

ASTRAZENECA JOB PRODUCTION
INDIA TO FUND CAPACITY
BOOST AT SERUM
INSTITUTE AS VACCINES
RUN SHORT
SEE PAGE 6

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"... The government launched a crackdown taking advantage of the lockdown over the last few days. It's arresting BNP leaders and activists, religious leaders and alem-ulema indiscriminately."
BNP SECRETARY GENERAL MIRZA FAKHRUL ISLAM ALAMGIR



"I think by the time we get to the first quarter of 2022, we will be able to vaccinate children of virtually any age - hopefully before then."
TOP US INFECTIOUS DISEASE EXPERT DR ANTHONY FAUCI



"The terrorism threat has moved to other places. And we have other very important items on our agenda, including the relationship with China..."
TOP US DIPLOMAT ANTONY BLINKEN



Lockdown extends as deaths climb

Fresh curbs to stay in force from April 22 to 28; gazette today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The current travel and other restrictions will be extended for a week from April 22 as hospitals continue to struggle to cope with the number of Covid-19 patients.

The number of deaths reported in a day was the highest in the country yesterday while the major health facilities have recently been operating at capacity.

The cabinet division yesterday sent a proposal to extend the restrictions to the Prime Minister's Office for approval following a meeting held virtually between secretaries of different ministries and business association leaders.

A gazette notification might be issued by today, said Surath Kumar Sarker, principal information officer at the Press Information Department.

"The lockdown will remain in force from April 22 to 28 with the same restrictions imposed the week before. It'll be a stricter one," State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain said after the cabinet division meeting chaired by Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam, reports UNB.

Sources present in the meeting said the initial decision was to extend the restrictions until April 29, but the businessmen convinced others to limit the

restrictions to an additional seven days.

The proposal sent to the PMO sought a ban on public transport on roads, waterways, railways, and air. There will be no restrictions on freight, emergency, and other services linked to production units.

Health officials yesterday reported 112 deaths from Covid-19, the highest in a day in Bangladesh.

The number of deaths has been over 100 for three days in a row.

Yesterday's proposal for extending the restrictions followed the recommendations made by the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19.

In its 31st meeting held virtually on Sunday night, the committee members suggested another week-long strict lockdown to contain the rapid spread of coronavirus, according to a press release from the committee.

An outcome cannot be expected in less than two weeks of lockdown, the committee said, adding, "Considering the infection rate, further decisions can be made."

The press release said the experts expressed satisfaction over the current lockdown and recommended formulation of a plan to lift the restrictions in phases.

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Frontliner Reshma Munier in tears of joy as she hugs Maksuda Begum, in wheelchair, at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday. Maksuda, 65, got admitted to DMCH on April 7 with Covid and she left the hospital yesterday. Reshma had been taking care of Maksuda during her hospital stay.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Testing tumbles despite spread

Experts urge making Covid tests free

MOUDDUD AHMED SUJAN

While the transmission of the novel coronavirus has turned almost the entire country into a high-risk zone, the number of daily tests has been decreasing resulting in many people carrying the virus undetected - ultimately infecting others around them.

In this context, the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 yesterday recommended making Covid-19 tests at government facilities free of costs and also the reducing of the price of tests in private laboratories.

"Detecting Covid-19 patients fast [as possible] is important to prevent transmission. [But] the number of daily tests has decreased recently. Setting up sample collection booths in each ward of each town is urgent," the committee recommended in its 31st meeting held on Sunday night, said a press release published yesterday.

According to data of the Directorate General of Health Services, the total number of tests conducted last week (April 13-19) was 156,386 while it was 346,135 in the previous week (April 6-12), which means the number of tests last week decreased by 55 percent compared to the previous one.

Since the government started testing suspected novel coronavirus cases from January 21 last year, the number of

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Govt forms body to find alternative vaccines

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

With the disruption in the supply of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from the Serum Institute of India (SII), the government has formed a five-member committee to find alternative sources of Covid vaccines.

The committee, led by the director general of the Drug Administration, will find the alternative sources and submit a report to the Prime Minister's Office within seven days.

A meeting was held in the PMO, chaired by the principal secretary, where this decision was made.

"There is an uncertainty over vaccine availability. We have formed a five-member committee to find alternative sources of vaccines," Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid

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Railway projects falling behind

Deadlines of 24 out of 39 projects to pass in June; only 4 may make it; 19 already revised at least once



TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Around half of the ongoing projects of Bangladesh Railway will have to be revised after the end of the current fiscal year, thanks to poor implementation.

As a result, cost of most of the projects - aimed at improving railways services - is likely to escalate, prolonging people's wait for better services from the struggling railway.

BEHIND SLOW PROGRESS

- » Poor planning
- » Weak feasibility studies
- » Lack of accountability
- » Lack of skilled manpower
- » Vested interests
- » Covid-19 outbreak

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HEFAJAT MAYHEM 2013 CID asked to probe 23 cases Mamunul on 7-day remand

RASHIDUL HASAN, MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and ASIFUR RAHMAN

Irrked by Hefajat's violent activities starting with the protest against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit last month, the government has decided to bring to book everyone involved in the mayhem in different parts of the country, especially Brahmanbaria.

To ensure punishment of the perpetrators and to properly collect evidence of the Hefajat-e-Islam's mayhem at different times including at the capital's Shapla Chattar in May 2013, law enforcers on Sunday handed over the charge of investigation of over 23 cases to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

Meanwhile, in an apparent bid to come to an understanding about the recent arrest of several of its top leaders, a delegation of Hefajat held a meeting with Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal at the latter's residence in the capital last night.

The move to hand over charge of the investigations to CID was made to gather digital and forensic evidence of vandalism and mayhem, following directives from the government, sources said.

Government high-ups have also directed law enforcement agencies to take stern action against Hefajat men involved in the violent activities since 2013.

MAMUNUL PLACED ON REMAND

A Dhaka Court yesterday placed Hefajat Joint Secretary

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BUSINESS

Sustaining policy response key to tackling 2nd wave

IMF says about Bangladesh

Bangladesh faces challenges in sustaining the effective response it unveiled in the initial phase of the pandemic last year as it grapples with a devastating second wave of the deadly pathogen, the International Monetary Fund has said.

The government will have to continue its support to the vulnerable groups through social safety nets and its support for the agriculture sector, the multilateral lender said in a virtual media briefing recently.

STORY ON B1



With no masks, let alone physical distancing, a number of teens hangout on a footbridge in Azimpur in the capital yesterday. The country recorded a record 112 Covid deaths in 24 hours yesterday but many seem to care little about health guidelines.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

BANSHKHALI POWER PLANT Questions over rationality of police firing

332 shots fired to quell demo of unarmed workers

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Cig

Police had fired 332 shots and four teargas shells during demonstrations by agitating workers of SS Power I Plant in Gandamara area of Chattogram's Banshkhali upazila on Saturday, which left five workers dead and at least 21 people injured.

Human rights bodies have raised questions about the rationale for police firing. However, police officers claimed that they opened fire to "save lives and properties".

Speaking to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, a Chattogram district police official said, "Police personnel had fired 270 shotgun bullets, 62 china bullets and four teargas shells to disperse the crowd."

At least six senior police officials told this correspondent that police usually first use rubber bullets to disperse any gathering if it poses a threat to lives and properties in an area. If the situation becomes critical, then police open fire as per rules of Police Regulations, Bengal (PRB).

There was a gap in sharing intelligence between the Chattogram police high command and field-level police personnel which led to the untoward incident, they said.

"According to media reports, the workers' unrest started on Friday morning. But no additional police force was deployed at the project site on Saturday which clearly

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