

BANGLADESH UPDATE



535
New cases in 24hrs



5,36,107
Total cases



8,149
Deaths



4,80,728
Recoveries



2,256,283
Deaths



104,201,113
Total cases

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

Next round talks look uncertain

UNB, Dhaka

Amid the changed situation in Myanmar, the next round of virtual discussion on Rohingya repatriation, scheduled for tomorrow, looks uncertain.

Bangladesh is yet to establish any contact with the new military-led interim government in Myanmar, but it communicated with the Chinese ambassador in Dhaka as China is mediating talks between Bangladesh and Myanmar on Rohingya repatriation.

"We had a conversation with the Chinese ambassador here on Monday. Let's wait until tomorrow [today]," Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen told reporters at the foreign ministry yesterday.

He said they were waiting for feedback from Myanmar about the planned DG-level working group meeting as there was no formal communication with the interim government of Myanmar.

Masud said they had a preference for talks on February 4 with Myanmar and China was enquiring about it. "There might be some logistical issues since there has been a change in Myanmar."

He said Bangladesh wants to hold the working group meeting with Myanmar as soon as possible and follow the remaining agreed roadmap on Rohingya repatriation. "We

conveyed it to the Chinese side."

Responding to a question, the foreign secretary said diplomacy can continue with everybody and at every level. He referred to Bangladesh Army chief Gen Aziz Ahmed's visit to Myanmar.

He said Bangladesh will establish communications with the new interim government in Myanmar once it becomes functional.

"We've been persistent in developing mutually beneficial relations with Myanmar and have been working with Myanmar for the voluntary, safe and sustained repatriation of the Rohingyas sheltered in Bangladesh," said the Bangladesh foreign ministry on Monday.

The foreign secretary said Bangladesh remains more vigilant along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border amid the changed situation in Myanmar.

Replying to another question, Masud said Bangladesh wants to see Rohingya repatriation issue is discussed at the UN Security Council meeting. He said they were focusing on accountability and repatriation fronts.

"Due to the changed situation in Myanmar, issues related to getting back democracy on track and political matters will come up for discussion. But we want to see that Rohingya issue is discussed at the meeting."

Covid ICU deaths have plunged, but progress may be stalling: study

AFP, Paris

Covid-19 treatments and improved hospital care have reduced death rates in intensive care by more than a third since the early months of the pandemic, but this progress might be stalling, according to research published yesterday.

Whereas medical staff in the first wave of the epidemic had few insights to help them tackle the new virus, they now have some effective drugs and therapies for treating severely ill patients.

A large-scale meta-analysis of overall mortality of Covid-19 patients in intensive care units (ICUs) around the world, published in the journal *Anaesthesia*, found that it had fallen to 36 percent by October.

An earlier analysis by the same authors found that ICU mortality

had fallen from 60 percent in late March 2020 to 42 percent at the end of May.

"After our first meta-analysis last year showed a large drop in ICU mortality from Covid-19 from March to May 2020, this updated analysis shows that any fall in mortality rate between June and October 2020 appears to have flattened or plateaued," the authors said.

Researchers looked at data from 52 observational studies involving 43,128 patients.

The studies were from Europe, North America and China -- areas included in the earlier analysis -- as well as reports from the Middle East, South Asia and Australia.

The authors said that hospitals now have much more knowledge about what works -- and what does not.

Scrap seller turns 'liquor' maker

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-- Sayed Al Amin, 30, manager of the factory, Redowan Ullah, 35, the wholesale distributor, and distributors Sagor Bepari, 27, and Monotosh Chandro, 35.

Abdullah Al Mamun, the owner of a private advertisement firm, and his friend Shehzad Tony bought a bottle of vodka last Friday for Tk 7,500 from the factory's distributor Akash. Drinking the liquor, Mamun fell ill and died at a city hospital.

Shehzad is currently undergoing treatment in the hospital.

Learning of the incidents, detectives started investigating and arrested the syndicate members, said police.

DC Mashiur Rahman said Nasir actually used to work in different hotels as an attendant. Sometimes, he used to buy bottles of foreign liquor for Tk 2,500 each from different warehouses and sold those to customers for Tk 3,000, he said.

After the Covid-19 pandemic hit the country, Nasir lost his job. Recently, strict measures were also taken by warehouses about selling foreign liquor in the local market, said police.

This created a scarcity of liquor and Nasir seized the chance, joining forces with others to start selling fake liquor.

According to law enforcers, Jahangir, who had a scrap material shop in Old Dhaka, used to buy a gallon of spirit from the capital's Mitford area for Tk 10,000.

The syndicate then bought mineral water bottles in which they would mix sugar, colour, and a portion of the spirit. They would pour their mixture in old bottles of alcohol bought from roadside shops and the "foreign liquor" would then be ready for sale.

From a gallon of spirit, the syndicate used to make around 100 bottles of "foreign liquor", which they sold for Tk 7-8,000, said DC Mashiur.

Mashiur further said they have collected a diary from the fake factory containing details of over hundreds of customers who bought the fake liquor from the syndicates.

Asked about death of Gazipur victims, DC Mashiur Rahman said that the samples collected from the Gazipur and Mohammadpur victims matched those of the bottles seized from the fake factory.

Yesterday, a case was filed with Sreepur Police Station in Gazipur against unnamed accused in connection with the deaths of three

staffers of a media organisation, allegedly from ingesting toxic liquor.

The station's Sub-inspector Nayan Bhuiyan filed the case, our Gazipur correspondent reports quoting the SI.

Two staffers of the organisation died on Sunday and one on Monday after ingesting toxic alcohol during a company trip to a resort. Thirteen of the party of around 43 are currently hospitalised, according to the case statement.

In Bogura, at least 13 people died within the last 72 hours after consuming toxic liquor, reports our Bogura Correspondent.

At least five suspected to have drunk toxic alcohol died while undergoing treatment at different hospitals in the city yesterday while another person died on Monday. Five of the deceased were identified as Abdul Jalil, 65, Zulfiqar Ali, 55, Abu Kalam, 52, Mehedi Hasan, 25, and Laju Mia, 32.

Neighbours said Mehedi had taken rectified spirit from a local homeopathy shop on Monday night, became sick and died on way to the hospital yesterday morning.

Another Bogura man, Abdul Ahad, died on Monday in his room. Family members admitted that he used to have alcohol regularly and also drank the night before. He passed away in his sleep.

Humayan Kabir, officer in-charge of Bogura Sadar Police Station said, the forensic department of the Bogura Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital have been conducting autopsies on 11 people suspected of dying from toxic liquor consumption within the last 72 hours.

A case against four homeopathy shop owners and some unknown accused has been filed with the sadar police station regarding the incident, he said.

Monower Hosain Ripon, 42, a victim's brother, filed the case.

However, police were not able to arrest any of the accused till filing of this report last night.

Ali Ashraf Bhuiyan, superintendent of police of Bogura, told this newspaper that they did not get the autopsy reports of the deceased yet.

"Once we get the report, we may be able to say clearly how the victims died, [whether by] consuming toxic alcohol or not," he said, adding that the police are conducting drives to arrest the accused homeopathy shop owners and others involved.



A man cutting scrap, collected from ship-breaking yards, with a blow torch and without maintaining any safety measures on a footpath in Chattogram. The oxygen cylinders, once used in ships, are turn into kitchen tools that have a huge demand in the local market. The photo was captured from Ashraf Ali Road in the port city.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

UNSC members unable to agree

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military coup, with diplomats saying negotiations will continue, reports AFP.

"China and Russia have asked for more time," one diplomat told AFP following the behind-closed-doors videoconference meeting in New York that lasted just over two hours.

"A statement is still under discussion," confirmed another diplomat, also on condition of anonymity.

According to a draft of the text seen by AFP, the United Nations Security Council would call for a return to civilian power following Monday's bloodless coup in which democratically elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other top politicians were detained.

The text, drafted by Britain, would also call for Myanmar's military to "immediately release those unlawfully detained."

It would also demand that the one-year state of emergency be repealed and "for all sides to adhere to democratic norms." The draft does not mention sanctions.

To be adopted, it requires the support of China, Myanmar's main supporter at the UN and a veto power as a permanent member of the Security Council.

During the Rohingya crisis in 2017, China thwarted any initiative at the council to meet on Myanmar or issue joint statements. Beijing insisted the brutal military crackdown of the Muslim minority was an internal issue.

Britain, which holds the rotating council presidency for the month of February, had long planned to hold a meeting on Myanmar this week, but brought it forward given the circumstances.

China had demanded the discussion take place in private, diplomats told AFP.

Its foreign ministry had on Monday called for all sides in Myanmar to "resolve differences".

TARGETED SANCTIONS'
Britain's ambassador to the UN, Barbara Woodward, told reporters after the meeting that she hoped the council will "be able to speak with one voice".

"Discussions will continue among Council colleagues on next steps," she added.

Amnesty International and Human

Rights Watch released statements calling on the council to impose targeted sanctions against Myanmar military leaders and a comprehensive global arms embargo.

The United Nations also raised fears on Monday that the coup in Myanmar will worsen the plight of some 600,000 Rohingya Muslims still in the country.

A 2017 military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine State sent about 750,000 Rohingya Muslims fleeing into Bangladesh, where they are still stranded in refugee camps. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Western states accused the Myanmar military of ethnic cleansing, which it denied.

"At this point in time, we must ensure the protection of people of Myanmar and their fundamental rights. We must do everything to prevent violence from breaking out," Burgener said.

"There are about 600,000 Rohingyas that remain in Rakhine State, including 120,000 people who are effectively confined to camps ... they cannot move freely and have extremely limited access to basic health and education services," UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters in New York.

"So, our fear is that the events may make the situation worse for them," he said, reports Reuters.

Meanwhile, the United States formally determined yesterday that Myanmar's military carried out a coup, legally requiring an end to US assistance to the government, a day after US President Joe Biden threatened to reimpose sanctions on Myanmar and called for a concerted international response to push the army officials into relinquishing power.

Biden condemned the military takeover on Monday and called for a concerted international response to push the army officials into relinquishing power, terming the coup and detention of Suu Kyi "a direct assault on the country's transition to democracy and the rule of law".

The crisis in Myanmar marks the first chief test of Biden's pledge to collaborate more with allies on international challenges, especially on China's rising influence, in contrast to predecessor Donald Trump's "America First" approach.

Army HQ condemns Al Jazeera report

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to destabilise the country in the recent times," said Inter Service Public Relations Directorate (ISPR).

It said the commentators of the report are David Bergman, a convict of International Crimes Tribunal, Zulkarnain Saer Khan (featured as Sami in the report), an ex-cadet expelled from Bangladesh Military Academy on charges of drug addiction and Tasneem Khalil, the chief editor of "infamous" Neta News.

"The nexus among the ill-motivated and vested personalities is clearly visible in their past credentials."

The Army Headquarters said it is not clear how an international news channel like Al-Jazeera can associate itself with such an ill-intentioned group of people with criminal records.

"The video is prepared putting together clips of different official, social and private events using technology. Several disconnected events are edited together giving voices at the background."

Bangladesh Army denounces the "false information" provided in the report with respect to procurement of the Mobile Interceptor Device from Israel. The truth is the equipment was

procured from Hungary for one of the Army Contingents due to be deployed in the UN Peacekeeping Mission, it said.

"Nowhere in the equipment was mentioned/written that these were of Israeli origin. There is no scope of defence co-operation/procurement from Israel since Bangladesh does not have any formal diplomatic relation with the country."

The rejoinder said Bangladesh Army views the report as an attempt by the "vested group" to disrupt the harmony among different government organs with a view to obstructing the growth and development of the country.

"Bangladesh Army is the most disciplined under the present Chain of Command and loyal to the constitution and the government. Bangladesh Army had always been and will remain respectful to the government of Bangladesh and contribute in the nation building efforts of our beloved motherland," it said.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh foreign ministry has described the Al Jazeera investigative report "All the Prime Minister's Men" as "false, defamatory and a politically motivated smear campaign".

"The government of Bangladesh

"The international community should come together in one voice to press the Burmese military to immediately relinquish the power they have seized, release the activists and officials they have detained," Biden said in a statement.

"The United States removed sanctions on Burma over the past decade based on progress toward democracy. The reversal of that progress will necessitate an immediate review of our sanction laws and authorities, followed by appropriate action," he said.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other detained leaders yesterday, describing the coup a day earlier as a "stain" on the military's history.

Speaking in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said the government was in touch with "all sides" about the meeting and the international community's actions should contribute to "a peaceful resolution".

The military takeover ousting Aung San Suu Kyi's government from power in Myanmar was "inevitable", the country's army chief said yesterday.

"This was inevitable for the country and that's why we had to choose it," said General Min Aung Hlaing, according to the military's official Facebook page.

PROTEST IN YANGON
In the biggest public display of anger so far, people in Yangon banged on pots and pans and honked car horns and chanted "evil be gone" -- in the first widespread protest against the military coup.

"It is a Myanmar tradition to drive away evil or bad karma by beating tin or metal buckets," said Yangon resident San Tint.

People have not taken to the streets so far in a country with a history of bloody repression of protests.

Medics in at least 20 government hospitals rallied to a campaign of civil disobedience against the generals and cut short a tentative transition to democracy. Doctors threatened to stop work even with coronavirus infections still rising steadily in the country of 54 million.

Three killed in wave of bomb attacks in Afghanistan

REUTERS, Kabul

At least three people were killed and seven wounded in a series of explosions in Afghanistan yesterday, after Western countries called on the Taliban to end a wave of violence that the group denies responsibility for.

With Washington and Nato reviewing plans to withdraw their forces from the country by May, one blast in Kabul hit an SUV and killed two people, including Mohammad Atif, the head of non-governmental charity Jamiat-Islah, police in the capital said.

We want justice

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The victim died on Sunday, a day after her father filed a rape case accusing five of her fellow students, including four named.

Police are now on a manhunt for two accused as they have learnt details from where the counterfeit liquor that according to the case statement the victim was made to drink by the accused at a restaurant in Uttara on Thursday before the rape.

One of the accused in the case -- Arafat -- died at a hospital in the capital's Mohammadpur on Saturday, two days after drinking with the same group.

Two of the accused -- Mortuza Raihan Chowdhury, 21, and Nuhut Alam Tafsir, 21, -- were arrested and placed on a five-day remand on Sunday. The arrestees went to the same private university as the victim.

Police said one of the accused, Neha, is on the run, said Abdul Latif, officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station. He, however, did not disclose the name of the other accused.

"When we can arrest and interrogate the two, we will be clearer from where they collected the counterfeit liquor, carried it or who supplied it," he told this correspondent.

Harun-Ur-Rashid, deputy commissioner of Tejgaon division, told reporters that after drinking liquor at a restaurant in Uttara on Thursday, the group went to another restaurant in Gulshan where they had more alcohol and attended a party.

Meanwhile, police decided to appeal to the court seeking permission to exhume Arafat's body for postmortem.

OC Latif said they already identified the place where Arafat was buried.

Earlier, the OC said Arafat was buried without police being informed. He said they got the necessary information from the hospital where he died.

According to the case statement, five, including the victim, went to a restaurant in sector-3 of Uttara on Thursday. There, they made her drink alcohol. As she fell sick, they took the girl to one of her friend's house in Mohammadpur. There the prime accused, Raihan, one of the two arrestees, raped her.

The following day, the victim stayed at the friend's house and when the victim's physical condition deteriorated and she started vomiting, the students took her to a hospital, according to the statement.

Propaganda on against Bangladesh, says PM

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reflected in the results of the recent polls to local bodies.

After the PM's address, the thanksgiving motion on the president's speech was adopted unanimously by the House.

A total of 133 lawmakers from the government and opposition benches spoke on the motion for 25 hours and 25 minutes.

Hasina said, "People are now getting services from Awami League, development of the country is going on and the people's wellbeing is being improved. Accordingly, Awami League has gained people's trust and confidence. We saw its reflection in the local government elections."

She said the people are casting ballots with enthusiasm and elections are being held in a free and fair manner.

"Polling is now being held through electronic voting machines (EVMs) and there is no scope for committing irregularities. I thank the people for exercising their voting rights and

expressing their opinion."

She said there is no system for influencing the polls by using muscle power.

"Yes, troubles might occur among councillor candidates in some places during the elections to local bodies."

The leader of the House said some previous governments were forced to step down in the face of movements over rigging votes.

Without mentioning the names of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and acting chairman Tarique Rahman, the PM questioned how a party could work for the people when it is led by people who were jailed for graft and embezzling orphans' money and convicted in the 10-truck arms haul and grenade attack cases.

COVID VACCINE
Regarding the Covid-19 vaccine, Hasina said no significant side-effects of the vaccine were reported so far.

"A few people felt pain in their hands and a few others had fever. The number of such people was four to five. We are

also monitoring this."

Noting that the vaccine has already reached all districts, the premier said the countrywide vaccination programme will begin on February 7 or 8. All the people interested in receiving the vaccine will have to register their names, she added.

Hasina said the government has also given instructions to carry out antibody tests.

She said there was a lot of criticism before the arrival of the vaccine in the country. The vaccine itself has given answers to all of these (criticisms). **'NO APPRECIATION AT HOME'**
The PM said the government has taken all kinds of measures to check the spread of the novel coronavirus in the country and it also earned appreciations from across the world in this regard.

"We don't get appreciation from inside the country. But the whole world, including the UN secretary-general, praised Bangladesh."

Hasina said the BNP's innate nature is to mislead the people by spreading

rumours, telling lies and providing untrue information. "They will continue saying their words. We will continue our works and serve the people. Let them speak their words."

'CONFINED TO A LARGE PRISON'
The premier said she passes a nice time when parliament remains in session as she apparently stays confined to a large prison due to the pandemic situation.

"I am apparently confined to a large prison. I come to parliament when it is in session. Here I have a chance to meet all. I really spend a good time," she said. **REOPENING OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**
Mentioning that the Covid-19 situation has largely come under control in the country, the PM said educational institutions would be reopened after the pandemic situation comes under control a bit more.

She urged all to wear masks and follow hygiene rules even after getting vaccinated until the world becomes free from the pandemic.