

## BANGLADESH UPDATE

12,198  
New cases in 24hrs10,47,155  
Total cases16,842  
Deaths8,89,167  
RecoveriesGLOBAL UPDATE  
4,058,646  
Deaths188,299,638  
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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health safety guidelines, including wearing face masks, during this period."

It further said that taking into consideration the overall Covid situation, restrictions will be reimposed at 6:00am on July 23 and will be in force till August 05 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 industries and factories will remain closed during the period, the circular said.

During the previous restrictions, factories were allowed to operate, maintaining the health safety rules.

According to the directives, non-motorised vehicles or rickshaws will not be allowed to ply the 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, the kitchen markets 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.

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

Tickets for inter-city trains will be available online while those for commuter trains will be issued at counters, it said in a circular yesterday.

Private airlines US-Bangla Airlines

and NovoAir are going to resume flights on all domestic routes on July 15 in compliance with the health safety regulations.

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 makeshift cattle markets.

Talking to The Daily Star earlier on Monday, 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 those border areas where cases of delta variant had been detected. But we didn't do it... 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," he cautioned.

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

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

"Not wearing face masks 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 the novel coronavirus.

## 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 bharta" 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 bharta" as her final dish to the judges.

Here's why this mattered: "panta bhaat-aloo bharta" 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.

## Malaysia shuts jab centre after 200 workers infected

## AFP, Kuala Lumpur

A Malaysian coronavirus vaccination centre was shut down yesterday after more than 200 workers tested positive for Covid-19, authorities said, as the country's cases set a new daily record.

The Southeast Asian nation is battling a serious outbreak driven by

highly infectious variants, and has been under a strict lockdown since the start of June.

It has ramped up its jab drive by opening mass vaccination sites, and about 11 percent of the population are so far fully vaccinated while almost 25 percent have received a first dose.



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 nationwide 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 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.

## Admin, public reps, locals to decide place for Eid prayers

## STAFF CORRESPONDENT

This year, local administrations, in consultation with public representatives and local dignitaries, would decide whether the Eid prayers would be held at mosques, eidgahs or open spaces.

The religious affairs ministry said this in an emergency notification issued yesterday.

The decision would be made considering the severity of coronavirus infection in any particular area.

The circular read that the authorities must disinfect mosques before saying prayers and no carpets would be allowed on mosque premises. The worshippers would bring their prayer rugs to mosques if necessary.

Every worshipper must perform ablution at home before visiting any mosque or eidgah. While performing their ablution, they must wash their hands with soap for at least 20 seconds. Every worshipper must wear a mask.

Soap, water, hand sanitiser or handwashing system should be kept at the entrance of the mosques or eidgah grounds. Jainamaz and caps reserved at the mosques cannot be used.

In the case of standing in the queue during the Eid prayers, one must follow the social distance and health guidelines and the lineup for prayer will take place after every alternative line.

Children, the elderly, sick persons and those engaged in attending the sick persons will have to be discouraged from participating in the Eid prayers.

Hugs and handshakes should be avoided at the end of Eid Jamaat to ensure the prevention of coronavirus infection.

Khatibs, imams, mosques or eidgah management committee members and local administration should ensure implementation of the instructions.

In case of violation of the above instructions, the local administration and law enforcement agencies will take legal action against the responsible persons.

The local administration, law enforcement agencies, officials and employees of the Islamic Foundation and the management committee of the respective mosques were requested to implement the guidelines to prevent the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

The Eid-ul-Azha would be celebrated on July 21 this year.

## 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 Vilfan of the Rosgidromet agency said at a press conference.

## Govt to open schools, colleges soon

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are closed in 19 countries, affecting over 156 million students, said a Unicef and Unesco joint statement on Sunday.

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 statement reads.

In Bangladesh, education of around four crore students has been affected by the Covid-induced closure since March 17 last year. As per the latest decision, educational institutions will remain closed until July 31.

The government started inoculating university students earlier this month to be able to eventually reopen the universities. No decision has yet been made regarding schools and colleges.

The health minister said the

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.

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