

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



2,419
New cases in 24hrs



4,49,760
Total cases



6,416
Deaths



3,64,611
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,396,475
Deaths



59,169,475
Total cases

Myanmar urged to end prosecutions

10 rights organisations call for release of peaceful protesters

UNB, Dhaka

Myanmar authorities should immediately release imprisoned human rights defenders and end criminal proceedings against dozens of peaceful protesters and others charged in relation to recent legitimate activities, Fortify Rights and nine other human rights organisations said in a joint statement yesterday.

“Aung San Suu Kyi’s government needs to immediately take appropriate measures to free all political prisoners in Myanmar,” said Ismail Wolff, Fortify Rights regional director.

He said the National League for Democracy should use its increased majority in parliament to repeal or amend abusive laws that infringe on fundamental rights, including the right to peaceful assembly.

Police arrested and detained at least 25 peaceful protesters following a series of anti-war campaigns organised by the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) beginning in early September.

The protests called for the government to lift mobile-internet restrictions in Rakhine and Chin

states, where armed conflict between the Myanmar armed forces and the Arakan Army is going on.

In a joint statement released from Bangkok, the rights bodies called on the Myanmar authorities to end the crackdown on human rights defenders and peaceful protesters.

“The Myanmar authorities’ arbitrary targeting of student activists calling for peace and the end of human rights violations contravenes the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly,” the statement says.

Most of the detained protesters face multiple charges -- in some cases, in multiple jurisdictions -- including for alleged violations under the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law (Peaceful Assembly Law), the Myanmar Criminal Code, and the Natural Disaster Management Law.

“The prosecution of those involved in the campaigns violates the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly,” the statement says.

Any restrictions on these rights must be provided by law, in pursuit of a legitimate aim, and necessary and proportionate to that aim, it added.

It’s worsening

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Dr Zakir Hossain Habib, head of microbiology and principal scientific officer at the IEDCR, who has been leading the study, said, “There is no chance of improvement; irrational use of antibiotics is more common now than at any other time. Even the reserve drug Imipenem is being used indiscriminately.”

The World Health Organization classifies antibiotics in “access group”, used for a wide range of primary-level infection, “watch group” used for higher resistance bacteria, and “reserve group” used when all alternatives fail.

Dr Habib added that laboratory analyses done between 2017 and 2019 found that Imipenem was becoming ineffective in treating different bacteria. “Only a few other antibiotics are left if these don’t work.”

In its 22nd meeting on Sunday, the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 also said there was “irrational use” of antibiotics because the national Covid-19 treatment protocol was not being followed in many hospitals. This resulted in antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

According to a Global Antibiotic Resistance Partnership (GARP) report titled Antibiotic Use and Resistance in Bangladesh 2018, the use of counterfeit or poor-quality antimicrobial medicines, weak laboratory capacity,

and inadequate drug monitoring and surveillance are among the main reasons behind the rise of AMR.

Besides, the report said that poor treatment adherence, non-therapeutic use of antibiotics for growth promotion in farm animals, self-medication and over-the-counter access to antibiotics are to blame for AMR growth.

Besides, there was no progress in surveillance during the pandemic, experts said.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) of the Directorate General of Health Services organised an event on Sunday involving researchers from different government departments and global development agencies to discuss the Draft National AMR Surveillance Strategy 2020-25.

Discussions said the AMR was going to pose a bigger threat than the pandemic in the years to come and a coordinated effort was needed because AMR was making its way into the food chain.

Addressing a plenary session, Dr Mahmudur Rahman, former director of the IEDCR, said the research on AMR was inadequate.

Pointing to the aggressive marketing by pharmaceutical companies to promote antibiotic drugs, he stressed on regular information dissemination among physicians so that they can select the right drug for the patients.

The art of cargo theft

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Police then arrested two businessmen -- Shamsul Arefin, 55, Monir Hossain, 33 -- for selling stolen fabrics and a case was also filed against them.

“We seized around 92,672 yards of fabrics from the shop. During interrogation, the shopkeepers disclosed that they have actually bought the cloth from Teri Bazar area of Chattogram and the seller’s name is Abul Kashem,” Saifur Rahman Azad, additional deputy commissioner of DB (Lalbagh division), told The Daily Star.

“Kashem got arrested and admitted that he actually bought this cloth from Arun, a C&F agent of Mongla Port,” said the DB official.

Investigators said per yard of Torre fabric of China is supposed to sell in local market at Tk 70. But the C&F agent Arun sold it to Kashem at Tk 48 and Kashem then sold it to Shamsul and Monir at Tk 58.

Detectives also arrested a labour leader named Sagor, 45, who has been working at the port for 26 years with around 500 workers under his wings.

ADC Saifur said the labourers help the syndicate members unload the goods after they break the lock of a container. “We have found names of around five to six labour leaders, who are involved in this.”

He further said they have got some information about the syndicate members based in Chattogram, Mongla and Islampur, and are now working to trace them.

“We have also come to know that Islampur market in Dhaka is not the last destination of these stolen fabrics. It goes to different other places, including in Narayanganj and Narsingdi,” he added.

ROLE OF C&F AGENTS

C&F agents release port goods on behalf of importers and they deliver those to the given addresses.

For example, if a container of toys needs to be unloaded from the port, the C&F agent will first take customs clearance and then hire a truck to deliver the goods to the

importers.

But the agent linked to the syndicate hires an extra truck.

On the day of unloading the goods, he will place his customs-cleared container beside another container, goods from which is supposed to be unloaded later by another C&F agent.

During the time of unloading the toys, the syndicate members break the locks of the second container and load its products on the additional truck.

NO BAR CODE

Hussain Ahmed, commissioner of Mongla Port Customs House, told this newspaper that they have detected around eight to 10 such cases in the last six months. They sometimes found the containers totally empty.

Regarding the theft of 25,000kg fabrics, he said they have found an “interesting thing” while investigating the case.

“When the container was sent from China, there was a white paper on its lock with an order code and a barcode. But it was changed after the container reached the Mongla port,” he said.

There was a paper with order code on the lock but it contained no barcode, said the commissioner.

The importer also confirmed this, saying the Chinese company had sent him a picture.

“We want to stop the practice and that is why we’ve already filed a case regarding the theft of 25,000kg cloth,” added the commissioner.

Sultan Ahmed, president of Mongla Port Customs Clearance and Forwarding Agents Association, told this newspaper that it is a fact that some of the C&F agents are involved in the theft racket.

“We have communicated with the port authorities a number of times seeking action but no steps were taken for a mysterious reason,” he said.

Asked about the alleged involvement of port staffers in the theft of goods, Rear Admiral M Shahjahan, the chairman of Mongla Port Authority, said, “We would definitely take action if any report comes to us.”



With the ferry service on Nazirganj-Joukura route suspended for about three months due to poor navigability in the Padma, people take boats and unfit launches, *not in the picture*, to cross the river, putting their lives at risk. Local officials of the Roads and Highways Department, which operates the service, say they are awaiting a decision from the higher authorities to address the problem. The photo was taken at Nazirganj Ferry Ghat in Pabna’s Sujanagar upazila on Thursday.

PHOTO: STAR

‘Got neither a penny, nor a fistful of rice’

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imbalanced and another divorced with a daughter,” she said yesterday.

Shilpi said she had joined more than five factories over the last eight years, but could not work for than 15 days at each as she was not able to sit or stand too long due to the severe injuries she sustained to her spinal cord and head during the fire incident.

Since the gate was locked on that tragic day exactly eight years ago, she blacked out after being trampled by workers in the mad rush to escape the flames.

Having no relative or acquaintance in the city, Shilpi initially went to her village home at Patuakhali’s Kalapara and started taking paracetamols from a nearby dispensary for her pain. After around five months, when she was still unable to walk properly due to the intolerable pain and having no money, no access to food on credit, but loans aplenty, she had to return to Dhaka.

“I had to take regular treatment from many hospitals, including CRP [Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed] in Savar.”

“But I got neither a penny, nor a fistful of rice from the government or any NGO, although I lost my ability to work permanently,” said Shilpi.

“Around four years ago, with Tk 10,000 taken from a local worker leader in Savar, I started selling ladies’ undergarments door to door, worked as domestic help, but I couldn’t continue to work due to my physical condition.”

Currently, Shilpi sells winter pithas, betel nuts and cigarettes in a makeshift tea stall in Ashulia. But her income has

dried up due to the Covid-19 pandemic, causing hardships in paying rent and sending money to the village from her meagre income.

30-year-old Mosammat Rehena Begum, who has been staging demonstrations with 44 other former workers of Tazreen Fashions for the past 69 days outside the National Press Club, said she had to stop the education of her two school-going children, as the lone income of her rickshaw-puller husband cannot cover family expenses anymore.

The then senior sewing machine operator Rehena had jumped from the third floor to escape the fire and sustained injuries to her spinal cord, hand and head. She said she only received a voluntary donation worth Tk 3.5 lakh in 2016, which was not enough for her treatment.

“Even today, I can’t stop having painkillers for a single day. I cannot even clean my room, let alone work jobs,” she said.

The same fire killed her elder sister, brother-in-law, their son and their daughter-in-law. “If I knew then that I would have to beg like this, I wouldn’t have jumped,” she said. “I will not return empty-handed, even if I need to die here [staging demonstrations].”

Jorina Begum, who was also demonstrating, still cannot sit or stand for too long as three rods had pierced her bones and flesh when she jumped from the third floor of the building. She said her husband left her years ago and her elderly mother had to take care of her and her two children.

“I have mouths to feed and loans to repay, as my mother is getting older

and sick. I don’t know about my future. On November 24, I will go to the Prime Minister’s Office dressed in a shroud along with the other demonstrators with my three-point demand -- compensation, rehabilitation, and long-term medical treatment,” she added.

COMPENSATION OR ALMS?

Although labour activists have long been arguing that the compensation for permanently disabled workers should be equal to at least their lifetime’s earnings as per the Bangladesh Labour Act, the amount of compensation is Tk 1 lakh in case of death, and Tk 1.25 lakh each in case of permanent disability.

According to the final report of the executive commissioner to Tazreeen Claims Administration (TCA) Coordination Committee, 90 injured workers were paid Tk 1 lakh each from BGMEA, and 14 injured workers were paid Tk 50,000 each from the Prime Minister’s Office as compensation.

However, Shahidul Islam Sabuj, general secretary, Garments Workers Unity Forum, said 173 workers were listed for compensation, and only 45 injured workers have gotten some voluntary donations.

According to Sabuj, among the 45 workers, 35 have been sitting idle at home due to permanent disability, while 10 can never do hard labour.

“But they spent more than Tk 2 lakh for their treatment. Still, they haven’t received any assurance about getting a dignified compensation. Around 45 days ago, the representatives of BGMEA and Bangladesh Labour Welfare Foundation came and took their names. We can’t reach them anymore,” he said.

Make people wear mask

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others took part from the secretariat.

The cabinet secretary said the issue of wearing masks was prominently discussed in the meeting. Yesterday, divisional commissioners said they were imposing fines on a large number of people who go outside without masks. Several thousand people had already been fined, he added.

“We’ve been told to observe the situation for one more week. After that, if people fail to be alert, we will ask them [commissioners] to motivate them more. Then we’ll have to go for tougher punishment [for not wearing masks].”

The cabinet secretary said they operated mobile courts in the capital’s 37 places to make sure people use facemasks outside home.

Asked whether people would be sent to jail for defying the government’s directive in this regard, he said, “Let’s see. The amount of fine may be increased. Now we’re imposing a fine of Tk 500 to 1,000. It could be increased to Tk 5,000.”

Mobile courts will take masks with them to give those to people after fining them for not wearing them, he said.

Saying that the number of patients at hospitals in Dhaka has increased in the last one week, Anwarul said, “It seems that the Covid-19 cases are on the rise.”

Meanwhile, the cabinet approved the draft of the “Bangladesh Film Artists’ Welfare Trust Act, 2020” to ensure overall welfare of actors and actresses of the country’s film industry and enhance their professional excellence.

According to the act, there will be a board chaired by the information minister. The board will look after the benefits of artists.

To get the benefits, artists need to get registered. There is an Artists Welfare Trust under the culture affairs ministry. Artists who are registered with the Artists Welfare Trust will not be able to get benefits from the proposed Bangladesh Film Industry Welfare Trust.

Three other issues -- future plans as well as the steps undertaken by the agriculture ministry to tackle the possible second wave of Covid-19, the

steps taken by the disaster management and relief ministry during the pandemic and the update of the foreign aid -- were also discussed at the meeting, the secretary said.

He said the agriculture ministry has taken 97 short, medium and long-term plans to increase production, development of marketing of agricultural products and ensure fair price to tackle the impact of Covid-19 and other natural disasters.

Anwarul added that the disaster management ministry has taken various safety net programmes to deal with the impact of Covid-19 and cyclone Amphan.

Under the programmes, it distributed more than 2.35 lakh tonnes of rice, over Tk 100 crore in cash and spent more than Tk 29 crore for baby food.

Another Tk 3.80 crore was distributed for cattle fodder. It also distributed 5,900 bundles of tin and Tk 1.77 crore for building houses.

The ministry gave another 1.68 lakh tonnes of VGF rice to over 10 lakh families.

Israeli PM met MBS, Pompeo

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meeting between HRH the Crown Prince and Israeli officials during the recent visit by @SecPompeo,” Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said in a tweet.

“No such meeting occurred. The only officials present were American and Saudi.”

There has been widespread speculation, within Israel and the United States, that Washington may push for other Arab states to join the Abraham Accords before President-elect Joe Biden is sworn in.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who was in Israel last week, was also at the reported talks, according to Kan’s diplomatic correspondent.

Pompeo has confirmed he was in Neom on the Red Sea as part of a Middle East Tour and met with Prince Mohammed, who is widely known by his initials MBS.

Publicly, Saudi Arabia has said it would stick to the decades-old Arab League position of not having ties with Israel until the Jewish state’s conflict with the Palestinians is resolved.

The Palestinians have condemned the Abraham Accords as “a stab in the back”, urging Arab states to hold

firm until Israel ends its occupation of Palestinian territory and agrees to the creation of a Palestinian state.

But experts have said that Biden’s upcoming inauguration may have created urgency in Riyadh, which has dealt discreetly with Israel over a joint desire to contain common foe Iran.

LATE NIGHT TALKS

Kan quoted multiple Israeli officials as saying that Netanyahu and the head of the Mossad spy agency, Yossi Cohen, “flew yesterday to Saudi Arabia and met Pompeo and MBS in the city of Neom.”

Prominent diplomatic correspondent Barak Ravid of Walla News and Axios reported that Netanyahu and Cohen flew on a plane belonging to Israeli businessman Udi Angel.

Ravid cited flight tracker data showing Angel’s plane leaving Israel at 8:00 pm (1800 GMT) on Sunday, heading to Neom and returning to Israel five hours later.

Netanyahu’s office was not immediately available to comment on the reports.

The Saudi royal court and media ministry did not immediately respond to AFP’s request for comment on the reported meeting between Netanyahu, Prince Mohammed and Pompeo.

US and Israeli officials have said more Arab states wanted to establish ties with Israel, which before the Gulf deals only had peace treaties with two Arab nations, its neighbours Egypt and Jordan.

In late August, Netanyahu said Israel was holding “unpublicised meetings with Arab and Muslim leaders to normalise relations with the state of Israel,” without naming any countries.

Sudan has since then agreed in principle to establish ties with Israel.

But, amid speculation that smaller Arab states like Oman were also interested in a deal, Saudi Arabi has stood out as a key target for Israel, given the kingdom’s wealth and influence.

ABRAHAM ACCORDS

Sunni Arab states and especially Israel worry that Biden may seek to revive the Iran nuclear deal agreed between Tehran and world powers during Barack Obama’s presidency, which was scrapped by Trump.

Trump’s administration has also downplayed the importance of human rights issues in international diplomacy and was particularly cautious about criticising Saudi Arabia’s rights record, notably over the murder by Saudi agents of prominent journalist and Saudi royal critic Jamal Khashoggi.

MISSING COLLEGE GIRL

Skull, bones recovered after 3 months

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushiia

Almost three months into the disappearance of a female college student from Kushiia, her skull and bones were recovered in Chuadanga’s Damurhuda on Saturday, police said.

The law enforcers also recovered a vanity bag, a burqa, certificates and mark sheets from the scene. On Sunday evening, her parents confirmed her identity after they were shown the belongings at the Damurhuda Model Police Station.

Abdul Khaleq, officer-in-charge of the police station, said the victim was identified as Mim Khanam, 18, daughter of Madhu Khan of Pipulbaria village in Kushiia’s Mirpur. She was a second-year student of Amla Government College.

Mim’s mother Sarejan Nesha said her daughter went missing two months and 23 days ago after she had left for her grandmother’s house in Sultanpur in the same upazila. Her parents then filed a general diary with the Mirpur Police Station over the matter.

The OC said one of her relatives, however, told them that the girl had eloped with a boy.

Police said locals found a skull and bones scattered on the banks of the Mathabhanga river in Wazirpur village of Damurhuda on Saturday afternoon. Upon receiving the information, the law enforcers recovered them from there. A vanity bag, some clothes, including a burqa, were also recovered.

According to the police, Mim was killed a few months ago and parts of her body, along with her belongings, were then dumped in garbage piled up on the river bank.

Police sent the bones and other body parts to Chuadanga Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy on Sunday. The information was also forwarded to other adjacent police stations.

Being informed by Mirpur police, the victim’s family went to Damurhuda Model Police Station and identified the belongings.

The OC also said a murder case was filed with his police station and that they were trying to arrest those involved in the murder.

“We are investigating the matter and trying to trace the boy with home the victim had allegedly eloped,” he added.

Ensure no entry

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of quarantine be borne by passengers who arrive without a test report.

They also said those sent to quarantine centres can be tested again within one or two days, and be released or sent to isolation depending on the results.

The committee also stressed on being alert about fake test certificates, recommending financial penalties if anyone breaks rules.

Meanwhile, terming the “Covid-19 National Vaccine Deployment Plan” “complete and rightful”, the NTAC said students over 18 years should be included for vaccination.

“If students do not get vaccines, opening universities and colleges is tougher,” the NTAC said.

The NTAC also reiterated its call to ensure Covid-19 treatment in government hospitals, especially supply of oxygen and high-flow nasal cannula.

The committee also said there is “irrational use” of antibiotics as the national Covid-19 treatment protocol is not being followed in many hospitals and there is a need for “strict directives”.

“While the irrational use of antibiotics is developing antimicrobial resistance, it may also have disastrous results in Covid-19 treatment,” the NTAC said.

HIGHEST INFECTIONS IN 11 WEEKS

In 24 hours till 8:00 am yesterday, 2,419 people tested positive for the novel coronavirus, said a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

This was the highest single-day case in 82 days dating back to September 2, when 2,582 cases were recorded.

Yesterday’s count takes the total number of Covid-19 cases in the country to 4,49,760.

In the same 24 hours, 28 people have died due to the viral infection, raising the death toll to 6,416.

The death rate was 1.43 percent against all confirmed cases.

Against a total of 16,059 tests in 117 labs, the positivity rate was 15.06 percent while the overall positivity rate is 16.88 percent.

Meanwhile, 2,183 Covid-19 patients have recovered during the 24-hour period, taking the total number of recoveries to 3,64,611 -- 81.07 percent of all cases.

Among the 28 deceased, 21 were males and seven females.

Two were aged between 41 and 50 years, five between 51 and 60 and 21 were above 60 years, added the release.