

Antigen testing

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Speaking at the event yesterday, the health minister said, “Testing is very much needed to control novel coronavirus and also for its treatment. Antigen-based testing will be introduced in all districts at the earliest.”

He said the antigen-based testing were being carried out following the guideline of World Health Organization (WHO).

Mentioning that the number of Covid-19 patients and the death rate are on the rise recently, Zahid said, “Patients can be brought under treatment fast through detection of the infection. However, maintaining self-protection is more important.”

Bangladesh is now conducting around 15,000 Covid-19 RT-PCR tests a day in 118 authorised laboratories. It is near the bottom of the list of countries in terms of tests conducted considering its population of over 160 million.

Asked whether the government had any plan to significantly increase the number of daily tests, the minister claimed that people were not opting for the test. “That’s why the number of tests is low.”

DGHS DG Prof ABM Khurshid Alam said they could introduce the rapid antigen-based testing and that it was delayed. “It is better late than never.”

Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of DGHS, civil surgeons of 10 districts and the directors of 10 hospitals attended the online event, conducted by Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, additional director (planning and development) of DGHS.

35 MORE DIE
Thirty-five more people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, according to a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With this, the total number of deaths from the virus has reached 6,807 in the country. The death rate is 1.43 percent.

Among the 35 deceased are 23 males and 12 females.

A total of 1,888 new infections were recorded in the same 24-hour period, taking the total number of infected people to 475,879, added the release.

With 13,540 tests conducted, the positivity rate was 13.94 percent for the same period. The overall positivity rate now stands at 16.70 percent.

Meanwhile, 2,457 Covid-19 patients have recovered in the 24-hour period, taking the total number of recoveries to 393,408. The overall recovery rate is 82.67 percent.

Of the 35 deceased, one was aged between 21 and 30 years, one between 41 and 50, nine were between 51 and 60 and 24 were above 60 years.

Anti-socials

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in peace, he asserts that the miscreants must be rooted out. The prime minister painfully notes that while the country is passing through great hardship and lakhs of people are going hungry some evil elements are indulging in corruption and bribery. He cautions them that they would be wrong to think that “we are weak”. Corruption and bribery must be banished from society, he adds.

Bangabandhu advises the Rakkhi Bahini to always cultivate the cooperation of the people. People’s cooperation is essential for maintaining law and order. The Army, BDR, Police and Rakkhi Bahini can’t alone establish law and order, he adds.

WALDHEIM REPLIES TO MUJIB’S REQUEST
UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim has replied in positive to a request by Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for the continuation of UN aid beyond March, 1973. The UN has already coordinated for Bangladesh the largest international aid programme in history.

SOURCES: December 7, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Dainik Ittefaq.

Ring with 12,638

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Surat, India’s diamond hub. “My target was always more than 10,000 diamonds. I trashed many designs and concepts over the years to finally zero in on this,” Bansal told AFP.

In a statement, his company said that each tiny petal in the ring’s eight-layer flower design was unique.

Bansal said he had already knocked back requests from prospective buyers.

“We have no plans of selling it right now,” he said. “It’s a matter of pride for us. It’s priceless.”

The previous record determined by Guinness, also set in India, was for a ring containing 7,801 diamonds.

BGB seizes

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an abandoned condition”, he said, adding that they were deposited to the Jashore Customs.



PHOTO: AFP

Demonstrators clash with a riot police vehicle during a protest against Chilean President Sebastian Pinera’s government in Santiago, on Friday.

Be cautious, follow health guidelines

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Funds have been allocated to procure Covid-19 vaccine to ensure vaccination of the people once it is ready, she added.

The PM asked the Border Guard Bangladesh to restrict smuggling alongside protecting the country’s independence and sovereignty.

“You have to love your country, its people and work for them,” she said.

She advised the BGB personnel to discharge their duties and responsibilities with the mentality of serving the country and the nation.

Mentioning that discipline is very important for any disciplined force, she urged BGB members to always keep it in mind.

The PM said the country has been liberated with an ideology in mind and all have to uphold it.

She asked the BGB members to obey the orders of their seniors while discharging duties without fear. Also, the border guards should work having sympathy for juniors, the PM added.

“All have to work so that the country can be developed further in future.”

Hasina asked the newly-recruited BGB personnel to carry out their duties drawing inspiration from the force’s four basic principles -- morale, brotherhood, discipline and skill -- with sincerity and honesty.

She said the Awami League government was continuing its efforts to establish BGB as an international standard and modern border force through its development and modernisation. “For that we have adopted the Border Guard Bangladesh Vision 2041.”

“Recently, we have turned BGB into a three-dimensional force. The BGB has attained the capacity to discharge its duties in water, land and air,” she said.

The premier said the government has adopted a plan to recruit 15,000 more manpower for the force in phases. Besides, ultramodern surveillance equipment, AIVs and modern APCs, helicopters, vehicle scanners and speedboats have been inducted as part of the smart border management, she added.

The PM recalled the heroic contributions of the members of BGB, the then East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in spreading the proclamation of Independence of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 25, 1971.

She renewed her pledge to give houses to every landless and homeless people by the Golden Jubilee of the country’s independence alongside bringing all houses under electrification to build a prosperous and developed country free from hunger and poverty as envisioned by Bangabandhu.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan and Senior Secretary of Public Security Division Mostafa Kamal Uddin also spoke virtually at the programme from the home ministry.

BGB Director General Maj Gen Md Shafeenul Islam delivered the welcome speech.

The BGB chief, on behalf of the prime minister, handed various awards to the trainees for their outstanding performance during the training period.

Many univs keen on final year exams

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several universities are holding protest on the demand of exams.

Public universities are now holding online classes as they cannot hold in person classes since March 17, when the government closed all educational institutions due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

The closure was extended till December 19.

An UGC member said vice-chancellors of several universities, while talking at the meeting between them and UGC on December 1, raised the issue of holding semester final exams.

VCs said that many students were middle of the honours final year and postgraduate level, some of them have completed theoretical exams and

need to just appear in practical exams.

“VCs said that it is high time to allow public universities to hold the final exams of last semester of honours so that they can take part in the upcoming BCS exam with appeared certificate,” the member said.

They also argued that private universities are taking semester final exams, so public universities should take the final exams following the Covid 19 health guideline strictly, the member added.

The Bangladesh Civil Service is a highly competitive examination in Bangladesh conducted by the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPS) for recruitment to the various Bangladesh Civil Service cadres.

During the last week of November

PSC published the circular of holding the 43rd BCS examination, with aiming to recruit 1,814 for different cadres.

The application process for the 43rd BCS will open from on December 31 and complete on January 30.

Honours final semester students of Jahangirnagar University on December 2 held a sit-in programme on the campus, demanding the completion of their honours examinations.

History department student Nuruzzaman Shuvo said they cannot appear for 41st BCS exams due to session jam and they cannot apply for 43rd BCS exams as their exams remain incomplete.

Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University VC Prof AHM Mustafizur Rahman, who favoured the taking of

honours final year exam at the meeting, said that they are under pressure from students. “They want to sit for exam so that they can give BCS exam”

“They have sent me application, some of them meet me and fall into tears, we need to hold exams,” he said.

Barisal University VC Prof Sadekul Islam said that after a meeting between UGC and VCs of all universities it was decided that universities will hold online classes and there would be no exams and lab classes.

“So we did not take exams. Students are not passing the exams on time. We are looking for alternative. We are thinking that we will take viva exams following online method”, said Sadekul, adding that some of his students also have submitted applications for holding the exams.

Vaccines no magic bullet

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“Vaccination will add a major, major, powerful tool to the tool kit that we have. But by themselves, they will not do the job.”

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also cautioned against the “growing perception that the pandemic is over” with the virus still spreading fast, putting enormous pressure on hospitals and health care workers.

Health officials in Moscow said they had opened 70 coronavirus vaccine centres in the Russian capital that would initially offer jabs for health, education and social workers.

The WHO caution came as countries prepare for the approval and

rollout of several vaccines that have proven effective in trials.

The WHO says 51 candidate vaccines are currently being tested on humans, with 13 reaching final-stage mass testing.

Britain on Wednesday became the first Western country to approve an inoculation, from a Pfizer-BioNTech, for general use, piling pressure on other countries to swiftly follow suit.

The United States is expected to give a green light later this month.

Belgium, France and Spain have said jabs will begin in January for the most vulnerable.

With the imminent arrival of vaccines that need storage at ultra-low temperatures, US companies

are preparing for a massive logistical effort to aid their distribution.

Firms specializing in insulating containers are on a war footing after Pfizer and BioNTech said their vaccine needs to be stored at -94 degrees Fahrenheit (-70 Celsius).

Meat processing giant Smithfield said it was ready to put the cold rooms at its abattoirs at the disposal of vaccine rollout operations.

And US logistics giant UPS is producing 1,100 pounds (500 kilograms) of dry ice an hour in its depots and has developed portable freezers capable of storing the vaccines at temperatures down to -112 Fahrenheit.

Standing in the way of success are

growing signs of vaccine skepticism, with misinformation and mistrust coloring public acceptance of inoculation.

In Russia, Levada polling agency recently found that only 36 percent of respondents were prepared to be vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Several high-profile figures have pledged to receive the vaccine in public in an effort to build confidence, including Biden, Tedros and former US presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

More than 65 million people have contracted Covid-19 globally with the death toll from the disease topping 1.5 million since it first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

Kuwait holds parliamentary election under shadow of virus

AFP, Kuwait City

Kuwaitis hoping for reform went to the polls yesterday in a parliamentary election overshadowed by Covid-19, with facilities laid on for citizens infected with the disease to vote in special polling stations.

The oil-rich emirate has enforced some of the strictest regulations in the Gulf to combat the spread of the virus, imposing a months-long lockdown earlier this year.

While some of those curbs have been eased, over-the-top campaign events that traditionally draw thousands for lavish banquets were absent from this year’s election, while masks remain mandatory and temperature checks are routine when venturing outdoors.

Infected people or those under mandatory quarantine are usually confined to home, with electronic

wristbands monitoring their movements.

But in an effort to respect their right to vote, authorities designated five polling stations -- one in each electoral district -- for them to cast their ballots, among the 102 across the country.

And yesterday authorities set up security barriers around the polling stations to prevent gatherings, with designated lanes for entry and exit.

Mask-clad voters, who were also forced to wear gloves, were subject to temperature checks before entering the facilities where election officials stood behind glass barriers.

Unlike other oil-rich Gulf states, Kuwait has a lively political life with a parliament elected for four-year terms that enjoys wide legislative powers.

Political disputes are often fought out in the open.

But with more than 143,000

coronavirus cases to date, including 886 deaths, the election campaign has been toned down with a few banners hoisted over the streets.

Instead, this year’s campaign has mainly been fought on social networks and in the media.

The usual themes are a constant though, from promises to fight corruption and plans to address youth employment, to freedom of expression, housing, education and the thorny issue of the “bidoon”, Kuwait’s stateless minority.

Some Kuwaitis have expressed their desire for change and reform in their country, where 70 percent of the 4.8 million population are foreigners.

“We want change, new blood, to encourage the youth,” said Hoda al-Hassan, who cast her ballot in the Al-Rawda area of Kuwait City.

“I also hope that the parliament will resolve the issue of the ‘bidoon’ and

that of the demographic imbalance,” she added.

Yousef Ahmed Safar, who voted in the Al-Nazha area, said he too hoped for reform.

“We want to improve our situation, including in employment and housing, as well as the issue of combatting corruption,” he said.

The polls, which opened at 8:00 am (0500 GMT), are the first since the new emir, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, took office in September following the death of his half-brother, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, at the age of 91.

More than 567,000 Kuwaiti voters were eligible to choose among the 326 candidates, who include 29 women.

Like most Gulf countries, Kuwait’s economy has been hit hard by the double whammy of the pandemic and slumping oil prices.

US House backs decriminalizing cannabis in historic vote

AFP, Washington

US House legislators voted for the first time Friday to decriminalize cannabis, a key step towards bringing federal laws in line with states and other countries that have freed up use of the drug.

The House of Representatives, controlled by Democrats, easily passed the bill by 228 votes to 164. It stands little chance however in the Senate, which is controlled by Republicans.

The bill would remove marijuana from the federal Controlled Substances Act, which listed it beside heroin and cocaine as a dangerous narcotic and mandated tough penalties.

The drug’s inclusion on the list has left the US federal government out of line with the many states which have legalized marijuana for medical use and some, like Colorado, which have completely freed and regulated it for recreational use.

Rape victim

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she was 14. Prodip then refused to marry her.

On October 25 that year, the victim filed the rape case with Godagari Police Station accusing Prodip.

On June 12 the following year, Rajshahi Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal sentenced him to life in prison.

Several months ago this year, the convict filed a petition with the High Court through a lawyer seeking bail. In the petition, he said he would marry the victim. His lawyer also submitted a document from the victim to the court stating that she would have no objection if Prodip was granted bail following their marriage.

On October 22, a HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman ordered for their marriage at the jail gate.

The court also ordered the jail authorities to send the marriage documents to it within 30 days after the marriage.

UN recognises

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hosting Rohingyas in Cox’s Bazar. “That’s a difficult situation.”

Bangladesh is hosting over 1.1 million Rohingyas in Cox’s Bazar, and majority of them entered the country since August 25, 2017 amid military crackdowns against them.

In the face of growing concerns over the extreme congestion in the camps of Cox’s Bazar and to avert any risk of death due to landslides and other unwarranted incidents, the government decided to relocate, 100,000 Rohingyas to Bhashan Char in phases.

Accordingly, in the first phase, more than 1,600 Rohingyas, who expressed their willingness for relocation, were shifted to Bhasan Char on Friday afternoon.

The Bangladesh government invested more than \$350 million in developing the 13,000-acre island with all modern amenities and enhanced facilities, said the foreign ministry.

The facilities include uninterrupted supply of electricity and water, agricultural plots, cyclone shelters, two hospitals, four community clinics, mosques, warehouses, telecommunication services, police station, recreation and learning centres, and playgrounds.

UK, EU call

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Europe grapple with the vast economic cost of the Covid-19 outbreak.

British and EU negotiators paused trade talks on Friday to call in their leaders to try to narrow the gaps and get an agreement after a week of negotiations failed to bridge significant divergences between the two sides.

“We keep calm, as always, and if there is still a way, we will see,” EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier told broadcasters in London as he left for Brussels.

Johnson was expected to speak to Barnier’s UK counterpart David Frost and other officials, ahead of the von der Leyen call.

The pause in talks on Friday was the latest twist in months of negotiations which have barely moved on the three thorniest issues - fisheries, ensuring fair competition guarantees and ways to solve future disputes.

Sources from both sides said that French demands over fishing rights in British waters remained a key issue.

However, one EU diplomat said French President Emmanuel Macron was not the only one with reservations, and several member states had also raised concerns over how far Barnier had moved on competition issues, known as the level-playing field.

“It’s not just Macron,” the diplomat said.

Britain says the EU must respect its sovereignty because the 2016 Brexit referendum result was a vote to “take back control”.

But the EU says Britain’s proximity to the bloc means it cannot offer the “Canada-style” free trade deal that Johnson had been seeking.