

BANGLADESH UPDATE



11,874

New cases in 24hrs



10,21,189

Total cases



16,419

Deaths



8,74,501

Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE



4,046,485

Deaths



187,486,594

Total cases

Tripura CM sends queen pineapples for Hasina

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb yesterday sent 800 kilograms of queen pineapples as a return gift to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, six days after Bangladesh PM had sent 300 kilograms of Haribhanga mangoes to Deb.

The consignment in 80 cartons, after rigorous quality checks, was sent to Bangladesh through Akhaura Integrated Check Post (ICP) in Brahmanbaria around 9:00am.

Tarit Kanti Chakma, director of Industries, Commerce and Tourism of Tripura State, handed over the gift to Udat Jhan, Second Secretary of the Indian Assistant High Commission in Chittagong, at Akhaura Land Port zero point.

"The gifts will be handed over to the Bangladesh Prime Minister's Office on Monday [today]," said Mohammad Ali, revenue officer of Akhaura Land Port Customs.

The pineapples were collected from Ampri village in Gomati district of Tripura, the best quality is grown in

the state. Tripura grows an estimated bulk of 1.28 lakh MT pineapples every year across 8,800-hectare orchards in different districts.

On July 3, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sent 2,600 kilograms of sweet Haribhanga mangoes to Indian President Ram Nath Kovind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Narendra Modi and Mamata Banerjee have written letters to PM Hasina thanking her and expressing overwhelming satisfaction for the gifts.

PM Hasina also sent mangoes to the Indian chief ministers Biplab Kumar Deb of Tripura, Himanta Biswa Sarma of Assam, Zoramthanga of Mizoram and Conrad Sangma of Meghalaya.

Conrad Sangma told Indian news agency PTI he will send Meghalaya spices, turmeric and organic products in return.

Prime Minister Hasina also sent mangoes to the leaderships of Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain.



Grieving relatives of Selina Begum, 35, who died with Covid-19, console each other beside the ambulance that will take the body to the deceased's village home in Cumilla from Dhaka Medical College Hospital's Covid-19 unit. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Justice now a mirage to them

FROM PAGE 1

"The final hearing is yet to take place," she said.

Both Sharmin and labour leader Taslima said that in almost all cases workers do not get adequate compensation.

According to the labour law, the amount of compensation is Tk 2 lakh in case of death. It is meagre and the victim's family has to wait for long even to get that, they pointed out.

Sharmin observed that the compensation should be raised, keeping in mind several criteria such as treatment cost, age of workers and how many years he or she could have worked.

FACTORY FIRES IN GAZIPUR, SAVAR At least 41 workers were killed in a massive fire at a packaging factory, Tampaco Foils Limited, in BSCIC industrial area in Tongi on September 10, 2016.

Two cases were filed over the fire incident -- one by police and another by Abdul Kader, the father of a deceased worker, against Tampaco owner Syed Mokbul Hossain and seven others.

About the case filed by Kader, Gazipur Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner (Prosecution) Shubhashish Dhar said police submitted a charge sheet to a Gazipur court against five, including Mokbul, in 2018.

He said the trial in the case is still going on.

However, police could not give any update on the other case.

Asked, Tongi Model Police Sub-Inspector Ajay Kumar Chakraborty, who filed the case on behalf of police, failed to give any update on it.

"It will require time... I can give an update on the case after seeing the files," he told this newspaper.

Earlier in September 2016, BLAST, ASK and Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA) filed a writ petition, pointing to the failure of the authorities concerned to ensure labour safety and adequate compensations for the victims.

The final hearing on the writ petition is yet to be held, said the petitioner, Sharmin Akter.

The police officials concerned failed to give any update on the cases filed over devastating fires at Garib and Garib sweater factory in Gazipur in February 2010 and Ha-Meem Group's sportswear factory at Narsinghapur in Ashulia in December that year.

At least 21 workers were killed in Gazipur while 26 lost their lives in the Ashulia fire.

Contacted, Kamrul Faruk, officer-in-charge of Gazipur's Bason Police Station, said he was unable to give any update on the case over the fire at Garib and Garib factory, saying the incident took place more than a decade ago.

"We don't have any information as the case was filed before the creation of Gazipur Metropolitan Police in 2018. I cannot say whether the charge sheet in the case was submitted or not," he said.

Asked about the case over the fire at Ha-Meem Group's sportswear factory, Inspector (investigation) Ziaul Islam of Ashulia Police Station said he was unaware of any case filed in connection with the fire.

"If any case was filed over the fire incident, you can check it with the court concerned," he added.

[Our correspondents in Gazipur and Savar contributed to this report.]

Eid-ul-Azha

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father to please Allah some 4,500 years back.

But the Almighty in His benign mercy spared Hazrat Ismail (AS) and instead sent a ram to be sacrificed.

To commemorate this historic event, the Muslims all over the world slaughter sacrificial animals and draw inspiration from the unique example of sacrifice to please Allah as shown by two great prophets -- Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) and his son Hazrat Ismail (AS).

On the occasion, the Muslims across the country will offer prayers in congregations and sacrifice animals in the name of Almighty Allah.

Delta ravages even through lockdown

FROM PAGE 1

Robed Amin, spokesperson of the DGHS, said in a virtual briefing on the Covid-19 situation yesterday.

As of yesterday noon, there were only 301 ICU beds vacant out of 1,263 across the country, according to DGHS data.

Robed Amin said the Delta variant, first detected in India, is causing deaths not just of the older people but also younger ones.

Earlier, the Institute of Epidemiology and Disease Control (IEDCR) said the Delta variant caused 78 percent of infection in the samples on which they did genome sequencing in June.

Experts, however, said, the country is already in a "disastrous" situation and it could turn bleaker surrounding the Eid holidays later this month. They also said the government should extend the lockdown -- currently in force till July 14 -- to stem the surge of the virus, which has reached remote villages across the country.

Of the 230 deaths in the 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, Khulna division saw the highest 66 deaths followed by 56 in Dhaka division, according to DGHS data.

Among other divisions, 39 died in Chattogram, 26 in Rajshahi, 22 in Rangpur, eight each in Barishal and Sylhet, and five in Mymensingh.

The number of new cases has risen by 37.54 percent during the past week till Saturday compared to the previous week, according to a DGHS press release.

The number of deaths has also risen by 48.66 percent.

With the latest counts, the total

number of confirmed cases rose to 10,21,189 and the death toll to 16,419. Yesterday, the positivity rate was 29.67 percent -- down from more than 31 percent the previous day.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury also said yesterday that the government may continue the lockdown if the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 suggests.

"If the advisory committee on Covid-19 suggests, the ongoing restrictions can be continued. The current situation, however, is not suitable to return to normal life," Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury told reporters at the secretariat yesterday.

Robed Amin said, "Covid-19 has spread to all districts in all divisions and it has been rising, so the deaths too are increasing... If we can't control it in the next one week, the situation will turn miserable."

'RESTRICTIONS SHOULD CONTINUE'

Saying many are still going outside even though there is no urgency to do so, Robed Amin urged people to properly adhere to health safety guidelines.

Experts also said the impact of the ongoing lockdown, enforced since July 1, has been less than expected even after 11 days.

Prof Mushtuq Hussain, consultant of the IEDCR, told The Daily Star, "There will be a rising trend in deaths for the next week. The transmission, however, has not decreased despite the lockdown. So, there is no alternative to continue the restrictions."

He feared that the transmission

will intensify in the cities after the upcoming Eid festival if the government relaxes lockdown for economic activities and people return to their home districts for Eid-ul-Azha, which will be celebrated in the country on July 21.

Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist, echoed Hussain.

"We are already in a disastrous situation thanks to inadequate tests in the rural areas. Patients from there are coming to the district hospitals late mainly due to lack of transportation during lockdown," Prof Ridwanur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

In this context, Dr Mushtuq Hussain urged the government to set up field hospitals at community level by engaging people of communities.

"While there has been a move to build five new field hospitals in Dhaka, building field hospitals at the community level is more important. The new move will be less effective," Dr Mushtuq said.

On Saturday, Health Minister Zahid Maleque announced the convention centre of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University would be turned into a Covid field hospital to tackle the rise in infections.

The Delta variant, first detected in India, is 55 percent more transmissible than the Alpha variant, which was itself around 50 percent more transmissible than the original Wuhan virus, World Health Organization estimates.

The Delta variant was first detected on May 8 in Bangladesh, it has caused health disasters across the Khulna and Rajshahi regions before spreading to other parts of the country.

Fire safety was lost on inspectors

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Trade Union Centre.

The factory owners and the DIFE are equally responsible for the incident, he said.

Jafrul Hasan Sharif, a labour expert involved in drafting the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 and the National Labour Policy 2012, said the DIFE's capacity for inspections multiplied after the Rana Plaza collapse.

"The disaster in Narayanganj would not have happened if the DIFE properly inspected the factory. The issue of the lack of stairways, fire extinguishers, child labour and other safety hazards are supposed to be flagged during an inspection. Did they not find anything during the annual license renewal of the factory?" asked Sharif, who was also involved in drafting the Bangladesh Labour Rule 2015.

According to the DIFE website, "The department was established in 1970 with a vision to create a better working environment for the workers through implementing labour laws and regulations, eliminating child labour, enhancing productivity of factories by creating a better working environment, ensuring workplace safety including fire safety and welfare of workers and implementing minimum wages declared in different sectors."

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Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, former executive director of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, said the DIFE mainly focuses on readymade garment factories and other factories have for years remained out of their radar.

Amid rapid economic growth in the country, new factories are sprouting up every year, he said, adding, "A culture of impunity and poor compensation for the victims have developed over time. This should stop right now."

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, there are around 80 lakh economic units across the country. One unit means a factory where five or more workers are employed.

THE DIFE'S EXPLANATION In Narayanganj zone, 3,450 factories are registered with the DIFE. The department is mandated to visit each factory once a year. There are 14 labour inspectors and six assistant inspector generals in the zone, Suman Barua said, adding that the workforce is inadequate for the job.

"It is a Herculean task for us. We cannot visit every factory once a year with such understaffed manpower," he said.

Top officials of the department said there are more than 90,000 factories registered with it, adding that it has been growing as fast as the economy

of the country. To visit these facilities, the department has around 300 inspectors.

It means that over 246 factories would have to be visited by the department every day to cover all the registered ones in a year.

The department also does not have offices in every district. It operates through a headquarters and 23 district offices.

Khan said if his department wanted to visit all the economic units, registered and unregistered, it would take 10 years for it to revisit a factory.

In the 2018-19 fiscal year, the organisation inspected 43,401 factories, shops and establishments. A total of 2,755 complaints were received and 2,064 complaints were resolved.

A total of 1,429 cases were filed and 844 were settled.

In the 2015-16 fiscal year, the DIFE inspected 27,000 factories and filed 1,004 cases. In the 2016-17 fiscal year, it inspected 32,924 factories and filed 1,273 cases. In the 2017-18 fiscal year, a total of 42,639 factories were inspected and a total of 1,772 cases were filed.

"We visit only the registered factories and give licenses to the new factories," said DIFE Inspector General Md Nasir Uddin Ahmed.

Syria govt raises bread, diesel prices as crisis deepens

AFP, Damascus

Steep bread and diesel price hikes went into force in government-held parts of war-torn Syria yesterday, bringing more pain for civilians in a long-running economic crisis.

The price of diesel fuel nearly tripled and the price of bread doubled, according to the official SANA news agency, only days after Damascus announced an increase in the price of petrol.

The move coincided with a decree

issued by President Bashar al-Assad yesterday that increases by 50 percent public sector salaries and sets the minimum wage at 71,515 Syrian pounds a month (\$57 at the official rate), up from 47,000 pounds (\$37).

In a second decree, Assad raised public sector and military pensions by 40 percent, according to SANA.

According to a revised price list published by SANA on Saturday night, one litre of diesel fuel will now cost 500 pounds, up from the 180 pounds

users in most sectors were paying previously.

Mustafa Haswiya, of the state-run Syrian Company for the Storage and Distribution of Petroleum Products, said 80 percent of Syria's hydrocarbon needs are purchased from abroad using foreign currency.

"It was necessary to raise prices in order to reduce the import bill," which would otherwise have risked making oil products unaffordable, SANA quoted him as saying.

Tigers win big

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able to record just their fifth ever away Test win in 59 matches, and their first since beating Sri Lanka in Colombo in 2017.

It is Bangladesh's second victory in Zimbabwe, with the other two away wins both coming in the West Indies in 2009.

The win also marked the farewell from the format for veteran Mahmudullah Riyad, who announced his retirement from Tests on the third day of the game. At the start of play yesterday, his teammates gave Mahmudullah a guard of honour and captain Mominul Haque let him lead the team out onto the ground.

After being included in the playing XI at the last moment, Mahmudullah rescued Bangladesh with a first-innings 150 batting at No 8. He added 191 runs for the ninth wicket with Taskin Ahmed, who made a career-best 75.

The 34-year-old was adjudged player-of-the-match, however, during the post-match presentation there was no official announcement from the man about his retirement. The Bangladesh Cricket Board has not made any official announcement either, but it is understood that Mahmudullah is sticking to his decision of not playing in the longest format anymore, a decision he had reportedly conveyed to his teammates during the third day of the Test.

The teams will now contest a three-match One-Day International series starting on Friday, which will be followed by three Twenty20 matches.

Jumped off

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jumped off the second floor of the building. She ended up breaking her limbs.

Like her, six other workers, who jumped off the building, are now undergoing treatment at the US Bangla Hospital.

With pain and plastered arms and legs, they are now worried about the treatment cost and their future.

Speaking to The Daily Star from her hospital bed, Monwara said, "When I tried going downstairs, I saw fire on the staircase and came back to the second floor. By that time, smoke engulfed the whole area... The heat made us feel like our flesh was melting. I thought of jumping off the second floor and some others too fell down on me and I lost consciousness. Once I got back my senses, I found myself in hospital."

"My injured husband is starving. Who will look after my children? Who will bear the expenses of my treatment?"

Like her, Sonia Akhter was in bed-1, Rozina in bed-2, Maria in bed-3, Nadia in bed-4, Monoara Begum in bed-5, Ruma in bed-6, and Ashrafal Islam in bed-5 of the men's ward.

Sonia, 14, started working, with a salary of Tk 5,600, at the factory since her father was unable to continue work due to the lockdown.

"It's been a month and a half. She was about to get the salary, but the chance of that has also faded. Now I don't have money for food at home. How can I arrange treatment for my daughter?" asked Abdul Quader, Sonia's father and a day-labourer.

"Sonia's left arm is broken. Doctors said an operation, which will cost around Tk 50,000, has to be done. If the operation doesn't take place in two to three days, she won't be able to work with that hand. Where will that money come from?"

Sonia's elder sister Rima, 16, who worked on the ground floor, also survived the fire.

In the six-storey building, the third floor was from where 48 bodies were recovered. Several workers alleged that the gate of the floor was locked and that's why most of the casualties were on that floor, where cream-chocos, ice bars, chocolates, and lollipops were manufactured.

A police official, wishing not to be named, said they would investigate whether the supervisor of the third floor, Mahbubur Rahman, received any instructions over phone to force the workers to stay on the floor.

Meanwhile, the workers said the government announced the provision of some money as compensation but only a little amount of that was actually provided.

Police on Saturday arrested the owners of Hashem Foods Ltd -- Md Abul Hashem and his four sons. Three others, accused of burning 51 employees to death, were also arrested. They all are now on a four-day remand.

Meanwhile Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Dr Zafullah Chowdhury, Ganosambhati Andolon chief coordinator Zonayed Saki, and Awami League organisational secretary Mirza Azam, were among others, who visited the spot yesterday.

Zafullah said it cannot be called an "accident", because it looks like a "premeditated murder".

"It's an overall failure of the government. There is an industrial department, their inspectors are supposed to come and inspect at what distance the chemicals should be kept. If they would come here, they would understand where the danger was... All the basic rules were violated. But what happens here, because of corruption, is that they submit reports without proper inspection."

He demanded a compensation of Tk 50 lakh for each of the deceased person.

Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Ganosambhati Andolon Bangladesh, said the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments is a place of a sheer negligence and corruption.

"They visit factories for money. If these government officials, including factory inspectors, are brought under the law, there will be no such incident in Bangladesh in the future. It needs to be properly investigated. We want justice."