

<b>BANGLADESH UPDATE</b>	<b>8,364</b> New cases in 24hrs	<b>8,96,770</b> Total cases	<b>14,276</b> Deaths	<b>8,07,673</b> Recoveries	<b>GLOBAL UPDATE</b>	<b>3,942,449</b> Deaths	<b>182,057,781</b> Total cases
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# MIX-AND-MATCH APPROACH IN COVID VACCINATION

## One AZ shot followed by a Pfizer jab gives better protection: study

REUTERS, London

A mixed schedule of vaccines where a shot of Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine is given four weeks after an AstraZeneca shot will produce better immune responses than giving another dose of AstraZeneca, an Oxford study said yesterday.

The study, called Com-COV, compared mixed two-dose schedules of Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines, and found that in any combination, they produced high concentrations of antibodies against the coronavirus spike protein.

The data provides support for the decision of some European countries that have started offering alternatives to AstraZeneca as a second shot after the vaccine was linked to rare blood clots.

Matthew Snape, the Oxford professor behind the trial, said that the findings could be used to give flexibility to vaccine rollouts, but was not large enough to recommend a broader shift away from clinically approved schedules on its own.

"It's certainly encouraging that these antibody and T-cell responses look good with the mixed schedules," he told reporters.

"But I think your default has to stay, unless there's a very good reason otherwise, to what is proven to work," he added referring to the same-shot vaccine schedules assessed in clinical trials.

The highest antibody response was seen in people receiving two doses of Pfizer vaccine, with both mixed schedules producing better responses than two doses of AstraZeneca vaccine.

An AstraZeneca shot followed by Pfizer produced the best T-cell response, and also a higher antibody response than Pfizer followed by AstraZeneca.

The results were for combinations of vaccines given at four week intervals to 830 participants.

Com-COV is also looking at mixed schedules over a 12-week interval, and Snape noted that AstraZeneca's shot was known to produce a better immune response with a longer interval between doses.

In Britain, officials have suggested an 8-week gap between vaccine doses for over-40s and a 12-week gap for other adults.

"Given the UK's stable supply position there is no reason to change vaccine schedules at this moment in time," England's Deputy Chief Medical Officer Jonathan Van-Tam said, adding that the data on a 12-week interval would influence future decisions on the rollout programme.

Over 80% of adults in Britain have now received one dose of Covid-19 vaccine and 60% have had two shots.



Debris of a three-storey building from Monday night's explosion in Moghbazar. In this photo taken yesterday, a bus badly damaged in the incident is also seen on the street in front of the building. A portion of the street remains off-limit to traffic for rescue activities.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Gas line leak may have caused it

FROM PAGE 1

BDU officials said they primarily suspect that gas leaked from a pipeline and an electric spark or someone lighting a flame ignited the gas and caused the catastrophic explosion.

Requesting anonymity, a senior BDU official involved with the investigation told The Daily Star that they detected inside the building an odour of hydrocarbon gas like natural gas or methane, which accrued from a gas pipeline in the building.

Experts and officials also ruled out explosion of air conditioner or gas cylinder as causes for the huge blast.

"The cylinder found in the building was intact and it is clearly assumed that it was not the source of the amassed gas," said the official, adding that they had not found any proof of an AC explosion.

Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd (TGTDCL) authorities, however, blamed a cylinder blast.

"The explosion was from a cylinder blast and the owner of the building is not a consumer of Titas gas," Ali Iqbal Md Nurullah, managing director of TGTDCL, said.

Contrary to the Titas statement, officials of Department of Explosives, fire service and BDU found gas pipeline connections in the building.

"We have found gas line connection on the second and third floors of the building and gas was still found coming out even after the explosion," said an official of the Department of Explosives.

No case was filed till around

6:00pm yesterday in this connection.

"We are looking for the building owner Khokon to get details of utility connections but he is on the run after the incident," said Monirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Ramna Police station.

**CAUSE OF THE EXPLOSION?**

Brig Gen Md Sazzad Hussain, director general of BFSCD, said they are primarily suspecting that the explosion took place due to accumulation of gas.

"We found the presence of gases including hydrogen sulfide, phosgene and methane. These gases are produced from waste, especially human waste. Sewerage line can be a probable source of the blast," he said.

The DG also said they are trying to identify the sources of the blast and also the sewerage network connected to the building.

"We have collected evidence and after analysing the evidence we can say exactly what the source of the explosion was."

Echoing Sazzad's statement, former DG of BFSCD Brigadier General (ret'd) Ali Ahmed Khan said the building was old and there was no ventilation system in the room.

"We found a manhole cover and leaked gas pipelines in the room. These two made the room into a gas chamber. After 14 hours of the accident, we found the presence of methane gas to be around nine percent. That gas ignited somehow and caused the huge blast," Ahmed, president of Safety Awareness Foundation, said.

Abul Kalam Azad, chief explosive

inspector of Department of Explosives, said they have found presence of hydrocarbon in the debris. Presence of hydrocarbon gas of 5 to 18 percent is enough for explosion, he said.

Echoing Azad, Buet's Associate Professor of Department of Chemical Engineering Dr Md Easir Arafat Khan said usually there should not be a huge amount of hydrogen sulfide and phosgene gas but those gases can accumulate inside a small room from sewerage and drainage lines.

"But if methane gas also accumulated in a confined room from leakage of natural gas pipelines, then such type of explosion can take place. These three gases altogether can cause such a devastating explosion. However, we have to identify the sources of the gases," he said.

**PROBE COMMITTEES**

Department of Explosives have formed a three-member probe body with the deputy chief explosive inspector as its chief. The committee will submit a report within seven working days.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh police have also formed a seven-member committee headed by additional commissioner of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit to investigate the Moghbazar explosion. The committee will submit the report within seven working days.

Answering a query about whether it was an act of sabotage, after visiting the spot Inspector General of Police Benazir Ahmed told journalists that they have to wait a day or two for experts' opinion.

## MPs fume over bureaucrats

FROM PAGE 1

noticed. We will need officials from the administration, but not with the exclusion of politicians."

Tofail said politicians are the elected representatives of the people and they should have their specific place and job for them and that they should remain there.

"When a secretary goes to our district, we will welcome them. There is no problem in it. But they don't go there for a day."

He said Sheikh Hasina first became the prime minister in 1996. At that time, ministers were in charge of different districts. Party leaders and activists used to gather when they visited the districts. Those days are now gone, he added.

JP's Kazi Firoz echoed Tofail's statement and said the AL lawmaker pointed out the issue in the right manner. "Politics is absent in the country now. Secretaries are given charge of districts ... Bureaucrats run the country."

He said at different government and state programmes deputy commissioners sit close to the prime minister while MPs have to sit at a distance.

"Sometimes, MPs need to request the DCs to let them talk to the prime minister. This is the current situation of politicians," he said.

"When such things happen, the importance of lawmakers goes down."

The senior JP lawmaker claimed that the country's political arena was slowly being occupied by business people. "Who is running the country? Businessmen and bureaucrats are running the country."

"We politicians are now standing in the third line. This is our bad luck. But this country was liberated by politicians."

He said it was the politicians, not the businessmen, who have political commitment.

Criticising the government for its poor handling of the Covid-19 situation, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu told

parliament that there was an "unrest" within the government over the issue.

Speaking on a point of order, Inu said the unrest was manifested in the recent confusions regarding the announcement of the strict lockdown from Thursday.

He said the lack of coordination among the ministries concerned in dealing with Corona was evident.

Inu, a top leader in the ruling AL-led 14-party alliance, said government notices over the lockdown were changed repeatedly and had contradictory information.

He said there was no alternative to lockdown and shutdown to prevent the spread of infection. "But we have experienced that within two to three days of a lockdown, general people's outcry for food begins. There will also be demand for beds for the infected persons, oxygen, and ICU beds."

**'GRAFT IN EVERY SECTOR'**

While participating in the discussion on the proposed budget, opposition JP and BNP MPs lambasted the government for its failure to stop widespread corruption and money laundering.

JP MP Rustom Ali Farazi said there was not a single sector or department or ministry, which was free from corruption and bribe.

Opposition Chief Whip Moshirur Rahman Ranga said the "festival of corruption" was going on all over the country. Banks are plagued by defaulted loans.

He said according to a newspaper report, Tk 31,000 crore has been looted. Irregularities have increased 16 times in the last nine years. Bangladeshis' money has piled up at Swiss Bank, he said.

"If these [money] can be brought back, several budget can be outlined during this Corona time," he said.

Another JP MP Anisur Islam Mahmud, AL MPs -- Matia Chowdhury and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim -- among others also participated in the budget discussion.

## Lives taken, dreams shattered

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Medical College Hospital, said Kashem's relatives.

Kashem had loaned Tk 11 lakh and bought a bus of Azmeri Poribahan 15 months ago.

"We are supposed to pay back 1.2 lakh every 12 months, including Tk 10,000 interest, as instalments [until the loan is cleared]," said Kashem's wife Shohagi Begum.

"We failed to pay eight instalments as the income from the bus dropped significantly during the lockdowns. He [Kashem] had even thought of driving a CNG-run auto-rickshaw in the upcoming lockdown to earn some extra money... After I saw the bus burning, I knew it was all over."

She said Kashem used to visit her family, who live in Gazipur's Chandura upazila, every four or five days. Their only daughter is eight years old.

Shohagi had called her husband a mere 10 minutes before the explosion. "He told me he was stuck in traffic and would call me back later. Hours later, we saw the news of the explosion on television."

Kashem was supposed to go home yesterday, she said.

Mostafizur Rahma Shagor, 25, a

third-year student of Bangla department at Kabi Nazrul Government College and a passenger in the bus Kashem was driving, also died in the accident.

His cousin SM Munir Akhra Mahfuz told The Daily Star that after the explosion, Shagor sustained a head injury, while some parts of his body were burnt.

"A shutter of a shop nearby flew onto the bus due to the impact of the explosion and hit Shagor's head. He was taken to a nearby hospital. His mother received a call from there and heard the news."

From Mymensing's Gogorao, Sagor lived in the capital's Shonir Akhra with his friends. He came to this area as he had an appointment with an ENT specialist. After visiting the doctor, he called his mother and let her know that he would be going back home soon.

Two other victims were Jannat Akter, 23, and her nine-month-old daughter Subhana. The two had gone to Shawarma House, a restaurant in the area, with Jannat's brother.

Her husband Sujon, who works at Ramna Pharmacy near Moghbazar, said after the explosion he went to Community Hospital and found his daughter's dead body. He then went to

DMCH and found Jannat's dead body.

"Subhana had just started calling me 'baba [father]', I have lost everything... Why should I keep living any longer?"

Three other victims were Ruhul Amin Noman, a law firm employee; Md Swapon, a driver of a tobacco company; and Osman Gani Tushar, 27, chef of Shawarma House.

Tushar died at 3:00am yesterday while he was being shifted to a hospital in Panthapath from DMCH. After his death, he was immediately taken to Chandpur and buried. Police were informed about his death later, confirmed Monirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Ramna Police Station.

Dr Samanta Lal Sen, coordinator of Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, yesterday told The Daily Star that 17 people were treated at the institute after the explosion. Most of them have been released.

Till yesterday, three were undergoing treatment in the ICU -- all with 90 percent burns on their bodies -- while two are being treated at wards in the institute.

Two others are undergoing treatment at DMCH, said Bacchu Mia, inspector of DMCH police outpost.

## Govt to enforce stay at home

FROM PAGE 1

"The prime minister has given clear directives to the disaster management ministry to provide aid to the people under the social safety net programmes as in the previous year."

"You will get the details tomorrow [today]," he said.

Meanwhile, the country saw a record number of daily Covid cases yesterday, a day after it logged the highest daily death toll.

Of the 35,059 samples tested yesterday, 8,364 were found Covid positive. It is the highest number of infections on a single day since the detection of the first Covid patient in the country on March 8 last year.

The cabinet secretary said they closely monitored the Covid situation in four divisions and found it to be deteriorating.

"We had no alternative but to impose strict restrictions."

He further said the government could not impose the lockdown before June 30 due to some "practical" reasons.

In the previous phases of restrictions on public and vehicular movement, the police issued passes to people for outdoor movement.

Asked if such permits will be issued in the upcoming lockdown, the cabinet secretary said, "This time there will be

no movement passes. No one will be allowed to step out of home."

Emergency services will remain out of the purview of the restrictions, he mentioned.

On Saturday evening, the Cabinet Division decided that the nationwide "total and complete" lockdown would be enforced from July 1, not June 28.

It announced a "limited-scale" lockdown for three days from June 28.

Earlier on Friday evening, the PID issued a press statement and stated that the country would be put under a lockdown from Monday until further notice.

This was the first time the government used the word "lockdown" indicating the strict nature of restrictions about to be put in place.

Around half an hour later, the PID issued another statement saying the lockdown will be in force for a week.

Meanwhile, the closure of borders with India has been extended for 14 more days till July 14.

The decision was made at an inter-ministerial meeting chaired by Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen yesterday.

Travel to and from India through the land ports has been suspended since April 21 amid a spike in Covid deaths and infections in that country. Goods-carrying vehicles, however, are allowed to operate.

## Gas leaks 4th most blamed for fires

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that a leaky pipeline of the Titas gas was what fuelled the fire.

The issue of tragedies caused by faulty gas connections has again come to the fore after an explosion on Sunday night in the capital's Moghbazar left at least six people dead and 50 others injured.

Three probe committees have been formed and the cause of the explosion has yet to be ascertained.

However, Abul Kalam Azad, chief explosive inspector at the Department of Explosives, told reporters at the spot that there were signs of stray gas at the site.

Ali Iqbal Md Nurullah, managing director of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd, said a gas tank, not a Titas pipe, was responsible for the blast.

According to fire service department data, at least 722 fires at gas transmission lines were reported last year. Firefighters had to work at 485 of those sites.

Those fires cost Tk 2.29 crore in

damage and the firefighters were able to rescue assets worth Tk 40.53 crore, data shows.

A total of 21,073 fires were reported last year. Of those, electric wires caused 7,729, stoves 3,564, and smoking 3,465.

Debashis Bardhan, deputy director (operations and maintenance) at fire service, said fires from leaky gas pipes have been on the rise in such a scale that firefighters last year began to separately keep an account of the incidents.

There are illegal gas connections, where poor-quality pipes are being used. These become leaky and ultimately cause fires, he said.

Defective valves attached to gas tanks are also another reason behind such incidents, he added. Users and service providers have to be more cautious to prevent such incidents.

A government official, who worked at the Department of Explosives for a long time, said the lack of proper and regular maintenance and quick response from the service providers are responsible for such frequent incidents.

Many of such fire incidents can be prevented if users report leakages immediately and service providers act promptly, he said, wishing not to be named.

## 83 Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 1

AFP on Friday reported, citing International Organisation for Migration (IOM) figures, more than 1,000 migrants, hoping to reach Europe, had set off from Libya and ended up in Tunisia since January.

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.

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.

## Myanmar violence escalates with rise of 'self-defence' groups: report

AFP, Yangon

Violence in post-coup Myanmar has escalated as anti-junta "self-defence" forces step up to take on the military, a report said yesterday, warning of an "enormous" human cost if the regime uses its full power in subsequent crackdowns.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the February coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government, with more than 880 killed in a junta crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.

In some areas, locals -- often using hunting rifles or weapons manufactured at makeshift jungle factories -- have formed "defence forces" to fight back.

In response, the military has used helicopters and artillery, including against groups in northwestern Chin state and along the eastern border with Thailand.

"Faced with armed insurrection, the Tatmadaw [the Myanmar military] can be expected to unleash its military might against civilians," the International Crisis Group said Monday.

"The human cost will be enormous -- particularly for women, children and the elderly, who face the greatest hardships from violence and displacement."

Clashes have taken place in areas that have not seen conflict for decades, forcing humanitarian agencies into a race to set up new operations and supply lines, the ICG said.

An estimated 230,000 people have already been displaced by fighting and insecurity so far, the United Nations said last week.

The self-defence groups add to the volatile mix in the poor Southeast Asian country, where more than 20 ethnic rebel groups were already in various stages of the conflict with the state before the coup.

As the economy collapses, the new militias may "seek sources of revenue beyond the ad hoc community donations that have so far sustained them," the ICG warned.

It is also unlikely that the shadow "National Unity Government" -- formed largely of lawmakers from Suu Kyi's ousted government -- will be able to bring them under its control, it added.

## Highest cases

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As many as 35,059 samples were tested in laboratories across the country during the 24-hour period, said the DGHS.

A total of 3,570 Covid patients recovered during the same period, taking the number of recoveries to 807,673. The recovery rate was 90.06 percent.

Among the 104 deceased, 68 were men and 36 women. Of them, five were within 21-30 years old, four were aged between 31and 40, 14 between 41 and 50, 23 between 51 and 60, and 58 were above 60 years old.

## Migrants to get

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The government initially planned to give the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines to the migrant workers, but problems arose when the countrywide vaccination got suspended due to vaccine shortages.

Later, when the government received Chinese Sinopharm vaccine as a gift from the China government, it decided to vaccinate the workers with them.

But the migrant workers pointed out that Saudi Arabia government has not approved Sinopharm vaccine. So the migrant workers would have to stay in hotel quarantine after landing in the Gulf country at their own costs.

Another Gulf country Kuwait also said they would not allow any migrant workers if they were not jabbed with any of the four vaccines -- Pfizer/BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Moderna and Johnson and Johnson.

The health DG said that the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment would send the list of the migrant workers to the DGHS.

"We will then ensure that they all are jabbed," he said.

Welcoming the move, Ali Haider Chowdhury, former secretary general of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira), said although they demanded Johnson and Johnson vaccine but this Pfizer vaccine was also good for the migrant workers.

"We thank the government. Migrant workers can now save Tk 70,000-80,000 as they don't need to stay in quarantine," he said.

Health officials said since the arrival of the Pfizer vaccine, people have started lobbying to the health officials to get the shots.

The first consignment of 1.06 lakh doses of the Pfizer vaccine arrived in Bangladesh as part of the global vaccine initiative COVAX on May 31.

Later, the government started administering Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine at three centres in Dhaka -- Sheikh Russel Gastro Liver Institute and Hospital, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University and Kurmitola General Hospital.