

BANGLADESH UPDATE

3,840
New cases in 24hrs

8,41,087
Total cases

13,345
Deaths

7,76,466
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

3,851,704
Deaths

177,962,510
Total cases

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

Dhaka seeks clear roadmap from UN

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is seeking a clear roadmap from the UN on the Rohingya repatriation, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Myanmar Christine S Burgener in New York Wednesday.

Referring to the negative impacts on Cox's Bazar, particularly on the host community, due to the protracted presence of Rohingyas, Momen said if the repatriation did not start soon, it would only deteriorate the overall situation there and create instability in the region and beyond.

Bangladesh provided shelter to the Rohingyas out of humanitarian consideration. The solution to the Rohingya crisis lies in their safe and sustainable return to Myanmar, but the repatriation couldn't even be commenced in the last four years.

Rohingyas, who fled military crackdown in Rakhine in 2017 and earlier, said the conditions in the Myanmar state were not conducive to their return and that they did not have guarantee of safety and citizenship there. The situation in Myanmar is worsening.

Against such a backdrop, Momen, who is in New York to attend two UN events -- one on the Myanmar crisis and the other on LDC, told Christine S Burgener: "Now the UN needs to provide us with a clear roadmap in this regard [Rohingya repatriation]."

According to a statement from the Bangladesh Permanent Mission to the UN in New York, Momen briefed the special envoy on the Bhasan Char project under which Rohingyas can engage in economic activities and stressed on the engagement of the UN in providing humanitarian assistance there.

He invited the special envoy to visit Bhasan Char when the Covid situation would improve.

Christine S Burgener also briefed Momen on her efforts to reach out to the UN member states, and all other stakeholders within and outside Myanmar with a view to resolving the crisis in Myanmar in a sustainable manner so that the conditions on the ground could be improved and the repatriation could commence soon.

She also expressed her eagerness to visit Bhasan Char.

Wednesday afternoon, the foreign minister had a meeting with the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix. The minister reiterated Bangladesh's commitment to support and contribute to the peacekeeping operations of the UN.

He thanked the department of Peace Operations for their cooperation in ensuring safety and security of the peacekeepers.

Referring to the pioneering role of Bangladesh in the Women, Peace and Security agenda, he recalled the sacrifices of the peacekeepers and suggested that the DPO promote women's participation by preparing special documentary and other communications materials.

The foreign minister also requested Lacroix to appoint more Bangladeshi military and civilian officers to the senior positions both at the UN headquarters and at the field level.

Lacroix lauded Bangladesh for its contribution to UN peacekeeping for over three decades and expressed hope that the partnership between Bangladesh and the UN in the field of peacekeeping would continue to grow.

He also praised the professionalism, and dedication of Bangladeshi peacekeepers working in the UN peacekeeping missions.



Failing to get a stretcher or a wheelchair, a man carries a patient to the emergency unit of Chattogram Medical College Hospital. Many patients and relatives going to the hospital have to suffer this way. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

It's not as big as projected: CPD

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the social protection budget.

"Recently, two other programmes involving savings certificate interest assistance and agricultural subsidies have been reported as part of social protection, inflating allocations. These three account for 38.6 percent of the social protection budget for fiscal 2021-22," said Towfiqul Islam Khan, senior research fellow at CPD.

Not just that -- even though the allocations for the social protection budget has increased by 12.5 percent compared to the outgoing year, these three had 84 percent of the hike.

On the other hand, allocations went down massively for crucial programmes that support education, employment and livelihoods, stated Towfiqul.

Allocation for stipends for primary school students has decreased by 48.8 percent, while stipends for secondary, higher secondary and madrasa students were lowered by 35 percent in the proposed budget, CPD found.

The allocation for the Ashrayan project under which homes are built for the homeless has shrunk by 56.4 percent, while allocations for work for money schemes saw a decrease of 34.1 percent.

Other programmes which saw a decrease in allocations include contraception and family planning services and interest subsidies for small and medium enterprises (including cottage industries) due to the pandemic, CPD pointed out.

"Allocations for programmes for food security, stipend and credit support programmes have also been lowered," added Towfiqul.

CPD also said the decrease in credit support programmes' allocation was massive -- a decrease of 431 percent -- because two projects, a refinancing scheme for low income farmers/small traders and an employment generation programme through four state-owned entities, are omitted from the next year's budget.

Stipend programmes saw a decrease of 132 percent in allocations.

Speakers commented that there was never a scope for discussing the budget among parliamentary or statutory bodies.

"The problem is that we do not have enough participation from the government in these discussions," said CPD Chair Prof Rehman Sobhan.

Rashed Khan Menon, president of Workers Party of Bangladesh, said, "Our discussions in parliament are meaningless. We are not given enough time. I was given 10 minutes to reflect on the budget. If the parliamentary committees were given the chance to discuss the budget, then there could be constructive debates. When we have to be limited to 'yes or no' votes, our ability to speak up becomes meaningless."

Dr Sobhan commented on effective implementation of social protection budget. "Now that we have thousands of crores of taka worth social protection going on, what political weapons are going into the hands of the ruling party? How can the monitoring of the utilisation of social protection programmes be made into a communal effort rather than being under the exclusive patronage of a single party?" he asked.

CPD Executive Director Fahmida

Khatun noted that the government has a tendency to ignore the new poor.

"We might disagree on the number of new poor formed, but there is no doubt that they have formed," she said.

In response, Dr Sobhan said, "The concept of the new poor has been used by economists to categorise people. The relevant issue is not a statistical line but the categories of people, and the relevant shocks they face. For example, rickshaw-pullers are part of the new poor, but they have always been vulnerable. Them being over the poverty line does not in any way lower their insecurity. You needed programmes that target their specific problems [whether they're over the poverty line or not]."

"What happens when workers become unemployed? What you needed ahead of time was an unemployment insurance programme for garment workers. Problems are specific to particular categories of people and specific to areas," he said.

Ali Ashraf, MP, chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Government Assurances, also spoke at the event, so did Laila Ashrafun, professor and head of Department of Sociology, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Manisha Chakraborty, member secretary of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal's Barisal district unit, Shams Mahmud, former president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Ashekur Rahman, assistant resident representative, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

CPD Distinguished Fellow Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya chaired the session.

Cybercrimes against women

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When Antika broke it off with the man, he uploaded the photos and videos to different social media platforms.

The PCSW was able to trace the suspect after Antika's mother filed a complaint. Legal action was being taken against the man.

It is not just Likee that the criminals are using. TikTok, Bigo Live, Imo and Facebook are being used. A large number of the criminals also harass girls over the phone, according to sources in the PCSW.

Law enforcement agencies recently unearthed human trafficking rackets who used TikTok to lure girls with "well-paying jobs in India" and use them as sex workers.

It was recently discovered that Bigo Live was being used for paid illicit shows. An agent and the country manager of the app was arrested for the hosting of live-streaming shows of girls for paid customers on the platform.

TYPES OF COMPLAINTS

The Daily Star obtained data on the 10,040 complaints made via the PCSW Facebook page. The wing also received complaints via phone and email.

The PCSW was able to address 4,703 of the complaints by taking actions like legal steps, taking down content from the internet, etc.

According to the data, the most common crime, 28.07 percent, is creating fake accounts of a person and slandering the victim. Exposing the victims' private contents account for 20.95 percent of the complaints.

At least 4.36 percent of the complaints were specifically on spreading private nude photos.

A staggering 10 percent was on blackmailing while hacking accounts accounted for 7.8 percent of the complaints.

The progress of PCSW has been hampered largely by victims not sharing the information the wing needs for the probe. At least 1,659 of the victims refused to share information when the PCSW asked for details regarding 2,558 complainants.

The victims of cybercrimes are mostly aged between 17 and 30.

Mir Abu Touhid, assistant inspector general at the PHQ, said many victims were not interested in filing cases against the perpetrators, fearing further trouble.

The case of Nila (not her real name) is a case in point.

She met an expat on social media who was living in the middle-east.

They eloped but soon it was discovered that her husband was

having an affair.

After Nila divorced him, her ex-husband opened fake social media accounts on her name and started sharing personal photos of her.

Nila filed a general diary (GD) but refused to file a case considering her and her family's names would be dragged through the mud.

Her ex-husband was released after signing a document that he would not do it again.

TRAFFICKED TO INDIA

The recent revelation of trafficking of some Bangladeshi girls to India and forcing them into sex work has made headlines. The girls were lured into the trap via TokTok.

After a video clip of a 22-year-old woman being tortured and sexually assaulted in India went viral on social media, the law enforcers in Bangladesh found the racket involving Bangladeshis and Indians.

Investigators said that the racket had trafficked 50 girls over the last two years and that its network stretches to the UAE and some other Middle East countries.

Salma Ali, president of Bangladesh National Lawyers' Association, told The Daily Star that the lack of victim support, expertise in cyber policing at police stations, and fear of further problems were discouraging people against filing cases.

She observed that cybercrimes were on the rise as schools and colleges have been closed for more than a year.

"The teenagers and youths are spending a lot of time on cyberspace. The easy access to social media has made it easy for criminals to target the young women. The women with minimal digital literacy are becoming an easy prey for them."

"Instead of putting a ban on platforms like TikTok and Likee, the government should find a better way to monitor these platforms so that such crimes can't take place using these platforms."

Mir Abu Touhid, the AIG at the PHQ, said they have a special social media monitoring team at the PHQ and a decision has been made recently to increase the monitoring and hold the service providers accountable.

They would send directives soon to all police stations, he added.

Rezaul Masud, special superintendent (Cyber Intelligence and Risk Management) of the CID, told The Daily Star that they have a monitoring process to check which applications were harmful and were in violation of the law.

Heated debate in parliament

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at that time.

Naming some clubs in the capital, Mujibul said, "Alcohol is consumed randomly in those clubs. Gambling also goes on there. Gallons of alcohol are sold there. If anyone in Bangladesh wants to drink alcohol, he/she needs to have a licence. Then how alcohol is sold to everyone?"

The lawmaker questioned how government officials become members of different clubs, including the boat club, and from where the huge sums of money comes.

Mujibul said the owner of the land, where the boat club is situated, cannot go there.

He asked the prime minister to intervene in the issue and stop holding DJ parties in the city's upscale areas. "Dance parties take place there and people consume drugs. Alcohol is also served there. Our law, culture and religion do not permit such activities."

The lawmaker requested the prime minister to give instructions to the home minister in this regard.

Film actor Pori Moni on June 13 alleged that Nasir Uddin Mahmud, a member of the club, attempted to rape and kill her with the assistance of a businessman named Tuhin Siddique Omi on June 10.

On Monday, the actor filed a case

with Savar Police Station in connection with the incident accusing Nasir and several others.

Shortly after Mujibul's remarks in the House yesterday, Awami League Presidium Member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim blamed BNP founder Ziaur Rahman for giving permission and issuing licence regarding alcohol and gambling in Bangladesh.

Referring to the June 10 incident, he said, "This is boat club, but Ziaur Rahman had set up 'steamer club'. Bangabandhu had stopped issuing licences for alcohol and gambling, but Zia resumed issuing those. Those who committed crimes first should be tried first. You have to start the process from there."

BNP MP Harunur Rashid said an opposition lawmaker tried to draw the attention of the prime minister to a specific issue, but a senior MP (Sheikh Selim) talked on another issue.

"Many foreigners live in Bangladesh. Also, consuming alcohol is legal for people of other religions and those working in mortuaries. But law does not allow it for any Muslim."

Harun said he would step down as a lawmaker if anyone could prove that former president Zia gave licence to legalise consuming alcohol.

"People from the government are involved in alcohol business in all

these clubs. I'm challenging this. Police collect money from these places. The prime minister does not belong to any party. She is the prime minister of the state. She should find it out."

After Harun's speech, Sheikh Selim again took the floor and said, "Have you forgotten Lucky Khan's dance? Hijbul Bahar? It was Ziaur Rahman who had initiated those."

He said the government did not give permission to any Muslim to consume alcohol.

"You [BNP] will raise a hue and cry if the government moves to stop this [permission of alcohol]. You will tell that foreigners need alcohol," he added.

Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvandyary of Bangladesh Tarikat Federation said Harun should resign as an MP as Zia gave permission to allow Muslims to take alcohol.

Jatiya Party lawmaker and Opposition Chief Whip Mashiur Rahman said, "Bangabandhu did not give the licence. The law is being misused. The BNP gave the licence. If a Muslim takes alcohol now, the government has nothing to do with it."

He also demanded the authorities concerned find out Abu Twa-ha Mohammad Adnan, an Islamic speaker from Rangpur, who remained missing for the last few days.

Bangladeshis' deposits drop 3rd year

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banking law allows.

For instance, the Swiss Banking Law of 1934 made it criminal for Swiss banks to disclose any information regarding an account (even its existence) without the depositor's permission.

The only exception, the only way information will be revealed, is if a government agency claims that a depositor is involved in a serious criminal act or is involved in some other financial issue (such as bankruptcies, divorces, and inheritances).

Like people from all over the world, Bangladeshis have been stashing their funds in Swiss bank accounts.

The deposits cannot automatically be attributed as black money as the Bangladesh government and

particularly the Bangladesh Bank keep their funds in Switzerland too as well as the Bangladeshis nationals working abroad, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

"Of course the money launderers also hide their funds there," he said, while urging the government to disclose how much it has kept in Switzerland for the sake of inferring how much ill-gotten wealth is stashed in the European nation.

However, the lure of Switzerland as a tax haven has come off in recent years among Bangladeshis, said Mansur, a former economist of the International Monetary Fund.

There are other options like Jersey, Cayman Islands, Panama, Singapore and Dubai.

"Swiss banks are no longer safe as

the Switzerland government is more open to sharing information with other countries."

Which, probably, explains the decline in deposits attributed to Bangladeshi nationals.

"Or it could be that the Bangladesh Bank itself has withdrawn some funds and deposited it elsewhere as the interest rate in Switzerland is negative," Mansur added.

However, a BB official said that it is not easy to get information on Swiss bank accounts even though the two countries' Financial Intelligence Units have an agreement to do so.

"They only cooperate when there is a court order and there is a specific name," he said on condition of anonymity as he is not authorised to speak with the media.

Delta variant

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Of the 40, only two were in Dhaka while others were in Dinajpur, Gaibandha, Bagerhat, Jhenidah, Pirojpur, Chapainawabganj, Gopalganj, and Khulna.

The latest findings indicate the Delta variant has started dominating the transmission in Dhaka city.

Experts fear the Delta variant will soon turn the situation in Dhaka city as bad as Khulna and Rajshahi divisions.

The first case of the variant was detected in the country on May 8.

In the 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, 63 people died with Covid-19.

Of those who were reported dead yesterday, eight died at home, according to a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

From June 3-17, the number of deaths of people with Covid-19 symptoms has been on the rise in Rajshahi and Khulna divisions.

Of the people who died with Covid-19-like symptoms in different districts in Khulna and Rajshahi divisions, at least five were in Jhenidah, 34 in Sakhira, 38 in Khulna and 20 in Chapainawabganj.

A 36-year old man died of Covid-19 at Daulatdia Ferry Ghat while he was being taken to Dhaka from Jashore District Hospital for better treatment on Monday afternoon, reports our correspondent in Jhenidah.

With a rising number of Covid patients in Khulna and Rajshahi divisions, the hospitals are at capacity.

Experts say the number of daily tests was too low compared to the level of transmission.

"The majority of the infected people are undetected. There must be many unreported deaths where the transmission is higher," infectious diseases specialist Prof Ridwanur Rahman told The Daily Star.

Of those reported dead yesterday, the highest 20 were in Khulna division, followed by 13 in Rajshahi.

Eleven deaths were reported in Chattogram, 10 in Dhaka, three in Barisal and two each in Rangpur, Mymensingh and Sylhet.

At least 3,840 people tested positive for Covid-19 while the positivity rate declined to 15.44 percent from 16.62 in the previous day.

Bangladesh

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Bangladesh's improvement this year makes the country third most peaceful in South Asia, with an overall score of 2.068 -- behind Bhutan and Nepal. Singapore has been named the most peaceful country in Asia, positioning itself at 11th overall in the world.

However, the report also includes Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia in the Positive Peace deficit list, measured until 2019, which claims the countries are likely to experience "increasing levels of violence" over the next decade.

India experienced a slight improvement of 0.7 percent in overall peacefulness over the past year, driven by an improvement in the ongoing conflict domain.

Bangladesh and India have the lowest fear of violence rates in South Asia, with 25 and 23 percent of people respectively being very worried about violent crimes.

The average level of peacefulness in the region improved by 0.1 percent, with improvements occurring in five of the seven countries in the region. South Asia recorded improvements on the militarisation and safety and security domains.

Globally, Bhutan has been ranked 22nd overall, with its level of peacefulness increasing by 0.9 percent over the past year, driven by an improvement in the homicide rate.

On the other hand, Afghanistan remains the least peaceful country in South Asia and the world on the 2021 GPI, a position it has held for the past four years. Afghanistan still has a higher terrorism impact than any other country in the world.

Pakistan was one of the few countries to record an improvement on the violent demonstration indicator, although the overall risk of future civil unrest remains relatively high.

According to the 15th edition of GPI, Iceland remains the most peaceful country in the world, a position it has held since 2008. It is joined at the top of the index by New Zealand, Denmark, Portugal, and Slovenia.

Afghanistan is the least peaceful country in the world for the fourth consecutive year, followed by Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, and Iraq.

The report says the average level of global peacefulness deteriorated by 0.07 percent. It reveals a world in which the conflicts and crises that emerged in the past decade have begun to abate, only to be replaced with a new wave of tension and uncertainty as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and rising tensions between many of the major powers.

It says while some forms of violence declined in the short term, growing unease with lockdowns and rising economic uncertainty resulted in civil unrest increasing in 2020. Over 5,000 pandemic-related violent events were recorded between January 2020 and April 2021.

"The changing economic conditions in many nations increases the likelihood of political instability and violent demonstrations."

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY POLICE CYBER SUPPORT FOR WOMEN

TYPES OF COMPLAINTS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
FAKING SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS	2,819	28.07
HACKING SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS	783	7.79
BLACKMAILING	1,008	10.03
HARASSMENT USING MOBILE	697	6.94
SENDING NUDE CONTENTS	438	4.36
OTHERS	2,104	20.95
NOT RELATED TO CYBERCRIME	2,191	21.82
TOTAL (Nov 16 2020 to June 15, 2021)	10,040	