

BANGLADESH UPDATE



7,248
New cases in 24hrs



14,40,644
Total cases



24,719
Deaths



13,27,028
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

4,401,115
Deaths



209,779,184
Total cases

More areas flooded as Padma, Jamuna swell

STAR REPORT

Fresh areas of the country are being inundated as two major rivers -- Padma and Jamuna -- continue to swell due to a combination of onrush of water from upstream and heavy downpours.

Low-lying areas of at least two districts -- Faridpur and Tangail -- have been submerged. Vast tracts of cropland have gone under water while houses and roads have become inundated, causing much hardship for people in the affected areas.

Officials of Water Development Board (WDB), however, have ruled out any chances of long-term flooding.

Meanwhile, a bulletin of Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) yesterday forecast that the water level in all major rivers, except the Surma, were rising.

The 24-hour forecast was released at 9:00am yesterday.

"The flood situation in low-lying areas of Rajbari and Faridpur districts may deteriorate," it said. "The Teesta river may rise and remain close to the danger level at Dalia [in Nilphamari] point."

Our correspondents from different districts yesterday reported on the flood situation.

In Faridpur, some 3,000 families of 25 villages in Sadar upazila were marooned because of floodwater from the Padma.

The river was flowing 16cm above the danger level at Goalanda Ghat Point in Rajbari yesterday morning, according to WDB officials.

"We are going through untold suffering as most roads of our area have been submerged," said Abdul Rajjak Sheikh, 32, of Mujaffar Dangi village in Faridpur Sadar upazila.

A farmer, Jalal Sheikh, 52, of Tajuddin Mollar Dangi village in the same upazila, said, "I cultivated Aush paddy on around 1.5 bighas of land, but I was forced to cut all of my crop before it reached maturity as floodwater entered the land."

Juleka Begum, 41, a homemaker of Sultankhar Dangi village in Sadar upazila, said, "Water is increasing rapidly in our area. Our toilet has gone under water -- we are facing immense hardship."

The local administration has arranged relief for the flood-hit people, said Masum Raza, Sadar upazila nirbahi officer (UNO).

In Tangail, low-lying areas have gone under water as water level of Jamuna, Dhaleshwari river and a few other branches of the Jamuna continued to rise.

Besides, river erosion has impacted different places in Sadar, Bhuanpur, Kalihati and Nagarpur upazilas. Many people were seen relocating because of it.

The water level of the Jamuna has risen by 23cm in 24 hours preceding 6:00am yesterday, although it was still below the danger mark, said WDB officials.

Contacted, Sirajul Islam, executive engineer of WDB in Tangail, said the Jamuna may continue rising for the next two or three days, but there is no possibility of flood in the mainland.

Besides, necessary measures have already been taken to check river erosion, he added.

In Sirajganj, the water level of Jamuna has increased, but WDB officials ruled out any chances of flooding.

"Water levels have been rising since August 13 -- increasing by 25cm to 30cm each day. The water level is expected to rise further in the next two or three days," said Md Nasir Uddin, sub-divisional engineer of Sirajganj WDB.

But the water level is still below the danger level, he added.

The onrush from upstream combined with heavy downpour has caused a quick rise in the water level of the Jamuna, Nasir said, adding that despite the rise, there is no immediate fear of flooding.

[Our correspondents in Faridpur, Tangail and Sirajganj contributed to this report.]



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

FOOTPATH OR ROAD? Two rickshaw-pullers with passengers pedal their vehicles past a parked car on a footpath of the capital's Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue yesterday. It is illegal for vehicles to get on a path that by its very name denotes that it is meant for pedestrians, but such rule violations are a common sight in the capital.

Data sovereignty or data control?

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Palak said this new law is being drafted to make sure that citizens' data will stay inside the country.

Apart from tech companies, foreign financial institutions will also have to establish data centres in Bangladesh and will be brought under this legislation, he said.

"They will be obliged to follow the law, or else they will not be allowed to operate in Bangladesh," said Palak. "We are formulating this law in order to make sure that the data of the people stay within the country."

Mustafa Jabbar, minister of Post and Telecommunication, said this law is being drafted to fulfil three major gaps. "We have no laws to take action against social media companies. We have no laws on data protection and nothing to protect the privacy of people."

"It is our ultimate goal to make social media companies follow the laws of Bangladesh," said Mustafa Jabbar.

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's tracker, Bangladesh is one of the 25 countries in the world with no laws on data privacy and protection, so experts recognise the need for legislation in this area.

But experts fear that the new legislation is not focusing on the right thing.

"What the government is trying to do is called data localisation," said advocate Md Saimum Reza Talukder, a senior lecturer at Brac University who specialises in law, privacy and digital technologies.

Data localisation means that the physical device in which a person's data is contained, has to be located within the borders of the state that the person belongs to. Experts call this a double-edged sword.

"It is not clear whether the new draft will contain provisions for the government to get access to such physical devices or not. The worrying aspect of this is that if proper checks and balances are not described in the new draft, the government will have a chance to get access to personal information," said Talukder. He added that it is also not clear in the proposed law whether the government is allowed to seize the physical device where the data is stored.

"The government thinks that data is the biggest wealth of the future, and it is to protect this data that we are making this law," Palak argued.

Experts insist that the law should be about protecting user data from anyone -- including state actors.

"Data about me should be my property-- no law recognises this," said

Talukder.

"We have known cases, prominent cases where private conversations came out into the open. There are reasons to believe that these were not private organisations executing these leaks. National security is an important issue, but this is often capitalised upon to serve partisan interests," said Dr Abrar.

"What we want are formal laws that ensure this privacy from the state," he said.

The dire need for a law that protects data from anyone can be understood if the existing Data Privacy and Protection Regulation 2019 -- which is not a law -- is scrutinised.

Experts say that in the regulation -- which provides a guideline for the application of the Digital Security Act's (DSA's) section 60 -- there are not enough checks and balances to protect data from state actors.

The regulation defines how citizen's personal data can be obtained, stored and used, but in many cases also exempts state agencies from complying with them.

For example, Section 21 (b) of the guideline allows government agencies to share private information among one another to investigate cyber incidents and identify individuals.

"There should be a judicial scrutiny to obtain such access," opined Talukder. Talukder also pointed out, "The definition of the words 'national sovereignty', 'integrity', 'national and digital security' mentioned in Section 15 (a) needs to be given; otherwise these remain vague terms."

After all, vaguely defined terms have been part of the pitfalls of the DSA. During the formation of the law, it was repeated over and over that the law will not be abused to target journalists and dissenters, but the reality is fairly different.

"Governments are pushing for data localisation under the guise of boosting the economy, tackling online harms, or protecting privacy. But the laws often do the opposite while making it easier to conduct surveillance. In countries that have poor standards of cyber-security, judicial independence, and data protection, data localisation presents a risk not only to privacy, but to the full spectrum of human rights," said Adrian Shahbaz, the director for technology and democracy at Freedom House, a Washington DC-based think-tank, which published a report last year called "User Privacy or Cyber Sovereignty?"

An example of a strong data protection law is the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation. Not only does it regulate how data can

be accessed and who can access the data, but it also gives citizens the right to know what data is being collected about them, what will be done with it, how it will be processed, and finally, empowers the citizens to withdraw consent at any point in time.

India recently clamped down on Mastercard Inc and earlier, American Express, for not complying with local data storage rules. The Reserve Bank of India wanted data on Indian card payments to be stored inside India only. In July, Russia fined Google \$40,000 for refusing to localise users' data.

The law that will force tech companies to store data locally comes at a time when the Bangladesh government has made the highest number of requests to both Facebook and Google for user data.

In 2013, the government had made only one request to Facebook for user data. Last year, that amount had risen to 541. As many as 76 of those requests dealt with criticism of the government.

For the past four years, the social media giant had given data for at least half of the requests.

Last year, only a little over half the requests made by the government followed the "legal process" while the rest were made under the category of "emergency disclosure".

The social media platform defines emergency requests as, "In emergencies, law enforcement may submit requests without legal process. Based on the circumstances, we may voluntarily disclose information to law enforcement where we have a good faith reason to believe that the matter involves imminent risk of serious physical injury or death."

Similarly, in 2014, the government had made only one request to Google regarding content, citing defamation, issues of national security and government criticism. Last year, that number was 87. A vast majority -- 74 of them -- dealt with criticism of the government.

The government will not just stop at formulating a data protection act -- they are also going to bring crucial changes to Bangladesh Telecommunications Act 2001 to widen the net for those involved in "anti-state activities", Mustafa Jabbar said.

The law will be amended so as to legally prosecute those participating in "anti-state" activities stationed abroad, in such a manner as if they are located inside the country. The DSA already allows for this under Section 4.

"However, this is still in draft stage and has not even gone to the law ministry," he said.

Court slaps travel ban on 5 people of eorange

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday issued a travel ban against 3 officials and two former owners of e-commerce platform eorange in a case filed for embezzling around Tk 1,100 crore by not delivering their products.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Rajesh Chowdhury passed the order, following an application submitted by the case's investigation officer, court sources said.

The five people are eorange's former owners Sonia Mehjabin, her husband Masukur Rahman, Amanullah, Bithi Akter, and Kausar Ahmed.

Earlier, Md Abubakar Siddique, Dhaka's additional chief metropolitan magistrate, sent Sonia and Masukur to jail after the couple surrendered before court, seeking bails in the case.

On Monday night, Md Taherul Islam, a customer, filed the case against the five with Gulshan Police Station over embezzling nearly Tk 1,100 crore, alleging the platform was not delivering products purchased since April 28 this year, said Aminul Islam, inspector (investigation) of the police station.

In the case statement, the complainant said the products were supposed to be delivered within an agreed period, but it did not happen, adding that the customers were not getting assurance whether they would get their money back.

"Confusions have been created over a change in ownership [of the company]," said Taherul, who was accompanied by several other eorange customers when the case was filed.

Six held in Joypurhat for 'making porn'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Rab arrested six people for their alleged involvement in producing and marketing porn in Joypurhat's Khetlal upazila on Tuesday night.

They are Mehedi Hasan of Salukdubi village, Faruk Hossain of Ikargara village, Akram Hossain of Salban village, Sujjan Haldar of Namapara village, Ekklasur Rahman and Shahinur Rahman of Baniyapara village of the upazila.

The arrestees are aged between 24 and 35, said Rab.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of Rab-5 in Joypurhat held them from different places of the upazila in the overnight raid.

After a case was filed under the pornography act, Rab handed them over to police yesterday. Later, the six were sent to jail by a court.

Lt Toukir Ahmed, commander of Joypurhat Rab camp, said the arrestees were members of porn production and marketing racket in the district, and the youths were their potential customers.

Several electronic items, including a computer, were seized from their possession, the Rab official said.

Bashundhara

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The other accused are Bangladesh Pratinidin Editor and News24 TV CEO Naem Nizam; Kaler Kantho Editor Imdadul Haq Milan; The Daily Sun Editor Enamul Haque Chowdhury; Bangladesh Pratinidin reporters Saidur Rahman Rimon, and Mohammed Selim; and its Chattogram Bureau Chief Reaz Hyder Chowdhury; Kaler Kantho reporter SM Rana; and the editor of Banglanews24.com.

Dipak said the court accepted the case and fixed September 23 for hearing.

According to the case statement, using their media outlets, Akbar Sobhan and his son Anvir, also managing director of East West Media Group Ltd, published fake, baseless, and fabricated news reports out of personal enmity, bringing false allegations of corruption and unlawful activities against Shamsul and his son Nazmul Karim Chowdhury Sharun.

The publication of more than a hundred such news reports harmed the social status and political reputation of Shamsul and his family, affecting the lawmaker mentally, physically and financially, it mentioned.

Lawyer Dipak said his client filed the defamation case for compensation, showing respect to law.

Citing from the case statement, the lawyer said, "The accused published fake, baseless and fabricated news reports one after another in their media outlets out of personal enmity with my client and his son, tarnishing their personal, social and political image."

"Several notices were sent to them over this [publication of the news items] but they did not respond. My client said he has no enmity with the journalists of the media outlets under Bashundhara Group but he had no choice but to go for a legal battle," said Dipak, also senior vice president of Patiya Lawyers' Association.

Protests test Taliban's

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square in the city, killing three people and injuring more than a dozen.

Al Jazeera later reported that the protests had expanded beyond Jalalabad to several other provinces.

Meanwhile, the Taliban yesterday gave hints at how the future government in Afghanistan may look like.

The new government may take the form of a ruling council, with Taliban supreme leader Haibatullah Akhundzada in overall charge, a senior member of the group said.

But Afghanistan would not be a democracy, Waheedullah Hashimi told Reuters: "It is sharia law and that is it."

The power structure that Hashimi outlined would bear similarities to how Afghanistan was run the last time the Taliban were in power from 1996 to 2001. Then, supreme leader Mullah Omar remained in the shadows and left the day-to-day running of the country to a council.

Akhundzada would likely play a role above the head of the council, who would be akin to the country's president, Hashimi added.

"Maybe his (Akhundzada's) deputy will play the role of 'president'," Hashimi said, speaking in English.

The Taliban's supreme leader has three deputies: Mullah Yaqoob, son of Mullah Omar, Sirajuddin Haqqani, leader of the powerful militant Haqqani network, and Abdul Ghani Baradar, who heads the Taliban's political office in Doha and is one of the founding members of the group.

Many issues regarding how the Taliban would run Afghanistan have yet to be finalised, he added.

On Tuesday, Mullah Baradar returned to Afghanistan for the first time in more than 10 years. Reports said that he is expected to head any future government.

It also comes as a Taliban commander and senior leader of the Haqqani Network, Anas Haqqani, yesterday met former Afghan president Hamid Karzai for talks to form an "inclusive government", a Taliban official said.

Karzai was accompanied by the old government's main peace envoy, Abdullah Abdullah, in the meeting, said the Taliban official, who declined to be identified. He gave no more details.

The talks came as president Ashraf Ghani -- who fled Afghanistan as the insurgents closed in on Kabul at the weekend, sealing their return to power -- said from the United Arab Emirates that he supported those negotiations and was in talks to return home.

The Taliban took effective control of the country on Sunday when Ghani fled and the insurgents walked into Kabul with no opposition. It capped a staggeringly fast rout of all cities in just 10 days, achieved with relatively little bloodshed, following two decades of war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

The rout was paved by US President Joe Biden decision to troops withdrawal from Afghanistan. Yesterday, British lawmakers harshly criticized him calling Afghanistan's collapse into Taliban hands a failure of intelligence, leadership and moral duty.

Despite the dovish tone of Taliban, thousands of Afghans, many of whom helped US-led foreign forces in the two decades since an invasion ended

the Taliban's 1996-2001 rule, are desperate to leave the country.

About 5,000 diplomats, security staff, aid workers and Afghans have been evacuated from Kabul in the last 24 hours and military flights will continue around the clock, a Western official told Reuters.

But chaos remained around the airport.

Taliban commanders and soldiers fired into the air to disperse crowds outside Kabul airport, a Taliban official said. "We have no intention to injure anyone," he told Reuters adding they were trying to bring order to chaos.

The United Nations said it had begun moving up to 100 international staff to Kazakhstan but said the measure was temporary and stressed it is "committed to staying and delivering in support of the Afghan people in their hour of need". The UN has about 300 international staff and 3,000 local staff in Afghanistan.

ACTIONS NOT WORDS
The Taliban have suggested they will impose their laws more softly than during their former harsh rule, and a senior official yesterday said that the group's leaders would be less restrictive than in the past.

In Taliban's first news briefing since their return to Kabul, the group's spokesperson said the new regime would be "positively different" from their 1996-2001 stint, which was infamous for deaths by stoning, girls being banned from school and women from working in contact with men.

Biden's administration gave a non-committal response to the Taliban's pledges of tolerance.

"If the Taliban says they are going to respect the rights of their citizens, we will be looking for them to uphold that statement and make good on that statement," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

Russia and China have quickly signalled their willingness to work with the Taliban but remained skeptical of their promises.

"We'll see what they do, whether it will be according to the pronouncements that they made," Russia's UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzia told reporters.

Echoing that comment and those of other Western leaders, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the Taliban would be judged on their actions.

"We will judge this regime based on the choices it makes, and by its actions rather than by its words, on its attitude to terrorism, to crime and narcotics, as well as humanitarian access and the rights of girls to receive an education," he told parliament, recalled from summer recess to debate the crisis.

The EU, US and 19 other countries issued a joint statement yesterday saying they were "deeply worried about Afghan women and girls", urging the Taliban to ensure their safety.

Many Afghans are sceptical of the Taliban promises. Some said they could only wait and see.

"My family lived under the Taliban and maybe they really want to change or have changed but only time will tell and it's going to become clear very soon," said Ferishta Karimi, who runs a tailoring shop for women.



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meeting insider quoted Sheikh Hasina as saying.

Usually, secretary-level meetings are held randomly and the PM remains present once a year. But this time, the PM joined the Sachib Sabha after about four years. The previous Sachib Sabha was held in 2017.

Standard practice is that the PM holds Sachib Sabha immediately after formation of a new government, to inform various government policies to the highest-level bureaucrats.

But yesterday's meeting was the first meeting after the incumbent Sheikh Hasina-led government assumed office in 2019. The PM, however, had visited several ministries after the government was formed.

Hasina told the secretaries that the government was providing all benefits to them, so she would not tolerate any corruption. She threatened to take tough actions against corrupt public servants, said sources.

The PM also warned that she would not accept any misuse of power and public money, the sources said.

At the meeting, Hasina said agricultural land was being lost to different development work and asked secretaries to take new development plans only after saving agricultural land.

She called upon the secretaries to make their highest efforts in inviting

foreign investments to their respective sectors, said sources. Besides, the PM emphasised on establishing good governance.

At the meeting, the education secretary informed the premier of his ministry's preparations for reopening educational institutions, which have remained closed since March last year due to the pandemic.

The PM then asked the secretary to make sure that the Covid situation and the number of vaccinated students, aged 18 and above, are taken into consideration before the reopening, said sources.

In her introductory speech, the PM emphasised the need for reopening of the educational institutions and asked the authorities concerned to make a quick move regarding this, reports UNB.

"Not only universities, but also