

POST-COUP CRISIS IN MYANMAR
Local militia opposed to junta retreat from the town of Mindat after days of assault
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"Is Israel above all international laws?"
INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING MINISTER HASAN MAHMUD OVER ISRAEL'S ATTACK ON PALESTINIANS

"This must not become a forgotten crisis."
UNHCR SPOKESPERSON ANDREJ MAHECIC ABOUT ROHINGYA CRISIS

"Deeply disturbed by the destruction... of a high-rise building in Gaza City that housed the offices of several international media organizations."
UN CHIEF ANTONIO GUTERRES



Rescuers bring out a girl alive from rubble of a house destroyed by Israeli air strikes, in Gaza City, yesterday. *Inset*, a tower housing AP, Al Jazeera offices collapses after Israeli missile strikes in Gaza city, on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Grimmer crisis on the horizon

Warn experts citing arrival of deadly variants, lowering of guard against Covid-19

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

With the guard against Covid-19 lowered, health officials and experts fear that the country is heading towards a grimmer health crisis.

The relaxation of lockdown, public disregard for social distancing and uncertainty over vaccination have made the situation volatile as all four Covid variants of global concern have already made their way into Bangladesh. Those include the B.1.617 variant, which is ravaging neighbouring India and spreading fast in other parts of the globe.

Prior to the Eid-ul-Fitr, the government relaxed the lockdown to create space for economic activities. Though it suspended public transport to stop people from travelling millions left big cities, including the capital, for their village homes to celebrate the Eid, flouting the health safety guidelines.

Only 2 percent of the country's 160 million people have so far got the double-dose of AstraZeneca vaccine while less than 4 percent got the first shot.

Due to a crisis of the vaccine, the authorities have suspended administering the first dose. Around 14 lakh people, who

got the first shot, are now in uncertainty over getting the second one.

Health officials say there is a shortage of more than 14 lakh doses for administering the second shot to those who have already got the first jab. Vaccines are crucial in the fight against Covid as those reduce the mortality rate.

As of yesterday, a total of 36,51,153 people got both the first and second jabs while 58,19,912 people got the first shot.

Amid uncertainty over vaccines, there is no alternative to wearing face masks and following the social distancing rules to avoid a dreadful situation like the one India and Nepal are facing now, health experts cautioned.

Md Sayedur Rahman, chairman of pharmacology department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), said the country's healthcare facilities could come under pressure again as infections may surge after a couple of weeks.

"We must prepare right now in case such a situation arises."

Currently, there are 1,069 ICU and 12,059 general beds dedicated for Covid patients across the country, according to

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OFFICE DESTRUCTION AP 'shocked, horrified'

Al Jazeera vows not to be silenced

AFP

The Associated Press and Al Jazeera have vowed not to be silenced and expressed 'shock' after an Israeli airstrike destroyed a building housing the news agencies' Gaza offices and those of other international news media.

"This is an incredibly disturbing development. We narrowly avoided a terrible loss of life," AP President and CEO Gary Pruitt said in a statement about the attack on the building on Saturday.

A dozen AP journalists and freelancers had been in the building but were able to evacuate, Pruitt said.

The White House, which has kept a relatively low profile on the Israeli-Palestinian flareup, said

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UNSC mum amid Gaza bloodbath

Israeli strikes kill 42 more in Palestinian enclave pushing death toll to 192, including 58 children

AGENCIES

Israeli strikes killed 42 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip yesterday, the worst daily toll yet in almost a week of deadly clashes, as Palestinian and Israeli leaders both appealed for support at a UN Security Council session but little action was in sight.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pleaded for an immediate end to the bloody violence, warning that the fighting could plunge the region into an "uncontainable security and humanitarian crisis."

"Fighting must stop. It must stop immediately," Guterres said as he opened a Security Council session delayed by Israel's ally the United States.

Guterres called the violence "utterly appalling."

The heaviest fire in years, sparked by unrest in Jerusalem, has killed 192 in the crowded coastal enclave of Gaza since

Monday along with 10 in Israel, according to authorities on either side.

Israel said its "continuing wave of strikes" had in the past 24 hours struck over 90 targets across Gaza, where the destruction of a building housing news media organisations sparked an international outcry.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in a televised address said: "We will continue to act as long as it is necessary to restore calm and security for you citizens of Israel. It will take time."

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki yesterday accused Israel of committing "war crimes" in its nearly weeklong offensive on Gaza as he urged international pressure at a United Nations Security Council session.

"Some may not want to use these words - war crimes and crimes against humanity - but they know they are true," al-Maliki told the virtual session on the crisis.

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» Netanyahu says Gaza bombing to continue 'in full-force', defends bombing media offices

» China accuses US of blocking a UNSC statement as Biden backs Israel's right to self-defence

» UN chief calls the violence 'utterly appalling', urges immediate stop to hostilities

» Israel envoy, Palestinian FM clash at UNSC over 'war crimes in Gaza'

» Thousands rally in Americas, Europe in solidarity with Palestinians

MAD RUSH BACK

Virus scare takes back seat again

STAR REPORT

Thousands of people are returning to Dhaka from their homes after the Eid holidays as government and private offices reopened yesterday.

Health experts have been expressing concerns that the people travelling cross-country en masse will cause a sharp spike in the number of new cases of Covid-19.

The Directorate General of Health Services yesterday urged people who left Dhaka ahead of the Eid last week to return after 14 days. The detection of a deadlier Indian variant of the coronavirus in Bangladesh has also raised serious concerns in recent days.

Thousands of people from the southern districts flocked to ferry terminals yesterday to reach the capital, crossing the Padma river after the three-day holidays.

The travellers didn't have to wait for long, as 18 ferries operated between Shimulia and Banglabazar, 16 between Paturia and Daulatdia, and four between Aricha and Kazirhat.

Crowding was inevitable on the ferries and many didn't wear any face covering let alone maintain social distance.

Telecommunications and ICT Minister Mustafa Jabbar said at least 10,645,697 mobile phone subscribers travelled out of Dhaka between May 4 and May 15. Yesterday, 412,763 returned to the capital.

On Wednesday, five people died in stampedes and

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'Lockdown' extended till May 23

Experts fear things could turn in last of month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has extended the ongoing countrywide restrictions on movement and inter-district public transport until May 23 to contain the spread of Covid-19.

Even as infection and death numbers have been declining following the second wave of the virus, the recent detection of an Indian variant and its sub-type, called double-mutant, has caused concern especially as hundreds of thousands travelled within the country to celebrate Eid last week.

Experts fear that the country may experience the impact of the Eid rush from the last week of May.

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MITU MURDER From plaintiff to prime accused

Ex-SP Babul shown arrested after victim's father files a murder case

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Former superintendent of police Babul Akter, plaintiff in a murder case over the killing of his wife Mahmuda Khanam Mitu in 2016, will be produced before court today after being arrested in another case filed over the same incident.

The victim's father Mosharraf Hossain filed the second case with Panchlaish Police Station last Wednesday naming Babul as the prime accused.

The former SP was shown arrested in the case the same day, said Police Bureau of Investigation's (PBI's) Inspector Santosh Kumar Chakma, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case.

The dramatic turnaround from plaintiff to prime accused happened after Babul, summoned for interrogation to Chattogram PBI metro office last Tuesday, could not answer detectives' questions satisfactorily.

Among the questions was one surrounding a payment of Tk 3 lakh via Babul's business partner to Kamrul Islam Musa -- the fugitive accused in the original case and a long-time informant of Babul when he was an SP. The payment was done soon after the murder.

Till yesterday, Babul was in a five-day remand in connection with the second case and will be produced before a court today, said Inspector Santosh Kumar Chakma.

The IO told The Daily Star that PBI will collect information

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Hundreds of people and a few vehicles disembarking from a ferry that brought them from Banglabazar terminal to Munshiganj's Shimulia terminal yesterday afternoon. After spending Eid in their home districts, people are returning to the capital. A large portion of them are not wearing masks amid fears of another Covid-19 spike in the country.

PHOTO: SAJJAD HOSSAIN

WHAT YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

US TAKES NOTE OF CHINESE ENVOY'S COMMENT ON QUAD AND BANGLADESH
The US has taken note of the statement of Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming that Dhaka's relations with Beijing will "substantially get damaged" if it joined Quad, a US-led initiative meant to ensure free and open Indo-Pacific, said Ned Price, US State Department Spokesman, in a media briefing on May 12.

HEFAJAT MAYHEM: EX-JAMAAT MP SHAH JAHAN ON 3-DAY REMAND
Jamaat-e-Islami leader Shah Jahan Chowdhury, also former lawmaker of Chattogram-15, from Satkania upazila of Chattogram has been placed on a three-day remand in a case filed with Hathazari Police Station over Hefajat-e-Islam's mayhem on March 26.

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