

7,075
New cases in 24hrs

6,44,439
Total cases

9,318
Deaths

5,55,414
Recoveries

2,870,030
Deaths

132,269,317
Total cases

GLOBAL
UPDATE

132,269,317
Total cases

Peace pre-requisite for development

PM tells outgoing Afghanistan ambassador

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said establishment of peace is a pre-requisite for ensuring development.

"Peace is a must for development. We involve people so that their support can help establish peace," she said.

The PM was talking to outgoing Afghanistan Ambassador to Bangladesh Abdul Qayoom Malikzad yesterday when he paid a farewell call on her at the Gono Bhaban.

PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters after the meeting.

During the meeting, the Afghanistan envoy informed the Bangladesh premier that the historic March 7 speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was translated into Afghan language.



Talking about Covid-19 situation, Hasina said, "Coronavirus is a problem for all as it is a global pandemic. We have been fighting this deadly disease collectively."

Describing Bangladesh-Afghanistan relations as wonderful, the PM said the two countries have worked together in the international arena.

The premier also expressed her desire to help Afghanistan in its development. She said Bangladeshi NGO Brac has been working in Afghanistan for its socio-economic advancement.

Hasina said her government has been working to make Bangladesh a poverty- and hunger-free country as envisioned by the Father of the Nation.

The PM also conveyed her regards to Afghan president.

India's daily Covid cases top 100,000

Maharashtra announces night curfew

AGENCIES

India has reported a record rise in coronavirus infections, becoming only the second country after the United States to register more than 100,000 new cases in a day, as hospitals in its worst affected state are overrun by patients.

Maharashtra, home to India's financial and entertainment capital Mumbai, recorded nearly 60,000 cases in the last 24 hours.

The struggling state authorities tightened the evening curfew to allow only people involved in essential services out of their homes from 8:00 pm to 7:00 am.

The region of 110 million people will also see weekend lockdowns, with gatherings of over four people banned and places of worship and restaurants shut.

In Mumbai over the weekend, one of Bollywood's biggest stars, Akshay Kumar, became the latest celebrity to test positive.

The shooting of the religious epic "Ram Setu" that Kumar was making was halted after 45 crew members also tested positive.

tested positive.

"How long shooting remains halted depends on Akshay Kumar's recovery. We can replace all our crew members, but we cannot replace the star of the film," Ashok Dubey from the Federation of Western India Cine Employees told AFP.

Kumar, 53, tweeted meanwhile that he had been hospitalised "as a precautionary measure under medical advice".

"The new variant, or variants of concern, probably explains a lot of it, rather than simplistic explanation of behaviour," said Rajib Dasgupta, head of the Centre of Social Medicine & Community Health in New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University.

India has found hundreds of cases of the virus variants first detected in the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil.

Subhash Salunke, a former WHO official who advises Maharashtra on its Covid-19 strategy, said cases in the state would continue to rise for another couple of weeks. He said a way out was vaccinating all adults in its hardest-hit cities such as Mumbai, Pune and Nashik.

ICU beds to double in Dhaka

FROM PAGE 1

The meeting was aimed at assessing the current situation and devising the next course of action, said Khurshid Alam.

Ventilation support is a key factor for critical Covid-19 patients. Over the past few weeks, as the Covid-19 infection rate spiked again, patients and their relatives have been complaining about not getting ICU support or general beds at public and private hospitals in the capital.

The number of daily coronavirus cases crossed the 7,000-mark for two consecutive days as 7,075 new infections were recorded yesterday.

According to the updated DGHS statistics, there are 2,555 Covid-19 general and 128 ICU beds in government hospitals in Dhaka. There are 772 general and 180 ICU beds in private hospitals.

The DGHS said that it has already started increasing the number of ICU beds.

"We will increase ICU beds in public hospitals to more than 200," he said, adding that normal beds would be increased to around 5,000.

He also said the process was on to turn the Dhaka North City Corporation kitchen market in Mohakhali into a makeshift hospital for coronavirus patients.

"This will be the largest Covid-19 dedicated hospital in the country and there will be 251 ICU and HD beds. The main feature of this hospital would be that we will provide ICU facilities in all 1,200 beds," the DGHS director general said.

He added that not only the ICU beds but the general beds will also be doubled by this time as all Covid-19 designated hospitals have begun expanding.

For example, he said, Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital has already added 200 beds and will add another 200 in the next few days.

The National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases has also already started working to open 200 additional beds.

The National Institute of Mental Health and National Institute of Kidney Diseases and Urology have started adding 100 beds each.

Even private hospital, like Aagar Ali Hospital, Evercare Hospital and United Hospital, have started increasing the number of their beds as well, he said.

The DG also said the meeting has decided to provide no objection certificates to public hospitals so that they can purchase the Meropenem injection, which is used in Covid-19 treatment, from their own sources.

Challenging for BJP

FROM PAGE 1

This worry is quite logical as Abbas Siddiqui, custodian of the famous Furfura Sharif shrine in Hooghly, has a huge number of young Muslim followers mostly in Howrah, Hooghly, and North and South 24 Parganas.

On the other hand, BJP's main challenge is to maintain the momentum of their growth, which has risen from 6.91 percent to 37.45 percent within three years, while the Left Front, which had its dominance in these areas before, will try its best to regain its field.

South 24 Parganas is a TMC dominated area with a Muslim population of nearly 36 percent. In Howrah, the Muslim population stands at 26 percent and 35 percent in Hooghly.

BJP's target is to capture Hindu dominated seats in South 24 Parganas like Gosaba, Sagar, Patharpratima, Kakkwp, Sonarpur and Jaynagar.

The party was in a comfortable position in the last two phases of polling for 60 seats where the share of Muslim voters was low. But the third phase would be really challenging for them.

However, to woo voters in its third phase campaign, it targeted the TMC over corruption issues in the Amphan relief fund as the three districts were worst affected during last year's cyclone.

The TMC on the other hand banked on its welfare schemes like "Duare Sarkar", "Swastho Sathi" and

"Kanyashree" to counter the BJP.

Both the parties filed candidates for all seats while the CPIM has fielded 13 candidates, All India Forward Bloc filed two candidates, Revolutionary Socialist Party filed one, Congress nominees are contesting in seven seats and in eight Indian Secular Front has fielded its candidates.

In today's polling, bigshots like BJP leader and former Rajya Sabha MP Swapan Dasgupta is contesting from Tarakeswar in Hooghly, BJP leader and popular actress Tanushree Chakraborty is contesting from Shyamapur in Howrah, former Minister and senior CPIM leader Kanti Ganguly is contesting from Raidighi under South 24 Parganas, West Bengal Speaker Biman Banerjee is contesting in Baruiapur Paschim and prominent TMC leader Saukat Molla is contesting from Canning Purba Assembly seat.

In today's poll, around 78 lakh voters will exercise their franchise to decide the fate of 205 candidates.

A total 618 companies of central forces were deployed for the third phase to guard 10,871 polling stations, all of which have been marked "sensitive" by the Election Commission.

Of 31 assembly seats, 16 are in South 24 Parganas, seven in Howrah and the remaining eight in Hooghly.

The fourth phase of polling, when 44 constituencies will go to polls, is scheduled for April 10.



Retiree Mozammel Haque, a Covid-19 patient, being taken out of an ambulance by his son, left, and another youth in front of the Mughla Medical College Hospital around 10:30am yesterday. Mozammel had been having breathing problem and his condition worsened earlier in the day.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

'Lockdown' goes lightly on first day

FROM PAGE 1

Rab mobile court fined some for violating the rules.

Meanwhile, shop owners and employees in New Market and nearby areas demonstrated for the second straight day yesterday, protesting the government decision to put restrictions "on their businesses".

The situations outside Dhaka were almost similar, reported our correspondents.

Traders and businessmen in Rajshahi, Chattogram, Kushtia, Jhenaidah and Panchagarh staged demonstrations, demanding shops be allowed to remain open.

On Sunday, the Cabinet Division issued an 11-point directive to be followed from 6:00am yesterday to 12:00am on April 11 to contain the spread of the virus in the country. Punitive actions were supposed to be taken against violators of the directives.

The government's restrictions come at a time when the country reported 7,075 new infections yesterday with a positivity rate of 13.39 percent. Another 52 people died from the virus in 24 hours ending 8:00am yesterday, taking the death toll to 9,318.

Two correspondents of this newspaper visited the capital's Mirpur, Ibrahimpur, Bshantek, Shyamoli, Tejgaon, Farmgate, Karwan Bazar, New Market areas and found most of the shops in the alleys open.

The circular said while shops and malls would stay closed, they would be allowed to sell products online. Besides, sellers would have to follow the health safety guidelines and no buyers would be allowed in person, the circular read.

In the morning, many had to come out of home as the restrictions were not applicable to office-goers and transports involved in maintaining law and order, emergency services, relief distribution, health services, and electricity, water and gas supply, fire, telephone and internet services.

Besides, banks remained open

from 10:00am to 12:30pm. Industrial units and factories were allowed to stay open. Amar Ekushey Boi Mela remained open from noon to 5:00pm.

Despite being a mode of public transport, auto-rickshaws operated and carried passengers, often more than their capacity. Many passengers were seen sharing rides.

Many people took bike rides, even though it was prohibited as per the restrictions.

Many passengers in Rayerbagh area of the city's Jatrabari staged demonstrations on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway, demanding transport so that they could go to work.

A good number of garment factories are situated in the city's Mirpur area. As these factories were out of the purview of the restriction, many workers were seen walking in groups to their factories.

SHOP OWNERS STAGE DEMO Shop owners and employees of different markets in New Market and nearby areas in Dhaka demonstrated for the second consecutive day yesterday.

They demanded that the government allow them to keep their shops open ahead of Pahela Baishakh and Eid by maintaining health safety rules.

Witnesses said several hundred shop owners arrived in the market area around 10:00am and started demonstration.

Additional police members were deployed to keep the situation under control, said SM Kaiyum, officer-in-charge of New Market Police Station.

"We managed to convince them to leave the spot," he said.

Traders and shop employees in the city's Islampur area also demonstrated over the same demand.

In Rajshahi, traders demanded exclusion of small businesses from the "lockdown", reports our staff correspondent.

They blocked the Shaheb Bazar Road, right in the middle of the

city, in the morning and staged demonstrations. Several shops in RDA Market near Zero Point area were kept open.

Our correspondents from Chattogram, Kushtia, Jhenaidah and Panchagarh also reported similar protests by shop owners.

SOME STEPS TAKEN

Rab yesterday conducted a drive in the capital to ensure that people wear masks.

The drive, led by Rab's Executive Magistrate Palash Kumar Basu, was conducted at the capital's Shahbagh intersection for two hours from noon.

At the spot, the mobile court fined 25 people a total of Tk 10,000 for not wearing masks and carrying passengers on motorcycles.

"Some people have been fined Tk 200 to Tk 500 each for not wearing masks in public. We are also trying to stop the unnecessary movement of people," the executive magistrate said.

He also said free masks have been distributed to about 2,500 people in those two hours.

The mobile court also fined a man as his 13-year-old son was driving their car. Asked, the father, who was sitting next to the boy, could not answer why it was necessary for them to come out of home.

Later, the members of the Rab team gave them a ride home in Paribagh.

The executive magistrate said the purpose of Rab's drive was to raise more awareness about the spread of the coronavirus.

Around 4:00pm, police in Bshantek and Mirpur-10 areas were seen asking shoppers to close their shops immediately.

In Savar, a mobile court fined owners of a shopping complex, long-distance buses and four pedestrians for disobeying the instructions.

Drives were carried out in various markets, restaurants and transport services' offices in Savar and Hemayetpur areas as many shops remained open in those areas violating rules.

No sehri, iftar at mosques

Religious affairs ministry announces guidelines

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Religious Affairs yesterday said people will not be allowed to have iftar and sehri at mosques during Ramadan.

To curb the spread of Covid-19, the ministry notification said soap, water, hand washing facilities or hand sanitisers should be available at the entrance of each mosque, and everyone must wear a mask.

People should come to the mosque after performing the ablutions and Sunnah prayers at home, it said, urging people to wash their hands with soap for at least 20 seconds while performing the ablution.

The notification, signed by Deputy Secretary Sakhawat Hossain, also said carpets should not be laid in mosques and each worshipper has to bring their own prayer mat. The entire mosque should be cleaned with disinfectants before each prayer.

Social distancing must be ensured during prayers. Children, the elderly, and those engaged in taking care of the sick should refrain from praying in congregation, the directive further mentioned.

Soaps and hand sanitisers should be kept where worshippers perform ablutions in the mosques. Prayer mats and caps kept in the mosque should be avoided.

Khatibs, imams and mosque management committee members have been asked to implement these directives, said the notification.

If these are not complied with, the administration and law enforcement agencies will take action against those concerned.

Tales of woes

FROM PAGE 1

though yesterday was the date for their inoculation.

"They told us that the vaccine shots have yet to arrive here today. Since they do not know when the vaccine will arrive, we have not been told when to come back," Sobhan said.

At the queue of people coming to get tested for coronavirus, a man named Munir said at 8:30am that he arrived there for the test before daybreak and was still waiting for his turn.

"There are still 70 people ahead of me," he said.

Four Niger soldiers killed in double 'terror' attack

AFP, Niamey

Niger's defence ministry said Sunday that four of its soldiers had been killed the day before in twin "terrorist" attacks in the country's southeast, the day after President Mohamed Bazoum was sworn in.

"Several terrorists" had been killed in the simultaneous Saturday morning attacks against military positions, the ministry said using a term usually used to describe jihadists.

It added that the "heavily armed" attackers "came from a neighbouring country" in a reference to Nigeria, where groups linked to Boko Haram are active.

Despite death

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As of yesterday, the government has inoculated 55,39,494 people, while 69,45,678 people have registered with the Surokha app for vaccination.

The mass inoculation campaign started on February 7 with 70 lakh vaccine doses in hand.

The country got 50 lakh doses of the Oxford vaccine from the Serum Institute of India (SII) on January 25. The country also received 20 lakh doses of Oxford vaccine as gift from the Indian government.

The 50 lakh doses were the first instalment of the three crore vaccines the country purchased from the SII. As per the agreement, the government was supposed to get 50 lakh doses of vaccines each month for six months.

But the government received only 20 lakh doses of vaccines in the second instalment on February 22. The country received another 12 lakh doses of Oxford vaccine as gift from India last month, taking the combined tally to 1.2 crore so far.

However, the government was yet hear anything concrete from the SII or its local agent Beximco Pharmaceuticals Limited regarding the third consignment, which was due late last month.

Besides, the Covax programme, led by the World Health Organisation and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, has committed to give Bangladesh a total of 6.8 crore vaccine shots. As part of the commitment, the country is expected to receive 10,908,000 shots of the Oxford vaccine by May.

Global media reports said that the Indian government has reportedly imposed a temporary restriction on all major exports of the AstraZeneca vaccine made by the SII to meet domestic demands.

India's decision on restriction has also impacted the global supply chain of the vaccine, global media also reported.

Nazmul Hassan Papon, managing director of Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd, on Sunday told The Daily Star that they were yet to get any specific date from the SII about the next consignment.

Mob torches Saltha UNO's office, 2 cars

FROM PAGE 1

constables were injured, police said.

Sources said a rumour started spreading that two people had been killed in police fire. A mob formed outside the upazila parishad compound a few kilometres away from Fukra Bazar.

The mob late last night besieged the UNO office and the Saltha Police Station next door, the locals alleged.

Police fired shots in the air to disperse the mob but the mob attacked the policemen forcing them to retreat.

The mob torched the UNO's office and vandalised the upazila agriculture officer's office. They also torched two vehicles parked in garages inside the compound.

AC (Land) Marufa Sultana said, "I went to Fukra Bazar as my routine duty for lock down enforcement around 6:30pm. There I found two tea stalls where locals were passing time. I asked my Ansar members to tell them to close the shop. When they went to tell them a group of 50-60 people with sticks tried to attack us. So, we left the place and informed police. After that

what happened I have no idea."

Sumiur Rahman, additional superintendent of police (Nagarkanda and Saltha) said, "A fundamentalist group took the opportunity under the cover of common people. Bangabandhu's mural was also attacked. They also blocked the road by logs, the reason for which police from district headquarters could not come."

Superintendent of Police of Faridpur Md Alimujaman said people getting killed in police fire was just a rumor.

Death toll 29, 7 still missing

FROM PAGE 1

Contacted, Babu Lal Baidya, assistant director of BIWTA at Narayanganj Launch Terminal, said, "In primary investigation, we have come to know that the passenger launched was rammed by cargo tanker SKL-3. We will take further legal action after talking to the higher authorities concerned."

Speaking to The Daily Star, Shaheedul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Narayanganj River Police, said, "We will start a drive to seize the tanker after a case is filed against it."

Contacted, Narayanganj launch owners' association's President Badiuzzaman Badal said, "We will surely file a case against the vessel." "THEY DIED ON THEIR WAY HOME" Sorrow and grief engulfed the area since dead bodies of victims were being kept on the bank of the Shitalakkhya since Sunday night.

Family members and relatives of the victims broke down with grief upon seeing bodies of their loved

ones.

Most of the deceased were residents of Munshiganj.

Twelve-year-old Mahin was rendered speechless when he saw the bodies of his father and mother last evening. The body of his eight-year-old sister was recovered later in the night.

"We live in Sonir Akhra in the capital. My father, mother and sister were going to our village home in Munshiganj," said Mahin.

"Now, I have become alone. How will I spend the rest of my life without them?" he wailed.

Three members of a family of Munshiganj Sadar upazila's Ramjanbeg village also died in the accident.

"My wife, daughter and mother-in-law have died in the accident," said Mohammad Arif, a resident of the village.

"My wife Brithi Begum was 25 years old, daughter Arifa was one and mother-in-law Pokhina Begum was

45. They had gone to a diagnostic centre in Narayanganj. They died on their way home."

Two sisters -- Lata Begum, 22, and Sadia Akhter, 10 -- who were residents of Nayagaon area of Munshiganj town, went to visit a doctor in Narayanganj. They died on their way home, said their elder sister Tunji Begum.

Protima Ghoshal, 45, a resident of Malpara area of Munshiganj town, used to work in a government office in Narayanganj. She was returning home on the launch and lost her life on the journey, said her husband Pritimoy Ghoshal.

He also said his wife usually travelled between Munshiganj and Narayanganj by road. But she along with some other people opted to travel by launch that day to avoid the rush on the highway following the announcement of the seven-day restrictions to curb the spread of coronavirus.

[Our Correspondents from Narayanganj and Munshiganj contributed to the report]