

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



2,212
New cases in 24hrs



436,684
Total cases



6,254
Deaths



352,895
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,338,088
Deaths



55,678,163
Total cases

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

Talks after formation of full Myanmar govt

Says foreign minister

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said Bangladesh would approach for resuming the Rohingya repatriation talks after the formation of a full new government in Myanmar.

The repatriation talks remain halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic and elections in Myanmar.

Bangladesh would also activate a tripartite mechanism -- Bangladesh-China-Myanmar -- so that Myanmar takes back its Rohingyas from Bangladesh, said the foreign minister, adding that three such meetings were already held.

"Rohingya remains a big problem. We remain engaged in all fronts," Momen told reporters after a discussion on "Sylhet Development Authority Law" at the Foreign Service Academy in the capital.

He said Bangladesh's friends like

Japan, China, the United Kingdom and the European Union were mounting pressure on Myanmar afresh to resolve the crisis.

"Myanmar makes commitments again and again. But they don't take back their nationals."

Responding to a question, Momen said the government would send 100,000 Rohingyas to Bhasan Char, but no date for the relocation was fixed yet.

He said the full Myanmar government was not formed yet though an election was held there. "When all countries will recognise the [new] Myanmar government, we'll also do the same."

Myanmar made commitments over the repatriation of Rohingyas in various ways, but not a single Rohingya returned to Rakhine over the last three years.

There is a trust deficit among Rohingyas and it needs to be addressed by the Myanmar side, Bangladesh said.



A family takes a rickshaw ride in the capital's Bashabo yesterday. With all five passengers and the rickshaw puller on the street without face masks, they are putting themselves at risk of Covid-19 infection. The country is seeing a rise in novel coronavirus cases in recent weeks.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Efficient delivery main challenge

FROM PAGE 1

designed to keep vaccines within WHO recommended temperature ranges, from the point of manufacture to the point of administration.

Bangladesh has the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) framework, capable of keeping life-saving drugs at temperatures as low as minus 20 degrees Celsius.

The framework -- supported by GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance and the World Health Organisation (WHO) -- has a capacity of storing, transporting and distributing around 1.5 crore doses at a time, according to government officials.

"Currently we are not thinking of vaccines being developed by Moderna or Pfizer as we don't have the capacity under the EPI to preserve and transport them. It is also very expensive to upgrade the existing system," said Shamsul Haque, a line director who looks after the EPI at Directorate General of Health Services.

"Rather, we are focusing more on vaccines that we can preserve with our existing capacity," he told The Daily Star.

"If it turns out that the approved vaccines need to be stored at much colder temperature, we will have to go for that no matter what it takes."

Since no vaccine candidate is approved by the WHO, its administrative protocol and logistics are still not known.

On November 5, the government signed a trilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Serum Institute of India and Bangladesh's Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd to get three crore doses of Covid-19 vaccines from Serum, keeping in mind the existing cold chain.

Beximco will collect and transport the Covishield vaccines to storage

facilities under the health directorate's EPI.

The Covishield, originally named as ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 by the inventor organisations -- Oxford University and AstraZeneca -- is at the final stage trial in multiple countries. It could be ready as early as December, as reported in the Indian media.

The three crore doses will be delivered in phases with 50 lakh doses every month, according to the agreement.

Different vaccines require different temperatures and cold chain facilities and handling procedures. For example, Covishield doses must be stored at 2-8 degrees Celsius.

But the vaccine candidate being developed by New York-based pharmaceutical company Pfizer requires a storage temperature of minus 80 degrees Celsius. Once thawed, the vials can be refrigerated for just two days.

American biotech company Moderna, which initially stored its vaccine at minus 70 degrees Celsius, now plans to ship the shots at minus 20, the company said. Once thawed, the vaccine can remain refrigerated for a week.

"We have a very good network of EPI," said Prof Md Sayedur Rahman, a member of the Bangladesh National Research Ethics Committee that reviews research involving humans, especially the clinical trials.

However, all the vaccines are not the same and therefore they are not preserved in the same manner, he added. "The existing cold chain is basically for vaccination of children and may support vaccines required for one to 1.5 crore people."

Shamsul Haque of DGHS added, "We administer mainly six types of

vaccines right now. Among those, only one needs to be preserved at minus temperature. We have the capacity in almost every upazila to preserve vaccines at temperature up to minus 20 degrees Celsius."

According to WHO, a vaccine against Covid-19 will be ready for registration by the end of this year or early next year at the earliest.

The first vaccine safety trial for humans began in March and six vaccine candidates have so far been approved for limited use in respective countries.

At least 11 more have reached the final stages of testing as of November 3, according to the New York Times Coronavirus Vaccine Tracker.

Officials and experts said the countries who have already paid will get the vaccine in first phase.

"By analysing the present global situation in vaccine research, I apprehend that even after 24 months from now, 80 percent of people in Bangladesh might not get the vaccine, if there is no miracle," said Prof Sayedur.

In Bangladesh, officials also say, all people will not be vaccinated at the same time.

"One thing we have to keep in mind that we will not vaccinate all people at a time. Vaccines will arrive in the country in phases and we will vaccinate in phases. So, it'd not be a big deal," said Prof Mohammad Shahidullah, head of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19.

Contacted, Health Secretary Abdul Mannan said, "We will purchase vaccines spending public money. Before the arrival of vaccines, we will ensure a smooth cold chain network so that a single vaccine is not spoiled."

TURMOIL IN ETHIOPIA

'Full-scale' humanitarian crisis unfolding

Warns UN as Nobel peace laureate PM says operations against dissident region entering 'final phase'; thousand flee country

AFP, Addis Ababa

The UN yesterday said a full-blown humanitarian crisis was unfolding in northern Ethiopia, where thousands of people each day are fleeing the conflict in the Tigray region.

As international pressure mounted over his campaign against the dissident region, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Africa's youngest leader and the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner, declared operations were entering a "final" phase, and his government confirmed fresh air strikes near the Tigray capital, Mekele.

Abiy, last year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, announced a military campaign on November 4, saying it came in response to attacks by the local ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), on federal military camps.

The United Nations refugee agency said around 27,000 Ethiopians have fled across the border into Sudan -- a figure now rising by around 4,000 people each day.

"A full-scale humanitarian crisis is unfolding," spokesman Babar Baloch told a virtual press briefing from Geneva.

"Refugees fleeing the fighting continue to arrive exhausted from the long trek to safety, with few belongings." Those arriving in Sudan recounted terrifying scenes of artillery barrages and massacres.

"I saw bodies dismembered by the explosions," said Ganet Gazerdier, 75, whose home was destroyed in the town of Humera, and finds herself at a refugee camp in eastern Sudan.

"Other bodies were rotting, lying on the road, murdered with a knife", she added.

On Friday Abiy declared the TPLF was "in the final throes of death" and gave troops in the region three days to "rise up" and side with the national army.

In a Facebook post yesterday morning, he said their time was up.

"The three-day deadline for the Tigray regional special forces and militia to hand themselves over to national defence forces instead of being a tool for the greedy junta has expired. Those Tigray special forces and militia who used the three-day deadline are appreciated," he said.

"Since the deadline has been completed, in the coming days the final law enforcement activities will be done."

A communications blackout in Tigray has made it difficult to assess how the fighting is going or verify a death toll that could be in the hundreds.

Federal forces claim to control Tigray's western zone, where fighting has been heavy, and over the weekend said they had seized the town of Alamata, 180 kilometres south of the regional capital, Mekele.

JS passes bill to allow death

FROM PAGE 1

ordinance was placed in parliament for its approval by Law Minister Anisul Huq.

It was issued in the wake of waves of anti-rape demonstrations across the country after a series of rapes, most notably the gang-rape of a housewife in Noakhali's Begumganj upazila on September 2. The incident was videotaped by the perpetrators and later released and made viral on the internet.

At least 975 women were raped across the country in the last nine months and 161 rape incidents took place in September alone, according to rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra's October report.

Of them, 208 women were gang-raped, 43 murdered after rape and 12 victims of rape died by suicide afterwards, the report added. Three women and nine men were killed while protesting assaults.

On the other hand, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad said they recorded 129 rape incidents in September and 83 of the victims were minors.

A number of organisations, including Feminists Across Generations, an inter-generational feminist alliance, however, argued that the death penalty was not a solution; they demanded an end to the "rape culture".

Naripokkho argued: "How many people can be dealt with by the death penalty? The problem is all around us, rapists don't come from another planet -- they are our brothers, our relatives. Children must be taught to respect women from an early stage, this is the only solution."

According to article 9 (3) of the existing law, if a woman falls victim to gang-rape and gets injured or dies, the punishment is death penalty or life imprisonment for each rapist.

As per the bill, changes were also proposed to two other sub-articles -- 11 (Ga) and 20 (7) -- of the existing law.

Any simple injury for dowry will be a compoundable offence (the complainant can compromise to drop the charge against the accused) in accordance with the article 11 (Ga) of the proposed law.

As per the same article, one shall be sentenced to maximum three years but minimum one year's rigorous imprisonment and will be awarded pecuniary (monetary) penalty for "hurting" for dowry.

In article 20 (7) of the bill,

"the Children Act, 2013" has been incorporated in place of "Children Act, 1974" to follow the latest law as much as possible during the trial of any crime committed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act-2000 in case any child commits or witnesses such crime.

The trial of rape cases shall be completed within 180 days at Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals, according to the existing law.

MP Bablu blames feminists for rape incidents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Independent MP Md Rezaul Karim Bablu yesterday in parliament said that feminists are to blame for the increase in rape incidents around the country, even resorting to comparing women to tamarinds in line with a religious cleric's words in 2013.

The Bogura-7 lawmaker was speaking on the Women and Children Repression Prevention (Amendment) Bill, 2020, which was passed yesterday in parliament, allowing death penalty as the highest punishment for rape.

"In the name of women's liberation, feminists are encouraging women to become freer. This has increased the acceptability of rape so much among rapists that they are encouraged to commit the act," the lawmaker said.

Bablu also suggested that the theory of late amir of Hefajat-e Islam, who in 2013 compared women with tamarinds, be applied.

"Honourable Speaker, if the tamarind theory of Allama Shafi is used, the rapists would be discouraged from rape... and religious sentiments would grow within them."

Bablu was elected MP from Bogura-7 (Gabtali-Shahjahanpur) with the support of BNP in the last parliamentary election in 2018.

He, however, said the bill was important.

"We have enacted so many laws but our laws are rendered ineffective only due to lack of proper implementation, formulation and implementation," he said.

Covid-19 deaths creeping up

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With the latest figure, the total number of deaths rose to 6,254 which was 1.43 percent of all confirmed cases.

Besides, the number of single-day cases has continued to increase in the same 24 hours as new 2,212 people tested positive for the virus, according to a DGHS press release.

This is also the highest number of coronavirus infections recorded in a day in the last ten weeks.

Against a total of 15,990 tests in those 24 hours yesterday, the positivity rate was 13.83 percent and the overall positivity rate was 16.97 percent.

The previous day, the positivity rate was 13.57 percent.

Since last month, countries across Europe and America are seeing a resurgence in Covid-19 cases at the advent of winter after successfully slowing outbreaks early in the year.

Considering this, the experts as well as policymakers earlier assumed the transmission may increase in Bangladesh in the winter season.

Prof Mushtaq Hussain, consultant of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told The Daily Star, "Whatever we do beyond scientific measures will not work. There are specific scientific

methods to curb transmission and we had implemented it in our country earlier of this pandemic. We have to detect, trace, isolate and treat every case scientifically."

About recent measures taken by the government, he said those are still inadequate.

"Only strict measures in airports will not give any result when there is community transmission. We have to deploy community volunteers and provide livelihood to the poor during quarantine; there is a need for investment here and it will not go in vain," Dr Mushtaq said.

He also stressed on supplying masks to the people for free and ensuring hand washing facilities in every public place.

Meanwhile, a total of 1,749 Covid-19 patients recovered in the same 24 hours yesterday.

With this, the total number of recoveries rose to 352,895 and the recovery rate was 80.81 percent.

Among the 39 dead, 30 were males and nine were females.

One of them aged between 10 and 11 years, one between 21 and 30, one between 31 and 40, two between 41 and 50, 10 between 51 and 60 and the rest 24 were above 60 years, added the release.

Sunamganj, Sylhet

FROM PAGE 1

anger. Some advised others to store water, apprehending that the electricity supply might not be restored soon.

Contacted, Khandker Mokammel Hossain, additional chief engineer at Power Development Board (PDB) in Sylhet, told The Daily Star that they suspected some transformers caught fire. "We're working hard to restore the supply. But it is hard to say when we will be able to fix it," he said.

He also said the power supply to Sylhet and Sunamganj depends on the power plant. "There is no alternative source of power generation here," he said.

Sylhet's Deputy Commissioner M Kazi Emdadul Islam said, "The whole district is out of electricity and we are uncertain when we can restore it."

A probe body will also be formed to investigate the cause of the fire, he said.

The power plant is looked after by Power Grid Company of Bangladesh. Contacted, a chief engineer of the PGCB said they were trying to restore power partially. "I hope within one or two hours, we'll be able to restore power partially through two transformers," he said.

Soon after the incident, the PGCB formed a four-member probe committee to find out the reason behind the fire, he added.

Trump poised to settle for partial Afghan withdrawal

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump's new Pentagon team has not yet signalled an imminent withdrawal of all US troops from Afghanistan, raising expectations among US officials and allies that Trump might settle for a partial reduction before leaving office.

A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the military was expecting formal orders in the coming days to go down to about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan by early next year from

around 4,500 currently.

A Nato official also cited expectations of a 1,500 to 2,000 troop decline.

Trump fired his defense secretary, Mark Esper, and appointed other top Pentagon officials last week after longstanding concerns that his priorities were not being dealt with urgently enough at the Defense Department.

They included ending the 19-year-old Afghan engagement by

Christmas, an ambitious target that opponents of the country's longest war welcomed but which Trump's critics warned could be reckless given ongoing militant violence plaguing Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has featured in a flurry of introductory calls by acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller, Esper's replacement, to US allies' defense ministers and chiefs of defense, a senior U.S. defense official told Reuters.

Tk 1.4 crore compensation for death of air passenger

JS passes air transport bill

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Parliament yesterday passed The Air Transport (Montreal Convention 1999) Bill 2020 to pave the way for compensating the heirs to an air passenger's properties \$160,000 (Tk 1.4 crore) in case of his death.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Md Mahbub Ali had placed the bill in the House on June 23. It was passed on a voice vote.

Once the bill is signed into law by the president, it will also help ensure proper compensations for passengers' injuries, damages to their baggage or cargo goods in line with the Montreal Convention 1999.

Bangladesh is a signatory to the Montreal Convention which deals with passengers' rights and compensation, but there had been no law related to the Convention in the country.

As there was no such law, Bangladesh did not get benefits as prescribed in the Convention.

Previously, the heirs to an air passenger's properties used to get a compensation of Tk 20.37 lakh for his death.

The new bill stipulates that a passenger will receive a compensation of \$70 for damages to each kg of his baggage and \$27 for damages to each kg of his cargo goods.

According to the bill, the maximum punishment for violating its any provision by an airline would be 10 year's jail or a fine of Tk 100 crore.

Man who threatened to kill Shakib arrested in Sylhet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Rapid Action Battalion yesterday arrested the man who threatened to kill Bangladesh cricketer Shakib Al Hasan during a Facebook live video on November 15.

A team of Rab-9 arrested Mohsin Talukdar, 25, from Ronoshi village in Dakshin Sunamganj upazila around 11:15am, Assistant Superintendent of Police Samiul Ahmed, media officer of Rab-9, confirmed to The Daily Star.

He will be handed over to Sylhet police, said Rab officials.

The arrest was made after police filed a case against Mohsin -- of Talukdarpara area in Shahpur under Sylhet Sadar upazila -- under the Digital Security Act.

Sub-inspector Mahbub Morshed filed the case with Jalalabad Police Station in Sylhet late on Monday night, said Okil Uddin, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Human chain in favour of hotel in Chimbuk

Some Mro people 'tricked into' attending the programme

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

At least 120 members of the Mro community from Alikadam upazila in Bandarban were allegedly tricked yesterday into attending a human chain in favour of constructing a five-star hotel in Chimbuk hill area.

Talking to this newspaper, a number of them said some people from the local authorities brought them to Bandarban Press Club area with a promise that they would get relief materials at a government programme.

But upon their arrival there, they were informed that it was a human chain, not a relief distribution or a government programme. The human chain called for constructing a five-star hotel in Chimbuk hill area which members of the Mro community have been opposing.

They were given copies of a press release which read some vested quarters are spreading propaganda against the initiative to create a tourist spot in Jibannagar-Chandrapahar area of Bandarban by R&R Holding Ltd.

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Clarification

Romzan Ali, project director of Akhaura-Laksham Double Line Project of Bangladesh Railway, has sent a clarification to a report run by The Daily Star on October 22 under the headline "Akhaura-Laksham expansion: Rail project PD to be removed over graft".

In the clarification, he claimed that some people were conspiring against him.

The report was based on the railway ministry's directive to remove him from the project after a graft case was filed against him.

The ministry took the initiative following the directives of the Prime Minister's Office.

Our reporter called Romzan Ali and also sent him text message to have his comments, but he did not respond.

In the clarification, he did not contradict any part of the report directly. We stand by our report.