

BANGLADESH UPDATE

10,420
New cases in 24hrs

13,86,742
Total cases

23,398
Deaths

12,48,075
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,333,383
Deaths

205,209,715
Total cases

COVID TRANSMISSION

Positivity rate drops for 10 days straight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The positivity rate has declined for the 10th consecutive day yesterday.

The country recorded 10,420 new Covid cases yesterday but over the last 10 days Bangladesh has been recording over 12,000 new daily cases on average.

Yesterday, the positivity rate was 23.45 percent while it was around 30 percent on August 2.

Experts said this decline was an impact of the countrywide lockdown that was lifted yesterday. They warned the infection may rise again as more people would go outside now.

Yesterday, the country logged 237 Covid-19 deaths, which matched a previous daily record on August 5, taking the death toll to 23,398.

The number of deaths on the first 11 days of this month was high -- more than 246 a day on average -- because of higher infection rates, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

In the preceding 11 days, more than 214 Covid deaths were logged a day on average.

With the latest count, the total number of confirmed cases reached at 1,386,742.

Of yesterday's deceased, 134 were males, while 103 were females.

Dhaka division saw the highest -- 105 -- deaths, followed by 54 in Chattogram, 23 in Sylhet, 20 in Khulna, 11 in Mymensingh, 10 in Rajshahi, eight in Barisal, and six in Rangpur.

Yesterday, a total of 1,107 Covid-19 patients were in the intensive care units (ICU), occupying more than 83 percent of the total 1,331 beds there, according to the DGHS data.

Meanwhile, a total of 9,976 Covid-19 patients were receiving treatment in general beds. The general bed occupancy rate was more than 58 percent against a total of 17,131.

The new Covid-19 cases and deaths had been galloping since the Delta variant was detected in the country on May 8.

To control the virus transmission, the government imposed different types of restrictions on people's movement since July 1.



Locals walking on sand bags propped against the edge of a building to avoid the waterlogged pathway in Pagar Alerteg area adjacent to the Tongi Industrial Zone of the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation. Rain causes the area to become flooded by pitch-black filthy water from the nearby factories. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

48 factories run without ETP

FROM PAGE 1

has been living in the neighbourhood for the past 26 years.

And yet, neither the BSCIC authorities nor the Department of Environment (DoE) are taking any steps to solve the unmitigated health and environmental hazards posed by the 48 units that are operating without the mandatory ETPs in the industrial estates in four divisions.

Dhaka division has the highest number of offending units (22), followed by Chattogram at 16, according to a report prepared by the Industrial Estate Division of BSCIC.

The Industrial Estate Division classified the 48 industrial units as red and orange.

Rajshahi division has six such factories while the remaining four are in Khulna, said the report.

For factories that generate chemical waste, it is mandatory to set up ETPs, according to BSCIC guidelines.

But the BSCIC do not have the authority to penalise factories without ETPs, and so the owners have been shelving their plans to set up the facility, according to sources.

One such offending factory is Compliance Fashion and Design, which produces 100 litres of waste that is dumped in the drain every day.

"We are not financially solvent. We need some time to build the ETP," Nazmus Shakib, one of the owners of Compliance Fashion and Design, told The Daily Star.

But Union Industries, a carton factory founded in the BSCIC Industrial

estate at Konabari of Gazipur four years ago, has started the process of setting up the waste treatment facility following pressure from the BSCIC and the DoE.

"Our factory is located on 28 decimals of land. At least 14 decimals of land are required to set up an ETP. Where do we get the land?" said Farhan Hossain, manager of the company.

Two years ago, the BSCIC had a plan to set up a central ETP in the industrial city, but the plan has not been implemented yet.

"This could have been a great help for many of the industries," Hossain said, adding that the factory's ETP will take another three to four months to come through.

Contacted, Md Abdus Salam, deputy director of DoE of Gazipur, said he was not aware of the BSCIC report.

"The Tongi Industrial City in BSCIC requires ETPs. There is no scope to run such a factory without an ETP," he added.

Masud Iqbal Md Shameem, director (environmental clearance) of DoE, also said he was not aware of the BSCIC report.

"It is not in our knowledge that so many BSCIC factories are operating without ETPs. We will talk to BSCIC shortly and take appropriate action," he added.

Nasrin Rahim, deputy general manager of the industrial estate division at the BSCIC, said they are monitoring the matter regularly and taking action against those who violate

the rules.

"The BSCIC has not been successful anywhere because it did not take the required measures," said Sharif Jamil, general secretary of the Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon.

On the other hand, the DoE has long been saying that it does not have the sufficient budget and manpower to monitor the industries properly.

"Both institutions are not exercising their authority to ensure that factories do not flout the rules. The law has to be changed. The punishment has to be increased," Jamil added.

BSCIC Chairman Md Mostaque Hassan said they sent letters to the DoE many times asking them to identify the factories with no ETPs.

"We cannot mete out punishment to the violators. But the DoE has the legal right to punish them. We are giving the owners some time for setting up the ETP and if they cannot comply with it, the DoE can fine or shut them down," he added.

Regardless, for the sake of the long-suffering neighbours like Rubiya and the environment, one has to keep one's fingers crossed that the DoE steps up sooner than later.

"We, the residents of the area, sent a letter to the BSCIC and the Department of Environment for a permanent solution to our misery. We even talked to the local commissioner, who advised us to go to the mayor. We got assurances, but the problem persists. Had we not owned the property, we would have been long gone," said a frustrated Rubiya.

'Nation losing patience'

India's SC to govt on urgent need to weed out criminals from electoral politics

TNN, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court on Tuesday drummed loudly the urgency for weeding out criminals from electoral politics, and scathingly criticised the Centre's lackadaisical approach in enacting suitable laws to decriminalise legislatures and warned that the nation is losing patience as repeated appeals for reforms have fallen in the deaf ears of sleeping political parties.

In a 71-page judgment holding most political parties guilty of contempt for breaching a SC laid down rules mandating publicising criminal antecedents of candidates in the fray, a bench of Justices R F Nariman and B R Gavai said, "The nation continues to wait, and is losing patience. Cleansing the polluted stream of politics is obviously not one of the immediate pressing concerns of the legislative branch of government."

The bench recounted the apex court's continuous efforts for nearly a decade to decriminalise politics and said, "No one can deny that the menace of criminalisation in the Indian political system is growing day by day. Also, no one can deny that for maintaining purity of the political system, persons with criminal antecedents and who are involved in criminalisation of the political system should not be permitted to be the lawmakers."

"This court, time and again, has appealed to the lawmakers of the country to rise to the occasion and take steps for bringing out necessary amendments so that the involvement of persons with criminal antecedents in polity is prohibited. All these appeals have fallen on the deaf ears. The political parties refuse to wake up

from deep slumber," it added.

Justices Nariman and Gavai said though the court wanted to proceed further, its hands are tied because of the boundaries of separation of power between the judiciary and legislature, which alone had the power to enact laws.

"In view of the constitutional scheme of separation of powers, though we desire that something urgently requires to be done in the matter, our hands are tied and we cannot transgress into the area reserved for the legislative arm of the State. We can only appeal to the conscience of the lawmakers and hope that they will wake up soon and carry out a major surgery for weeding out the malignancy of criminalisation in politics," it said.

The bench, however, refused to bar candidates with criminal antecedents from being fielded by political parties. But it bolstered its February 13, 2020 directions by issuing a set of mandates to the Election Commission and political parties.

Political parties will have to publish information regarding the criminal antecedents of candidates on the homepage of their websites, thus making it easier for the voter to get to the information that has to be supplied. It will be necessary now to have on the homepage a caption which states "candidates with criminal antecedents".

The EC will have to create a dedicated mobile application containing information published by candidates regarding their criminal antecedents, so that at one stroke, each voter gets such information on his/her mobile phone.

Govt to buy digital content

FROM PAGE 1

due to the pandemic. The authorities are yet to decide on the reopening of educational institutions that have remained shut for nearly 17 months.

On March 17, 2020, the government closed all educational institutions to check the spread of Covid. The closure has recently been extended till August 31. The long closure has led to cancellation of exams and left academic calendars in disarray.

Following the closure, the government launched TV education programmes through state-run Sangsad television channel for secondary and primary students. Later, it asked all schools to introduce online education.

Most of the students in urban areas have access to learning through the internet, but the digital divide has so far proved to be a great disadvantage for the underprivileged learners, mainly for a lack of devices and poor access to the internet.

At the end of last year, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education asked all the secondary schools to start giving assignments to students.

All these interim efforts were made so that students do not suffer learning loss during the closure.

The term "learning loss" refers to any specific or general loss of knowledge and skills or to reversals in academic progress, most commonly due to extended gaps or discontinuities in a student's education, according to educationists.

The NCTB chairman said they chose the direct purchase method to buy the digital contents from Startup Bangladesh Limited as no other organisation can produce and provide such digital contents.

"I do not think that Tk 27,000-28,000 for each content is too much," he said in reply to a query.

All the digital contents will have to be validated by experts who will determine whether those were made in line with the national curriculum and are of the required standards, he added.

Seeking anonymity, a top official of Startup Bangladesh Limited told this newspaper that they had earlier produced and supplied many educational contents that were aired on Sangsad Television channel.

"We will be able to produce quality content."

Asked about the average production cost of a content, the official said, "We need to pay for studios, recording, editing and other purposes." The official couldn't give any specific amount but said the average cost would be around Tk 25,000.

Startup Bangladesh Limited under the ICT Ministry is the first and only venture capital fund sponsored by the government. It started its journey in March 2020 with an allocated capital of Tk 500 crore, according to its official website.

The Covid-induced school closure for over a year has put a minimum of 3.42 million primary students and 2.50 million secondary students at risk of learning loss, said a joint study of Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) released on May 10.

The survey was based on telephone interviews of heads of 6,099 rural and urban slum households having school-going children.

The researchers said learning loss was caused as students were not studying at all or they became irregular in their studies.

Threats intensified

FROM PAGE 1

Another corridor -- Chunati and hills seriously threaten their existence.

"The extent of elephant deaths we see each year is really alarming," eminent wildlife biologist Monirul H Khan told The Daily Star, calling for immediate action.

According to Forest Department data, the country lost 90 elephants by direct killing between 1995 and 2016.

Despite the frequent killings, the Forest Department could not bring any offenders to book since the government formulated the Wildlife Conservation Act-2012.

As per the law, elephant killing is a non-bailable offence and offenders are jailed for a minimum of one year and up to a maximum of seven years. Besides, a fine of Tk 1 lakh at the lowest and Tk 10 lakh maximum is imposed for the offence.

CORRIDORS THREATENED

In the last three years, three out of the 12 recognised corridors in Cox's Bazar were blocked due to large structures and the Rohingya camps.

The rest of the corridors are threatened by encroachment, setting up of brick kilns, gardening, and fish farming inside reserve forests.

Monirul, also a professor of zoology at Jahangirnagar University, said, "We must regenerate the habitats of elephants. The corridors must be secured for their risk-free movement."

"We have to apply the conservation law to ensure exemplary punishment of the offenders. We also have to raise awareness among mass people."

Raquiul Amin, country director of IUCN, said elephants will not get safe habitation and their population will not be protected until the government includes it in the national priority list.

"Out of the 12 corridors, three have already been blocked. There are corridors which fall on private

land. So, we need to make sure the elephants are safe when they move through private land," he said.

Md Amir Hosain Chowdhury, chief conservator of forest, said they were conducting a feasibility study to identify more corridors being used by elephants.

"The elephant response teams formed under the BECAP worked well in the beginning but due to the fund crisis, we could not incentivise them. I have directed forest officials concerned to find ways to ensure coordination," he told this newspaper.

Amin said they have taken up a project to mitigate human-elephant conflict by reinstating the corridors.

"Some of the corridors are on private land. So, we will write to the government to acquire the private land so that elephant movements are secured."

He added, "The project will cover three regions. If the ministry approves the project, we will be able to implement many of the action plans outlined in BECAP."

Despite crackdowns, no dearth of experts

FROM PAGE 1

Boma Mizan later fled to India, where he was arrested at Ramanagara near Bengaluru on August 6, 2018.

After Mizan, "Boma Shakil" and Raisul Islam Khan Noman alias Fardin alias Nasif took over as explosive experts, said counterterrorism officials.

Shakil, a diploma holder in electrical engineering, and Fardin, who studied physics in Chattogram University, sincerely performed their tasks making grenades and other explosives. They also trained fellow operatives in bomb-making since 2013.

In December 2016, after busting a Mirpur den, where a huge consignment of grenades and bomb-making materials were found, DB officials said that Shakil took charge as top explosives expert after a long gap since Boma Mizan was arrested. Shakil was believed to have been killed in internal feud later.

Fardin and Tarikul Islam were killed as a powerful grenade went off in a den in Bogura on April 3, 2016.

After the explosion, law enforcers recovered grenades identical to those used in the military and four pistols from the den, said an official.

Fardin supplied the IEDs blasted at a mosque in the Navy's Issa Khan Base of in Chattogram in December 2015.

Then came neo-JMB leader Maynul Islam Musa, a notorious bomb maker, who was killed with three other militants in a Sylhet den, where a heavy amount of explosives was stashed a large number of powerful explosives was stashed, in March 2017.

M Shakhawat Hossain, a former member of the Bangladesh Navy, an accused in the Chattogram Navy-mosque blast case, was also known to be an efficient explosive-maker.

Most recently, Ismail Hasan Furkan, who studied chemistry in Jahangirnagar University, was a serious matter of concern for law enforcers.

He provided training to around 60 neo-JMB operatives online on how to make IEDs.

Since 2018, the top explosives expert has been making manuals

and videos on making IEDs and then sharing those with other members through end-to-end encrypted apps to train up operatives of the outfit.

He was arrested yesterday by the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit.

"We had been looking for Furkan for the last four years," Rahmat Ullah Chowdhury, in-charge of CTCIC bomb disposal unit, told The Daily Star yesterday, confirming the arrest.

Sanwar Hossain, a superintendent of police of Anti-Terrorism Unit, who served long years in the bomb disposal unit of CTCIC, said other explosive experts of the JMB were nowhere near as skilled as "Mollah Omar" and "Boma Mizan".

"The duo made powerful explosives with perfection. The others tried, but could not due to lack of capability or unavailability of bomb-making materials... So, we have seen bombs either blasted while being manufactured or because they [militants] could not detonate them [bombs] properly on targets."

Furkan planned

FROM PAGE 1

He was lured into extremism by contents on a social media account in 2016, and then joined the Neo JMB under the guidance of the outfit's then chief Musa.

As a chemistry student of Jahangirnagar University (JU), Furkan quickly became an expert in making IEDs after joining the outfit.

A number of top Neo JMB leaders have been killed in law enforcement's continued anti-militancy drives since 2016, which had caused Furkan to go into hiding to avoid arrest.

But recently, under the leadership of the outfit's current chief Mahadi Hasan Jon, Furkan has started providing training to make remote-controlled IEDs and grenades.

The CTCIC have also arrested two other Neo JMB members and associates of Furkan on Sunday -- Saiful Islam Maruf alias Basira and Rumman Hasan Fahad alias Abdullah.

Explosive materials, three cell phones, a tab and remote-controlled devices were also recovered from the arrestees' possession.

Md Asaduzzaman, CTCIC chief, disclosed the arrest while addressing a briefing at the media centre of Dhaka Metropolitan Police yesterday.

He said in the last few years, Neo JMB tried to conduct IED attacks on 10 to 12 police outposts.

"The IEDs were of the same pattern. Those who make the bombs have been arrested in various raids, but new ones have been found," he said.

Furkan used to provide the training to make IEDs, according to CTCIC officials.

"When any member of Neo JMB contacted Furkan about making IEDs, he [Furkan] would open a new social media account to make video calls and train the member. Once the training was complete, Furkan closed the account and changed locations to remain traceless," said a senior official of the counterterrorism unit, requesting anonymity.

CTIC chief Asaduzzaman said Furkan was a meritorious student but he was not able to complete his Masters as he left home to join Neo JMB.

Asaduzzaman said another arrestee, Saiful Islam, was a skilled IED maker and received online training from Furkan.

In primary interrogation, Saiful admitted that he had been involved in several IED attacks, he said.

As per the outfit's decision, both Saiful and Rumman migrated to Bandarban to receive military training. They rented a house in Tongi recently and committed robbery there to generate funds for the outfit, said the CTCIC chief.

A case was filed with Kafurl Police Station in this regard.

MEETING WITH SOME ROHINGYAS
According to CTCIC sources, Furkan tried to go to Rakhine state in Myanmar five times since 2017, but failed.

"Furkan even managed to invite some Rohingya to join Neo JMB and asked them to open a branch of the outfit in Rakhine," said a senior CTCIC official, requesting anonymity.

CTIC chief Asaduzzaman said Furkan had held multiple meetings in Rohingya camps with the aim of expanding the organisation's activities.

4 ANSAR AL ISLAM MEMBERS ARRESTED

Members of police's Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) said they arrested four members of the banned militant group Ansarullah Bangla Team, also known as Ansar al Islam, from Dhaka's Rayerbagh area early yesterday.

The arrestees are: Raihan Hossain, Tanvir Hossain, Aminul Islam and Sagar Islam.

A team of ATU arrested them during a drive around 4:00am along with four mobile phones, two knives and some extremist literature, said Aslam Khan, special superintendent (media and awareness) of ATU.

They were active on social media, disseminating extremist contents and trying to recruit new operatives for the militant group. They used to communicate with each other through end-to-end encrypted apps, he said.

A case was filed with Kadamtali Police Station in this regard.

6cr more jobs

FROM PAGE 1

received 11 lakh doses of Sinopharm vaccine as gift.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque recently told reporters that 54 lakh vaccine jabs will arrive in the country by August 15. Of the doses, 30 lakh will be from Covax, a global arrangement.

A consignment of 17 lakh Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccine shots, under the Covax facility, reached Dhaka yesterday evening from China.

Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Health Services yesterday said there was no reason to get worried about the second dose as there were sufficient number of vaccines for the second shots.

"We have enough number of Pfizer, Moderna and Sinopharm vaccines in hand. So, there is no room for concern for the second dose. So, don't pay heed to any rumors," Nazmul Islam, spokesperson for DGHS, said in a regular briefing.