

9,964  
New cases in 24hrs



9,54,881  
Total cases



15,229  
Deaths



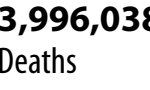
8,39,082  
Recoveries



3,996,038  
Deaths



184,744,115  
Total cases



184,744,115  
Total cases

MOGHBAZAR BLAST

# Building had no gas connection

*Titas claims after fire service, bomb disposal unit say gas accumulated in building*

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Titas Gas yesterday refuted the inference by Fire Service and Civil Defence and the Bomb Disposal Unit officials that the explosion at the three-storey building in capital's Moghbazar may have been due to the accumulation of gas in the pipeline.

"There was no connection to the gas line in the building," Ali Iqbal Md Nurullah, managing director of Titas Gas, told The Daily Star.

The gas pipeline found in the building was disconnected a couple of years back, he added.

The Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) and Bomb Disposal Unit (BDU) officials found a gas pipeline that was emanating gas while moving the debris from the explosion on June 27 that injured about 50 and claimed 11 lives.

On Sunday evening, Titas Gas officials were called into the site and the gas connection to the building was stopped.

"We are suspecting there was definitely an illegal gas line connection in the building. We are suspecting the explosion took place after gas accumulated from the Titas Gas line," said Dinomoni Sharma, deputy director of FSCD.

FSCD has sent a letter to Titas Gas seeking documents of the connection, said Sharma, also a member of the five-member probe body formed to investigate the explosion.

A letter also sent to Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha to enquire how a residential building was turned into a commercial space, he added.

Rahmatullah Chowdhury, the chief of BDU and the member secretary of the police-formed seven-member probe body, echoed Sharma's account on the gas line.

"There were several gas pipelines points around the building and gas leakage found. The explosion took place after gas accumulated from the line," he told The Daily Star.

There was a sewerage line in the building but no source of gas was found in it, said another high official of the BDU involved in the investigation.

While visiting the spot yesterday,

the correspondent found a rotten meat stench coming out from the building.

The building housed a restaurant and meat shop.

No one touched anything or removed any product as court permission is needed for it, the tenants said.

#### THE INVESTIGATION

Following the explosion, police have filed a case against unidentified persons but as of yesterday, no arrests were made.

The Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit is now investigating the case.

A letter will be sent to Titas Gas authority, said CTTC officials requesting anonymity as they are not authorised to speak with media.

CTTC would interrogate the officials of Titas Gas, they said.

Police would also interrogate the building owner, Mashuri Rahman, once he recovers from his illness, they added.

Asked about the progress, Chowdhury said they are trying to ensure a scientific investigation and point every single reason behind the explosion.

"The investigation is taking time because of this," he said, adding that so far statements were taken of about 50 people, including eyewitnesses.

#### PROBE BODY

A five-member probe body was formed by the Petrobangla helmed by its general manager Shahnewaz Parvez last Wednesday. The committee has been asked to submit a report within 10 working days.

The committee members have visited the spot yesterday.

"We are checking the gas line connection and riser in the building. We are also trying to know whether the line was disconnected properly or not," Parvez told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the police formed a seven-member probe body yesterday appealed for ten days extra to submit its probe report, say officials.

Regarding the progress of the Fire Service committee, Sharma said they are compiling the findings and hopeful of submitting the report in due time.



**A long queue of mostly women waiting behind a mobile shop of Trading Corporation of Bangladesh selling daily essentials in Jatrabari in the capital. The corporation started selling groceries yesterday to help residents amid the lockdown.**

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Curbs to stay during Eid

FROM PAGE 1

cities for their village homes, the sources said.

Meanwhile, the government extended the ongoing lockdown for a week till July 14 to curb the spread of Covid that has already claimed more than 15,000 lives in the country.

In a gazette notification yesterday, the Cabinet Division said all the ongoing restrictions have been extended in consideration of the current state of the pandemic.

Contacted, State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain said, "We will do everything to reap the benefits from the ongoing lockdown. The next few weeks will be important for us."

"We have taken lessons from the previous Eid and are proceeding accordingly," he told The Daily Star.

The extension came following advice from the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 and the grim records that the country saw in both Covid deaths and new infections.

As many as 164 people died in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, by far the highest number of deaths from Covid in a single day since the pandemic hit the country last year.

The total number of Covid deaths reached 15,229 and the death rate was at 1.59 percent.

At least 9,964 new infections -- the highest in a day -- were reported in the 24 hours, taking the total number to 954,881, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The daily Covid positivity rate was 29.30 percent, meaning more

than one in every four samples tested positive for the virus.

Last week, the number of deaths rose by 46.6 percent and new cases by 43.6 percent compared to those in the previous week, according to DGHS data.

#### CATTLE MARKETS

Cattle markets have become a big headache for the government as those in the capital draw huge crowds of buyers and sellers before the Eid-ul-Azha every year.

"We will encourage people to buy cattle online. If the situation improves, we will allow some cattle markets given that the health safety guidelines are strictly followed," Farhad said.

Separate websites for buying and selling livestock have been created for each district and campaigns will be run to publicise those, he added.

Expressing similar view, Dr Mohammad Shahidullah, chief of the NTAC, said, "We must encourage online cattle markets."

Even if the government allows cattle markets before the Eid, the number of such markets should be very low and the health safety protocols must be followed strictly there, he noted.

#### OTHER MEASURES

Sources in the government said the ongoing restrictions will be lifted in phases if the spread of Covid slows down.

In the first phase, offices will be allowed to operate before the Eid with limited manpower. Private vehicles will also be allowed to run. And there will be no time limit for keeping open stores that sell daily essentials.

However, public transport and

shopping malls will remain closed to prevent people from crowding those to do Eid shopping.

Before all three Eids since the Covid outbreak in the country, there was a huge rush of homegoers making perilous journeys to their village homes without maintaining the health safety guidelines.

During the Eid-ul-Fitr two months ago, the government kept inter-district public transport closed to check public movement, but that could not stop people from going home, using private vehicles.

Shopping malls were allowed to operate under certain conditions, but the health safety protocols were ignored in most of the malls and markets as those failed to control the crowd.

In her concluding speech of the budget session on July 3, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also expressed her frustration with the homegoers during the Eid-ul-Fitr.

The PM said she had urged people repeatedly before the Eid-ul-Fitr not to move from their respective places, but to no avail.

"If all had listened to our call, then this spread might not have occurred," Hasina said.

Dr Shahidullah said that ideally, the lockdown should be continued for three weeks at a stretch.

"It is tough ahead of the Eid. What can be done is strict enforcement of the health safety rules in all cases. Offices will run with a minimum number of staffers, and violators of the rules will be penalised."

## Plane graveyard to go

FROM PAGE 1

and take the planes elsewhere, but did not get any response, said Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman, chairman of Caab. "That's why we decided to confiscate the planes."

Airport officials hope the cargo village will soon regain its real estate occupied by the decaying and unsightly planes.

The airplanes have been de-registered, clearing the way for them to be auctioned off, he said, adding that officials will soon call for tenders from parties interested in buying the planes.

Caab assigns a unique registration number to every plane that operates in the country, and a plane cannot be legally dismantled and sold unless it has been de-registered.

An official, requesting anonymity, said in case no one shows interest in buying the planes, Caab will tear them down and sell them.

"If no one shows interest, we will discuss what can be done next," Touhid added.

GMG stopped its flight operations in 2012 and left its MD-82 to gather dust in the cargo village since then. Officials of GMG could not be reached for comment.

United Air ceased its flight operations in February 2016 without making a formal announcement, about 10 years after its first flight.

Contacted, Kazi Wahidul Alam, Chairman of United's board of directors, said, "We are aware of the

outstanding charges and we are taking the matter seriously."

He said he hopes to settle the issue through negotiation with Caab, adding that his company is making arrangements for a technical audit to assess the value of the aircraft.

"We will assess whether the aircraft laying at the airport are airworthy," said the aviation expert and editor of Bangladesh Monitor, an aviation and travel magazine.

In February, Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) took an initiative to revive United Airways. BSEC reorganised the board of directors with Kazi Wahidul Alam as its chairman, replacing Tasbirul Alam Chowdhury.

United was listed with the BSEC in 2010. It was the first private airline to be listed with the stock exchange. It is still listed with the BSEC, but its transaction has been closed.

Kazi Wahidul Alam told The Daily Star that reviving the operations of a defunct airline is very difficult.

"We will try to bring back the confidence of investors. The first task is to secure the investors' money."

Regent took to the skies in 2010. It ceased operations last year amid the economic fallout from the pandemic. The airline has yet to resume operations.

Avina started off in 2008 but shut down within a few years.

Officials of neither Regent nor Avina were available for comment.

## 35yrs and above

FROM PAGE 1

inoculation against Covid-19. Of them, 42,89,913 received both shots while 58,20,015 got only the first.

On Friday and Saturday, 25 lakh Moderna vaccine doses from Covax and 20 lakh Sinopharm vaccine doses from China arrived in Dhaka.

On July 1, the government began administering the Sinopharm shots at district-level hospitals and at 40 locations in the capital.

Less than 3 percent of the population have been inoculated against Covid-19.

The mass vaccination campaign, which started on February 7, stumbled after the Serum Institute of India stopped supplying the doses amid a

surge in new cases and deaths in its home country.

Amid a fast depleting vaccine stock, Bangladesh suspended administering the first dose of the vaccine on April 26. Registration for vaccination was suspended nine days later.

Bangladesh and Serum signed an agreement that the latter would ship three crore shots of the vaccine to Bangladesh in phases between January and June.

Serum delivered the first 50 lakh doses in January, but shipped only 20 lakh the following month. No shipment has arrived since. Indian government gave Bangladesh 3.3 million doses of the vaccine as gifts.

## Covid deaths galloping

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The number of new cases was 58,111 in the past week while the previous week's total confirmed cases were 40,466 across the country.

Yesterday, the country witnessed the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic so far as the DGHS reported 164 deaths in the 24 hours till 8:00am -- the highest single-day death toll in the country.

A total of 9,964 people tested positive for the virus during that period.

"We are getting very high positivity rates in the samples we test every day. The situation is not good at all. The ongoing lockdown has started only a week ago. So, the number of deaths probably will continue peaking for the next two weeks," said Dr Arifa Akram, assistant professor at the National Institute of Laboratory Medicine and Referral Center (NILMRC).

The RT-PCR lab at the NILMRC tests on an average 3,500 samples daily -- the highest among all the

427 Covid-19 testing labs across the country.

Dr Arifa said, "We have been receiving samples from Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions mainly. It seems there are Covid-19 patients in every household in these divisions and it has spread massively to the remote areas."

Meanwhile, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) said the Delta variant of the Sars-Cov-2 has been the dominant factor in the ongoing rise in infection.

"Delta variant was found in 45 percent of the total samples [on which genome sequencing was done] in May and 78 percent in June," reads the Covid-19 situation report of IEDCR released on Sunday.

IEDCR said they have so far completed genome sequencing of 646 Covid-19 variants between December 2020 and June 2021.

While the number of Covid-19 patients being treated in the hospitals

## S Africa's Zuma refuses surrender to police by deadline

AFP, Nkandla

South Africa's former president Jacob Zuma, ordered to surrender himself to start a 15-month jail term for contempt, said Sunday he would not be doing so by the court-set deadline.

"No need for me to go to jail today," he told journalists at his Nkandla homestead in Kwa-Zulu Natal province, where hundreds of his supporters are camped outside in solidarity.

"They cannot accept papers and expect me to go to jail," he said, referring to his legal challenge of the sentence.

"Sending me to jail during the height of a pandemic, at my age, is the same as sentencing me to death," he added.

Earlier, the former president, 79, had told supporters his "constitutional rights were abused" by judges of the

country's constitutional court.

He and his legal team had written to the court to plead their case that the sentencing had been wrong, in a bid to either reduce it out entirely, he added.

He led supporters in a rendition of the anti-apartheid song "Umshini Wami" (Bring Me My Machine Gun), which has become his signature tune.

Zuma's supporters have vowed to render South Africa ungovernable if he is jailed.

Zuma was sentenced to the jail term for contempt of court last Tuesday after he repeatedly refused to appear before corruption investigators to give evidence.

The investigating committee set up in 2018 to look into allegations of corruption against the former president has already heard from around 40

witnesses.

The court gave him five days to surrender to the authorities, which made the deadline Sunday.

The South African court nonetheless agreed to hear his legal challenge to rescind the order, and that hearing will take place on July 12.

Cathleen Powell, a South African law professor, told AFP the decision to hear Zuma's challenge did not suspend the constitutional court ruling.

In a show of force, loyalists clad in their African National Congress (ANC) regalia have been outside their embattled leader's home for weeks.

"When I saw the police here I wondered 'how will they get to me, how will they get through all these people?'" Zuma said earlier as he continued to mock South African authorities.

## Deprived of oxygen 4 Covid patients die in Pabna hospital

UNB, Pabna

At least four Covid patients died at Pabna General Hospital in 24 hours till yesterday noon, allegedly due to a shortage of oxygen supply.

The deceased are: Rashida Begum, 70, Rokeya Khatun, 70, Nure Alam, 67, and Najmul Islam, 72.

Speaking to UNB on condition of anonymity, a senior doctor at the hospital said, "The hospital is seeing a crisis of oxygen as the number of Covid patients increased in the last few days. Many had to arrange oxygen cylinders personally. These patients died due to disruption in oxygen supply."

Alamgir Hossain, son of deceased Rashida, said he got his mother admitted to the hospital around noon on Sunday with fever and breathing problems. "Seeing the shortage of oxygen at the hospital, I requested the authorities about 10 times to arrange oxygen for my mother. But my mother breathed her last gasping for oxygen."

He said at least three more patients died in front of his eyes gasping for oxygen.

Regarding the deaths, Dr Saleh Mohammad Ali, acting assistant director of the hospital, said: "Most of the patients came at last stage when there was little left to be done for saving them anyway."

Having no central oxygen supply system at the hospital, oxygen was being supplied to patients through a manifold system, which is not enough for the high number of patients and it created the crisis, he added.

Pabna Civil Surgeon Monisur Chowdhury said 139 people were infected with Covid-19 in the district in the 24 hours.

With this, the district's death toll reached 28 while the total caseload stood at 5,341.

The district's infection rate is 21.35 percent, the civil surgeon said.

## 6 Barishal cops

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inspector (investigation) of the police station.

In the case statement, the victim could mention names of two accused -- OC Ziaul Ahsan and Inspector Mainul Islam of the police station. She said the ASP of Udzirpur circle was also involved in the incident, but could not mention his name. Besides, she named three other policemen in uniform as accused in the case, said Momin.

After the case was filed, Ziaul and Mainul were withdrawn, said Maruf Hossain, superintendent of police (SP) in Barishal.

They were withdrawn so that they could not influence the investigation, said SM Akhtaruzzaman, deputy inspector general (DIG) of Barishal Range Police.

On Sunday, police formed a two-member inquiry committee, led by Barishal Range Superintendent of Police Kazi Shoaib, to investigate the incident. The body was asked to submit a report within three working days.

On Friday, the woman, who is accused in a murder case, was produced before a court after her two-day remand.

At the court, she alleged that Mainul, investigation officer (IO) of the murder case, and some other law enforcers at the police station sexually harassed and tortured her, said court sources.

Taking the allegation into cognisance, Barishal Judicial Magistrate Mahfuzur Rahman directed the authorities to conduct a medical test of the woman. He also asked the director of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital to submit a report within 24 hours.

Doctors after conducting test submitted a report where they said injury marks were found on the woman's both hands, neck and other parts of her body.

Earlier, The Daily Star contacted Mainul, who claimed the allegation was false.

On June 26, Ujirpur police recovered the body of vegetable vendor Basudeb Chakraborty in Jambari village.

The victim's brother Barun Chakraborty filed a murder case against the woman the next day.

Police arrested her on June 30 and produced her before a court that placed her on the two-day remand.

## Australians trapped in vaccine 'Hunger Games', says top official

AFP, Sydney

Getting vaccinated in Australia is like "The Hunger Games" a top health official admitted yesterday, as the country battles scarce supplies during a growing Covid-19 outbreak.

A vaccine shortage has led to panicked efforts by people looking to get jabbed, said Brad Hazzard, health minister for the country's most populous state New South Wales.