

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**

**292**  
New cases in 24hrs

**5,38,062**  
Total cases

**8,205**  
Deaths

**4,83,372**  
Recoveries

**2,324,395**  
Deaths

**106,552,960**  
Total cases

**MYANMAR ANTI-COUP PROTESTS**

# Tens of thousands rally for 2nd day

Shots heard as police break up protest in Myawaddy; internet access partially restored; Pope voices solidarity with people

**AGENCIES**

Tens of thousands of people yesterday rallied across Myanmar to denounce last week's coup and demand the release of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, in the biggest protests since the 2007 Saffron Revolution that helped lead to democratic reforms.

In a second day of widespread protests, crowds in the biggest city, Yangon, sported red shirts, red flags and red balloons, the colour of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy Party (NLD).

"We don't want military dictatorship! We want democracy!" they chanted.

Monitoring service NetBlocks said internet services were partially restored on some mobile networks in Myanmar yesterday afternoon, but social media platforms remained inaccessible and it was unclear how long the connectivity would last.

Pope Francis expressed "solidarity

with the people" yesterday and asked Myanmar's leaders to seek "democratic" harmony.

Massive crowds from all corners of Yangon gathered in townships, filling streets as they headed towards the Sule Pagoda at the heart of the city, also a rallying point during the Buddhist monk-led 2007 protests and others in 1988.

A line of armed police with riot shields set up barricades, but did not try to stop the demonstration. Some marchers presented police with flowers. One officer was photographed giving a surreptitious three-finger salute.

Protesters gestured with the three-finger salute that has become a symbol of protest against the coup. Drivers honked their horns and passengers held up photos of Suu Kyi.

"We don't want a dictatorship for the next generation," said 21-year-old Thaw Zin. "We will not finish this revolution until we make history. We will fight to the end."



Photographs of Health Minister Zahid Maleque being taken while he was getting vaccinated for Covid-19 at Sheikh Russel National Gastroenterology Institute and Hospital in the capital's Mohakhali on the first day of the mass inoculation campaign yesterday.

**PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON**

## 2.57 lakh acres of forest

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different public and private organisations, including Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation.

Of the 1.60 lakh acres, 43,095 acres were given to BFIDC and 23,221 acres to different government and non-government organisations.

Besides, 93,923 acres were allocated for the Army, Air Force, Navy, Rapid Action Battalion, and Border Guard Bangladesh, according to the documents submitted to the committee.

Emerging from the meeting at the Jatuya Sangsad Bhaban, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, a ruling Awami League MP and chief of the parliamentary watchdog, told reporters that the committee has asked the ministry to make public the names of the grabbers through its website so that people could identify the grabbers and the process of preparing the grabbers' list became transparent.

"This is for the first time in the country's history that we got a complete and detailed list of grabbers of forest land ... which is a huge document containing 5,000 pages," Saber told The Daily Star.

The parliamentary body has asked the ministry to take immediate

measures to recover the grabbed forest land.

"The ministry has informed the standing committee that they have already written to the deputy commissioners for taking measures to recover the forest land from grabbers," Saber said.

The standing committee also asked the ministry to make sure that a "good amount" of forest land is recovered in the next two to three years.

The forest department said it has already recovered 534 acres in three months since October.

About the handed over of forest land to different organisations, Saber said the committee recommended that the authorities stop the handed over of forest land to any government or private organisations in the name of development activities, unless the prime minister asked them to do so.

The standing committee also recommended realising damages from those that have been handed over forest land.

About grabbing of Sangu-Matamuhuri forest land, on which The Daily Star ran a report in late December, the committee recommended relocating around 300-400 families living on the land.

## Toll collection likely to start

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the proposal. There would be four exits and entrances to the expressway and the toll would be according to the exit vehicle takes.

The new rate is about half of what the Roads and Highways Department recommended earlier following the Toll Policy-2014.

"The rate was fixed for an interim period. The rate would be fixed again after the opening of the Padma bridge," an official of the division told The Daily Star.

After the road transport and bridges minister approves the proposal, it would go to the finance ministry for the final approval, the official said, seeking anonymity.

The RHD is currently collecting tolls on the two-lane 50km Hatikumul-Bonpara highway, 13.7km Chattogram Port Access Road, and a 74km stretch of Dhaka-Sylhet highway between Jagadishpur and Sherpur.

**TOLLED ROADS**

In September 2019, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in an Ecnec meeting instructed the authorities concerned to collect tolls from long-haul vehicles on the national highways.

The move got momentum after she inaugurated the 55km expressway in March last year.

Earlier, the authorities had decided to start collecting tolls on the expressway once the Padma bridge was opened to public. The authorities have not yet finalised the toll for the bridge.

After toll collection starts on the expressway, the authorities will gradually begin collecting tolls on the national highways that are at least dual-carriageways.

**PROPOSED TOLL RATE**

On January 3 this year, the RHD placed a proposal on the toll rate in a stakeholders' meeting.

Although there is no mention of expressways in the Toll Policy-2014, the RHD considered it an "important highway".

With three bridges and 55km of expressway, the base toll for a medium truck per km was proposed at Tk 20.18, meaning that the truck would have to pay Tk 1,110 for using the entire expressway.

But the participants of the stakeholders' meeting observed that the toll was "very high".

**NEW TOLL PROPOSAL FOR DHAKA-MAWA-BHANGA EXPRESSWAY**

VEHICLE	PROPOSED RATE
Trailer	Tk 1,361
Heavy truck	Tk 1,089
Medium truck	Tk 544
Large bus	Tk 490
Mini truck	Tk 408
Minibus	Tk 272
Microbus/ Pickup/Jeep	Tk 218
Sedan car	Tk 136
Motorcycle	Tk 27

A 17-member committee was formed to finalise the toll rate. The committee, in its January 14 meeting, opined for fixing an interim toll rate until the Padma bridge was complete.

It also proposed fixing the toll rate of the expressway, considering it as a national highway (Tk 1.5 per km) as there was no mention of expressways in the toll policy.

At this time, toll is being collected at the three major bridges on the expressway without following the toll policy. A medium truck has to pay Tk 460 to cross the bridges.

The committee opined for collecting tolls from those at the existing rate and rest of the expressway under the toll policy.

Khondaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, also a committee member, said the decisions they had made earlier were discussed in yesterday's meeting.

A decision was taken to start toll collection from July, Enayet told this paper.

He said they would decide later on bus fares on this route.

Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, secretary general of Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, also a member of the committee, said the authorities should monitor so that transport operators cannot charge irrationally from passengers after the toll collection begins on the expressway.

## Fanfare, hope mark first day

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The minister also instructed the officials to take initiative for spot registration so that people get easy access to vaccine.

People were sceptical about the safety and efficacy of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine initially but participation of eminent figures will encourage the common people to get registered for vaccination, said a number of the vaccine recipients.

They also urged people not to pay heed to any rumours, saying the Oxford vaccine is considered safe.

The mass vaccination started after pilot vaccination at five hospitals in Dhaka on January 27-28. A total of 567 people were vaccinated.

Yesterday, Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Education Minister Dipu Moni, Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque, Fisheries and Livestock Minister SM Rezaul Karim, Science and Technology Minister Yeafesh Osman and State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain were vaccinated at different centres in the capital.

"My wife and I took vaccine. We have not had any problems till now. I urge the people of the country to get registered for vaccination soon," the chief justice told journalists after receiving his first jab of the two-dose vaccine.

Yeafesh Osman recited a few lines of a poem he wrote to encourage people to get vaccinated.

"You [journalists] know I recite poem in the cabinet. Bangabandhu's daughter [Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina] asked me whether I have written any poem..." the minister

**said.**

Gonoshasthya Kendra Founder Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury urged all to take vaccine without fear.

"I am fine. There is no reason to panic. I call upon people to get vaccinated whenever their turn comes. It is your duty to receive vaccine," said the freedom fighter.

Zafrullah also urged the prime minister to take vaccine soon to encourage people to follow suit.

"Had the prime minister taken vaccine today, the people of the country would have been more confident about the vaccination campaign," he observed.

BNP leaders and activists should also get vaccinated, he said.

Zafrullah, however, pointed out that BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia should receive it after taking doctors' advice since she has many health complications and arthritic problems.

The mass inoculation programme continued till 4:00pm yesterday. Since morning, people started forming queues at the designated centres across the country for vaccination.

They got vaccinated one by one, showing printed documents of online registration for vaccination.

Each of the vaccine recipients was kept under observation for 30 minutes. The recipients expressed their satisfaction after taking shots.

None of the recipients complained of any adverse effect on the first day of vaccination. However, 21 of them complained of minor side effects.

"The mass inoculation programme started across the country in a festive mood... Till now, we have not received any report of adverse effect," Prof

## Get vaccinated, protect people

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Covid-19 vaccination campaign, said survival if I get infected. That's why I took the shot," he said.

The year-long mass vaccination programme started yesterday across the country with the frontline workers and people aged above 55 years taking the shots.

Some 31,160 people took the jabs in 1,005 vaccination centres across the country, according to the data received by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) as of 6:00pm yesterday.

In the morning, Health Minister Zahid Maleque inaugurated the campaign by addressing different vaccination teams through video conference from the health directorate.

A number of eminent personalities took the vaccine.

"I really felt relief after taking the vaccine today. There is no reason to be fearful about the vaccine," Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzak said after getting the shot at the Sheikh Russel National Gastroenterology Institute and Hospital.

Urging people to take vaccine, he said, "Those who are spreading rumors are doing it with a motive. As experts worldwide said — we have to take vaccine to stay safe."

Country's prime medical college, Dhaka Medical College Hospital, started its vaccination programme giving its official Dipankar Ghosh the shot.

"I am not nervous at all as I am aware of the vaccination process. I would urge everyone to get vaccinated to stay safe."

After him, doctors, nurses, health officials and other common people started taking the jabs at the DMCH.

After being vaccinated at DMCH around noon yesterday, Workers Party of Bangladesh President Rashed Khan Menon said, "It felt like getting a regular flu or pneumonia vaccine."

Each and every countrymen should come forward and participate in the

Covid-19 vaccination campaign, said Menon, also a lawmaker.

He said the government was proactive in bringing the vaccine and Bangladesh is one of the few countries to get the shots this early.

Menon said as far as he knows the Covid-19 vaccine is safe. He urged people not to worry about it.

As of yesterday afternoon, some 270 people, including 102 females, were vaccinated at the DMCH while there was no reported case of immediate side-effects, said the hospital's Deputy Director Alauddin Al Azad.

He said in the coming days, freedom fighters and persons with disabilities would be given priority at the hospital.

Talking to journalists around noon, DMCH Director Brig Gen Nazmul Haque said frontliners and senior citizens were being given priority.

He said they have a facility for spot registration at the DMCH.

He, however, encouraged people to register before going to the hospital to save time for everyone.

Asked whether he was nervous while getting the shot, Shushanto Kumar Paul Chowdhury, 76, a former government official, replied in the negative.

He said he would have the second dose on March 8 as prescribed by the DMCH authorities.

High Court judges, Dhaka University teachers, officers of Bangabhaban and staff-doctors of BSMMU took the vaccine at the BSMMU.

Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque got the first shot given at the BSMMU. After her, Justice M Enayetur Rahim, Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman and Justice Ruhul Kuddus received the vaccine.

Muhammad Samad, pro-VC (administration) of DU, got the first shot among teachers. DU VC Md Akhtaruzzaman, pro-VC ASM Maksud Kamal, and members of proctorial team also got vaccinated.

Nasima Sultana, additional director general at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), told The Daily Star.

Health officials said the vaccination programme will continue round the year and all the people, except for those below 18 and pregnant women, will be gradually vaccinated.

According to officials at the Department of Information and Communication Technology, a total of 4.10 lakh people got registered online for vaccination till yesterday afternoon.

The government's initial plan was to inoculate 60 lakh people in the first month of the campaign. The target was later lowered to 35 lakh.

The government has already secured around 70 lakh doses of three different batches. Shots of two batches will expire in April and those of the other in June this year. Officials didn't say the exact expiry dates.

Bangladesh purchased three crore doses of the Oxford vaccine called Covishield from Serum Institute of India. The first shipment of 50 lakh doses arrived on January 25. Besides, the country received 20 lakh shots of Covishield as a gift from the Indian government.

In South Asia, Bangladesh has got the highest number of vaccine doses after India.

On Wednesday, the COVAX initiative for equitable global access to Covid vaccines announced that Bangladesh would get 12.79 million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine by June this year.

The country has so far recorded 538,062 Covid cases. The death toll hit 8,205 yesterday.



## Reza Kibria quits from Gonoforum

**UNB, Dhaka**

Nearly 26 months after joining the party, Reza Kibria resigned from Gonoforum and its post of general secretary.

"I've resigned from both the general secretary post and membership of Gonoforum. I've already submitted my resignation letter to party president Dr Kamal Hossain," he told UNB.

Asked about his plans, Reza said he has not yet thought about it due to the pandemic. "I'll work out my future plan once the Covid situation improves."

Replying to another question, he said he was staying in Bangladesh and would remain here during the days to come to serve the people.

Reza expressed his gratitude towards Dr Kamal Hossain and Gonoforum leaders for giving him the scope for working as the party general secretary. "I feel very honoured as I had been able to work with Dr Kamal Hossain."

He said he returned home in 2018 leaving a job at The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and joined Gonoforum with a goal to serve the

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## Prison officials

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But there was no one else in the room when Tushar met his wife on January 6.

Col Md Abrar Hossain, additional inspector general (IG) of prisons, told The Daily Star that the jail officials were supposed to inform the Department of Prisons about the meeting, but they had not done it. Moreover, the jail officials refused to divulge the information when the department asked them about it.

"The probe report was submitted to the home ministry last week. In response to the report, the ministry last Thursday suspended 11 jail officials, including the jail superintendent, jailer, and three deputy jailers, and recommended departmental action against seven others," said Col Abrar.

Superintendent Ratna Roy and jailer Nur Mohammad Mridha are among the 11 officers suspended.

On January 6, Tushar, brother-in-law of Hallmark Group Managing Director Tanvir Mahmud, was allowed a visitor in violation of the coronavirus restrictions.

In leaked video footage from security cameras, Tushar was seen walking around wearing black clothes in the area where jail officials' cabins are located. Soon afterwards, a woman in purple clothes was seen entering from outside and going to the said area around 12:55pm.

The footage also showed another officer Saqlain greeting the woman and leaving a room after the woman walked in. Saqlain came back to the room with Tushar, and after around 10 minutes, Ratna left her room, and two minutes later, Tushar went towards Ratna's room with the woman. A little later, Tushar and the woman returned to Saqlain's room where they spent time together.

Two committees were formed to investigate the incident.

Col Abrar said his department collected the documents relating to the meeting. "We have found that they [Tushar and the woman] are married."

A former high official of prison, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star yesterday that this was not the first time an inmate met with a spouse inside the prison.

Sources said, such visits are arranged in exchange for money.

Asked about this, Col Abrar said officers were alerted about such incidents and asked to keep all prisons of the country under tougher surveillance.

Sources in the department of prisons said a step was taken by the authorities in 2007 to create a "love centre" in jails where married couples could spend time together.

An inmate with good records inside the prison was to avail the opportunity to meet his wife every three to four months, they said.

Shamsul Haider Siddique, former deputy IG of prisons, who was in charge at the time, said, "We once went to see the prison system in Iran and saw that they had such arrangements. This opportunity is also available in some other countries."

"After that visit, we made a proposal, but it did not materialise at the time," he said.

Shamsul said the initiative to make such arrangements can now be taken from humanitarian grounds. "It will also help improve the prison environment and bring transparency in the management."