

BANGLADESH UPDATE



2,436
New cases in 24hrs



8,26,922
Total cases



13,118
Deaths



7,66,266
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE



3,813,384
Deaths



176,553,298
Total cases

COVID IN BORDER DISTRICTS

Positivity rates remain high

Authorities struggle to enforce movement restrictions; 47 more die nationwide

STAR REPORT

While the number of deaths and confirmed Covid-19 cases continues to increase and the situation in the border districts has further worsened.

Yesterday, 47 more Covid patients died, which was the highest in more than a month, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services.

Fifty-eight people died from coronavirus on May 9.

In 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, 2,438 more people tested positive for the virus, up from the previous day's 1,637 cases.

The overall positivity rate was 12.99 percent against 18,749 tests.

As the transmission rate keeps rising, the health officials urged people to follow the health safety guidelines strictly.

"The transmission rate has continued rising this week [till Saturday]. We have to be more careful in maintaining the health safety guidelines," Nazmul Islam, spokesperson for the DGHS, said in yesterday's virtual bulletin.

With the latest figure, the number of confirmed cases reached 6,26,922 and the death toll 13,117.

SITUATION IN BORDER DISTRICTS

Of yesterday's 47 deaths, the highest 15 were in Dhaka division followed by nine in Chattogram, while six were in Rajshahi, eight in Khulna, four in Rangpur, two each in Sylhet and Mymensingh and one was in Barisal.

Meanwhile, two patients breathed their last with Covid-19 symptoms in Khulna Medical College Hospital yesterday.

Yesterday, the highest positivity rate was 66.07 percent in Chuadanga followed by 64.19 percent in Satkhira. Besides, the positivity rate was 53.67 percent in Rajshahi, 45.13 percent in Jhenidah and 31.41 percent in Khulna.

To contain the virus transmission, administrations in Satkhira, Khulna, Bagerhat, Natore, Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj and Kushtia have continued enforcing restriction on people's movement.

The administrations in several districts, however, struggling to restrict people from coming outside home.

"It is not possible to tackle the

situation by increasing the hospital bed only; strict lockdown is the only way. People do not want to abide by the restrictions," Hussain Safayat, civil surgeon of Satkhira, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The district administration has imposed movement restrictions in Satkhira from June 5.

Members of the law enforcement agencies have set up check points on roads that connect Satkhira with Jashore and Satkhira with Khulna to prevent people's movement.

SM Mostafa Kamal, deputy commissioner of Satkhira, told this paper, "We are conducting awareness campaign. But people find it tough to abide by the restrictions."

There were 112 Covid-19 patients in Satkhira Medical College Hospital against its capacity to treat 135 patients, while 38 patients were in Sadar Hospital against its 40-bed capacity.

The Khulna Medical College Hospital authorities were struggling with 143 Covid-19 patients against its capacity to treat 100 patients.

To cope up with rush of Covid-19 patients, the KMCH authorities decided to move the Covid-19 unit to the district hospital, said Mehedi Nawaz, vice-principal of Khulna Medical College, and convener of Corona Protirodh Committee of Khulna district.

The transmission rate in Chapainawabganj keeps falling thanks to the ongoing lockdown that started from May 25.

Against 538 tests yesterday, the positivity rate was 10.59 percent. Two patients died in this border district yesterday.

In Natore, the local administration has kept Nature and Singra municipalities under lockdown.

Except emergency, no one is allowed to enter or go outside those municipalities via the main roads of the towns.

People, however, are coming outside using other roads.

The number of beds in the district hospital has been increased to 50 from 31 for Covid patients.

[Our correspondents in Satkhira, Khulna, Bagerhat, Jhenidah, Kushtia Natore, Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj contributed to this report.]



The shipment of six lakh Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccine doses arrived in the capital's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

Administering first-job vaccine set to resume

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vaccine is already being administered to medical students as first shot. And by the end of this week, those will be administered to people across the country," the minister said.

If the authorities fail to start administering the jobs this week, they will begin it early next week, he said mentioning that the doses have to be transported to different districts from the capital.

Zahid also said they will not administer all the 11 lakh Sinopharm vaccine doses as first dose like they did in case of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

"We do not want to face the same

problem again. We will administer five lakh vaccine jabs as first dose and the rest will be kept for second dose."

The second dose of Sinopharm vaccine will be administered three weeks after the first one.

On May 12, Bangladesh received five lakh Sinopharm vaccine jabs as gift from China.

The authorities have already started administering those to healthcare students on a priority basis.

Yesterday, two Bangladesh Air Force aircraft brought another six lakh Sinopharm vaccine shots from China.

Earlier on May 31, Bangladesh received 106,000 doses of Pfizer vaccine. The jabs will be administered

at four vaccination centres in the capital as those need to be kept at a very low temperature in storages that are not available outside the capital.

The Directorate General of Drug Administration approved the emergency use of Pfizer vaccine on May 27.

The government started nationwide mass inoculation against Covid on February 7 with a target of vaccinating all citizens aged 18 and above in phases.

But the authorities halted administering the first dose of vaccine on April 26 due to the shortage of jabs. More than a week later, the administration of the second dose

Momen off to LDC, Myanmar crisis UN events

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday left for the US for a weeklong visit to attend two UN events -- one on Myanmar crisis and the other on Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

During his tour, at the invitation of UN General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir, he will also try to hold a meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Washington DC.

"Rohingya is a big issue. It is a chance for us to discuss the issue. We will demand quickest repatriation of the Rohingyas at the event on Myanmar crisis," Momen told reporters last week.

Momen will also address the LDC meeting where he will highlight issues related to Bangladesh's graduation to a developing nation.

During the events, he will demand quick delivery of Covid-19 vaccines by the developed countries and making vaccine a public good.

Momen is expected to return on June 22.

was also suspended at all the centres across the country.

The inoculation campaign stumbled after Serum Institute of India failed to provide the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine amid a surge in virus deaths and cases in that country.

As per an agreement, Bangladesh was supposed to receive three crore shots of the vaccine from Serum in six months.

Serum delivered 50 lakh doses in the first consignment in January, but shipped only 20 lakh shots the following month. The country has not received any shipment from the company since then.

The republic of bureaucrats!

FROM PAGE 1

former additional secretaries as treasurer and registrar of Islamic Arabic University and a government college teacher as treasurer of Jashore University of Science and Technology.

Legally, there is no bar to appointing a retired bureaucrat to the top post of a constitutional, statutory, or independent government body.

But the recent trend is an aberration in the standard practice of some specialised sectors where the guiding principle has been to appoint the most professionally qualified and experienced persons in that particular field.

For instance, renowned educationalist Dr AQM Bazlul Karim was the first chairman of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (PSC), established on April 8, 1972. He won the Independence Award in 1999 for his contribution to education.

The trend of a renowned educationalist holding the top PSC post continued till 2007. The high-profile list included Mohiuddin Ahmed, M Moydul Islam, Faiz Uddin Ahmed, SM Al Hussaini, Iajuddin Ahmed, SMA Foyaz, Md Mustafa Chowdhury, and ZN Tahomida Begum.

Dr Sadat Hossain became the first retired government bureaucrat to hold the PSC chairman's post in November 2007. Since then it has been a show of retired government officials -- AT Ahmedul Huq Chowdhury, a retired police official, and retired bureaucrats Ikram Ahmed and Muhammad Sadique.

A similar deviating trend has also been prevalent in the Election Commission. A retired judge used to hold the post of the chief election commissioner from 1972 to 1996. The five out of six CEOs after that have been retired bureaucrats.

Dr Mizanur Rahman, a Dhaka University law professor, was the first chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), established in 2007. But his successor Reazul Hoque was a retired bureaucrat as are current chair Nasima Begum and her two associates -- Dr Kamal Uddin Ahmed and Nomita Halder.

The Information Commission was set up in 2009 for the sole purpose of ensuring that the general public can demand information from the government.

The Commission's website states that its duty is "to issue directives for the preservation, management, publication, publicity of and access to information by authority" and to "oversee the Right to Information Act".

However, except for Golam Rahman, a former Dhaka University teacher, all the chairpersons of the Commission came from the bureaucracy.

Martuza Ahmed, current chief information commissioner, and two commissioners -- Suraiya Begum and Abdul Malek -- are from the civil service, a sector which the Commission is tasked with holding accountable.

Experts believe that accessing vital information in the public interest,

especially from the government, will be made more difficult when the body's heads are from the bureaucracy itself.

The Anti-Corruption Commission is also no exception though its first chairman was Justice Sultan Hossain. The incumbent chairman, Md Mainuddin Abdullah, and two of the three commissioners are retired public servants.

In 2018, the government added a clause in the Public Service Act that said no public servants could be arrested without the permission of the authorities concerned, a decision that various organisations including Transparency International Bangladesh opposed.

The ACC did not raise a voice against this though it makes their job more difficult. When the clause was included, retired bureaucrat Iqbal Mahmud was the ACC chairman.

The Bangladesh Bank governor post had been exclusive territory for economists, with the first five governors -- from 1972 to 1992 -- being renowned economists. Still, retired bureaucrats Fakruddin Ahmed, Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, and incumbent BB governor Fazle Kabir are examples of a break with tradition since.

The government had to pass a bill in parliament, extending the age limit for governor from 65 to 67 years, to accommodate Fazle Kabir in the post.

National flag carrier Bangladesh Biman has also seen retired bureaucrats holding top posts in recent times, after it was turned into a public limited company.

Although the CEO and MD of Biman had always been people with vast experience in the highly technical aviation sector, irrespective of Bangladeshi or foreign citizenship, the trend curiously changed in 2019.

That year, the Biman authorities published an ad for the post of its CEO and MD, asking people with 20 years' experience in the field to apply. Seventy aspirants, including 12 foreign nationals, applied for the hot seat.

However, the government appointed Mokabbir Hossain, then additional secretary of the Civil Aviation and Tourism ministry, as the Biman CEO and MD. His successor was also a bureaucrat, Abu Salah Mostafa, who took over in 2021.

The current chairman of the Biman executive board is also a retired public servant. Before him, two former Air Force chiefs -- Air Marshal (ret'd) Jamal Uddin Ahmed and Air Marshal (ret'd) Muhammad Enamul Bari -- held the post.

Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited, the authority implementing the metro rail project, and Dhaka Bus Rapid Transit Company Ltd, which aims at providing low-cost, quick and improved public bus service, were established in 2013 with two retired bureaucrats as their chairmen. But experts opined that experienced engineers deserved to be at the wheel.

The government formed the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund in 1990 to support the family members of

destitute migrant workers.

The fund was built around contributions from the country's expatriate labour force. Surprisingly, the 16-member board that the government formed to take care of it has no less than 12 bureaucrats.

Top bureaucrats have also been recently empowered to dictate domains reserved for politicians as public representatives, such as relief operations.

Last year, the government formed committees headed by secretaries in 64 districts to oversee relief operations among the poor and jobless due to the coronavirus pandemic.

A government circular said the 64 secretaries will consult the lawmakers of the respective districts and others while conducting relief operations.

In the time of Covid, bureaucrats are doing the job of people's representatives, said Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon. "But at the end of the day, politicians have to face all the criticism."

He observed that everything is being controlled by civil bureaucrats when politics has become subordinate to the state machinery.

"Once we were under military rule and everything was run by military bureaucracy," the veteran politician said. "Now it has turned into a bureaucratic regime under political rule."

He, however, thinks the failure of politicians is also responsible for this.

In this context, Menon recalled Bangabandhu's remark that the administration should always be under political leadership to serve the people.

"When we are celebrating Bangabandhu's birth centenary, the country is run totally going against his ideology," he added.

Former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder told this correspondent that decay has taken place in all organs of the state. Lack of political commitment and qualified people not appointed to proper places are the major reasons behind this.

It is not wise to be fully dependent on bureaucracy, he said, but it is also true that professionals from other sectors are failing to deliver on many occasions.

Giving an example, "MA Aziz was a very qualified justice. We know what Aziz has done as the chief election commissioner of Bangladesh. On the other hand, ATM Shamsul Huda did well as the chief election commissioner. Shamsul Huda was a former bureaucrat," Imam said.

Dr Shantanu Majumder, professor of political science at Dhaka University, said it is frustrating that the present political government is relying on bureaucrats instead of their own people.

"Urban civil society will also have to take responsibility as they have singled out political leaders and labelled them as dirty. Political leaders have also been portrayed as incapable. There is a conception that there will be corruption under the political leaders," he told The Daily Star.

It has led to the young generation

hating politicians and growing apathy towards politics. Due to the trend of character assassination, politicians are ignored while distributing many responsibilities, observed Dr Shantanu.

Ruling Awami League lawmaker Saber Hossain Chowdhury believes capable and experienced personnel should lead the institutions. "Our expectation will be limited if the right person is not in the right place," he told this newspaper yesterday.

He further said education and experience in the related field should be considered for appointing personnel -- being able to just follow the instructions should not be the criteria.

Competent people -- whether from the civil service or other sectors -- should be appointed to the right position, said Saber Hossain, also the chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

The way the bureaucrats are being appointed in different government or statutory bodies, it seems there has been a change in the government policy, he observed.

Govt mulling

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occasion of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Jail Release Day at the Jatiya Press Club.

She said the government was thinking of all options. She doubted if the exams could be held in border areas where Covid-19 infections were increasing.

The government could conduct the SSC exams just before closing all educational institutions on March 17 last year, but it was not possible to hold the HSC exams.

The HSC examinees were promoted based on the previous two public exams.

The closures of educational institutions were extended many times since then. Latest, the closure that was until June 13 was also extended until June 30.

While educational institutions in the urban areas held online classes, most schools in the rural areas remained closed -- a situation that worried the parents and students over the future of education.

Dipu Moni said there was no reason for the parents and students to worry. The government would not take any decision that causes gross harm to the students.

The damage being caused to the education of the students is true for all, globally, she added.

"Not having an exam for a year will not cause any huge damage," she said. "We have a plan on how to compensate the harm caused to education."

The education minister said the schools are holding online classes. Besides, the students are learning through assignments. "Please continue that."

"Please don't be confused, don't take wrong ways. Take care of your physical and mental health. Don't engage with anything bad," she told the SSC and HSC examinees.

HC orders action against

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Ullah before this court is unacceptable, because he sent the children to custody although he had no jurisdiction to do that, the HC said.

The law secretary will withdraw Enayet Ullah's criminal jurisdiction and will provide him with only civil jurisdiction in consultation with the Supreme Court, the bench said.

The police personnel ordered to be suspended include Officer-in-charge Abul Kalam and Child Affairs Officer Sub-inspector Bashir Uddin Khan of Bakerganj Police Station. The court ordered departmental action against them for keeping the children confined and taking them to a child development centre.

The HC struck down the rape case filed against the four children, saying that the police have filed the case in violation of the fundamental rights enshrined under articles 27, 31 and 32 of the constitution and the relevant law.

The government has also been asked to suspend Abu Tahar, the probation officer in Bakerganj, for being negligent in his duty.

Turning down the unconditional apology offered by the police and probation officer, the HC said they would continue violating the fundamental rights if stern action was not taken against them.

The HC bench directed the home secretary to come up with a guideline for dealing with the detained or arrested children and circulate the guideline at every police station across the country.

Lawyer Md Abdul Halim, an intervener to the suo moto rule, told The Daily Star that the judicial magistrate has no jurisdiction to deal with the arrest of or proceeding against children or their bail.

The Children Act, 2013, reserves the task for the Children Court, he said.

Lawyer Halim, another intervener of the rule, told The Daily Star that the HC did not mention the names of the four other policemen.

He said the police must determine the ages of children and contact their guardians immediately after they are brought to a police station, and police must grant bail to the accused children if they are arrested in the

bailable allegations.

The child affairs police officer at the police station will convey the confinement of children to the probation officer under the social welfare ministry and then the probation officer will look into all affairs including legal issues as per the Children Act 2013, he said, adding that the probation officer of Bakerganj has not discharged his duties in this case.

Assistant Attorney General Golam Sarwar Payel told this correspondent that the HC has kept the suo moto rule as a continuous mandamus so that any aggrieved person involved with such matters can approach this court for necessary directives in future.

On October 7 last year, Barisal's Bakerganj police arrested four boys for raping a six-year-old child and brought them to the court of Senior Judicial Magistrate Md Enayet Ullah. The magistrate rejected their bail petitions and ordered police to send them to a child development centre.

At 9:30pm on October 8, 2020, the two HC judges led by Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah virtually operated a bench and directed the Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Daman Tribunal of Barisal to instantly grant bail to the four children and directed the authorities concerned to release the boys aged between 10 and 12 from the custody of a development centre at Pulerhat in Jashore on bail and hand them over to their guardians by that night.

The HC bench came up with the order after a TV channel reported on the arrest of the children and rejection of their bail prayers.

The Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Daman Tribunal of Barisal granted bail to the children immediately after the HC order.

According to a complaint, the four boys raped a six-year-old girl on October 4. The victim disclosed the matter to her mother after she fell sick on October 6. Her father filed the case the same day.

Bakerganj police arrested the boys the next day and produced them to the court of the senior judicial magistrate.

On October 9, after they were released, the boys were handed over to their parents.