

BANGLADESH UPDATE

3,319
New cases in 24hrs

8,33,291
Total cases

13,222
Deaths

7,71,073
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

3,832,363
Deaths

177,201,381
Total cases

Plant at least three trees

PM asks every one

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon the people, including the leaders and workers of Awami League and its associated bodies, to plant at least three saplings to make Bangladesh a much greener country.

She made the call while inaugurating the three-month long tree plantation campaign of Bangladesh Krishok League at the Gono Bhaban.

Hasina said the government wants to ensure overall economic development of the country keeping its environment and surroundings protected.

She said the government was implementing various programmes to improve the environment of the country.

The PM said forestation in Bangladesh now has gone up to 22 percent from mere 7 percent due to massive afforestation efforts by her successive governments.

Social afforestation and programmes on gardening at every home are also underway to further advance the government's initiative, she added.



Hasina said such steps will help improve the country's environment, and this is how Bangladesh will be able to set an example in the world.

About the plantation campaign, the premier said Awami League had taken a decision in 1983 to observe countrywide tree plantation campaigns on the 1st day of Bangla month Asharh every year to take afforestation programmes forward.

She requested the leaders, workers and well-wishers of AL and its associated bodies and those who believe in Bangabandhu's ideology to plant at least one fruit, one wood, and one medicinal saplings.

The PM said these trees would ensure economic and nutritional security of the people alongside protecting the country's environment.

Earlier, Hasina inaugurated the tree plantation campaign of Krishok League by planting a Palash sapling at the Gono Bhaban.

PM's daughter Saima Wazed also planted a plum sapling.



Jaichhatra pineapple market, the largest one in Tangail's Modhupur upazila, is bustling with activity as trading of the summer fruit goes on. The fruit was being sold for Tk 25 to Tk 50 a piece, depending on size. The photo was taken a couple of days ago.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Curbs in more bordering areas

FROM PAGE 1

Hospitals in those border districts are grappling with an increased number of coronavirus patients for the past several days. In the meantime, major hospitals there are having a shortage of frontline doctors and nurses.

The authorities have imposed restrictions and lockdowns in various areas of the districts to tackle the deteriorating situation.

Such measures continued yesterday.

The authorities locked down the entire Damarhuda upazila of Chuadanga. Earlier, only certain villages and unions of the upazila were under lockdown.

On June 2 and June 6, the restriction was imposed on several villages of Karpasdanga union, Kurulgachhi union and Parkrishnapur-Madna union of the district.

Chudanga Deputy Commissioner Nazrul Islam told The Daily Star that they would be setting temporary camps to test Covid samples in areas with high infection rates.

He said the movement of all vehicles, except those of emergency services, would remain halted until further notice.

"Those who test positive will have groceries and essentials delivered to their doorsteps so that they can quarantine themselves," he added.

It was also through this district that 16 more Bangladeshis, who got stuck in India due to a travel embargo, returned home.

Sub-inspector Abdul Alim, immigration in-charge of Darshana Joynagar check-point, said 16 Bangladeshis crossed the Darshana border with no objection certificates (NOCs) from the Bangladesh mission in Kolkata.

In the last 28 days, 838 Bangladeshis returned from India through the Darshana check-point, reports our Kushtia correspondent, quoting Abdul Alim as saying.

Additional Deputy Commissioner and Convener of Coronavirus Control and Prevention Sub-Committee Monira Parveen said following formalities by the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), the Immigration Branch, and the Customs Department of the police, the Bangladeshis were sent for 14-day mandatory institutional quarantine.

Monira also said the health department conducted rapid antigen tests on all of them at the check post. No one tested positive.

Up north in Kurigram, the authorities

imposed a seven-day restriction on movement in three wards under Kurigram municipality, beginning yesterday noon.

Mohammad Rezaul Karim, deputy commissioner of Kurigram, said, "We are currently taking measures to check public gatherings and movement of people in wards 2, 3 and 7 of the municipality areas. The restriction will be effective for the next seven days. Even then, if the infection is not curbed, we will go for a stricter lockdown."

The DC said all shops, except the drug and food stores, will be closed.

Restrictions on the movement of motorcycles and auto-rickshaws will be enforced in Zia Bazar and Municipal Bazar areas so that there is less gathering of people, he said.

DC Rezaul Karim said mobile courts would conduct drives in this regard.

Three border-adjacent villages of Meherpur's Gangni and Mujibnagar upazilas were also put under a 14-day lockdown yesterday. Sixteen of the 26 people who died of Covid-19 in Meherpur district were from these two upazilas.

Meherpur Civil Surgeon Dr Nasir Uddin said many of the people of Hinda and Tetulbaria villages were showing Covid symptoms, but hardly anyone was getting tested.

Several villages of the upazilas, such as Nabinagar, Shikarpur, Tajpur, Karimpur and Dhara, are along the border. In certain parts of the border, fields, land and ponds are shared by citizens of both India and Bangladesh. Many often cultivate the same lands.

Every single day, Indian citizens cross over to Bangladesh to till their lands.

Meherpur's DC Mansur Alam Khan said during the lockdown, no outsiders would be allowed into these villages.

Hakimpur upazila in Dinajpur also enforced a seven-day lockdown from yesterday. Dinajpur Sadar upazila is already under lockdown, but our correspondent reported that there was a massive presence of battery-run three-wheelers and motorcycles on the roads. Shops and shopping malls, however, remained closed.

To deal with the coronavirus situation, the ongoing lockdown in Natore has been extended for seven more days, until June 22.

Apart from these, the curbs are in force in Jamalpur, Sakthira, Khulna, Bagerhat, Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Kushtia, Chuadanga and Noakhali -- either in parts or in the entire district.

When will their mindset change?

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such recommendations might come up with another recommendation saying that the guard of honour will not be given to female war heroes.

"Why is the mentality of some people not changing? When will it change? We will have to be tougher in this regard."

Leader of the House and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was present in parliament at the time.

Shirin Akhter, also general secretary of JSD, speaking on a point of order, said, "I am surprised, shocked and upset that my colleagues have made such recommendations. The constitution says there can be no discriminations between men and women. We are stunned..."

The parliamentary standing committee on Liberation War Affairs ministry on June 13 recommended taking necessary measures to find alternatives to a female upazila nirbahi officer's presence during the guard of honour given to valiant freedom fighters after their deaths.

The committee said usually women do not take part in namaz-e-janaza. Therefore, in case of giving the guard of honour to a freedom fighter, it is necessary to give the charge to a male officer if the UNO is a female.

The committee's recommendations touched off huge criticism saying such suggestion is breaching of the country's constitution and law, which stipulates equal rights for men and women.

Speaking on this issue, Shirin argued

that a namaz-e-janaza and guard of honour are not the same.

WRIT PETITION

A writ petition was filed with the High Court on Monday challenging the legality of a parliamentary standing committee's recommendation for the exclusion of female UNOs in giving the guard of honour to freedom fighters after death.

Rights organisation Foundation for Law and Development (FLAD) submitted the writ petition as a public interest litigation, seeking a stay on the parliamentary committee's recommendations.

Yesterday, the HC bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Kamrul Hossain Mollah adjourned the hearing on the writ petition for four weeks.

The bench passed the adjournment order as the authorities concerned of the government are yet to issue any notification for making the recommendation functional.

petitioner's lawyer Fawzia Karim Firoze told The Daily Star.

Citing the petition, she said the recommendation made by the parliamentary body is a violation of articles 27 and 28 of the constitution and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Article 27 says, "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law."

Two-thirds gone as greed at play

FROM PAGE 1

also raised a private rubber garden on the land," he said.

"A few months ago, locals vandalised my office, and kept the assistant forest conservator confined to his office in retaliation to a drive by foresters to recover a piece of forestland grabbed by a local Garo woman," he said.

Jamal Hossain Talukder, assistant forest conservator (north) of Tangail Forest Department, said they were failing to save the forest due to various factors, including a shortage of workforce and logistics and interference by influential people.

Syndicates of both locals and outsiders have grown guava, jujube and pineapple after grabbing forestland at different places, he said. "Locals do not want the presence of forest officials here at all."

He added, "When we go for recovery of any grabbed forestland, the vested interest groups take different strategies including highlighting the rights of local ethnic communities. Phone calls also come from powerful quarters."

Jahirul, divisional forest officer in Tangail, said, "The parliamentary standing committee on the forest and environment ministry had asked for the list of forestland grabbers. We already sent it to the committee."

"Afterwards we got directives from the ministry to recover the grabbed forestland but the process is getting delayed because of the pandemic."

He added, "Support from all quarters concerned are needed to save the forest and also recover the grabbed forestland."

Replying to queries over the status of forest areas, he said of the original 1,22,876 acres of forestland, 45,565 acres were in Madhupur, 47,220 acres in Sakhipur, 21,855 acres in Ghatail, 7,576 acres in Mirzapur, and 669 acres in Kalihati.

Of it, 58,206 acres has been declared reserved forest, he said, citing declarations of forest settlement officers.

A social afforestation programme was done on around 28,000 acres and rubber gardening on 10,000 acres of land.

Shaheed Salahuddin Cantonment in Ghatail, Firing Range of Air Force, and Forest Research Institute in Madhupur were established on the remaining 5,000 acres of land, Jahirul added.

WHAT LOCALS SAY

Alik Mree, a local Garo community

leader and also general secretary of Bangladeshi Adivasi Chhatra Sangram Parishad, said, "The local indigenous people are not the ones who chop down trees as the forest is like their mother. Yet, hundreds of false forest cases have been filed against them."

He further said, "The poor indigenous people have been cultivating crops on their ancestral land for decades. As many of them are very poor, they leased out their land to others."

He alleged that the foresters were raising an arboretum clearing natural forest at Telki in Madhupur. They were also constructing a guest house and boundary walls on an ancient crematorium of local indigenous people there, he claimed.

Ajoy-A-Mree, president of the United Council of Indigenous Organisations of Greater Mymensingh, said the massive destruction of the forest started in the '80s when the Forest Department initiated rubber plantations there.

"Social afforestation programmes are one of the main reasons behind the disappearance of a large area of natural forest in the region. Many got the plots for social afforestation. This gave outsiders the opportunity to grab land after wiping out natural forest," he added.

Eugene Nokrek, president of Jainsahi Adivasi Unnayan Parishad, said, "Local indigenous communities are not grabbers. Their forefathers started living in the area long before the Forest Act of 1927 was enacted."

"A good number of people, including 25,000 indigenous people, live in 44 villages inside the Madhupur forest, and the authorities should take into account their interest while making any plans regarding the forestland."

Leaders of local ethnic communities also said Garo, Koch and Bormon communities have been living in Madhupur from time immemorial. But it is very unfortunate that their land issues have not been permanently resolved even after 50 years of independence, they said.

Moreover, conspiracies have been hatched during the tenures of different governments to evict the local indigenous people from their land in the name of National Park, Eco Park, Eco Tourism, Firing Range and Reserve Forest, they alleged.

They demanded a separate land commission for the indigenous people of the plains and formal

discussions with the communities before undertaking any project in the forest.

WHAT ENVIRONMENTALISTS SAY
Gautam Chandra Chanda, a senior research officer of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), said the social afforestation programme is one of the main reasons behind rapid degradation of the Sal Forest.

The government's social afforestation programme is meant to bring monetary benefit to the poor people who contribute to preservation and development of plantations on land allocated by the Forest Department.

The beneficiaries remain involved in the adoption and implementation of afforestation plans, tree planting and maintenance, control and management of forest resources, distribution of dividends and reforestation.

This newspaper in 2007 reported that the Forest Department in the previous seven years had leased out thousands of acres of forestland in the district under the social afforestation programme.

Plots of forestland were supposed to be leased to local landless and poor people under the programme but mostly influential people and outsiders got most of the leases in exchange for hefty sums of bribes, different sources told this correspondent back then.

A section of dishonest forest officials earned a large sum of money from those leases, they added.

Things have hardly changed in the last 14 years as Gautam Chandra blamed negligence as well as corruption by a section of foresters for the wholesale tree felling and forestland grabbing.

The environmentalist recommended creating "Forest Villages" following models in India and Nepal to save existing forests with the participation of locals.

He also called for implementation of the High Court verdict of August 28, 2019 that came following a writ petition of Bela filed in 2010 for protecting the natural Sal Forest in Madhupur and also rights of the people dependent on the forest.

"The nine-point directive in the verdict included demarcating the reserve forest at Madhupur Sal Forest area according to the gazette notifications of 1956 and 1984," he mentioned.

Booters lose 3-0 against Oman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh suffered a 3-0 defeat against Oman in the last game of the second round of Joint Qualifiers for the World Cup and Asian Cup in Doha last night.

Mohammad Al Ghafri broke the deadlock in the 22nd minute before a second-half brace from Khalid Al Hajri gave the Gulf side a comfortable victory.

Playing without five of their regular starters due to injury and suspension, Bangladesh were on the backfoot all through and had only two shots on target against 22 from Oman.

The defeat means Bangladesh ended the round at the bottom of Group E with two points from eight matches.

While they have missed out on direct qualification for the third round of Asian Cup Qualifiers, the men in red and green will have the opportunity to qualify through playoffs, to be played in September.

Cops arrest ex-Hefajat leader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives yesterday arrested a former leader of Hefajat-e-Islam from the capital's Jatrabari area over the Islamist outfit's countryside mayhem in March.

The arrestee, Azharul Islam, was organising secretary of the previous central committee of the Qawmi madrasa-based organisation.

Iftekhairul Islam, additional deputy commissioner (Media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, confirmed his arrest to The Daily Star.

Later, he was produced before a Dhaka court that placed him on a five-day remand in a case filed over acts of violence in Jatrabari area.

Police officials said Azharul was accused in several cases filed with different police stations following the nationwide violence in March this year and the mayhem at Shapla Chattar in the capital in 2013.

The Islamist outfit indulged in violence across the country, protesting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh in late March.

UN urged to probe sharing of Rohingya data

AFP, Geneva

The UN improperly collected and shared data from more than 800,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, passing it on to Myanmar, the country they fled, Human Rights Watch said yesterday, urging an investigation.

Over the past three years, the United Nations refugee agency has registered hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh camps, enabling Dhaka to provide them with identity cards needed to access essential aid and services.

But according to a fresh HRW report, the refugees were generally not made aware that the data they were providing would also be used by the Bangladesh government to submit details about them to authorities in neighbouring Myanmar, with a view to possible repatriation.

The UNHCR refuted this, with spokesman Andrej Mahecic telling AFP that the refugee agency has "clear policies in place to ensure the safeguarding of the data we collect when registering refugees all over the world".

HRW however said the refugees often likely did not understand that the data being collected, including photographs, fingerprints and biographic data, could be shared with Myanmar.

This, the report said, was particularly concerning in the case of the approximately 880,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, many of whom fled a 2017 crackdown in Myanmar that UN investigators say amounted to genocide.

"The UN refugee agency's data collection practices with Rohingya in Bangladesh were contrary to the agency's own policies and exposed refugees to further risk," Lama Fakih, HRW's crisis and conflict director, said in a statement.

NO 'INFORMED CONSENT'?
The global rights group interviewed 24 Rohingya refugees between September 2020 and March 2021 about their experience registering with UNHCR in Cox's Bazar, along with aid workers and others who witnessed or participated in the registration.

The UN agency insisted its staff asked Rohingyas for permission to share their data for repatriation eligibility assessments, and explained that the so-called Smart Card needed to access aid would be issued regardless of whether they agreed to sharing the information.

It also said it had provided individual advice to ensure refugees "fully understood the purpose of the exercise".

But all but one of the 24 refugees told HRW they were never informed the data would be used for anything beyond establishing aid access.

They were given a receipt with a box ticked stating that they had agreed to the data being shared with Myanmar -- but only in English, which only three of them could read.

Fees, fear, lack of awareness to blame

FROM PAGE 1

"Despite all our efforts, people are not coming forward to get Covid tests done. At times, we force them to do so, but this should not be the case. People should willingly do it because the more tests are done, the clearer the picture will be," he told The Daily Star.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) data shows that 16 districts recorded less than 50 tests each in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

Worryingly, no Covid test was done in Laxmipur and Shariatpur.

In stark contrast to the situation in the two districts, 10,355 tests out of the total 23,365 across the country were conducted in the capital.

The national positivity rate was 14.27 percent yesterday while the overall rate was 13.40 percent.

Health experts said if the number of tests doesn't go up, it would not be possible to get the real picture of virus transmission in the country.

The government has to devise a mechanism to increase tests at any cost, they said, adding that asymptomatic Covid patients will inadvertently spread the virus unless they are tested and isolated.

Prof Nazrul Islam, member of the National Technical Advisory

Committee on Covid-19, said they have repeatedly recommended increasing the number of tests, but unfortunately that has not happened.

"If a person is found Covid positive, all the family members should be tested. Isolation and quarantine should be enforced strictly...," he told this newspaper yesterday.

Nazrul said less than 50 tests in a district is not acceptable as it would not give the real picture of the Covid situation.

"It's true that people are reluctant, but the government should motivate them to go for Covid tests," he noted.

Asked, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said they have been trying to increase the number of Covid tests.

"We are trying our best but people have to come forward," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

In reply to a query, he said the government would consider waiving the Covid testing fee for the poor across the country if the district administrations make recommendations in this regard.

Last week, the health ministry asked its officials in several bordering districts to provide free Covid test to the poor.

TESTING AT DISTRICT LEVEL

Around 20 lakh people live in Habiganj, but only 46 people were tested in the district yesterday. Of them, nine tested positive for the virus.

On Monday, 68 samples were tested and the results of five came positive.

Dr AKM Mustafizur Rahman, civil surgeon of Habiganj, said they have the capacity to collect 200-300 samples a day but people have to come to the centres to get tested.

"There are many poor people in the district. If the testing fee is waived, more people would be interested to get tested," he said.

Jhalakathi is another district where the number of tests was very low.

Against more than eight lakh people in the district, only 63 samples were tested yesterday.

On Monday, only five people got tested and two were Covid positive.

The civil surgeon's office said they have enough testing kits.

"We've never turned away anyone seeking Covid test. But people are still not aware of the situation. They care very little about the virus," said Ratan Kumar Dhali, civil surgeon of the district.

He also suggested waiving the testing fee for the poor to encourage them to get tested.