

BANGLADESH UPDATE

6,058
New cases in 24hrs

8,72,935
Total cases

13,868
Deaths

7,98,783
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

9,909,746
Deaths

180,497,828
Total cases

BOAT CAPSIZE IN CARIBBEAN SEA

5 Bangladeshis rescued

Five more still missing

EZAZ MAHMUD

Five Bangladeshi migrants were rescued after a boat sank in the Caribbean Sea near Puerto Escondido of Colombia.

Five others have been missing since the incident, several Bangladeshis in Colombia told The Daily Star yesterday.

They said the boat carrying 18 people -- 10 Bangladeshis and eight Nepalese -- started from Colombia's Necoci and was heading towards Capurgana through the Gulf of Urabá, the southern Caribbean coast.

The boat sank after being hit by a storm. Later, on June 22 night, a group of fishermen and coastguard members rescued four Bangladeshis near Puerto Escondido.

The next day, another Bangladeshi managed to swim to the shore in the same area, said the Bangladeshi migrants in Colombia.

The coastguard was continuing the rescue operation to trace the missing victims, local media reported.

Of the five rescued, the identities of three were confirmed. They are Sahab Uddin and Omar Faruk of Amishapara of Noakhali's Sonaimuri upazila and Saidur Rahman of Sylhet.

The missing Bangladeshis are Soyeb, Badrul and Rony of Sylhet, Faysal Ahmed of Kashimpur of Noakhali's Begumganj upazila and Sheikh Didar of Amishapara.

The rescued Bangladeshis were in the custody of the Colombian immigration authorities. They are currently in San Jeronimo de Monteria Hospital.

Their condition is stated to be critical as they were in extreme heat and suffered from malnutrition, the local authorities said, adding that one of them was in a very critical state.

"They were trapped for several hours at the place where they were found. They all have signs of dehydration and one of them is in a critical condition," said the Puerto Escondido mayor.

"It was confirmed by an interpreter that these migrants were of Asian descent, more precisely Bangladeshis, who had left Necoci for Panama," said Rocco Manuel Vargas, a representative of the municipality of Puerto Escondido.

Captain Luz Perela Gonzalvez Silva, commander of the Coast Guard station, told the local media that the rescued migrants said their boat had sunk after a crash. However, the matter has not yet been confirmed because their statements about what happened was not very clear.

"The rescued migrants did not have passports or any documents, which made it difficult to learn their full identities," he said.

Nur Islam, elder brother of Sheikh Didar, one of the missing Bangladeshis, told The Daily Star that his brother had left the country a year ago. For a long time, he worked in Suriname, a small country on the Atlantic coast. Didar had arrived in Colombia via Brazil a few days ago. The family last talked with him on Sunday when they came to know that Didar would leave for Panama the next day.

The final destination of this migration route in the Urabá Antioquia region is the United States through the Darien jungle in Panama.

Every year, several thousand migrants, including Bangladeshis, enter the United States through this route.

Some 17,668 people entered the United States through this route in 2019 and some 3,887 in 2020, according to statistics of United Nations (UN).

Ezaz Mahmud is a freelance journalist.



SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, the new chief of army staff, being adorned with the general rank badge by the chief of naval staff and the chief of air staff, in presence of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

SM Shafiuddin takes charge as army chief

BSS, Dhaka

General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed took the charge as the newly appointed Chief of Army Staff yesterday, said an ISPR press release.

Earlier in the morning, Shafiuddin was adorned with the new rank badge of General in the presence of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

Chief of Naval Staff Admiral M Shaheen Iqbal and Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal Shaikh Abdul Hannan adorned the army chief with the rank badge of General.

PM's Assistant Press Secretary MM Emrul Kayas confirmed the BSS of the matter.

After the ceremony, he said the premier congratulated the new army chief by presenting a bouquet and wished his success.

The army chief also greeted the PM by presenting a bouquet and sought her blessing.

PM's Security Affairs Adviser Major General (ret'd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division Lieutenant General Waker-Uz-Zaman, PM's Office Secretary Md Tofazzel Hossain Miah, Director General of Special Security Force Major General Md Majibur Rahman and PM's Military Secretary Major General Naquib Ahmed Chowdhury, among others, were present.

General Shafiuddin, who replaced former army chief General Aziz Ahmed, has been appointed to this position for the next three years.

EU must seek 'direct contact' with Putin: Merkel

AFP, Berlin

The European Union should seek direct talks with President Vladimir Putin even as it stands together against "provocations" from Russia, said Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday.

"In my opinion, we as the European Union must also seek direct contact with Russia and the Russian president," she told parliament.

"It is not enough for the American president to talk to the Russian president," she said, stressing that the European Union too "must also create different formats for talks".

Putin and US President Joe Biden held face-to-face talks last week, in a meeting that both said could lead to a more predictable, albeit still tense, relationship.

34pc families

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with 4.7 members, which is higher than the pre-pandemic national average of 4.06 [according to 2016 data], according to the study findings.

The households tried to cope with these shocks by eating through their savings and taking loans, and on average families experienced a 62 percent decrease in the average monthly savings and a 31 percent increase in debt.

"The international returnee migrants aged 35 and above are 44 percent -- qualitative data suggest they have lesser chance to go back due to age related risk aversion and other factors," said the study.

KAM Morshed, senior director of Brac, presented the research findings. The study also found that there was a higher incidence of child marriage during the pandemic.

Of the marriages that occurred during the survey period, more than three-fourths of the brides were below 18 years and 61 percent were below 16 years at the time of their marriage.

Shoko Ishikawa, country representative, UN Women Bangladesh, said Bangladesh is one of those countries where schools remain closed for over one and a half years although digital learning opportunities for children are quite inadequate particularly in the rural areas.

"Long period of shutdown of schools has implications on child marriage at an increasing rate and economic challenge is forcing families to get their girl children married off. We need to make sure that social protection measures and social safety nets are reaching the families so that they do not need to resort to such measures," added Ishikawa.

Columbia University Professor Daniel Naujoks said, "Our economic and social systems are strained and often broken down being exposed to many vulnerabilities. To address these challenges, we need political momentum to really revolutionise the system and find strong large-scale reforms."

Leah Zamore, humanitarian crises programme lead at the Center on International Cooperation of New York University, moderated the dialogue.

'Total shutdown' anytime

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enforcement of complete shutdown for 14 days across the country to save lives," said the press release signed by Prof Mohammad Sahidullah, chief of the NTAC.

Asked what they meant by shutdown, Prof Sahidullah said, "It means stay home. Everything will be closed except for emergency services."

He said the committee emphasised on staying at home without using the word "lockdown" as the word had lost the significance required to help curb transmission.

"We may have some difficulties for two weeks, but it will save lives and livelihoods," Prof Sahidullah.

State Minister for Public Administrations Farhad Hossain told the media yesterday that he thought the recommendations made by the experts were logical and that the government was prepared to implement it. He also claimed that an announcement could be made any time.

Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director at the DGHS, said had the government enforced strict lockdown in the border districts before it spread across the country, the situation could have been

different.

"Delta variant has now spread across the country and that's why the infection rate is high. If we fail to take strict action now then the coming days will be hard," he said.

Between June 1 and yesterday, 948 people died from Covid in seven divisions and during the same time 260 people died in Dhaka division, according to the data of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

On an average, 50 people died of Covid-19 every day so far this month, the second highest average after 80 deaths a day in April.

Rajshahi and Khulna divisions, which have long borders with India, are the hardest hit now. Khulna recorded 295 deaths and Rajshahi 245 this month.

In the previous 14 months since the first cases of Covid were reported, the death toll in Rajshahi was 691 and in Khulna 792.

Yesterday, Chuadanga, a district in Khulna division with a border with India, reported a 100 percent positivity rate as all 41 people tested turned out positive for Covid-19.

The World Health Organization in its weekly situation report has

highlighted the deteriorating Covid-19 situation in all districts under Khulna division.

The report, released on Tuesday, said the districts in the division were in the very high risk zone. It also put 40 districts of the country in the same zone.

An area with an infection rate of 30 percent or above is considered as a very high risk zone.

According to the WHO, six out of eight districts in Rajshahi division were in a very high risk zone, and the remaining two were in a high risk zone.

Six districts in Chattogram were in a very high risk zone, three in high risk, and one district in medium risk.

Two other districts, including Dhaka, were in a high risk zone.

Experts blamed the Delta variant and people's nonchalance towards health safety guidelines for the surge.

Since late last month, the Delta variant gradually spread across the country, they said.

As of yesterday, a total of 8,72,935 people tested positive for coronavirus and 13,868 died with Covid-19, according to DGHS.

'So much air but not a bit for him'

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experiencing breathing problems, doctors advised ventilator support at the intensive care unit (ICU).

But there were at least 75 other patients ahead of him in line for a bed at the 20-bed ICU, which was full of critical patients.

On the night of June 22, when Aman's condition deteriorated critically, he was shifted to a recently vacated ICU bed.

Aman could never regain the desired oxygen saturation level and he breathed his last at 11:00am the following day.

"He spent three sleepless days and nights till his death, trying to gasp air at every moment," Papi narrated in a tear-choked voice.

"He was telling us repeatedly that he would feel good if only he was shifted to the ICU. But getting an ICU bed was nearly impossible at that time," she said.

Aman's death, after waiting for days for an ICU bed even as his oxygen levels plummeted, is not an isolated case at the RMCH.

Hosne Ara, 61, a Covid-19 patient, was waiting for an ICU bed with her oxygen saturation level at 70 percent while Muktara Begum, 50, with 60 percent and Sohrabi Ali, 60, with 65 percent.

Both of them died.

Hospital staffers said the oxygen saturation level of these patients could not be increased even after providing them with oxygen using high flow nasal cannulas at a rate of 60 litres per minute.

Rajshahi division has a total 100 nasal cannulas, 65 of them at RMCH.

RMCH Director Brig Gen Shamim Yazdani said doctors usually prescribe ICU beds for patients when their oxygen saturation level dips below 86 percent, but it has become impossible for ICU managers to cope with patients with saturation levels below 70 percent.

"Our main focus now is to provide oxygen to those who can survive with the support. We have to lose hope for others," he said.

Although the hospital authorities have been raising the number of beds and oxygen supply capacity almost daily for its Covid-19 unit, they are unable to increase the capacity of its ICU.

"We can't increase the ICU capacity easily as that would require physically expanding the facility and allocation of ventilators," RMCH Director Yazdani told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Even if we are given ventilators and beds, we would need more than a few months to develop the infrastructure," he said.

The 10-bed ICU was turned into a 20-bed one after the pandemic began last year.

As the number of patients spiked in June, the full 20-bed ICU unit was dedicated for treating Covid patients.

"The demand for ICU beds doubled during June," the hospital director said.

In early June, the number of patients waiting for an ICU bed was around 30 and the number is currently around 70, he said.

"Even the BSMMU has no more than a 20-bed ICU unit," he said.

They had proposed a separate 20-bed ICU for a separate Covid-dedicated hospital in Rajshahi, he said.

The new hospital is going to be housed in the two-storey building of Rajshahi Sadar Hospital, which had housed the RMCH's dental unit for the last 20 years.

Once the proposal is approved, the hospital with a central oxygen supply would take at least two months to become ready for service, he said.

More than 50 new patients are admitted every day and the 357-bed Covid unit was treating 404 patients yesterday, according to RMCH data.

Health professionals say the situation has worsened as the community transmission increased, while a large number of households in various parts of Rajshahi city are reporting Covid-19 cases.

Authorities of Rajshahi City Corporation and Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, who offer free supply of oxygen cylinders, told The Daily Star that they were receiving calls from almost every area of the city.

The month of June has so far seen a record number of deaths at the RMCH's Covid unit, with at least 273 people -- 141 of them Covid-19 positive -- having died in the first 24 days of the month.

The previous monthly deaths' record was 124 in May.

The hospital authorities have installed a second oxygen vaporiser at its oxygen plant on Wednesday to increase oxygen pressure in its 11 Covid-19 wards.

In addition to its central oxygen supply, the hospital is supporting the patients with 183 oxygen concentrators and 725 oxygen cylinders.

The authorities is likely to install

another liquid oxygen tank at its plant soon as it plans to further extend the Covid wards.

RMCH provides treatment to patients from all eight districts of Rajshahi division and many districts of Khulna division.

Yesterday, out of a total 404 patients at the hospital, 272 were from Rajshahi, 59 from Chapainawabganj, 32 from Naogaon, 26 from Natore, 10 from Pabna, three from Kustia, and one each from Chuadanga and Dhaka.

According to Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) data, in all of Rajshahi division only two districts, Rajshahi and Bogura, have ICU beds -- 20 at the RMCH and 26 in three hospitals in Bogura.

On Thursday, all 20 ICU beds of RMCH were occupied.

Of the 26 ICU beds in Bogura, six out of eight beds at each of Mohammad Ali District Hospital and Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital were occupied, and one out of 10 beds was occupied at the TMS Medical College and Rafatullah Community Hospital.

Dr Habibul Ahsan Takuder, director of Rajshahi divisional DGHS, said most patients needing treatment in ICUs were delaying going to hospitals and so were appearing with 40 percent of their lungs infected.

"Most of these patients fail to regain an expected level of oxygen saturation," he said. "As the number of patients surged, we are focusing only on those who can survive."

"ICU facilities cannot be increased overnight; managing its manpower, logistics and infrastructure requires time," he said, adding that the DGHS has purchased some ICU equipment and those would be supplied to hospitals in Rajshahi division soon.

He said Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital has prepared the infrastructure for a new 10-bed ICU unit, but other hospitals are not yet ready.

He also said the facilities for RT-PCR tests is increasing as the DGHS has allocated five more RT-PCR laboratories in the division.

Two of the laboratories, one each at Rajshahi Medical College and Rajshahi Tuberculosis Hospital, are likely to start operation from the first week of July.

Three medical college hospitals in Bogura, Pabna and Naogaon are also going to have new RT-PCR laboratories soon, he said.

Asean nations should tighten screws on Myanmar military

Experts at ANN webinar suggest Asean engage with National Unity Government to ease crisis

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Asean members, collectively or otherwise, should tighten the screws on Myanmar's military by engaging with the National Unity Government (NUG) before geopolitical manoeuvres by superpowers further complicate the crisis, experts said.

The recommendation comes at a time when Myanmar is going facing a crisis since the February 1 coup.

Myanmar has since then seen almost 900 people killed, including 70 children, while 6,200 civilians were detained as political prisoners.

Many fear a civil war brewing as the People's Defense Force, the armed wing of the NUG -- a shadow government -- is gaining strength in Myanmar. The Myanmar junta, meanwhile, is also on the hard line.

The UN General Assembly last Friday adopted a resolution condemning the military coup, calling for preventing the flow of arms into Myanmar and returning democracy in the country.

Of the 156 member states, 119, or 76 per cent, voted in favour of the resolution; 36 abstained and one voted against.

Of the Asean members, six voted in favour, while Brunei, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos abstained.

Asean Chair Brunei failed to convince the junta to implement the five-point consensus approved by Asean leaders back in April to end the violence.

"Last Friday was important for many reasons. It made clear who is who," said Laetitia van den Assum, former member of the Kofi Annan Commission on Rakhine, while addressing a webinar titled "Myanmar: Hope fades, fear mounts" organised on Wednesday by the Asia News Network (ANN), an alliance of 23 media houses of Asia.

The webinar was moderated by ANN Executive Editor Pana Janviraj.

Dr Marty Natalegawa, former Indonesian foreign minister, said nothing would make the State Administration Council (SAC), set up by the junta to run Myanmar, "more disturbed and it would serve as a greater wake-up call for the

Asean to publicly reach out to the NUG".

He voiced support for the NUG's inclusive approach towards civil societies and ethnic groups, and its ambitious attempt at state and peace building, while being in hiding and on the run.

"It is a good ground for the NUG to build on. The Asean can go about engaging them and hearing their opinions, and helping them make it work."

However, he said a division within Asean is extremely damaging because it raises questions about the whole Asean project and its reliability and commitment. This will only benefit the Tatmadaw, and they should not be allowed to reap the benefit from Asean's inaction.

Marty added that the longer Asean delays, global geopolitical manoeuvring involving the US, Russia, China, France and others would be replicated in the region.

"We will become part and parcel of geopolitics that we can't control."

Tan Sri Syed Hamid Albar, former Malaysian foreign and defence minister, said the Asean must force itself to play an effective role as agreed at the leaders' meeting in Jakarta. It must not wait for the approval of the Tatmadaw.

"When I looked at the NUG, I was excited -- more inclusive, more open, more willing to discuss..." he said referring to NUG's announcement of equal rights for all, including the Rohingyas, in the constitution.

Kobsak Chutikul, former Thai ambassador, described the Asean as "fractured and disunited", and said they "would not be able to deliver changes or reverse the situation in Myanmar".

Given the humanitarian urgency, he suggested other channels, including the appointment of a non-Asean national as an envoy to rally other countries to work in an alliance, to put pressure on the Tatmadaw.

Moe Thuzar, a Myanmar citizen and researcher at ISEAS Singapore, said the people of Myanmar are more determined than ever before to take matters into their own hands with a civil disobedience movement.

Cops reveal identity

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public domain as it is an offence, said experts.

Salma Ali, human rights activist and the president of Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers Association (BNWLA), said, rape victims' identities cannot be disclosed in any way as it is a punishable offence.

She said, "Police must clearly know this as a law enforcement agency."

"It is also illegal to disclose the identity of the accused, except for incidents where police caught them red-handed."

She further said, "I strongly condemn such irresponsible attitude of the police, and I want to send a legal notice in this regard."

Prof Rasheda Akhtar of Jahangirnagar University's Department of Anthropology said police cannot disclose rape victims' identities on a Facebook post.

Prof Rasheda, who is also the head of the Anti-Sexual Harassment Cell at JU,

also said, "It is an offence. If the police do it, they have violated the law."

According to the Facebook post, one Tarek Rahman, 21, Rabbi, 20, and Omir Hassan, 22, were arrested on Wednesday night after the mother of the victim filed a case with Savar Model Police Station in this regard.

According to the case statement, the victim has been working at a garment factory in Savar for the last three months. Tarek and Rabbi are her coworkers.

On June 22, Tarek and Rabbi forcefully took the victim to Tarek's rented room while she was returning from work. Tarek, Rabbi and Omir raped her there and before letting her go, threatened to kill her if she told anyone about the incident.

Later, the victim told her family about the incident after which the mother filed the case.

The victim was sent to the One-Stop Crisis Centre of Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment and medical examination, the OC said.