

BANGLADESH UPDATE



5,869
New cases in 24hrs



8,78,804
Total cases



13,976
Deaths



7,79,559
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE



3,918,881
Deaths



180,898,134
Total cases

IMPROVING EDUCATION

WB approves \$191m credit to Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The World Bank's board of executive directors has approved a \$191 million credit to Bangladesh and a \$18 million grant to Afghanistan to help the countries strengthen their higher education sector and respond better to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Higher Education Acceleration Transformation Project -- the first World Bank-supported regional education project in South Asia -- will support regional collaboration in the higher education sector, including student mobility through equivalence programmes, credit transfer schemes, and university twinning arrangements within the region, WB said in a press release yesterday.

It will also help more women access quality higher education, which will result in increased female labour force participation.

The project will support pandemic and emergency response and build systemic resilience in the higher education sector with a specific focus on digitisation.

"For our collective future, higher education is a necessity, not a choice. As Bangladesh aspires to achieve upper middle-income status, the country needs to invest in its youth to create a skilled and globally competitive workforce," said Mercy Tembon, World Bank country director for Bangladesh and Bhutan.

"This financing will help Bangladesh strengthen the quality and relevance of tertiary education particularly for women, as well as ensure business continuity during the Covid-19 pandemic," added Tembon.

It will establish a South Asian Higher Education Portal, hosted in Bangladesh, to facilitate the "virtual mobility" of students, by allowing students from the registered universities to take courses for credit outside their home country.

To enable more women to access quality higher education, get better jobs, and become leaders, the project will build a network of women's universities and institutions, which will be initially anchored on the Asian University of Women in Chattogram, Bangladesh.

"The project will help meet the increasing demand for quality higher education in South Asia. Further, it will also help South Asian countries benefit from regional cooperation in higher education and strengthen research and innovations capacities in the universities," said Mokhlesur Rahman, WB task team leader of the project.

The credit is from the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA), and has a 30-year term, including a five-year grace period. Bangladesh currently has the largest ongoing IDA programme totaling over \$14 billion.

Democrats launch committee to probe US Capitol riot

AFP, Washington

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi formally announced Thursday that lawmakers will create a select committee to investigate the deadly US Capitol riot, weeks after Senate Republicans blocked formation of a bipartisan, 9/11-style commission.

"This morning, with great solemnity and sadness, I am announcing that the House will be establishing a select committee on the January 6 insurrection," Pelosi, the top Democrat in Congress, told reporters.

She described the attack on the citadel of American democracy by supporters of then-president Donald Trump as a "day of darkness" for the nation that requires a thorough investigation.

"It is imperative that we establish the truth of that day, and ensure that an attack of that kind does not happen" in the future, Pelosi said.

She also leveled criticism at the "cowardly" Republicans whom she said obliged when Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell asked them to vote against creation of the broader, bipartisan commission a month ago.

Six Republicans broke ranks and voted with Democrats to launch the

commission, but it was four short of the number needed to advance the bill.

In a display of loyalty to Trump -- and likely concerned about how the findings of an investigation might impact the 2022 midterm elections -- the other Republicans voted against launching the probe.

Now, rather than a thoroughly bipartisan panel, Pelosi will retain full control of the select committee, and will name its leader.

Few details have been formally released but the committee is expected to have subpoena power.

Republicans have bristled at the prospect of House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, top aides to Trump and even Trump himself being compelled to testify about any role they may have played in the run up to the riot.

Pelosi waved off concern that the select committee's findings might be dismissed by the American public because it is not a fully bipartisan commission.

The committee will be headed by a Democrat but the speaker said she hopes the House's top Republican will appoint "responsible people" to it.

Food official assaulted

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residence but was barred by Rasel. He was forced to stay there till evening, he said.

While leaving the place in the evening, Rokon asked the victim to go to Lalpur with him, according to the victim.

On their way, the lawmaker's men demanded Tk 20 lakh and said the money would be required if the government official wanted to continue his career in the area, the victim alleged.

"As I expressed my inability to give

them the money, they started beating me up," he said.

Contacted, Rabindra Lal Chakma, district controller of the food department in Natore, said Rafiqul did not inform his superiors about the incident.

"When a subordinate officer falls in any trouble, s/he should inform the superior authority," he said.

Asked about the allegation, MP Shahidul Islam Bakul said, "It is propaganda against me. Some of my political enemies are playing this to tarnish my image."

2.5m doses arrive

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On March 2 this year, Covax informed the government that it would provide Bangladesh with 1.09 crore doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine by May. But it didn't deliver those.

Meanwhile, the Finance Division has disbursed funds for purchasing the first batch of Chinese Covid vaccines, said officials.

The Division allocated the funds following the Health Services Division's proposal for buying the vaccines from the Beijing Institute of Biological Products Company Ltd.

"We will get the first batch of Sinopharm vaccine in the first week of next month," the health minister said.

Asked about the price and quantity of the jabs, Zahid declined to answer.

The government said it would buy 1.5 crore Sinopharm vaccine shots and those would arrive in three instalments.

Bangladesh has so far inoculated less than three percent of its population. Its vaccination campaign, which started on February 7, stumbled

due to suspension of vaccine supply from the Serum Institute of India.

Following a surge in both deaths and infections in India, Serum failed to ship the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine shots that Bangladesh purchased from it.

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.

In the meantime, the country received 3.3 million AstraZeneca vaccine doses as gift from India.

Bangladesh suspended administering the first dose of Covid vaccine on April 26 due to the shortage of jabs. The vaccine registration process was also halted on May 5.

The government resumed administering the first dose on June 19 on a limited scale with around 11 lakh doses of Sinopharm vaccine it received as gift from China.



Leaning against her luggage, Salma Begum, 85, takes a nap in front of the ticket counter of Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday. Unaware of the suspension of train communications, she went to the station from the city's Bashabo area to catch a train for Sylhet.

PHOTO: STAR

Country logs

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between 11 and 20; two were within 21-30; seven between 31 and 40; 15 between 41 and 50; 25 between 51 and 60 and 58 were above 60 years old, added the release.

Khulna division recorded the highest 27 deaths, Dhaka 25, Chattogram 23, Rajshahi 16, Rangpur 10, Mymensingh four and Sylhet three.

During this period, 2,776 Covid patients recovered, bringing the total recoveries to 797,559.

DGHS statistics showed 90.76 percent of infected people recovered, while the mortality rate remained at 1.59 percent.

Suspect killed

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When the criminals fled, the police team found a body and locals confirmed that the deceased was Shamim.

Police also claimed to have recovered a pistol, one bullet, a magazine and a stolen mobile phone from the scene.

The police official said the mobile phone was stolen from the house of one of the neighbours of the girl, Sumaiya, 10, on the day of her rape and murder.

"As we found the stolen mobile phone in Shamim's possession, we are considering that he [Shamim] might have been linked with the girl's rape and murder," Iftekhaer said.

Police collected DNA samples from the deceased and sent those to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital for forensic tests, he said.

Sumaiya's body was found in a pile of straw on the roof of a neighbour house on Sunday morning.

Police investigation later revealed that she was raped and strangled sometime in the early hours of that day.

Her father Anwar Hossain, a mason, filed a case with Godagari Model Police Station against unnamed criminals in this connection.

Quoting locals, police said Shamim was involved in mobile theft for long and that he had recently injured a girl when he failed to rape her in the same village.

The incident was settled through arbitration, police said.

India's IT minister slams Twitter for denying access to account

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's technology minister yesterday slammed Twitter for denying access to his account for almost an hour amid growing tensions between the US company and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration over compliance with new IT rules.

Ravi Shankar Prasad said in a thread on Koo, a home-grown rival to Twitter, that the company had denied access on the grounds he had violated the U.S. Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), subsequently restoring access.

Prasad said Twitter had violated India's new IT rules, which became effective in May and mandate that an intermediary or a host of user content must inform a user of the grounds for its action.

The rules also say that a user must be "provided with an adequate and reasonable opportunity to dispute the action" taken by an intermediary.

It was not immediately clear which of Prasad's posts violated the DMCA.

Twitter did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The dispute over the minister's account comes as India's federal government and Twitter are wrangling over non-compliance with the new IT rules.

In a separate case, police summoned Twitter's India head Manish Maheshwari earlier this month for failing to stop the spread of a video that allegedly incited religious discord. On Thursday, a court gave Maheshwari relief in that case.

Lockdown

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The positivity rate also jumped to 21.22 percent yesterday, the highest in the last 69 days. On April 17, the infection rate was 21.46 percent, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The country is already going through "restrictions on public and vehicular movement", which were announced on June 16 and are to continue till July 15.

Besides, restrictions on public and vehicular movement were imposed in seven districts around Dhaka on June 21 by the Cabinet Division to guard the capital against the virus.

According to a government notification, all tourist spots, resorts, community and entertainment centres must remain closed, and all types of public gatherings are banned.

SITUATION OUTSIDE DHAKA
Experts said the second wave of the pandemic continued in the country with the spillover of the Delta variant of the virus from India into the bordering districts.

As Bangladesh is set to be put under a complete lockdown, hospitals in the bordering districts totter due to a crisis of beds and other supports as cases continue to surge.

In Khulna, the three Covid-19-dedicated hospitals were overflowing with patients. At least seven people died and 176 cases were reported there yesterday.

Khulna division, which consists of 10 districts, has so far been the worst victim of the recent surge in cases. Nine

hundred and sixteen people have so far died in the division. Of them, 164 passed away in the last one week alone, according to the DGHS.

In Satkhira, at least eight people died either with Covid-19 or its symptoms in 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, while hospitals keep grappling with patients.

"The pressure of Covid-19 patients is so high that we have to keep patients on the hospital floor amid a shortage of beds," said Dr Quadrat-E-Khuda, superintendent of Satkhira Medical College Hospital.

"Currently, 180 such patients are admitted in this hospital. Of them, 142 tested positive. The rest were showing Covid-19-like symptoms," said Taposh Kumar Sarker, resident medical officer of the hospital.

In Kushtia, the authorities yesterday declared the 250-bed general hospital a Covid-19 dedicated facility for the time being as the number of patients increased sharply.

"Due to a shortage of beds in the hospital, a large number of Covid-19 patients are now staying in isolation at home. If they do not follow the quarantine rule, the situation will worsen further," said Abdul Momen, superintendent of the hospital.

In Patuakhali, the infection rate was 42.85 percent on Thursday, said Dr Jahangir Alam, civil surgeon of the district.

[Our correspondents in those districts contributed to this report]

Govt scraps 10 coal

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Payra has been contributing 600MW to the national grid every day for the last few months, the state minister said.

Before Payra, a 525MW plant in Barapukuria, Dinajpur, was the country's only coal-fired plant. The Matarbari plant is set to start producing electricity in 2023.

Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon welcomed the scrapping of the 10 coal-fired power plant projects, saying that it is a big step towards achieving the goal of sustainable development.

"We demand that the government make a road map to scrap all coal-fired power plants in phases," said the

statement signed by Sultana Kamal and Sharif Jamil, president and secretary of Bapa.

The statement said the LNG also has a negative impact on the environment and urged the government to move towards renewable energy.

However, Nasrul said the coal-fired power plants are being constructed using "ultra-super critical technology. These power plants will have a less impact on the environment than a brick kiln."

He said there is a power plant in the city of Yokohama in Japan.

"Are people dying there?" the minister asked.

264 Bangladeshis

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After being rescued, the Bangladeshi migrants were put in quarantine in Tunisia, Kabir told this newspaper over the phone.

He said Bangladesh does not have a mission in Tunisia, but the mission in Libya provides consular services there.

The embassy official said they would be able to meet the rescued Bangladeshis once their quarantine, which may take up to a week, ends.

The boat carrying the migrants might have started its journey off the Libyan coast on Wednesday, Kabir added.

With the latest incident, at least 485 Bangladeshi migrants heading for Europe were rescued off the Tunisian coast in the last 90 days, said sources at the Bangladesh embassy.

Some 221 Bangladeshis were rescued in the Mediterranean in last three or four incidents between May 18 and June 24, said the labour welfare counsellor.

Voicing concern over the recent incidents of rescuing Bangladeshis in the Mediterranean, Shakirul Islam, chairperson of Ovbashi Karmi Unnayan Programme, said when the pathway to regular labour migration is closed or shrunken, many resort to irregular ways of entering a country.

Also, human trafficking groups become active and take advantage of the situation.

Shakirul said as labour migration from Bangladesh largely remained stalled since the pandemic hit the country last year, chances were there that such incidents would occur.

"I think the latest incident is such an example," he said, adding that migrant rights groups have been voicing concern since last year over occurrence of such incidents.

He said since Bangladesh does not have a regular labour market in Europe,

there is little chance that the incidents in the Mediterranean have correlation with the country's labour migration.

Citing Tunisian coastguard, AFP reports that Tunisian navy helped bring the rescued migrants to shore at Ben Guerdane port in southern Tunisia, near the border with Libya, and they were handed over to the IOM and the Red Crescent.

The migrants were placed in quarantine at a hotel on the Tunisian island of Djerba, the IOM said.

According to IOM figures, more than 1,000 migrants, hoping to reach Europe, had set off from Libya and ended up in Tunisia since January, and the number of departures is rising.

There have been 11,000 departures from Libya from January to April this year, over 70 percent more than in the same period last year, according to UN refugee agency UNHCR.

The agency said the "deteriorating" conditions of migrants in Libya and Tunisia are pushing many to make the dangerous crossing from the North African coast to Europe.

Red Crescent official Mongi Slim said centres set up to house migrants in Tunisia are full.

According to the UN, at least 760 people have died trying to cross the Mediterranean between January 1 and May 31, compared with 1,400 last year.

Migrants who set out on sea journeys off the Libyan or Tunisian coast mainly try to reach Italy. Boats carrying migrants heading for Italy often set off from Libya but cross the Mediterranean near Tunisian coast.

According to data of Tunisian National Guard, some 308 attempts of illegal migration towards Italy were halted till May 31 this year. About 4,376 people, including 2,531 foreigners, were rescued during these operations.

PM for stronger global co-op to mitigate water-related disasters

Bss, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed the need for creating stronger and inclusive international cooperation to mitigate water-related disasters for a resilient and sustainable post-Covid-19 world.

"Growing scarcity of clean drinking water, outbreak of diseases like cholera, typhoid etc. reminds us of crucial need of water for peace and development. To mitigate the water-related disasters, we have a shared responsibility to create stronger and inclusive international cooperation," she said.

In a recorded speech aired in the 5th United Nations Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters held virtually, Hasina reminded the international community that the world is confronting "the gravest global health crisis of our times" due to the Covid-19 pandemic that caused enormous economic and social disruption and thus slowed down the progress for sustainable development.

The High-level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters (HELP), which was established to assist the international community, governments and stakeholders in mobilising political will and resources to solve the water-related disasters, organised the session.

This year's session was held under the title -- "Building Back Better towards More Resilient and Sustainable Post-Covid-19 World".

In her address, Hasina also put forward five-points for consideration by the international community to address the water-related disasters.

In her first and second proposals, the premier said the world needs to take a comprehensive, result-oriented, focused and adaptive global approach for water security and raise political awareness alongside sharing good practices, knowledge, and experiences.

Placing her third and fourth proposals, she also said there should be synergies on water management, and water policies and use among the nations of upper and lower basins. The world should focus on implementation of the Sendai Framework, the SDGs, and the Paris Agreement.

The PM said, "We need to mobilise financial resources for the vulnerable countries to ensure their adequate access to water."

Hasina gave a brief description of her country's water-related disasters.

She said Bangladesh is one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world where floods, tidal surges, cyclones, and river erosion occur more frequently now.

To address these challenges, Bangladesh is taking disaster risk reduction to the next level, the PM added.

SHIFT IN GLOBAL ECONOMY

Bangladesh needs to be prepared to cope with it: FM

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen said the nation should be prepared with skills, education and infrastructure as a major shift is taking place in the world economy.

"To gain from this change, we've to prepare ourselves with skills, education, infrastructure, good governance, and, above all, goodwill," he said.

"I'm confident that through our collective efforts, strong coordination and hard work, we'll be able to turn Bangladesh into 'Shonar Bangla' as dreamt by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation," Momen said.

He was addressing a virtual programme titled "Perspective Plan 2041 and Quest for Development: Golden Bengal as a Label for Nation Branding" held on Thursday night.

Bangladesh Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Dr Md Javed Patwari and Dr Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury also spoke at the event organised by Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh.

Dr Momen said, "We've received the final recommendation from the United Nations Committee for Development Policy [CDP] to graduate from the group of Least Developed Countries [LDC]..."

The government's Vision 2041, which is a continuation of Goal 2021, aims to end poverty and to graduate into a higher middle-income status by 2031 and a developed country by 2041, he said.

Momen said Bangladesh is located in a strategic location between South and Southeast Asia. It also offers attractive investment opportunities for foreign investors, including the ones from Saudi Arabia, he mentioned.

"The Saudi side could tap on our public private partnership investment opportunity."

He said Bangladesh is expecting to sign an MoU very soon with Saudi Arabia, which will allow Saudi investors to invest here.

Saudi investors could explore other opportunities here. Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) will provide the necessary support, Momen added.