

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



12,198
New cases in 24hrs



10,47,155
Total cases



16,842
Deaths



8,89,167
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



4,059,226
Deaths



188,404,749
Total cases

1.6cr Covid shots to arrive by end of August

Says Momen

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The current Covid-19 vaccination campaign in the country is set to get a boost with the expected arrival of around 1.6 crore vaccine doses by the end of August.

The first phase of the campaign hit a roadblock in March due to a halt in supply from Serum Institute of India, following a massive surge of cases and deaths in that country.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Facebook yesterday said Japan will soon supply 2.9 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine while the European Union will provide more than seven million doses of the same vaccine by August.

“Japan will stand by Bangladesh in the fight against #COVID19,” Japanese Ambassador to Dhaka Ito Naoki tweeted yesterday.

He said Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi had announced that Japan will provide 11 million vaccines to 15 countries in the region, including Bangladesh, under the Covax facility.

The AstraZeneca shots will be of special importance for Bangladesh as some 15 lakh people, who had been administered the first dose, have not been able to get the second one.

Momen said in the Facebook post that China will provide one million doses of the Sinopharm vaccine as a gift, in addition to the gift of 1.1 million doses earlier.

Besides, under a purchase agreement, China will supply five million more Sinopharm vaccines later this month or in early August, Chinese Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission Hualong Yan said at an event on July 11.

Bangladesh has so far received 1.6 crore vaccine doses -- 10.03 million AstraZeneca from India, 2.5 million Moderna and 1.06 lakh Pfizer from US and 3.1 million Sinopharm from China.

“Initially, we had a strong supply [of AstraZeneca vaccines] from India. There were problems in the vaccination programme after the halt in the supply, but we are in a good position now. Vaccines will keep coming,” Momen told reporters yesterday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the government will vaccinate 80 percent of the population, for which 26 crore vaccine doses will be needed, he said.

Bangladesh already has contracts with the Serum Institute of India and China’s Sinopharm, while agreements with Sinovac of China and Sputnik V of Russia are also in the final stages.

Bangladesh is also working with both the Russian and Chinese authorities for co-production of vaccines, he said.

“If we can produce vaccines locally, we will not have any problem at all,” Momen had told reporters on Monday.

As if Eid will give it a break

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and economic activities ahead of the festival,” reads the notification.

“But people will have to remain cautious and strictly maintain the health safety guidelines, including wearing face masks, during this period.”

It further said that taking into consideration the overall Covid situation, restrictions will be re-imposed at 6:00am on July 23 and stay in force till August 5 midnight.

The Cabinet Division issued 23 directives for the said period.

Barring a few, all the directives are almost similar to those issued earlier for the current restrictions.

All the factories and industrial units will remain closed during the period, the circular said.

However, factories have been allowed to operate since the government first imposed the Covid restrictions last year, maintaining the health safety rules.

According to the directives, non-motorised vehicles, including rickshaws, will not be allowed on roads during the two-week lockdown.

“Operation of all kinds of vehicles, including public transport [river, rail and road], as well as domestic flights, will remain suspended,” it read.

Kitchen markets will stay open from 9:00am to 3:00pm every day.

Now, those remain open from 9:00am to 5:00pm.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) in a circular said launches and other water vessels will be allowed to operate at half capacity from July 14 to 23 given that they follow the health safety guidelines.

Also, Bangladesh Railway announced operating 38 inter-city and 19 commuter and mail trains during the period.

Tickets for inter-city trains will

be available online while those for commuter and mail trains will be issued at counters, it said in a circular yesterday.

Two private airlines -- US-Bangla Airlines and Novoair -- said they will resume flights on all domestic routes on July 15 in compliance with the health safety rules.

In the capital, cattle traders have started bringing sacrificial animals to the makeshift markets. This year, the two Dhaka city corporations have permitted setting up of 18 such markets.

Talking to The Daily Star earlier, Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said, “Our unscientific approach of relaxing the lockdown will aggravate the crisis. If the government really wants to curb infections, it must continue the lockdown.”

“We needed to put under complete lockdown the border areas where cases of delta variant were detected. But we didn’t do that... Now it has spread all over the country.”

“More than one lakh people got infected even during this lockdown. Following its relaxation, the number of Covid cases may double or treble.”

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

At a virtual conference yesterday, State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain called upon people to stay alert and avoid crowds during the Eid to protect themselves against the virus.

“Refusal to wear face masks [in public places] is one kind of offence. It increases the risk of infection,” he said, adding that it is everyone’s responsibility to take preventive measures against Covid.

To us, Kishwar has already

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“small dream” of highlighting Bangladeshi food on the show, perhaps most of us took it casually.

But then as the season progressed, she demonstrated that she meant what she said. Starting from “machher jhol” to “jau bhaat”, “lau chingri”, “begun bhorta” to the inventive dessert highlighting “paan” -- her trajectory has generated immense interest not just in her home country Australia and ancestral home Bangladesh, but also in India.

In her own words while talking to The Daily Star: “My father is from Bangladesh, and was a freedom fighter. He moved to Australia about 50 years ago as a student and met my mother, who is from Kolkata. I was born and brought up here in Australia. I moved to Dhaka and lived there for five years for work. My in-laws are based in Dhaka and I used to travel there four to five times a

year pre-Covid. Therefore, living and working in Bangladesh played a role in shaping me.

“I’m a versatile cook with affinity for all different cuisines, like any metropolitan person. When I do cook Bengali food though, I get a sense of pride. I think that shows,” she said.

Kishwar’s masterstroke came in the MasterChef grand finale, when she served “panta bhaat-aloo bhorta” as her final dish to the judges.

Here’s why this mattered: “panta bhaat-aloo bhorta” is quintessentially Bangladeshi. We eat it on the first day of the Bangla year, but we think it’s too plebeian to serve to outsiders.

What better way to say that as a nation we’ve arrived on the global food stage, than serve something as humbly Bangladeshi as this?

You may not be MasterChef Australia, Kishwar, but you’re certainly MasterChef Bangladesh.



Launches parked at the Sadarghat terminal in the capital. Workers passed busy hours yesterday cleaning the vessels since they are set to resume operation tomorrow at half capacity and maintaining the health safety rules, after the end of a 14-day Covid-19 nationwide lockdown.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

For the poor made poorer

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lockdown today, Tk 450 crore has been allocated to distribute Tk 2,500 each in cash to about 17.2 lakh people.

Of them, about 14.4 lakh would be day labourers, 2.4 lakh transport workers, 50,445 small traders and 1,603 shipping workers.

In another package, Tk 100 crore has been allocated to all deputy commissioners for providing food assistance when someone makes a request by calling 333.

Another Tk 150 crore has been allocated for operating 813 special open market sale (OMS) centres across the country from July 25 to August 7 to help the low-income people in urban areas get food.

Allocations were made for 20,000 tonnes of rice and 14,000 tonnes of flour. Rice would be sold at Tk 10 per kilogram, down from Tk 30 per kg at present, said a top official of the food ministry.

executive director of the Policy Research Institute, while calling for the assistance to be rolled over until the second wave has been snuffed out in full.

The package is better defined than the previous one provided last year when the country went into a 66-day countrywide shutdown to snuff out the first wave of coronavirus cases as it addresses many of the grey areas, he said.

However, the issue of duplication, which was present in the last package, remains.

“If the same persons get help from different ministries, then the net for assistance becomes small,” said Mansur, also the chairman of Brac Bank.

Had the government created a central database or handed out the assistance through the mobile financial services platform, then the benefits would have been better targeted.

“The Tk 3,200 crore is a little more than last year’s package but it is still a

come if you do not have food. It takes effort to come and collect food. Plus, there is a stigma attached. So, it is a good initiative,” Sen added.

VGF AND OTHERS

In a separate move, the government is set to distribute 10 kgs of rice for free ahead of Eid-ul-Azha to about one crore “ultra-poor and destitute families” that have the vulnerable group feeding (VGF) card in 492 upazilas and 328 municipalities across the country.

The disaster management and relief ministry on July 4 sent a letter to all the offices concerned and asked the deputy commissioners of all districts to inform the respective lawmakers about the allocation.

The letter also asked the officials to distribute the allocated rice by July 19 to all the VGF cardholders.

According to the letter, the ultra-poor and destitute families will need to meet at least four out of the 12 criteria to be eligible for the assistance.

The criteria include landless households or those who have only homestead; households dependent on daily wage labour; households dependent on women’s income or begging; households with no income-generating assets; households headed by widowed, divorced or separated women; households headed by a freedom fighter with a disability, and households without access to two full meals a day for most of the year.

Only one beneficiary per household can receive the food aid, which will be distributed by local public representatives.

The letter also asked for redistribution of the VGF cards for unions and wards based on the 2011 census.

Besides, the ministry on the same day sent separate letters to concerned offices informed that 14,000 tonnes of rice and Tk 1.41 crore has been allocated in favour of 64 DCs, 3,280 tonnes of rice and Tk 3.28 crore for 328 municipalities and 800 tonnes of rice and Tk 4 crore for 12 city corporations as humanitarian assistance.

Priority should be given to the victims of natural disasters and people who became jobless, particularly the transport workers, as a result of the pandemic.

The allocation can be spent on giving food assistance -- rice, pulses, salt, oil, potatoes -- to those who seek help by calling the national helpline 333.

“We have made the allocation so that people can have some food stocks during the festival,” said a top official of the Disaster Management and Relief Ministry.

Muezzin’s body found floating in pond

Police suspect he was murdered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nature

Police recovered the body of a muezzin in Naogaon’s Sadar upazila around 10:30am on Tuesday.

The body of Quddus Hossain, 52, muezzin of a local mosque, was found in a pond near MS Seemana Brick Kiln in Chakchampa area, said police.

Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Naogaon Sadar Police Station, said Quddus had been missing since Monday afternoon.

The muezzin headed towards Shailgachhi market on Monday afternoon and had remained missing ever since, said the victim’s family members.

Later, the workers of the brick kiln found his body floating in the pond, they further said, adding that the workers then informed the victim’s family.

Suspecting the death to be a murder, the officer-in-charge said, the body bore injury marks.

“It is believed that some miscreants beat him, tied his hands, and threw him into a pond,” he said.

The body was sent to Naogaon Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

No case was filed until this report was filed.

Russia warns of hot summer after June records

AFP, Moscow

Russia’s meteorological service said yesterday the country could see its hottest summer on record, driven by climate change, after a record-breaking heatwave in June.

Moscow was hit by a historic heat wave at the end of June, with temperatures reaching a 120-year record.

“We estimate that temperatures will be high in the country both in the second half of July and August,” meteorologist Roman Vilfand of the Rosgidromet agency said at a press conference.

He added that it was “of course possible” that it will be the hottest summer ever recorded in Russia.

Vilfand said the average temperature in the European part of Russia was the highest since records began 130 years ago.

Russia as a whole saw its hottest June since 2012.

Vilfand said that not all of the country was affected by the heatwave, saying there were “swathes of cold in western Siberia.”

He also explained that climate change is leading to a shift in atmospheric circulation, due to significant temperature contrasts between the country’s Arctic and southern regions.

“There are more and more anticyclones in northern regions which increases the risk of fires,” he said.

According to many scientists, Russia -- especially its Siberian and Arctic regions -- is among the countries most exposed to climate change.

Russia has set numerous records in recent years and in June 2020 registered 38 degrees Celsius (100.4 degrees Fahrenheit) in the town of Verkhoyansk -- the highest temperature recorded above the Arctic circle since measurements began.

Govt to open schools after inoculation

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government was contacting the World Health Organization seeking suggestions on vaccinating school and college students as a few countries have started inoculating students aged between 12-18 years.

Prof Dr Be-Nazir Ahmed, a member of the National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAG), said, “We have also discussed how we can reopen the schools and colleges and how the students can be vaccinated.”

He said the USA, the UK and several other countries have started inoculating students aged between 12 and 18 years with the Pfizer vaccine.

Regulatory bodies like the WHO, FDA [Food and Drug Administration] or CDC [Centre for Disease Control and Prevention] are making the strategies. We are also collecting

evidence and information from various sources to see the feasibility,” he said.

Prof Mohammad Shahidullah, chief of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19, said the committee had recommended reopening the universities by inoculating the students and teachers in the soonest possible time.

About vaccinating younger students, he said, “We are waiting for WHO’s suggestions.”

On Sunday, Deputy Education Minister Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury said that the government made significant progress towards reopening schools as 65 percent of the secondary and about the same percentage of primary teachers have been vaccinated.