

BANGLADESH UPDATE	569 New cases in 24hrs	5,27,632 Total cases	7,906 Deaths	4,72,437 Recoveries	GLOBAL UPDATE	2,036,103 Deaths	95,246,530 Total cases
--------------------------	----------------------------------	--------------------------------	------------------------	-------------------------------	----------------------	----------------------------	----------------------------------

Make more films on Liberation War

PM urges filmmakers at National Film Awards handover ceremony

BSS, Dhaka



Stating that her government would do everything necessary for survival of the country's cinema industry, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged all concerned to make more films on the Liberation War.

New generations will know the real history of Bangladesh's emergence as an independent nation that way, she added.

"I request you all concerned to make more films on the Liberation War as the generation after generation can know the real history of our victory as the history was distorted with the assassination of the Father of the Nation on August 15, 1975," she said.

The PM said this while addressing the ceremony of the National Film Award-2019. She addressed the event from the Gono Bhaban.

The Ministry of Information organised the function at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre (BICC) in the

capital. "We are a brave nation. We had achieved victory in the Liberation War. The history of the victory, the history of the Liberation War, our spirit and our ideals must have reflections in our films," the PM said. She added that her government would do whatever necessary for the survival of the Bangladesh Film Industry, saying, "We will do whatever is necessary for modernisation of the film. Remember, I am always with you as the cinema industry was founded at the hands of my father. I am working to this end keeping that in mind."

Noting that the cinema is the only means of entertainment for the commoners, Sheikh Hasina said her government has been working to reach the cinema culture to the upazila level and for which a fund of Taka 1,000 crore is going to be raised from where people can take loans at low interest rate to build cinema halls or cineplexes for amusement of the people of the localities.



An excavator demolishing a structure in Khulna's Moylapota area. The roads and highway department, with assistance from the Khulna City Corporation, conducted the drive to demolish structures that had encroached upon the road, which will be turned into a four-lane highway. The photo was taken around 11:30am yesterday.

Nigeria army retakes military base from jihadists

AFP, Kano

Nigerian troops regained control of a military base in the northeast hours after it was seized by jihadists, sources told AFP yesterday.

Jihadists aligned with the Islamic State militant group captured the base in Borno state on Saturday, after launching raids earlier in the week.

Officials blamed the violence on Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a group that split from Boko Haram in 2016.

The army has claimed some success recently, destroying at least one of the group's camps located on islands in Lake Chad, on the borders of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad.

An army statement Saturday evening said its troops along with the air force had "effectively destroyed seven Boko Haram/ISWAP terrorists' gun trucks" and killed several of the fighters.

"The troops are still engaged in pursuit of the fleeing terrorists," the statement added.

Sources told AFP yesterday that the army had regained control of the base and the jihadists had left Marte, the town where the base is located.

Tk 2,700cr fresh stimulus unveiled

FROM PAGE 1

female entrepreneurs. The SME foundation will disburse loans among the small businesses and entrepreneurs hit hard due to the economic downturn caused by the pandemic, said finance ministry officials.

Besides, Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) will get Tk 100 crore under the package.

The state-run corporation, established to support small initiatives across the country, will provide loans to small entrepreneurs and industrial units set up in the BSCIC estates under its existing credit programmes.

The package also includes financial support for business initiatives by women who suffered due to the economic slowdown.

Joyeta Foundation, a government initiative to support women's ventures and empower women financially, will get Tk 50 crore. Apart from the loans, the foundation will provide training to women entrepreneurs.

The NGO Foundation will get Tk 50 crore for providing small loans through NGOs.

Besides, Social Development Foundation, Palli Daridro Bimochon Foundation, and Bangladesh Palli Development Board will get Tk 300 crore each and Small Farmers Development Foundation Tk 100 crore.

The government has not yet decided on the interest rates for the loans to be provided through all these organisations and agencies, said finance ministry officials.

"Before releasing the funds, the Finance Division will discuss and

review their existing rates and fix it. But the beneficiaries will get the loans at a reduced rate," said one of the officials, seeking anonymity.

In March last year, the government announced a Tk 20,000-crore stimulus package for the cottage, micro, small and medium enterprise (CMSME) sector after the pandemic hit the country. However, the disbursement rate of the loans was low compared to that for the large industrial and service sectors.

Talking to The Daily Star, Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, said, "These are steps in the right direction, but the devil is in the details, as always."

The key parameters of the Tk 1,500-crore package for CMSMEs is unclear, he pointed out.

"The money will be provided as credit to enterprises in the rural areas. What will be the interest rate at the recipient level and the repayment period? Who will bear the risk?"

The inclusion of medium-sized enterprises may frustrate the objective since they are not exactly the most distressed and deprived of assistance under the previous packages, he said.

The involvement of the NGOs and semi-government institutions is welcome, but one cannot but wonder whether the assistance is spread too thin across too many institutions, Zahid said.

Suggesting review of the distribution of allocations to these institutions based on performance, he said the entire package could be provided as grants to micro, cottage and small enterprises faced with

existential threats. "Many of them are currently not in a position to take on additional debt because of depressed cash flows as business is still dull, although perhaps better than in the first half of 2020. A one-shot infusion of grant money would help recapitalise and thereby keep these enterprises afloat."

THE SECOND PACKAGE Under the Tk 1,200-crore package, all disadvantaged elderly people, widows and female divorcees in 150 poverty-stricken upazilas of the country will get cash assistance. The beneficiaries will get an allowance of Tk 500 a month.

The package will be implemented in fiscal 2021-2022.

The amount is likely to increase by 5 percent from the next budget as the finance ministry has already made a decision in this regard, said an official of the ministry.

However, the government is yet to finalise the number of beneficiaries.

It started giving the cash incentives to all those who fall under the beneficiary groups in 112 poverty-stricken upazilas after the pandemic hit the country.

Referring to the allowance, Zahid said it seems the additional social assistance will be provided to new beneficiaries so that all the elderly people and distressed women in the rural areas are covered by fiscal 2022.

"Proper listing of eligible beneficiaries and pilferage-free transfer of the cash payments have been and remain the key challenges in this regard. The adequacy of the benefits per person remain an open question," he said.

More hardship for poor as cold spell likely to linger

STAR REPORT

The bone-chilling cold in the country's northern and north-eastern region that is causing immense public sufferings may prolong as the ongoing cold wave may continue.

A bulletin of Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) yesterday said, "Mild cold wave is sweeping over the regions of Dinajpur, Sayedpur, Nilphamari, Bogura, Naogaon and Srimangal. It may continue."

"Weather may remain dry over the country. Moderate to thick fog may occur during midnight to morning and it may continue till noon at places over northern part of the country."

The bulletin also said that night temperature may fall slightly over southern part of the country and it may remain nearly unchanged elsewhere over the country. Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged.

The 24-hour bulletin was released at 9:00am yesterday.

The bulletin said, "Rainfall activity is likely at the end period."

Yesterday's lowest temperature was recorded as 7.5 degree Celsius at Sreemangal of Moulvibazar, said the BMD's bulletin.

Meanwhile, poor and underprivileged residents of shoal area

in Lalmonirhat and Kurigram are facing double blow as they are suffering from shortage of warm clothes.

Mominul Islam, 48, a farmer of Char Jatrapur in Kurigram Sadar upazila, said, "The intensity of cold is so severe that people do not go out of home without a major reason. But we have to go to crop land for cultivation."

Mubarak Hossain, 52, a day laborer of Kalmati area in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, said, "When we go out of home, it seems that our body is getting paralysed. We cannot move our hands and legs properly. Nevertheless, we have to go to work for earning livelihood."

"We don't have sufficient warm clothes because we cannot afford those. We are facing dire straits," he added.

Although blankets are distributed among the cold hit poor people by the government and some NGOs, but these are not sufficient, said locals.

There are around 400 char areas of the Brahmaputra, Dudhkumar, Teesta, Dhara and Jinjiram Rivers in Kurigram and Lalmonirhat.

Most of the people of these areas are extreme poor. So, their need should be provided, locals demanded.

Our Lalmonirhat correspondent contributed to this report.

Proactive steps can fetch \$30b a year

FROM PAGE 1

remittance every year in the future. "The money is there," he said, adding that yearly remittance inflow is yet to hit the \$30 billion mark because such money is still not coming through the formal channels.

The banking sector was yet to provide services with sufficient "speed", which the non-formal sector ensures, he said.

He added that the government's two percent cash incentive was a reason for the increase in recent remittance inflow and suggested it would be sustainable with a further increase in the incentive.

Syed Saiful Haque, chairman of Welfare Association for the Rights of Bangladeshi Emigrants (WARBE) Development Foundation, said it is not surprising that the country received about \$20 billion remittance in a year.

He referred to a study of the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, conducted about a decade ago, and said the study then revealed that it was possible to get about \$30 billion in remittance annually.

If the government and other stakeholders, including the banking sector, work proactively, then it is most likely that inward remittance will continue to surge, he added.

Saiful also suggested that "visa-

trading" be stopped in this regard through bilateral initiatives, adding that about \$3 billion to \$4 billion was spent for "visa purchasing" every year.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director and chief executive officer of Mutual Trust Bank, said in the case of remitting money, "speed" and "trust" are important because those who remit money look at how quickly, especially in cases of emergency, the money reached their dear ones back home.

He said the government recently re-determined the maximum time limit to distribute remittance to the beneficiary in two working days, which was 72 hours earlier.

Such steps are largely being implemented at present and this has helped in the increase of remittance inflow, he said.

Chairing and moderating the dialogue, Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, convener of the citizen's platform and distinguished fellow of Centre of Policy Dialogue (CPD), said although there were various reasons behind the recent inward remittance increase, there is no doubt that the government's two percent cash incentive was a key reason.

Remittance kept coming in large amounts, but even greater amount of expatriates' earnings may have been involved in different market-oriented sectors, he said.

Whether such money was inflowing through a "third channel" instead of reaching the beneficiaries directly from the wage-earners is a matter to look into, Debapriya added.

Addressing the dialogue, CPD Chairman and eminent economist Prof Rehman Sobhan said although the government's two percent cash incentive for inward remittance was a positive step, the macro beneficiary of it is the "balance of payment" of the country.

The diversion from hundi to here was essentially a macro issue because households were continuing to get the same amount that they were getting in the past, he said.

"So, we have now added to our foreign exchange reserves and improved official balance of payments," he added.

He said the problem that should essentially be addressed is the about one crore people who, going abroad after 45 years, are still "disempowered individuals" and at "the mercy of the market".

CPD Distinguished Fellow Prof Mustafizur Rahman, founding chair of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit Prof Tasneem Siddiqui, and Centre for Non Resident Bangladeshis Chairperson MS Shekil Chowdhury, among others, addressed the virtual dialogue.

Dhaka to have 330

FROM PAGE 1 Shamsul, also the director of Expanded Programme on Immunization, said the home ministry was informed about the need for additional security measures.

"A team from the Prime Minister's Office has started working on it. They will monitor the security measures," he added.

The DGHS has been training the people who will implement the programme in the field, and eventually those in administrative positions will get the training.

India launched the world's largest coronavirus vaccination programme on Saturday. Over 1.6 lakh healthcare and sanitary workers at the frontline of India's Covid-19 battle got their first jab on the very first day of the programme.

Bangladesh will get the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from Serum Institute of India by January 25, said officials.

Bangladesh has purchased three crore shots of the Oxford vaccine from Serum for \$4 per shot, according to the tripartite agreement signed between the government, Serum and Beximco on November 5 last year.

As per the contract, Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd will deliver the three crore doses to the district level EPI storages from Serum in six phases.

It was decided earlier that those aged under 18 and those who are pregnant would not get the vaccine shots. Each person would get two shots in a space of between eight and 12 weeks.

Officials are expecting 50 lakh shots to arrive in the first shipment. People expressed scepticism about the shipment after Serum CEO Adar Poonawalla earlier this month said in an interview with the Associated Press that, "The vaccine has been granted emergency authorisation by

the Indian regulator on Sunday, but on the condition that Serum Institute doesn't export the shots to ensure that vulnerable populations in India are protected.

"We can only give the vaccines to the government of India at the moment," he said, adding that the decision was also made to prevent hoarding.

Poonawalla further said the "company also has been barred from selling the vaccine in the private market".

Besides, Serum was planning to give 200 to 300 million doses to COVAX by December 2021, said the AP report.

The report also observed that the ban on export "means that poorer nations will probably have to wait a few months before receiving their first shots".

Officials then urged people not to worry.

AL candidates sweep second phase too

FROM PAGE 1

Returning Officer Istafizul Islam said when he got allegations about driving out agents, he took steps immediately. At another press conference held at his home, Mohammad Mohsin, Sreepur municipality ward-7 candidate, alleged that some criminals attacked his supporters after the polls.

Contacted, Khondokar Imam Hossain, officer-in-charge of Sreepur Police Station, said they were investigating the incident. Meanwhile, police formed a four-member committee to probe the killing of councillor-elect Tarikul Islam, 45, in Siraiganj municipality on Saturday night in post-polls violence, said Muzahhidul Islam, additional DIG of Rajshahi range.

He, along with high-placed police officials, visited the spot yesterday,

reports our Pabna correspondent. "A four-member probe committee, led by the superintendent of Siraiganj police, is investigating the incident. The criminals must be punished," the DIG told journalists.

A tense situation is prevailing in Siraiganj after the killing of the councillor-elect while celebrating his victory. The victim's family alleged that supporters of AL men and councillor candidate Shahadat Hossain Buddin, defeated in the polls, killed Tarikul. "I lost my husband and my family lost the wage-earner. How can we survive?" said victim's wife Hasi Khatun.

EC Senior Secretary Md Alamgir claimed that elections were held peacefully. Violence and killing was never expected. "There will be

investigations in these connections," he said.

14.65 LAKH NEW VOTERS The Election Commission yesterday disclosed the update of the new voter list, saying 14.65 lakh new voters were added to the draft list.

Alamgir at a press briefing said officials would do corrections and resolve disputes by February 7, and the final list would be published on March 1.

The current number of electorates is 11.13 crore, according to the draft list. Before the last parliamentary polls, the number of voters was 10.42 crore. He said the names of dead voters were not removed from the draft list, and removal of their names would take place before publishing of the final voter list.

UK demands China grant UN access to Xinjiang over abuses

AFP, London

Britain's government yesterday pressed China to allow UN rights inspectors to visit Xinjiang after raising anew allegations of "appalling" human rights abuses against the Uighur minority people.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab last week introduced import controls on firms that may have sourced goods from the region in northwest China using forced labour from the mainly Muslim Uighur community.

Number of new

FROM PAGE 1 As per the latest data, the daily infection rate dropped to 4.23 percent.

The country recorded a daily infection rate of 4.90 percent on January 14, 8.29 percent on January 10, 7.52 percent on January 4, and 8.18 percent on January 1.

Bangladesh reported its first cases on March 8 and the first death on March 18.

Meanwhile, there has been no let-up in the number of tests conducted. So far, 3,457,453 tests have been conducted -- 13,446 in the last 24 hours.

Charges framed

FROM PAGE 1 of the case, submitted the charge sheet to Sylhet Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Abul Kashem's court.

The case was later forwarded to the tribunal which accepted the charge sheet on January 13.

According to the charge sheet, the victim and her husband were forcibly taken to the hostel by the accused when the couple went to visit the college area in the evening of September 25.

Later, the accused asked for Tk 50,000 as ransom. Being refused, they raped the victim after tying her husband, snatched her gold jewellery and mugged Tk 2,000.

In the charge sheet, six were charged with rape of the woman, while two were made accused of abetting them.

The rape accused are Saifur Rahman, 28, Shah Mahbubur Rahman Rony, 25, Tarekul Islam, 28, Arjun Laskar, 26, Mohammad Ainuddin alias Ainul, 26, and Misbual Islam Rajon, 27. Other accused are: Rabiul Hasan, 25, and Mahfuzur Rahman Masum, 25. All are now in jail.