

BANGLADESH UPDATE



5,727
New cases in 24hrs



8,66,877
Total cases



13,787
Deaths



7,91,533
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



3,900,967
Deaths



180,079,074
Total cases

More talks needed over transfer of NID services to Home

Says chief election commissioner

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda yesterday said that more discussions will be needed regarding the shifting of services relating to National Identity (NID) cards from the Election Commission to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

While talking with journalists after the inauguration of a medical camp at the Electoral Training Institute, Nurul Huda said that if the NID services were shifted from the EC to the home ministry, they would face some problems.

He, however, did not mention the nature of the problems.

Nurul Huda said that they want NID services to remain with EC. It is not final that the government has taken the NID activities.

"It is important that we sit with them [the government]", he said.

Nurul Huda said, "They have informed us that they want to take the NID services. We will need to have talks with them. We will present our reasons at the meeting. It is a matter of government what decision they will take after the dialogue".

NID services were a result of much hard work. Several thousand dedicated employees have created it in the last 12 years, they are also professionals.

EC is proud of its NID activities, he added.

"It is not possible to prepare several thousands of employees in a year. They are giving a reason that NID activities should be under government but we want to say that we are not part of the government but we can give necessary services to government," Nurul Huda said.

The Prime Minister's Office in late May instructed the Cabinet Division to take necessary steps to move NID-related services to the Security Services Division under the home ministry.

KM Nurul Huda and Election Commissioner Mahub Talukdar earlier have expressed concern regarding the matter.

Bangladesh Election Commission Officers Association and Bangladesh Election Commission Secretariat and Field Level Officers-Employees Unity Council also expressed worry over this.

The moving of NID services to the home ministry was contrary to the constitution, eminent citizens said in June.

They said such a move might create scope for misuse of citizens' personal information. And it might also allow policing to harass people and get involved in corruption.



A man stands on the roof of his torn down house after Chattogram district administration evicted people living on the hill slopes ignoring risks of landslides. The photo was taken in Lal Khan Bazar of the port city.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Enforcement still falling short

FROM PAGE 1

densely-populated Dhaka city from a Covid onslaught.

The sources also said the government is not currently considering putting the capital under lockdown.

The authorities plan to check public movement and ensure that no one in those seven districts leave their homes unless faced with emergencies.

Vehicle movement will be stopped completely and no one will be allowed to enter or exit those districts, the sources said.

Experts have, meanwhile, said Dhaka and all other districts in the country should be put under a strict lockdown immediately since the overall positivity rate is now over 15 percent.

Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist, said, "With these high positivity rates, a lockdown is needed in Dhaka city and other parts of the country. It is required to reduce the rush of patients at hospitals and to save lives."

He said the real situation, however, was still not known as there were not enough Covid tests.

Prof Ridwanur warned that without proper and immediate measures the situation may become as bad as the one faced by India recently.

Abu Jamil Faisal, member of the Epidemiology and Public Health Expert Committee of the DGHS, also suggested a countrywide lockdown.

"Without an enormous number of tests and isolating positive patients, the lockdown, however, will not be fruitful. We have been asking to increase tests since the beginning of the pandemic. It is still fewer than what is required," he said.

Talking to The Daily Star, a senior official of the Cabinet Division said the government was not thinking about a lockdown in the capital right now.

"Rather, we are trying to enforce restrictions more strictly in the seven districts surrounding Dhaka. We

have already directed the deputy commissioners of those districts to ensure that the restrictions are followed properly," the official said, wishing not to be named.

"We are observing the situation in Dhaka. If the situation worsens, the government will act accordingly," he said.

In the wake of sharp spikes in Covid cases and deaths, the government on Monday imposed movement restrictions on the seven districts around Dhaka -- Manikganj, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Gazipur, Madaripur, Rajbari and Gopalganj -- to cut the capital off from rest of the country.

The following day, the government suspended all inter-district transports -- road, rail and waterway -- in a bid to stop people from entering and leaving Dhaka.

Talking to this daily, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said, "We have already enforced lockdowns in districts adjacent to Dhaka to keep the capital isolated. Dhaka is under a 'semi lockdown' now."

If the caseload increases sharply in Dhaka, it will be tough to manage the situation, he said.

Similar Covid curbs are currently in place at dozens of districts, upazilas and municipalities across the country.

'RELAXED ENFORCEMENT'

Despite the restrictions, people were seen in Gazipur heading towards the capital throughout yesterday. As buses were parked inside depots, they travelled in rickshaws and auto-rickshaws, reported our correspondent in the district.

Even tailbacks of vehicles were seen at several places on the Dhaka-Gazipur road.

In Munshiganj, hundreds of passengers crossed the Padma river through the Shimulia-Bangla Bazar ferry route.

As per government instruction, operations of launches and speedboats

remained suspended. But some ferries plied to carry goods. People scrambled to board them, reported our correspondent in the district.

Many used cars and CNG-run auto-rickshaws to reach the terminal.

"I've come here all the way from Narayanganj's Chashra. I came in an auto-rickshaw. I need to go to Barishal for an emergency," one Adnan Hossain said at the terminal around noon yesterday.

In Narayanganj, many vendors opened shops on the streets. A large number of rickshaws and auto-rickshaws were seen.

Many walked to their destination after failing to find any transport.

In Cumilla, long tailbacks appeared on Dhaka-Chattogram highway's Daudkandi area. It happened as police barred vehicles from going towards Munshiganj, said Jahurul Islam, officer-in-charge of Daudkandi highway police.

In Kushtia, where a seven-day lockdown has been underway since Monday, people continued to disregard the restrictions. Most people were seen without masks on the streets of Kushtia town.

In Satkhira, a lockdown has been in force for the last 19 days. However, cars, minibuses, easy-bikes and motorcycles operated on the roads in large numbers.

In Tangail, two municipalities passed the second day of a lockdown. Almost all shops, except those selling daily essentials and medicines, were kept shut. Vehicular movement was strictly restricted.

Meanwhile, fresh lockdowns were imposed for seven days yesterday at Benapole municipality and Sharsa upazila of Jashore as well as in Jibonnagar upazila of in Chuadanga.

Besides, the Lalmonirhat district administration yesterday announced a seven-day lockdown from Saturday. A fresh seven-day restriction will begin in Rajshahi City Corporation area tomorrow.

DHAKA-14 BY-POLLS

AL nominee set to be elected unopposed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League nominee Agha Khan Mintu is likely to be elected unopposed in Dhaka-14 by-polls, scheduled for July 28.

Assistant Returning Officer Mohammad Shahjalal said Jatiya Party's Mostakur Rahman, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu)-backed Abu Hanif, and Bangladesh Nationalist Front nominee AYM Kamrul Islam had withdrawn from the race yesterday.

The candidates cited the pandemic as the reason for their withdrawal, said an official.

Shahjalal said the returning officer's office earlier cancelled the candidacy of independent runners Mohammad Moniruzzaman and Ruhul Amin Sarkar.

Moniruzzaman's nomination was cancelled as he submitted signature of four people who were not voters of Dhaka-14 constituency and Ruhul Amin submitted incomplete nomination forms.

According to the Representation of the People Order, 1972, submission of signatures of one percent of the total voters in the constituency concerned is mandatory for an independent candidate.

Moniruzzaman appealed to EC against the returning officer's decision but the EC upheld the decision after a hearing, said Shahjalal.

The last date for withdrawal of candidature is today [June 24].

Dhaka-14 fell vacant after AL MP Aslamul Hoque died on April 4.

Khulna on edge

FROM PAGE 1

Yesterday's positivity rate was 20.27 percent while the total positivity rate stood at 13.53 percent.

Since the first case was detected in the country in March last year, Khulna division saw 896 deaths and 47,878 cases.

What's alarming is, 251 of the deaths and 13,587 the cases were recorded in just the last 23 days. At least 121 died in just the last five days.

"It is not possible to keep the people at home with the limited number of manpower," Mohammad Helal Hossain, deputy commissioner of Khulna, told The Daily Star.

Visiting the 130-bed Covid hospital where Kashem was taken first, this correspondent found that all the beds were occupied with patients still coming from different districts of the division.

There was a separate isolation centre at the KMCH but people were seen going in and out of the centre disregarding the rules.

"Relatives and attendants of patients were seen close to patients. They go outside the hospital and then come back. Two to three people get into the centre for one patient. This is how the virus is transmitting," said a doctor of the hospital wishing not to be named.

Mehedi Newaz, coordinator of the hospital, said, "Peoples' recklessness was spreading the virus. There are asymptomatic cases and they are spreading it silently."

He said the beds were increased from 100 to 130 but on an average, 160 patients were staying at the unit.

Khulna Sadar Hospital, where Kashem eventually found a bed, was declared a Covid dedicated hospital on Sunday with 70 beds.

Rasheda Sultana, the divisional director of health, said the overall Covid-19 situation in the division was still under control and that they were trying their best to provide patients with services.

Unacceptable

FROM PAGE 1

Ruling Awami League lawmaker Shajahan Khan presided over the meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. The minister, who is a member of the standing committee, was also present at the meeting.

According to meeting sources, a committee member raised the issue of arranging the guard of honour ceremony in the presence of UNOs who are female.

The member said women do not usually take part in namaz-e-janaza. Many people ask questions about this. Therefore, while giving the guard of honour to a freedom fighter in places where the UNO is female, the task should be given to a male officer.

Assistant commissioner (land), education officer, agriculture officer or any such officer can do the task.

Different organisations strongly denounced the recommendation, terming it humiliating for women and contradictory to the constitution.

Several MPs, including one from the ruling party, criticised the committee in parliament.

Senate Republicans block sweeping US voting rights measure

AFP, Washington

US Senate Republicans on Tuesday torpedoed a Democratic effort to protect voting rights and expand ballot access for all Americans, a flashpoint issue months after an election marred by Donald Trump's baseless allegations of fraud.

Waving off broad bipartisan public support for election law updates, the opposition party united to block the advancement of a sweeping package which would amount to the most expansive federal election reform in decades.

Democrats brought the "For the People Act" to the floor as a test vote, in reaction to controversial efforts by Republicans to enact strict new voting laws in dozens of states.

Critics have widely savaged those measures, which include restricting mail-in ballots, criminalizing the delivery of water to people waiting to vote, and limiting early Sunday voting hours as a way to deny Black churches' "souls to the polls" events.

The Democrats' historic bill, S1, is aimed at ensuring Americans can vote by mail, plus have full access to early voting and use of ballot drop boxes.

A version of the bill, which also reforms campaign finance laws and attempts to thwart gerrymandering, or the partisan redrawing of district lines, passed the House of Representatives in March.

But the text failed on a strictly party line 50-50 vote in the Senate, where support from 60 senators was needed in order to even begin debating the measure.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer delivered a scathing rebuke

to Republicans as he sought to claim a moral victory.

While all Democrats voted to protect voting rights, "voter suppression has become part of the official platform of the Republican Party," he said.

Vowing that the fight was "far from over," President Joe Biden called the Republicans' move "suppression of a bill to end voter suppression," while also labeling it "another attack on voting rights that is sadly not unprecedented."

The blocking of S1 ensures the issue remains a political firestorm into the 2022 midterm elections and beyond.

There was worry that Democratic moderates, led by Senator Joe Manchin, would not support it.

But Manchin aligned with his party after leadership agreed to introduce a "commonsense compromise" that he proposed.

"I remain committed to finding a bipartisan pathway forward because the future of our democracy is worth it," Manchin said in a statement.

Manchin's compromise maintains most of the Democratic bill's provisions, but allows a key concession -- voter identification requirements -- in a bid to win over Republicans.

Democrats have accused Republicans of caving to Trump's pressure about mail-in voting and other expansive voting rules, and targeting the ways that younger, poorer, non-white and typically Democratic voters access the ballot.

The White House had acknowledged the vote would fail, but nevertheless issued a statement of support, as it highlighted how Americans' right to vote "is under assault" thanks to moves by Republican state legislatures.

Green light for human trial

FROM PAGE 1

BMRC Director Prof Ruhul Amin yesterday asked icddr,b to inform the council when and where the trial would begin so that the latter could monitor.

The council has yet to announce its decision about two other vaccine candidates awaiting approval.

The Chinese Academy and International Center for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) signed an agreement in August 2020 on holding clinical trials.

The academy paid \$10,48,846 to icddr,b for carrying out the trials and appointed One Pharma as its local agent.

Bangladesh has so far inoculated less than three percent of its population against the coronavirus. The country's vaccination campaign, which started on February 7, stumbled due to a lack of vaccine supply from the Serum Institute of India.

"The clinical trial of Vero Cell will begin in two weeks," KSM Mostafizur Rahman, managing director of One Pharma, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Prof ABM Farooque, former dean of pharmacy at Dhaka University, said the country would benefit from the trials.

He said lifestyle, climate, habit and people's behavior tend to be different from one country to the next. "If

clinical trials are held in Bangladesh, we will be able to assess how the vaccine works on our population. We will be able to know its efficacy, how well it works, and what are its adverse effects."

Farooque added that the trial should follow the guidelines set by WHO. "Any deviation would not be acceptable."

Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director of disease control at the health directorate, said, "If the trial is successful, the availability of the vaccine will be ensured."

"The government should have given the permission much earlier. But it's better late than never. It will develop expertise in producing vaccines, because the local experts will be engaged in the trial process," he said.

Vero Cell is an inactivated vaccine like those of polio and influenza. The third phase clinical trials of the vaccine took place in Malaysia in January this year.

Meanwhile, Bharat Biotech of India and Bangladesh's Globe Biotech last year sought permission for holding human trials.

Ruhul Amin said Globe Biotech might get the approval once it meets certain conditions set by the BMRC.

"We've yet to decide on Bharat Biotech's application," he said.

Taking effective steps to ensure vaccine for all

FROM PAGE 1

The PM said, "We're taking effective measures so that everyone gets vaccines. We'll do that."

She said the government started contacting every country where vaccine development was at the research level. "Many countries in the world could not go for vaccination yet, but Bangladesh started the inoculation drive after collecting vaccines."

The AL chief said India banned vaccine export following the massive transmission of novel coronavirus there. Although Bangladesh fell in trouble to some extent due to the export ban, it later started procuring vaccines from other sources, she added.

"I feel stunned when I see those who were given two doses of vaccines on a priority basis now criticise us."

Hasina asked the critics to try to understand the global situation over the vaccine issue. "Bangladesh earlier procured vaccine doses for \$4 each... now it's \$15. The price will go up further

in the days to come."

The PM said the government has worked out plans so that vaccines can be produced locally by setting up a vaccine institute here to conduct research in this regard. "We'll take the necessary measures to develop vaccines in the future by setting up this institute."

Noting that the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic is highly transmitted throughout the country and many places across the world, the premier urged the people to follow the lockdown and health safety rules even after getting vaccinated.

"You all will have to follow the lockdown restrictions that we have enforced. All will have to stay home. If we stay home, wear face masks, wash hands regularly and remain alert, then we can overcome this situation."

BOOK LAUNCH

In the beginning of the discussion, Hasina unveiled the cover of a memorial book titled "Sheikh Hasinar Netritter Char Dashak: Sangrami Neta Theke Kaljoyee Rastronayok" (Four Decades

Most don't have plan for relief

FROM PAGE 1

Between 41-45 percent of Gazipur's population existed below the poverty line, according to SANEM, but the district has not taken any initiatives for relief distribution during the ongoing lockdown.

"We have not received any new instructions to distribute relief. If we get the instructions, we will comply. A certain income category of people get relief and we have lists from previous relief distribution activities, which we will update if we get the instructions," said Gazipur's additional district commissioner Mamun Sardar.

Similarly, Rahima Khatun, the district commissioner of Madaripur, said the district does not have a specific distribution plan but that anyone can get relief by calling the 333 hotline.

About a third of Madaripur existed below the poverty line last year, according to SANEM.

Similarly, SANEM's poverty map said that 51-55 percent of the population of Munshiganj existed below the poverty line.

Abdul Kuddus Bulbul, the district relief and rehabilitation officer, said

there have been no special allocation for the lockdown.

The old allocations are still being distributed.

A few weeks ago, the district got funds for helping 34,000 in its 68 unions and the local chairpersons will soon begin distribution, Bulbul said, adding that he could not however say when that will be.

Munshiganj has no list of poor people, while Rajbari is adopting a similar strategy.

Mahabubur Rahman Sheikh, the additional district commissioner-general of Rajbari, said last week they gave all the unions Tk 1 lakh each.

"This is coming every two or three months. We do not have a cohesive list of poor people but we are trying to identify the poor through union committees," Sheikh said.

Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, criticised the method of distributing an equal lump sum in relief for all unions.

The think-tank had surveyed 2,600 households across the nation and found that only a fourth of the poorest quartile group had received relief.

"They have a certain amount of resource and they distribute it equally. This is not need-based."

There is a data deficit since the districts do not know who the poor are and where they live, Rahman said, adding that the only exception is Gopalganj.

Gopalganj has a poverty rate of 46-50 percent, according to SANEM.

Iliasur Rahman, the ADC general of Gopalganj, said Gopalganj is the only district to make a list of all the families.

"We even know their income. This list was prepared in March, and it is being continuously updated. We target the ultra-poor by default. Otherwise, if someone knocks us for relief, we will give it to them. They can contact the local representative."

He said they have enough relief; its 67 unions are receiving Tk 67 lakh worth of relief.

"Our relief activities are ongoing since Gopalganj has had restrictions for a week by now."

(Our Manikganj, Munshiganj, Gazipur and Narayanganj correspondents contributed to this report)