drop in the given time is less than 1 percent which is well below BTRC's standard rate of 2 percent for call drops," said Robi Axiata in an email reply yesterday.

Robi Axiata also said in Bangladesh, mobile operators are being forced to operate within a limited spectrum (the radio frequencies allocated to the mobile industry and other sectors for communication over the airwaves) principally due to price issues.

In order to ensure quality service, there is no alternative to allocation of an adequate amount of spectrum to operators considering the number of people they serve, it added.

The operator had applied to the government and the BTRC last year for additional spectrum at a discounted price, which is still awaiting regulatory approval.

Those in rural areas seem to encounter call drops and poor signals more frequently than city residents.

Jayed Rahman, a resident of Gopalganj's Muksudpur, subscribes to the services of three operators -- Grameenphone (GP), Banglalink and Robi.

"While at home I face network problems with all of three operators. But the worst experience is with GP's network," said Rahman.

However, half a dozen people in the capital using dual networks at a time said GP is comparatively better as it has fewer call drops and instances of poor signals.

There were over 46 crore call drops for GP users in the eight months. The leading operator has 7.75 crore subscribers as of September.

Banglalink users Tanzina Aktari Moumi, who has been living at Bogura town's Colony area since the pandemic hit Bangladesh, has given up using Banglalink in May after facing frequent call drops.

"In a 10-minute call, there were three-four call drops. I was so fed up that I switched to another operator," she said

However, Abdus Salam of Habiganj said he has been using Banglalink, which now has 3.47 crore subscribers, for over a decade and its network is good.

CALL DROPS IN CRORES IN 2020					
MONTH	GP	ROBI	BANGLALINK	TELETALK	TOTAL
January	5.44	5.79	1.96	0.59	13.79
February	5.7	5.88	2.02	0.53	14.16
March	6.46	6.82	2.21	0.47	15.97
April	5.31	5.23	1.56	0.42	12.54
May	5.93	5.99	1.77	0.52	14.23
June	5.44	5.79	1.69	0.51	13.45
July	5.64	6.19	1.68	0.52	14.03
August	6.05	6.45	1.72	0.51	14.74
TOTAL	46.01	48.17	14.65	4.11	112.94

SOURCE: BTRC

Misinformation swirls

FROM PAGE 1
vowed action on posts by candidates trying to declare early victory.

Twitter also applied labels to posts by Democrat and Republican officials in the battleground states of Wisconsin and Florida, warning users that the information may be contested or inaccurate.

Early yesterday, Twitter hid a Trump tweet that claimed "we are up BIG, but they are trying to STEAL the Election" behind a label that said it was potentially misleading. The company also restricted users' ability to share the post.

Facebook added a label to the same post, which had about 18,000 shares, that said "final results may be different from initial vote counts as ballot counting will continue for days

Banglalink subscribers experienced 14.65 crore call drops in the first eight months of this year, putting the operator in a better position from top rivals Grameenphone and Robi Axiata in terms of call drop figures.

"Our call drop rate is much lower than the benchmark set by BTRC. In order to ensure the best digital and voice services, we purchased 10.6 MHz spectrum back in 2018," said Taimur Rahman, chief corporate and regulatory affairs officer of Banglalink.

There is 1 Megahertz spectrum for around every 1.1 million Banglalink users, which is the highest ratio among operators other than Teletalk.

Zehad Al Mehedi, a customer of state-owned mobile operator Teletalk residing in Dhaka, often faces call drops and poor signals during conversations with his parents in Bagerhat.

There were 4.11 crore call drops in the eight-month period for Teletalk customers.

Posts and Telecommunications Minister Mustafa Jabbar recently told The Daily Star he is concerned about frequent call drops.

"Our telcos is doing well in many areas but there is some technical advancement needed to address the issue of call drops," he said.

He stressed on tougher regulatory reassures to ensure the customers' rights.

However, mobile phone operators argued the industry average for call drops is lower than the average of the developed world with the telecom regulator's ceiling of 2 percent.

"Any number becomes cognisable when compared with the relevant data. So, an average 14-crore call drops per month should be compared with the total number of generated calls during the period to get the actual picture," said Brig Gen SM Farhad (Retd), secretary general of the Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh.

"Moreover, call drops are very natural for wireless services for multiple reasons, such as weather, network conditions, network pockets, network interference, unauthorised jammers, cable cuts, etc.,"

However, in Bangladesh, the mobile call drop rate is within the regulators' threshold, he added.

In the last two years, mobile and internet subscribers increased by over 1 crore and nearly 2 crore respectively.

However, there were no new towers in Bangladesh since then, prompting service quality to decline gradually.

Covid death

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on March 8 while the first death due to the virus was recovered on March 18.

Meanwhile, in those 24 hours, a total of 1,517 new cases of infection were reported. With this, the total number of confirmed cases rose to 414,164.

Against a total of 13,914 tests in 114 laboratories yesterday, the positivity rate in the country was 10.90 percent.

With this, the overall positivity rate stood at 17.33 percent, read a DGHS press release.

Besides, a total of 1,910 Covid-19 patients recovered from their illnesses in those 24 hours, raising the total number of recoveries to 331,697. The overall recovery rate is more than 80 percent.

Of those who died yesterday, 17 were males and four were females. All of them died in hospitals, according to the press release.

One of them aged between 21 and 30, four between 41 and 50, two between 51 and 60 and the rest 14 were above 60 years old.

One each of them was from Mymensingh, Rangpur, Barishal and Khulna divisions while five were from Chattogram and the rest 12 were from Dhaka division, read the press release.

Migrants' crisis mishandled

FROM PAGE 1
They suggested taking prior preparation and due steps ahead of full-fledged resumption of the international labour market and before destination countries resume hiring fresh Bangladeshi workers.

According to Brac Migration Programme, which cited data of immigration authorities at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport and home ministry, about one lakh to 1.5 lakh expatriates came home between January and March this year before the pandemic.

Most of them were expecting to go back to their workplaces but they got stuck due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

When some countries resumed air communications with Bangladesh in mid-June, many workers found the visa validity and residence permits expired.

NO PROPER STRATEGY
"We knew that these people had to return. So why did we not have any proper strategy to deal with return migration?" prominent migration expert Prof CR Abrar told The Daily Star.

"Since our economy thrives on remittance, to what extent did we conduct the negotiation? To what extent there was policy coherence between ministries of civil aviation, expatriates' welfare and overseas employment and foreign affairs?"

He observed there was a "palpable lack of communication channel" to the migrants.

The government's decisions -- like making Covid-19 test mandatory for all out-going passengers irrespective of destination countries, and fixing Tk 3,500 as fee for such passengers -- were made on an ad hoc basis and without due plan and strategy, he noted.

As a result, he added, workers unnecessarily faced harassment and exploitation.

Hundreds of Saudi Arabia-bound migrant workers took to the streets in September when the Gulf country resumed air communications, demanding government steps to renew their re-entry visas and residence permits.

Earlier in July, Saudi Arabia approved three months' automatic extension of the validity of the expired iqama (residency permit) and exit and re-entry visas of expatriates staying outside the Kingdom.

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, thinks a lack of data regarding stranded migrants, especially those who were expecting to return to Saudi Arabia, was an obstacle to dealing with the crisis.

"It would have been easier to make decisions if data on how many migrant workers came home on vacation and how many got stuck was prepared as



Lack of maintenance and cleaning have left the sculpture and mural of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a poor state at Gulistan in the capital. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

early as in April," he told this newspaper.

Those who got stuck at home after coming on vacation suffered most as there was no discussion and plan on them, he added.

The government communicated with Saudi Arabia only after workers' visas and iqamas got expired, he said, adding, "Suffering [of workers] would have been less if we could do this earlier."

Migrant workers' contribution has been considered as one of the main pillars of the country's economy. Last year, the country received \$18.3 billion in remittance sent by migrant workers, shows data from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET).

More than one crore Bangladeshis live in over 160 countries.

Of all migrant workers making trips for jobs abroad since 1976 till last year, 76.93 percent went to six Gulf Cooperation Council countries -- Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Bahrain, says BMET data.

'COMPLEX' LOAN SCHEME

As the deadly virus continued to rage on, about 2.09 lakh Bangladeshi migrant workers, including 22,936 women, returned home between April 1 and October 18, according to data of expatriates' welfare ministry.

Most of them came home after losing jobs.

In order to support the returnees, Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad after an inter-ministerial meeting on April 5 announced a government decision to provide loan support to migrant workers for their reintegration.

The ministry created a Tk 200 crore fund after taking the money from Wage Earners' Welfare Board and prepared the "Guideline for reintegration loan for the Covid-19 affected migrant workers-2020" to disburse loan at 4 percent interest rate through Prabashi Kalyan Bank.

Initially, the loan scheme failed to draw workers' interest as the guideline was "complex", experts say.

The government later published a fresh guideline on September 17 with amendments to some clauses.

As per the previous guideline, a returnee needed to submit details of his or her one-year income and expenditure to get a loan for a project. This obligation has been removed.

Still there are some requirements that many returnees find difficult to fulfil.

For example, a returnee still has to submit documents of either owning or renting a property to get a loan of Tk 5 lakh if he or she wants to start a small-scale trade.

Probashi Kallyan Bank started

disbursing the loan on September 21 and received about 400 applications as of October 13. Some 60 loan schemes worth a little over Tk 1 crore have been disbursed so far, said an official, seeking anonymity.

Brac Migration Programme head Shariful said the previous guideline was "complex and prepared without proper scrutiny" and that the guideline was amended following protest from migrant rights activists.

He said only giving loans to the poor migrants might not help them greatly. Many migrants had been in debt while they were also without income for the past seven to eight months.

Contacted, Md Shahidul Alam, additional secretary (administration wing) of expatriates' welfare ministry, said the expatriates' welfare ministry provided the Probashi Kalyan Bank with money while the bank being comparatively new lacked sufficient manpower for the loan management.

The loan disbursement initiative has got pace lately, he said, adding they made changes to the loan policy.

Commenting on the ministry's handling of the situation, Shahidul said the situation was brought under control "due to government actions".

Apart from holding more than a dozen inter-ministerial meetings, the expatriates' welfare minister personally wrote to different labour-receiving countries so that they take back the stranded migrants when opportunity arrives, he said.

WHAT STILL COULD BE DONE?

The experts suggested taking initiatives on the potential migrants who are facing a new problem after they were asked to resubmit documents for reissuing their visas, which expired amid the pandemic.

As Saudi Arabia will reissue 25,000 new visas, these potential workers have to do their medical tests again, collect fresh "police clearance" certificates, and get fresh approval from their prospective Saudi employers.

"Worryingly, many Saudi employers might not hire the workers amid post-Covid-19 economic situation which could create a new crisis," Shariful Hasan said.

A mechanism could be taken on how such workers get their money back if they fail to get jobs abroad, he said.

"Steps could be taken for 1 crore Bangladeshis who are abroad at present so that they do not have to return in large numbers."

If separate and comprehensive initiatives -- for those who are abroad, or waiting for new employment, and the returnees -- are taken and monitored properly, the problems could be resolved to a great extent, Shariful added.

12-year-old held over rape of girl in Dinajpur

Woman arrested over rape of schoolgirl in Tangail

STAR REPORT

A woman was arrested yesterday in connection with the rape of a schoolgirl in Tangail, while in Dinajpur, a 12-year-old boy was arrested for the rape of a seven-year old.

In Tangail, the victim's father filed a case on Tuesday night against one Ratan Sarkar, a clothes trader, and Sumi Begum, the girl's neighbour.

Saidul Islam Bhuiyan, officer-in-charge of Delduar Police Station, told The Daily Star that after the case was filed, police conducted a raid and arrested Sumi. She was presented before court yesterday.

Saidul added that the victim was sent to hospital for tests while drives were being conducted to arrest Ratan.

According to the case statement, the schoolgirl went to Sumi's house on Saturday evening and Ratan went there at the same time.

Allegedly as per previously planned, Sumi gave the girl a piece of cake and asked Ratan to give her water. He drugged the girl by mixing sedatives in the water. When she was senseless, Sumi and Ratan tied her hands and legs and he raped her.

When the girl did not return home, her mother and elder sister went to Sumi's house and found the girl tied up.

Meanwhile in Dinajpur's Phulbari Upazila, police arrested a 12-year-old rape accused early yesterday.

Police produced the boy before a Senior Judicial Magistrate's court yesterday afternoon.

Dinajpur's Court Inspector Israel Hossain said the court recorded the boy's statement and is yet to decide where he should be sent.

Phulbari Police arrested the boy from his home, said family members said.

Quoting the First Information Report, the boy, on Tuesday afternoon, lured the seven-year-old girl behind a bush and raped her.

Hearing her screams, locals rushed there and rescued her but the boy had fled by then.

The girl's mother filed the case with Phulbari Police Station on Tuesday night, said Mahmudul Hasan Inspector (Investigation) and the office-in-charge of the station.

The girl was sent to M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital for forensic test, police said.

(Our Tangail and Dinajpur correspondents contributed to the report.)

HC accepts Minni's appeal for hearing

She challenges her conviction in Rifat murder case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday accepted for hearing the appeal filed by Ayesha Siddika Minni challenging the Barguna court verdict that convicted and sentenced her to death in her husband Rifat Sharif's murder case.

It also stayed the trial court order that fined her Tk 50,000 in the case.

The bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman came up with the order after Minni's lawyer ZI Khan Panna placed the appeal before the judges for its admission for hearing.

ZI Khan Panna told The Daily Star that they would take necessary steps so that the HC holds hearing of his client's appeal as soon as possible.

He said some other convicts have also filed appeals with the HC against the Barguna court's verdict.

On October 6, Minni filed the appeal with the HC challenging the Barguna court verdict that sentenced six people, including her, to death in the murder case on September 30.

Democratic hopes to flip

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"We did it!" a relieved Ernst said on Twitter.

Another hotly contested seat was tilting the Republicans' way in North Carolina, where networks had yet to call the race but Senator Thom Tillis claimed a crucial win, with some 94 percent of the vote counted.

"What we accomplished tonight was a stunning victory -- and we did it against all the odds, right?" Tillis told boisterous supporters, adding that he was doing his part "to save the Senate."

Polls had shown several races tilting towards Democrats, and election forecaster FiveThirtyEight gave Democrats a three in four chance of winning Senate control.

Joe Biden's Democrats would need to gain four seats to seize the chamber -- or three seats if Biden wins the White House, as a vice president breaks a tie in the Senate in the event of a 50-50 vote.

Democrats are now eyeing Maine and Georgia as potential flips.

But Maine's embattled Republican Senator Susan Collins was seven percentage points ahead with two-thirds of precincts reporting, and in

Georgia incumbent David Perdue was leading Democrat Jon Ossoff with 90 percent of precincts reporting.

If Democrats can win one of these seats, control of the chamber could hang in the balance until a runoff in Georgia's other special election Senate race is held on January 5, 2021.

Controlling the Senate is vital as the party in power determines which bills reach the floor and which of the president's nominees receive confirmation votes.

Democrats meanwhile kept the House of Representatives, with Speaker Nancy Pelosi -- Trump's chief nemesis in Washington -- likely to preside over her flock for two more years, but it remained unclear whether Democrats could increase their majority.

Popular New York progressive Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez comfortably secured a second term, as did the three other members of "The Squad," a liberal quartet that has occasionally faced intense criticism from Trump and his allies.

"I'm very, very proud of the fact that tonight -- relatively early -- we are able to say we have held the House," Pelosi said.

Still swinging

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"The counting will not stop. It will continue until every duly cast vote is counted," it said. "If the president makes good on his threat to go to court to try to prevent the proper tabulation of votes, we have legal teams standing by ready to deploy to resist that effort."

Voting concluded as scheduled on Tuesday night, but many states routinely take days to finish counting ballots. Huge numbers of people voted by mail because of the pandemic, making it likely the count will take longer than usual.

The US Elections Project estimated total turnout at a record 160 million voters including more than 101.1 early voters, 65.2 million of whom voted by mail.

The next president will take on the raging disease, which has killed more than 231,000 people in the United States and left millions more jobless, amid a political climate marked by racial tensions and bitter polarization.

The trio of "blue wall" states that

unexpectedly sent Trump to the White House in 2016 - Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin - remained too close to call. Biden held a slight lead in Nevada, where officials said they would not update the count until Thursday.

Two Southern states, Georgia and North Carolina, were also still in play; Trump held leads in both. A win for Biden in either one would narrow Trump's chances considerably.

Biden's victory in Arizona - both Fox News and the Associated Press projected he would win the state - gave him multiple pathways to the White House.

If he holds onto Nevada, he could secure the presidency by winning the Midwestern states of Wisconsin and Michigan, where he held narrow leads yesterday, even if he loses Pennsylvania.

Trump's most likely path goes through Pennsylvania; if he wins that state, he would secure re-election if he also held onto the Southern states and

won at least one Midwestern state.

Officials in Michigan and Georgia yesterday said they expected the states to complete their counts by day's end.

Earlier, Biden's hopes of a decisive early victory were dashed on Tuesday evening when Trump won the battlegrounds of Florida, Ohio and Texas. But the former vice president said he was confident he could win by taking the three key Rust Belt states.

"We feel good about where we are," Biden said in his home state of Delaware. "Keep the faith, guys, we're going to win this."

During the final days of the campaign, Trump had suggested he would claim victory if ahead on election night and seek to halt the count of additional ballots.

Before his White House appearance, Trump slammed his opponent, saying in a tweet, "We are up BIG, but they are trying to STEAL the Election. We will never let them do it. Votes cannot be cast after the Polls are closed!" Twitter swiftly tagged the tweet as

possibly misleading.

"It's not my place or Donald Trump's place to declare the winner of this election. It's the voters' place," Biden said on Twitter in response to the president.

It was not clear what Trump meant by saying he would ask the Supreme Court to halt "voting." The high court does not hear direct challenges but instead reviews cases that have worked their way up from lower courts.

However, legal experts have said the election outcome could get bogged down in state-by-state litigation over a host of issues, including whether states can include late-arriving ballots that were mailed by Election Day.

The Supreme Court previously allowed Pennsylvania to move forward with a plan to count ballots mailed by Nov. 3 that arrive up to three days later, but several conservative justices suggested they would be willing to reconsider the matter. State officials planned to segregate those ballots as a precaution.