

BANGLADESH UPDATE



2,322
New cases in 24hrs



8,15,282
Total cases



12,913
Deaths



7,55,302
Recoveries



3,757,375
Deaths



174,590,378
Total cases

SUPPLY OF COVID VACCINES

Bangladesh should go for production

Experts say at webinar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For long-term solution to Covid vaccine supply, Bangladesh needs to go for vaccine production as the crisis for the shots is worldwide, experts said at a webinar yesterday.

They also said the government must inoculate the majority of the population against the deadly virus within a short period of time and manage the vaccine properly if herd immunity is to be ensured.

At the webinar, experts stressed the need of more research on the virus locally, prioritising students and teachers for vaccination, creating awareness among people to take vaccine and proper distribution of the shots across the country.

Institute of Health Economics (IHE) of Dhaka University, Initiative for Health and Development (IHD), and Universal Research Care (URC) jointly organised the webinar titled "Covid-19 Vaccine from Different Sources in the Country: Management Issues."

Stressing on research, medical scientist Liakot Ali said it was yet to be known properly how long immunity against the virus stays after vaccination. Also what is the reaction of the vaccine among different age groups is still unclear, and therefore, research is necessary, he added.

Talking about the herd immunity, he said at least 12 crore people have to be vaccinated to ensure herd immunity. This has to be done as soon as possible, or else it won't work, he said.

Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of pharmacology department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), said, "According to science, if we want to vaccinate 12 crore

people within 12 months, then we will need two crore vaccine doses monthly. We have to do this within a year, which is the effective period of the vaccine. This won't give a chance for a new variant to develop."

Giving examples of Cuba, Iran and Kazakhstan, he said they are using locally manufactured vaccines without approval of WHO as it is now an emergency. So, a country can make such a decision based on its capacity and research.

He also suggested that the government allocate more money in research and production of vaccine.

Referring to an assembly of WHO, public health adviser Prof Mohammad Abul Faiz said the country has the capacity to produce vaccine because an assembly of WHO named a few countries who are capable of producing vaccine and Bangladesh is one of them.

He said people are yet to know if they could take different vaccines in their first and second jabs or they should stick to the vaccine of one company and therefore, more research is needed.

URC representative Abdul Hamid said, "As vaccines are now coming from different sources, it is getting complicated as people don't know whether they should use the same vaccine or different ones."

"We can't depend on foreign countries for the vaccine in the long term. Besides, there are other diplomatic issues and politics which are well related to vaccines. We have to produce our own," he said.

IEDCR consultant Mustaq Husain gave emphasis on administering vaccine doses to the university students along with the frontliners who are combating Covid-19.

IHE Director Nasrin Sultana and IHD head Abu Jamul Faisal were also present.

DU TEACHER'S FIRING

HC questions legality of syndicate decision

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday questioned the legality of the Dhaka University authorities' decision to terminate its teacher Prof Morshed Hasan Khan from his job.

On September 9 last year, the DU authorities terminated Prof Morshed, a teacher of marketing department, on charges of distorting the country's history and defaming Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The decision to dismiss Prof Morshed was made at a meeting of the university's syndicate.

Yesterday, the HC issued a rule asking the authorities concerned of DU and the government to explain in four

weeks why the decision should not be declared illegal.

The bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Sardar Md Rashed Jahangir came up with the rule following a writ petition filed by Prof Morshed challenging the DU authorities' decision.

Petitioner's lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua told the media that his client Prof Morshed has appealed to the DU vice-chancellor against his dismissal, but the VC has not disposed of the appeal in seven months.

On April 2, 2018, the DU authorities suspended Prof Morshed over allegations of distorting history of the Liberation War and defaming Bangabandhu and said the punishment will be effective until further notice.

organisations whose employees got priority in getting jobs.

Of those interviewed, 27.2 percent complained of hassles at vaccination centres while 50.2 percent said they were not briefed about the benefits and side-effects of the vaccine.

Many migrant workers from Bangladesh had to spend an additional Tk 60,000-70,000 each as quarantine cost upon their arrival in the destination countries as they had not been included timely in the priority list of vaccine recipients.

The study said the new Covid variant has spread in the country due to slack surveillance at airports and land ports.

Besides, there was no initiative to encourage people to change their attitude towards the pandemic which led to a spike in virus transmission in March and April.

And 26.6 percent of the Covid infections and 24.2 percent of the deaths occurred in those two months, it mentioned.

The RT-PCR testing is still limited to 30 districts and there is a lack of capacity to detect new strains of the virus.

Besides, the fees for RT-PCR test have not been reduced yet though the price of testing kits dropped significantly.

"People have to wait for four to five days to get Covid test results."

Despite the availability of funds and necessary devices, the plan to install 10 ICU beds in every district-level hospital has not been implemented yet.

Due to the crisis of ICU beds, people are being forced to take treatment at private hospitals which costs a patient more than Tk 5 lakh, the study pointed out.

The TBI recommended setting up RT-PCR labs in every district, fixing Covid treatment cost and providing livelihoods to low-income people during lockdown.

The study revealed that there was corruption in spending allocations for Covid-19 -- Tk 5-crore graft in spending Tk 62.3 crore for five hospitals, and corruption in the purchase of one lakh RT-PCR kits and issuance of purchase orders.

The progress in investigation into the corruption allegations is slow while the officials of the health department involved in these are yet to be brought to justice.

The study also said around 35 percent of the Tk 128,303-crore funds under 23 stimulus packages have not been disbursed yet.

"While most of the funds for heavy industries have been disbursed, the pace was slow in disbursing those for agriculture, small and medium industries, and the low-income people," it mentioned.



Buses on a waterlogged street near Azimpur Chowrasta in the capital after a brief spell of rain yesterday morning. This caused disruption in movement of traffic in the area for hours.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

An extension of chaotic capital?

FROM PAGE 1

Although the initial plan was to only build a residential township, many commercial buildings have been included later on -- replacing playgrounds and other civic amenities.

The Purbachal New Town area will also be under pressure from the private housing sprouting around the project site.

During a recent visit, The Daily Star found former greenery has now turned grey in the project area with workers dismantling a newly-built road to make it wider.

Construction of 100-foot canals on both sides of the road were also going on simultaneously.

The boulevard, known as 300 feet, meanwhile, has become a popular hangout for Dhaka residents.

Md Ashrafur Islam, project director of Detailed Area Plan of Rajuk, said as per the building construction rules-2008, which sets the highest number of buildings within a given area and how much empty space has to be kept, the population living inside the Purbachal project will be around 27 lakh.

Such a population is destined to create great pressure on services and facilities already constructed or under construction based on a design for 10 lakh people.

"Purbachal is destined to fail as a planned town due to long delays and accommodation of commercial and business zones in a residential-only hub without any proper assessment," said Adil Mohammad Khan, secretary general of Bangladesh Institute of Planners.

"Although it is called new town, Purbachal is developing as an unplanned extension of Dhaka city," he told The Daily Star.

Ujjwal Mallick, project director and chief engineer of Rajuk, said the project has so far seen 70 percent physical progress and 65 percent financial progress.

"We are expecting to complete the whole project by 2025," he said.

EVER-CHANGING PLANS
Since the development work of the project started in 2002-03, Rajuk revised its design in 2004, 2005, 2009, and in 2013.

Following a public interest litigation in 2013, the High Court endorsed the fourth revision and directed Rajuk not to "efface, subtract, vary or modify the forest, lakes, canals, urban green, parks, playgrounds", as shown in the fourth

revised layout plan, without the court's permission.

But Rajuk introduced a fifth revision in 2017, violating the 2014 HC judgment and allegedly allotted 89 plots secretly in 2018 taking land from areas earmarked for schools and their playgrounds, open fields and spaces, as The Daily Star previously reported.

It included an "iconic" tower on around 100 acres, more residential plots, and an increased number of hospitals and clinics as part of Rajuk's plan to introduce a Central Business District (CBD) in the project area, according to Rajuk officials.

Rajuk appealed to the HC for approval of the fifth revision but was rejected in 2018.

At the monthly coordination meeting of Rajuk held last March, officials said they are still trying to involve the attorney general's office in this regard.

Rajuk Chief Engineer Ujjwal Mallick, however, said they will do their job as per the court's direction.

Adil Mohammad Khan said the plan to accommodate the CBD will create greater pressure of people in the project area.

He alleged that the additional commercial and residential plots are being created to accommodate those influential and politically connected.

"According to the existing rules there is scope for constructing a 10- or 12- or 14-storey building on a seven- to eight katha plot," he said, questioning how habitable Purbachal will be with up to 20-25 lakh people.

COST HIKED, MONEY AND TIME WASTED

The urban planner also said due to the long delays and many changes in the planning, many roads under the project area now need to be repaired or upgraded.

"Due to the lack of transparency in the planning, main roads which have been constructed as four lanes are now being upgraded to eight lanes, which is a sheer waste of public money and time," he said.

He said this delay was due to Rajuk's failure to determine how the main roads of the project would be classified -- as a national highway or regional highway after construction.

After a digital land survey, land acquisition and development work in the first phase started in the 2002-03 fiscal year. The initial project cost was Tk

3,312 crore and was revised to Tk 7,782 crore in 2010.

In 2015, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnc) approved another Tk 5,000 crore for the "Excavation and development of a 100 feet wide and 13.2km canal on both sides of Kuril-Purbachal Link Road (from Kuril to Balu river)."

On November 4, 2018, Ecnc also approved a revised project cost of Tk 10,329.66 crore, which was a revision of the 2015 canal development project with the addition of three more canals, eight-lane expressway, bridges, and other ancillary issues, according to project documents.

The government decision to construct the 12.36km eight-lane expressway from Kuril -- including a six-lane expressway from the Balu river to Kanchan Bridge, three service lanes on each side and other ancillary facilities -- was a belated one.

As a result, Rajuk is now dismantling the existing four-lane road, completed in 2018 at a cost of Tk 275 crore from the second revised budget.

Rajuk's Mallick said, "The proposal of an eight-lane expressway was in the first plan, but we had no money to execute the plan at that time. After getting the money we started it."

He said 80 percent of the canal development work from Kuril to Balu river has been completed.

Regarding the three additional canals, Mallick said the land acquisition is yet to be completed. The canal development project completion deadline is in December this year, as is that for the road expansion.

The project director claimed that plot owners could start living in the project area from July 2022. "The area will be suitable for living by July next year as the water supply will be set up by then," he said.

Adil Mohammad Khan also said overhead power lines were initially constructed but Rajuk is now shifting to an underground cable ducting system, adding that there are no clear guidelines or planning about other utility lines like sewerage, water, and gas.

Asked about sewerage and other facilities, Rajuk's Mallick said these facilities and electricity will only be completed by 2030. Between 60-70 percent of electric lines have already been completed while they will start distributing water in sectors 5 and 6 in the first phase from next February.

Anisuzzaman Khan passed away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Noted zoologist and wildlife expert M o h a m m e d Anisuzzaman Khan passed away on Monday, leaving behind his wife, son, daughter, siblings, and a host of friends and well-wishers to mourn his death.



Anisuzzaman, the younger sibling of prominent wildlife expert and birder Reza Khan, was born on September 30, 1954, at his ancestral home in Manikganj.

He inspired hundreds of people to join hands in nature conservation efforts across the country.

Anisuzzaman was found dead in a bus. He was travelling from Chattogram to Dhaka after attending a programme in the port city.

Shuvo Ranjan Chakma, duty officer of Chouddagram Police Station in Cumilla, said Anisuzzaman was found dead on the bus's chair when it stopped at the Time Square restaurant at Mirbazar, Cumilla.

Later police handed over the body to his family. He was buried at Uttara sector-10 graveyard yesterday morning.

Anisuzzaman graduated from Rajshahi University in 1977 and did his master's in 1978.

Later, he participated in training and workshops organised by the Zoological Survey of India in 1984 and the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in 1984.

He also worked briefly for International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Dhaka.

Survey of natural resources of St Martin Island, Sonadia Island biodiversity conservation plan, Biodiversity mapping of Karnafuli river and its recovery plans, Biodiversity mapping of Sangu and Matamuhuri rivers and taking conservation efforts, Survey and research in the coastal area with polders, Afforestation on the bank of Karnafuli, Sangu and Matamuhuri rivers, Finding water source in the hilly area for sustainable water management, and Research and survey in the swatch of no ground was some of the works he did in the recent years.

He was the life member of Wildlife Society of Bangladesh, Bombay Natural History Society, India, member of IUCN Commission on Ecosystem, adviser to River Foundation, Save our Sea, founder member of Nature Conservation Management (Nacom) etc.

Daily Covid cases

FROM PAGE 1

This is the highest number deaths recorded due to coronavirus infection since May 9, when some 56 people died due to the infection.

Besides, at least 2,322 new cases were reported in the same period. The numbers of daily new cases were below 2,000 since April 30, when some 2,177 new infections were recorded, according to DGHS statistics.

The total number of deaths from Covid-19 has now become 12,913, while the total number of infected people are 8,15,282.

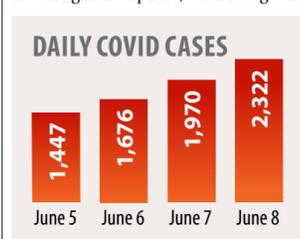
DGHS statistics yesterday said the current positivity rate was 12.12 percent, which was 11.47 percent a day ago.

According to World Health Organization (WHO) standards, if any country's positivity rate remains below five percent for two consecutive weeks, it is considered that the infection rate has come under control in that country.

As people outside the capital are getting rapidly infected, fresh lockdowns are to be enforced in some districts.

In Natore, a seven-day lockdown will be enforced in the district headquarters and Singra municipality area from 6:00am today.

In Khulna, the same will come into effect from 6:00am tomorrow at Paikgacha upazila, including its



municipal area and four other unions.

In Jashore, the district administration has decided to enforce restrictions at Noapara municipal area under Avoyanagar upazila. However, the length of the lockdown was yet to be finalised till the filing of this report last evening.

In Rajshahi division, the death and infection rates yesterday broke all previous records.

At least 12 people died and some 673 were infected in eight districts of the division in 24-hours till 8:00am yesterday, said Nazma Akhter, assistant director of the divisional office of DGHS.

The current positivity rate in the division is 16.26 percent.

In Dinajpur, the district's civil surgeon Dr Abdus Kuddus said the Covid-19 situation is worsening there as the people are not following the health safety guidelines properly.

In Thakurgaon, the local administration and law enforcers have beefed up vigilance to enforce health safety guidelines.

Border Guard Bangladesh personnel have remained alert to check illegal cross-border movement.

In some bordering districts, lockdowns have been ongoing for the past few days as Covid-19 cases have been increasing.

(Our correspondents from respective districts contributed to the report.)

Would it bring cheap internet? Unlikely

FROM PAGE 1

platforms not based in Dhaka. Their overhead for internet connection would simply come down.

Given the cheap internet and the rise of edtech platforms geared towards teaching coding, the move could potentially go on to create a populace of software engineers and IT professionals in second- or third-tier cities.

No doubt it is a well-intentioned move, but the problem is the BTRC has not actually thought through the logistics of making it work.

For the internet service providers (ISPs), the cost of service includes the price for bandwidth, the cost for transmission and maintenance cost.

Of the three, the ISPs can more or less calibrate the maintenance cost, leaving them at the mercy of third parties for the other two crucial elements of their service.

When there has been no pricing guideline for the nationwide telecommunication transmission network (NTN) operators or the international internet gateway (IIG) providers, how does the BTRC expect the ISPs to manage the new lower rates?

And this is where the BTRC's objective of cheaper internet, particularly in rural areas, falls flat on its face. It simply did not have a plan on how to achieve its goal.

The price ceiling fixed is impracticable and not sustainable, according to the ISPs who spoke on the condition of anonymity to talk candidly on the foolhardy nature of the BTRC order.

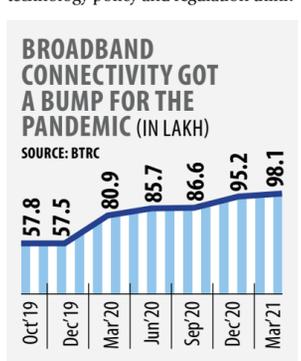
For ISPs in Dhaka and Chittagong, such rates would still be manageable given the density of the transmission network. But as one travels outside the two cities, the prices set are simply unworkable.

"It would be particularly challenging for the smaller ISPs," said MA Hakim,

president of the Internet Service Providers Association of Bangladesh.

For the BTRC's plan to work at all, he demanded the NTN and IIG providers' rates to be fixed as well as a service-level agreement for them.

The most crucial element for effective functioning of telecommunication services is transmission, according to Abu Saeed Khan, senior policy fellow at LIRNEasia, a Colombo-based information and communication technology policy and regulation think-



tank active in the Asia Pacific region.

"But our transmission system is flawed."

The task of transmission by way of optical fibre is in the hands of two companies: Fiber@Home and Summit Communications.

"And the two are not in a position to deliver," Khan said.

The mobile operators and the ISPs are reliant on the two companies for their transmission.

"And the government's plan for a nationwide transmission network rollout through the two companies has

failed. Only 35 percent of the mobile operators' transmission is through optical fibre, which goes to show how pathetic our transmission backbone is."

And what makes for a grim reading is the situation is unlikely to get any better in the foreseeable future.

The industry is suffering from a dearth of human capital in optical fibre, according to Khan.

And the reason for this is a government policy that barred mobile operators from laying out their own optical fibres.

"This anti-investment policy of the government has crippled the sector. The mobile operators are the biggest investors in the telecom industry," Khan said, adding that things began to go sideways for the telecom industry in 2007, before the current Awami League came to power.

In the absence of any improvement in the transmission network, the BTRC's move on Sunday actually bodes bad news for end-users.

Make no mistake, the ISPs would still follow the BTRC's order -- but on paper. For the new pricing regime to make a business case for them, something has to give and that would be by way of slower internet speed.

At present, one broadband line is split between 3-4 users. Under the new pricing structure, the ISPs might opt to divide the line amongst 20 users, meaning dilution of the internet speed.

On paper, one might still be paying Tk 500 for 5 Mbps. Whether one is actually getting that internet speed at that price is highly doubtful.

This begs the question: what was the point of the grandiloquent announcement without any groundwork?

And as Dwight D Eisenhower, former American president, once said: Plans are nothing, planning is everything.