

BANGLADESH UPDATE

1190
New cases in 24hrs

15,41,300
Total cases

27,182
Deaths

14,98,654
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,696,882
Deaths

228,682,592
Total cases

Half a crore Covid shots arrive

35 more die, 1,190 test positive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 50 lakh more doses of Covid-19 Sinopharm vaccine reached Bangladesh from China early yesterday.

A flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, carrying the vaccines, landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 2:00am, Maidul Islam Proddhan, senior public relation officer of the health ministry, told The Daily Star.

Earlier on September 11, around 54 lakh doses of the Sinopharm vaccine arrived in Dhaka from China.

The vaccine jabs have come under the first agreement with the Chinese state-owned vaccine producer -- Beijing Bio-Institute of Biological Products Co Ltd, to purchase 1.5 crore vaccines.

Besides, the Cabinet Committee on Purchase on August 11 this year approved a proposal to procure more six crore more doses of Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccine from China.

According to the officials, the Chinese company will start supplying those vaccines from November this year.

On January 27, Bangladesh kicked off the Covid-19 vaccination campaign with the Oxford-AstraZeneca's

Covishield vaccine from the Serum Institute of India (SII).

Bangladesh purchased 3 crore doses of AstraZeneca vaccine from Serum. But the country has so far received only 70 lakh in two shipments, for which the mass vaccination campaign faced a huge setback.

Later, the government resumed the campaign with the vaccines from alternative sources -- China and the Covax facility.

35 DIED, 1190 INFECTED

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) yesterday reported 35 deaths and 1,190 fresh cases of Covid-19.

With the latest count, the total number of deaths due to Covid-19 rose to 27,182 and the total cases to 1,541,300. The death rate was 1.76 percent.

Against a total of 19,668 tests yesterday, the positivity rate was 6.05 percent.

Of the deceased yesterday, 16 were male and 19 female. Of them, the highest 19 were in Dhaka division followed by six in Chattogram, three each in Rajshahi and Khulna, two in Sylhet, and one each in Rangpur and Barisal.



Workers dismantling a large hoarding from the side of the Dhaka-Aricha highway near Amin Bazar to make room for a new bridge there. After a bridge subsided disrupting traffic flow on the key highway, the authorities have decided to build the new structure with better capacity.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Manpower crisis lies at the crux

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in the country annually under different immunisation campaigns, said health officials.

The government has initially planned to inoculate a maximum 3.5 lakh people daily and around one crore a month through around 11,000 vaccination centres across the country. But it could not fulfill the target due to vaccine supply shortfalls.

The mass inoculation remained suspended for over two months due to the shortage of doses. The country suspended administering the first dose of the vaccine on April 26. Registration of people for vaccination was suspended nine days later.

The government resumed administering the first dose on June 19 on a limited scale and then gradually expanded it.

Due to a smooth flow of vaccine supply over the last couple of months, the government now plans to inoculate massively in the coming months to catch up with the lost time.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Wednesday told parliament that the government was planning to vaccinate 55 percent of the country's over 163 million people by the end of this year.

She also said six crore Sinopharm vaccine doses would arrive -- two crore each month -- from China between October and December.

Among the over 24.65 crore shots the government is supposed to get, more than 4.4 crore have already arrived in the country as gift or under different bilateral purchase agreements till September 12, the PM informed the House.

Last week, Health Minister Zahid Maleque told The Daily Star, "Initially we are targeting to administer two crore doses of Sinopharm vaccines each month if we get those as per the commitment."

Health officials said the Covid-19 vaccination should be made more

systematic and structured to meet the target as only six percent of the country's targeted population has so far been inoculated.

"We are still facing challenges in the mass inoculation drives as the manpower and logistics needed to administer jabs are far from adequate," said an EPI official, preferring anonymity.

And the outstretched manpower and logistics might eventually hamper the regular EPI activities, one of the very few bright spots in the country's healthcare system, he added.

"The EPI was assigned to vaccinate 2.5 to 3 crore kids in the country annually. But as per the government plan, we will now have to administer 25 crore doses apart from carrying out the existing EPI activities. The job has already become burdensome for us," a top official of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), told The Daily Star wishing not to be named.

He said around 15,000 health assistants of DGHS looked after the regular EPI activities at the field level although health officials had asked for an additional workforce of 11,000 people in 2018.

"Without increasing the manpower, running the Covid-19 vaccination campaign for a long time is unrealistic. We do not know how it can continue this way," said the official.

Contacted, ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of DGHS, told The Daily Star that they had already sent a proposal to the health ministry on recruiting over 11,000 health assistants.

"It is not feasible to conduct EPI activities with hospital staffers. We have already initiated the process to recruit 11,500 health assistants. We have forwarded the file to the health ministry," he said.

The DG also said that the recruitment would not be made at the local level.

The EPI is also facing a crisis of cold chain technicians.

In every district there should be at least one cold chain engineer but in 30 districts there is no engineer, said EPI officials.

In Dhaka, there are only five cold chain technicians. Whereas, the number should be 20, they said.

Sheikh Rabiul Alam Khokon, president of Bangladesh Health Assistant Association, said their work pressure has mounted since their work starts from ensuring home quarantine to sample collection and from Covid-19 vaccine administration to data entry.

"We are doing these apart from carrying out our regular EPI activities. We are overburdened," said Khokon.

Shamsul Haque, member secretary of the Covid-19 Vaccine Management Taskforce Committee of DGHS, however, said with the existing manpower they can administer a maximum of two crore doses a month. "If the vaccination campaign is ramped up massively then we will need more manpower to keep the vaccination smooth," Shamsul, also director of EPI, said.

He also said vaccines can be found in the black market and vaccines could be administered privately if the campaign is not regulated by the EPI.

"If the vaccination campaign was supervised solely by the DGHS, such unethical and illegal incidents would not happen. These will continue to happen if other stakeholders are involved in the vaccination."

He said a dedicated Covid-19 cell was required to keep the vaccination programmes smooth as a huge number of people require to be jabbed.

"Currently, we have separated the Covid and EPI activities internally. But they should be brought under a systematic structure," he said.

Moderna Covid vaccine edges Pfizer in new US research

AFP, Washington

A new study released by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Friday is the latest to suggest the Moderna Covid vaccine confers better long-term protection against hospitalization than Pfizer.

CDC researchers conducted an analysis of nearly 3,689 adults who were hospitalized with severe Covid from March 11 to August 15, 2021 -- a period that precedes and includes the dominance of the Delta variant.

Overall, 12.9 percent were fully vaccinated with the Moderna vaccine, 20.0 percent were vaccinated with Pfizer-BioNTech, and 3.1 percent were vaccinated with Johnson & Johnson. Over the entire period, the Moderna vaccine was 93 percent effective against hospitalization, Pfizer was 88 percent effective, and J&J was 68 percent effective.

Students compliant

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Girls School and College, Mohammadpur Government High School, Nilkhet Government Primary School and Shahid Buddhijibi Dr. Amin Uddin Government Primary School.

The students were wearing masks and they sanitised their hands at the entrances while there was proper social distancing in the classrooms.

However, around 12:00pm yesterday, a group of students of Agargaon Adarsha High School was seen entering the school without a temperature-check and without having their hands sanitised at the gate.

School's shift-in-charge Tarikul Islam, said "They sanitised their hands at the washrooms inside the building."

But guardians were seen flouting the health guidelines, forming crowds at Mirpur Girls' Ideal Laboratory Institute, Monipur High School and College (Shewrapara), Azimpur Government Girls School and College and most of the other schools visited.

Prof Amir said, "Guardians should act reasonably while dropping off and picking up their children."

Although students are by and large maintaining health guidelines on campuses, many ignored it after the school hours.

Two 5th graders outside Nilkhet Primary School said it was too difficult for them to wear the masks for such a long time.

Our correspondents in Chattogram found most schools maintaining health guidelines. But parents were seen forming crowds outside the schools in the port city too.

Chattogram Government High School is one such school.

In Rajshahi, the authorities of different schools and colleges were failing to get students to follow the virus rules properly.

Social distancing in classrooms and on campuses was not being maintained. Students came to schools and colleges and returned home in groups, reported our staff correspondent in Rajshahi.

Visiting four schools in Sylhet city, our correspondent found that students were flouting the rules as they walked out of the schools. They were seen forming crowds.

In Khulna, many students of the Government Bangabandhu College were seen on the college premises without any face covering. Tanmay Baidya, a student, said he wore a mask in the classrooms.

Faruqul Islam, headteacher of Iqbal Nagar Secondary Girls' School, said, "Before they enter the classroom, students who do not have any, are provided the masks."

Prof Amir said officials have asked every school to create awareness among students about maintaining the health guidelines in and outside the campuses.

Govt to start

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According to the health officials, they were expecting another five million Pfizer jabs by this month.

Administering this particular vaccine also has its own challenges in rural settings because of its rather strict cold-chain requirements.

The country has now the capacity to store over 1 crore doses of the Pfizer vaccine.

Besides, there has been frequent hiccups in the country's regular mass inoculation campaigns mostly because of a shortage of doses.

The government could not continue the special vaccination campaign held from August 7-12 because of the same reason.

In yesterday's event, the health minister informed that a Tk 10 crore agreement has been signed with World Health Organization (WHO).

About the Covid-19 outbreak situation, the minister said, "Eight countries around the world including Bangladesh were put on the red list. Bangladesh's name has now been removed from the list by the UK."

"The prime minister of Somalia lost power following the coronavirus outbreak; Thailand's prime minister's situation is similar too. However, we are in good shape," the minister said, adding, "We have vaccinated 2.5 crore people so far."

According to the health directorate, however, around 2.18 crore people received only the first dose of Covid-19 vaccines across the country as of Thursday.

BNP leaders want to wage

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meetings where 112 spoke and the discussion went on for over 16 hours.

Seeking anonymity, a member of the standing committee said that all the leaders said there was no alternative to waging a movement before joining the election fray.

The party sources said the meetings were discussed again in a standing committee meeting last night and the committee found that almost all the leaders opined for not taking part in any elections under the incumbent government.

The party is likely to hold meetings with its executive committee members and district committee leaders between September 21 and 23.

In those meetings, the top brass would try to know what the grassroots activists think the party's strategy should be ahead of the next parliamentary polls, said another standing committee member.

BNP General Secretary Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir will hold a press

conference at the Gulshan office where he will disclose the standing committee meeting decision.

Sources said the party's acting chairman Tarique Rahman prepared 10-12 talking points to get the views of the party's top leaders and grassroots leaders.

Based on the suggestions and opinions, the party will devise its next course of action, said party leaders.

Meanwhile, a source said Fakhrul met party Chairperson Khaleda Zia at her residence last night. But it was not independently verified neither the content of the discussion nor the meeting was.

The series of meetings is the first meeting of this scale since BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia landed in jail on February 8, 2018.

It has also been the biggest meeting since Tarique Rahman became the acting chairman of the party.

Khaleda is currently out of jail after the government suspended her sentence. Tarique, who is facing several cases at home, is in London.

Defamatory, ill-motivated

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Leaders of Jatiya Press Club, two factions of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ), Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) and Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) were present at the press conference.

Making a statement on behalf of the 11 journalists, DRU General Secretary Mosiur Rahman Khan said, "What is the reason behind circulating the news of seeking details of journalist leaders' bank accounts even before getting the requested information? Such a move by BFUJ has tarnished the image of journalists, our organisation and journalism."

"We protest this move and demand specific and detailed explanation from the government on this matter," he added.

Nine out of the 11 journalist leaders were present at the conference.

Jatiya Press Club President Farida Yasmin said, "When they sought details of my bank account, they didn't just stain the image of Farida Yasmin, they tarnished the image of the entire Jatiya Press Club. Because we have been elected by all journalists and we represent the entire journalist community of the country."

M Abdullah, president of a BFUJ faction, said, "Journalists have already been struggling to save their profession during this pandemic. Many journalists have lost their jobs and many others are not getting salaries regularly. We,

the journalist leaders, are trying hard to keep them motivated. Such a move in this circumstance will certainly create an unhealthy and alarming environment for journalists."

However, the journalist leaders also demanded the bank account information of the 11 journalists be disclosed in the media.

Molla Jalal, president of another BFUJ faction, said: "We would like to state that if they get any information about the involvement of any of us in money laundering, illegal transaction or financing militancy, such information should be published in the media transparently."

"However, if they do not get information about any such activities, this information should be circulated through the media as well," he added.

Farida said the BFUJ is mandated to investigate any individual or organisation if there are specific allegations against them about financial irregularities. "However, there was not a single such allegation against these leaders."

Terming such a move by BFUJ "unprecedented", she called upon journalists to investigate into what led them to take such a step.

"We believe that our prime minister is very friendly towards journalists and this move is part of a conspiracy to put the media face to face with the government," the press club president added.

The last girl standing

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the closure of schools.

Fazle Rahman, the head teacher of the school in Kurigram Sadar upazila, confirmed to The Daily Star that except Nargis, the other girls of class nine were married off, while three girls of class 10 were also married off.

"Besides, we have come to know that a sixth grader, two seventh graders and four eighth graders were also married off by their family members," he said, adding that before the schools were temporarily shut down, there were 63 female students, out of 225, from class six to 10.

After reopening, there are about 60-65 students attending, of whom, only 15 are female.

"Attendance has not been satisfactory since the school reopened," he said, adding, "we have formed a team of teachers who will go to each absent student's house to see why they have not been coming."

Speaking to The Daily Star, Nargis, all alone in her classroom, said she was upset to learn that all her classmates had become victims of child marriage.

"I have been having troubles as I have no friends to share anything with anymore... I don't know how I will continue attending classes as the lone

girl student, but I am trying not to give up."

Nargis said a local "matchmaker" had come to her house with a marriage proposal as well last April. She, however, made it clear to her family that she would not marry now.

Nargis's father Abdul Khaleq told The Daily Star that multiple proposals had come for his daughter but they rejected all of them as per their daughter's wish. "Our daughter is now the only girl student in the class and she is struggling. We are also disappointed at the situation," he said.

Nazrul Islam, father of a female absentee of the school, said his daughter didn't continue studying at home after school closure.

"A good marriage proposal also came along last May."

Asked how and with whom the child had gotten married, the father did not respond.

Shamsul Alam, Kurigram district education officer, told The Daily Star that the situation was similar in many other schools across the district. "The problem is especially evident in schools on chars and in border areas... We have started a survey through teachers and will soon be able to find the number of students absent in each school and reasons behind it."