

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,907
New cases in 24hrs



15,40,110
Total cases



27,147
Deaths



14,97,009
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



46,86,050
Deaths



22,79,23,189
Total cases

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

Dhaka seeks help from C'wealth

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has sought the Commonwealth's solidarity for smooth repatriation of Rohingyas to their home in Myanmar's Rakhine.

Leading the Bangladesh delegation in the 21st Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers' Meeting (CFAMM), he urged Commonwealth to assist in persuading the government of Myanmar to follow their commitments.

Momen highlighted the current impasse over the Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs) voluntary repatriation to Myanmar and their partial relocation to Bhasan Char. He also sought efforts to boost up intra-Commonwealth trade, ensure vaccine equity and result-oriented climate action.

Commonwealth leaders have commended Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's humanitarian role in taking the bold decision to give shelter to a huge number of FDMNs and thus saving thousands of innocent lives.

They also appreciated her leadership at the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF). They made these comments during the 21st CFAMM held virtually in London on Thursday.

The foreign minister informed the Commonwealth leaders of the initiatives undertaken as the Chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF).

The Foreign Minister also called

upon further collaboration between the Commonwealth and the CVF.

Momen urged the Commonwealth member states to stand together more than ever for trade and economic recovery which was hampered due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

He also called upon the post-pandemic Commonwealth to demonstrate Commonwealth solidarity, connectivity and collective action to build back a more resilient, greener and sustainable post-coronavirus recovery.

The foreign minister informed the meeting that as the leading country for the Commonwealth Business-to-Business Connectivity Cluster, Bangladesh has relentlessly championed for connecting the Commonwealth private sectors for creating a tech-driven low carbon business recovery model and a Commonwealth digital marketplace at the first High-level CW B2B Connectivity Dialogue organised by Bangladesh in November 2020.

Elizabeth Truss MP, the UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs chaired this meeting where Commonwealth Secretary General and Foreign Ministers of the Commonwealth countries were present.

Before this meeting, the Commonwealth Ministerial Group on Guyana was held on September 14, 2021, which was chaired by Momen.



Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque, left, sees off Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday. The premier left Dhaka for New York to attend the 76th United Nations General Assembly. Ministers, high officials and the chiefs of the three forces were also present at the airport to see her off.

PHOTO: PID

Law left crippled when crashes leap

FROM PAGE 1

The government says the law is supposed to bring discipline in the road transport sector and curb road crashes. But after three years, road safety has not improved, rather it has only worsened.

The country witnessed a 40 percent rise in road accidents and deaths till July this year compared to the same period last year, shows police data.

As many as 3,095 people were killed in 3,259 road crashes till July this year, shows the data.

The numbers of road accidents and deaths were 2,609 and 2,635 respectively in 2018. The numbers rose to 4,198 and 3,918 respectively last year, according to the data.

Different road safety platforms say the numbers are much higher.

Talking on the issue, Supreme Court lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua said the road transport sector was one of the few sectors where transport owners' and workers' bodies hold enormous power due to their leaders' direct links with the ruling party.

"So, the law is not being implemented properly here," Jyotirmoy, also the vice chairman of Road Safety Foundation, told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

THE MUCH-TALKED ABOUT ACT
On September 19, 2018, the Jatiya Sangsad passed the Road Transport Act following an unprecedented student protest for road safety.

But the law did not come into effect until November 2019 as road transport associations called strikes against several sections of the law in October 2018.

The government, following a meeting between the home minister and transport leaders in November 2019, decided not to enforce several sections of the act till June 2020.

The government decided not to penalise those who drive large vehicles with licences for light or medium sized vehicles for that period. Later, the deadline was extended for another year.

The authorities would also not impose a fine on any vehicles that were modified for carrying containers. Commercial vehicles would also not be fined for illegal parking if there was no parking space.

Hossain Ahmed Majumdar, joint secretary of Bangladesh Covered-van Owners Association, admitted that police still do not file cases for operating such modified vehicles and the BRTA still issues fitness clearances to them.

IMPLEMENTATION YET TO

START FOR SOME SECTIONS

Under the Motor Vehicles Ordinance-1983, road crash victims or their family members had the opportunity to seek compensations from the Motor Accident Claim Tribunal for death, injuries, and damages to properties.

But the ordinance was repealed after the act in question came into force in November 2019, narrowing victims' scope for getting compensations.

In some cases, victims can now file writs with the High Court to get compensation.

As per the act, the government will create a fund for compensating and treating, if necessary, road crash victims.

The fund would be created with one-time or annual "contributions" from motor vehicle owners, transport associations, and the government.

The government will form a trustee board to manage the fund and related issues, the act says.

The relevant rules, however, have not been formulated.

The ministry on December 22 last year issued a circular, making BRTA chairman and its secretary the chairman and secretary of the trustee board with immediate effect.

BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder on Thursday said other members of the board were nominated and the ministry was expected to issue a gazette in this regard soon.

"We are expecting to hold our first meeting next week to discuss the organogram of the board and manpower recruitment issues," he told The Daily Star.

However, the trustee board cannot deal with compensation-related issues until the relevant rules are formulated.

As per section 11 of the act, each driver will have 12 points against his or her driving licence and the point would be cut for violating traffic rules. His or her licence can also be cancelled for repeated offences.

The way the points would be cut or added would be determined by the rules.

BRTA officials said as the point-related issue is new in the country, they cannot be implemented until formulation of the rules.

WHEN WILL THE RULES COME?
After the law was passed, the road transport and bridges ministry tasked the BRTA with formulating a draft of the rules. After missing four deadlines,

BRTA submitted a "partial" draft.

But the law ministry, where the draft was sent for vetting in 2019, rejected it and asked for a "complete" one.

The BRTA prepared the "completed" rules and sent them to the road transport ministry in September last year. The ministry sent the draft to the law ministry again in April this year, said officials aware of the development.

The draft is still pending with the law ministry for vetting, an additional secretary of the road transport ministry said on Tuesday.

Once vetted, it will be sent to the finance ministry for approval, as there are some issues related to fees for traffic rules violation, the additional secretary said, seeking anonymity.

The Cabinet Division's approval would also be required before making the rules functional, he said, adding, "So it is not possible to say when the rules would come into action."

Asked about the delay in framing the rules, the BRTA chairman said, "Formulation of a law or rules usually takes some time."

MOVE FOR AMENDING LAW

In April, the road transport ministry uploaded a draft of the amended law on its official website. It held an inter-ministerial meeting on August 30 to discuss opinions from line ministries and individuals concerned on the draft.

As per the draft, at least 29 of the 126 sections of the act will be amended and punishment or fine under at least 14 sections would be reduced.

The law, if amended as per the draft, will lose its jurisdiction to hold a driver responsible for causing injuries by reckless and negligent driving.

The jurisdiction will only be applicable when someone dies in an accident.

The educational qualifications required to obtain a driving licence will also be changed. Drivers, who will operate registered three-wheelers, will get licences if they have a class-five certificate, instead of class eight, says the draft.

The Daily Star tried to contact Road Transport and Highway Division Secretary Nazrul Islam for comments, but could not reach him over the phone.

Talking on the issue, Jyotirmoy Barua said, "The move to amend the law even before its full implementation is nothing but a compromise [with transport associations]."

CAAB, healthcare facilities

FROM PAGE 1

PCR lab for Covid-19 tests for outbound passengers at the country's three international airports within three to four days, the expatriates' welfare ministry on September 15 gave permission to seven healthcare facilities to set up labs at HSI.

The seven firms chosen by the Directorate General of Health Services are: Stenz Healthcare (BD) Limited; CSBF Health Centre; AMZ Hospital Limited; Anwar Khan Modern Medical College Hospital; Zainul Haque Sikder Women's Medical College and Hospital (Pvt) Ltd; Gulshan Clinic Limited; and DMFR Molecular Lab and Diagnostic.

The facilities were given between three to six days to set up the labs and the fees for the Covid-19 test were fixed between Tk 1,700 and Tk 2,300.

Caab on Thursday held a meeting at its headquarters in the city's Kurmitola with representatives of the seven facilities and asked them to set up the labs at the open space on the roof of the multi-storied parking building to the north of HSI.

The representatives however said the open roof is not suitable for setting up rapid-PCR labs.

Another complication is that, the seven organisations will have to send their SOPs to the UAE to verify whether they are up to requisite standards.

"If UAE raises objections about the SOP of any healthcare facilities, they will not get the job," an official who had knowledge of the meeting said.

Caab chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman, who chaired the meeting, wanted to know from the seven organisations how long they would take to set up the labs and the number of manpower needed, meeting sources said.

Representatives of the seven organisations said temperatures on the roof and wind will create obstacles to testing activities.

They demanded that Caab allocates spaces to set up labs on the second floor of the car park.

"There are various obstacles in setting up rapid-PCR test lab in an

open space. Besides, setting up tents or mobile sheds will also not be possible to carry out test," a representative of one of the seven healthcare facilities said.

Caab, however, rejected their objections, saying they have already informed the intended organisations that space will be provided on the roof for setting up the lab.

"Those who will work will have to create an environment for setting up labs at their own expense. If the lab is not set up within the stipulated time after receiving the work order, action will be taken against the respective organisation," he said.

In August, the UAE lifted ban on flight operations from Bangladesh and several other countries but made the rapid PCR test result mandatory for passengers flying in from Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Uganda, Vietnam, Zambia and Indonesia.

Since then, the expatriate Bangladeshis in UAE, who sent home about 10 percent of the \$24.8 billion of remittance the country received in the last fiscal year, have been demanding setting up of rapid PCR test labs at the country's three international airports.

India vaccine tycoon calls Covid booster shots 'unethical'

AFP, Mumbai

The head of the world's largest vaccine maker said yesterday it was "unethical" to give third doses of the Covid-19 vaccine while developing nations are struggling to access first and second jobs.

Adar Poonawalla, billionaire chief executive of Serum Institute of India, spoke out as he announced a \$4.9 billion deal to take a 15 percent stake in a rival pharma firm, allowing vaccine production to be ramped up.

PM off to New York

FROM PAGE 1

International Airport, Helsinki.

This is Hasina's first foreign trip since the Covid-19 pandemic hit Bangladesh in March last year. She will attend the UNGA for the 18th time as the head of the government and will address the General Debate on September 24.

Tomorrow, Hasina will leave Helsinki for New York by a VIP flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines at 3:00pm (local time). The flight is scheduled to land at John F Kennedy International Airport, New York, at 6:00pm (local time).

She will stay at Hotel Lotte Palace during her stay in New York from September 19 to 25 as part of her official visit to attend the UNGA and a number of high-level events there.

The premier will also hold talks with a number of leaders during her stay in New York. She is likely to return home on October 1.

On Monday, Hasina will attend a closed-door meeting on climate change at the UN Headquarters, plant a tree and dedicate a bench at the UN Gardens in honour of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the occasion of his birth centenary, and lay a floral wreath at the Peace Memorial on the North Lawn of UNHQ.

She will sit in two bilateral meetings with EU Council President Charles Michel and Barbados Prime Minister Mia Amor Motley. Besides, she will join a virtual event of Sustainable Development Solution Network.

On Tuesday, the PM will attend the

opening session of the UNGA General Debate, sit in a bilateral meeting with Denmark Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen in the afternoon and join Business Roundtable by US-Bangladesh Business Council.

Hasina on Wednesday will virtually attend three events -- the high-level meeting of the UNGA to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, White House Global Covid-19 Summit and a high-level event on Rohingya crisis.

On Thursday, the Bangladesh PM will send her pre-recorded statements to two events. She will sit in four bilateral meetings with Queen Máxima of the Netherlands at the place of residence, UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and Vietnam President Nguyễn Xuân Phúc at the UNHQ.

The Bangladesh prime minister on Friday will address the UNGA 76th general debate in the morning, sit in a bilateral meeting with Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte at UNHQ, and join a community programme virtually.

On September 25, Hasina will depart New York for Washington DC by a Biman flight. She will stay in Washington DC from September 25 to 30.

The PM is scheduled to leave Washington DC for Dhaka on September 30. She is expected to return home on October 1 after a short stopover in Finland.

UPAZILA PARISHAD HC for proper security to chairpersons

Asks govt to provide them with gunmen

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court has directed the government to provide security to all upazila parishad chairpersons with gunmen like that of the upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs) across the country.

The court also asked the authorities concerned to put up signboards reading "Upazila Parishad Office" instead of the existing "UNO Office" on the gates of all upazila parishad offices.

The HC bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice SM Maniruzzaman came up with the order on September 7 following a writ petition filed by three upazila parishad chairmen, including Md Abdul Aziz of Patuakhali's Dasmina upazila, seeking necessary directives.

Online gambling

FROM PAGE 1

siphoned off through online gambling. During the drive against the casino business, around 30 operations were conducted at 22 places.

Rab arrested immediate-past Dhaka City Jubo League (south unit) president Ismail Hossain Chowdhury Samrat, organising secretary Khaled Mahmud Bhuiyan, vice-president Enamul Haque Arman and Dhaka City North unit joint general secretary and ward councillor Tarequzzaman Rajib, and Krishak League central committee member Shafiqul Alam Feroz on charges of running illegal casino business.

Jubo League later expelled all these leaders.

Names of several patronisers came out in media reports, but no legal action has yet been taken against them.

The arrestees also include Jubo League leader and tender Mogul GK Shamim, Shamim, Mohammedan Sporting Club's director-in-charge Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan, Online casino kingpin Selim Prodhan, three local AL leaders and ward councillors Moynul Haque Manju and Habibur Rahman Mizan were also arrested.

A huge quantity of gambling equipment, liquor, 22 firearms, Tk 8.45 crore in cash, FDR worth Tk 166.27 crore, gold ornaments weighing around eight kg were seized in the drives. Besides, Rab mobile courts fined or sentenced 204 others to different terms of imprisonment.

The Rab crackdown brought to light how a group of political leaders in alliance with some sports organisers turned renowned sporting clubs in the capital into lavish establishments to run casino businesses round the clock.

Rab, Criminal Investigation Department and Anti-Corruption Commission officials filed 58 cases against 15 people. Rab investigated 10 of the cases and already submitted charge sheets in nine cases.

A top ACC official said they have already submitted charge sheets in 13 of some 22 graft cases they were tasked with probing.

The rest are being investigated by police.

45pc bearings

FROM PAGE 1

maintenance of the bridge, with its Secretary Abu Bakr Siddique in the chair.

Italian company FIP Industrial had supplied the pot bearings and as per the bridge maintenance manual, the service life of the bearings is between 20 to 30 years, shows the meeting minutes.

Pot bearing is a special type of bridge bearing used for transmission of load from superstructures to piers and absorb vibration caused due to the movement of vehicles, experts said.

China Communications Construction Company Limited (CCCC) is the Bangladesh Bridge Authority's operator for maintenance and operation of Bangabandhu Bridge.

A CCCC report said problem surfaced in around 45 percent of 112 bearings' pad, shows the meeting minutes.

Prof Khan Mahmud Amanat of Buet civil engineering department said service life of a pot bearing used in a bridge is between 25 and 30 years. He said problems in 45 percent bearings would not pose any immediate risk to the bridge.

The problem gives an indication that service life of the bearings has been over and they need to be replaced immediately, he added.

However, a senior engineer involved in constructing roads and bridges said most of the bridges in the country lack regular and periodic maintenance.

He said problem in around 45 percent bearings of Bangabandhu Bridge also indicates a lack of regular and periodic maintenance of the structure, he said wishing not to be named.

Different types of problems would surface if the bearings are not replaced on time, the engineer said.

Both the experts said replacing bearings is very technical work and it may take several months to replace all the problematic bearings. They, however, said it is possible to change those keeping the bridge operational.

Bridge Division Secretary Abu Bakr Siddique, also the executive director of Bangladesh Bridge Authority, said they have already directed the authorities to communicate with the Italian supplier to replace the bearings.

"If they can't supply the bearings, we will look for other sources," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Liabilities transfer was Evaly trick

FROM PAGE 1

As of February 28, the liabilities of Evaly stood at Tk 403 crore, the company was worth Tk 65 crore, the amount shoppers paid to it was Tk 214 crore, and payment of Tk 190 crore to individuals and businesses was due, said the Rab official.

The Rab official said Evaly has been making losses since its inception in December 2018.

Rassel and Nasrin told officers that they failed to come up with a plan on how to clear the debts to their customers and suppliers.

"Since February, Evaly has not been able to deliver any large [expensive] product to any customer. Rassel has a marketing policy... He wanted everyone in South Asia to know Evaly's name. He wanted to create a brand value. People know him... He ran campaigns and sponsored [others] with the hard-earned money of his customers."

Moin ruled out the likelihood of any influential individual patronising Rassel. Rassel often went live on Facebook asking for time to refund the customers as a ploy to deceive people until he filed for bankruptcy.

Evaly's has over Tk 44 lakh customers, he added.

The company made a very little investment as its strategy was to extract a large sum of money from the suppliers and the consumers. They lured the customers with impressive discounts and cashback offers in campaigns titled Earthquake, Cyclone, Priority Store, T-10, and T-5.

A Rab official said the couple bought a Range Rover and an Audi for personal use and each withdrew Tk 5 lakh in salaries. The source of the money was individuals who paid for the goods.

The company's CSR programmes and promotional activities were also

run with the money of the people who thought they were paying for products.

"Evaly's debts are increasing by crores every day," Moin said.

Conglomerates at home and abroad didn't invest in Evaly because they saw no way out for the company, he added.

Rassel started several other e-commerce platforms like E-food, E-khata, and E-bazar.

During primary interrogation, Rassel and Nasrin told Rab that the Evaly head office and customer care in Dhanmondi and two warehouses in Amin Bazar and Savar were set up in rented space.

The company at one stage had about 2,000 permanent and 1,700 temporary employees. The numbers have come down to 1,300 and 500. It once paid Tk 5 crore in salaries each month. The current amount is Tk 1.5 crore. Besides, many employees have not been paid since June.

A Dhaka court yesterday placed Rassel and Nasrin on a three-day remand each.

Late last night, Sub-inspector Ohidul Islam, who is investigating the case, told this correspondent that Rassel was taken to Mitford hospital as he felt unwell around 9:30pm. He was taken back to Gulshan Police Station after doctors said the issue was not serious.

Rassel and Nasrin were arrested in their Mohammadpur apartment on Thursday on charges of embezzlement as thousands of consumers worry if they would get back their money or the products they had paid for.

The arrests happened hours after Arif Baker, an aggrieved consumer, accused Rassel, Nasrin and several unnamed individuals involved in the company's financial management of embezzlement in a case filed with Gulshan Police Station.

The e-commerce company disrupted