

BANGLADESH UPDATE

816
New cases in 24hrs

15,50,371
Total cases

27,393
Deaths

15,10,167
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,754,847
Deaths

232,156,772
Total cases

REPATRIATION OF ROHINGYAS

Dhaka seeks EU's support

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has sought effective measures by the European Union for creating a conducive environment in Myanmar for sustainable repatriation of the Rohingyas sheltered in the country.

Raising the issue, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said Bangladesh is facing enormous social, economic and environmental cost by sheltering over 1.1 million Rohingyas.

The minister held a bilateral meeting with Josep Borrell, high representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy, and vice-president of the European Commission (HRVP) on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York recently.

Borell thanked Bangladesh for the humanitarian gesture to the Rohingyas, and assured that EU would work with Bangladesh and the international community to ensure sustainable repatriation of the Rohingyas.

The issue of climate change was discussed in the bilateral meeting.

Momen briefed the HRVP about the role of Bangladesh as the president of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), said the foreign ministry yesterday.

He raised the issue of the \$100 billion annual climate fund pledged by the developed countries, and requested the EU to fulfill the commitment.

The minister stressed the importance of allocating 50 percent of the climate financing for adaptation measures.

He explained the importance of loss and damage incurred because of river erosion, intrusion of salinity, rise in sea level, floods and draughts.

Momen emphasised sharing of responsibility for the climate migrants -- the people uprooted from their homes and traditional jobs because of impacts of climate change.

He also explained the need of creating high and wide embankments in the coastal belt, and in the areas prone to river erosion. He invited public funding and private sector investment from the EU in developing the embankments, with roads, solar panels and windmills on those.

Borell said significant efforts would be needed to contain the temperature rise.

He was of the view that there would be social and economic shocks in the effort of addressing the challenges of climate change.

The foreign minister agreed with the HRVP, and sought technology transfer for coping with the mitigation targets.

Talking about trade with the EU, Momen thanked Borell for providing duty-free market access to Bangladeshi products under the EU's EBA scheme.

He also thanked the EU high representative for allowing continued market access to Bangladesh till 2029, and requested the EU to provide GSP+ facilities once the EBA facilities to Bangladesh will be over in 2029.

The HRVP assured the minister that he would convey the request with positive recommendation to the EU authorities concerned.

Feminist icon Kamla Bhasin

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Feminist Network, co-chair of the worldwide network, Peace Women Across the Globe and South Asia Coordinator of One Billion Rising.

Though she was Indian by citizenship, Kamla identified herself as a "South Asian" who transcended jingoistic national boundaries and believed that the power of love and camaraderie could bridge the economic, political and religious divides in the subcontinent.

She began promoting peace and understanding between the countries and their people in 1975.

"One of my slogans is 'I am not a wall that divides, I am a crack in that wall. So, all these walls of nationalities - Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian, we become cracks in these walls and we go across borders and make friends. Pakistani women were the first to apologise for the genocide here [Bangladesh] - Pakistani feminists," Kamla said in an interview with The Daily Star in 2016.

She had a special relationship with Bangladesh -- for over four decades, she worked closely with women's rights activists and NGOs in Bangladesh, conducting participatory, experiential, capacity-building workshops for women and men, focused on gender, feminism, sustainable development and human rights.

Her death was mourned by generations of activists in the country yesterday.

Born on April 24, 1946, in the district of Mandi Bahauddin, which is now in Pakistan, her family shifted to Rajasthan in India after partition. She earned her MA from Rajasthan University and then went on to study Sociology of Development at University of Münster in West Germany.

She began her career working for the empowerment of the rural and urban poor in 1972, with a voluntary organisation in Rajasthan, India. From 1976 to 2001, she worked with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, supporting innovative NGO

initiatives for the development and empowerment of marginalised people, especially women, in South East Asia and South Asia.

In 2002, she left her job at the UN to dedicate her time to Sangat, a network that has brought together thousands of women across the region in a common understanding on gender, poverty and social justice.

Kamla believed and taught that the struggle for gender equality was not a fight between men and women.

"It is a fight between two ideologies -- two ways of thinking -- one is that patriarchy is better, men are superior. The other says no, equality is better, men and women are different and equal and equality is good for all. And that men must realise that unless women are free men cannot be free," she would say.

She wrote extensively on gender, women's empowerment, participatory and sustainable development, participatory training, media and communication. Her books have been translated in over 30 languages. She prided herself on writing books in accessible language for activists and development workers. She also wrote numerous children's books on the themes of freedom and equality.

She penned songs, poems and slogans advocating peace and feminism.

Kamla loved to joke, sing and dance and her laughter, like her love, was infectious, remembered by her friends and comrades, as condolences poured in from across the globe yesterday.

She believed South Asia needed a "cultural revolution to change our language and traditions such as those that prevent women from participating in the last rites."

"Schools, madrasas and media have to start this cultural revolution. Media is responsible for spreading patriarchy. There may be one good article in favour of gender equality but then most of the advertisements continue to be patriarchal. So, I think we need a cultural revolution, a new Mukti Andolon," she said.

Formulate law to form new EC

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perform their duties during elections."

Although the constitution explicitly mandates the appointments to the election commission "subject to the provisions of any law", no government has taken such an initiative in the last 50 years, they said.

Before the appointment of the last two election commissions, the president constituted on an ad hoc basis two search committees under the chairmanship of Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, the present chief justice of the Supreme Court.

"The Rakibuddin commission and the Nurul Huda commission, constituted on the recommendations of those two ad hoc search committees, have brought our electoral system to the brink of collapse through their nakedly biased conducts, creating among the people widespread distrust in the election commission and serious concerns about fair elections."

The proposed law must specify the qualifications of the chief election commissioner and the other commissioners and include a provision for the formation of a search committee with non-partisan individuals acceptable to all related stakeholders.

The mandate of the search committee must be to prepare, following a transparent process, a panel of honest, non-partisan and reputed individuals, meeting the qualifications laid down

in the law for recommendation to the president for appointment to the election commission.

To ensure transparency, the proposed law must include provisions for making public the names of individuals initially being considered for appointment to the election commission, holding public hearings and publishing a report providing the rationale for recommending the individuals to the President for the appointment."

The eminent citizens hoped that the law ministry will take the initiative on an urgent basis to enact the law for reconstituting the election commission with appropriate initiatives.

"We as citizens stand ready to provide the necessary assistance by providing feedback," they added.

Serajul Islam Choudhury, professor emeritus of the Dhaka University; Amir-Ul-Islam, member of constitution formulation committee; M Hafizuddin Khan, Akbar Ali Khan and Rasheda K Choudhury, all advisers to former caretaker government; Abdul Matin, former justice of the Bangladesh Supreme Court; M Sakawat Hussain, former election commissioner; Hameeda Hossain, human rights activist; Salehuddin Ahmed, former governor of the Bangladesh Bank; Ali Imam Majumder, former cabinet secretary, signed the statement among others.



An artisan working on the idols of Hindu gods ahead of the Durga Puja at Sree Sree Jagannath Mandir in Barishal city.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

It's needed more than ever now

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The current Election Commission has drawn flak from many opposition parties, election watchdogs, and civil society members over holding of the 2018 national election. It has also come under fire from different quarters for low voter turnout in local body elections, by-polls and many candidates getting elected unopposed.

Election experts blamed the EC for the failure to ensure free and impartial elections, which has caused people and many political parties to lose interest in polls.

The use of EVM (electronic voting machine) in elections by the EC has also come under scrutiny with some claiming that the machine was introduced to enable polls irregularities.

The current commissioners assumed office on February 15, 2017. As there is no specific law, the president had formed a search committee earlier that year for appointing the CEC and other commissioners.

Since 1972, most of the governments constituted the EC by appointing persons of their choice.

Article 118 (1) of the constitution says, "There shall be an Election Commission for Bangladesh consisting of [the chief election commissioner and not more than four election commissioners] and the appointment of the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners shall, subject to the provisions of any law made on that behalf, be made by the president."

Noted jurist Shahdeen Malik yesterday told The Daily Star, "The formation of a law for an Election Commission is now urgent than any other time for the interest of holding free and fair elections."

He said, "If a law is formulated, the government cannot appoint the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners of its own choice because it is the law which will determine the qualification of the candidates for the posts."

He also said once the law is enacted, the government will have no control in the formation of selection committees. "If the EC is constituted through formulating a specific law under the constitution, it will be more impartial than the existing commission led by the chief election commissioner [KM Nurul Huda]."

He also said, "The present EC has succeeded in making the voters reluctant to go to the polling stations and also in making the candidates disinterested to

contest the elections... It has turned the elections of the country into a farce."

Malik then pointed out that the present search committee for recommending the names of EC has "no legal basis."

Referring to the appointment of ECs in neighbouring countries, Malik earlier told The Daily Star, "Most countries in South Asia have enacted laws and we don't have to reinvent the wheel. The current practice of the so-called ad-hoc search committee is nothing but a sham."

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir on September 13 said their party wanted a permanent solution to the issue over the formation of an Election Commission. "But before that, we want a neutral government under which a neutral Election Commission will be formed."

On September 15, Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader demanded enactment of a law in line with the constitution to have the "permanent solution".

Awami League General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader on September 18 said the ministry concerned was working for the formation of the EC as per the constitution.

He alleged that the BNP came up with a new conspiracy ahead of the formation of a new commission.

Contacted, Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam said, "The constitution mentions that a specific law has to be formulated. It is obligatory. But no government has done that so far. It is not our duty to make a law. Personally, I feel if the government seeks EC's support, we should provide it."

Law Minister Anisul Huq recently told The Daily Star that the present government is considering with utmost importance the issue regarding the formulation of a law for appointing election commissioners.

He, however, did not say exactly when the government would take steps to formulate the law or rules.

Regarding the current appointment procedure of the EC, the law minister said, "The government is functioning under the constitutional provisions and there is no violation of the provisions."

PAST INITIATIVE
Election Commission sources said that the then EC prepared a draft law in 2007-2008 and submitted it to the caretaker government. And the then government advised the EC to submit the draft to the new government.

After further review, another draft was prepared in 2011.

Plot on to tarnish country's image

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Hasina said military dictators Zia and Ershad had come to power by violating the country's constitution, and the court declared their governments illegal.

She said Khaleda Zia was jailed for embezzling orphans' money, while her son Tarique Rahman was convicted in the 10-truck arms haul case and the August 21 grenade attack case.

The FBI of the United States had revealed the information regarding their involvement in corruption, the PM said.

Hasina said the BNP even paid money to kidnap and kill Sajeeb Wazed Joy in the US.

She said the people of the country have voted AL to power boycotting the BNP. The premier urged the BNP to take part in the next general election if they have faith in people's mandate.

Hasina said when the AL came to power after 1975, the people of the country first realised that the government is for serving the people and for the welfare of the people.

"Whenever the Awami League remains in power, Bangladesh continues to march forward."

The PM mentioned two reasons for her travel to New York by a Dreamliner of the Biman Bangladesh Airlines with the first being giving money to the state-owned carrier instead of others and thus keeping the money at Bangladesh's hand.

She said her government is pursuing a process to resume Biman's flights on Dhaka-New York route.

Hasina said, "A section of people is spreading falsehood that sacks and trunks filled with foreign currency were brought to New York by Biman aircraft."

She asked the rumour mongers to say "where those sacks and trunks go".

The PM reminded all that BNP chief Khaleda Zia went to Saudi Arabia taking 150 suitcases full of money when she was in power and kept those by hiring lockers there.

She also said then (state) minister of Khaleda Zia's government Babar was held with several lakhs of US dollars at a US airport and he was later released following the intervention from the local Bangladesh embassy.

'INVEST IN MOTHERLAND'
Speaking at a press conference after the civic reception, the prime minister urged the Bangladeshi expatriates in the US to invest in their motherland taking the opportunity of her government's attractive offers for investment.

"You, the Bangladeshi expatriates, along with US nationals can invest in Bangladesh," she said.

Hasina told the expatriates that her government was offering attractive stimulus packages and advantages to the investors from home and abroad.

PM REACHES WASHINGTON DC
The Bangladesh premier reached Washington DC yesterday morning (US time) from New York, wrapping up her week-long official visit to attend the 76th United Nations General Assembly at the UN Headquarters. "A VVIP chartered flight of Biman

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the draft "Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioner (Appointment Procedure) Act, 2012," prepared in November 2011.

The draft proposes constituting the EC with the CEC and four election commissioners. One of the commissioners will be a woman. It suggested that the president should appoint commissioners who are skilled, honest, righteous and neutral.

APATHY TO ELECTIONS

In an ominous sign for democracy, the practice that candidates get elected unopposed has gripped the recent parliamentary by-polls as well as local body elections. These elections also witnessed low turnouts.

Even a few years ago, these elections would be held amid much enthusiasm and fanfare irrespective of how the national polls had gone, experts said.

For example, last week, 160 union parishads went to elections and of them 43 chairman candidates were elected uncontested, which means around 29 percent chairmen were elected without a single vote being cast.

In elections of 456 upazilas, held between March and June 2019, 94 chairman candidates were elected unopposed.

Of the 94, at least 93 were AL candidates.

The Sylhet-3 by-polls, which were held on September 4, saw only 34 percent voter turnout. The picture was grimmer in the Dhaka-10 by-polls on March 21 last year, which saw a turnout of only around five percent.

Local government and election expert Professor Tofail Ahmed said, "The country is witnessing a suffocating period. The voting system and culture has been damaged. Political democracy is already demolished. Politics is a profitable business now so there is no place for democracy there."

Election watchdogs and civil society members have criticised the current EC over the holding of the 2018 national election tainted with alleged irregularities including ballot stuffing.

At a party meeting in February, Workers Party of Bangladesh, a component of the ruling alliance, alleged that the government's interference in the electoral system is now a public knowledge and people have lost confidence in the system.

Forty-two eminent citizens, in two separate letters on December 14, 2020 and January 17 this year, urged the president to constitute Supreme Judicial Council to probe allegations of corruption and misconduct by the EC.

Daily cases drop below 1,000

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of new cases yesterday have declined below 1,000-mark after more than four months as the health directorate reported 818 cases.

Earlier on May 17, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) reported 698 case.

In the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, a total of 25 Covid-19 patients died across the country.

Against a total of 17,818 samples tested in those 24 hours, the positivity rate was 4.59 percent—the below five percent for five days in a row.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), below five percent positivity rate for 14 days in a row indicates the transmission of the virus is under control.

Since early August, the positivity rate has been declining steadily.

With the latest count, the total number of case reached at 15,50,371. Of them, 15,10,167 or around 97 percent have already recovered from their illness, including 965 in those 24 hours.

The total number of casualties to 27,393 which is around 1.76 percent of all confirmed case.

On December last year, the Covid-19 breakout was first detected in China's Wuhan city which spread across the world within months.

In Bangladesh, the first three cases were detected on March 8.

Still no Covid

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up to the United Arab Emirates bound passengers.

As part of the trial run, about 100 health officials gave their samples last night, Shahriar Sazzad, a health official at the airport, said.

The result from the trial tests would be provided to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), he said.

If everything goes well, then CAAB will inform the airlines concerned to start sending their passengers to the labs for undergoing RT-PCR tests there, he added.

Shahria further said Tk 1,600 per person has been fixed as a fee to have the Covid-19 test at the labs.

According to sources at the airport, the installation of the six labs was completed yesterday.

Initially, the labs have been set up inside Terminal-1. Later, those will be shifted to the designated space on the rooftop of the multi-storied car parking building of the airport, they said.

Several thousand UAE-based expatriates, including migrant workers and professionals, who came home on vacation, have been unable to fly to the Gulf country as there were no such test facilities at the country's international airports.

UAE last month made it mandatory for foreign passengers to have a rapid PCR test for Covid-19 maximum of six hours before the flight.

Following the Gulf country's announcement, the stranded expatriates at home had been demanding for speedy setup of the test facilities at international airports, saying such facilities were imperative for their economic survival.

Many of the expatriate workers feared that failure to reach their workplaces in UAE on time might cost them losing their jobs.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on September 6 instructed the ministries and the health directorate concerned to set up labs at the country's three international airports in Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet within two to three days.

Schools

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to schools or even at educational institutions. We're alert so that we can take steps immediately. We'll take measures in consultation with local administrations, civil surgeon offices and health department if we receive any complaint or report," she added.

A class-VII student died of Covid while a class-X student of another school tested positive for the virus, the minister said, adding that all their classmates were tested but no one was found to be Covid positive.

Students of schools and colleges in Bangladesh returned to their classrooms September 11 after a prolonged closure due to the pandemic.

BANGABANDHU-BAPU EXHIBITION
The Bangabandhu-Bapu Digital Exhibition was opened for public viewing at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy yesterday.

The exhibition celebrates in a uniquely thematic way the life and legacy of the Fathers of two nations India and Bangladesh -- Mahatma Gandhi and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Education Minister Dipu Moni, State Minister for Cultural Affairs KM Khalid and Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Vikram Doraiswami, among others, joined the inauguration of the digital exhibition.

The exhibition, hosted by the High Commission of India in association with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Bangladesh and Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, will remain open from September 26 to October 11.

After October 11, the exhibition will also be displayed at Chattogram, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Khulna and Kolkata.

The event was specially curated by the two governments to commemorate "Mujib Borsho" and to mark 150 years of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, as well as the golden jubilee of India-Bangladesh bilateral relations.

The exhibition was virtually inaugurated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi on December 16 last year during the India-Bangladesh Virtual Summit.