

BANGLADESH UPDATE

15,192
New cases in 24hrs

11,79,827
Total cases

19,521
Deaths

10,09,975
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,180,122
Deaths

195,173,548
Total cases

Myanmar junta cancels 2020 polls results

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta yesterday cancelled the results of 2020 polls won by Aung San Suu Kyi's party, announcing they were not "free and fair" almost six months after deposing the Nobel laureate in a coup.

Investigations had uncovered more than 11 million cases of fraud in the elections in which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy trounced the military-aligned opposition, the junta's election commission said.

"They (the NLD) attempted to take state power from non-NLD parties and candidates by misusing Covid-19 restrictions," said commission chairman Thein Soe.

"[It] was not free and fair, that is why the result of 2020 election is cancelled."

He did not say whether fresh polls in the country of 54 million would be held.

The junta has previously said it would hold new elections within two years, but has also threatened to dissolve the NLD.

Suu Kyi has been detained since the coup, and faces an eclectic raft of charges, from flouting coronavirus restrictions to illegally importing walkie talkies, that could see her jailed for more than a decade.

Myanmar has been in chaos since the military's power grab, with more than 900 killed in a crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.

A resurgent virus wave has caused deadly havoc across the country, striking with many hospitals empty of pro-democracy medical staff.

Myanmar's economy is expected to shrink by 18 percent in 2021, the World Bank said yesterday, as a result of massive unrest following the coup and a third coronavirus wave.

The NLD saw their support increase in the 2020 vote compared to the previous election in 2015.

In a report on the 2020 polls, the Asian Network for Free Elections monitoring group said the elections were "by and large, representative of the will of the people".



Workers unload pineapples from a truck in Kadamtali fruit market in Sylhet after they were brought from Tangail's Madhupur upazila. Traders in the market say pineapple prices have dropped amid a dearth of buyers due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

India begins landslide, flood clean-up as deadly monsoon rains ease

AFP, Mumbai

Rescuers waded through waist-deep mud in western India yesterday to reach injured residents and start a massive clean-up after heavy monsoon rains triggered landslides and floods that killed 159 people.

India's western coast was hit by severe rainstorms over several days, with a quarter of a million people evacuated from their homes in three states and power cut across vast areas.

Experts say climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of the annual deluge -- which is critical to replenishing rivers and groundwater but also causes widespread death and destruction.

"The focus has now shifted to evacuating the injured and restoring electricity as water levels recede," a National Disaster Relief Force spokesperson told AFP.

"The rainfall has stopped in most places and water levels have receded. We are helping with clean-up, relief and restoration."

In the worst-hit state Maharashtra, where the toll rose to 149 on Sunday, officials said search operations were halted in the hillside village of Taliye, southeast of Mumbai.

Some 53 bodies have been recovered in the village so far, with 17 people still missing, after a large landslide washed away people and homes on Thursday.

DSA weaponised to muzzle dissent

FROM PAGE 1

Amnesty International called on the Bangladeshi authorities to ensure that defamation was treated as a matter for civil litigation, not criminal, the statement said.

Irene Khan, the United Nations special rapporteur for freedom of expression and opinion, also made observations down that line at a webinar, titled "No Space for Dissent -- Freedom of Expression in Bangladesh", organised by Amnesty International.

"The punishments of the law are not consistent with the international standards. This is a relic of colonial times when the sovereign was in conflict with the people and the only way the sovereign could stay in rule was to introduce criminal libel," Irene said.

She said it should be possible to take someone to court and fine them for damages. "That is protecting my [the person's] reputation. But using power of criminal law is putting too much power in the hands of the state."

The measures need to be proportionate, she said. "There are grounds when the right to freedom of expression can be restricted, but these grounds have to be put out very precisely for example, for the purpose of national security or protecting other people's rights," added Irene. "For that, we need narrowly-defined precise laws, not vague laws."

The UN special rapporteur also said she has not received any response from the Bangladesh government regarding DSA cases like the ones against cartoonist Ahmed Kishore and writer Mushtaq Ahmed.

"In terms of official responses from the government, I have not gotten any on the individual cases, but I have been told that I will, so I am waiting," said Irene.

On March 31, she wrote to the government requesting information. The letter was also signed by the UN

special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the special rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and the special rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

They had asked the government to explain under what legal grounds Kishore and Mushtaq were arrested. They had also asked the government to provide details on what investigations the government had carried out following the custodial torture of Ahmed and Mushtaq.

"The government needs to take the UN international system seriously, we are here to help the government live up to its obligations," Irene said at the webinar.

Agnès Callamard, secretary general of Amnesty International, said, "This draconian law [DSA] with vague provisions criminalises legitimate forms of expression online. This is a key factor, key weapon, responsible for the shrinking of Bangladesh's civic space."

Eminent lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua commented, "For the last couple of years, there has been no political dissent in Bangladesh. We have removed offline dissent from the Bangladesh dictionary. So all sorts of dissent is completely online."

"That is currently under attack," Amnesty International said that the cyber tribunal in Dhaka has dismissed nearly 50 percent of the cases (or 97 out of 199) during the period under review for lacking merit and evidence.

"The volume of DSA cases turned down by the tribunal demonstrates the way in which powerful people in Bangladesh have weaponised the law to silence dissent," said Saad Hammadi, Amnesty International's South Asia campaigner.

Numbers keep getting grimmer

FROM PAGE 1

Yesterday's data suggests that transmission is the worst across Sylhet, Barisal and Chattogram divisions.

As of yesterday, the pandemic has caused 19,521 confirmed deaths and 11,79,827 infections.

Of those reported dead yesterday, 141 were male and 106 female. Of them, 72 were in Dhaka, 61 in Chattogram, 46 in Khulna, 21 in Rajshahi, 16 in Rangpur, 14 in Sylhet, 12 in Barisal and five in Mymensingh divisions.

COVID HOSPITALS AT 90 PERCENT CAPACITY

"Ninety percent of the hospital beds are occupied with patients, and our health workers are tired now," Health Minister Zahid Maleque told reporters after yesterday's cabinet

meeting.

"It's unfortunate how people are going outdoors... breaking the rules and risking lives," he added, urging the authorities to be stricter in enforcing the lockdown.

"In hospitals, 70 percent of Covid patients are older people from villages and the fatality rate among them is 90 percent."

Mass vaccination will now be boosted in the wards, unions and upazilas, said the minister.

The government has taken an initiative to vaccinate the elderly people because they are reluctant to get the jabs.

Besides, the government will recruit 4,000 more doctors and nurses to cope with the situation, he said.

Govt taking jabs to people's doorstep

FROM PAGE 1

"We have estimated that we can administer over one crore doses a month. But everything depends on availability of vaccines."

The minister said they are considering allowing some private hospitals to administer Covid vaccines as those have the required facilities.

He further said the government expects to get 21 crore doses of Covid vaccines within a year and a half.

"We have the capacity to store eight crore shots at a time. Storing vaccines is not a big concern for us."

He said the government is bringing freezerscapable of storing at a time one crore jabs like that of Pfizer which need to be kept at ultra-low temperature.

Asked about the manpower needed for a broader inoculation campaign, an official of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said, "Nursing students may be engaged in administering vaccines along with the existing health workers."

Healthcare professionals, including nurses, are now administering vaccine doses.

"Administering a vaccine shot is not a difficult task. Nursing students from the second academic year onwards can be engaged in administering jabs," the official said, seeking anonymity.

Yesterday, more than two lakh people across the country got their first shot of Covid vaccine and 3,500 the second one.

The government has so far received 2.12 crore vaccine doses from different sources, including 33 lakh jabs as gift

from India and 11 lakh shots from China.

As of July 25, a total of 1.18 crore people were inoculated -- 43 lakh of them got both the first and second shots.

Officials of the Extended Programme on Immunization (EPI) said they can go for a massive vaccination campaign once they secure a good stock of Covid vaccines.

"Once we start such a campaign, we cannot halt halfway. Administering vaccines on a massive scale will not be a big issue," said a top EPI official.

Talking to journalists, the health minister said the government will get around 21 crore vaccine shots from different sources.

"Even if we administer one crore jabs a month, it will take 21 months... Our target is to do it faster."

Asked about the sources, Zahid said, "We will get three crore doses from AstraZeneca and another three crore from Sinopharm."

"We have signed a contract with Russia for one crore doses of Sputnik V. We will also get 6.8 crore shots from the Covax facility. We have also struck a deal with Johnson and Johnson for seven crore jabs that we will get in the second quarter of next year."

AstraZeneca and Sinopharm vaccines will be administered at ward, union, upazila and district levels while Moderna and Pfizer vaccines will be given in the city corporation areas across the country, the minister mentioned.

Zahid further said Bangladesh is likely to get around 30 lakh Sinopharm jabs from China by the

end of this month.

Besides, 60 lakh Pfizer vaccine shots may arrive next month under the Covax facility, a global vaccine alliance, but the schedule is yet to be confirmed.

When the inoculation drive began on February 7, health officials said they had the capacity of administering 3.60 lakh jabs a day but could never reach that number.

The drive revolved mainly around AstraZeneca vaccine supplied by Serum Institute of India. It came to a grinding halt after New Delhi suspended vaccine export in the last week of April amid a massive surge in Covid infections in that country.

Bangladesh suspended administering the first dose of AstraZeneca vaccine on April 26. The inoculation of the first shot resumed on a limited scale this month with the arrival of Sinopharm and Pfizer vaccines.

But the administering of the second AstraZeneca dose among around 15 lakh people hangs in the balance due to suspension of supply from Serum, the largest vaccine producer in the world.

However, the uncertainty has partially been removed with the arrival of 2.45 lakh AstraZeneca vaccine doses from Japan under the Covax facility.

Bangladesh is supposed to get 6.8 crore vaccine doses this year from Covax. Those could cover around 20 percent of the population. But the country has so far received 1.06 lakh Pfizer shots and 55 lakh Moderna jabs from the vaccine alliance.

They wanted impunity, but cabinet said no

FROM PAGE 1

Section 41(1) of the law states that public servants cannot be arrested until a court frames charges against them. No prior permission is needed in that case.

But before charges are framed, any government official can only be arrested after getting permission from the government or hiring authorities defined in any other existing law.

This section directly contradicts the constitution, which states that all citizens are equal in the eyes of the law.

In addition, the 2018 law also allows government servants to be convicted for less than a year, with little more than a slap on the wrist.

According to the law's section 42, such public servants are to be penalised with words of denunciation, temporary demotion or temporarily halting raises. The job however remains intact.

This proves to be a problem when the courts summon government servants, and they fail or refuse to show up.

The penalty for incurring the contempt of court, in practice, is six months. Since government employees are protected by the 2018 law's provision on sentences that are less than a year, they can get away with flouting the court.

The High Court, however, on September 26, 2013, scrapped the contempt of court law that had a provision of six months' simple imprisonment or a fine of Tk 2,000 as maximum punishment.

The draft of the 2018 law had initially made it mandatory for government employees to give an exam before every promotion but by the time the bill was finalised, the provision was scrapped.

Dengue menace on the prowl

FROM PAGE 1

To keep children safe from mosquito bites, Kinkor suggested keeping them under mosquito nets and ensuring they are covered properly.

Meanwhile, the government has decided to dedicate six hospitals for dengue patients.

Speaking to The Daily Star on Sunday, Health Minister Zahid Maleque, said, "We have planned to dedicate six hospitals for dengue patients and we have also started the allocation of manpower in this regard."

Dr Afsana Alamgir Khan, deputy programme manager (malaria and Aedes transmitted diseases), said they have received a proposal from the health ministry in this regard and they are working on finalising it soon.

"Sir Salim Ullah Medical College, Mitford Hospital, and Lalkuthi Hospital in Mirpur, Railway General Hospital in Kamalapur, and Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master General Hospital in Tongi are some, along with others, that can be proposed as primary sites for dengue treatment."

On the other hand, experts have asked all city corporations to strengthen their anti-mosquito drives, especially to kill adult Aedes mosquitoes.

Prof Kabirul Bashar, entomologist

at Jahangirnagar University, said, "Like in 2019, dengue will spread in all districts [this year as well] as a huge number of people have recently gone to their homes outside the capital to celebrate Eid."

According to DGHS statistics, of the 1,802 dengue cases this year, only 50 were outside Dhaka.

"Every deputy commissioner will have to take measures to control Aedes mosquitoes, while civil surgeons will have to ensure conducting dengue tests on any patient admitted to hospital with a fever and will have to take necessary measures in this regard," he said.

Manzur Chowdhury, entomologist and former president of the Zoological Society of Bangladesh, said the government will have to take initiatives to make insecticides and its spraying tools readily available, so that people can carry out anti-mosquito drives in their areas on a regular basis.

"Monitoring this virus is important, but there is no such initiative in our country," he said, adding that in developed countries like the USA, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, they first identify the dengue virus and its locations, and then they destroy the adult Aedes mosquitoes in those particular areas through extensive drives.

"We are at a stage where we have to use adulticides [a type of insecticide used to kill adult mosquitoes] on a massive scale to control the spread of dengue. We also have to carry out special drives to identify the dengue patients' addresses."

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the risk of dengue has multiplied as hospital beds and ICUs are already occupied by coronavirus patients, Manzur said.

"We have a good recovery rate, compared to other countries, for dengue. The fatality rate is 0.2 percent, which is one of the lowest in the world, but it will increase if we fail to provide treatment in hospitals."

LGRD Minister Md Tazul Islam told The Daily Star that the ministry has already instructed all city corporations, including the two in Dhaka, to strengthen their anti-mosquito drives.

The ministry, he said, also held an emergency meeting with the mayors of Dhaka and Gazipur on Sunday and asked them to form a dengue cell.

The mayors were also asked to identify the addresses of the dengue patients in order to conduct special anti-mosquito drives at those houses, in their adjoining areas, and in hospitals.

Tight security as Nigeria separatist's trial resumes

AFP, Abuja

Heavy security was deployed outside Nigeria's federal high court yesterday as the trial of a leading separatist extradited last month resumed, an AFP journalist at the scene reported.

Nnamdi Kanu of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), an outlawed movement which agitates for a separate Biafran state in southeast Nigeria, was sent back to Nigeria at the end of June to face trial.

He was arrested in late 2015 in Nigeria but disappeared in 2017 after being released on bail.

"Nnamdi Kanu has been intercepted... He has been brought back to Nigeria, in order to continue facing trial after disappearing," Nigeria's justice minister and attorney general Abubakar Malami said in a June 29 statement.

Malami said Kanu faces charges that include "terrorism, treasonable felony, managing an unlawful society, publication of defamatory matter, illegal possession of firearms and improper importation of goods, among others."

Officials did not say where he was arrested but his family and lawyers claim he was taken while in Kenya.

As Kanu's trial was scheduled to start in Nigeria's capital Abuja, many journalists were barred from entering the courtroom, a move that was condemned as restrictive by rights groups.

"We call on the Nigerian authorities to respect the right to a fair hearing and immediately lift the restriction and allow the media unhindered access to the court to do their job," Amnesty International said in a statement.

Calls for a separate state in southeast Nigeria are just one of the challenges facing president Muhammadu Buhari's government ahead of the 2023 election.

Another activist, Sunday Igboho, who advocates for independence for the southwestern Yoruba people, was arrested last week at the airport in neighbouring Benin, police and airport sources told AFP.

Igboho was expected to be arraigned yesterday in Benin's commercial capital Cotonou.

At least 50 people who support Igboho and the Yoruba separatist cause were outside the courtroom, an AFP journalist at the scene reported.

Igboho was on the run after a gun battle that killed two of his men and weapons and ammunition were discovered at his home, Nigeria's Department of State Services intelligence agency said.

Igboho "will be extradited to Nigeria as soon as the two countries have agreed on conditions," a senior Benin police official said, with a second confirming the arrest.

A source at Cotonou airport said he was arrested before boarding a Germany-bound flight.

Nigerian authorities did not immediately respond when contacted by AFP.

Stern action

FROM PAGE 1

linkage of pharmaceuticals like chemical, plastic, packaging, glass, medical equipment; leather; edible oil; detergent and hand sanitisers; fish processing; and soft drinks are allowed to stay open during the lockdown.

Only those garment factories or units that make face masks or personal protective equipment can run amid the movement control order, intended to be the most stringent yet since the pandemic began in March last year.

The decision, which came on the eve of the three-day Eid-ul-Azha holidays, was a big blow to the garment and textile factory owners, who had lobbied ardently with the government to keep their plants out of the purview of the lockdown given the strict lead time of the export orders.

In case that could not be managed, they were lobbying to resume production from August 1 instead of August 5, when the lockdown ends.

But Hossain yesterday said the government has no plan yet to allow the garment factories to run before August 5.

"It is necessary to implement restrictions strictly," he added.

A total of 338 factories were running yesterday, according to Industrial Police's data, which had no sector-wise breakdown of industries.

Of the factories running as normal, 113 were in Gazipur, 15 in Chattogram, 57 in Narayanganj, 88 in Khulna, 32 in Mymensingh and 33 in Savar-Ashulia in operation.

Meanwhile, three factories in Gazipur that do not fall under any of the categories exempt from the government directive were fined Tk 80,000 each for staying open yesterday, according to a senior official of the Industrial Police.

However, one cement factory in Narayanganj was allowed to run due to emergency supply to the important government development projects.

Md Sakhwat Hossain, superintendent of police of industrial Police-1, said they were patrolling the industrial area in order to ensure that industries that are not allowed to remain open are not running during the coronavirus containment measures.