

BANGLADESH UPDATE 418 New cases in 24hrs

5,39,571 Total cases

8,248 Deaths

4,85,971 Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE 2,368,310 Deaths

107,993,497 Total cases

Motivate rural people to get vaccinated

PM directs Ansar, VDP members

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the members of Bangladesh Ansar and VDP to motivate rural people to receive the Covid-19 vaccine to eliminate the pandemic.

"I would like to ask you [Ansar and VDP personnel] to motivate rural people to get vaccinated so that all the people of Bangladesh get protection from the global coronavirus pandemic. Our efforts to this end will continue," she said.

The PM was addressing the 41st National Rally of Bangladesh Ansar and VDP at its academy in Shafipur of Gazipur. She joined the event virtually from the Gono Bhavan.

Noting that the Covid-19 inoculation programme has already started in the country, Hasina asked every member of the Ansar and VDP to encourage every person to get vaccinated in due time. "Many people are even afraid of injection [getting the shot]."

She said the government has taken measures so that people can get vaccinated in time alongside following health protocol. "We seek your [Ansar and VDP] cooperation in this regard."

The premier said people can get registered to get the shot going to digital centres nearby. She urged all to be sincere so that they along with their family members take the vaccine.

She described the Bangladesh Ansar and VDP as the country's largest public-oriented disciplined force.

Hasina asked the force members to



continue their special role in protecting the country's young generation from drugs, militancy and terrorism. "I would like to ask you to pay special attention so that our children do not slip into a wrong path."

Mentioning that the members of the Ansar and VDP always stand beside people, she said the force members fully reined in the arson attacks unleashed by the BNP-Jamaat clique.

The PM said her previous government had started modernising the Ansar after taking office in 1996.

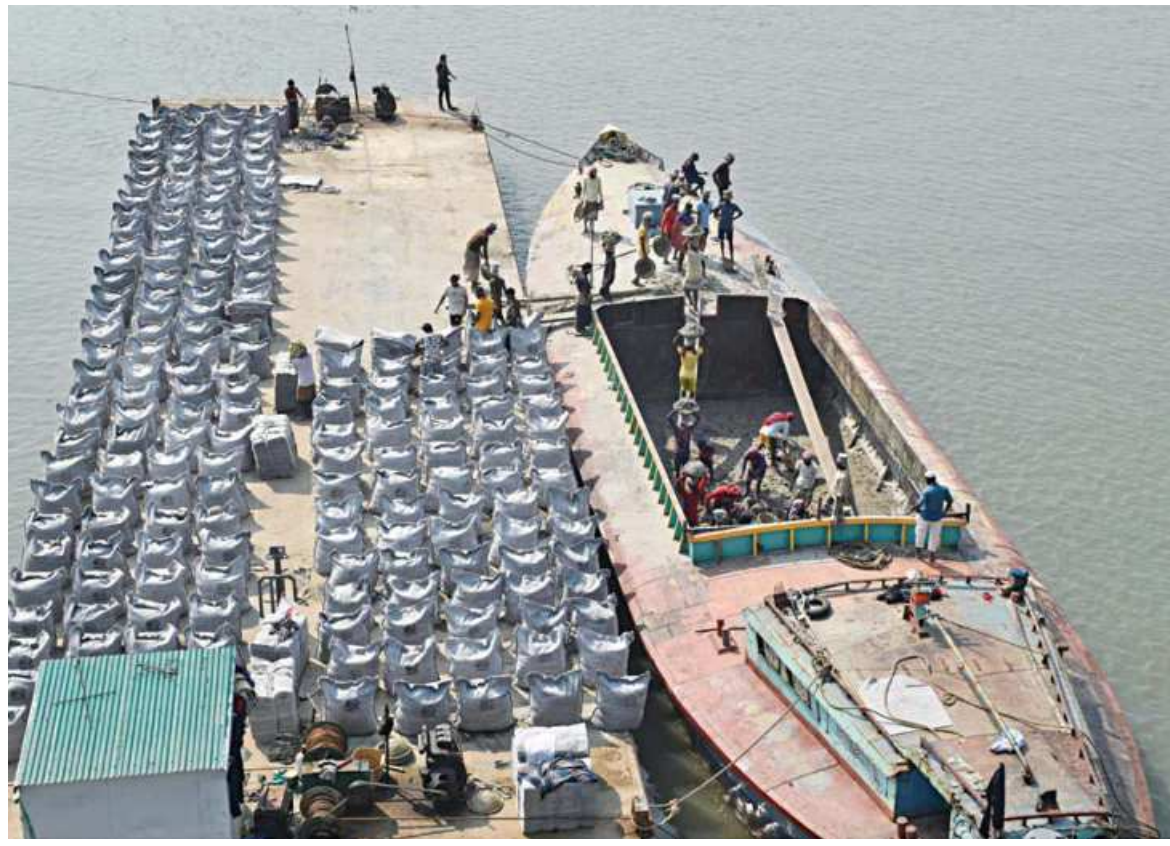
She cited various activities taken by her government, including modernisation of promotion and posting systems and trainings, introduction of ration facilities, a separate uniform, medals (for recognition of performance), and making service permanent.

Recalling Ansar's contributions to every movement, Hasina said its commander Abdur Jabbar was martyred in the 1952 Language Movement and its 70 personnel made their supreme sacrifice in the Liberation War in 1971.

At the function, the PM took the salute from a spectacular parade of the Ansar and VDP members.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, on behalf of the premier, handed special medals to 140 Ansar and VDP members under eight categories in recognition of their bravery and praiseworthy services.

Senior Secretary to Public Security Division Mostafa Kamal Uddin also spoke at the function.



The Bangladesh Water Development Board is using a barge as a platform for preparing sandbags. A bulk carrier has brought in the sand. The bags would be dumped in different spots along the Sugandha river of Barishal's Babuganj upazila where erosion is severe. The photo was taken from Doarika area recently.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

United they kill rivers

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winter months when river flow is slower. They use it to make bricks, said locals.

Iqbal Hossain of Khamia village said he witnessed workers load bricks into sacks and throw these into part of the river in front of the respective kiln. This way, they encourage greater silt deposits and expand even further onto the river land.

Though grabbing river land is a criminal offence and the occupiers have been running these brick kilns for the last 12 years, the local administration is yet to take any visible action against them other than sending notices to the brick kiln owners.

According to the Brick Making and Establishment of Bricks (Control) Act 2013, setting up of brick kilns on government or privately owned forests, sanctuaries, agricultural land, gardens and wetland areas is a punishable offence.

One of the brick kilns on the list of grabbers is KPB (Kalapada) Bricks, which occupies 175m of Bhadra's left river bank.

Lawmaker from the Khulna-5 constituency (Dumuria-Phulola) and former Fisheries and Livestock Minister Narayan Chandra Chanda, admitted that he owns this brick kiln but denied occupying river land.

"I have not grabbed this land," the MP, also president of the Dumuria Upazila Brick Owners' Association, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"When this char land emerged, it was allocated by the DC office to the landless and we leased it from them [the landless]. If the government takes any measures to dredge the river, we will stop operating the brick kiln and surrender the land to the government."

The other brick kilns found by the

BWDB Khulna to have grabbed river land include Setu Bricks, owned by Dumuria Upazila Chairman Ajaz Ahmed, and KB Bricks, owned by UP chairman of Dumuria Sadar Humayun Kabir Bulu.

According to BWDB Khulna's report, these brick kilns owned by elected officials among others have each grabbed 175m to 250m into the Bhadra river while four brickfields in Gutudia union each occupied 190m-250m of the banks of Upper Shailmari river.

The report shows the upazila chairman's Setu Bricks occupies 230m into the Hori river, and the UP chairman's brick kiln KB Bricks occupies 210m into the left bank of Bhadra.

Contacted, Humayun Kabir Bulu, owner of KB Bricks and UP chairman of Dumuria Sadar, said, "Most of the land has been taken from local owners after signing on a non-judicial stamp over 15 years ago and some land belongs to the Water Development Board, where we are just piling up the soil."

Asked if there was any approval from the Department of Environment and the district administration, he replied, "I am operating the brick kiln with all the approval."

Upazila Chairman of Dumuria Ajaz Ahmed said he had built the brick kiln, Setu Bricks, in accordance with all the rules of the law.

"I leased the land from a local landowner. There is no land of the river in my brick kiln. I am not engaged in the filling of the river," he said.

"I don't know who made this list and what the process was," he said, adding he was yet to get any notice from the Water Development Board.

Polash Kumar Banerjee, executive engineer of Water Development

Board's Khulna Management and Maintenance Division-1, told The Daily Star that the brickfields on the list are slowly killing the local rivers.

He added that these 18 brick kilns aren't all -- the list of river land grabbers is not complete.

Dumuria UNO Abdul Wadud said of the 37 brick kilns in the upazila, 18 brick kilns built on river banks have been listed.

"I sought all their legal papers and now I am scrutinising these," he said, adding that the eviction drive will start as soon as this process is completed.

"I am sure most of them occupied river land," the UNO told this newspaper.

Chairman of Atlia Union Parishad Kumar Roy told The Daily Star that there are 11 brick kilns, operating on the banks of the Bhadra in his union, which are degrading the environment and damaging crops.

He said two brick kilns in particular are aggressively occupying river land ignoring the free flow of river. These are located beside the Khamia bridge.

Saifur Rahman Khan, director of Department of Environment in Khulna, told The Daily Star that at the moment it is not possible to say which brickfields have been built occupying the Bhadra or Hori river or are destroying the environment.

"We give environmental clearances according to certain criteria but the district administration oversees these as a whole, sometimes conducting mobile courts."

According to the Deputy Commissioner's Office, there are 153 licensed brick kilns in Khulna.

Although the registration of these brick kilns have to be renewed every year, most of the brick kilns continue to operate without renewal as they lack the required documents, officials from the DC office said.

COUP IN MYANMAR

US slaps sanctions against junta leaders

Warns of more action if military uses violence against protesters

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday announced sanctions on the leaders of Myanmar's junta and several gem companies, and warned it would act further if the military uses violence against protesters.

A day after President Joe Biden previewed the sanctions, the Treasury Department said it was blocking any US assets and transactions with 10 current or former military officials held responsible for the February 1 coup.

The targets include General Min Aung Hlaing, the new junta chief, who already was under US sanctions over the brutal campaign against the mostly Muslim Rohingya minority.

But the sanctions also hit new individuals, including the military leaders named to a new cabinet such as Defense Minister General Mya Tun Oo.

"We are also prepared to take additional action should Burma's military not change course," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said, using Myanmar's former name.

"If there is more violence against peaceful protesters, the Burmese military will find that today's sanctions are just the first," she said.

The junta has voiced increasingly ominous warnings to anti-coup protesters and deployed tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets, with isolated reports of live rounds being fired.

The Treasury Department also announced sanctions on three companies dealing in the country's key gem export: Myanmar Ruby Enterprise, Myanmar Imperial Jade Co. and Cancro Co. It said it was designating the three companies because the military controls them.

Biden in his remarks Wednesday

also said the United States was cutting off the Myanmar generals' access to \$1 billion in funds in the United States.

Meanwhile, Myanmar's ruling general signalled waning patience yesterday with nationwide protests over the military's takeover, ordering demonstrators to return to work or face "effective actions".

His warning comes after a sixth consecutive day of anti-coup rallies condemning the ouster of civilian leader Suu Kyi. The demonstrations have largely been peaceful.

By yesterday evening, army chief General Min Aung Hlaing -- who now holds legislative, judicial and executive powers -- called for civil servants to return to work after days of nationwide strikes supporting the protests.

"Due to unscrupulous persons' incitement, some civil service personnel have failed to perform their duties," he said in a statement.

"Effective actions will be taken." Since the February 1 coup, there has been an outpouring of anger and defiance, calling for the release of Suu Kyi and other detained senior figures of her National League for Democracy party.

Demonstrators again marched peacefully yesterday in Naypyidaw -- the capital and military stronghold -- as well as Yangon, the largest city and commercial hub, which saw tens of thousands flood into the streets.

Western nations have repeatedly denounced the coup.

Yesterday, former colonial power Britain welcomed Biden's steps, with foreign secretary Dominic Raab tweeting that "we will hold those responsible to account".

NID requirement

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worried as my mother has health complications," Shimul told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said he was exploring ways to obtain the number from the Election Commission. "I am not sure how I would recover the number."

Homemaker in Rangpur Tahmina Begum, 57, is on the same boat. She too has lost the card and has no way of registering for the shots.

Like them, there are many seriously vulnerable to Covid-19. They cannot register online.

According to the Election Commission's National Identity Registration Wing website, the upazila Election Commission office concerned could let a voter know of his or her number and there was no way to get the number online.

But the worse off are those who never had an NID card. There is no way for them to get the vaccine at this moment.

Shamsul Alam, member secretary of the National Covid-19 Vaccination Campaign of the DGHS, told The Daily Star, "Currently we are accepting only NIDs. The number of people without NID is small -- 0.1 percent may be [of the population]. But we will arrange a way for them too ..."

"We have no way to accept people without NID cards for vaccination."

According to the Election Commission, there are 10.40 crore registered voters in the country as of March 2 last year.

The population of Bangladesh is 16.47 crore, according to the UNFPA.

At least 2,04,540 people received the shots across the country yesterday, according to the DGHS. With this, the number of vaccine recipients rose to 5,42,309.

The government has a target of vaccinating 35 lakh people in the first month of the campaign.

Of those vaccinated yesterday, 86 had side effects. With them, the number of vaccine recipients who had adverse effects rose to 363.

However, none of them had any severe side effects, say health officials.

Initially, the government had planned to administer 60 lakh shots in the first month, but the number was revised apparently due to lukewarm response from people.

Over 12.37 lakh people registered with www.surokkha.gov.bd until 8:00pm yesterday.

The government had planned to administer the second shots to vaccine recipients two months after their first jabs. Due to the poor public response, it now plans to give the second dose a month after the first shot.

Charged with 'defaming ministers, MPs, leaders'

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regarding the arrest and alleged crimes of expelled Jubo Mahila League leader Shamima Nur Papia.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the charge sheet yesterday.

In the charge sheet, the investigator said Jubo Mahila League's Narsingdi district unit general secretary Shamima Nur Papia was arrested by Rapid Action Battalion for her alleged involvement in different crimes. Soon after her arrest, Jubo Mahila League expelled her. The Narsingdi Jubo Mahila League committee was also dissolved.

Kajol was also charged with uploading indecent, defamatory, objectionable and fake information about Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, AL General Secretary and Road Transport Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, several other ministers, AL leader and lawmaker Amir Hossain Amu, others lawmakers, Jubo Mahila League's President Nazma Akhter, its General Secretary Apu Ukil and several other female leaders and activists.

Kajol also allegedly tried to extort the female leaders by coming up with indecent posts and fake photographs, and threatened to cast aspersions on their character through his Facebook account, the charge sheet said.

The investigation officer claimed to have found information on Kajol's chat with Usmin Ara Bally on Facebook between March 10 and 17 last year. Moreover, on March 3 that year, Kajol sent six photographs to Usmin's messenger; of them, one photograph was indecent, the charge sheet said.

The officer claimed that the charges brought against Kajol for uploading indecent, objectionable, defamatory and false information about Awami League leaders, Jubo Mahila League leaders, ministers and lawmakers, and demanding extortion through his Facebook were primarily found to be true.

So, Kajol should face trial for his

alleged involvement in such offences, the charge sheet added.

If the charges are proven in court, Kajol might face a sentence of five to seven years in jail.

Kajol was shown arrested in the case on May 14 last year. On June 28, he was placed on a two-day remand.

Contacted, Kajol's lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua said that he was yet to receive a copy of the charge sheet.

"I will be in the position to say anything about the charge sheet once I get a copy," he told The Daily Star last night.

He, however, said the investigation itself was flawed.

"In any case filed under the DSA, the allotted investigation time is 60 days, with an additional 15-day extension. If the investigation is not complete within that time, another 30 days are allowed, subject to the approval of the cyber tribunal. Since this investigation into the said case could not be completed in 105 days and no time petition was sought from the tribunal, the investigation itself is flawed," said the lawyer.

Kajol faced 53 days of enforced disappearance and spent seven months in prison. He had disappeared on March 10 last year and was "found" by the Border Guard Bangladesh roaming around the Benapole border 53 days later.

He then landed in jail in a case filed under the DSA by lawmaker Saifuzzaman Shikhor, and two Jubo Mahila League activists over a Facebook post.

The lower court concerned kept denying him bail for seven months, until the High Court on November 24 granted him bail in one case and ordered the investigation officer and Cyber Tribunal to submit reports in the two others.

Finally, on December 17, the HC granted him bail in the two other cases after Kajol's lawyer pointed out that

PAPUL'S WIFE, DAUGHTER Probe forgery of BB document placed with bail petition

HC orders ACC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the Anti-Corruption Commission to inquire into forgery of a Bangladesh Bank document submitted with the bail petition of convicted lawmaker Mohammad Shahid Islam alias Kazi Papul's wife and daughter in a Tk 148.41 crore laundering case.

According to the forged document, a BB official said there might not be any money laundering on the part of Papul's wife Selina Islam and daughter Wafa Islam from their accounts of NRB Global Bank.

Yesterday, the HC asked the ACC to record statements of Selina, also a lawmaker, her daughter Wafa, their representative Hafez Ahmed and others concerned to find the people involved in the forgery and to submit a probe report to it within two months.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Mohi Uddin Shamim came up with the order after hearing a suo moto rule issued earlier to this end.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star that it has been primarily found true that a forgery has been committed in connection with the BB document submitted with the bail petition of Papul's wife Selina and daughter Wafa in the money laundering case.

BB Deputy Director Md Arefin Ahsan Miah signed the paper, according to the forged document which apparently cleared Selina and her daughter Wafa of money laundering, he said.

The lawyer said in continuation of hearing the rule, the HC summoned the deputy director to appear before it and called for the record from the BB.

The deputy director appeared before the HC bench in line with the court order and told the court that the paper, in which his signature was seen, was tampered.

Central bank lawyer Khan Mohammad Shamim Aziz told the court that there is no similarity between BB's original document with the paper submitted along with the bail petition.

He also said an inquiry needs to be conducted to find the persons involved in this fraudulence.

Sayed Ahmed Raza, lawyer for accused petitioners Selina and Wafa, told the court that his clients were given the document from NRB Global Bank.

NRB Global Bank lawyer Motafer Hossain Sazu told the court that his client did not supply any document to the bail petitioners.

Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik represented the state during the hearing.

Selina and Wafa submitted the petition to the HC on November 26 last year, seeking bail in the money laundering case filed by the ACC.

A Kuwaiti court has sentenced Kazi Papul, an independent lawmaker from Laxmipur-2, to four years in jail in a bribery case.

Papul, who is in prison in Kuwait, is also an accused in two other cases filed on charges of human trafficking and money laundering.

Daily Covid infection rate falls to 2.65pc

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh's daily coronavirus infection rate fell to 2.65 percent yesterday.

The health authorities recorded nine deaths from Covid-19 and 418 fresh cases in the last 24 hours until morning.

So far, Bangladesh has confirmed 539,571 coronavirus cases, including 8,248 fatalities.

The mortality rate stood at 1.53 percent, according to a handout from the Directorate General of Health Services.

Until morning, 485,971 patients (90.07 percent) have recovered.

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

So far, 3,808,017 samples, including 15,776 in the past 24 hours, have been tested. The overall infection rate is 14.17 percent.

The government launched a countrywide Covid-19 vaccination drive on February 7.

Doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine that Bangladesh brought from India's Serum Institute have been sent to hospitals across the country to make the inoculation drive a success.