

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



4,636
New cases in 24hrs



8,56,304
Total cases



13,626
Deaths



7,85,482
Recoveries



GLOBAL
UPDATE

3,885,375
Deaths



179,419,204
Total cases

102 Bangladeshi migrants held in Malaysia

ANN

Malaysian immigration department arrested 309 undocumented migrants, including 102 Bangladeshis, during an operation carried out at a settlement near a construction site in Dengkil early yesterday.

Among the other arrestees are 193 from Indonesia, eight from Myanmar, four from Vietnam and two from India, according to Malaysia's national news agency Bernama.

The arrestees, aged between 20 and 50, included 280 men and 29 women.

Immigration Director-General Datuk Khairul Dzamee Daud said they had received information that at the settlement, there were individuals who were believed to have violated the standard operating procedures of the movement control order (MCO).

Accordingly, the department raided the area and found that they did not comply with the MCO.

Speaking to reporters at the scene, Khairul Dzamee said, "I arrived with the operations team and found that their settlement was dense, dirty and did not have a proper drainage system, apart from having a place to gather and eat in large numbers.

"They also admitted that they lived in a group in one room, which is

about four to seven people."

He said this showed that they were free to do anything at the construction site without any compliance with the MCO.

The immigration DG also explained how Indonesian women sneaked into the country.

"Indonesian women enter Malaysia using a social visit pass and continue to reside in the country beyond the stipulated time. In addition, they live with their husbands who work illegally in the country."

Khairul Dzamee said all these undocumented migrants were supposed to undergo Covid-19 testing yesterday at the Putrajaya and Seremban district health offices.

After the screening test, the migrants would be sent to Semenyih Immigration Depot to be detained and investigated in accordance with laws, before deportation, he added.

During the operation, the Immigration Department also inspected 10 Rohingya refugees who are United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) cardholders.

Of the 10, only two were arrested for possessing fake UNCHR cards, the immigration DG said.

A truck stand on the Turag

FROM PAGE 1

This newspaper and other media reports previously detailed multiple allegations and actions taken against the former MP for Dhaka-14 constituency and his company, Maisha Group, for encroaching upon the Turag river and setting up structures there.

Last December, a probe by the National River Commission found Aslamul filled up more than 54 acres of Buriganga river land and wetland to construct a power plant and factories.

Contacted, Mofizul denied the matter. He claimed neither he, his late brother Aslamul or any other family member were involved in the establishment or operation of the truck stand.

Mofizul further said the place in question had been empty and the Bangladesh Inter-District Truck Drivers' Union had then established the stand there. He referred this writer to Ahmed Ali, general secretary of the truck drivers' union.

Contacted, Ahmed Ali said the union was in no way involved with the establishment and operation of the Diabari truck stand.

Environmentalists said the setting up such a structure on the river land is a violation of environmental laws. They demanded effective government action against the illegal truck stand immediately.

Chairman of Poribesh Bachao Andolon Abu Naser Khan said a truck stand occupying river banks cannot be accepted in any way. If action is not taken for such offences, other perpetrators will get inspired to do the same.

Sharif Jamil, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, too said necessary measures should be taken against the truck stand immediately.

Contacted, Md Motiul Islam, executive engineer of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), a government body responsible for maintaining waterways, said the truck stand is not permanent and drives would be taken against it shortly.

The 71-kilometre Turag river originates from Gazipur's Kaliakoir area and flows across Joydevpur in Gazipur, Mirzapur in Tangail, Savar, and Mirpur areas of Dhaka.

Earlier, both the Turag and Dhaleshwari rivers would supply water to the Buriganga river.

Recently, however, the connection between the Buriganga and Dhaleshwari rivers was severed, leaving the Turag as the only source feeding the Buriganga.

[Tarun Sarkar is a freelance journalist and researcher who writes for The Daily Star]

Govt to buy 7cr

FROM PAGE 1

The minister said they will reply to Covax, confirming the government's decision by today or tomorrow.

"We will not take Moderna vaccine due to cold chain difficulties," he added.

The Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) issued an emergency use authorisation (EUA) for Johnson & Johnson's Covid-19 vaccine in the country on June 15.

It is the first single-dose Covid-19 vaccine approved for emergency use in the country. Earlier, the DGDA approved five double-dose Covid-19 vaccines for emergency use in Bangladesh.

The Janssen vaccine has indicated active immunisation against Covid-19, caused by SARS-CoV-2, in individuals aged 18 and above.

The World Health Organization, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the Food and Drug Administration of the United States of America and Health Canada have already approved this vaccine for emergency use.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is compatible with Bangladesh's standard storage and distribution channels, as it can be stored at temperatures between 2-8°C.

The advance purchase speaks volumes of Bangladesh's desperate effort to procure vaccines from every possible source to inoculate the country's 163 million people.

Bangladesh has so far inoculated less than three percent of its population. Its vaccination campaign, which started on February 7, stumbled due to a lack of supply from the Serum Institute of India and also from Covax.

Serum Institute failed to ship the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines that Bangladesh purchased after cases surged in India.

As per an agreement, Bangladesh was supposed to receive three crore shots of the vaccine in phases from

January to June. Serum delivered the first 50 lakh doses in January, but shipped only 20 lakh shots the following month. No shipment has been received since then. Besides, the country also received 3.3 million AstraZeneca vaccine doses as a gift from India.

Bangladesh was supposed to receive a total of 68 million vaccine doses, which would cover around 20 percent of its population, from the Covax facility this year. But it has so far received 1.06 lakh doses of the Pfizer vaccine, which was expected to be 1.09 crore by May-June.

Bangladesh submitted an official Expression of Interest (EOI) to Gavi last July 7, to get the vaccines from the Covax. On September 18, Gavi announced that Bangladesh was eligible to get vaccines, after which the health directorate submitted the National Vaccine Deployment Plan to Gavi on December 7.

"We need a huge amount of vaccines to inoculate our population. So, we have to procure them from various sources. Covax's offer was good and that's why agreed to procure [Johnson & Johnson's vaccine]," Zahid Maleque said.

Bangladesh suspended administering the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine on April 26 due to a depleting stock. The vaccine registration process was also halted on May 5.

However, the government resumed administering the first dose from Saturday on a limited scale with around 11 lakh doses of Sinopharm vaccines, which the government got as a gift from China.

Besides, it has also started administering the Pfizer vaccine in Dhaka city yesterday.

But the government is yet to secure a bulk-purchase of vaccines even though negotiations for China's Sinopharm and Russia's Sputnik V vaccines have been ongoing for quite some time.



Undocumented migrants held by the Malaysian authorities. Three-hundred and nine such migrants, including 102 Bangladeshis, were arrested in a drive in Malaysia's Dengkil early yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT OF MALAYSIA

Dhaka to remain almost cut off

FROM PAGE 1

The city will only be accessible through a small portion of the boundary the capital shares with Tangail district, but no major highway leads into Dhaka through that part.

In another development, Khulna's district administration announced a weeklong lockdown for the whole district starting today. In a deviation from the norms, the circular issued by the district administration specifically used the word "lockdown".

According to the Cabinet Division circular, the districts put under movement restrictions near the capital are Manikganj, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Gazipur, Madaripur, Rajbari and Gopalganj. The first four are districts that border Dhaka.

"Everything will be closed. People will not be able to move about. The districts will be completely blocked off; nobody will be able to enter or exit," said Cabinet Division Secretary Md Rezaul Islam.

The circular said the decision was made "taking into consideration the Covid situation across the country".

Sources in the health ministry said they have been recommending for weeks that Dhaka be cut off, ever since the more contagious Delta variant -- first found in India -- was detected in the border districts.

The decision to curb movement in the districts surrounding the capital has come after Sunday saw a jump in the number of single-day deaths.

All government and private offices -- except for those providing essential services such as post, utilities, internet and telecommunications -- will have to remain closed. The press too is exempted.

Only ambulances, and vehicles carrying goods, relief, health services and essential goods would be allowed to move about. Staff vehicles of essential providers are also exempted.

All long-route buses from Dhaka will remain suspended from today, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) officials and road transport leaders confirmed to The Daily Star last night.

All launch services, speedboats and passenger trawler services along

Mushiganj's Shimulia and Madaripur's Banglabazar water routes will also remain suspended until June 30, said Md Shahadat Hossain, the assistant director of Shimulia river port's river safety and traffic operations division.

The naval police and the local administration have been informed to take action in this regard, he said. A total of 87 launches operate on this route.

Shafiqul Islam, assistant general manager of Shimulia Terminal of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC), said emergency services such as ambulances, freight trucks and pickups can cross on ferries. However, passenger transport will not be able to cross.

The lockdown in Khulna and the "movement restrictions" around Dhaka come at a time when the country is already going through a nationwide phase of "movement restrictions" that was announced on June 16 and is slated to go on till July 15.

According to the government notification, all tourist spots, resorts, community and entertainment centres were supposed to be closed, and all forms of public gathering were supposed to be banned.

However, apart from educational establishments, all economic activities have been going on at full swing.

Of the districts blocked off by the Cabinet Division circular, Gopalganj logged an alarmingly high positivity rate of 74 percent on June 20, while Rajbari had 58 percent.

Gazipur, Madaripur and Manikganj's daily positivity rates were 21 percent, 18 percent and 16 percent respectively.

Narayanganj's positivity rate was 10 percent.

RUSH IN KHULNA

In Khulna, all vehicular movement in and out of the district will be halted from today until June 28, said the district administration's circular. The arrival and departure of all trains to and from Khulna railway station will remain suspended, as will all vehicular movement, including that of battery-operated 'easy bikes', said the circular.

All shopping centres and businesses will be closed except for kitchen markets and convenience stores, which will operate from 7:00am till 2:00pm.

FDI outlook bleak for Bangladesh

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In Sri Lanka, the announced greenfield investment projects in 2020 plummeted 96 per cent.

This contraction is due to weak investment interests in garment production, a major export industry and FDI recipient, the report said, adding that investment in, and production of, garments suffered severely in 2020, with no sign of recovery as of early 2021.

"There is no climate for investment -- how would the inflows come?" asks Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

The foreign companies prefer to invest in the export processing or economic zones and there are just three functional ones, he said.

At present, investors from Japan, India and South Korea have shown interest in the economic zones in Narayanganj, Anwara and Mirsarai.

"Instead of targeting 100 economic zones, why not focus on the ones where there is registered investor interest and get them ready at the earliest? In doing so much, we are unable to anything."

If those three economic zones are up and running, there would be a cascading effect and reassure foreign investors, Hussain said.

Besides, there is hardly any regulatory preparation.

With the view to providing choice service to foreign investors, the government has set up the likes of the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority, the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority, the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority and the Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority.

But those are not truly facilitating the foreign investors, Hussain said.

"The foreign investors have no shortage of investment options, but there are not many bankable investment projects here. It would be very difficult to draw in transformative investment from abroad," he added.

But Bangladesh has great potential to attract foreign investment in the healthcare sector, particularly in

vaccine manufacturing, according to the report.

The study went on to highlight Bangladesh's pharmaceuticals sector as an example for other low and lower middle-income countries.

The level of economic development, an insurmountable obstacle, did not get in the way of the development of Bangladesh's pharmaceuticals sector, the UNCTAD said.

"Since the 1980s, Bangladesh has been consistently implementing measures to support the development of the local pharmaceutical industry. Over time, the measures helped to improve the business environment, including the availability of skilled personnel and streamlining of trade and industrial regulations."

Bangladesh, as a least-developed country until 2026, would be privy to patents of Western drug makers until 2033, as per the World Trade Organisation agreement.

"Among LDCs, Bangladesh demonstrated its ability to use this flexibility when one of its pharmaceutical companies, Beximco Pharma, launched in 2015 a generic version of a hepatitis C drug that had been developed by Gilead Sciences," the report said.

Incepta's interest in manufacturing the COVID-19 vaccines would also be taking advantage of the benefit.

The drug maker "preferred to cooperate with vaccine developers to manufacture the already-approved vaccines, rather than work on its own to develop manufacturing processes that meet the regulatory standard, which it perceived would be more challenging".

"The success of the Indian pharmaceutical sector is credited to the use of this flexibility," the report said.

So the country's pharmaceuticals sector, which has developed the scale, is ripe for foreign investment.

Bangladesh can particularly showcase and also build on its vaccine manufacturing capabilities, according to Hussain.

Hearing about the week-long lockdown in Khulna, people from all walks of life rushed to the markets in droves, throwing caution to the wind even while the district sees the worst of the pandemic.

Yesterday, 161 patients were receiving treatment at the 130-bed Dedicated Corona Hospital in Khulna Medical College Hospital. For the last five days, the average infection rate in the district had been 34 percent.

Awal Sheikh and his four classmates were buying panjabis from a new outlet of Signal near Shibbari Mor in Khulna city yesterday afternoon. No one was wearing masks.

While the group tried on the outfits, another group of five to six youths haggled over panjabis next to them. Unlike Awal and his friends, they had masks -- but the masks were pulled down to their chins.

When asked about this, one of the shoppers replied, "The suffocating atmosphere is making it difficult to wear a mask, even though there is a danger of being infected."

On average, half the shoppers were not seen wearing masks, even though the market authorities stapled signs saying "no mask, no sale" at the entrance of the outlet.

Visiting different areas of Khulna city including Dakbangla mor, Clay road, Nixon market, Boro Bazar, Picture Palace mor, Khulna Shopping Complex, Jail Tower, New market, it was seen that there were disinfectant tunnels in front of most markets. However, none of the tunnels worked.

A security guard in front of New Market said the disinfectant tunnel does not work as the authorities have not refilled the disinfectant in the last seven months.

Tofazzal Mia, a small business owner of Koyra upazila, came to Khulna Hawkers' Market yesterday to buy cosmetics for his shop.

He told our correspondent that he would not be able to come to Khulna for supplies during the lockdown, but that there would be a demand for cosmetics in the upazila markets.

[Our Khulna and Munshiganj correspondents contributed to this report]

IRREGULARITIES AT NBFI

BB probe body asks ex-deputy governors to give statements

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bank's fact-finding committee has asked two former deputy governors to give their versions on the financial irregularities at a non-bank financial institution (NBFI).

The two former deputy governors, SK Sur Chowdhury and SM Moniruzzaman, who played different roles in the central bank when the scam was taking place at Bangladesh Industrial Finance Company (BIFC), will deliver their depositions to the committee today.

The committee, led by BB Deputy Governor AKM Sajedur Rahman Khan, was established on February 17 and has been looking into the scams that occurred at some NBFIs in recent years.

The central bank formed the committee as per the high court's instruction.

Md Serajul Islam, spokesperson and an executive director of the central bank, said that the committee had already called different former officials and board members of the BIFC.

It also asked some former and running BB officials to detect those involved in the BIFC scandal, he said.

As part of the process, the two former deputy governors of the central bank have been called by the committee.

In a 2016 probe, the BB found some former directors of the BIFC to be largely responsible for the institution's financial crisis.

The financial health of the BIFC, established in 1998 by a group of entrepreneurs led by Maj (Retd) Abdul Mannan, started to decline in 2008.

The BB found that scammers embezzled Tk 518 crore from the BIFC between 2005 and 2015 in the form of loans against 53 fictitious companies and individuals.

As majority of the borrowers were made up, the BIFC is finding it difficult to recover the money, said one of its officials, seeking anonymity.

The central bank removed Mannan's wife Umme Kulsum Mannan, also former BIFC chairman, and their two daughters, from the BIFC board between 2015 and 2016 for alleged involvement in sanctioning the loans unlawfully.

The central bank's committee has been empowered to interrogate any of its official to unearth the truth behind the financial scams at NBFIs.

At least 10 NBFIs are in dire straits due to massive irregularities.

Many of them have been unable to pay back depositors, despite the maturity of the fund.

Ex-Hefajat assist secy held in Hathazari

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTC

Police yesterday arrested former Hefajat-e Islam leader Nasir Uddin Munir in Chattogram's Hathazari over the organisation's mayhem at Hathazari on March 26.

Abdullah Al Masum, additional SP (DSB) of Chattogram district police, told The Daily Star that Nasir was arrested from Hathazari about 3:20pm in cases filed over the violence by Hefajat men.

Assistant secretary of the dissolved Qawmi madrasa-based organisation, Nasir stands accused in at least six cases filed with Hathazari Police Station. He is now being interrogated. He would be produced before a Chattogram court soon, said the police officer.

Ten cases were filed with the police station against over 100 Hefajat leaders, including its chief Mohammad Junayed Babunagari, and BNP activists. Over 6,000 unidentified persons were also accused in the cases.

On March 26, four people, including three madrasa students, were killed at Hathazari as Hefajat men and police clashed during the demonstration against the visit of Indian PM Narendra Modi.

Modi came to join the concluding ceremony of a programme marking the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence and birth centenary of the country's founding president Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Positivity rate

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new cases were detected, the highest in nine weeks, according to the DGHS.

This has been the highest since April 14, when 5,185 people tested positive for the virus.

Since the first three cases were reported in the country on March 8 last year, the highest 7,626 cases were reported on April 7.

As of yesterday, the total number of confirmed cases was 8,56,304.

The health directorate reported 78 new deaths from Covid-19. This takes the total number of confirmed deaths to 13,626.

Of those reported dead yesterday, 23 were in Dhaka, 15 in Rajshahi, 14 in Khulna, 11 in Chattogram, nine in Rangpur, three in Barisal, two in Sylhet and one in Mymensingh divisions.

The positivity rate reached 23 percent on April 1, the highest ever reported in the country.

Amid travel restrictions across the country, the numbers began to fall and reached the lowest in the first week of May, when the positivity rate remained about 7 percent.