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Your Right to Know

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"The [Covid] situation will be grave if [virus] transmission can't be controlled. The death toll will rise."



"The vaccination campaign has been a complete mess... The government has failed to tackle the pandemic."



"Today we had to come out here to speak to you (the media) as we are not allowed to speak inside parliament... This is the murder of democracy."



Taliban close in on Kabul

Capture Ghazni, Herat; Afghan gov offers to share power with insurgents, say media reports

AGENCIES

The Afghanistan government has made a power-sharing proposal to the Taliban in exchange for a halt in the escalating violence in the country, media reports said yesterday, as the insurgents seized the strategic cities of Ghazni, just 150 kilometres from Kabul, and Herat, the country's third-largest city.

A senior security source from Herat told AFP that government forces and administration officials had retreated to an army barracks outside the city.

"We had to leave the city in order to prevent further destruction," he said.

A Taliban spokesman, however, tweeted "soldiers laid down their arms and joined the Mujahideen".

Herat -- about 150 kilometres from the Iranian border -- is home to veteran warlord Ismail Khan, who for weeks has been rallying his forces to make a stand against the Taliban.

The Taliban also appeared close to capturing Kandahar, the second largest city and the spiritual home of the Taliban, which now control about two-thirds of Afghanistan.

Earlier, the interior ministry confirmed the fall of Ghazni, which lies along the major Kabul-Kandahar highway and serves as a gateway between the capital and militant strongholds in the south.

The capture of Ghazni is their most important strategic gain in a lightning offensive that has seen them overrun 10 provincial capitals in a week.

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- Pakistan PM says insurgents won't talk peace unless Ghani goes
- US intel report warns Kabul may fall in 90 days
- US, UK to send troops to evacuate officials, citizens



VACCINE RECEIVED
SINOPHARM
 70 lakh (Procured)
 11 lakh (Gift)
 34.70 lakh (Covax)

PFIZER
 1.06 lakh (Covax)
MODERNA
 55 lakh (Covax)

ASTRAZENECA
 70 lakh (Procured)
 33 lakh (Gift)
 16,41,980 (Covax)

TOTAL
 2,91,17,980

VACCINE ADMINISTERED
Sinopharm
 71,94,872

AstraZeneca
 1,05,90,918

Pfizer
 82,734

Moderna
 22,20,583



VACCINATED PEOPLE
 1,50,23,162
 (First dose)

50,65,945
 (Second dose)

Mass vaccination began on Feb 7, suspended on Apr 25

Vaccination resumed on July 7

Special campaign began on Aug 7

Total registration - over 3 crore

GOVT RECRUITMENT Proposal for raising age limit by 21 months

UNB, Dhaka

The ministry of public administration proposed increasing the maximum age limit for entering government jobs by 21 months from the current 30 years due to prolonged academic life caused by Covid-19 restrictions.

The proposal was sent to the prime minister, State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain told reporters at the Secretariat yesterday.

He said, "We have taken several initiatives for people of different classes and professions to make up for the loss caused by the coronavirus. A new proposal for government job seekers has been sent to the prime minister.

"We did the same last year. We relaxed the age limit allowing candidates who turned 30 after March 25 to apply for government jobs."

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Everything open from Aug 19

Govt decides to lift curbs on social gatherings, tourist spots

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is lifting most of the coronavirus restrictions from August 19, even as the number of deaths reported daily from Covid-19 continues to be over 200.

Social gatherings will be allowed and tourist destinations will reopen on the condition that they operate at half their capacities.

The Cabinet Division in a circular yesterday said all public transport will be allowed to operate on the roads, railways and waterways maintaining health guidelines from August 19.

Transport companies are currently allowed to operate 50 percent of the buses on the roads.

From August 19, community centres, tourist attractions and recreational facilities will reopen and operate at half of their capacities.

However, the authorities have not specified how crowds will be controlled at places like sea beaches.

The decision was based on discussions at an inter-ministerial meeting on Covid-19 on August 3 and the overall situation of the country, the circular said. It said everyone must wear a mask and follow the other health rules.

If any of the conditions are violated, the authorities concerned will be held responsible, it added.

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VIRUS TRANSMISSION

If not checked, situation may turn grave

Warns health minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said the Covid-19 situation in the country will turn grave unless the transmission of the virus is controlled.

"Unless we can control corona [novel coronavirus infection], the situation will become even tougher," he said while addressing a seminar -- "Challenges of Covid Pandemic and Dengue Outbreak" -- as chief guest.

The event was organised by Bangladesh Society of Medicine in association with US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in Dhaka.

"The transmission has declined a little bit in recent days; but the number of deaths is still higher. We have to keep this transmission under control. For this, we have to adhere to health rules.

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COVID-19 VACCINATION

Next drive likely to begin Tuesday; target 20 lakh

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The government plans to inoculate at least 20 lakh people against Covid-19 in another special vaccination drive expected to begin on Tuesday.

The drive's duration will depend on the availability of the shots, said health officials, adding that only Sinopharm jabs would be administered as first dose during the campaign, which has been planned mainly to vaccinate the elderly and those living in rural areas.

The plan was outlined as a six-day special vaccination piloting ended yesterday. Around 48 lakh people received their first shot during the drive, said officials.

The government had targeted to vaccinate 32 lakh people in the piloting, launched on August 7 on the sidelines of the regular vaccination campaign. It had to raise the number in the face of huge demand and massive response from people across the country.

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THE THIRD VIEW



MAHFUZ ANAM

"DECISION GAMES" that we play with our people

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ATTACK ON 2 BANKERS

Dhaka court clears Sikder brothers of charges



COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday cleared Ron Haque Sikder, managing director of Sikder Group, and his brother, of the charges of abducting, torturing, and opening fire on two Exim Bank officials.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Rajesh Chowdhury passed the order after complainant of the case Exim Bank Director Lt Col (ret'd) Serajul Islam told the court that he had no objection if the court accepted a police final report.

During the hearing on the probe report, Ron was present in the court. He had obtained bail.

His brother Dipu Haque Sikder, now abroad, was shown as absconding.

On July 29, investigation officer Md Ripon Uddin, a sub-inspector of the Detective Branch of police, submitted the report to Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court of Dhaka mentioning that an out-of-court settlement had been reached.

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A man takes a nap and another sits nearby while waiting for free food distributed by police in Paribagh area of the capital yesterday. Unable to endure the sun, many left sandals, as placeholders, in the circles drawn on the street to ensure physical distancing.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

MACHINE-READABLE PASSPORTS No explanations yet on 1.5 lakh pending requests

PORIMOL PALMA and SHARIFUL HASAN

When over 1.5 lakh applications for machine-readable passports are pending for some two months, the authorities have yet to come up with any official explanations about what led to this situation and when and how it is going to be addressed.

Bangladesh missions from different countries over the last months wrote to the Department of Immigration and Passports (DIP), describing the problems they were facing as passport processing was either delayed or not delivered to Bangladeshi migrants.

Migrants said they were becoming undocumented or failing to apply for renewal of work permits due to the delay in getting passports. They also said they were facing trouble accessing healthcare at a time when the pandemic is causing havoc to the migrants through joblessness and infections.

Some officials also said it might lead to a security breach that so many passport applications have been pending for so long. They questioned why the DIP did not take actions to upgrade the software system well ahead of the time when the 30-million limit of the MRPs was crossed in early June.

The Daily Star published a report on Wednesday, quoting officials, that the MRP

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