

BANGLADESH UPDATE

366
New cases in 24hrs

5,43,717
Total cases

8,356
Deaths

4,92,059
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

2,481,435
Deaths

112,129,723
Total cases

Singapore, Romania to recruit 12k Bangladeshis: FM

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said Singapore and Romania would recruit 10,000 and 2,000 Bangladeshis respectively soon.

"These are new avenues which are good news for us," he told reporters at his ministry office in the capital.

Mentioning that Bangladesh has opened its mission in Romania recently, Momen said recruitment of around 2,000 Bangladeshis was completed in various phases and the country would recruit another 2,000.

"Romania will recruit Bangladeshis for the Halal meat processing units," he said, adding that the country exports Halal meat to other countries.

The minister said the government became worried seeing the impact of Covid-19 on Bangladeshi workers abroad, but things are turning positive amid their efforts. "We have been

working in various ways for creating employment for Bangladeshis."

He said the Bangladesh mission in Singapore is working beyond its capacity by issuing 500 visas every day as it issues the work permit for Bangladeshi workers in Singapore.

About female workers, Momen said the government believes in equality between men and women. "So, it's difficult to accept the demand to stop sending female workers abroad."

He said all must work together for the protection of female workers at the workplaces. Female workers send 90 percent of their income to home which is not seen in case of men, the minister added.

He said the recent tough steps taken by the Saudi Arabian government to prevent harassment of women would help decrease the number of crimes against the female workers.



Crows feast on garbage dumped on the capital's Jahir Rayhan Sarak inside Buet campus. A section of locals throw their household trash right on the busy street, causing inconvenience to pedestrians and motorists. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Open dorms on March 1

FROM PAGE 1

and went in.

The DU students demanded that all residential halls be opened by the end of February so they can stay at the halls from March 1.

A growing number of students at different public universities across Bangladesh like Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Islamic University in Kushtia, Rajshahi University and Barisal University have been demonstrating for the last few days to reopen their residential halls, which have been closed since the government shut down all educational institutions in March 2020 due to Covid-19.

Yesterday, after breaking open the locks of the doors of two halls, DU students stayed there for an hour and then, around 3:00pm, joined a protest rally in front of Raju Memorial Sculpture under the banner "Open Hall for All-Year Students".

The agitating students then submitted a memorandum to the VC. They first issued a 72-hour ultimatum to press home their demands, but later withdrew it after a meeting with the VC and said they would wait for the decision of the university's academic council, which will be held today around 10:30am.

The VC held a meeting with a five-member delegation of the students. After the meeting, Tanvir Alam Chowdhury, a third-year student of the criminology department, said, "We have placed our demands to the vice-chancellor. There is a meeting of the academic council of the university tomorrow [Tuesday]. If the demand for opening the hall is not accepted in the meeting, we will announce a new programme."

DU VC Prof Dr Md Akhtaruzzaman said, "The academic council of the university will take a decision in coordination with the national decisions of the government in this regard."

Replying to a query on the students' move to enter the dorm after breaking its lock, he said "Our students are responsible. I firmly believe they will behave responsibly in this regard. In times of pandemic, it is not possible to take a unilateral decision on any issue." **'WE WILL NOT LEAVE DORM'** On Saturday, several hundred students of Jahangirnagar University broke open the locks to all 16 residential halls, a day after at least 35 students were injured in clashes with villagers just outside the campus.

The university administration locked down eight female dormitories and later gave an order to vacate the halls by yesterday, or else legal action would be taken against the students.

However, defying the order, the protesting JU students yesterday vowed to stay inside the dormitories. Residential students of Bangamata Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall yesterday again broke the lock on the hall door and started staying in the hall.

In a press conference at 4:00pm yesterday, they placed their five-point demand, which include the immediate arrest of identified attackers instead of filing a case against unnamed accused, the formation of a probe body, and withdrawal of hall vacancy notice within 12 hours.

However, they welcomed the education minister's statement regarding reopening of halls and universities. But, they said they will stay inside the dormitories as the case of JU is exceptional because it's the lone fully residential university in the country.

Also, in the aftermath of Friday's clash with the villagers it is not suitable for them to go back, they said.

Professor Sohel Ahmed, provost of Shaheed Rafiq-Jabbar Hall, said the students were asked to leave the halls in accordance with the decision by government's high-level policymakers.

"We do not have any conflict with the students, we are only thinking of their wellbeing," he said. "We are asking them to leave the halls as that would be the right thing to do at the moment."

University Grants Commission (UGC) has already issued a notice saying the halls will reopen following vaccination of the students, he mentioned.

Meanwhile, RU students gave an ultimatum to the university authority to reopen dormitories by February 28.

On behalf of the students, Khairul Islam Dukhu of the economics department said, "We have been staying out of campus for a long time. Our economic situation has deteriorated following the pandemic. As a result, it is hard for us to maintain living costs at private dormitories outside the campus. We want to go back to our dormitories and to our classrooms."

"If the authorities don't reopen the dormitories by this month, we won't be silent anymore. We will break into the dorms by March by any means."

ACC probing some RMG

FROM PAGE 1

Manufacturers and Exporters Association, the volume of annual export of garment products stood at \$34 billion -- 68 percent of total export.

Repeating to another question, the ACC secretary said it is scrutinising allegations against the Election Commission, including the chief election commissioner, of causing a loss of Tk 7.47 crore of the state in the name of training allowance.

"Our committee [which scrutinises allegations before enquiry] is examining it," he said.

On January 7, 10 Supreme Court lawyers submitted an application to the ACC for taking appropriate legal action over the allegations.

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Kidnappers in Nigeria free 53 seized on bus

AFP, Abuja

Kidnappers have released 53 people including women and children they seized on a bus in Nigeria, local authorities said, while dozens of others taken from a school in a separate incident are still missing.

Criminal gangs known locally as

"bandits" in northwest and central Nigeria have scaled up attacks in recent years, kidnapping, raping and pillaging.

A gang last week seized 53 people, including 20 women and nine children, who were travelling on a state-owned bus in Kundu village in Niger State.

Strike grips Myanmar

Thousands of anti-coup protesters rally on streets defying junta's lethal warning

AGENCIES

A general strike against military rule shut businesses in Myanmar yesterday and huge crowds gathered peacefully despite fears of violence after authorities warned that confrontation could be deadly.

Three weeks after seizing power, the junta has failed to stop the daily

protests and a civil disobedience movement calling for the reversal of the February 1 coup and release of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

International alarm continued to build, with the United Nations chief yesterday condemning the military's "brutal force", and the European Union announcing it was ready to impose sanctions on the junta.

Hundreds of thousands gathered in cities and towns across the country, from the northern hills on the border with China to the central plains, the Irrawaddy river delta and the southern tip of the panhandle, social media images showed.

For protester Kyaw Kyaw in the main city of Yangon, losing pay to join the strike was a small price to pay.

Confusion added to chaos

FROM PAGE 1

she said, adding that 1.30 lakh residential students, 15,000 teachers and other staff members of public universities would be vaccinated before May 17.

"Vaccination is a must for students if they want to return to their halls. But if any student has any logical medical ground for not taking the jobs, the issue will be taken into consideration," she said.

No examinations will be held at those universities before the reopening. But online classes will continue, the minister said.

There are 48 public and 107 private universities in the country. About 41 lakh students are currently enrolled into the public universities and their affiliated colleges, while the private universities have around 3.50 lakh students.

At the cabinet meeting, which began around 10:30am, the PM instructed the authorities concerned, including the education ministry, to examine whether the current situation was conducive to reopening educational institutions, said the cabinet secretary. The PM joined the meeting from the Gono Bhaban via videoconference.

He said that the prime minister also instructed to ensure that all teachers, officials and other employees were vaccinated before the reopening.

Besides, the PM asked to ensure safety of the residential students of all universities, he added.

On March 17 last year, the government closed all educational institutions aiming to contain the spread of coronavirus. The closure led to cancellation of exams, leaving academic calendars in disarray.

The government in phases extended the closure until February 28.

Authorities of school, colleges and universities started online classes but many students still remain out of it due to a lack of digital devices and internet facilities.

'LEAVE HALLS'

At the press conference, the education minister said if students have already gathered at any dormitories, they will have to leave immediately. "Government directives should be

honoured. Otherwise, actions will be taken in line with the existing law," she warned.

Dipu Moni said universities will not take responsibilities for any "illegal" activities outside the campus.

She voiced the warning when several groups of students of Jahangirnagar University on Saturday broke into at least six dormitories. They demanded reopening of the halls.

They were still in the halls when this report was filed around 11:00pm, our correspondent at the university reports.

Students of Dhaka University also broke the locks on the doors of two halls yesterday, demanding the reopening of the university dormitories.

Residential students of Dr Muhammad Shahidullah Hall and Amar Ekushey Hall entered the hall premises in the afternoon, breaking the locks. They demonstrated for about half an hour demanding the dormitories are reopened.

BCS EXAMS TO BE DELAYED Dipu Moni also said the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination will be delayed in line with the reopening of universities and halls.

The government will take necessary steps so that students who have crossed the age limit, due to the closure, can sit for the exams, she said.

Preliminary examination of the 43rd BCS is scheduled to be held on August 6, according to the Bangladesh Public Service Commission.

On January 27, the BPSC extended the deadline till 6:00pm on March 31 for applicants, from January 31.

This was announced after the University Grants Commission requested the BPSC in January to extend the deadline, as many final semester students would not be able to apply for the sought-after government jobs as their university exams could not be held during the pandemic.

In a letter, the UGC said all educational institutions remain closed since March last year. Because of this, honour's and master's exams were not held as per schedule.

Keeping this issue in mind, many public universities have started preparation to hold final honour's and master's exams, the letter added.

Momen flies to Washington

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Momen told reporters at his ministry yesterday.

The US under Biden has rejoined the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; World Health Organisation; announced reforms to immigration policy, allowing pathway for the undocumented immigrants to citizenship; and is in the process of joining Iran's nuclear deal, which is stark contrast to President Trump's "America First" and unilateral ways of doing things.

Foreign relations analysts say Bangladesh has new opportunities to work with the US, especially on climate change, addressing the coronavirus pandemic and the Rohingya crisis. The US is so far the largest donor in the humanitarian crisis and also creates pressure through sanctions on Myanmar generals' assets.

Biden's foreign policy also includes promoting democracy and human rights across the globe.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said Biden's Climate Envoy John Kerry has already called him and discussed on cooperation in the climate change front more vigorously.

"John Kerry is very excited. He is a star on climate change issue...we are always ready to work on it," he said, noting that Bangladesh is president of the Climate Vulnerable Forum and

can actively work on the interests of the vulnerable countries.

Dhaka also wants to augment trade with the US, which currently imports over \$6 billion a year, mostly garment products, and to draw US investments in Bangladesh.

Momen said the US is the largest investor in IT and energy, but there are other areas, including pharmaceuticals where the US can make investments given the new special economic zones being prepared for investors.

The minister will also give interviews to two US media outlets to respond to the "negative propaganda" in the US on Bangladesh. He did not name the outlets.

"It is said that many extrajudicial killings take place in Bangladesh. This is false. It hardly happens in Bangladesh. It does not happen for nothing... it has a procedure," Momen said.

"If you talk about it, such extrajudicial killings happen in high numbers in the US. In 2020, at least 1,004 people were killed in extrajudicial ways. Of course, it was not intentional," Momen said.

He said he would also invite some US officials to join the golden jubilee celebrations of Bangladesh's independence.

"We have already invited the US officials. We will extend the same during my visit to Washington [DC]," Momen

said, without naming the officials.

He said during his meetings, he would also request the US officials to arrange repatriation of Rashed Chowdhury, the fugitive killer of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

In July last year, US Attorney General William Barr reopened a sprawling case against Rashed Chowdhury, signaling that he could face deportation and death sentence.

Asked if he would meet the US attorney general, the foreign minister said, "NO".

Let other countries take Rohingyas Foreign Minister Momen urged other countries and human rights bodies to come forward to share the burden of the Rohingyas, saying that Bangladesh has done enough.

The comment comes in relation to the UNHCR appeal for the immediate rescue of a group of Rohingya refugees in distress in the Andaman Sea. The refugees left Cox's Bazar approximately 10 days ago.

"An estimate shows around 84,000 people live in per square kilometre at Kutupalong Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar. Do you see it anywhere in the world? Let other countries take (Rohingyas). We can't take more," he told reporters.

Take the jobs, maintain Covid guidelines: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged everyone to receive coronavirus vaccine shots and maintain proper health guidelines.



She asked all to wear masks and wash hands regularly even after taking the vaccine. She also requested all to take the second doses which have to be taken between eight and 12 weeks of the first shots.

Hasina said researchers are still trying to find out the effectiveness of the vaccine.

"At least it's giving the people protection, but you've to keep yourselves more protected," she said, reminding everyone to follow doctors' recommendations to avoid being infected.

Hasina was virtually addressing a discussion marking the International Mother Language Day from the Gono

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Second lot

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second consignment of the vaccine to Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 11:00pm. The doses will then be transported to the Beximco warehouse in Tongi from where the shots would be dispatched to government-designated destinations.

The flight landed around 12:30am.

Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said they are capable of storing 50 lakh doses a month.

"Maybe they [Serum Institute] have reduced the number of vaccine shots due to growing demands in other countries," he told The Daily Star.

Asked whether the reduction in the number was a violation of the agreement, Khurshid said, "No, it will not be a violation as long as they [Beximco] adjust the number during the six-month supply deadline."

Meanwhile, SII CEO Adar Poonawalla on Sunday urged countries to be patient about the supplies of the vaccine as the company has been directed to prioritise the "huge needs" of India.

"Dear countries and governments, as you await #COVISHIELD supplies, I humbly request you to please be patient, @SerumInstIndia has been directed to prioritise the huge needs of India and along with that balance the needs of the rest of the world. We are trying our best," Poonawalla tweeted.

Bangladesh started the mass inoculation campaign on February 7 with 70 lakh Oxford vaccine shots in hand. Apart from the 50 lakh doses of purchased vaccine, the country received another 20 lakh doses of Covishield from the Indian government as a gift.

Initially, the government had planned to inoculate 60 lakh people in the first month. After two revisions, the government now plans to vaccinate 70 lakh people in the first month.

Meanwhile, the number of people who have registered on www.surokkha.gov.bd has reached 34.45 lakh as of yesterday.

Of them, around 23,08,157 lakh have been given the shots, including yesterday's 2,25,280.

Bangladesh is expected to receive 1.31 lakh doses of Pfizer vaccine under the COVAX arrangement by the end of this month, according to health officials.

The country is expected to get 6.8 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccine from Covax, the global vaccine alliance.

17.5kg gold bars

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90 gold bars, and from seat number 18A, 60 gold bars."

On October 2, 2019, CIID detained Mohammad Ilias, a cleaner of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, with 36 gold bars weighing around 4.22kg and worth Tk 2 crore from the same flight.

The deputy commissioner of customs added, "It is very difficult for a passenger to carry out such a misdeed by his or her own."

Several times, we conducted drives in aircrafts and recovered a large quantity of gold bars abandoned in the toilets, galley and other parts of the planes.

"It is not possible to run such smuggling without the involvement of aircraft employees concerned."

She also said, "The commissioner of the Chattogram Customs House told us that he sent a letter to the National Board of Revenue to find out the main culprits in such smuggling."

Biman MD and CEO Mokabbir Hossain told The Daily Star that the security agencies of the city of departure were responsible for such incidents in these cases.

"If our staff is found involved in any such incident after investigation, we will of course take action," he added.

The seized gold bars will be deposited at Bangladesh Bank while a departmental case will be lodged under the Customs Act [1969], said customs officials.

According to Chattogram airport data, 2,987 abandoned gold bars weighing around 348kg were recovered between January 2015 and October 2020.