

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**

**11,651**  
New cases in 24hrs

**9,89,219**  
Total cases

**15,792**  
Deaths

**8,56,346**  
Recoveries

**GLOBAL UPDATE**

**4,021,422**  
Deaths

**186,093,735**  
Total cases

## HUMAN RIGHTS IN BANGLADESH

# No overall improvement

*Says annual report submitted to UK parliament; cites restrictions in freedom of expression, DSA, extrajudicial killings*

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

There was no overall improvement in the human rights situation in Bangladesh in 2020, said the UK government in a report noting concerns over further restrictions of freedom of expression, including the use of the Digital Security Act (DSA) to suppress criticism of the government's Covid-19 response, and continued violence against women and girls.

The 2020 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Report on Human Rights and Democracy, which was presented to UK Parliament and published yesterday also spoke of the restrictions on political freedom, extrajudicial killing, death penalty, enforced disappearances and Rohingya crisis.

The report, which included Bangladesh as one of 32 human rights priority countries, said Dhaka City Corporation elections in February last year were marred by widespread allegations of voter intimidation and attacks on opposition candidates, and the government criticised the diplomatic missions for observing the elections.

There were further incidents of violence and allegations of intimidation and voter suppression during by-elections in November, it said.

In March, the report that's annually published said BNP chief Khaleida Zia was released from prison following a government decision to suspend her sentence for six months on the condition that she received

medical treatment at home and did not travel abroad.

She remained under house arrest in Dhaka throughout 2020, following an extension to her suspension in September.

Referring to local human rights groups, the report said law enforcement agencies were responsible for 225 extrajudicial killings, including "crossfires" and incidents of torture.

In August, following the killing of a retired army officer by police, extrajudicial killings received unprecedented public attention and the number reported dropped.

There were at least 31 reported cases of enforced disappearances, the report added.

Also, two executions were reported, and 218 death sentences were handed down, compared with 327 in 2019.

And, media freedom remained under pressure as it dropped to 151 out of 180 in the Reporters without Borders Press Freedom Index, its lowest ever position.

According to NGO Article 19, 198 cases were brought under the DSA against 451 individuals, while 75 journalists were charged in 41 cases, and at least 32 journalists were arrested.

Over 400 other people, including health professionals and people critical of the government's handling of COVID-19, were charged under the DSA, the NGO reported.

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## 36 more dengue cases reported in 24 hrs

UNB, Dhaka

Officials reported 36 new cases of dengue in the 24 hours until yesterday morning as concerns mount over the spread of the mosquito-borne disease during the monsoon.

The recent spike in dengue cases has compounded worries as the country continues to grapple with the coronavirus pandemic.

A total of 151 patients diagnosed with dengue were receiving treatment at different government and private hospitals as of yesterday morning, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Thirty-six new patients were admitted to different hospitals in Dhaka in the 24 hours. No one was

reported to be hospitalised outside Dhaka during the period.

Since January, 601 patients have been admitted to different hospitals with dengue. Of them, 450 were released after recovery.

Health authorities reported 1,193 dengue cases and three confirmed dengue-related deaths in 2020.

According to official figures, 101,354 dengue cases and 179 deaths were recorded in 2019.

Dengue fever was first reported in Bangladesh in 2000 when it claimed 93 lives. In the following three years, the fatalities almost fell to zero.

However, the mosquito-borne viral infection struck again in 2018, killing 26, and infecting 10,148.

## Hasina seeks support

FROM PAGE 1

Climate Vulnerable Finance Summit.

Hasina, also the president of Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), opened the summit, organised by Finance Ministers of the Vulnerable Twenty (V-20), joining it virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

"Every country must pursue an ambitious target to curb Greenhouse gas emissions to keep the global temperature-rise below 1.5°C," she said.

"Fund flow must be predictable, balanced, innovative and incremental. Development partners and international financial institutions should adopt a user-friendly process of fund allocation and disbursement. There must be synergies among various climate funds," she said in the third proposal.

"Rich nations must help V-20 countries by closing the existing financial gaps in protecting climate-induced disasters. Financial support is needed to introduce smart insurance premium subsidies and capitalisation of insurance products for CVF countries," said Hasina, placing the fourth proposal.

"Finally, every vulnerable country may actively consider adopting a 'climate prosperity plan' like our 'Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan'. I request the international community to provide all-out support to realise our plans," she said, putting forward the fifth proposal.

The premier said the Earth is in a dire state. "We must be sensible in our actions. Let's work together to build a strong climate resilience world."

She urged the finance ministers, development partners, international

financial institutions, and multilateral development banks to find innovative financing solutions for climate prosperity.

Hasina said the disastrous impacts of climate change mainly caused by greenhouse gas emissions are loudly visible around the world. "We must reverse these for our survival and survival of our future generations."

The 48 countries under CVF-V20 account for only five percent of the total global emission. But they are the worst victims of the manmade crisis, she said.

Besides, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has added new miseries claiming lives and affecting the livelihoods of millions. "At this critical juncture of human history, we must forge a unity and extend cooperation to face the ongoing and future crises," she said.

The international community and the developed countries should play their historical responsibilities and their moral and legal obligations, the PM said.

Talking about Bangladesh, Hasina said the country is ranked 7th amongst the worst victims of climate change as per the Climate Risk Index 2020.

The Covid-19 pandemic, prolonged floods and the Super Cyclone Amphan in 2020 took a heavy toll on the lives and livelihoods of millions in Bangladesh, she said.

Besides, Hasina called upon the developed countries to reduce their carbon emissions drastically. "We also count on the delivery of the agreed \$100 billion per annum as climate finance. We also request a COP26-CVF joint programme along with the Dhaka-Glasgow declaration," she said.

## Crammed in vans

FROM PAGE 1

When the lockdown began, 55-year-old Mofazzal Hossain followed all rules, stayed home and shuttered his tea stall in Kadamtala area at the capital's Shabujbagh.

But as he realised his family was about to face a food crisis, he had to open up his stall for business. He had also been unable to pay his house and shop rent since June.

Mofazzal was arrested by Sabujbagh police on Wednesday morning for defying the lockdown.

Soon after the arrest, his two children rushed to the police station to see their father, who had earlier suffered a stroke along with other health complications.

Later, they also went to the court premises after failing to provide their

father with some food at the police station.

"We are not allowed to get out for work, we are not given any government assistance. How are we expected to survive the lockdown?" the son asked.

Mofazzal was released around 12:30pm yesterday.

Mokles, 63, was seen walking on the staircase of the court yesterday morning. He had come to release his son Miraj – the lone earner of the family.

Miraj, 30, was arrested by police from Konapara area in Dhaka's Demra on Wednesday evening as he went out for work.

"We did not get any help from the government during this lockdown. If my son doesn't work, we will have to starve," Mokles said.



Failing to find any ambulance, family members brings Farid Ali, an 80-year-old critical coronavirus patient, to DNCC Covid-19 Hospital in the capital's Mohakhali in a pickup truck. In this photo taken in front of the hospital, his son and wife are seen attending to him on the pickup.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Alarmed, govt revs up response

FROM PAGE 1

14-day countrywide lockdown has been in place to curb the spread of the virus.

At least 11,651 new cases were recorded in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the highest in a single day since the pandemic hit the country in March last year.

The total number of people infected with the virus rose to 989,219, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

In the 24 hours, 199 people died from the virus, taking the total number to 15,792. It was the second highest casualty in a single day. On Wednesday, the death toll was 201.

The Covid situation started deteriorating from the end of May due to the spread of the delta variant.

In the last 15 days, 122,342 cases were registered and 2,005 people died from the virus. April saw the highest number of deaths -- 2,404.

ENGAGE PRIVATE HOSPITALS

At yesterday's meeting, the deputy commissioners were asked to find ways to increase beds at public hospitals already overwhelmed by Covid patients.

"A proposal was made to use upazila health complexes and clinics as Covid-dedicated hospitals," one of the deputy commissioners told this newspaper, seeking anonymity.

"We have been asked to communicate with the authorities of private hospitals beforehand so that

people can avail their services at the time of crisis."

If needed, all public and private medical college hospitals at the district level will be used for providing treatment to Covid patients, added the DC.

The meeting also discussed oxygen supply at hospitals.

"The government is planning to import oxygen from India by trains," said a meeting source.

The local administrations highlighted their activities at the field level.

They told the meeting that committees have been formed at ward and thana levels to create awareness among people about the novel coronavirus.

"We have been asked to enhance community engagement and encourage people to take vaccines," another DC told this newspaper.

Contacted, Prof Dr Maniruzzaman Bhuiyan, president of Bangladesh Private Clinic and Diagnostic Owners Association, said they are ready to assist the government.

"In this crisis, if we can be of any help to the government, we'll do that," he said.

SITUATION IN DISTRICTS

In the last few weeks, hospitals across the country have been witnessing a surge in the number of patients, which has raised fears of a medical oxygen crisis.

Jashore General Hospital is one of

those.

Flooded with Covid patients, the hospital was in a mess. Some patients were receiving treatment, lying on the floor of the hospital and its premises.

The number of patients in the yellow zone (those who don't need oxygen support) at the hospital is three times the number of beds.

Arif Ahmed, resident medical officer (RMO) at the hospital, said though the number of beds has recently been increased in both red and yellow zones, they were unable to cope with the huge rush of patients.

The 100-bed Covid-dedicated Hospital in Rangpur was also overwhelmed by patients.

Meanwhile, the authorities have increased the number of beds at Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH), Pabna General Hospital, and M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital in Dinajpur to cope with the rising number of patients.

The RMCH authorities decided to set up another 50-bed unit for Covid patients. It will include two ICU beds.

The authorities of Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital raised the number of beds to 100 from 70. It was accommodating patients double its capacity.

Pabna General Hospital also raised the number of beds to 200 from 100 in its Covid unit.

[Our correspondents from Rangpur, Pabna and Benapole also contributed to this report.]

## 12 families paid UP chairman to get houses

FROM PAGE 1

occasion of the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Chhabi Begum, 62, one of the beneficiaries, said, "I had to pay Tk 25,000 to get my house. I borrowed the money from my relatives. The UP chairman told us that the funds were being used to transport construction materials for the ashrahan project site."

One Anik Hasan said, "My grandmother got a house here. We had to pay the UP chairman Tk 25,000."

"The bricks used in the construction are of poor quality. We objected to the use of sub-standard bricks, but it was ignored. As a result, cracks have already developed in some houses,"

the 24-year-old Anik added.

This correspondent also found that bricks came out of stairs of at least three houses.

The house recipients said there is just one tube well for 12 families, but it isn't working. They asked the chairman to give them a new tube well, but he demanded Tk 900 from each family, they claimed.

They also gave Tk 2,500 to Palli Bidyut office for electricity connections and Tk 1,200 to the chairman for the property deed, they added.

Contacted, UP Chairman Mehidi Hasan said, "No funds were allocated for transporting the construction materials to that location. For this, money was taken from the recipients. We asked for Tk 25,000 from each

family, but only a few gave that amount, and some gave less. Records of all expenses have also been kept. I didn't keep any of the money for myself."

Masum Raza, Faridpur Sadar upazila nirbahi officer, said he asked the people involved in construction of the houses, including the chairman, to know about the money and the allegation of irregularities.

Abul Hasan, general manager of Faridpur Palli Bidyut Samity, said he was not aware of taking money from the house recipients. If money was taken, it would be given back, he said.

Power connections would be given to the houses without taking any money from the homeless beneficiaries, he added.

## Black money finds legal home

FROM PAGE 1

The data also confirms that it is the business owners who account for the bulk (75 percent) of the undisclosed income, but they are not the only ones.

Public officials and professionals such as doctors, lawyers and engineers also account for a significant proportion, Hussain said.

Total tax collected through this policy accounts for less than 1 percent of NBR tax collections through May and the total money whitened is a trivial fraction of total liquidity expansion in the economy.

"This goes to show that the realised return from the policy, even in its most generous form as was the case last year, is not even remotely close to what it is touted to be. These do not seem to be worth the disincentive and demoralising effects on the honest taxpayers."

The NBR deserves kudos for their transparency on the results produced by the undisclosed money whitening facility, he said.

"It is high time to completely phase out this policy and reform the personal income tax system in ways such that the taxpayers are incentivised to disclose income voluntarily without fear," the economist added.

After Tax Zone-4, the second-highest amount (Tk 1,620 crore) was whitened from Tax Zone-8, where business owners, lawyers, engineers

and chartered accountants pay their taxes, the NBR data showed.

The government should analyse the legalised fund to realise which sector and which professions are mostly whitening money, said Muhammad Abdul Mazid, a former NBR chairman.

By the analysis, the NBR can realise who are evading tax to a higher extent. "It would help avoid tax evasion in the future," Mazid added.

Tax Zone-5 Dhaka, where owners of construction companies pay tax, was the third-highest in legalising undisclosed money and they whitened Tk 1,570 crore of their assets.

Big taxpayers whitened about Tk 1,500 crore in the Large Taxpayers Unit but here, only 31 taxpayers legalised funds.

The Tax Zone-10, where most taxpayers are doctors and owners of private clinics and hospitals, received a tax of Tk 142 crore for undisclosed funds of Tk 1,420 crore.

The owners of hotels and restaurants pay taxes mostly in the Tax Zone-7. Some Tk 1,144 crore was legalised here by paying Tk 114 crore of tax, the NBR data showed.

The Tax Zone-2 Dhaka -- where RAJUK officials, contractors and companies whose name start with S (except cement company and hotels) pay taxes -- collected tax of Tk 96 crore for whitening undisclosed sum of Tk 960 crore.

Some 111 taxpayers legalised their

flats from the zone, second only to Tax Zone-12. In the zone, Rajuk officials and contractors pay their taxes mostly and around Tk 708 crore was whitened here.

Most flats were legalised from Tax Zone-12 as 116 tax payers legalised the assets here.

Outside of the capital, the taxpayers of Chattogram whitened undisclosed fund of Tk 1,555 crore followed by Tk 538 crore in Khulna tax zone, Tk 347 crore in the Narayanganj tax zone and Tk 340 crore in the Bogura tax zone.

Some 286 taxpayers invested their undisclosed money in the securities approved by the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission. The value of the securities is about Tk 402 crore against which Tk 40.29 crore of tax was collected.

About 65 taxpayers from Tax Zone-12 whitened their black money in the stock market, which is highest among all the zones.

Artists and sportspersons pay their taxes in the zone, where a total of Tk 708 crore was whitened last fiscal year. Most of the flats that were legalised were from the tax zone: 116.

Some 83 taxpayers of Tax Zone-4 and 78 of Tax Zone-6 legalised their lands.

From the outside of Dhaka, taxpayers of Cumilla and Narayanganj whitened their lands mostly.

From outside Dhaka, 293 taxpayers of Cumilla legalised their flats.

## COVID-19 TEST

# 3 arrested for selling fake certificates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Detectives arrested two health directorate employees and a woman in Rajshahi on charges of forging negative coronavirus test certificates and selling those to people who tested positive for the virus.

Rafiqul Islam, 42, an ambulance driver at Rajshahi Tuberculosis Hospital, and his wife Shamsunnahar Shikha, 38, were arrested at their house in Wabda Kolabagan area of the city on Wednesday, officials told a press conference yesterday.

Tarek Ahsan, 41, an office assistant at Rajshahi Civil Surgeon's office, was arrested yesterday morning after the couple told investigators that they were led into the forgery racket by him.

Officers are looking for four other suspects involved in the racket.

Detective Branch Deputy Commissioner Arefin Jewel said the suspects used blank government forms to make the certificates.

People travelling out of the country and those working in certain offices are required to show proof of negative tests.

The suspects used to sell each certificate for between Tk 3,000 and Tk 15,000, the officer said.

Rafiqul and his wife Shamsunnahar used to collect the list of people who got tested for coronavirus. Then they called the individuals who tested positive and asked whether they needed a negative certificate.

If the individual happened to be someone willing to spend money for a negative certificate, the suspects then started negotiating the price of a certificate.

They used to receive the payment via mobile banking services.

Tarek was the one who prepared the fake certificates and gave those to the duo.

The DB has found evidence of 30 fake certificates given in the last four months mostly to people leaving the country.

Officers said the suspects have been engaged in forgery since March last year.

The officers seized about 100 blank Covid-19 test certificates from their possession.

## BNP urges cash, food aid for poor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday urged the government to form an advisory committee and take coordinated steps to curb the transmission of the Covid-19 that has spread across the country.

The party also urged the government to give Tk 15,000 cash assistance to the people and food assistance too to keep the poor people in their houses.

The other demands included encouragement for people to follow health guidelines, a coordinated and specific roadmap of vaccinating 80 percent population, immediate and effective steps for production of vaccine locally, and adequate healthcare facilities in the hospitals.

"Although it is late, a crisis time advisory committee comprising of health experts, all political parties, NGOs and social organisations should be formed soon," BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said.

## 3 die jumping

FROM PAGE 1

fire service official said. Three were being treated in local hospitals, DMCH police outpost inspector Bachchu Mia told The Daily Star.

The fire broke out on the ground floor of Hashem Food and Beverage around 7:00pm yesterday and spread fast, Shah Alam said.

Eighteen fire engines of Rupganj Fire Service and Civil Defence were working to douse the flames, which had spread to the first floor of the building, as of 12:00am, when this report was filed.

Quoting locals, the fire service official said 20 workers were stuck on the roof.

He said they are working to evacuate them.

The origin of the fire could not be known immediately, he added.

## Covid situation

FROM PAGE 1

treatment. But our capacity will be exhausted soon if the rush of patients continues," Brig ARM Nasir Uddin, director of DNCC Covid-19 Hospital in Dhaka, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Launched in April, the hospital with 212 ICU beds is the country's largest Covid-19 hospital.

As of yesterday noon, the hospital had 73 empty ICU beds while the rest 15 public Covid-19 hospitals in Dhaka had 22 ICU beds vacant, according to the DGHS.

Dhaka division saw the highest 65 Covid-19 deaths yesterday followed by 55 in Khulna, 37 deaths in Chattogram, 15 in Rajshahi, 10 in Mymensingh, nine in Rangpur, five in Sylhet, and three in Barishal divisions.

Of those reported dead yesterday, 133 were male.

Due to community transmission of the highly infectious Delta variant of coronavirus, the country started witnessing a fresh surge from the third week of May.