

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**

**8,772**  
New cases in 24hrs

**10,09,315**  
Total cases

**16,189**  
Deaths

**8,68,139**  
Recoveries

**GLOBAL UPDATE**

**4,038,321**  
Deaths

**187,048,127**  
Total cases

## Ukrainian soldier killed, three wounded as tension mounts

AFP, Kiev

The Ukrainian army yesterday said that a soldier had been killed and three others wounded in the country's pro-Russian separatist east, amid rising tensions in the conflict-torn region.

It was the fourth Ukrainian soldier killed in the past week.

The wounded soldiers were being treated in hospital and their injuries not life-threatening, the army said.

Ukrainian positions on the frontline had been targeted by artillery, mortars, grenade launchers and machine gun fire, it said on Facebook.

"Over the past two weeks, there has been an increasing number of ceasefire violations," the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which is deploying hundreds of observers to the zone, said on Thursday.

The war, which has left more than 13,000 people dead, broke out in 2014 shortly after Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula.

Russia has always claimed that its support for the separatist regions was purely political, but Kiev and its Western allies have accused Moscow of sending troops and weapons.

After a largely respected truce in the second half of 2020, tensions have risen again this year, especially in the spring when Moscow deployed nearly 100,000 troops to Ukraine's borders for several weeks.

## Myanmar rebel group suspends key leader in massacre investigation

AFP, Bangkok

A prominent ethnic rebel group in Myanmar suspended one of its key leaders this week, a spokesman said yesterday, as it investigates an alleged massacre of civilians on its territory.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since a February coup ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government, sparking huge protests among civilians and renewing clashes between the military and ethnic rebel armies in its border regions.

The Karen National Union (KNU) -- one of Myanmar's largest rebel groups in its east, which has tussled with the military for decades -- has been locked in renewed conflict with the army since the coup.

In May, state-run media accused fighters from one of the group's armed wings, the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO), of a May 31 massacre of 25 construction workers -- an allegation the KNU had said it would investigate.

Spokesman Padoh Saw Nee confirmed Saturday that the KNDO's head, General Ner Dah Bo Mya, and his subordinate Lieutenant Saw Ba Wah have been "suspended temporarily".

"According to the Geneva Conventions, even if they are our enemies, we just arrest them, you cannot kill like that," he said.

"We stand firmly on our commitment to the Geneva Conventions and the international community, and we have to deal with this carefully."

The decision -- made on Monday by KNU leaders -- will inject more discord within the rebel group, whose political divisions over the handling of the junta have spilled out in recent months to the public.

Padoh Saw Nee defended the suspension as "part of our procedures".

But General Ner Dah Bo Mya blasted the decision, saying that the KNU's political leaders had refused to hear the KNDO's side.

He alleged that Burmese soldiers had ambushed his troops with mortar artillery as they were arresting military intelligence personnel.

"During the armed conflict, the soldiers didn't take care," he told AFP, adding that he did not want to cooperate with the investigation because "they didn't talk to me".

"Our grand leader and politicians should side with us instead of working with the enemies," he said.

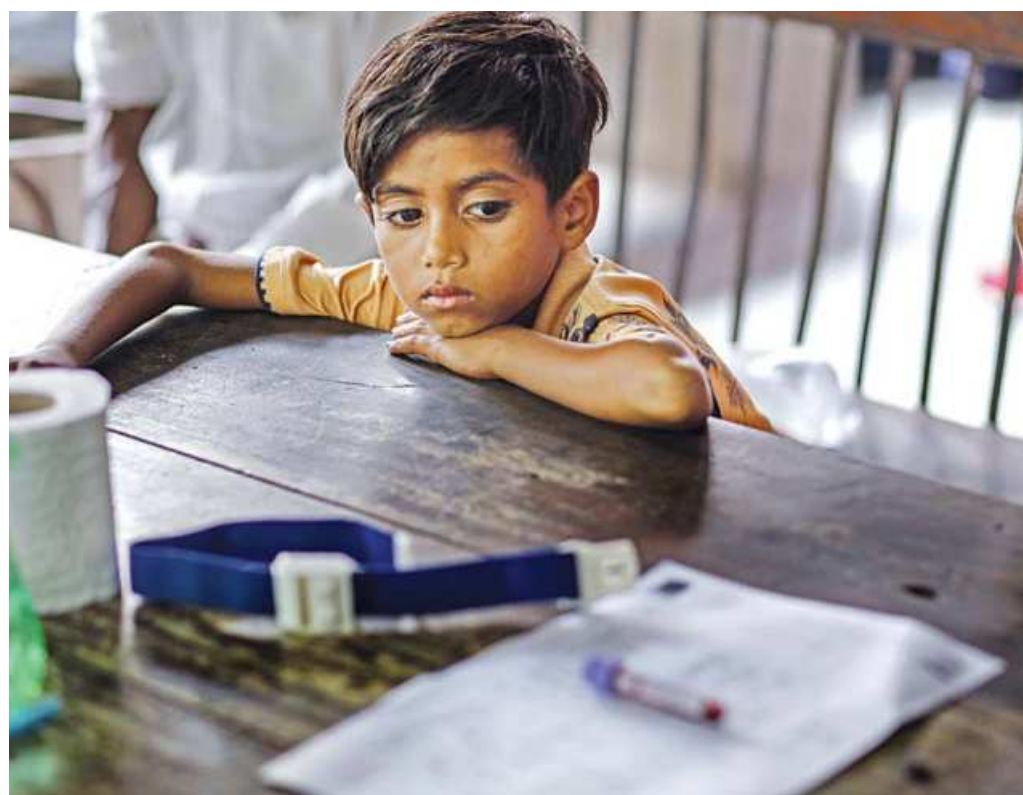
"We cannot mingle with the devil."

Myanmar's border regions are a patchwork of territories and alliances held by more than two dozen rebel groups, most of whom have fought with the military for more autonomy and resources.

Since the coup the KNU has clashed sporadically with the Myanmar military along the Thai border.

In March its fighters seized a military post and the army retaliated with air raids, the first in more than 20 years in Karen state.

The group has also condemned the military for the power grab, and provided shelter to dissidents working to oust the State Administration Council -- as the junta has dubbed itself.



**Clockwise, a toddler watches in front of Dhaka Medical College Hospital as his mother gives blood for DNA test to identify a loved one who was killed in the Rugganj factory fire. An elderly woman showing her daughter's photo who's missing since the fire broke out at Hashem Food and Beverage Factory in Narayanganj's Rugganj. The lock kept workers trapped inside the factory when the fire burned the whole building.**

PHOTO: STAR



## It's murder, not accident

FROM PAGE 1

Firefighters on Friday said the total number of deaths was 52. But police and district administration yesterday said the number was 51.

Bodies of 48 people trapped on the third floor with its lone exit locked were found. The bodies were charred beyond recognition. Most of the victims were women and children. Besides, at least 10 others were injured while the firemen rescued 25 from the rooftop of the factory.

After conducting the autopsy of 49 bodies at Dhaka Medical College morgue, 15 bodies were sent to a mortuary of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College as the DMCH mortuary was at capacity.

The body of Morsalin, 22, who jumped off the second floor, was handed to his family members.

Besides, samples of 51 family members of 36 deceased were collected for DNA matching.

Some of the families have demanded compensation for their losses.

On the site of the six-storey building, Director (operations) of Fire Brigade and Civil Defense Lt Col Zillur Rahman said, "We didn't find adequate firefighting equipment. Some places in the building were locked. Many could not get out because of the partitions. These can be a cause of the fire and the loss of life."

There is a chance that the fire originated from electric sparks as machineries and raw materials were kept at the same place.

The entire building was full of combustible materials, he said, adding that some sections were locked.

A team from the Electric Safety and Security Association of Bangladesh (ESSAB) visited the building and was shocked at the level of fire safety measures.

## From toil to tail end

FROM PAGE 1

All of the children were locked in and could not escape, said their families. The only children who did survive, managed to do so by jumping off the third floor of the factory.

The number of children recuperating in hospitals could not yet be determined.

In 2006, the Bangladeshi government outlawed employment of anyone below the age of 14. According to the labour law, those under 14 years of age are children, while those between 14 and 18 are adolescents.

"Adolescents can be employed as per the labour law, but cannot work with hazardous labour and cannot work for more than 5 hours a day in a factory," said Jafrul Hasan Sharif, a labour expert involved in drafting the Bangladesh Labor Act 2006, National Labor Policy of Bangladesh 2012, Bangladesh Labor (amendment) Act 2013, Bangladesh labor Rule 2015

"34 types of work are classified as hazardous according to the labour regulations, and operating machines with moving parts is one of them," said Jafrul Hasan.

They also cannot work after the hours of 7 pm, says the law.

All of the missing children were working the afternoon-evening shift, and were working between 8 to 12 hours a day, according to testimonials from their families.

Md Salauddin, the factory's admin officer had previously said this newspaper, "The issue about the age of the workers is wrong. They were hired after reviewing the relevant documents. If the age is low, it is the workers who tampered with the documents."

But no amount of tampered papers can make Shimu Akhter's 12-year-old daughter Shanta Moni look like an 18 year old. She frantically searched the long corridors of DMCH peeking into

every single children's ward.

"This was her third day at work. Her father died 7 years ago, and she used to be in class 4 in a madrassah, but stopped studying because it was closed. They were going to give her Tk 5500 per month for making lollipops. She used to work on the third floor," said Shimu.

Shimu refused to believe that her daughter was dead. "Please take me to where the living children are," she implored.

15-year-old Nazmul used to be a ninth grader before the pandemic struck, and had only been working for a month, informed his brother Mobarok Hossain.

"School is closed, and our father is a farmer, so he thought of earning some money during this time," said Mobarok. "He used to make Nocilla" 13-year-old Moni broke down while describing how her 16-year-old sister Shahana died.

"We used to work in the same factory compound, just different buildings. She made Nocilla and has been working in the factory for three years. Because she was little, she was not given the night shift, but rather the evening shift," said Moni. "They locked my sister in and killed her," she sobbed.

16-year-old Hima Akhter was a class five drop-out, and had been working in the factory for three years, said her sister Arjina. "She used to work the chocolate machines, the one that packages chocolates into containers." For this she used to get Tk 5600 per month.

It is illegal to have children man machines. Hima's cousin, 14-year-old Takia used to be in the same line as her and is missing.

"Their factory's license was renewed two months back. How did they renew the license of a factory employing children?" said Jafrul Hasan.

## Chronicle of greed foretold

FROM PAGE 1

An unsafe working environment is created by the owner by saving costs because there is a slave market for exploiting, and concerned officials abetting in the crime. Our problem is we do not take notice of the dire circumstances until a life or two is lost.

The sequence begins with the ignition of a fire, the reason for which most often and immediately is attributed to a "short circuit", so that no one can be held accountable. But, every electrical accident occurs because of the negligence of someone, including the reluctance of the owner to invest in safety measures.

After the fire has developed, no one knows what to do because regular fire drill was not practiced, as per the rules. Fire alarm is often the people shouting. There is no fire marshal to take charge. Supervisors, who could

possibly help, have been guilty of ordering workers not to leave.

Only under a live fire situation, shrieking workers and children find out that there are no working fire extinguishers, no water or sand are available, nor sand. Sprinklers are unheard of.

As the fire engulfs them, workers and children tried to escape. They find out in horror that the exit door is locked, that the windows are secured with grilles, and that the stairs are inaccessible, each a violation of existing legislation. Finding the heat and billowing unbearable and escape by stairs impossible, jumping to their deaths was inevitable.

The familiar series continues with the quick declaration by the authority that "the building was unauthorised", as if it was built the night before. Many similar unapproved buildings exist but the concerned government

agencies are not interested since they are not on fire yet.

As in the case of Rana Plaza collapse 2013, when 1,134 people died, despite a warning of the impending danger the day before, the Rugganj factory was reportedly on fire fifteen days ago, but no one paid heed.

All warnings, however insignificant, should be taken seriously to save lives. Working conditions should first and foremost should adopt expert advice and not consider a monetary liability. Putting employees in danger by business people interested to profit is a culpable offence.

Owners and their responsible representatives, and concerned authorities, face manage to escape punishment. That is the reason for a culture of unsafe working conditions at the cost of sacrificing the needy segment of our population.

## Sylhet slowly waking up to family planning

FROM PAGE 1

Sunamganj, where religious orthodoxy, inaccessible transportation system, illiteracy and social propaganda by rural midwives against family planning reign supreme.

One such example is Mafia Begum of Dariapara village in Madhyanganj of Dharmapasha upazila of Sunamganj.

Last year, at the age of 18, she had a stillbirth at home even though it is widely known that being pregnant as a teenager puts girls at higher risk of complications during childbirth.

She is pregnant again and has not made any antenatal visits to the local community clinic or family welfare assistant due to the reluctance of her husband and mother-in-law.

Similarly, Nazia Sultana of Haripur area of Jaintapur upazila of Sylhet, is a mother of three after she was wedded off at the age of 16 and will most likely have more children given the lack of family planning for reasons pertaining to restrictions from family and religion.

A report last month of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics also revealed that the Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR)

was the lowest (32.7 percent) among the women of the Sylhet division.

The family planning situation is comparatively worse among tea workers, so is the total fertility rate, unmet needs, maternal deaths and stillbirth, said Binoy Sing Rowtia, a health assistant at Sreemangal Upazila Health Complex.

The situation used to be worse in the past, said Rowtia, who has been working on this issue in Sreemangal for the past 10 years.

The tea workers are not interested in hospital delivery, as they consider the arrangements needed for transport, blood, and medicine to be a hassle.

They largely depend on the local midwives, although most of them are not trained.

"When complications arise, they bring them to the hospitals, often with nothing left in our hands," he said, adding that superstition and phobia prevent them from going to health facilities from the onset.

Besides, most of the men have a lack of interest in using condoms, Rowtia added.

"Religious orthodoxy is so prevalent in this area that we cannot go to any house and talk about family planning directly," said Fauzia Begum, family welfare assistant in Haripur area of Jaintapur upazila in Sylhet.

They try to segue the matter after educating on children's health, vaccinations and so on but are stopped in their tracks.

"They use the excuse of religion," she said.

In terms of haor areas of Sunamganj, Halima Akhter, family welfare assistant at Sreepur South Union Family Planning and Health Centre, said they face huge difficulties in reaching remote villages in Tanguar Haor areas by boat during the monsoon as there is a constant fear of accidents due to the storm surge.

And in the dry season, they need to spend a good amount on transportation from their salaries.

The government should take timely and need-based intervention for people of tea workers, who are ostracised from the mainstream society, and haor areas, said Pulak Raha, team leader at Advance Family Planning initiative.

## Removal of US Capitol fencing begins six months after riot

AFP, Washington

More than six months after the deadly US Capitol insurrection, authorities on Friday began the process of dismantling fencing and barricades surrounding the iconic Washington building, although some access restrictions will remain in place.

Personnel were seen removing bars connecting sections of the eight-foot (2.4-meter) black metal fencing that had been erected in the days following the violent unrest at the citadel of American democracy.

Removal of the fence itself was to begin early Saturday, workers on the site said, with the deconstruction operation expected to last through the weekend.

## Air heaviest

FROM PAGE 1

On the ground floor, packaging materials were piled up beside machineries. Biscuits used to be produced on the first floor, soft drinks on the second, and lollipops, Nocilla (chocolate spread), and chocolates on the third floor. The fourth floor was used as a store and also a production floor of semai (vermicelli). Chanachur used to be made on the fifth floor.

All the floors were filled with plastic materials which helped the fire turn into a massive one, according to fire officials.

Visiting the building yesterday, a team from Electronic Safety and Security Association of Bangladesh (Essab) was astonished that there was no fire safety measures.

Mohammad Monzur Alam, vice president of Essab, said: "All the basic safety rules were violated here. There is no fire safety door, no hydrants, no evacuation plans. No safety plan seems to have been followed here. There's a barrier on every floor. Each of the section is locked by netting."

Parvez, who used to work on the second floor of the factory, shared his horrific experience with this newspaper.

"We were at work when the fire broke out. As the fire spread to the ground floor, all started screaming. When we tried to go out through the first staircase, we saw fire there. Some of us were very lucky to be able to come out using the second exit. Many got trapped inside and some of them later jumped off the building," said Parvez.

"On the third floor, the net partition just before the second exit was locked. By the time, the fire was all around," he said.

Yesterday, there was no crowds around the factory building as police barred visitors from getting closer to the area. Only some journalists were there. Firefighters were still busy pouring water on piles of burnt packaging materials, as smoke was billowing from those even 40 hours after the fire broke out.

The walls of the building turned black. From the first to the fifth floor, ashes were the only thing left there.

A portion of the fourth floor has collapsed on the third floor.

Security guard Nur Alam said, "Several hundred people used to come to the factory every day. Now the building stands like a skeleton. It is really sad that so many people have died. Everything has burnt into ashes. For whom I will provide security now?"

## England face Italy

FROM PAGE 1

Wembley, which was also the venue for England's 1966 World Cup triumph, will host around 65,000 fans for the game despite coronavirus restrictions still in place.

England began the tournament as one of several contenders to lift the trophy and have taken advantage of playing all but one of their matches at home.

Southgate's men will be willed on by the vast majority of a crowd that created a crackling atmosphere for England's second-round match against Germany and the semi-final against Denmark.

Standing in England's way are a battle-hardened Italy side who have restored the nation's pride after failing even to qualify for the 2018 World Cup.

England have never beaten Italy at a major tournament, although meetings between the nations have been few and far between.

Italy triumphed in a penalty shoot-out in the quarter-finals of Euro 2012 in Ukraine and won 2-1 when they met in the group stage of the 2014 World Cup, although both sides ended up being eliminated in the first round.

Both teams have been transformed since then.

The Azzurri have lit up Euro 2020 ever since beating Turkey 3-0 in the opening game a month ago.

They are on a national record 33-match unbeaten run under coach Roberto Mancini, who has spent time in England both as a player and as a manager.

Italy had the backing of around 11,000 British-based fans at the semi-final and their supporters will once again be there for the final.