

BANGLADESH UPDATE

13,768
New cases in 24hrs

10,34,957
Total cases

16,639
Deaths

8,81,521
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,052,763
Deaths

187,890,471
Total cases

Keeping more than 1 car gets costlier

Govt imposes 50pc more AIT from this fiscal year

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

If you have more than one car, SUV or minivan -- be it individually or jointly owned -- you have to pay 50 percent more income tax for each of such vehicles from the current fiscal year.

The Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) has started executing the move spearheaded by the National Bureau of Revenue (NBR) from July 1, said BRTA and NBR officials.

The development came seven years after the government imposed 50 percent additional tax on the owners having more than one such vehicles in 2014-15 fiscal year.

The government incorporated the provision of collecting additional tax in the Income Tax Ordinance-1984 at that time, but the additional tax could not be collected due to complications, including absence of necessary operating system at BRTA.

On an apparent bid to control small vehicles like cars, SUVs and minibuses, which is often blamed for traffic jam in the city, and collect higher tax from affluent people, the government had taken the decision to slap more tax at that time.

A total of 16.81 lakh vehicles got registered with Dhaka offices of BRTA till May this year. Of them, 4.39 are cars, SUVs and minibuses, show BRTA documents.

The BRTA, on behalf of the NBR, collects advance income tax from vehicle owners, through online banking system, while the owners have to pay for tax token or update vehicles' fitness certificates.

BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder said owners of more than one car, SUV and microbus have to pay 50 percent additional advance income tax from July 1.

"We have introduced the system," he told The Daily Star last night.

HOW MONEY TO BE PAID?

Explaining the matter, a BRTA official said if a person owns a 1,500cc car, he or she has to pay Tk 25,000 annually as advance income tax (AIT) now.

But if he or she has two such cars, then they have to pay Tk 37,500 as AIT for the second car. Similarly, they have to pay Tk 37,500 for the third one, the official said, wishing not to be named.

When a car owner will go to bank and shows his or her e-TIN (online taxpayer identification number), the bank official will be able to know the vehicle/vehicles the particular person owns and will take the particular amount from him or her, the official said.

A person with fake e-TIN certificate will not be able to pay the AIT, the official said.

Asked about the delay in executing the decision, he said there were some complications in this regard and they have to solve those.

The official added that their vendor developed the operating system to collect the additional tax and completed the trial run before formally introducing it on July 1.

A NBR official said a good number of vehicles got registered with the BRTA with fake TIN certificates due to the lack of scope for verifying the authenticity of certificates.

But now the BRTA has the access to NBR's TIN database, it is not possible to get vehicle registered with fake TIN certificates, the official said, seeking anonymity.

Meanwhile, the BRTA, in circular issued yesterday, said if any vehicle owner faces problem in this regard, he or she is requested to inform the BRTA office of the matter via email as the circle offices remained closed due to the ongoing lockdown.

The mail address is: ad@brta.gov.bd. The owners have to send soft copies of NID, e-TIN and acknowledgement slip to the mail address.



A man jaywalks on a street near Kakoli intersection in the capital's Banani area. A sign next to him urges people to use a nearby footbridge to cross the busy thoroughfare. Such disregard for traffic rules leads to accidents and loss of lives.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Lockdown to ease before Eid

FROM PAGE 1

At least 13,768 people were infected with the virus in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the highest in a single day.

The total number of infections stood at 10,34,957, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

At least 220 people died from the virus in the 24 hours, raising the death toll to 16,639.

Earlier on Sunday, the DGHS sounded alarm over the Covid situation. At the daily briefing, its spokesperson Dr Robed Amin said no hospital beds will be available in the next seven to 10 days if the current infection rate and patients' rush to hospitals continue.

Experts fear that the government decision to ease the lockdown may aggravate the already deteriorating situation as it would be difficult to ensure the health guidelines during home rush and at cattle markets.

And if the situation deteriorates further in the coming week due to relaxation of the restrictions, things would be out of the government's control as the healthcare system is already under severe stress amid a surge in patients all over the country,

they added.

"More than one lakh people got infected even during this lockdown. Following its relaxation, the number of Covid cases may double or treble," said Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) of the DGHS.

During the lockdown, the government kept garment and other factories open and allowed rickshaws on roads. There were no strict measures to keep the infected and the suspected cases in isolation or quarantine, he observed.

"The infected people moved around and spread the virus. Similar things will happen during home rush and at cattle markets," said Be-Nazir.

Renowned virologist Prof Nazrul Islam said, "The government needed to make people wear masks at any cost -- be it motivation or punishment. But we could not do that in the last 16 months."

Forcing people to wear masks could have been more fruitful than a lockdown in curbing infections, he observed.

Amid a surge in Covid cases, the government enforced a nationwide

strict lockdown from July 1 for a week. It was later extended for another week till July 14.

Since July 1, a total of 121,699 people were infected and 2,156 died from the novel coronavirus.

Contacted, Helal Uddin, president of Bangladesh Shop Owners Association, said that if the government allows, they would reopen markets on July 15.

Meanwhile, the two Dhaka city corporations said a total of 18 makeshift cattle markets will be set up in the capital tomorrow and sale of sacrificial animals will begin on July 17.

Though last year's data shows health protocols were largely ignored at the markets, DNCC Mayor Md Atiqul Islam claimed they will ensure that everyone follows the health safety rules this time.

"We've already formed monitoring committees to make sure that the health safety guidelines are followed properly."

"We will take immediate action if we find any violation of the guidelines. We have already given instructions to those concerned in this regard," he said.

'They should look at their own face in the mirror'

Says Momen about the UK in response to a human rights, democracy report

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has suggested that the UK pay attention to its own position before advising others on human rights and democracy.

"They should look at their own face in the mirror before advising others. If they cannot improve their own situation, they should stop this practice," he said in response to queries from reporters at his ministry yesterday about UK's Human Rights and Democracy Report 2020.

According to the report released last Thursday, there was no overall improvement in the human rights situation in Bangladesh in 2020.

It noted concerns over further restrictions on the freedom of expression, including the use of the Digital Security Act, to muzzle criticism of the government's Covid-19 response, and continued violence against women and girls.

The report also said that in March 2020, BNP Chairperson Khaleda 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.

On Sunday, the foreign ministry summoned acting British High Commissioner Javed Patel and conveyed the government's views and disappointment with certain issues mentioned in the report.

It clarified that it was grossly misleading to use the words "house arrest" in reference to Khaleda Zia.

"Khaleda Zia is not under house arrest. Their information is not accurate," Momen said.

Patel took notes on the government's views and assured that he would convey those to UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) authorities.

The acting high commissioner said the UK valued its diversified partnership with Bangladesh and wished to continue a constructive dialogue on human rights and governance issues through established mechanisms.

Momen said the UK report spoke of rapes in Bangladesh. Following that, he collected information from UK and found 7.33 lakh rape incidents happened last year, whereas only 9,000 cases of rape took place in Bangladesh in 2020.

"The UK has only 68 million people and the number of rapes is so high, but they are advising others."

"This is not acceptable."

Similarly, 85,000 rape cases also took place in the US in 2020, he said.

"You [media] start writing reports about them [UK and US]. All countries have good and bad elements. For that, we have the police force. None is an angel, but blaming someone is not a good mentality. If it is accurate, we will try to correct it," Momen said.

Momen said Bangladesh is going to organise the World Peace Conference on December 4 and 5 marking the Mujib Borsho and golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence. A peace award in the name of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman may also be declared at the conference.

Participants from various countries of the world, especially peace activists, singers, poets, intellectuals would be invited to the event.

Even bleaker days await them now

FROM PAGE 1

However, this was postponed after the tragedy.

As many as 2,035 people work in 11 factory-buildings of Hashem Foods, which produces mango juice, lachchi (yogurt drink), vermicelli, biscuits, lollipops, Nocilla spread, chanachur, noodles, fried peas, lychee drink, chocolate and various snacks.

Their monthly salary altogether amounts to about Tk 1.5 crore.

But the people who would sign the bank cheques -- Md Abul Hashem, owner of Hashem Foods Ltd, his four sons (directors of the company), and three officials, including the chief operating officer and deputy general manager of the factory -- are now behind bars on charges of burning 51 employees to death.

The Daily Star talked to at least 20 workers.

Some of them alleged that the factory often kept their overtime payment due.

The average salary of these workers is about Tk five to seven thousand a month. Almost all of them work overtime for extra money.

Recently, after a protest on July 1, they got their overtime payment for June.

"As we were supposed to get the salary and bonus ahead of Eid, the fire took place. The factory authorities said they would pay it on July 13

[today]. But then the owner and higher officials got arrested. Now we don't know what's waiting for us," said Rubel Mia, an electric engineer of the factory.

Production Supervisor Ashrafur Islam had jumped off the second floor of the six-storey building to escape the deadly fire on Thursday afternoon. With a fractured waist and back, he has been undergoing treatment at the US Bangla Hospital in Rupnaji, along with six others.

Speaking to The Daily Star, he said, "Eid will be celebrated in a few days but I have to be in hospital. I have severe pain in my waist and back. Doctors suggested bed rest for two months. Now who will bear the cost of my treatment? Who will bear the expenses of my family?"

Abdul Hakim, working at the factory's juice section for seven years, said, "There is no work at the factory. There is uncertainty over salary. If it [the factory] does not resume operation, how will we live with our families? With the house rent and shop rents due and with people back home waiting for me to send money, we will die of starvation."

Nahid Murad, manager (accounts), said, "If the owner of our company was not in jail, the salary would have been paid. But now the decision-makers, including the owner, are in jail. Even then, we are trying to pay

everyone's salary... Not just the salary, our owner will also help the deceased's families and injured workers as soon as he is released from jail. He talked to everyone before he got arrested."

About the factory's reopening, he said, "It will take time. After paying the salary, a decision will be taken about the resumption of the factory. Nothing can be said right now."

In the deadly fire, 51 workers and staffers lost their lives.

Bodies of 48 people, charred beyond recognition, were recovered from the third floor, where the only exit was locked.

Most of the victims were women and children.

The bodies were kept in the mortuaries of Dhaka Medical College and Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College.

Yesterday, the Criminal Investigation Department closed the temporary booth set up in front of the DMC morgue.

Drishy Islam, an assistant commissioner at the CID's forensic lab, told The Daily Star that DNA samples of 66 family members of 48 victims have so far been collected for matching.

The CID has issued a notice in front of the morgue to contact the forensic DNA laboratory of the CID in case any family member, of the deceased or missing person, want to give sample.

Nepal top court ousts PM

FROM PAGE 1

Political analyst Lok Raj Baral told AFP the court had stopped Oli from "doing as he pleases".

"Political stability ahead depends on an alliance among sharply divided political parties and their factions," he added.

The Oli government came to power in 2018 with a two-thirds majority.

There was optimism that his strong mandate at the polls would end years of instability and short-lived governments exacerbated by a devastating earthquake in 2015.

Deuba was elected as Nepal's prime minister four times between 1995 and 2018, including during the brutal, decade-long Maoist insurgency.

Govt won't reopen schools

FROM PAGE 1

The statement was issued ahead of the Global Education Meeting scheduled for today.

The statement said, "This should not go on. Schools should be the last to close and the first to reopen."

Education for millions of children has been disrupted since the Covid-19 outbreak started. As of yesterday, schools are shuttered in 19 countries, affecting over 156 million students.

In their efforts to limit transmission, governments have too often shut down schools and kept them closed for prolonged periods, even when the epidemiological situation did not warrant it.

These actions were frequently taken as a first recourse rather than a last measure. In many cases, schools were closed while bars and restaurants remained open, the statement said.

They said the losses that children and young people will incur from not being in school may never be recouped. From learning loss, mental distress, exposure to violence and abuse,

to missed school-based meals and vaccinations or reduced development of social skills, the consequences for children will be felt in their academic achievement and societal engagement as well as physical and mental health.

The most affected are often the children in low-resource settings who do not have access to remote learning tools, and the youngest children who are at key developmental stages.

"The losses for parents and caretakers are equally heavy. Keeping children at home is forcing parents around the world to leave their jobs, especially in countries with no or limited family leave policies."

"That's why reopening schools for in-person learning cannot wait," they said.

"It cannot wait for cases to go to zero. There is clear evidence that primary and secondary schools are not among the main drivers of transmission."

"Reopening schools cannot wait for all teachers and students to be vaccinated. With the global vaccine

shortages plaguing low and middle-income countries, vaccinating frontline workers and those most at risk of severe illness and death will remain a priority."

In Bangladesh, education of around four crore students have been affected by the Covid-induced closure since March 17 last year.

In February this year, the government announced that all schools and colleges will reopen in phases on March 30. As more and more new cases of Covid-19 were detected, they deferred the reopening plan to May 23.

As the infection rate surged again, the government extended the closure until July 31.

According to the officials, reopening of schools will happen in phases. The education ministry plans to hold in-person classes for the SSC and HSC examinees of 2021 and 2022 six days a week.

Students of class six to nine will have to go to school once a week. The number of classes will be increased based on the situation.

SUED UNDER DSA Man goes live on FB during traffic stop

Police say he tried to create chaos, deteriorate law and order

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Police have filed a case under the Digital Security Act against one Foysool Kadir, who claimed himself to be a journalist, over going live on Facebook after a traffic sergeant seized his motorcycle for violating traffic rules.

Nurul Afsar Bhuiyan, traffic sergeant of Sylhet Metropolitan Police, filed the case with Shahporan Police Station on Sunday night.

According to the case statement, Foysool tried to create instability, chaos and deteriorate law and order through Facebook Live.

It said police stopped a motorcycle carrying three people at a check post in Sylhet Sadar upazila's Surma Gate area on Friday evening.

As Foysool failed to produce his driving licence and bike registration documents, police seized the vehicle and lodged a case against him for not having the licence and documents, carrying two pillion passengers and riding the bike without wearing a helmet.

After having a heated argument with the traffic sergeant, the accused went live on Facebook and started saying that police were harassing an "on-duty journalist".

The video showed that the sergeant cleared his stand against Foysool over violation of traffic rules. But Foysool repeatedly told the cop that this was "harassment of a journalist" and he would call the deputy commissioner of Sylhet Metropolitan Police.

SMP Additional Deputy Commissioner (media) BM Ashraf Ullah Taher said police were trying to arrest the accused.

'BSF shoots' Bangladeshi dead

A CORRESPONDENT, Sathkhira

A Bangladeshi national was shot dead yesterday, allegedly by the Indian Border Security Force on Hingalganj border in India's North 24 Parganas district, opposite Sathkhira's Kaliganj frontier.

The dead was identified as Abdur Razzak, 19, of Kaliganj's Bharashimla union.

Abdul Khalek, Bharashimla union member, said several shots were heard from the border area around 2:30am.

Quoting locals, he said the incident occurred at Hingalganj near the Ichhamati river, adding that the BSF have taken the body away.

Habibur Rahman, the victim's uncle, confirmed the death and said he submitted an application to the Border Guard Bangladesh to bring the body back.

According to the border sources, Razzak was involved in cattle trading and smuggling of illegal products for long.

BGB Basantapur Border Out Post's Habilder Khalilur Rahman said the family confirmed the news of the death.

After receiving the written application, a letter will be sent to the BSF, he added.

Kaliganj Police Station officer-in-charge Golam Mostafa said he heard about the incident but was not officially informed.

Surge of new

FROM PAGE 1

and more than 5,000 are in hospitals across the country.

Of those reported dead yesterday, 64 were in Dhaka, 55 in Khulna, 37 in Chattogram, 23 in Rajshahi, 18 in Rangpur, 13 in Mymensingh, six in Sylhet, and four in Barishal divisions.

Of them, 142 were male and 121 were aged above 60. Thirteen of them died at home.

For more than a month, Khulna and Rajshahi divisions were the hotspots of the Delta variant of Covid-19. The situation worsened across the country over the last one week, especially in Rangpur and Chattogram divisions.

A majority of the patients are going to hospitals in critical condition, health officials said. This has strained the intensive care units and the high dependency units of hospitals.

As of yesterday noon, only 275 ICU beds out of 1,263 were vacant in 139 Covid hospitals nationwide.

In the Mymensingh division, the bed occupancy in Covid-19 hospitals yesterday was more than 111 percent.