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"The prime minister has made it clear about following the prefixed roll-out plan for the second dose of Covid-19 inoculation, scheduled to start from April 8."

CABINET SECRETARY KHANDKER ANWARUL ISLAM AFTER CABINET MEETING



"I will win Bengal on one leg and in the future, will get victory in Delhi on two legs."

WEST BENGAL CM MAMATA BANERJEE EXPRESSES CONFIDENCE IN HER CHANCES TO WIN ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS



"As we continue to make good progress on our vaccine programme...regular rapid testing is even more important to make sure those efforts are not wasted."

BRITISH PM BORIS JOHNSON ON COVID

'Lockdown' goes lightly on first day



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government restrictions, imposed to rein in the rising number of Covid-19 cases and deaths, were not enforced strictly on the first day yesterday.

Many city dwellers continued to disregard health safety rules even in this grave situation. They did not wear masks, let alone follow social distancing.

Streets in the capital were less crowded, large malls remained closed, but shops in alleys were open. People thronged those shops.

Intercity and long-haul buses did not operate but cars, auto-rickshaws and

rickshaws ruled the thoroughfares.

Commuters suffered during the morning rush as government offices and private firms were open on a limited scale.

Many rode rickshaws while many others took auto-rickshaws to get to work, spending extra. Some had to change vehicles multiple times and even walk to work.

Most shops on main roads could not avert the law enforcers and had to remain closed. Shops and convenient stores in neighbourhoods were open for business as usual.

In some places, law enforcers were seen asking people to follow health guidelines. A

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Exhausted, a migrant worker dozes off near a gate of a terminal at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 11:30am yesterday. He along with the others, seen in the photo, had been waiting there since Sunday night to catch a flight to Saudi Arabia at 7:00pm yesterday. They reached the airport early due to the weeklong restrictions on transport and public movement imposed to curb the spread of Covid-19. The flight left on schedule.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Tales of woes hang heavy at hospitals

ANISUR RAHMAN

When Mozammel Haque was taken to Mugda Medical College Hospital in an ambulance, it was evident that the Covid-19 patient needed oxygen support.

Gasping for air, Mozammel lay on his stomach, while his son, a university student, held an oxygen mask to his face.

The son begged the authorities for a bed, so that his father could get some life-saving treatment. The only thing available was a cold steel gurney. It was given to Mozammel.

A hospital employee wheeled the gurney into the emergency section and he was given oxygen support, for about 10 minutes. The hospital employees had no choice but to take the oxygen cylinder away and give it to a patient who just arrived.

Elsewhere in the hospital, where people are supposed to be inoculated, a sign was hung up to turn away people coming for the vaccine.

Abdus Sobhan and his wife came holding their vaccine cards, but had to leave without taking the shot even

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1ST, 2ND DOSE VACCINE DRIVES Despite dearth, govt to press on

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Even after a dearth in the supply of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, the government has decided to continue administering the first dose and to start giving the second dose of the Covid-19 vaccine as scheduled.

"The Prime Minister has made it clear to follow the prefixed roll-out plan for the second dose of the Covid-19 mass vaccine inoculation scheduled to start from April 8," Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam told reporters yesterday.

During the briefing after the weekly Cabinet meeting, he also said that the government has enough stock to begin administering the second dose. "I had a conversation with the health director general. There will be no problems. While we are administering the vaccine in hand, more will come," Islam added.

The health directorate also issued a fresh directive on April 4 saying that administering the first dose will continue simultaneously along with the second dose.

The countrywide vaccination campaign will continue during the "lockdown" and the month of Ramadan, said a circular from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Covid-19 Vaccine Preparedness and Deployment Core Committee on Sunday.

Those who have received the first dose will receive a confirmation text message for the second dose from April 5 onward, said the DGHS circular.

It also said that from tomorrow Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd will start transporting the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine to different district-level government storages as per the distribution list.

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Mob torches Saltha UNO's office, 2 cars

Enforcement of Covid curbs sparked it

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A mob set fire to Saltha upazila nirbahi officer's office and two government vehicles early today after officials trying to enforce Covid-19 guidelines at a tea stall sparked anger.

Locals said Assistant Commissioner (land) Marufa Sultana went to Fukra Bazar under Sonapur union and tried to enforce the Covid rules around 6:30pm. Ansar members, who accompanied her, beat a man for having tea with others violating the rules, the locals alleged.

At one stage the official left the scene and police from Saltha Police Station went there and clashed with the crowd.

SI Mizan and two

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NEWS ANALYSIS Slow response brings us here

WASIM BIN HABIB

In the first week of last month when the country started seeing a resurgence of Covid-19 infections, healthcare experts sounded alarm, urging the government to take immediate measures to rein in the surge before it goes out of control.

The government's response to a looming crisis, however, was lackadaisical.

The authorities blamed people's reluctance to follow the health safety guidelines for the spike and relied largely on procedural work such as sending letters to district administration for enforcing the guidelines and limiting mass gathering.

Even in the fourth week of last month when Covid cases as well as deaths from the virus kept soaring, the health directorate officials ruled out any possibility of re-imposition of a shutdown. It did not spell out any measures to deal with the situation that had the signs of an impending crisis.

Then on March 30, the government issued an 18-point directive to curb the rapid surge in cases. By that time, the country was already on course to see the highest infection rate ever. But nowhere in the 18-point directive the government hinted about any restriction or lockdown.

Two days later, the countrymen saw a careless act on the part of the health directorate as it allowed the holding of the entrance test for medical colleges without considering the health hazards it could pose.

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COVID SURGE ICU beds to double in Dhaka

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The government has decided to double the number of Intensive Care Unit beds in Dhaka to accommodate the surge of Covid-19 patients.

"We are working to double the [number of] ICU beds in Dhaka hospitals within seven to 10 days," Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), told The Daily Star yesterday.

The decision to ramp up the ICU facilities, as well as general beds, in both public and private hospitals came after a meeting yesterday between the DGHS and the hospital officials.

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3RD PHASE WB POLLS Challenging for BJP; TMC feels at ease

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

As voting for the third phase of the West Bengal election takes place today, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) will focus on keeping its traditional bastion intact while India ruler Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will try to end its duck in the battle for 31 Assembly seats.

The third phase of the election will be held across three districts -- Howrah, Hooghly and South 24 Parganas -- where Muslim voters play a key role, according to experts.

The ruling TMC won an overwhelming 29 assembly seats from these constituencies in 2016, while National Congress and Communist Party of India (Marxist) shared the other two.

The BJP on the other hand not only failed to win a single seat, but got just 6.91 percent of the votes. The party, however, managed to increase its votes to 37.45 percent in the constituencies that consisted of these 31 seats in 2019 Lok Sabha (National Election) polls.

In third phase, the main challenge for the TMC is to ensure that it keeps its Muslim votes intact. The worrying factors for the TMC is a possible split of Muslim votes between TMC and the coalition of CPM, Congress and the Indian Secular Front of Abbas Siddiqui.

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N'GANJ LAUNCH CAPSIZE

Death toll 29, 7 still missing

STAR REPORT

Twenty-nine bodies were recovered and seven people remained missing till last night after a passenger launch capsized in the Shitalakkhya river in Narayanganj on Sunday.

Among the deceased are 15 women, six children and eight men, said Narayanganj Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Nahida Barik. The bodies were handed to family members and relatives.

Families of each of the deceased were provided with Tk 25,000 for funeral expenses on behalf of the district administration, the UNO said.

Rescue operations to trace the seven missing persons were going on when this report was filed around 8:00pm.

The launch named Sabit Al Hasan left Narayanganj Launch Terminal for Munshiganj with nearly 50 passengers around 5:56pm on Sunday. Around 15 minutes later, it sank near the third Shitalakkhya Bridge at Koylaghat of Syedpur area when it was hit and dragged by a tanker.

Immediately after the accident, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), Fire Service and Civil Defence, Coast Guard and Police joined the rescue operation.

Five bodies were recovered on Sunday night, but authorities concerned had to halt the rescue operations around 2:00am yesterday due to adverse weather.

After a four-hour break, the BIWTA resumed the rescue operation around 6:00am yesterday. A rescue vessel of BIWTA started its operation to salvage the sunken launch around 10:00am.

The capsized launch was pulled out of the water around 12:20pm, said Abdullah Arefin, deputy assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defence in Narayanganj.

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Sabit Al Hasan, the launch which sank in the Shitalakkhya in Narayanganj on Sunday night, was salvaged in a joint operation yesterday noon. At least, 24 more bodies were recovered yesterday, taking the death toll to 29. Inset, a relative of a victim wails during the rescue operation.

PHOTO: SANAD SAHA