

AFGHAN CONFLICT
UN warns of 'unprecedented'
civilian deaths from Taliban
offensives
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"90 percent of the hospital beds are occupied with patients and our health workers are tired now."
HEALTH MINISTER ZAHID MALEQUE
ABOUT COVID PATIENTS



"... Legal action will be taken against those who are running factories."
STATE MINISTER FOR PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION FARHAD HOSSAIN



"If you look at the inflection of the curve of new infections... it is among the unvaccinated and since we have 50 percent of the country not fully vaccinated, that's a problem."
US INFECTIOUS DISEASE OFFICIAL ANTHONY FAUCI ON COVID

Govt taking jabs to people's doorstep

Moves to rev up inoculation drive to stem Covid surge

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA and
MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

The government has decided to set up more vaccination centres across the country to speed up the inoculation drive especially in remote areas amid a surge in Covid deaths and infections.

The healthcare system has been overwhelmed over the past few weeks with hospitals seeing a sharp rise in Covid patients. Yesterday, the country logged 247 deaths from the virus and 15,192 new cases -- the highest in a day.

"The prime minister has given directives to strengthen the vaccination campaign. She also asked for starting vaccination campaign at the ward level and inoculating elderly people," Health Minister Zahid Maleque told journalists after a cabinet meeting yesterday.

With the uncertainty about securing Covid vaccines gone, the biggest challenge for the government now is to vaccinate people, especially those in rural areas.

"Apart from the existing vaccination points, we have decided to set up around 14,000 points in the same number of wards in different unions all over the country," he said.

Currently, the vaccination programme

14,000 ward-level vaccination points to be set up at unions across the country

Govt expected to get 21 crore doses of Covid vaccines within 12-18 months

If needed, inoculators will go to people's homes to administer vaccines

is being run through 1,005 vaccination points across the country, and 150 doses can be administered at each point a day.

The minister said people would not need to go to the centres at the upazila level to get vaccinated, rather vaccines would be taken to their doorsteps.

Noting that vaccine is a key tool for saving lives and curbing infections, Zahid said if the government fails to vaccinate elderly people, it would not be possible to bring down the death rate.

Vaccines will be administered at union health complexes and also makeshift vaccination points at the ward level.

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Loved ones living in foreign lands see Amena Begum, a 55-year-old Covid-19 patient needing oxygen support, via video calls as she lies inside an ambulance in front of the DMCH. Amena was brought to the capital from Cumilla on July 22 and admitted to a private hospital. As her family could no longer afford her treatment costs there, they took her to the DMCH yesterday. She was later admitted to the ICU.

Numbers keep getting grimmer

Record 247 die from Covid, 15,192 infected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Numbers of confirmed new cases of Covid-19 and deaths from the disease set new records yesterday with officials reporting 247 deaths and 15,192 new cases.

Health experts have for over a week been saying that new cases and hospitalisations would spike partly because of the lifting of coronavirus restrictions around the Eid.

Officials yesterday reported a positivity rate of 29.82 percent after testing 50,952 individuals in the 24 hours preceding 8:00am, the highest number of tests in a day.

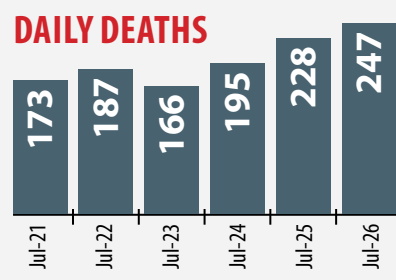
The previous records were 231 deaths reported on July 19 and 13,768 cases reported on July 12.

Infections and deaths caused by the virus have been setting new grim records since the Delta variant spread in the communities in May.

In Gazipur and Khagrachhari districts, the positivity rates reported yesterday were 64.73 percent and 51.21 percent. Thirteen other districts have positivity rates over 40 percent.

Twenty other districts had positivity rates between 30 and 40 percent, and 23 districts between 20 and 30 percent.

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Stern action if ineligible factories run

Says state minister for public admin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will take stern action if ineligible factories are kept open during the ongoing two-week-long strict lockdown that began on July 23, said Farhad Hossain, state minister for public administration.

"The way the coronavirus has spread, there is no alternative to strict restrictions. If anyone opens (a factory), legal action will be taken," he said after the cabinet meeting yesterday, on the day the country reported the highest single-day deaths from Covid-19.

Hossain's comment comes as some factories are running amid the lockdown in violation of the government directive put in place to rein in the runaway Covid-19 caseload and fatalities.

Factories pertaining to food processing; poultry food; pharmaceuticals; backward

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DSA weaponised to muzzle dissent

Amnesty Int'l voices concern over the alarming pattern

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amnesty International says it has found a concerning pattern in which the Bangladeshi authorities are weaponising sections 25, 29 and 31 of the Digital Security Act to target and harass critical voices.

The cyber tribunal based in Dhaka, which holds trials of cybercrimes including cases filed under the DSA, has received 199 cases between January 1 and May 6 this year.

Amnesty International has found 134 of those cases that clearly specified the sections under the DSA. Eighty percent of those cases (or 107 out of 134) were filed under both sections 25 and 29 of the DSA, it said in a statement on its website on Sunday.

Section 25 refers to the transmission, publication, etc. of offensive, false or threatening data or information, section 29 pertains to the publication, transmission, etc. of defamatory information and section 31 criminalises a person for deteriorating law and order.

"The way in which defamation is criminalised under the DSA shows the serious shortcomings of a criminal approach to defamation, where the law has been further instrumentalised to silence dissent," the statement said.

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"The Digital Security Act is a key factor, key weapon, responsible for the shrinking of Bangladesh's civic space."
Dr Agnès Callamard

SECRETARY GENERAL,
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

RETD PUBLIC SERVANTS

They wanted impunity, but cabinet said no

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

As recently as in 2018, the Sarkari Chakori Ain was formulated, giving public servants an array of benefits.

But even before three years have passed, the public administration ministry yesterday placed a proposal before the cabinet, seeking impunity for retired public servants, who had been convicted of committing serious crimes or ethical turpitude.

The cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, however, rejected the proposal placed by KM Ali Azam, senior secretary of the ministry, sources said.

According to section 51 (4) of the 2018 law, any retired civil servant convicted of a serious crime can currently be stripped of partial or all post-retirement benefits, including pension.

The confiscation of these benefits can be both temporary and permanent, as per the law. The section also adds that prior to this step, the retired government servant must

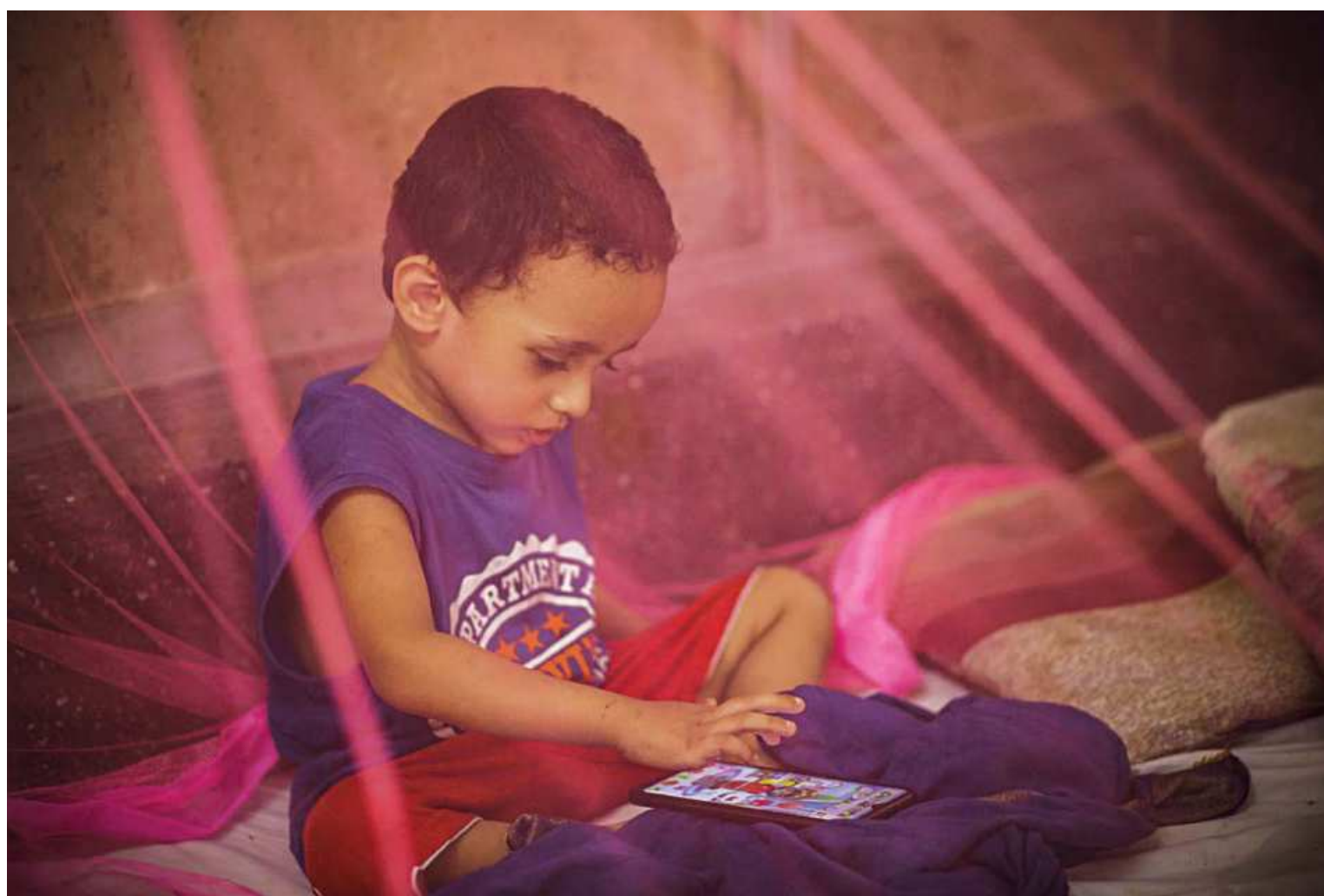
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BUSINESS

IT freelancers thriving amid pandemic

The Covid-19 has brought cheers to the freelancers in the country. More companies across the globe are hiring freelancers to reduce payroll expenses. This outsourcing trend has created a gold rush for many in Bangladesh, especially youth and the people who lost their jobs due the pandemic-induced economic slump. Bangladesh has 6 lakh IT service exporters or freelancers and around 1,600 team based freelancer companies. Together they bring roughly US\$ 500 million home annually through their services, according to the industry insiders.

STORY ON B1



Under a mosquito net, a child plays games on a mobile phone at Dhaka Shishu Hospital yesterday. Doctors said three children died of dengue at the hospital in the last three days. Dengue cases have surged with at least 1,430 patients admitted to hospitals this month alone.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Dengue menace on the prowl

Cases from this month alone surpass last year's total

HELEMUL ALAM

Surpassing the total number of cases last year, at least 1,430 dengue patients were hospitalised just this month, indicating an alarming rise in the Aedes-borne disease.

At least four children died of dengue over the last two days in two hospitals in the capital.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) control room, 123 patients were hospitalised across the country in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday. With this, the total number of this year's cases stands at 1,802.

In 2020, 1,405 dengue patients were hospitalised across the country, from which 7 had died, according to DGHS data.

The DGHS, however, did not independently confirm any deaths this year and is investigating only three death cases so far.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Kinkor Ghosh, epidemiologist of Dhaka Shishu Hospital, said three children, all under five, died of dengue over the past two days in their hospital.

The dead are Rouza, 14 months old, a resident of the capital's Gandaria, Tuba, two and half years old, from Savar, and Momim, four and half years old, a resident of Basabo, he said.

In another case, Zion, 10, son of Ziaur Rahman, deputy controller of import and export of the commerce ministry, also died of dengue in a city hospital on July 25, said Amit Kumar Chakrabarti, general secretary of 29th BCS All Cadre Forum.

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