

City streets see more vehicles

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Police arrested 550 people on the first day of the lockdown for violations, while 320 were arrested on the second day.

Yesterday, Rapid Action Battalion teams conducted 172 patrols and set up 181 check posts across the country, said another statement, adding that 31 mobile courts, accompanied by Rab, fined 277 people a total of Tk 1.98 lakh.

Visiting some areas of the capital, this correspondent found more people were on neighbourhood lanes than on main roads. Some of them weren't even wearing masks, while some shops were found open in different alleys.

Rab said that they would conduct drives in the alleys to check for public gatherings.

Commander Khandaker Al Moin, director of Rab's legal and media wing, at a press briefing in the capital's Russel Square, told reporters that although there were less people on the streets, many were seen in alleys and most of them were not following hygiene rules.

If necessary, Rab will conduct special drives in these places, he warned.

Visiting some checkpoints in the capital, The Daily Star found that some people were outside for trivial reasons.

At Shahab, army and police set up four separate check posts at the entrances of the intersection. They stopped every vehicle crossing the roads and questioned passengers.

Around 12:30pm, they stopped a private car with a sticker of a government organisation. The driver admitted that he came out to pick up passengers on rent. He was fined Tk 1,000.

"We even stopped a man carrying a jackfruit to his relative's house by rickshaw. See how negligent the people are being?" asked Marufa Sultana Khan, an executive magistrate at the checkpost.

Amid restrictions, some low-income people made desperate attempts to leave the capital.

At Gabtoli, Rubi Begum, 40, and her 23-year-old daughter, were waiting for a vehicle to go to Dinajpur.

The family used to live in a rented house in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and ran a small restaurant, visited mostly by students. As the agriculture university closed down due to the lockdown, they were facing losses and could not pay their house rent.

Rubi said they had to leave the house yesterday.

"My husband and son will now live inside the restaurant. But there is no room for a mother and daughter," she said.

She had Tk 4,000 to travel while a private car charged Tk 9,000.

"We are waiting for three more passengers to fill the seats," she said while waiting at Amin Bazar.

While visiting that Dhaka-Aricha highway and Savar, our photojournalists found RMG workers, mostly walking in groups, going to their work places.

Those who live far from their factories were either waiting for buses or battery-run auto-rickshaws.

Many of them were seen without masks and not maintaining distancing. They were also crammed into vehicles as there was a shortage of transportation on the roads due to the lockdown.

Yesterday, there were no public transports on city streets.

People were mostly using rickshaws, besides using private cars and motorbikes.

Most shops and markets remained closed.

Kitchen markets in the city remained open, with the government allowing them to operate from 8:00am to 5:00pm. A good number of people were seen buying essentials at Mohammadpur Town Hall and Karwan Bazar kitchen markets.

Outside Dhaka, law enforcers were seen on roads and highways, in and around cities and towns.

Additional police force was deployed at the sea side of Akmal Ali Road under the EPZ Police Station in Chattogram yesterday after some videos went viral on social media on Friday showing a good number of people visiting the area, with young boys playing football in front of police.

Visiting various areas of Khulna city, our correspondent found many people on the streets on the third day of the nationwide lockdown. Many rickshaws and vans were out and about with passengers.

Our correspondents in Rangpur, Dinajpur and Faridpur reported that law enforcers were active in those areas and fined a good number of people for violating stay-at-home orders.

The government imposed a seven-day-long "strict lockdown" from July 1 to July 7 midnight, to contain the increase in Covid-19 infections across the country.



A municipal worker drives an auto-rickshaw decorated with mock syringes through the streets to boost awareness amid people on the importance of Covid-19 coronavirus vaccination in Chennai, India, yesterday.

Govt hopes regular shipment

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Yesterday morning, another 1.2 million Moderna doses arrived from the US on Emirates flights.

The two ministers also received the first batch of 1 million Sinopharm jabs from China at 12:35am yesterday. Another one million Sinopharm doses arrived in Dhaka in the morning. Biman Bangladesh Airlines flights carried home the vaccines from China.

Under a purchase deal with China, Bangladesh is supposed to receive 1.5 crore doses of Sinopharm vaccine in three months.

The health minister said Bangladesh is expecting to receive 7 crore Johnson & Johnson vaccine jabs in the first quarter of next year.

"The US is a very close friend of us. We are very happy for the vaccines we have got from them. We express our gratitude to the US for donating 2.5 million vaccine doses. It is a great help for our people. We hope this type of assistance will continue."

Asked when the AstraZeneca vaccines would reach the country as 15 lakh people who had got AstraZeneca shots as their first dose were eagerly waiting for the second shots, Zahid said Bangladesh was discussing import of vaccines with different countries.

He said some countries have hinted at providing AstraZeneca vaccine.

"We have indications from India that they will start supplying AstraZeneca vaccine from August."

Earlier, Bangladesh suspended its nationwide vaccination campaign in April as India halted export of AstraZeneca vaccine after Serum Institute of India supplied 7 million doses of the 30 million it was supposed. India had gifted 3.3 million AstraZeneca jabs to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh resumed the vaccination campaign on a limited scale in late May after receiving gifts of 1.1 million Sinopharm vaccine jabs and 1.06 lakh Pfizer vaccine shots from China and the US respectively.

Yesterday, the health minister said the government would soon begin the nationwide registration and vaccination.

Foreign Minister Momen thanked US President Joe Biden for the vaccines, saying the president had declared supplying 80 million vaccine shots to the developing countries and he kept his promise.

"There's nothing to be worried about. There will be a lot of Covid vaccines. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has kept [aside] adequate funds for purchasing vaccines."

He said there were indications that plenty of vaccines would be arriving.

"The most important thing is that the US help came at the most critical time. We are so proud of it. We will also get the vaccines that we are buying. So, the situation has been stabilised," Momen said.

He also thanked the Bangladeshi expatriates in the US for campaigning for the vaccine.

Ambassador Miller said the 2.5 million Moderna jabs are a gift from the American people to Bangladesh and its only objective is to save lives.

He said the vaccine donation was only the beginning.

"We will use the power of our democracy, the ingenuity of American scientists, the strength of American manufacturing and, most importantly, the resilience, commitment and generosity of spirit of the American people to help the world beat this pandemic," the envoy said.

Miller said the United States has been Bangladesh's closest partner for five decades working to improve public health, and today, at this uniquely challenging moment in history, this partnership is more important than ever.

To date, the US government has contributed over \$84 million to help Bangladesh combat the pandemic, he added.

Cows' stomachs can break

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from Alpine cows in an abattoir in Austria.

The researchers tested the effect of rumen on three types of plastic -- polyethylene terephthalate (commonly known as PET), polybutylene adipate terephthalate (PBAT) and polyethylene furanoate (PEF).

Professor Georg Gübitz, from BOKU, told CNN that rumen could break down plastics in "several hours" -- and that it could break down some of the plastics entirely when treated with it long enough.

This is because cows' stomachs are already "trained" to break down difficult-to-degrade food matter, including the plant polymer cutin -- a waxy substance found in plants, including in apple peels and berries, Gübitz said.

Cutin is "a polyester, not identical, but similar to PET (the most common type of plastic, found in plastic bags and food packaging)," he said.

He said more research was needed but that the findings were significant because they could help find a solution to degrading otherwise "difficult to recycle" plastics.

Research into how microbes and enzymes affect plastics is already a current field of study, he said, but he believed the potential role of cows

had not been explored until now.

"It (rumen) was quite efficient when compared to other enzymes tested in the last 10 years," he said.

If manufactured at scale, rumen could initially be collected as a byproduct of the meat and dairy industry, he said.

"But longer term it will make more sense to produce the responsible enzymes and even further enhance their activity by using genetic engineering," he added.

The problem of plastic pollution is widely documented.

In Europe, "widespread consumption of plastic waste (has) led to the accumulation of 25.8 million tons of waste," the researchers said in the study.

Last year, a separate study predicted that the world will have 710 million metric tons of plastic by 2040 -- and that's taking into account efforts to reduce, reuse and recycle plastic products.

Plastics have also been found in some of the most remote places on earth.

There are estimated to be 14 million metric tons of microplastics sitting on the ocean floor, while plastic was found in the gut of a small invertebrate in a remote island in Antarctica in 2020.

Iraq sizzles as blackouts hit

AFP, Baghdad

When the mercury soared to 52 degrees Celsius (125 Fahrenheit) this week in Iraq, Ali Karrar placed his baby for a couple of minutes in the fridge.

But when the power went off on Thursday night across oil-rich Iraq, people were left at a loss as to how to escape the torrid heat.

Those with the means hooked up fridges, air conditioning units and fans to private generators -- but not Karrar, who lives in the town of Al-Hillah, as well as others across the impoverished and rural south.

Four southern provinces have been without electricity since Tuesday, including Basra -- home to Iraq's main port.

Sizzling temperatures have been compounded by high levels of humidity.

"The children sleep right on the floor to try and stay cool, but us, the adults, haven't slept a wink these past nights," Meshaal Hashem, a Basra dockerman and father of three, told AFP.

In the city of Diwaniyah, Rahi Abdelhusein buys bags of ice to cool down his children, saying it helps hydrate them.

Shops have placed hoses and

makeshift showers outdoors to attract customers to stop.

Anger has mounted among Iraq's 40-million population, with corrupt politicians at the centre of a blame game for its poor services and dilapidated infrastructure.

"The electricity ministry is blaming the oil ministry which is blaming the finance ministry, and the finance ministry says the culprit is Iran, but Iran says it's the Iraqi government's fault, and the government lays the blame on the people who accuse politicians of shortcomings," Iraqi political analyst Sajad Jiyad tweeted.

"The politicians just shrug and say, 'We've got to live with it.'"

Boiling temperatures and power outages often go hand in hand during the summer months in Iraq, but there are other factors behind the latest crisis.

Iraq -- the second largest producer in the OPEC oil cartel -- buys gas and power from neighbouring Iran to supply about a third of its power sector, dilapidated by decades of conflict and poor maintenance.

But Iran decided Tuesday to cut supplies to its neighbour, saying the Iraqi electricity ministry owes it more than \$6 billion in arrears.

Systematic campaign against Hindus

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bank accounts were frozen. Almost no Hindu students or teachers returned to the schools.

PAK-UK RELATIONS SHARPLY DETERIORATED

Pakistan's relations with Britain sharply deteriorated during the last two weeks of June, 1971, and there was speculation in the Pakistani press that a break in diplomatic relations could occur.

Pakistan charged Britain with having sided with the Indians, providing them with diplomatic, moral and economic support in its dispute with Pakistan over the war.

The Pakistan government instructed its high commissioner in London to resign the vice presidency of the Royal Commonwealth Society of London. The gesture was in protest against the

airing of anti-Pakistan propaganda by the society, Pakistan said.

Pakistan's anger at Britain was partly the result of London's view that continued aid to Pakistan should be contingent on a satisfactory political solution in East Pakistan.

INDIA DENIES CHARGES
The Indian defence ministry said today it had no knowledge of any attacks by Indian Air Force planes on East Pakistani territory. The spokesman

termed Pakistan's charges of attacks as "totally unfounded".

Earlier, Pakistan protested to India that the Indian Air Force attacked a village in East Pakistan.

According to the Pakistani complaint, four Indian fighters and one armed helicopter penetrated six miles into East Pakistan on July 3 shortly after noon and strafed the

town of Amarkhana in Dinajpur district. The Pakistanis said the town was shelled later in the day by Indian mortar batteries. The government statement did not mention casualties or damage.

POLITICAL SETTLEMENT ONLY WAY OUT

The former commonwealth secretary Bottomley, who returned to London after visiting India and Pakistan as the leader of a three-member British Parliamentary delegation, said today that General Tikka Khan understood nothing about the economic and social problems in East Bengal. He said there could be no return to normality until there was a political settlement with East Bengal.

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Unvaccinated people are 'variant factories'

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mutates, and it could throw off a variant mutation that is even more serious down the road."

All viruses mutate, and while the coronavirus is not particularly mutation-prone, it does change and evolve.

Most of the changes mean nothing to the virus, and some can weaken it. But sometimes, a virus develops a random mutation that gives it an advantage -- better transmissibility, for instance, or more efficient replication, or an ability to infect a great diversity of hosts.

Viruses with an advantage will outcompete other viruses, and will eventually make up the majority of virus particles infecting someone. If that infected person passes the virus to someone else, they'll be passing along the mutant version.

If a mutant version is successful enough, it becomes a variant.

But it has to replicate to do that. An unvaccinated person provides that

opportunity.

"As mutations come up in viruses, the ones that persist are the ones that make it easier for the virus to spread in the population," Andrew Pekosz, a microbiologist and immunologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, told CNN.

"Every time the viruses changes, that gives the virus a different platform to add more mutations. Now we have viruses that spread more efficiently."

Viruses that don't spread cannot mutate.

Variants have arisen all over the world -- the B.1.1.7 or Alpha variant was first seen in England. The B.1.351 or Beta variant was first spotted in South Africa. The Delta variant, also called B.1.617.2, was seen first in India. And the US has thrown up several of its own variants, including the B.1.427 or Epsilon lineage first seen in California and the B.1.526 or Eta variant first seen in New York.

The current vaccines protect well

against all the variants so far, but that could change at any moment. That's why doctors and public health officials want more people to get vaccinated.

"The more we allow the virus to spread, the more opportunity the virus has to change," the World Health Organization advised last month.

If a virus tries to infect someone with immunity, it may fail, or it may succeed and cause a mild or asymptomatic infection. In that case, it will replicate in response to the pressure from a primed immune system.

Like a bank robber whose picture is on wanted posters everywhere, the virus that succeeds will be the virus that makes a random change that makes it look less visible to the immune system.

Those populations of unvaccinated people give the virus the change not only to spread, but to change.

"All it takes is one mutation in one person," said Dr. Philip Landrigan, a pediatrician and immunologist at Boston College.

Protesters mark Myanmar coup leader's birthday with mock funerals

AFP, Bangkok

Protesters in coup-hit Myanmar yesterday marked the birthday of junta leader Min Aung Hlaing by burning his portrait and staging mock funerals.

The nation has experienced mass protests and a brutal military response since the February 1 coup which ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Almost 890 civilians have died in a crackdown by the State Administration

Council -- as the junta calls itself -- and almost 6,500 have been arrested, according to a local monitoring group.

On Saturday, anti-coup demonstrators posted pictures on social media of a traditional noodle soup dish called mohinga, which is often served at funerals in Myanmar.

"I made (mohinga) on his birthday because I want him to die soon," one Yangon resident told AFP.

"Many innocent people lost their

lives because of him. So, if he died, the whole country would be happy."

In Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, some activists burnt pictures of the junta leader and set fire to fake coffins at mock funerals.

"Because of this man, our Myanmar has many problems," a Mandalay resident told AFP.

"He actually should not have been born. Therefore, we hold his funeral as we want to say he should be dead."

Destiny boss now

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viral on social media and the news media reported on it.

Rafiqul had been in jail since 2012, when he was arrested in cases filed over embezzling and land grabbing around Tk 4,200 crore.

Since then, he was admitted to BSMU and Birdem Hospitals on pleas of different kind of diseases.

He is among several high-profile prisoners who made headlines on several occasions for "managing" to go to hospitals from prisons with excuses of ailments and staying in hospital cabins for long.

Once the media reported Rafiqul's "comfortable life", after "managing" jail guards and even doctors, he was taken back to prison.

Asked whether jail authorities earlier took any punitive action against jail staffers, Brig Gen Md Mominur Rahman Mamun, inspector general of prisons, yesterday said he was not aware of any action taken as he had not joined at that time.

After Rafiqul again made headlines after holding the Zoom meeting, jail authorities formed a three-member inquiry committee, headed by deputy inspector general (prisons) Towhidur Rahman.

Contacted yesterday, Towhidur yesterday said the matter was under investigation. He refused to give further details about the findings.

Jail authorities withdrew eight jail guards on Thursday, while suspending four chief prison guards. They also filed departmental cases against 13 others, including seven assistant chief prison guards, on Friday, in connection with the incident.

14 Rohingyas

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were all Rohingyas. They included six men, four women and four children -- all belonging to two families.

Mohammad Zakaria, Moulvibazar superintendent of police, said all of them had snuck out of the Rohingya camps to look for work. They stayed in Chattogram for a few days before coming to Sylhet. They heard they would get jobs here.

On June 27, they came to Moulvibazar. Unable to find work, they tried to move elsewhere on Friday night, when they were found and detained.

We have already contacted the authorities of the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. After questioning, we will send them back there soon, he said.

Coal for Rampal

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Once the 1320MW Rampal plant runs in full capacity, "we expect that around 20,000 tonnes of Indian coal will be sent from SMP Kolkata to Bangladesh every month," it said.

According to Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port President Vineet Kumar, Kolkata has been declared as Bangladesh's hub for coal and inland water traffic with various incentives.

Ten killed in Al-Shabaab attack on Mogadishu tea shop

AFP, Mogadishu

A suicide bombing attack by the Al-Shabaab jihadist group on a crowded tea shop in Somalia's capital Mogadishu killed 10 people and wounded dozens, the government said yesterday.

The death toll from the attack, which targeted a tea shop near heavily guarded government institutions on Friday evening, was significantly higher than the four previously reported.

"On the evening of July 2, a suicide bomber wearing a vest detonated the device near the Juba Hotel, killing at least 10 people with dozens injured," the ministry of information, culture and tourism said in a statement.

"The attack occurred during a busy hour where the victims were enjoying a local tea shop," it added, saying the "malicious" attack was by Al-Shabaab.

The Al-Qaeda-linked group swiftly claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement saying "15 elements from the governmental intelligence, police, and militia were killed and 22 others were wounded."

Sources told AFP that the attack took place just a few hundreds metres from the headquarters of the Somali Intelligence Agency at around 5:30 pm (1430 GMT) Friday.

"The cafe was crowded when the blast occurred," said witness Abdikarim Ali.

The cafe is often frequented by members of the Somali security forces, sources said.

Al-Shabaab, which is fighting to overthrow the internationally-backed government in Mogadishu, regularly attacks government and civilian targets in Mogadishu.

The group controlled the capital until 2011 when it was pushed out by African Union troops, but still holds territory in the countryside.