



The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION



REGD. No. DA 781 | Vol. XXXI No. 248 | ASHWIN 14, 1428 BS | **Your Right to Know** | SAFAR 21, 1443 HJRI | 16 PAGES PRICE : Tk12.00

Over 66 lakh shots given

Special Covid vaccination drive marks Hasina's 75th birthday

STAR REPORT

The country more than doubled its previous record of single-day vaccinations as the government inoculated more than 66 lakh people against Covid-19 yesterday.

Yesterday's special drive, to implement the government's aim of inoculating 75 lakh people to mark Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 75th birthday, produced numbers that nearly reached the ambitious target.

People turned out in droves, braving inclement weather even.

Across eight divisions, 66,25,123 people were vaccinated, according to the Directorate General of Health Services. The previous single-day vaccination record was around 29 lakh on August 7 this year.

Much of the campaign ran smoothly, but there were stray incidents of non-registered people showing up, some centres facing

a shortage of doses and, in a Munshiganj centre, a fight breaking out over the dearth of vaccines.

Upon visiting a vaccination centre in Dhaka, PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus told journalists that the special vaccination campaign will continue in places where the target has not been met.

During regular vaccination, three to four lakh doses are administered each day, which means yesterday's number was between 15 and 20 times higher.

The previous six-day special campaign from August 7-12 saw overwhelming response from people who stood in queues about a kilometre in length and people crowding vaccination centres. Many returned home without a jab.

This time, however, those incidents were few.

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PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

People wait in long queues at a Covid-19 vaccination centre at Fakir Chan Sardar Community Centre in the capital's Narinda yesterday during a daylong inoculation campaign. The health directorate carried out the nationwide campaign to vaccinate 75 lakh people marking the 75th birthday of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

JSC, JDC exams unlikely this year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is likely to cancel this year's Junior School Certificate (JSC) and its equivalent Junior Dakhil Certificate (JDC) exams due to the pandemic.

Last year, the government cancelled the exams meant for graduating from class-VIII due to the Covid-19 situation.

This year's Primary Education Completion (PEC) and its equivalent Ibtedayi Education Completion exams, meant for class-V students, have also become uncertain.

The government is likely to hold school-based final exams for students class-VI, -VII and -IX. If the government cancels JSC and JDC exams, students of class-VIII would need to sit for annual exams.

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Crystal meth creeps up on city

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MUNTAKIM SAAD

There is a growing market for highly addictive drug crystal meth in the capital, operated mostly through encrypted messaging apps, officials have found out.

Around 40 to 45 individuals are leading the drug trade with the help of around 100 small-time dealers, said officials of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC).

Like yaba, crystal meth, popularly known as ice, is mostly smuggled into the country from Myanmar through the border in Teknaf and Ukhiya upazilas of Cox's Bazar, and Naikhongchhari upazila of Bandarban, they added.

Rohingya refugees, including women and children, are often the ones carrying the rather expensive drug across the border and transport workers bring them to the city, they said, adding that the volume being smuggled appears to have increased.

DNC officials said they first came to know about ice after arresting two suspects in Mohammadpur in February 2019.

This year alone, officers recovered at least 7.72 kg of ice in eight raids in Dhaka, Chattogram and Cox's Bazar.

Talking with the newspaper, an ice user said the drug has been available in Dhaka since 2017.

"Most of the ice dealers also sell yaba pills. We place orders using messaging apps and sometimes on the phone," the user said.

Mehedi Hasan, an assistant director at the DNC, told The Daily Star that ice dealers do not supply the drug to unknown people.

"The users and dealers mostly belong to high society. They get to know each other at parties," he said.

According to users and law enforcers, only 10 grams of ice can cost up to Tk 1 lakh in Dhaka. The price comes down to Tk 80,000 if the supply increases.

Mehedi said, "We beefed up security measures and have arrested two members of the racket in Dhaka. We have also got some details on ice suppliers in Teknaf. Raids will be conducted soon."

A local in Cox's Bazar said hauls of the drugs arrive in the country through the Naf river and Whykong area.

"The Rohingya people and local women go across the border and bring the stash of ice. Sometimes, the Rohingya refugees use fishing boats for trafficking," said the local informant.

The traffickers, used to dealing in large yaba hauls, are now smuggling ice, he added.



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BTRC blocks BSS while weeding illegal news sites out

ICT minister intervenes to reopen it, others

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BTRC yesterday shut down the government's own Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha website, and other news portals like bdnews24.com and jagonews24.com for several hours as it attempted to comply with a High Court order to block all unregistered news outlets.

Post, Telecommunication and Information Technology Minister Mustafa Jabbar had to intervene to get those unblocked.

Following a writ petition, the HC on September 24 ordered the BTRC to shut down unregistered news portals within seven days and ban registered ones that resort to unethical practices.

"Today [yesterday] was the last day and we started working on this and we found that a number registered sites including state-owned media are falling under the criteria. We have stopped after that and reopened the sites. We will decide on this issue tomorrow [today]," said Subrata Roy Maitra, vice chairman of the BTRC.

The writ petition mentioned 92 registered news portals.

Failing to get a list of unregistered news portals from the information ministry, the BTRC itself identified 213 'errant' news sites and started blocking those yesterday evening.

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No more brokers

DIP plans licenced agents to assist passport seekers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Department of Immigration and Passports (DIP) has taken a plan to introduce licenced "agents" to help people get passports and renew them.

The move is aimed at stopping harassment by brokers, who illegally charge passport seekers exorbitant fees for different services. The agents will have to be paid certain fees. A decision on the amount will be made later.

The agents will assist passport seekers in filling out application forms and providing the DIP with the applicants' biometric data and photographs. It will ease the workload

of the passport office and make passport delivery easier, DIP Director General Maj Gen Mohammad Ayub Chowdhury said yesterday.

"We introduced the online application for e-passports. But sadly, a majority of the people, especially the migrant workers living abroad, don't have the technical know-how to apply for passports," he said.

Such applicants also face problems while depositing passport fees in banks. Finding no other way, they go to brokers and sometimes get cheated.

The agents will help the applicants with such procedures, Ayub said while

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BUSINESS

NRB Bank loses Tk 103cr on purpose to favour gamblers

NRB Bank has incurred a loss of Tk 103 crore after it was engaged in unethical trading practices to favour gamblers in the stock market, which weakened its own financial health and put depositors' money at risk. The unethical trading activity occurred between January and August this year, according to an internal report of the bank.

STORY ON B1



It is hard to believe that people have to use ladders like these to cross this bridge, built about 10 years ago over the Mainee river in Atarokchora of Rangamati's Longdu upazila. The contractor could not complete the construction work even after spending the total project budget of Tk 75 lakh. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



Jhumon finally out on bail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

After more than six months in jail in a case filed under the Digital Security Act, Jhumon Das finally walked out of Sunamganj District Jail at 6:15pm yesterday.

Earlier in the afternoon, the High Court's bail order, issued last Thursday, reached the jail.

Jhumon's mother Niva Rani Das was present at the jail gate when Jhumon appeared.

She told The Daily Star that she was happy to get her son back. "I would be happier to see my son acquitted of all charges. I am worried about his safety."

She said police were escorting them to their village.

Jhumon's lawyer Debangshu Sekhar Das said the certified copy of

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