

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



584

New cases in 24hrs



5,30,271

Total cases



7,966

Deaths



4,75,074

Recoveries



2,087,252

Deaths



97,483,187

Total cases

## REMEMBERING Mujibur Rahman Dilu

Noted actor Mujibur Rahman Dilu is known for his performance in popular television drama serials like "Songsotok" and "Laal Matir Kalo Dhoa". The actor recently passed away due to multiple health complications. His close friend and confidante, famed director Nasiruddin Yousuff, takes a walk down memory lane and relives their journey together.

NASIRUDDIN YOUSUFF

We shared a very intimate and personal bond. I still remember those days when newly-married Mujibur Rahman Dilu came to my Paltan residence with his wife. We used to live in a bungalow beside popular actor Raisul Islam Asad's house. Within just a few days, they became a part of my family.

Also, many do not know but he was an amazing cook, and my mother used to love him wholeheartedly for his humility and simplicity. Glimpses of him rehearsing his roles and the smell of his delicious dishes are still fresh in my memory.

Words fall short when I intend to describe his acting skills. His performance in the play "Ami Gadhra Bolchi", where the artist not only surprised everyone with method acting but also managed to present a beautiful adaptation of the drama, had made him the talk of the town at that time. I had the privilege to enjoy his stage performance multiple times.

His observation and the ability to absorb his character within his being is what has always amazed me. He went on to impress me with his performance when we worked together on many other projects, including the famed BTV drama serial "Laal Matir Kalo Dhoa", originally written by Selim Al Deen.

We were both freedom fighters and



as I was a commander, he honoured and abided by me a lot. His patriotic conscience and love for art have been his driving force throughout his active years. He was never afraid to take up any work and his honestly and undaunted efforts to excel is what makes him unique.

Alongside acting, he served at Hotel Purbani and was also posted in Dubai for a while. However, that did not keep him from pursuing his passion for theatre. He was also the coordinator of the children's organisation Tunituni. We had arranged a big event on the 10th anniversary of this organisation where we had also invited foreign delegates from India. He balanced both sides perfectly and that's what I admire about him.

Dilu's punctuality was unparalleled. His sense of commitment and cultural attributes contributed to making every play or drama a rather memorable one.

The masses still remember him as Maalu from "Songsotok" and his flawless performance in the film "Agami" where he shared the screen with legendary actors Pijush Banerjee, Aly Zaker and Rowshan. Dilu believed it is a great privilege for any artist to live through his work. Today, both Aly Zaker and Dilu rest in peace but their legacy lives on. Every time I walk by a stage or start rolling a camera, Dilu will accompany me in my heart.

### MISBEHAVIOUR WITH MAGISTRATE

## Provide security to presiding officer

HC orders IGP after the officer in Kushtia told court about his feelings of insecurity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the inspector general of police to provide security to the official who witnessed policemen misbehaving with a judicial magistrate during the municipality polls in Kushtia.

Shahjahan Ali, who was the presiding officer at Bheramara Pilot Model High School in Kushtia, told the court yesterday that he and his family members were scared of police.

During the polls on January 16, Senior Judicial Magistrate Mohsin

Hasan was talking to Shahjahan about allegations of voter fraud at the school, when Superintendent of Police SM Tanvir Arafath and several other police officers interrupted the conversation and asked Mohsin him to leave, according to complaints the latter had made.

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman issued the directive for the inspector general yesterday after hearing Shahjahan's statement.

Shahjahan, a jubo unnyan officer, SEE PAGE 10 COL 2

### 'ATTACKS' ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

## Amnesty Int'l voices concern

Urges govt to release cartoonist Kishore, writer Mushtaq

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amnesty International yesterday expressed deep concern over the recent arbitrary detention and other forms of harassment of artists who are facing increasing attacks on their right to freedom of expression in Bangladesh.

In a statement, the rights watchdog called on the Bangladesh authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all artists unlawfully detained, drop the charges against them, and guarantee people's right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity, as enshrined in domestic and international laws.

Amnesty called on the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore and writer Mushtaq Ahmed since they have been detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression, and drop all charges against film director Anonno Mamun, actor Shaheen Mridha, folk singer Rita Dewan, cartoonist Kishore, and writer Mushtaq.

It also called on the authorities to urgently repeal the Digital Security Act 2018 or substantially amend its repressive provisions.

The rights body said the right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity is enshrined both in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Bangladesh is a state party to both instruments.

Bangladesh's constitution also guarantees people's right to freedom of expression (Article 39).

In the 2013 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) before the UN Human Rights Council, Bangladesh accepted several recommendations concerning

the right to freedom of expression.

However, instead of reforming the legal regime in accordance with the commitments made then, Bangladesh has further undermined the space for artistic freedom with the introduction of a more repressive and draconian law in 2018 -- the Digital Security Act, Amnesty said.

"Bangladesh must uphold its obligations under international human rights law and guarantee the space of artistic and creative expression without the fear of retribution," added the rights watchdog.

Last month, a Dhaka court issued an arrest warrant against Rita Dewan, a female folk singer, and her two daughters, in a case filed in February last year under the Digital Security Act.

Rita and her daughters were accused of "hurting religious sentiments".

Rita was performing a Pala Gaan (a variant of local folk music festival where two folk singers engage in an extempore musical battle) in Tangail on February 1, 2020, and was debating with her colleague about the "Living Things Versus the Greatest".

Since the musical show, a total of four cases have been filed against Rita on similar grounds -- one was dismissed by a court, while three others are pending trial.

On 13 January this year, the Dhaka Cyber Tribunal granted Rita bail in one of the cases.

In May last year, Bangladesh police detained cartoonist Kishore and writer Mushtaq from their Dhaka residence under the Digital Security Act accusing them of "spreading rumours and misinformation on Facebook about the coronavirus situation" and "undermining the image of the Father of the Nation", the "national anthem" or "national flag".



Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, left, and Health Minister Zahid Maleque receive a box containing Covid-19 vaccine from Indian High Commissioner Vikram Doraiswami, right, at a ceremony at the capital's state guest house Padma. India handed 20 lakh doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca's vaccine, manufactured by Serum Institute of India, to Bangladesh as a gift at the event.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Vaccination plan gets a boost

FROM PAGE 1

"I'm thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi for sending the vaccine as a gift," she said, addressing an event virtually. She also said the procured vaccine would arrive as planned.

The government has prepared a list of groups that would be prioritised during the first phase when 1.5 crore people would be inoculated. The campaign is likely to launch at over 300 centres across the capital.

The government is set to launch today an awareness campaign on vaccination. 'GOODWILL GESTURE' Officials said India gifted Bangladesh 20 lakh doses of the vaccine in a goodwill gesture, which can be seen as another step in further cementing the strong friendship between the two countries.

A chartered plane of Air India carried the vaccine, branded Covishield, from Mumbai Airport to Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. The plane arrived shortly after 11:00am.

The doses were transported in cold boxes from the airport to a vaccine storage facility in Tejgaon under the supervision of officials from the Directorate General of Health Services and the Directorate General of Drug Administration.

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Vikram Doraiswami, formally handed the shipment to Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and Health Minister Zahid Maleque at a ceremony on the premises of the state guesthouse Padma around 1:30pm.

The world is struggling to tackle the coronavirus pandemic and only a few countries have begun vaccination programmes.

The confirmed Covid-19 death toll in Bangladesh reached 7,966, while the number of detected infections was 5,30,271 as of yesterday.

A video conference for Saarc leaders was organised on March 15 last year at the initiative of the Indian PM. There, Hasina called for collaboration through utilisation of collective capacity, expertise and resources. The Saarc Covid-19 Emergency Fund was set up

soon after that.

Addressing the handover ceremony yesterday, Doraiswami said the tranche of the vaccine was part of India's commitment at the highest level to its Neighbourhood First Policy.

"Together, India and Bangladesh, we will be able to fight the disease most effectively when we cooperate," he said.

Bangladesh received the vaccine shots four days after vaccination was launched in India on Saturday. This is among the fastest deliveries of vaccines that India has planned for anybody primarily because of the importance of ensuring that its friends receive immunity along with the Indians, he noted.

On Wednesday, India delivered the consignments of 1,50,000 doses of Covishield vaccines to Bhutan, 100,000 doses to the Maldives, and one million to Nepal yesterday.

Doraiswami said they hoped Bangladesh could kickstart the vaccination with this tranche of vaccine that would help improve immunity and resistance, and wished a good health of all Bangladeshis.

The foreign minister, the health minister and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam expressed gratitude to the Indian PM and Indian people for the gift.

"Today is a historic day," Momen said, adding that India fought a war against Pakistan, helping Bangladesh achieve its independence in 1971, and has now gifted 2 million vaccine doses during the difficult times stemmed from the coronavirus pandemic.

The gift from India is also significant as Bangladesh celebrates Mujib Borsho, marking its 50th anniversary of independence, and 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two nations, he said.

Momen said Bangladesh was one of the countries which are beginning vaccination early. He claimed that Bangladesh had been number one in South Asia in successfully tackling the pandemic both in health and economy-wise.

Shahriar Alam said the relations

between the two countries would improve further, and this message had been delivered to the people of Bangladesh and India through the gift in this difficult time.

Zahid Maleque said three crore more shots from Serum Institute of India, which is manufacturing the vaccine, would be arriving in Bangladesh in six months under a contract between the SII, Beximco Pharmaceuticals and the Bangladesh government.

He requested India to make sure that the 3 crore doses are delivered smoothly.

"We are supposed to get 50 lakh vaccines on January 25 or 26, but we can let you know the final date only after the flight schedule is confirmed," Maleque said.

He said the government's plan was almost final on starting the vaccination programme.

"We hope in the next six to seven days, we will conduct a trial. Prime Minister Hasina will let us know the date. She will join the inauguration through videoconference," the health minister said.

He called upon all not to do politics over vaccine, and not to spread any rumour on the vaccine import, vaccination and any possible side effects.

"It is a life-saving drug. We would call upon all not to confuse people. Those who go for conspiracy and politics with human life are not good people... we are saving lives, tackling Covid," he said.

The minister said the national committee on Covid-19 vaccine has prepared a rigorous plan, which is expected to be effective.

Bangladesh has a lot of experience in immunisation programme, and has eliminated a number of diseases, including polio and tetanus, through vaccination. Every year, crores of children are vaccinated in the country.

"We hope people are aware of it. They know vaccines might have some light side reactions. AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine is a good one. It has no serious side reactions. If there is, the government will provide all treatment."

## Govt launches vaccine awareness campaign

FROM PAGE 1

first shot of the Covid-19 vaccine in the country.

Prof Khurshid said the DGHS has already produced a documentary to make people aware of the vaccination and that will be aired soon, adding that a vaccine bulletin will also be aired regularly to remove any confusion.

"Every vaccine has some side effects. So, side effect for this vaccine is normal. That's why this time vaccines will be administered only in hospitals. After vaccination, every person has to wait for 15 minutes. If there is any side effect it will be addressed immediately," said the health DG.

Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) consultant Mushtaq Hussain said there will be newspaper advertisements, television scrolls, small documentaries, posters and brochures to reach out to the masses.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has already termed overabundance of information and the rapid spread of misleading or fabricated news, images, and videos as an "infodemic".

"We're not just battling the virus," said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on August 25 last year. "We're also battling trolls and conspiracy theorists that push misinformation and undermine the outbreak response."

In that context, public awareness

campaign for vaccination is very important to dispel concerns and worries about the possible side effects of the vaccine as well as tackling misinformation, said healthcare experts.

They also said a comprehensive campaign involving key public figures will tremendously help build public confidence before the rollout of the vaccine.

Prof Md Sayedur Rahman, chairman at the BSMMU's pharmacology department, said people who have influence in society should come forward to make an impact.

"Politicians, national players, cultural activists, scientists, clerics and some other professionals have influence on society. So, they should be involved in the campaign," he said, adding that around the world influential people have come forward to encourage people to get vaccinated.

He also said in many other countries, the biggest advocates of the Covid-19 vaccine have been their prominent social figures.

In the USA, newly elected president Joe Biden took the first dose of vaccine on December 21 last year to dispel fears about the side effects, according to media reports.

Joe Biden, who was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States on Wednesday, took the second dose on January 11 this year.

In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Boris Johnson also took the

vaccine to set an example for the general population.

Besides, noted personalities like Pope Francis, Queen Elizabeth II, and her husband Prince Philip, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, US Vice-president Kamala Harris, media mogul Rupert Murdoch and many others have already received Covid-19 vaccines.

Bangladesh, however, is yet to name any public figure for mass awareness and vaccination campaigns.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque recently said there was no plan to start vaccination with any important person of the country.

"The people of the country are the VIPs to us. Those who are in need of it first, will be given [the vaccine] first," said the health minister while responding to a query on whether Bangladesh would follow the example of starting the vaccination process with VIPs, like many other countries.

The country has so far purchased three crore Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine doses from the Serum Institute of India. The Indian government has also gifted 20 lakh of the vaccine doses, which arrived in Dhaka yesterday.

Besides, Bangladesh will get 6.8 crore vaccine doses from Covax, a global vaccine alliance.

Of the purchased vaccine from SII, the first consignment of 50 lakh is expected to arrive in Dhaka on January 2, government officials said earlier.

PADMA BRIDGE

## PM does not want it to be named after her

2 AL MPs proposed it in JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday disapproved two lawmakers' proposal to name the under-construction Padma bridge after her for her contributions to the country's development and progress.

She expressed her disapproval by waving her hand and shaking her head while two ruling Awami League MPs placed their proposal before parliament in this regard.

Lawmakers Pankaj Deb Nath and Mohammad Iqbal Hossain placed the proposal while taking part in the discussion on thanksgiving motion on the president's speech in the House.

"I want to propose that Padma bridge should be named after our prime minister who is the symbol of development and initiative," Iqbal said.

"The prime minister is a modest person. She would not want it [naming the bridge after her], but we have some responsibilities and obligations also," the MP said amid thumping of tables by the lawmakers.

Later, Pankaj also placed a similar proposal.

He said the PM made a bold decision to go ahead with the implementation of the bridge project with the country's own funds after donors cancelled their funding.

"She is a modest person, but we are not ungrateful," Pankaj said.

Earlier, on Tuesday, a Supreme Court lawyer filed a writ petition with the High Court seeking its directive on the government authorities concerned to name Padma bridge as "Sheikh Hasina Bridge" considering her contributions to its construction.

Lawyer Md Kamruzzaman submitted the petition as a public interest litigation to the HC. The petition said most of the people of the country desire that the bridge will be named after the prime minister as she had taken the challenge of building it with the country's own funds.

The HC may hold hearing on the petition next week, the lawyer told The Daily Star.

The last span of the Padma bridge was installed on December 10 last year. The top deck of the two-level steel truss composite bridge will accommodate a four-lane highway for vehicles and the lower deck railway tracks. The bridge is likely to be opened to traffic in the first half of next year.

The bridge, which would connect Dhaka to 21 southern districts, will be a potential catalyst for major economic changes in the lives of over 30 million people living in the region. It will also give a major boost to trade and economic activities.

The Tk 30,193-crore bridge will be one of the major transport corridors linking Bangladesh with India, Nepal and Bhutan. Besides, it will enhance regional trade and collaboration along the Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway Network.

## Three killed in Bandarban road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Three people were killed and four others critically injured as a jeep, popularly known as Chander Gari, fell into a ditch in Bandarban's Thanchi upazila yesterday.

Officer-in-charge of Thanchi police station Saifuddin Anwar said the vehicle plunged into a ditch around 10:00am after losing control leaving the three people killed on the spot and four others critically injured.

The dead were identified as Md Hossain, 60, of Cox's Bazar's Chakaria area, Payel Bawm, 27, of Baklai area, and Ashraf Ali, 50, of Chattogram's Bazalia area, he said, adding that the vehicle was headed for Thanchi from Baklai.

The injured were taken to Bandarban Sadar hospital, the OC said.

## 16 more die, 584 test positive for Covid in a day

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh recorded 16 coronavirus deaths and 584 fresh cases overnight.

The recovery count rose to 475,074 after another 602 patients were discharged from the hospitals during the period, a Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) press release read yesterday.

"Sixteen more Covid-19 patients died in the last 24 hours, increasing the death toll from the pandemic to 7,966," the release read.

It said the tally of infections has surged to 530,271 as 584 new cases were confirmed in those 24 hours.

Among the total infections, 89.59 percent patients have recovered, while 1.50 percent died so far since the first Covid-19 positive cases were reported in the country on March 8.

## PM greets Joe Biden

FROM PAGE 1

Paris Climate Agreement.

"You know that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is the president of Climate Vulnerable Forum. We thanked Joe Biden especially," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told reporters after the handover ceremony of India's vaccine doses as gift at the State Guest House Padma yesterday, reports UNB.

Momen said he was very happy to see Biden as the US president.

In a statement, the foreign ministry later said Bangladesh has welcomed new US President Joe Biden's important announcement on Wednesday to re-

enter the Paris Climate Agreement.

"Bangladesh also appreciates President Biden's promise to put the United States on a track to net-zero emissions by 2050 and his call to reestablish the US as global climate leader," it said.

On June 1, 2017, the then US president Donald Trump announced that his country would exit the Paris accord and re-enter only on terms that are "fair to the United States".

Bangladesh, as the current president of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) and the Vulnerable Twenty Group (V20), plays a leading role in climate discourses and focuses on the urgent

need to strengthen climate action and adaptation efforts by enhancing nationally determined contributions, the ministry said.

It said Bangladesh hopes that US's re-joining the global climate accord and re-prioritisation of climate change issues would encourage other leading emitters to reduce global emissions and to make investment in clean energy.

"On re-entering the Paris Agreement, the US government also acknowledged that the Paris Agreement created an unprecedented framework for global action to avoid planetary warming and to build global resilience."