BANGLADESH UPDATE 3,062 New cases in 24hrs | 15,03,680 Total cases | 26,274 Deaths | 14,31,984 Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE 4,539,682 Deaths | 218,913,594 Total cases

BUYING SIMS WITHOUT NID CARD

BTRC decides to cap it to two

SHAHID BAPPY

A mobile phone user will not be able to get more than two SIM cards against his or her passport or driving licence or birth certificate, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has decided.

Also, those SIM cards have to be registered within six months with the mobile operators against their National Identity (NID) cards. Failing to do so will lead to blocking of the cards if there is no valid reason for the delay in providing copies of the cards to the carrier.

The decision was made at a meeting of the telecom regulator recently to check crimes using SIM cards, said meeting sources.

Currently, a mobile phone user can buy 15 SIM cards against his or her NID card.

The BTRC allows those without NID or smart NID cards to get SIM cards against any of their passport or driving licence or birth registration certificate.

However, a mobile phone user can buy up to 15 SIM cards against each of the five identification documents. It this way, the person could purchase maximum 75 SIM cards, said BTRC sources.

The BRTC has already asked operators to prepare, said sources, adding that a directive would be issued.

The operator would send a text message to the user 30 days before the date of registration would be due.

The request for re-registration using the NID or smart card will also be sent via SMS. The phone numbers will be disabled if not registered.

Asked, BTRC Chairman Sam Sunder Sikder said the move is aimed at stopping criminal activities which are done by misusing SIM cards.

"It is being brought under one rule. This rule is applicable to all, whether they are Bangladeshi citizens or foreigners," he said.

According to the commission sources, the meeting decided that the regulator will cancel registration of the additional SIMs within 90 days of issuing a directive in this regard.

The mobile phone operator will take necessary steps to inform customer concerned about this, the sources said.

According to a report of the commission, the number of people who have taken 15 SIMs against one birth registration certificate is 154.

The number of people who have taken 15 SIMs against their driving licence is 26 and the number of people who have taken 15 SIMs against one passport is 84.

The number of people who have taken 3 SIMs against one birth certificate is 4,540, against one driving licence 394, and against one passport 4,373.

As of now, BTRC's Central Biometric Verification Monitoring Platform system does not have data on the same person's passport and birth certificate. The platform has all the data on those documents provided to purchase SIM cards so far in the country.

As there is no was to establish a link between national identity card, smart NID card, passport, driving licence and birth registration certificate, a customer has the opportunity to register a total of 75 SIMs, 15 against each of the five IDs, which is against the government guidelines.

The commission further said that in all cases, SIM registration, verification, re-activation, re-registration, replacement, de-activation etc. must be done only from the respective sales center of the operator concerned. It cannot be done through any retailer.

"We are in the consultation with the regulator, and will comply with any forthcoming instructions in this regard," Hossain Sadat, acting chief corporate affairs officer of Grameenphone Ltd, said.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Even though DSCC has put up a warning sign, inset, and fences around Hajaribagh's Kalunagar canal to prevent waste-dumping, the area's residents keep piling up junk in the water body. This line of behaviour raises the question, why do we keep treating our waterbodies the way we do?

New body to campaign for Hindu laws reform

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new organisation was formed yesterday to campaign for necessary reform to the country's "customary Hindu laws" and formulating relevant new laws.

The central committee of the newly formed Bangladesh Hindu Law Reform Council currently comprises 35 members.

Gradually, the number of members will be increased to 101, said a press release of the council.

The council was formed during a virtual meeting held by individuals belonging to different religious communities with various professional backgrounds. Journalist Ajay Dasgupta chaired the meeting.

Mayna Talukdar, associate professor of Dhaka University's Sanskrit department, has been made president of the council, while journalist Pulack Ghatack was named as its general secretary, said the release.

Prof Nirmal Kumar Saha of Chattogram University, journalist Subhash Saha and rights activist Rina Roy have been made vice-presidents of the council.

As part of its campaign, the newly formed council will conduct surveys, organise discussions, create mass opinion and stage demonstrations, the release added.

Primarily, the council will campaign for revoking gender-based discrimination from provisions related to Hindu inheritance and custodianship, gender- and caste-based discrimination from adoption clauses. It will also campaign for formulating divorce law, and making marriage registration mandatory.

Of those, campaigning to establish equal rights in inheritance law will be prioritised, the release added.

Lower courts abused their authority: HC

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of the remand order of a lower court.

Shamsunnahar Smriti, popularly known as Pori Moni, was released from jail yesterday morning, four weeks after Rab arrested the actress from her Banani home on July 4 allegedly with a stash of drugs and alcohol.

Justice Mustafa Zaman Islam at one point during the proceedings said the magistrate had abused the power by granting a remand order for the police to question Pori Moni for the third time.

"The investigation officer [of the case] appealed and the judge granted remand. What material was present in the investigating officers' petition that this remand was approved?" he questioned.

"This cannot happen in any civilised society," he said.

Ain o Salish Kendra, a human rights and legal assistance group, filed a self-initiated petition to question the repeated remand that allowed the police to interrogate Pori Moni in their custody.

Lawyer ZI Khan Panna and Pori Moni's lawyer Md Mojibur Rahman represented the petitioners at the hearing. They were also accompanied by Syeda Nasrin and Md Shaheenuzzaman.

Deputy Attorney General Abu Yahya Dulal and Assistant Attorney General Mizanur Rahman represented the state.

Justice Mustafa Zaman Islam said the Supreme Court has guidelines on remand, but the magistrates were not following them. Panna then called for an order to follow these guidelines.

The judge then said that the petition would be recorded.

Pori Moni's lawyer Mojibur Rahman told the court that neither Section 167 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, nor the Appellate Division's guidelines were followed in issuing the remand order.

The justice then said the High Court could examine the decision, call the remand record from the magistrate, and ask them for a satisfactory explanation for their decision.

"If they fail to answer, we can respond that we are unsatisfied and call for an appearance," he said.

A guideline could also be issued on how quickly a hearing date for bail should be set.

When assistant attorney general Mizanur Rahman noted that Pori Moni was no longer in remand, the Justice said: "We want to ask what material led to the granting of remand thrice.

"Why did the magistrate abuse his power? Was there a justification, after a four-day remand, to grant a third remand? We will ask the investigation officer to appear with the case docket," Justice Mustafa Zaman Islam said.

"If the investigation officer, without any material, submits a petition for remand, why did these two magistrates accept them?" he said. "This must not happen."

Though 2:00pm was set for further hearing, the court ordered "not today" upon a request by the assistant attorney general.

PORI MONI RELEASED

The film actress came out of Kashimpur Central Women's Jail in Gazipur at 9:36am in a white car and waved at the crowd gathered to see her.

Standing through the sunroof of the car, Pori Moni was seen shaking hands with her fans and taking selfies with them.

On Tuesday, a Dhaka court, considering her health, age and reputation in the film industry, granted her ad-interim bail.

The jail authorities could not release her the same day as they did not get the bail order in time.

The bail order will be valid until submission of the police report, the judge said in his order.

After her arrest, the actress was placed on a four-day remand first, and a two-day-remand after that and then again on a one-day remand. Three separate magistrates of the CMM court issued the orders placing her in remands.

Pori Moni had previously made headlines after she filed an attempted rape and murder case against several persons including a businessman centring an incident at the Dhaka Boat Club.

25pc rise in rice output

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fair price of crops, said researchers.

At a seminar yesterday in the capital, Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) presented a strategic paper on how to increase rice production. It also unveiled the cover of a book titled "Doubling Rice Productivity (DRP) in Bangladesh". The book is an outcome of two years' work by 40 researchers.

Presenting the research at the seminar, BRRI Director General Shajahan Kabir said the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) would have to play an important role in this regard by promoting rice seeds of high-yielding varieties among the farmers.

The DAE would have to arrange exhibition plots of high-yielding rice varieties and monitor the overall process so that farmers preserve at least 35 percent of their produce as seeds and distribute it among other growers, he added.

The BRRI organised the seminar on the occasion of "Mujib Borsho".

Shajahan said the DRP is a model concept for sustainable rice production for the next 30 years. It is not necessarily a model to double the rice production, but to double labour productivity and increase the production on a piece of land.

Following the model, Bangladesh will fulfil the Sustainable Development Goal by 2030 and become a developed country by 2041, he said.

Researchers said it is possible to raise the country's rice production to 40.7 million tonnes by 2030, 43.9 million tonnes by 2040 and 46.7 million tonnes by 2050.

The country produced 37.4 million tonnes of rice last year, according to BRRI data.

Researchers found 17 ecotypes of rice for different ecosystems in the country.

Bangladesh will have to feed an estimated 215.4 million people in 2050. The current yearly consumption of rice is 148kg per person, which is decreasing by 0.7 percent every year. So, it is expected that the annual consumption of rice would be 133kg per person by 2040.

Currently, the production of rice is increasing by 0.34 percent each year. At this rate, the country's rice production may reach 47.2 million tonnes in 2050.

PER CAPITA ANNUAL RICE CONSUMPTION

1977	180 kg
2020	148 kg
2040	133 kg

POPULATION PROJECTION

2015	160 million
2030	186 million
2050	215 million

SOURCE: BRRI

As per the model used by the researchers, 44.6 million tonnes of rice would be required for the country in 2050.

Considering all environmental odds, researchers have set a target to produce9.8 tonnes of Boro per hectare, 6.2 tonnes per hectare in drought infested areas, 7.3 tonnes in flood affected and 8.1 tonnes in salinity affected areas by 2030.

Speaking at the event as chief guest, Agricultural Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque said the book published by BRRI would work as a guideline to increase rice production in Bangladesh.

Today, Bangladesh ranks third in rice production in the world. The country is now self-sufficient in food production. It only became possible by following the agriculture policy adopted by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Shamsul Alam, state minister for planning, Humanth Bhandari, representative of International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Md Asadullah, director general of DAE, and Sheikh Mohammad Bokhtiar, executive chairman of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, addressed the seminar, with agriculture ministry Senior Secretary Mesbahul Islam in the chair.

Another wave may roll in soon

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about maintaining heath guidelines, the country might face another wave," Dr Mushtuq Husain, an adviser to the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

Experts also think the government should utilise the improving situation to plug the loopholes in healthcare facilities and so become adequately prepared for a possible third wave. They also suggested that the government ramp up vaccination, which is key to curbing deaths and hospitalisations.

Only around four percent of the country's population of over 160 million have so far received both doses of Covid-19 vaccine.

Talking to The Daily Star recently, Abul Bashar Mohammed Khurshid Alam, director general of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said, "We are keeping an eye on the neighbouring country [India] and also the Covid situation across the world.

"We will act in accordance with the situation. But again, if we fail to maintain health guidelines, things will turn grave in no time."

Experts blame the Delta variant, first detected in India, for the second wave that has so far claimed around 10,000 lives in Bangladesh.

In India, a panel of experts in a report submitted to the country's Prime Minister's Office predicted three scenarios: the third wave could peak in October with 3.2 lakh positive cases per day; five lakh positive cases per day; and two lakh positive cases per day.

After infections and deaths peaked in India in late April and early May, when daily infections shot to 4 lakh, it started declining gradually.

India, a country of over 1.36 billion people, recorded 25,000 new cases on August 22. But daily cases have risen to over 40,000 since then.

Kerala's weekly positivity rate is around 14-19 percent, which impacted the neighbouring states, according to an NDTV report yesterday.

The third wave will be driven mostly due to mutations of the virus, reported Indian media quoting government experts.

Experts are already looking at the Kappa variant, which was designated a Variant of Interest in April 2021 by the WHO.

Another variant causing concerns is the new Delta plus variant, which is considered highly infectious and has been reported in Maharashtra, Indian media reported, adding that experts have warned that this variant may trigger a third wave of the pandemic in the state.

Besides, the spectre of children being affected in a possible third wave is also rising.

"During the first wave, Covid attacked mainly the elderly and spared the youngsters -- the second wave is attacking a large number of young breadwinners. The third wave is likely to attack children, since most adults are already infected or immunised," Dr Devi Shetty, a cardiac surgeon and head of Karnataka's Covid-19 task force, wrote in an editorial in the Times of India on May 12.

Bangladesh's Covid-19 situation improved significantly early this year as daily infection rates came down to around two percent, but from March it started shooting up again.

Since the first case of the Delta variant was detected in India on May 8, the situation went downhill fast.

Due to the dominance of the Delta variant, Bangladesh witnessed record daily infection and death rates. June and July were the worst months.

THINGS THE GOVT SHOULD DO

Former DGHS director (disease control) Dr Be-Nazir Ahmed suggested that the government immediately conduct a serosurveillance in different areas to understand the real Covid-19 situation.

Serosurveillance provides estimates of antibody levels against infectious diseases and is considered the gold standard for measuring population immunity due to past infection or vaccination, according to National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS).

"This will help the government make a scientific projection and also plan effective measures to contain the probable third wave."

Ahmed also suggested that as the situation is improving, the government should identify the weak links in the chain of treatment facilities and address those immediately.

"In the new normal situation, the government should launch a massive campaign to encourage mask-wearing and frequent hand washing. At the same time, we have to expedite the vaccination campaign," said Ahmed.

Health officials said they were trying to appoint more healthcare professionals in the shortest possible time to improve healthcare services at the district level to counter any upcoming surge.

DGHS DG Khurshid Alam said 401 anaesthetists have already been appointed and they will be sent to district hospitals soon.

"Around 4,000 doctors will be recruited soon through the 42nd BCS [Bangladesh Civil Service] exam. Recruitment of technologists is also under process."

He added, "We have got time as the pressure on hospitals has recently decreased. So, now we will complete setting up ICU and HDU facilities in district hospitals that lack those. By the end of September, we will get 40 oxygen generators and those too will soon be installed."

The DG, however, said greater focus should be placed on prevention rather than on treatment facilities, given that resources are limited and already overstretched.

"We cannot increase the healthcare facilities overnight. Even if we expand healthcare facilities, is it possible to increase healthcare professionals? So, we have to keep focusing on prevention," said Alam.

Lowest daily Covid deaths in 2 months

10 lakh Pfizer shots arrive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country recorded the deaths of 79 Covid-19 patients yesterday, the lowest in more than two months.

"There has been a downward trend in the transmission of Covid-19 from the last week of July and the first week of August," said Nazmul Alam, director of disease control at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), in an online bulletin yesterday.

According to the DGHS data, both the Covid-19 cases and fatalities in Bangladesh dropped further as the country logged 79 deaths and 3,062 new cases respectively in the 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday.

The positivity rate also declined to 10.11 percent.

The fresh number pushed the country's total fatalities to 26,274 while the cases reached 1,503, 680, according to the DGHS.

On August 5 and 10, 264 deaths were recorded.

With the latest count, the total number of deaths rose to 26,274 and the total confirmed cases to 1,503,680.

Of the yesterday's deceased, 43 were men and 36 were women.

Meanwhile, health officials received 10 lakh shots of Pfizer vaccines from the United States.

The United States sent those vaccines as gift under global vaccine supply arrangement Covax.

Health Secretary Lokman Hosen Mia and the US Ambassador to Bangladesh Earl R Miller received the consignment at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Maidul Islam Prodhan, senior public relations officer of the health ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The country has so far received 3.81 crore Covid-19 vaccines from different sources. Of those, 2.62 crore jabs have already been administered since the vaccination campaign was started on January 27 this year.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has received 24 fridges capable of preserving vaccines at minus 70 degrees Celsius or below temperature.

Of all Covid-19 vaccines used in the country, the Pfizer vaccines require minus 70 degrees Celsius temperature for preservation.

Unicef has delivered those fridges on Tuesday under Covax arrangement while two more will arrive tonight, Shamsul Haque, member secretary of the Covid-19 Vaccine Deployment Committee at the health directorate, told The Daily Star this afternoon.

"We will keep those fridges in Dhaka to store vaccines," Shamsul said.

Around 90 lakh Covid-19 vaccine jabs can be preserved in those fridges.

Yemeni workers in Saudi at risk of forced returns: HRW

AFP, *Dubai*

Human Rights Watch has called on Saudi Arabia to stop laying off Yemeni employees, warning that this could force them to return to the humanitarian crisis in the war-torn country.

Yemen has been embroiled in conflict between the government, which is backed by a Saudi-led military coalition, and the Iran-allied Huthi rebels since 2014, creating what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Saudi authorities in July began "to terminate or not renew contracts of Yemeni professionals", HRW said in a statement on Tuesday.

The rights group cited local Saudi media reports that said new regulations require businesses to limit the percentage of workers from certain nationalities -- including 25 percent for Yemeni citizens.