

BANGLADESH UPDATE

363
New cases in 24hrs

7,80,159
Total cases

12,149
Deaths

7,22,036
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

3,387,342
Deaths

163,399,610
Total cases

Come back after 14 days

DGHS urges home-goers; 25 more die from Covid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health directorate requested those who had left Dhaka for Eid to return after 14 days.

"Those who have gone home and their workplaces haven't opened yet, there is no harm in returning late, and they should return to Dhaka at least after 7 to 14 days," Nazmul Islam, spokesperson of the directorate said during a virtual briefing yesterday afternoon.

About the mad rush to home before Eid, Nazmul said, "The government had advised all not to travel this Eid. But as we have seen, a large number of people ignored this advice and went home... We saw some tragic scenes also."

Urging all to maintain health safety guidelines, he asked those who have Covid symptoms to get tested at the nearest upazila health complex or district hospitals.

He said six people have so far been found to be carrying the Indian variant of the novel coronavirus.

"Five of them are in good health. We did not find anyone who came in contact with them to be infected," Nazmul said.

Expressing concern about India

returnees, he said, "We have seen some of those coming from India breaking the law and fleeing. They should not do this. Don't put lives of others at risk."

The DGHS has been putting all Indian returnees in institutional quarantine for 14 days.

Meanwhile, 25 people have died from Covid-19 during the 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, according to a press release from the DGHS.

The total number of deaths from the virus is now 12,149 and the death rate stands at 1.56 percent.

At least 363 new infections were recorded, taking the total number of people infected to 7,80,159.

The positivity rate was 6.69 percent. A total of 5,430 samples were tested across the country in the 24 hours.

At least 601 Covid-19 patients recovered during this period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 7,22,036 and the recovery rate is at 92.55 percent.

Among the 25 deceased, 18 were men and seven women. Two were between 31 and 40 years old; four between 41 and 50; six between 51 and 60; and 13 were above 60 years old, added the release.

Virus scare takes

FROM PAGE 1

possibly because of heat strokes at Banglabazar Ferry Terminal as hundreds of thousands of city residents left for their village homes ahead of the Eid.

Zillur Rahman, general manager of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation's regional office in Aricha, said traffic would get even heavier over the next few days.

Traffic police Inspector Hilal Uddin in Mawa said ambulances and vehicles carrying patients and corpses are being prioritised and trucks will be allowed to cross the river at night.

Defying the coronavirus restrictions, a few buses were seen operating between Shimulia and Dhaka while boats carried passengers across the Padma, reports our correspondent in Munshiganj.

But most holidaymakers had to hop on minibuses, cars and auto-rickshaws multiple times to reach Dhaka, paying exorbitant sums, as long-haul buses didn't operate.

Our Barishal correspondent reports that people from the southern region were getting on buses, three-wheelers, private vehicles and even on trucks to reach Mawa. With the river route closed, roads leading up to Mawa saw heavy traffic. People had to pay Tk 500 in transport cost, more than twice the usual fare.

BUSES TURNED BACK

Over 100 buses, which left Panchagarh, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Natore, Pabna and other northern districts for the capital

in defiance of the travel ban, were stopped by police in Sirajganj and not allowed to go across the Jamuna river using the bridge.

Some of the people on board got down and looked for other vehicles while others returned on the buses, officials said.

"We began stopping buses at the west end of the Bangabandhu Bridge yesterday morning. No passenger bus was allowed on the bridge," Mosaddek Hossain, officer-in-charge of Bangabandhu Bridge (west) Police Station, told the Daily Star.

Yasir Arafat, in-charge of Elenga Highway Police outpost, said that his team stopped at least 50 buses and turned them around.

Several bus drivers said they were desperately looking for a way to make a living amid the restrictions.

Shafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Bangabandhu Bridge (east) Police Station, said the number of vehicles was likely to increase today and tomorrow.

Passengers suffered a lot on Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Cumilla amid a shortage of vehicles. However, the number of vehicles increased in the afternoon.

Government officials were instructed not to leave their workplaces. But employee presence at many government and private offices in the capital was low yesterday.

[Our correspondents in Munshiganj, Manikganj, Tangail, Sirajganj and Barishal contributed to this report]

Babul Akter now

FROM PAGE 1

former police official, it was not easy to glean information from him.

While asking about the extramarital affair, the IO also said, "We will go to Cox's Bazar to collect data on her relevant to the case. If needed, we will write an official letter to interrogate her over the case."

Meanwhile, Motaieb Mia Wasim and Anwar Hossain, who were accused and arrested in the original case filed by Babul in 2016, were also shown arrested in the new case following a PBI appeal yesterday.

The duo is among four people, including Babul Akter, arrested in the case filed by the victim's father.

HOW BABUL BECAME THE ACCUSED

PBI sources said Babul came to Chattogram PBI metro office for interrogation on Tuesday.

PBI grilled him over a suspicious transaction of Tk 3 lakh with his business partner. Apart from that he failed to give any relevant answer to investigators about Kamrul Islam Musa who was his informant for a long time. Following that, PBI took him in custody.

On Wednesday, PBI submitted the final report in the case filed by Babul, mentioning him as the "mastermind" in the murder.

Citing the final report, IO Santosh Kumar Chakmasaid, "After the plaintiff of the case -- Babul Akter -- was taken to PBI office, I discussed with him the FIR [of the case filed by Babul], photos of the accused [Musa] captured from CCTV footage and the deposition of witnesses Sayful Haque and Kazi Al Mamun."

Sayful is a friend and business partner of Babul's while Mamun is a relative of prime accused Musa, said PBI sources.

"Babul failed to give any clear and relevant answer when interrogated. He intentionally denied to recognise his long-known informant Kamrul Islam Musa, fugitive accused of the case, even after seeing his photo captured from

the CCTV footage," the report said.

He also could not answer why he had sent Tk 3 lakh to Musa via Sayful soon after the murder, it added.

Sayful arranged the money from Babul's share of profits from his business and sent the money via Bkash, said a top PBI official.

The report also stated: "Babul, however, admitted that he had longstanding domestic disputes with his wife over several issues.

"Considering all the issues and evidence, Babul is apparently the main beneficiary of Mitu's murder as he made an arrangement to send Tk 3 lakh via his friend to Musa soon after the killing," the report said.

Moreover, Babul tried to divert the investigation, claiming that militants carried out the killing, said the report obtained by court sources.

The report also states that "considering the circumstance, material evidence, post mortem report, firearms' ballistic report, confessional statements of both accused and witnesses under section 161 and 164 of CrPC, and technological analysis, the offences of Babul Akter, the plaintiff of the case, had been primarily proved."

The plaintiff had given misinformation in the case statement, hiding the identities of the accused to save them, Inspector Santosh Chakma wrote in the final report.

PBI submitted the 575-page case documents including the final report of Mitu murder case, filed by Babul Akter with Panchlaish Police Station, before the prosecution section of court.

Last Tuesday, two witnesses -- Sayful Haque and Kazi Al Mamun -- had given confessional statements under section 161 in the original case before a magistrate of Chattogram court.

On June 5, 2016, Mitu was stabbed and shot dead when she was walking with her son to his school bus stop at the port city's GEC intersection. After the murder, Babul filed a case against three unidentified men with Panchlaish Police Station.



People lining up in front of the Covid-19 test counter at the Mugda Medical College Hospital in the capital yesterday morning. During the Eid holidays, testing numbers were low but the first day after the holidays saw greater numbers turning up to be tested.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Grimmer crisis on the horizon

FROM PAGE 1

the Directorate General of Health Services.

Learning from India's experience, the government should immediately ensure uninterrupted oxygen supply at every district hospital and arrange oxygen generators at all hospitals in cities as soon as possible, Sayedur pointed out.

"To accommodate patients, government should set up a few field hospitals in the meantime."

Besides, the big cities should be isolated from the rest of the country, and those who are going out of the cities should be allowed in only after they spend 14 days in quarantine, he suggested.

"The government must strictly enforce the health safety rules, especially the one for wearing face masks. It should also distribute face coverings on a massive scale."

Several experts warned that as the virus continues to mutate and all the variants of global concern have already been found in the country, there is a possibility that a new variant may develop here and it could be more lethal.

The B.1.617 variant, first found in India, is the fourth variant to be designated as being of global concern and requiring heightened tracking and analysis. The other three fast-spreading and lethal variants were first detected in the UK, South Africa and Brazil.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque recently warned that Bangladesh may see a situation like the one in India and Nepal after the Eid given the way people are moving from one district to another, flouting the health safety rules.

"People are recklessly moving around. If this continues, a situation like the one in India and Nepal may be created in Bangladesh after the Eid," he

said.

Dr Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) at the DGHS, said the vaccine crisis, disregard for the health safety rules and the Indian variant will pose a big challenge to the country in containing virus transmission.

"Following the Eid holidays, there may be a huge surge in positive cases. The next three months -- June, July and August -- will be crucial for us. The health department should make preparations right now," he noted.

Prof Nazrul Islam, former vice-chancellor at the BSMMU, fears that the infection rate may surge and the hospitals could see a huge rush of patients in the coming days. Deaths from the virus may rise too.

"We need to enhance our oxygen production and supply and also ready some field hospitals. If we fail to do so, the situation will be disastrous," he warned.

Deaths mount in Gaza

FROM PAGE 1

rockets had been fired from the coastal strip towards Israel, the highest rate ever recorded.

Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system had intercepted over a thousand rockets, the army said, in almost a week during which Israeli residential buildings have been hit, with over 500 people wounded.

"The intensity of the conflict is something we have not seen before, with non-stop airstrikes in densely populated Gaza and rockets reaching big cities in Israel," said the International Committee of the Red Cross.

"As a result, children are dying on both sides."

Two children were among the 10 killed in Israel.

Pope Francis said the violence risked degenerating further "into a spiral of death and destruction" and said: "Where will hatred and revenge lead? Do we really think we will build peace by destroying the other?"

The bloodiest military conflict in seven years has also sparked a wave of inter-communal violence and mob attacks between Jews and Arab-Israelis, as well as deadly clashes in the occupied West Bank, where 19 Palestinians have been killed since last Monday.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said it had targeted the infrastructure of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, including by pounding a vast tunnel system with some 100 strikes, and by targeting weapon factories and storage sites.

Israeli air strikes also hit the home of Yahya Sinwar, head of Hamas'

political wing in the Gaza Strip, the army said, releasing a video showing plumes of smoke and intense damage, but without saying if he was killed.

At least 58 children have lost their lives in Gaza, more than 1,200 people have been reported wounded and entire buildings and city blocks reduced to rubble.

The IDF says it takes all possible precautions to avoid harming civilians and has blamed Hamas for deliberately placing military targets in densely populated areas.

One strike on Gaza killed 10 members of an extended family.

The children "didn't carry weapons, they didn't fire rockets", said Mohammad al-Hadidi, one of the grieving fathers.

Some 10,000 Gazans have fled their homes near the Israeli border for fear of a ground offensive, the UN said.

"They are sheltering in schools, mosques and other places during a global Covid-19 pandemic with limited access to water, food, hygiene and health services," UN humanitarian official Lynn Hastings said.

The UN Security Council was due to meet at 1400 GMT later yesterday.

Israel ally Washington, which had blocked a UNSC meeting scheduled for last Friday, has been criticised for not doing enough to stem the bloodshed.

US President Joe Biden again underscored Israel's right to defend itself in a phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu but also expressed his "grave concern" over the violence as well as for the safety of

journalists.

US Secretary for Israel-Palestinian Affairs Hady Amr was to hold talks later yesterday with Israeli leaders before meeting Palestinian officials to seek a "sustainable calm", the State Department said.

Meanwhile, European Union foreign ministers will hold urgent video talks on the escalating fighting between Israel and the Palestinians tomorrow, the bloc's foreign policy chief said.

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also called for an immediate halt to what it described as Israel's barbaric attacks on Gaza and blamed "systemic crimes" against the Palestinians for hostilities now in their seventh day.

The OIC statement came after a virtual meeting in which Saudi Arabia condemned the violation of the sanctity of Muslim holy sites and evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem.

The 57-member body accused the United Nations Security Council of inertia. Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei issued a separate statement yesterday, tweeted by Malaysia's premier, calling for an emergency UN General Assembly meeting.

The escalating conflict was sparked by unrest in Jerusalem that had simmered for weeks and led to clashes between riot police and Palestinians, fuelled by anger over planned Israeli expulsions of Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of east Jerusalem.

'Lockdown' extended till May 23

FROM PAGE 1

Issuing the circular yesterday, the cabinet division said all offices and organisations related to revenue collection have been included under emergency services, which will be out of the purview of the restrictions.

Besides, shops that sell food items can remain open and hotels and restaurants will only be allowed to provide takeaway or online services during the period, the circular said.

Conditions that have been imposed in phases since April 12 will remain in force during the extended period of restrictions.

The government also extended the closure of all educational institutions until May 29.

The education ministry on Saturday night and the primary and mass education ministry yesterday afternoon made the announcements.

Both ministries said online

education at educational institutions will continue during the closure.

The primary and mass education ministry said students of primary schools and kindergartens should stay at home to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

The closure, first brought into effect on March 17 last year, was extended several times.

On Saturday, State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain said they fear that Covid-19 infection may rise after May 23 because of the Indian variant, people indiscriminately going to markets without wearing masks, and visiting their home districts for Eid.

He said mask wearing needs to be ensured at all places across the country in order to contain the spread of Covid-19 infection.

"Without ensuring masks at all levels, we won't be able to contain

Covid-19," he said.

There has been a discussion on giving police power to ensure people wearing masks.

"We can conduct mobile courts under the existing law. But if we give police the power, they will be able to carry out their job [ensuring people are wearing masks] smoothly," the state minister said.

Following an alarming increase in cases in March, the government enforced restrictions from April 5. It was later relaxed, allowing buses on the streets in 11 cities and shops and malls to open for eight hours every day till April 13.

A "strict lockdown" was imposed from April 14 but it was again relaxed before Eid. The government allowed buses to ply inside districts and shopping malls and markets to reopen ahead of Eid.

AP 'shocked, horrified'

FROM PAGE 1

Saturday it has cautioned Israel about the importance of protecting independent media.

"We have communicated directly to the Israelis that ensuring the safety and security of journalists and independent media is a paramount responsibility," White House press secretary Jen Psaki tweeted.

Israeli defense officials said the building housed not only news bureaus but offices of Hamas militants. AFP journalists watched the building

collapse after the air strike, sending up a huge cloud of dust and debris.

Al Jazeera television was among the tenants of the building.

Walid al-Omari, that news agency's Jerusalem bureau chief, vowed the network will not be silenced.

"Clearly there is a decision not only to sow destruction and killing, but also to silence those who broadcast it," he told AFP, adding in an on-air interview shortly afterward that "this is impossible."

Pruitt, in his statement, said, "The world will know less about what is

happening in Gaza because of what happened today."

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists also demanded an explanation from the Israeli government.

"This latest attack on a building long known by Israel to house international media raises the specter that the Israel Defense Forces is deliberately targeting media facilities in order to disrupt coverage of the human suffering in Gaza," said CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon.

WHAT YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

FROM PAGE 1

PM SAYS EVERYONE TO BE BROUGHT UNDER VACCINE PROGRAMME

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, while addressing the nation on May 13, assured people that everyone would be brought under the vaccination programme as her government has contacted multiple sources to collect Covid-19 vaccines alongside taking measures to domestically co-produce the jobs.

5 HOME-GOERS DIE AFTER FALLING ILL IN THE HEAT

Five people died after they fell sick due to the heat on two overcrowded ferries in Madaripur's Banglabazar on May 12. Eight others fell ill at the same time around yesterday noon, Shibchar Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Miraz Hossain told The Daily Star.

VIOLENCE IN MIDDLE EAST

Bangladesh urges UNSC to act

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has urged the UN Security Council to take up the issue of violence and breach of security in the occupied land of Palestine and work for a durable solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

"Bangladesh believes in a comprehensive and durable solution to the Palestinian issue in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the Quarter Road Map," said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen at an open-ended meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Executive Committee held virtually yesterday.

The meeting was convened in response to the repeated attacks of a "terrorist nature" by the Israeli occupation forces on the innocent civilians in Al-Quds Al Shareef, bombing on the Al-Aqsa mosque compound followed by attacks on worshippers, and the eviction of Palestinian families in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, said the foreign ministry in a statement.

Momen said there is no pretext that can justify killings of innocent civilians, disruption of prayer by the worshippers, and breach of international humanitarian laws and human rights standards.

Bangladesh expressed its sadness and deep condolences to the victims of the recent atrocities.

The foreign minister mentioned Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's letter to the President of Palestine, saying, "I take this opportunity to reiterate Bangladesh's unflinching commitment in realising the inalienable rights of the brotherly people of Palestine for an independent homeland and a sovereign and viable State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital."

In the meeting, Bangladesh endorsed the statement of the OIC group at the United Nations and agreed with the suggestion made in the statement of resumption of the 10th Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly if the Security Council fails to uphold its responsibility.

The minister also urged all the UN member states to stand strong and work for the betterment of humanity.

Rohingya leader shot dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Alleged robbers gunned down a Rohingya community leader at Lambersia refugee camp in Ukhaia upazila of Cox's Bazar on Saturday evening.

Majhi (community leader) Swakat Hossain, 45, was of Block-D of the camp, said Naimul Haque, superintendent of police (SP) of Arms Police Battalion (APBn)-14.

Witnesses said armed robbers went to a temporary cloth shop inside Lambersia camp around 4:00pm on Saturday.

They shot Swakat several times and fired shots in the air to create panic and leave, they said.

Swakat was taken to an IOM operated medical facility in critical condition and then to Cox's Bazar General Hospital where he declared dead on arrival.

SP Naimul said there were several bullet injuries on the upper part of the body.

Police recovered the body and later handed it over to the family yesterday after post mortem.

Filling of a case was going on, he added.