

BANGLADESH UPDATE

3,956
New cases in 24hrs

8,37,287
Total cases

13,282
Deaths

7,73,752
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

3,840,975
Deaths

177,599,497
Total cases

ROHINGYA CRISIS

UNSC efforts fall short of concrete actions

Foreign minister says at UNGA event

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has urged the UN Security Council to take urgent measures to resolve the crisis in Myanmar so that the Rohingyas can return to their homes safely and with security and dignity.

Taking part in an event at the UN General Assembly in New York Tuesday, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said efforts of the UN Security Council in addressing the Rohingya crisis have always fallen short of concrete actions.

He expressed hope that the UN Security Council would fulfill its charter obligations in addressing the crisis in Myanmar, which is going through severe turmoil since a military coup on February 1 this year.

In 2017, some 750,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine State, putting a huge burden on Bangladesh. Now, with the condition in Myanmar deteriorating, the Rohingya return gets even more uncertain.

Momen, who arrived in New York on June 13 to attend two events -- on Myanmar crisis and the other on LDC at the UNGA -- also urged the international community, countries of the region and other stakeholders to address the root causes of the Rohingya crisis, says a press release of Bangladesh Permanent Mission to the UN in New York.

At the high-level virtual discussion "The current situation in Myanmar: implications for Rohingya Minority" organised by the Bangladesh Permanent Mission, he said it was important to fulfil Rohingyas' fundamental right to return to their homes safely and with security and dignity.

The permanent missions of Canada,

Saudi Arabia and Turkey and the Global Centre for Responsibility to Protect co-sponsored the event.

The foreign minister presented the keynote speech while President of the UN General Assembly Volkan Bozkir joined him to share experience from his recent visit to Cox's Bazar, said the release.

Momen said Bangladesh was doing everything to ensure the wellbeing of the refugees despite severe resources and space constraints.

Referring to the newly established accommodation facility for the Rohingyas in Bhasan Char, he said after thorough assessment, the UN and the development partners expressed satisfaction with the arrangements in the island and were now considering to open their operations there.

Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the UN, Rabab Fatima, opened the discussion that was addressed by Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews, Special Adviser of Secretary General on Prevention of Genocide Alice W Nderitu, permanent representatives of Canada and Turkey and Rohingya activist Wai Wai Nu.

Executive Director of GCR2P Simon Adams moderated the panel discussion.

The panelists commended Bangladesh's remarkable humanitarian gesture and expressed their support in resolving the Rohingya crisis in a sustainable manner, the release added.

They all recognised the need to address the root causes of Rohingya crisis which lie in Myanmar, and support the ongoing accountability processes to ensure justice to the victims of human rights violations in Myanmar.

BANGAVAX COVID SHOTS

BMRC moves to resume process for clinical trials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Medical Research Council has sought documents of the homegrown Bangavax Covid-19 vaccine to further proceed towards allowing its clinical trial.

The BMRC is also considering whether to allow two more vaccines -- one each from China and India -- for the trials.

"We did not give approval to anyone. The process of approval remained stalled for a while but we resumed it. We sought some documents from them to fulfil the conditions of the BMRC," Dr Ruhul Amin, director of the council, told The Daily Star.

The director also said the three companies will get approval for clinical trial only after they meet BMRC conditions.

When asked whether the BMRC sent any letter to those companies, Ruhul said the letters will be sent by Sunday.

Vaccine developer Globe Biotech Ltd, the developer of Bangavax, sent a letter to the BMRC on January 17 this year to get ethical permission to conduct human trials.

Chinese state-owned pharmaceutical company Institute of Medical Biology and Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences (IMBCAMS) and Indian state-owned Bharat Biotech applied to Bangladesh last year for third-phase trials.

Chinese IMBCAMS appointed local pharmaceutical company One Pharma as its local agent. One Pharma sent a letter to the health secretary on December 23.

IMBCAMS and icddr,b signed an agreement on December 20. The icddr,b applied to BMRC to carry out the clinical trials. During the clinical development

of vaccines, small groups of people are given the trial vaccine in Phase I. In Phase II, it is expanded to a larger group of people with similar characteristics to the vaccine target group, and thousands of people are given the vaccine in Phase III to test for efficacy and safety, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.

The BMRC's website states drugs tested in Bangladesh require clinical trials to be carried out from Phase I to Phase III. It adds, "Generally, permission to carry out these trials are given in stages, considering the data found in earlier Phase(s)."

On October 5 last year, Globe Biotech announced that its first vaccine candidate had shown promise in pre-clinical trials on mice.

Researchers initially named it Bancovid but later renamed it as Bangavax.

Bangavax, along with two other vaccine candidates developed by Globe Biotech, were included in the World Health Organisation's draft landscape and tracker of Covid-19 vaccines in development worldwide, on October 17.

The company received permission from the Directorate General of Drug Administration to manufacture the necessary doses needed in a clinical trial on January 6.

The company had initially signed an agreement with icddr,b to hold the clinical trials. That agreement was later cancelled with a company named CRO subsequently getting the contract.

Last month, Globe Biotech's CEO Kakon Nag and other researchers published a study on Bangavax in Vaccine, an open access peer-reviewed medical journal in the US.

Cost of living up by 6.8pc

FROM PAGE 1
retail markets in the capital.

The prices of 114 food items, 22 consumer products, and 14 services were taken into account.

And the living cost has been calculated based on the weight of the products or services that are in the consumer's basket in comparison with the total expenditure of a family, it said.

Education, healthcare and commuting expenses were not accounted for in the report.

Compared to 2019, the price of rice increased by 20 percent on an average in 2020.

The prices of each kg of coarse rice varieties, Parjira and Swarna, have increased by 27.34 percent, Pajiam rice by 25.56 percent, BR8 and BR11 rice by 20.8 percent, Miniket by 14.94 percent, Nazirshail by 14.33 percent and the aromatic ones by 7.20 percent.

The price of a kg of flour has increased by 5.28 percent and the domestic and imported pulses by 14.17 percent. Spices have become costlier by 24.6 percent, vegetables by 9.8 percent.

The rent of lower- and lower-middle class houses have increased by 5.35 percent.

Besides, the price of each 1,000 litres of WASA water has increased by 25 percent and the average cost of electricity increased by 6.05 percent while the price of commercial electricity went up by 4.81 percent.

CAB said rice production per acre in Bangladesh is still lower than rice exporting countries like Vietnam and Thailand.

Increasing productivity and reducing the cost of production will improve the financial condition of the farmers and keep rice prices affordable.

Ghulam Rahman said the government subsidies in the power sector are mainly spent on private power plants that remain idle. This benefits the power plant owners, not the consumers.

There are allegations of irregularities in the management of funds by the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC).

The BERC created funds for gas and power development by charging additional sums from the consumers.

The comptroller and auditor general should immediately arrange a special audit of the management of the funds, he added.



Activists of left-leaning student bodies try to break through the barricade police set up on the Secretariat Link Road yesterday afternoon. The students were marching demanding reopening of all educational institutions and they were stopped before they could reach the education ministry.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

At least 50 dists now at high risk

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To curb the virus transmission, they suggested "cluster-wise implementation of restrictions". Otherwise, the rest of the country might face a situation similar to that in Khulna and Rajshahi.

"I fear the virus transmission in Dhaka city might turn as bad as in Khulna or Rajshahi within next three to four days," Dr Abu Jamil Faisal, member of the Epidemiology and Public Health Committee of the DGHS, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said there seems to be a lack of coordination among the government agencies and public representatives in making people aware of the situation, raising Covid tests and isolating the infected people.

The government assigned a secretary to coordinate the activities to tackle the Covid situation in each district. Besides, the public health committee recommended engaging lawmakers to mobilise people to help curb the virus transmission.

"But it seems everyone is asleep," said Faisal.

In 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the highest number of deaths -- 17 -- was recorded in Rajshahi division followed by Khulna -- 14.

Among other divisions, Dhaka and Chattogram saw eight deaths each, Sylhet

six, Rangpur four and Mymensingh three.

"The delta [Indian] variant of Covid has already spread widely at the community level. It is no longer concentrated in the bordering districts. The delta variant is more transmissible than any other variants," said Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist.

"The current situation is only the tip of the iceberg as Covid testing remains grossly inadequate... the situation in different parts of the country might turn as worse as that of Khulna and Rajshahi divisions in the next two weeks."

Noting that there is no alternative to increasing the number of tests, he recommended enforcing lockdown in the areas where the Covid positivity rate is 15 percent and above.

FUTILE RESTRICTIONS
Though restrictions are in force in Dinajpur, Satkhira, Khulna and Chuadanga, virus transmission has been on the rise in the four districts.

Officials said they have been struggling to enforce the curbs as people are not adhering to the health safety guidelines.

"We are trying to make people understand the necessity to follow the health safety guidelines. But no one seems to care about the virus transmission. Lax enforcement of restrictions will not help

bring down infections in the district," said Dr Abdul Kuddus, civil surgeon in Dinajpur.

In Satkhira, the infection rate is going up though restrictions on vehicular and public movement have been enforced in the district.

The infection rate rose to 53.19 percent yesterday from 49 percent the previous day.

Shafayat Hossain, civil surgeon of Satkhira, said people are not paying any attention to the rising trend of virus transmission.

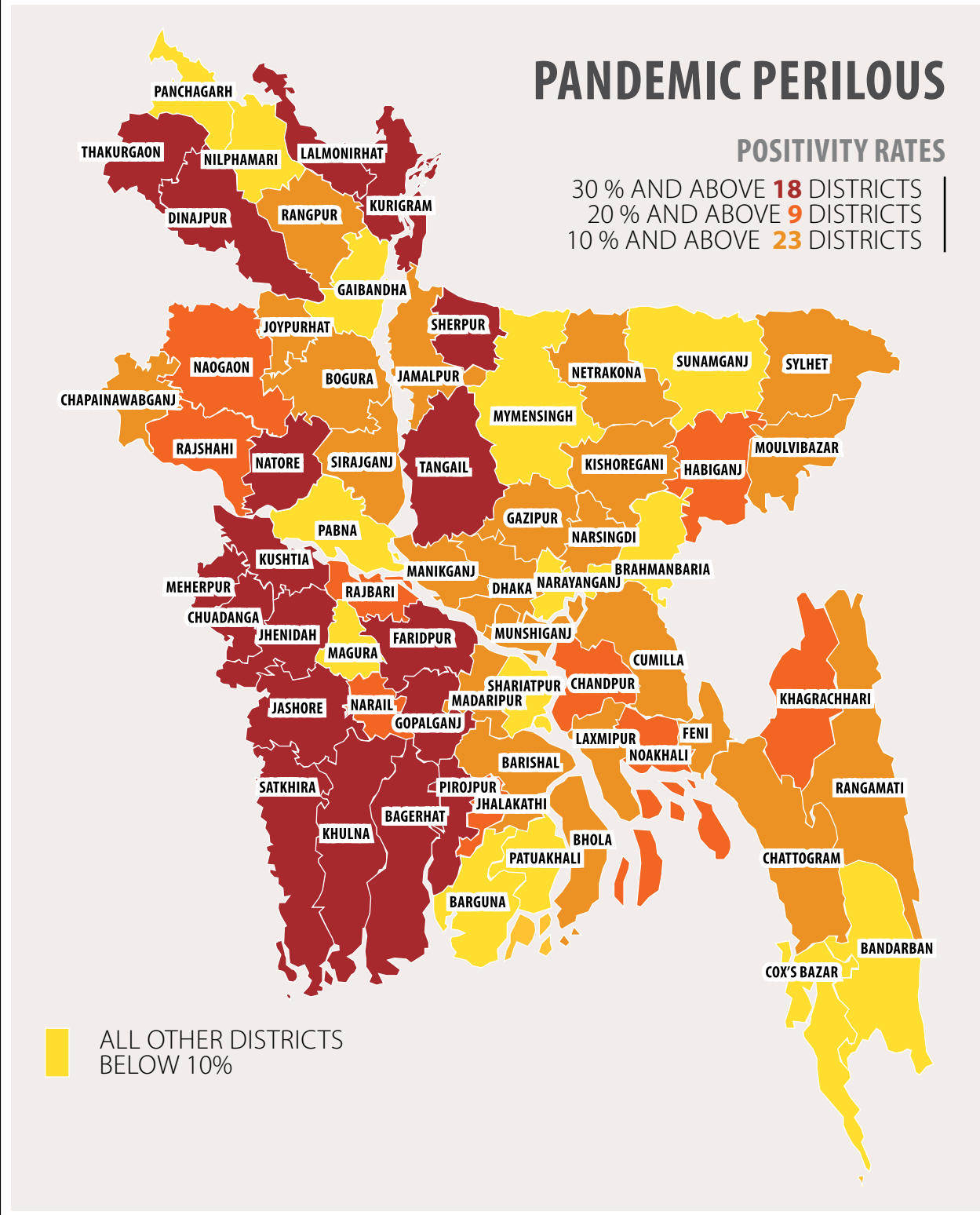
"They care little about the health safety guidelines," he said.

In Khulna, health officials said the entire division has turned into a Covid hotspot as both deaths and infections were high.

The infection rate in the division was 40.42 percent yesterday.

Suhash Ranjan Halder, focal person at Khulna Medical College Hospital, said, "As more and more patients are seeking treatment, the hospitals in all the 10 districts in the division are overwhelmed. It is quite impossible to provide proper treatment to everyone."

Rashed Sultana, director of the DGHS in Khulna division, said people need to be made aware of the situation as only their awareness can help tackle the situation.



Govt moves to set up vaccine institute

FROM PAGE 1

"We have received a letter in this regard from the World Health Organization," the minister said at a press briefing at the Secretariat.

Regarding import of vaccines from China, Zahid said China was yet to respond to Bangladesh on this issue.

Expressing optimism that China would inform Bangladesh about it by this month, he said, "We have completed all formalities from our end."

Zahid said the government was yet to receive any update from Serum Institute of India on the supply of vaccine. He, however, said talks were

going on.

The minister said China expressed unhappiness over disclosing the vaccine price and that's why there was a delay in receiving the vaccine. 'RUSSIA TO SUPPLY VACCINE' Russia has assured Bangladesh of supplying Covid-19 shots.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, the health minister said Russia told Bangladesh that the quantity of vaccine doses and the supply date would be finalised in the shortest possible time. "It's positive that the Russian authorities have agreed to give us the vaccines."

Bangladesh asked Russia to supply

Sputnik V vaccines as pairs of two doses, Zahid said.

The two doses of Sputnik V are different and not interchangeable. 'VACCINE COOPERATION TO CONTINUE'

China would continue its "vaccine cooperation" with Bangladesh, Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming said yesterday.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed. Although there is a huge demand for the vaccine in China and in the international market, the Chinese government is trying its best to support the Bangladesh government and its people," he said.

Swatilekha Sengupta passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Noted actor Swatilekha Sengupta passed away at a hospital in Kolkata yesterday after a long battle with kidney ailments.



She was 71. She left behind her husband Rudraprasad Sengupta and daughter Sohini Sengupta. She was undergoing treatment at the private hospital, after being admitted there with renal problems.

All India Trinamool Congress Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) and filmmaker Raj Chakraborty tweeted, "A huge and irreplaceable loss."

Chakraborty's upcoming project Dharmajuddha will mark Swatilekha Sengupta's last film.

Onir, who produced Swatilekha Sengupta's critically-acclaimed film Chauranga in 2016, wrote, "Very sad to hear about #SwatilekhaSengupta... Gone too soon."

Swatilekha Sengupta started her career as a theatre artiste in Allahabad in the early 1970s.

She joined the theatre group Nandikar in 1978. In that group, she worked under director Rudraprasad Sengupta, whom she later married.

Rudraprasad Sengupta is an actor and cultural critic as well. The couple's daughter, Sohini, is also a theatre artiste.

Furthermore, Swatilekha Sengupta was cast by Satyajit Ray for the portrayal of the character Bimala in "Ghare Baire", which was based on Rabindranath Tagore's eponymous novel.

She also played the character of Arati in Shiboprasad Mukherjee and Nandita Roy's blockbuster "Bela Seshe".

In both films, she was cast opposite Soumitra Chatterjee. The pair also worked together in Shiboprasad Mukherjee and Nandita Roy's upcoming film Bela Shuru, which will mark their last project together.

For her contribution to the theatre industry, she won the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 2011.

The actor was awarded the West Bengal Theatre Journalists' Association award. She also received Paschim Banga Natya Akademi Award.

She was last seen in Sudip Chakraborty's 2019 film Barof.

Accused Omi

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at a recruiting agency belonging to Omi recovered 102 passports and 50 blank stamp papers yesterday.

During the raid at Institute of Singapore Marine Technology in Dhaka's Dakshinkhan area, police also arrested two of its staffers, said Saiful Islam, deputy commissioner of Uttara Division Police.

The arrestees are: Basir Mia, marketing executive of the institute, and Mashhur Rahman, its deputy executive manager.

The DC also said they carried out a raid at another travel agency belonging to Omi, named "Holiday Planner", in Uttara but did not find anyone there.

Kamal Hossain, inspector (investigation) of Savar Police Station, filed a case against Omi and the two arrestees with Dakshinkhan Police Station under the passport act in this regard.

Investigators and locals of Dakshinkhan said Omi and his father had lived in Singapore for several years. Returning to the country Omi started the business and earned a huge amount of money in the last few years.

DC Saiful Islam said the seized passports belonged to women and men of different districts.

"We are investigating whether the recruiting agency has any authorisation and if the passports were kept illegally," he said.

Sources in law enforcement said they suspect that Omi has amassed a fortune recently through human trafficking.

Later yesterday, a Dhaka court placed Basir and Mashhur on a two-day remand each after the duo were produced before it with a 10-day remand plea.

On Monday, DB arrested Nasir and Omi and three women from an Uttara flat after Pori Moni filed a case, and seized 1,000 yaba tablets and foreign liquor from the house.

Meanwhile, BNP MP Harunur Rashid from Chapainawabganj-3 yesterday in parliament demanded that the government takes measures against Dhaka Boat Club, which the BNP MP said was constructed illegally on the bank of Turag river.

In a separate development, Pori Moni said yesterday that news of her unruly behaviour at a Gulshan club was baseless and was being used to distract from the attempted rape and murder case.

KM Alamgir Iqbal, president of the Gulshan All Community Club, told a TV channel that around 1:30am on June 7, Pori Moni and two others, including a man wearing shorts, went to the club with a member.

A director of the club asked the man in shorts to leave the club as no one is allowed to enter the club in shorts. This led Pori Moni and others to start shouting, the club president said.

The actor then called 999, prompting police to visit the club, said the club president.

Sudip Kumar Chakraborty, deputy police commissioner of Gulshan division, said one of their officers had gone to the club following information about Pori Moni's visit to the club.

Upon returning, he filed a GD on June 7 as an officer is required to register a GD after visiting a place as per rules.

The club president said they have no complaint against Pori Moni and will issue a show-cause notice to the member who took her to the club breaching club rules.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Pori Moni said, "This is completely baseless and it is a conspiracy to distract from the case I filed."