



"Why wouldn't government get real-time information about a union at the click of a button? Why should we have to wait for five, six or 10 years for census information?"

PLANNING MINISTER MA MANNAN

"We're going for a strict approach towards enforcing the lockdown from 6:00am on July 1 to 12:00am on July 7."

CABINET SECRETARY KHANDKER ANWARUL ISLAM

"This result gives me an incredible satisfaction because this is what a winning team needs."

BELGIUM COACH ROBERTO MARTINEZ FOLLOWING 1-0 WIN OVER PORTUGAL IN EURO 2020

Govt to enforce stay at home

Army, police, BGB to be on patrol during 'strict lockdown' from July 1, says cabinet secy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government plans to go all out to make sure that people stay at home during the "strict lockdown" to be enforced from Thursday to stem the surge in Covid deaths and infections.

It is going to deploy army personnel across the country with the task of enforcing the restrictions and keeping people off the streets.

"Members of the army, police, Border Guard Bangladesh and the Armed Police Battalion will be on patrol. They have been given the authority to take appropriate action so that people don't step out of their homes..." Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said yesterday.

He was briefing the media after a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Asked what kind of action army personnel will take to enforce the lockdown, he said, "They will carry out patrol. If anyone defies the lockdown, they [army personnel] can take legal action."

He did not give any direct answer to a question whether the army personnel would be given magistracy power.

Talking to The Daily Star, former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder said there are different types of legal actions that can be taken.

"Charging baton for unlawful gatherings is one kind of legal action... There are also mobile courts to take legal actions," he observed.

At yesterday's briefing, the cabinet secretary did not make it clear whether garment factories will stay open or rickshaws will be allowed to ply the roads.

He said they will meet with the home minister to discuss the lockdown in detail and the government decisions will be made public through a notification today.

Anwarul also said the government's relief distribution plan will be chalked out at a meeting today.

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Commuters wait for vehicles to go to work in the capital's Basabo area yesterday morning. Like them, hundreds of office-goers suffered badly as public transport remained suspended amid curbs imposed to stem the surge in Covid-19 cases. Inset, a man enters the cabin of a lorry in the same area to head towards work.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Highest cases a day after record deaths

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh reported 8,364 new Covid-19 infections in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, a record high number of daily infections since the confirmation of its first cases on March 8 last year.

With this, the country's Covid caseload went up to 896,770, said a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The previous highest daily infection of 7,626 was logged on April 7.

Besides, 104 more people died from the virus during the 24 hours, taking the total number of deaths to 14,276.

On Sunday, the country saw 119 deaths, its highest ever daily fatality from the virus.

The death rate now stands at 1.59 percent.

Yesterday, the daily positivity rate was 23.86 percent, the highest recorded so far in the country. The total positivity rate was 13.71 percent.

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Gas leaks 4th most blamed for fires

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Leaky gas pipes were the fourth most common cause of fires reported last year, according to Fire Service and Civil Defence data.

Experts and firefighters said the number of fires linked to gas transmission has been on the rise.

Poor maintenance of the pipelines, illegal and often faulty connections, slow response from the authorities, and lack of people's awareness are the main causes behind the fires, they said.

In one such incident on September 4 last year, 33 people were killed in Narayanganj after cooking gas leaked from a pipe got trapped in a mosque and caught fire because of an electric spark during prayer time.

An investigation found

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MOGHBAZAR EXPLOSION Gas line leak may have caused it

Bomb disposal unit, explosives department suspect; experts won't rule out gas from sewers as well

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Accumulated gas was behind the massive explosion at the ground floor of a three-storey building in the capital's Moghbazar on Sunday evening, said officials and experts.

At least six people were killed and 50 others injured in the blast that took place at the building on Outer Circular Road.

Officials said they had confirmed that it was a gas explosion but are yet to identify the source, speculating that the gas could have accumulated from sewerage lines or leaking gas pipelines.

Visiting the spot where the blast is thought to have originated -- a room of around 150 square feet behind the kitchen of a restaurant located on the ground floor -- these correspondents found the ceiling in a semi-collapsed state.

The entire ground floor of the building was damaged and cracks developed throughout the floor of the building. The rear wall of the building was broken and also developed a crack.

Officials of Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence (BFSCD) and Bomb Disposal Unit (BDU) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) in their primary assessment found that gas had accumulated in the room and was ignited by a spark, causing the explosion.

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Lives taken, dreams shattered

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and ASIFUR RAHMAN

Abul Kashem, 45, used to drive buses owned by others for 25 years and dreamed of one day owning his own bus.

Soon after he just purchased a bus of his own on loan, tragedy struck; he lost his life in an explosion in the capital's Moghbazar.

The explosion that occurred in a building in the area left at least seven killed and over 50 injured.

At that time, Kashem was steering a bus that was stuck in traffic on the road beside the building.

A heavy object on fire flew out of the building during the explosion and hit Kashem. Parts of his body were burned and he died on the spot. His assistant was also injured and admitted to Dhaka

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MPs fume over bureaucrats' sway

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tofail Ahmed, senior lawmaker from the ruling Awami League, and Kazi Firoz Rashid, an MP from the Jatiya Party, expressed frustration in parliament yesterday, saying that bureaucrats were being given various important responsibilities by ignoring the politicians.

Top government officials, including secretaries, are discharging duties as heads of the units tackling the Covid-19 pandemic in districts. The government has also appointed administrative officers as chief executive officers in municipalities to expedite work and ensure transparency.

Participating in a discussion on the proposed budget for Fiscal 2021-22, Tofail said, "I am sorry, I don't know whether I should say it here or not. An administrative officer has been given the responsibility in our district [Bhola]. We politicians help people but they think all that help is being provided by the administrative officials."

"But those officials do not go to the area. The person given the task in my area never went there."

The veteran politician said, "It is unfortunate because there is not a single MP in this parliament who did not stand by the poor and the distressed amid the pandemic."

"Everyone [politicians] is helping them meet their needs during this Corona time. I have given relief to 40,000 people in my own area. But people think that the administrative officials have given them all this."

Tofail claimed that the authority of politicians was fading. The planning minister had recently said there were bureaucrats even in Pharaoh's time. People don't like these words, he said.

He also said according to the warrant of precedence, the position of an MP is higher than that of a government secretary. "This needs to be

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Life expectancy up even amid pandemic

It's 72.8yrs: BBS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The average life expectancy of Bangladeshis has increased to 72.8 years in 2020 during the outbreak of coronavirus from 72.6 years in 2019, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

Last year, the life expectancy was 71.2 years for males and 74.5 years for females, up from 71.1 years for men and 74.2 years for women in 2019, according to the report styled "Monitoring the Situation of Vital Statistics of Bangladesh".

The life expectancy would have increased more were Covid not there, said Saleh Mahmood Tusher of Dhaka Medical College Hospital's Covid unit.

The number of deaths due to cold-related diseases, especially pneumonia, was low in 2020 due to health guidelines in place, he said, adding that the average life expectancy might have increased for this reason.

As of January 1, 2021, Bangladesh's total population stood at 169.1 million; among them, 84.6 million were men and 84.5

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Migrants to get Pfizer, Moderna vaccines

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Good news for Bangladeshi migrant workers!

The health ministry has decided to inoculate those heading towards Saudi Arabia and Kuwait with Pfizer vaccines against Covid-19.

Bangladeshi migrants have long been demanding their vaccination with any of the Oxford-AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson and Johnson vaccines, and the government has finally moved to vaccinate them -- initially with Pfizer and then with Moderna vaccines.

"We have decided to provide migrant workers [for Saudi Arabia and Kuwait] with the Pfizer vaccines," Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the workers would get Pfizer vaccines initially. "But when Moderna vaccines arrives in the country, they will also be inoculated with that vaccine."

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A critical coronavirus patient being stretchered into an ambulance on the premises of Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday. The condition of the man, who was admitted to the public hospital three days ago, worsened earlier in the day and he needed ICU care immediately. He had to be moved to a private hospital as all the ICU beds at the DMCH were occupied.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

83 Bangladeshis rescued from Mediterranean

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another 83 Bangladeshis were rescued in the Mediterranean off the Tunisian coast on Sunday when they were trying to go to Europe across the sea illegally.

Asaduzzaman Kabir, labour welfare counsellor at the Bangladesh embassy in Libya, yesterday said the Bangladeshis were among 178 migrants rescued by the Tunisian navy.

"The migrants were found adrift in a wooden boat," he told this newspaper over the phone, adding that nationals of Egypt and Eretria were also rescued during the incident.

With the latest incident, at least 568 Bangladeshi migrants heading for Europe were rescued off the Tunisian coast in a little over three months, according to Bangladesh embassy in Libya.

On Thursday, at least 264 Bangladeshis were rescued in the Mediterranean off the Tunisian coast when they were trying to sail to Europe.

They were among 267 people, including three Egyptians, found adrift in the sea which is widely used by traffickers as a route for illegal migration from North African countries to rich European countries, including Italy, Greece and Spain.

Labour Welfare Counsellor Kabir said migrants rescued on Sunday were yet to be brought ashore. Tunisian authorities are likely to put them on isolation after bringing them ashore due to the pandemic situation.

He said they would take necessary steps for the Bangladeshis' wellbeing once their quarantine ends. He added that the migrants might have started their journey from Libya's coastal township Juwara.

The Bangladesh mission in Libya provides consular service in Tunisia since Bangladesh does not have a mission there.

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