

BANGLADESH UPDATE

6,368
New cases in 24hrs

11,46,564
Total cases

18,851
Deaths

9,78,616
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,155,011
Deaths

193,603,856
Total cases

BID TO CROSS THE MED 17 Bangladeshi migrants drown off Tunisia

REUTERS, Tunisia

At least 17 Bangladeshi migrants drowned in a shipwreck off Tunisia as they tried to cross the Mediterranean to Italy from Libya, while more than 380 were rescued by the coastguard, the Tunisian Red Crescent said on Wednesday.

The boat had set off from Zuwara, on Libya's northwest coast, carrying migrants from Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Mali and Bangladesh, the humanitarian organisation said.

"Seventeen Bengalis died and more than 380 other migrants rescued in a boat that set off from Libya's Zuwara towards Europe," Red Crescent official Mongi Slim said.

In recent months, several people have drowned off the Tunisian coast, with an increase in the frequency of attempted crossings to Europe from Tunisia and Libya towards Italy as the weather has improved.

Hundreds of thousands of people have made the perilous Mediterranean crossing in recent years, many of them fleeing conflict and poverty in Africa and the Middle East.

Arrivals in Italy, one of the main migrant routes into Europe, had been falling in recent years, but numbers picked up again in 2021.

BCL activist stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A Chhatra League activist, who was stabbed and beaten up by a gang of criminals early Thursday in Gazipur, died from wounds at a hospital in the capital yesterday.

The victim, Masum Ahmed, 25, was from Beraiderchala village in Sreepur upazila.

Police and locals said the criminals broke into Masum's house around 3:00am on Thursday. They beat him up and stabbed him. Hearing his scream, neighbours rushed to the spot and the attackers fled the scene.

The locals took critically injured Masum to hospital, said his neighbour Md Habibullah, also ward councillor of Sreepur municipality.

As his condition deteriorated, he was shifted to the National Institute of Neurosciences and Hospital. He died around 7:30am yesterday.

Habibullah also mentioned that Masum was vying for the post of president of BCL Sreepur upazila unit.

Contacted, Khandaker Md Imam Hossain, officer-in-charge of Sreepur Police Station, said Masum's uncle filed a case over the incident, and they were trying to arrest the killers.

Ensure vaccine

FROM PAGE 1

To ensure vaccines for all. Talking further about the profit wall, the founder of Grameen Bank said, "Unless you break this wall or throw it away, vaccines cannot flow in the direction of people. There's a lot of capacity in the world to produce vaccines. The patent wall doesn't allow that to happen."

Yesterday, Prof Yunus received the Olympic Laurel as only the second person in history during the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics.

The distinction was created by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to honour outstanding individuals for their achievements in education, culture, development and peace through sport.

In his reaction to the distinction, the Noble laureate said he was "honoured and overwhelmed" to receive the Olympic Laurel.

"I'm honoured and overwhelmed to receive this Olympic Laurel. And so sad I can't be there with you."

The IOC is taking the social dimension of sports very seriously, Prof Yunus wrote on his verified Facebook page yesterday.

"You, athletes of the world, can provide the leadership in transforming this world," he said.

He called for creating a world of three zeros -- zero net carbon emission, zero wealth concentration to end poverty and once for all, zero unemployment by unleashing the power of entrepreneurship in everyone.

He wished the IOC success with its mission to help transform the world to a more peaceful world through sport.

Prof Yunus is also the recipient of numerous international awards for his ideas and endeavours. He is a member of the board of the United Nations Foundation.

In 2006, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for founding Grameen Bank, which pioneered the concepts of microcredit and microfinance for people living in poverty.

The first-ever Olympic Laurel was awarded to the Kenyan Olympian and social changemaker Kip Keino on August 5, 2016 during the Opening Ceremony of the Games of the XXXI Olympiad in Rio de Janeiro.

Initiated for Rio 2016, the Olympic Laurel is to be awarded at the opening ceremony of each summer edition of the Olympic Games.



An emergency response warehouse of Dhaka North City Corporation in the capital's Karwan Bazar. Different types of imported firefighting equipment have been gathering dust at the warehouses of city corporations as those remain unused for about one and a half years. Top right, a generator at the emergency response warehouse at Mirpur-10. Bottom right, a server at Mohakhali satellite control room.



PHOTO: STAR/ COURTESY OF IMED

Crucial yet left without care

FROM PAGE 1

The IMED report said the agencies involved in the project, including the city corporations and the fire service, do not have any organisational setup for urban resilience. There is also no allocation for maintenance of those equipment, which may threaten the project's sustainability.

The IMED recommended arranging necessary funds for maintenance and repair of equipment, setting up garages and appointing skilled manpower and providing them with necessary training.

WHY THE PROJECT? The government took up the project aimed at strengthening institutional capacity to tackle different natural disasters, including fire incidents and earthquakes.

Re-enforcing the country's emergency response capacity is one of the four components of the umbrella project. The DNCC is implementing one of the sub-projects at a cost of Tk 746.05 crore. Of the amount, the WB is providing Tk 731.50 crore.

Under the project, the authorities are to set up different establishments and procure 74 types of emergency equipment for the DNCC, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) and Sylhet City Corporation (SCC).

The establishments include two emergency operating centres, 10 satellite control rooms, two fixed and two mobile emergency command and control rooms, and 23 emergency response warehouses.

The project, which witnessed 80 percent progress till April, was supposed to be implemented between July 2015 and June 2020. But the deadline was extended till June 2021 due to the Covid pandemic.

The authorities then sought further extension of project deadline and raise of costs. If the revised proposal is approved, the project cost would be Tk 805.90 crore and the deadline would be April 2022, shows relevant documents.

The proposal is now pending approval from the Planning Commission.

IMED OBSERVATIONS According to the IMED report, an inspection team visited life-saving and Information and Communications Technology equipment at the headquarters of Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) in the capital's Bangabazar in May.

The three turntable ladders were there.

"During the inspection, one of the three supplied turntable ladders was found operational while foreign experts were seen working to repair the PTO [power take off] system of another [ladder]," reads the report.

"Side plate of the third turntable ladder got damaged while it was being taken to the garage. The supplier was informed about repairing it and necessary arrangements in this regard was being made."

A large number of ICT equipment had been kept at the FSCD site in Purbachal and the inspection team, which visited the site the same day, could not see the equipment as those were still in boxes.

The team visited an emergency response warehouse beside the DSCC regional office-3 in Azimpur on April 28.

No ambulance or any other vehicle for carrying bodies was found on the ground floor of the Azimpur warehouse and it seemed that the CCTV there was not operational, said the report.

"Like in other warehouses, there is an acute lacking of maintenance here. Dust gathered on the rooms of the warehouse and unused equipment lying there. There is possibility that delicate equipment can be damaged," reads the report.

The team visited a Mirpur warehouse the same day. The IMED attached five photos of the warehouse with its report.

One of the photos shows an unused ambulance while others show layers of dust on unused generators, furniture and other equipment.

The team also visited a Karwan Bazar warehouse on May 25 and found that its entrance was narrowed down by materials kept at the roadside for several under-construction buildings.

The main gate of the warehouse was blocked by bricks to be used for an under-construction park and it would not be possible to bring out equipment for rescue operations immediately after any incident.

"As in the other warehouses, equipment was left unused there in the absence of dedicated manpower for maintenance. Risks are there that the equipment would become non-functional," it said.

The IMED made similar observations about the Mohakhali and Kalyanpur warehouses and satellite

control rooms in Azimpur, Mirpur-10, Karwan Bazar and Mohakhali.

The satellite control room in Karwan Bazar is on the first floor of the warehouse.

"Necessary ICT equipment for the satellite control room has not been installed yet. There was a layer of dust on a server and a digital inverter at the control satellite room," reads the report with which two photos of the control room were attached to show the present condition there.

WHAT THE DAILY STAR SAW? These correspondents visited the warehouses and control rooms in Mohakhali and Karwan Bazar on July 8.

The warehouse and control room in Mohakhali were set up inside a two-storey steel structure near the DNCC regional office-3.

The warehouse, where a signboard was put up with the names of 53 equipment stored there, was locked. Grasses grew in front of the structure, giving a clear indication that the authorities seldom open the warehouse.

Contacted, Faruk Hasan Md Al Masud, executive engineer of area-3 of the DNCC, said the ambulances under the project were being used for the DNCC's Covid-dedicated hospital.

Replying to another question, Masud said he keeps the key of the warehouse and they open it whenever required. He requested these correspondents to talk to the project officials to know further about it.

Visiting the Karwan Bazar warehouse and the control room, The Daily Star correspondents found the two-storey steel-structure encircled by a fence of corrugated iron-sheet. There were dozens of makeshift shops around the fence.

The fence was put up to secure an under-construction part of a park. When these correspondents went to the other side of the fence through a narrow gate, three to four construction workers were found working at the park and the warehouse was locked.

Asked, one of the workers said the warehouse was last opened during the Ramadan, more than two months ago.

WHAT THE AUTHORITIES SAY? Contacted, Project Director Tariq Bin Yousef said they handed over the warehouses and control rooms to the zonal executive offices of the city corporation concerned around two years ago and that they were supposed

to do the maintenance work.

But the equipment is not being used due to the pandemic, he claimed, adding that different zonal offices and NGOs used to hold meetings at the control rooms previously.

He said the emergency operation centre would be set up in the next two or three months, connecting all zonal offices to the centre.

Asked about the Karwan Bazar warehouse, he said the fence was made to secure the under-construction part of the park and that there would be enough space for entrance after the completion of the work.

He said the development work was scheduled to be completed last year but it got delayed due to the pandemic.

About faults in one of the three turntable ladders, he said they were yet to receive the ladders officially, and that the supplier would fix the faulty one.

Asked about the IMED observations, he said the IMED did not seek any explanations from them.

Mostafizur Rahman, proprietor of Sadman Associates, local agent of Rosenbauer AG which supplied the ladders, said they handed over two ladders to the fire service "unofficially" and decided to hand over the other after fixing some "faults" detected by the company experts.

But fire service officials damaged a portion of one of the two ladders later while bringing it out of a garage, he said, adding that they had already received spare parts for both the ladders.

"But the experts who are supposed to fix it could not come to Dhaka due to Covid. We assured the project authorities and the fire service that the experts will fix it once the Covid situation improved," he told The Daily Star on July 15.

He also said the fire service "damaged" the third ladder while using it lately. "We will also fix the ladder at our cost."

Contacted, DNCC Mayor Md Atiqul Islam said the maintenance work was not done due to the Covid situation.

He said they would arrange a meeting soon with the FSCD, Red Crescent Society, Scouts and other volunteer organisations so that trained people remained ready to use the equipment.

"We will ensure mock exercises every three months so that everything remains functional."

Covid infections

FROM PAGE 1

42 percent in Munshiganj. However, during this period, the infection rate dropped in two other adjoining districts Manikganj and Tangail.

In Tangail, the infection rate dropped by one percentage point to 30 percent while by seven percentage points to 30 percent in Tangail.

Meanwhile, 166 people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, read a press release of the DGHS.

The total number of Covid-19 deaths in the country now stands at 18,851 and the death rate stands at 1.64 percent.

At least 6,364 new infections were reported during the period, taking the overall number of infections to 1,146,564, added the release.

The current positivity rate is 31.05 percent while the total positivity rate stands at 15.5 percent. A total of 20,493 samples were tested across the country in this 24-hour period.

At least 9,006 Covid-19 patients have recovered during the period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 978,616 and the recovery rate at 85.35 percent.

Among the 166 dead, 95 were men and 71 were women.

Of them, two were between 11 and 20 years old, seven between 21 and 30, 15 between 31 and 40, 24 between 41 and 50, 32 between 51 and 60, 46 between 61 and 70, 27 between 71 and 80, and 10 between 81 and 90, added the release.

During the three-day Eid vacation, between July 20 and July 22, a total of 22,908 Covid-19 cases were recorded and 560 persons died from the novel coronavirus infection.

The lowest number of cases on a day was recorded -- 3,697 -- across the country on Thursday as few people appeared at the testing centers.

However, the positivity rate was highest at 32 percent in comparison to the samples tested.

Holidaymakers

FROM PAGE 1

In Gabtoli and Aminbazar, police stopped a large number of private vehicles and rented cars and denied most of their entry to the capital.

Meanwhile, people on motorcycles, cars and minibuses travelled across the Padma on ferries between Daulatdia and Paturia and Bangla Bazar and Shimulia terminals. But the ferries could hardly keep up with the number of people and vehicles that kept arriving in the terminals. Many had to wait for hours before they managed to get on a ferry.

Yasmin, who travelled from Meherpur, told The Daily Star that she and her two children reached Daulatdia around midnight on Thursday and waited at the terminal until the next morning to get on a ferry.

Sadi Mohammad, another traveller, said, "I work for a private firm. The employer told me to come back if I wanted to save my job."

Tania Sultana, additional superintendent of police (Shibalaya circle), said, "Vehicles have been stuck at Daulatdia since last night. They were allowed to cross the river on humanitarian grounds."

Our Munshiganj correspondent reports that the picture was similar in Banglabazar and Shimulia.

According to the Traffic Control Room of Bangabandhu Bridge, vehicles including buses went across the bridge until 9:00am, reports our Tangail correspondent.

Streets in the capital's Farmgate, Shahbagh, Panthapath, Mohammadpur, Shyamoli, Ring Road, Adabor, and Dhanmondi areas were almost empty yesterday.

The picture was similar in Sylhet, Barisal, Chattogram, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Rajshahi cities, reports our correspondents.

Rab, Border Guard Bangladesh and army personnel were deployed to enforce the lockdown.

Police detained 403 individuals for being outdoors in Dhaka yesterday.

Mobile courts fined 203 individuals and shops Tk 1.27 lakh while DMP's traffic division fined 441 motorists Tk 10.60 lakh.

Govt hospitals to get 1,200 more Covid-19 beds

FROM PAGE 1

"It will have 400 ICU [intensive care unit] and as many HDU [high dependency unit] beds," said the health minister.

Apart from this, a central monitoring team has been formed to monitor the hospital services in the capital, Zahid said after Sunday's meeting with the officials of public hospitals.

"Our resources are limited. The increased number of beds will not be enough if the situation is not controlled right away," the minister warned.

Health professionals said increasing the number of beds will not bring any change if the manpower is not increased simultaneously.

"We have already started expanding the hospital beds. Our 8th-12th floor will be turned into a Covid unit. We are hopeful of adding 200 beds to the hospital, but we don't have ICU facilities," NITOR Director Abdul Gani Mollah told The Daily Star on July 19.

He, however, said they have a shortage of manpower as the NITOR doctors are not tasked with treating

Covid patients. "But we will try to ensure making our best efforts as this is a crucial time."

Prof Dr Khalilur Rahman, director of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, said they are capable of increasing the number of Covid beds up to 350.

Asked about manpower, he said they have already communicated with the Director General of Health Services (DGHS) for additional manpower.

Dr Sheikh Farid Hossain Miah, director (hospitals) at DGHS, said

they cannot recruit healthcare professionals overnight.

"Recruitment of doctors, nurses, and technologists is under process. The existing manpower will provide services for now."

He said the ICU beds for Covid patients will also be increased.

Currently, there are 15,625 general beds for Covid patients across the country. Of them 6,198 were vacant yesterday, according to DGHS data.

Out of 1,301 Covid ICU beds across the country, only 257 were unoccupied until yesterday.

Voice for the oppressed falls silent

FROM PAGE 1

Bangladesh's fight for independence.

The legendary folk singer and freedom fighter passed away yesterday at 10:56pm at the capital's United Hospital. He was 71.

The news was confirmed to The Daily Star by his son Mashaque Alamgir Rajeeb.

He had been suffering from Covid-19 infection and was admitted to the hospital on July 15 after his condition rapidly deteriorated.

He also suffered a heart attack while under ventilation around 10:00pm last night.

Soon after the demise of the Ekushey Padak-winning singer, President M Abul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed shock and conveyed their sympathies to the bereaved family.

In a condolence message, President Abul Hamid said the void that has

been created in the country's music arena due to the death of Fakir Alamgir will never be filled.

His songs have played an important role in the revival of patriotism and the development of the consciousness of the Liberation War among the younger generation, stated the message.

The president also prayed for the salvation of his departed soul.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the singer will be remembered for his great role in popularising Gono Sangeet among the masses.

Praying for the salvation of his departed soul, the premier also expressed her sympathy to the bereaved family.

Fakir Alamgir was one of the leading exponents of Gono Sangeet -- the songs of the masses -- in the country. Synonymous with voicing the rights of the voiceless, he was one

of the most beloved artists of his generation.

Born in Faridpur, Fakir Alamgir started his music career in 1966. During his student life, he was active in politics, while also writing Gono Sangeet to instil a sense of justice among the masses. He was a student of Mass Communication and Journalism in Dhaka University.

He played an important role as a member of Kranti Shilpi Gosthi and Gono Shilpi Gosthi during the mass upsurge in 1969. The legendary singer worked with Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra during the Liberation War.

After the announcement of victory on December 16, 1971, the singer sang "Bijoy Nishan Urchey Oi" with his fellow artists, weeping tears of joy.

Post-war, Fakir Alamgir created an amalgamation of earthy tunes and western influences to make unique

creations that reached out to the masses.

Alamgir played a pivotal role in influencing the sound of modern Bangladeshi music alongside Ferdous Wahid, Azam Khan, Pilu Momtaz and others by combining indigenous tunes with western music.

Throughout his illustrious career, he sang songs like "O Sokhina Gesos Kina", "Shantahar", "Nelson Mandela", "Naam Tar Chhilo John Henry", "Banglar Comrade Bondhu", among countless other hits, which resonated in the hearts of all listeners. "O Sokhina Gesos Kina" is considered his seminal work, being on the lips of every other Bangladeshi after it aired on BTV's Anandamela in 1982.

In 1976, he founded "Wrishiz Shilpi Gosthi", an organisation that has served this country's music scene for over four decades. He has

also served as the president of Gono Sangeet Shamanya Parishad (GSSP).

Also an avid writer, Fakir Alamgir published his first book "Chena Chena" in 1984.

"Muktijuddher Smriti Bijoy Gan" and "Gono Sangeeter Otir O Bortoman" are some of his notable books. "Amar Kotha", "Jara Achhen Hridoy Potey" and "Smriti Alaponey Muktijuddho" were also very popular.

Fakir Alamgir's name will forever be synonymous with Bangladesh's Gono Sangeet, one which people belonging to all walks of life could take pride in.

"We were all ready to give our lives for freedom, we were that determined for revolution," Fakir Alamgir had said in his last interview with The Daily Star.

Even though he is no more, he has left behind his legacy in the very existence of Bangladesh, alongside courageous freedom fighters with whom he selflessly served the country.