

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,676
New cases in 24hrs



8,10,990
Total cases



12,839
Deaths



7,51,322
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



3,741,032
Deaths



173,936,783
Total cases

MIGRANTS' QUARANTINE IN KSA

Govt to send them Tk 25k to help with hotel costs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to send Tk 25,000 as a subsidy to the hotel quarantine fee for Saudi Arabia-bound migrant workers to their bank accounts.

The money will be sent to the bank accounts of the workers or their selected representatives, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment said in a press release yesterday.

The subsidised money will be given to the workers who have already undergone hotel quarantine in Saudi Arabia on their own expenses since May 20 and those who will travel to the Kingdom by June 30, the release said.

The decision was taken after Saudi Arabia issued a travel advisory effective from May 20 citing mandatory institutional quarantine in Saudi Arabia and some other clauses for passengers traveling to the Kingdom from non-restricted countries including Bangladesh.

To be eligible, both workers who are scheduled to undergo quarantine in the Kingdom in the coming days and those who already underwent quarantine there have to apply along with

necessary documents to the concerned government authorities of Bangladesh, it said.

The application form can be downloaded from the expatriates' welfare ministry's website www.probash.gov.bd, website of Wage Earners' Welfare Board www.wewb.gov.bd, and website of Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training www.bmet.gov.bd.

Besides, forms are available at the Probashi Kalyan Desks set up at three international airports in the country.

Workers have to apply along with photocopies of emigration clearance cards known as a smartcard, first four pages of passport, visa, plane ticket, and hotel-booking receipt.

Workers travelling in the coming days have to submit the application on the day of their flight and before departure at the Probashi Kalyan Desk starting from June 7.

Workers who have already undergone hotel quarantine in Saudi Arabia have to apply along with the necessary papers through the postal service to the Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh and Bangladesh Consulate General in Jeddah within June 30.



Saudi-bound passengers line up in front of the Saudi Arabian Airlines office in the capital's Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel yesterday morning. These passengers had missed their flights as they could not book hotels in the Gulf country for their 7-day mandatory quarantine.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Turnover at DSE spirals

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from the income after expenses have been deducted.

So the cut means companies will have a bigger share of the profit pie to themselves, which, in turn, potentially means a higher dividend payout for shareholders.

"The budget had a positive impact on the market," said Shahidul Islam, chief executive officer of VIPB Asset Management Company.

Companies that report their true profits will see their share prices soar as a result, he added.

The proposed budget has nothing negative for the bourse, so the bull market continues, said Ahmed Rashid Lali, former president of the DSE Brokers Association.

A bull market is a market that is on the rise and where the conditions of the economy are generally favourable.

Since April 21, DSEX, the key index of the DSE, has been on the rise, gaining 11.3 percent and crossing the 6,000 point-mark along the way.

Yesterday, it closed at 6,038, down 0.25 percent from the previous session, which had recorded a four-year high.

Turnover more than trebled since April 21, when it stood at Tk 776.7 crore.

Given the positive moves the current management of the stock market regulator has taken since taking charge in May last year to safeguard the interests of retail investors, the general public is now considering the bourse as an option for parking their funds in the face of low interest on bank deposits, according to brokerage houses.

As of March, which is the latest available data of the Bangladesh Bank, the weighted average interest rate on deposits stood at 4.4 percent, in contrast to 5.5 percent a year earlier.

In 2020, Bangladesh's capital market yielded returns of 21.3 percent, the

highest among the bourses of Asia's emerging economies, according to LankaBangla Securities.

On March 19 last year, the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission had imposed a floor price on stocks as markets all over the world were on a freefall as news emerged of the fatal nature of the rogue pathogen from Wuhan, China that was running amok all over.

From April, the stock market regulator has started to lift the floor price in phases. In the first phase, the floor price of 66 companies' shares was withdrawn, and in the second phase, 30.

This also added to overall positive sentiment in the market, according to analysts.

All types of investors, both general and institutional investors, have been participating in the market in the last few months, said Khairul Bashar Abu Taher Mohammed, CEO of MTB Capital, a merchant bank.

And investor participation particularly rose yesterday because they approve of the budget for fiscal 2021-22, he said.

Mohammed went on to caution investors of over-valued stocks.

For instance, prices of most of the insurance stocks doubled in the last three months though their profit growth was insignificant.

Yesterday, the engineering sector gained the most -- 3.9 percent -- after the finance minister proposed tax exemption for the local engineering sector.

Of the top 10 gainers chart, four were from the engineering sector.

"Investors are hoping this sector's profits would be high," said Mohammed, also a former secretary-general of Bangladesh Merchant Bankers' Association.

Hefajat to get a committee

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announced at a press conference at 11:00am at Boro Jame Masjid at capital's Khilgaon Chourasta," Rashed Bin Nur, elder son of Nurul Islam Jihadi, member-secretary of the interim convening committee, told The Daily Star.

A leader of the organisation, requesting not to be named, said the government influenced the formation of the new committee and made sure it included "several followers of former Hefajat chief Ahmad Shafi" who was known to be close to the Awami League. His allies were excluded from the leadership roles after his death in September last year.

Junayed Babunagari and Nurul Islam Jihadi, who were the amir and secretary general of the now-defunct committee, will continue to be in the posts, intelligence officials and Hefajat sources said.

Soon after the last committee was dissolved on April 25, a five-member convening committee of Hefajat was announced with Junayed Babunagari and Nurul Islam Jihadi as its convener and member-secretary.

Hefajat has been under tremendous pressure from the government to restructure its central committee without the leaders who might have been involved in the violence in March, sources said.

Several Hefajat leaders arrested in recent months, told officers that they aimed at toppling the government.

Officers also found involvement of several top Hefajat leaders with banned militant outfits, including one based in Pakistan.

At least 17 people were killed in clashes between Hefajat men and law enforcers in different parts of the country, especially in Brahmanbaria from March 26 to 28. At least 154 cases were filed against Hefajat men in the following days.

At least 1,230 people, including more than 30 top Hefajat leaders, were arrested, according to police

headquarters data.

The Detective Branch (DB) of police, Criminal Investigation Department and Police Bureau of Investigation are investigating the cases.

BD officers are also investigating 14 of the 83 cases filed with different police stations accusing Hefajat leaders of vandalism and arson attacks on shops, government facilities and a police outpost on May 5, 2013. The organisation's demands at the time included laws against "blasphemy" and death penalty for atheists.

Of the 83 cases, police pressed charges in 18 and submitted final reports in two. Investigations of the 63 remaining cases have been stalled until the latest incidents.

Following the recent crackdown on Hefajat, some of its leaders started trying to negotiate with the government in the hope of avoiding "arrest and harassment".

In November last year, weeks after Shafi was dead, Babunagari was declared the new amir.

Soon after the 249-member committee was formed, certain Hefajat spoke against the construction of Bangabandhu's sculpture in the capital and gave anti-government statements.

The resulting tension between the government and Hefajat was eased following meetings between the two sides.

Not long afterwards, Hefajat opposed Modi's visit to Bangladesh on March 26, the day the country celebrated the golden jubilee of its independence.

The Islamist organisation first made headlines in 2009 by protesting a draft national women development policy that provided equal inheritance rights to women.

It is often said that former chief Shafi and the AL government became allies after 2013. This caused a rift within the organisation as a faction, led by Babunagari, strongly opposed Shafi's "soft approach" towards the government.

Curbs extended to cut virus spread

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The government has asked all the authorities concerned to take proper measures in this regard.

It mentioned that the deputy commissioners of the high-risk districts, in consultation with the committees concerned, will take necessary steps to contain the spread of the virus.

Yesterday, the Covid positivity rate was around 30 percent in six districts -- Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi, Satkhira, Chuadanga, Noakhali and Bagerhat.

The situation in 36 more districts is also alarming as the positivity rate in those districts was 10 percent or above.

The rate was above 20 percent in Rajshahi, Rangpur and Khulna divisions. In Dhaka division, it was around 6 percent, the lowest among the eight divisions.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said special instructions were given to the officials concerned in the bordering districts to properly ensure quarantine and isolation in their areas to cut virus transmission.

The authorities got alarmed following confirmation of community transmission of the Delta variant, popularly known as the Indian variant of Covid, in Bangladesh.

Since the first case of the Indian variant was detected in the country on May 8, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) and the Institute

for Developing Science and Health Initiatives (ideSHI) have completed genome sequencing of 50 coronavirus samples. And of those, 40 turned out to be the Indian variant.

Among those infected with the Delta variant, 14 had neither gone abroad nor come in contact with people who had not been to any foreign country in recent times.

Md Sayedur Rahman, chairman of the pharmacology department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), said the restrictions are inadequate to tackle the situation.

"We are sitting on a volcano. It may erupt anytime. In such a situation, tougher restrictions are required."

Inadequate restrictions, irresponsible behaviour of people, and almost zero vaccination have made the situation grim, he told this newspaper.

DEATHS, NEW CASES

Thirty-eight people died from Covid in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With this, the total number of deaths in the country reached 12,838. And the death rate stood at 1.58 percent.

At least 1,676 new infections were recorded during the same period, taking the total number to 810,990, said a press release issued by the DGHS.

The Covid positivity rate was 10.73

percent while the overall positivity rate was 13.41 percent.

A total of 15,613 samples were tested across the country in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

At least 1,897 Covid patients recovered during the period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 751,322.

Among the 38 dead, 25 were men and 13 women. Of them, 23 were above 60, 11 were between 41 and 60, and the rest below 40, mentioned the press release.

COVID TESTS AT NEW FACILITY

Bangladeshi nationals going abroad will be able to give samples for Covid test at a new facility at the army stadium in the capital.

The health directorate opened it as the coronavirus sample collection centre in the city's Mohakhali has been turned into a Covid-dedicated hospital, said Prof Mohammad Robed Amin, spokesperson for the DGHS.

He said this yesterday in a virtual bulletin on the Covid situation in the country.

The Mohakhali centre was the only government-run facility in the capital where the migrant workers going abroad could give samples for Covid tests.

Such government-run facilities are also there in 14 districts for the migrant workers.

Besides, 34 private sample collection centres have been set up across the country for them.

Govt moves to procure Sinovac

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The CoronaVac is the fifth vaccine to be given the emergency use authorisation. It received the authorisation in 22 other countries already.

On June 1, the World Health Organization also issued an Emergency Use Listing status to the CoronaVac.

This double-dose vaccine can be administered with an interval of two to four weeks on people aged 18 and above. It can be preserved in 2-8 degree Celsius temperature.

Contacted, Incepta Pharmaceuticals Managing Director Abdul Mukhtar said the company had just forwarded the Sinovac's application on behalf of them.

"The government shall directly interact and purchase vaccines from Sinovac without any intervention by Incepta. How the vaccines from Sinovac would be procured would be solely up to the government," he added.

Director General of the DGDA Maj Gen Md Mahbubur Rahman said after this product registration, there will be no bar to administering Sinovac vaccine in the country.

About the Sinopharm vaccine, the minister said they are in discussion and are hoping that the procurement deal would be signed soon.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister AK

Abdul Momen said discussions with Russia regarding coproduction and procurement deals of the Sputnik V vaccine are at the final stages.

"But the health ministry will say when the treaty will be completed. We have just facilitated the discussion," he told journalists after Russian ambassador to Bangladesh Alexander I Ignatov held a farewell meeting at the minister's residence.

In another development, health officials said they will start administering the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine as soon as the diluent arrives.

"The diluent [used to administer the vaccine] will come on Monday, after which the date of administration will be finalised," Md Shamsul Haque, line director of the Directorate General of Health Services, told The Daily Star.

The vaccine will be administered at four vaccination centres in the capital and those who have already completed registration and are waiting to be vaccinated will get the jobs, he said.

A consignment of 106,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine reached Dhaka last Monday.

The government received the vaccine under the global vaccine-sharing initiative called Covax.

The DGDA approved the emergency use of the Pfizer vaccine on May 27.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh is also supposed to receive six lakh Sinopharm vaccine doses as a gift from China by June 13. Earlier, on May 12, Bangladesh received a gift of five lakh doses of the vaccine.

The government has already started administering those doses to healthcare students on a priority basis.

Bangladesh suspended administering the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine on April 26 due to a depleting stock. The administration of the second dose was also suspended in many places.

The mass inoculation started on February 7, with a target of vaccinating all its citizens aged 18 and above in phases. The government suspended the vaccination registration process on May 5.

The inoculation campaign stumbled after Serum Institute of India failed to ship Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines after cases surged there.

As per an agreement, Bangladesh was supposed to receive three crore shots of the vaccine in phases from January to June.

Serum delivered the first 50 lakh doses in January, but shipped only 20 lakh shots the following month.

No shipment has been received since then.

Only 2pc RMG workers

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percent said they did not know if they were eligible," said the report done by SANEM and MFO.

Three-quarter of those eligible said they want to get vaccinated, while over 60 percent of those who were ineligible, or did not know if they were eligible, wanted to get vaccinated. But less than a quarter of them had information on how to gain access to a vaccination shot.

Even though transportation to and from factories was an important prerequisite given by the government for factories to operate amid Covid-19 restrictions, the survey found that only 4 percent of their respondents were using factory-provided transportation.

"This is indicating that not all factories took the necessary measures to ensure transportation to work for those workers who are reliant upon

it," said the report.

The survey found that this vast unvaccinated section of the workforce has mostly been walking to work, with only 2 percent using buses to go to work.

Upon analysing the data of respondents who said they did not want to be vaccinated, it was found that nearly half were afraid of side effects and of dying from the vaccine. Seventeen percent said they would much rather rely on their religious faith to stay protected.

"The data clearly indicate that workers do not have access to adequate information related to Covid-19 immunisation. This is a concern because inability to ensure access to Covid-19 vaccines will put millions of garment workers, who are employed in one of our most crucial industries, at risk," said the report.

In order to facilitate the recovery process of RMG production, export and the economy as a whole, factory owners, government officials, policymakers and advocacy groups will have to come together to prioritise the health and safety of workers, it added.

In July, the government had initially prohibited RMG workers from getting more than three days of Eid holidays so as to discourage them from leaving their workplaces and going to back to their hometowns. This decision was later withdrawn in face of protests.

Save for a brief period of time in March last year, RMG factories have remained open through multiple phases of lockdown of the economy and the country.

RMG workers were not in the priority list of people, and frontline workers, eligible for vaccines.

Mamunul has links with militants

Says N'ganj SP

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Police have found information about Hefajat-e Islam's former joint secretary general Mamunul Haque's involvement in local and external militant organisations.

Apart from that, there was truth in the rape allegations brought against him, said Zayedul Alam, superintendent of Narayanganj police. Hefajat unleashed violence in late March with the aim to assume state power, the police officer claimed at a press conference at his office in the city's Chanmari area.

The SP convened the press conference to share information that were found after interrogating Mamunul during his 18-day remand in six cases filed in connection with rape and violence.

"We have got primary information of his [Mamunul] involvement in local and external militant organizations. We will share details later after scrutiny," said Zayedul.

"Initially, we have found evidence that he raped the victim promising her to marry her," he said.

Asked about the March violence, the police officer said, "He [Mamunul] has told us the names of those, who were present during the violence and who provoked the violence... we hope to bring all of them to book."

BTRC fixes

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Md Nasim Parvez said the new tariff will benefit broadband internet subscribers across the country and is expected to attract foreign investment by boosting coordination among local internet service providers.

The cellular data users outnumber the broadband internet users, but the latter use 58 percent of the country's total bandwidth.

BTRC Chairman Shyam Sunder Sikder presided over the function while Posts and Telecom Minister Mustafa Jabbar was present as the chief guest.

4 corporations

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Nazmul added that they distributed more than 1,000 oxygen cylinders to different hospitals and refill about 100 cylinders every day.

GPH Ispat produces 220 tonnes of oxygen and 22-25 tonnes of liquid oxygen at its air separation plant daily, he added.

Abul Khair Group, another corporate giant of the port city, has provided 10,000 cylinders for free since May last year. The company also refills over 400 oxygen cylinders every day at its oxygen plant, which produces around 20 tonnes of oxygen in liquid form daily.

Imrul Qader Bhunya, senior manager of an Abul Khair Steel plant in Shitolpur, told this paper that they were regularly supplying oxygen to 25 hospitals.

"If any private or government hospital needs oxygen anywhere in the country, we will happily comply," he said yesterday.

Mostafa-Hakim Group distributed 1,000 cylinders and has created a network with 15 centres in Chattogram city to distribute oxygen to people in need.

Sarwar Alam, a director of Mostafa-Hakim Group, told this correspondent that they have started providing free oxygen to hospitals since the beginning of May last year.

"We are also refilling empty cylinders if anyone needs oxygen for a sick patient. On average, we refill 70-80 cylinders every day," he said, adding that they would supply oxygen to patients and hospitals in need around the country.

Managing Director of Master Group Shible Sabbir told The Daily Star, "Mostly, we produce industrial grade oxygen, but during the pandemic we also produced medical grade oxygen. Before the pandemic, we used to sell the oxygen to private suppliers. But we are now distributing it only to hospitals and patients."

He said they have provided oxygen cylinders to at least 3,000 people through a Facebook group and have been refilling 20-30 a day. The recipients are from various places in the country, said Shible Sabbir, adding that they are willing to supply to anyone in need anywhere in the country.

Rezaul Karim Azad, treasurer of Chattogram Maa-O-Shishu Hospital, told this paper, "We are getting oxygen support from Mostafa-Hakim, GPH Ispat, Abul Khair and Master Group when the demand increases."

Sheikh Fazle Rabbi, civil surgeon of Chattogram said, "Recently, the number of Covid-19 patients has increased in the country but there is no shortage of oxygen anywhere. An important contribution behind this is that some big corporate groups and several social organisations are providing free oxygen services."

"Hospitals in Chattogram district are getting oxygen as soon as they are asking for it from these business groups."