

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,310
New cases in 24hrs



15,53,873
Total cases



27,470
Deaths



15,13,876
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



4,774,194
Deaths



233,360,546
Total cases

Pro-AL leader caught smuggling wood

Yet, forest department does not file case against him

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A local Jubo League leader has allegedly been caught red-handed while trying to steal logs from a forest in Kulaura area of Moulvibazar.

Forest department filed a case with a district court on Monday, but it did not name anyone as accused. The department only mentioned recovery of the logs, said forest officials.

Gazipur Forest Beat Officer Bazur Rahman said a pickup loaded with the timber was seized in front of the range officer's office around 10:00am on Friday.

Sufian Ahmed, joint convener of Kulaura Municipal Jubo League, was inside the vehicle.

Bazur said they seized teak, firewood and other wood in the vehicle.

A forest official, wishing not to be named, said after the vehicle was seized, Sufian tried to get it released using his political clout.

Sources said Sufian is a furniture trader in local Laskarpur market. He has been stealing timber from the forest since he got the Juba League post in Kulaura municipality.

Contacted, Sufian denied stealing anything. He claimed that he owned



the seized wood and that he was taking them for "personal use".

Kulaura Range Officer Riaz Uddin said the owner of the vehicle pleaded guilty and filed an application with the Sylhet divisional forest officer seeking withdrawal of the case.

Asked why Sufian was not charged in the case, he said, "I joined here on Monday. I will take necessary action after talking to the local beat officer. No one is above the law."

Assistant Forest Conservator Abu Bakr Siddique said action would be taken against anyone found involved in the incident.

Shaheed Ahmed, convener of Kulaura Municipal Jubo League, confirmed that Sufian is a joint convener of the Jubo League unit.



Workers unload vegetables from a boat at Gazi Gachhola vegetable market in Khulna's Dumuria upazila yesterday. Vegetable growers from nearby villages bring their produce to this market every morning to sell it.

PHOTO: STAR

Daily Covid deaths jumps a little

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of deaths from Covid-19 has increased as the health directorate yesterday reported 31 more deaths.

The previous day, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) reported deaths of 25 Covid-19 patients across the country.

With this, the number of deaths reached 27,470 -- around 1.77 percent of all confirmed cases.

In past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, 1,310 more people tested positive for Covid-19. This was also up from the previous day's 1,212 cases.

After the Delta variant contributed to the latest record-rise in Covid-19 cases and deaths, the number of cases started falling from August 3 and the number of deaths from August 11.

With the latest count, the number of confirmed cases rose to 15,53,873.

Against yesterday's 29,186 samples tested, the positivity rate was 4.49, below five percent for the sixth day in a row.

Of the 31 deceased, the 17 were men and 14 women.

The highest 13 died in Dhaka division, five each in Chattogram and Khulna, two each in Rajshahi, Barisal, Rangpur and Mymensingh divisions.

There was no death recorded in Sylhet division.

On March 8 last year, the first three cases were detected in the country. Since then, the country has so far witnessed two waves of the pandemic.

Pfizer launches mRNA flu vaccine trial

AFP, Washington

US pharmaceutical company Pfizer said Monday it had begun a clinical trial to test an influenza vaccine designed with the same mRNA technology behind its successful Covid-19 shot.

The idea is to improve on the current generation of flu vaccines that have an efficacy of 40-60 percent against a disease that can cause up to 650,000 deaths a year.

JSC, JDC

FROM PAGE 1

"There is hardly any scope for holding this year's JSC exams, with the time we have in our hands. There are SSC and HSC exams," Education Minister Dipu Moni said yesterday.

"Class-VIII students will need to take annual exams at schools," she said while talking to reporters after attending a programme at the Gono Bhaban marking the birthday of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

SSC and its equivalent exams would begin on November 14 and conclude on November 23. HSC exams would start on December 2 and end on December 30.

PEC and its equivalent exams and JSC and its equivalent exams are the two largest public examinations and they are usually held in November.

With this announcement, it is clear that there will be no JSC and JDC exams this year, said a top education ministry official.

Several board officials said they were yet to start preparing questions for JSC exams.

Dipu Moni said the primary and mass education ministry has the final say about the PEC and its equivalent exams.

The PEC exams was introduced in 2009 and the JSC exams a year later. Each year around 3 million and 2.5 million students sit for PEC and JSC exams.

Early this month, State Minister for Primary and Mass Education Zakir Hossain said PEC exams were likely to be held in late November or early December, if the Covid-19 situation improved.

Jhomon finally

FROM PAGE 1

the HC bail order reached Sunamganj on Tuesday.

The High Court on September 23 granted Jhomon conditional bail for one year in the case filed over criticising former Hefajat-e-Islam leader Mamunul Haque on Facebook.

Police, with the help of locals, detained Jhomon on March 16 to pacify agitated Hefajat supporters and avoid a possible attack on the village.

They showed Jhomon, 25, arrested under section 54 of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) and produced him before a Sunamganj court on March 17.

The court later sent him to jail. His Facebook post allegedly led to a mayhem in Noaganj village of Sunamganj's Shalla upazila on March 17, which saw about 90 Hindu houses vandalised and looted.

On March 22, police filed the case against Jhomon and 20-30 unnamed people under DSA. In the case statement, they attached Jhomon's Facebook post and mentioned that he intentionally spread information that was aggressive, intimidating, false, and disgraceful in nature.

Man gets 60yrs for abduction, rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A Joypurhat court yesterday sentenced a man to 60 year's imprisonment in two cases over abducting and raping a teenage schoolgirl in 2018.

The court also fined Momin Akanda Tk 17 lakh. In default, the convict has to serve 12 more years in jail, said court sources.

Judge Rustam Ali of Women and Children Oppression Prevention Tribunal in Joypurhat delivered the verdict in a packed courtroom in presence of the convict.

According to the prosecution, Momin, 34, of Dharkiborail village in Joypurhat Sadar upazila gave illicit proposals to the girl on her way to a local school.

On September 3, 2018, Momin along with six others abducted the ninth grader from the school gate and left the area on a microbus.

The convict later took the victim to different places and raped her, said the case statement.

Two days later, the victim's father filed the cases with Joypurhat Sadar Police Station, accusing Momin in the rape case and seven people, including Momin, in the abduction case.

Law enforcers rescued the victim three months after her abduction.

Police in December 2018 filed the charge sheets in the two cases, accusing Momin. The six other accused were not named in the charge sheet of the abduction case as police did not find enough evidence against them.

BTRC blocks BSS

FROM PAGE 1

Minister Mustafa Jabbar said the High court only gave the BTRC seven days on September 24 to shut all unregistered and unapproved online news portals.

"And that day, I told the BTRC to ask the information ministry for a list of registered news portals as they know which are registered or unregistered."

"But the information ministry could not provide the list ... and I think it is very difficult to prepare such a list in seven days as the world of internet is vast."

He said yesterday was the last day to implement the court order and the BTRC started blocking websites to avert contempt of court proceedings against it.

"But the moment I heard that the Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha website was blocked, I instantly called the BTRC chairman and others tasked with blocking sites to unblock it as it is the national news agency. Besides, I instructed them to open all other news outlets like bdnews24.com and jagonews24.com."

"Now all the sites are accessible." Jabbar said he also called the information minister for getting the list quickly.

Interesting, the BTRC earlier in the day told the High Court that it would take action against the errant news portals after getting their list from the information ministry.

It said it was yet to receive the list

from the information ministry, BTRC lawyer Farzana Sharmin told the HC during the hearing of a writ petition.

She also prayed for two weeks' time from the HC for complying with its earlier directive to ban unregistered news portals.

The bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Kamrul Hossain Mollah, however, fixed October 25 for hearing and passing further orders on the issue.

Following the filing of a petition in August, the HC bench this month directed the government to ban all unregistered news portals.

It also has ruled that even if any registered news portal was involved in unethical practices, like spreading disinformation, the government could ban it.

The respondents (chairpersons of BTRC and Bangladesh Press Council) were directed to take immediate steps to ban all unregistered news portals, except the 92 registered ones mentioned in the petition, within seven days from the receipt of the order copy.

It also said if the registered ones were spreading disinformation, then the respondents had the liberty to ban them.

The HC bench delivered the order during the hearing of a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyers Rasida Chowdhury Nilu and Zaren Rahman seeking necessary directives from the court.

Crystal meth creeps up on city

FROM PAGE 1

Lt Col Ali Haider Azad Ahmed, commanding officer of BCB-34, said, "Since it is a new drug in the region, many border guards didn't know about it. We briefed the officials about what ice looks like and how it is carried. They are now watching out for ice like they do for yaba."

Lt Col Haider said the drug dealers traffic yaba and ice together.

"The traffickers use children, women and Rohingya refugees as mules," he said.

FROM MYANMAR TO DHAKA

Detectives said traffickers operate in "multiple layers" to evade detection. Each layer has a chief. Only a chief knows the identity of another chief. No one in the racket knows all the other members.

Mashiur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Detective Branch (Gulshan Division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star that militant outfits used to operate in a similar fashion.

One layer of the traffickers maintains contact with Myanmar, another layer brings the hauls to Chattogram from Cox's Bazar, yet another brings the stash to Dhaka, and the last layer delivers it to the users, he said.

"There is a market for ice in Dhaka. We have beefed up vigilance and are conducting drives to arrest members of the syndicate," added Mashiur.

These correspondents talked to

two transport workers who carry ice to Dhaka.

"A truck driver named Kaiser in Chattogram told us to bring the packs to Dhaka along with other goods. He was supposed to pay us once we delivered the pack," said one of the carriers, who is a helper of a truck.

WHAT IS ICE?

Crystal meth is a powerful drug that affects the central nervous system. Use of the drug poses high risks of stroke, heart attack, teeth decay, and permanent hallucinations, among other short and long-term health effects, according to the US National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Shafiqul Islam Sarker, an assistant chemist at the DNC, said crystal meth is about 20 times more potent than yaba. He added it is possible to make one lakh yaba pills with 500 grams of ice.

An ice user said one loses awareness of what is happening around them after taking the drug.

"It gives instantaneous energy for two or three days, but after that, it becomes unbearable and one needs a continuous two-day sleep to recover," added the user.

Quazi Lutful Kabir, acting chief consultant of Central Drug Addiction Treatment Centre, told The Daily Star that long use of ice can cause enhanced feelings of euphoria, abnormal behaviour and reduced appetite.

An addict may turn violent and must be taken to rehab, added Dr Kabir.

Over 66 lakh shots given

FROM PAGE 1

In areas under the Dhaka North City Corporation, the special vaccination drive began around 2:30pm, while it began in the morning in Dhaka South City Corporation areas.

Health officials said although they targeted administering 75 lakh doses yesterday, that target was not met due to rough weather and other reasons.

The mass vaccination campaign against Covid-19 started on February 7 this year for people aged 65 and above. In phases, the government eventually lowered the age bar to 18 years to include university students.

The country has suffered frequent hiccups in its regular mass inoculation campaigns, mainly due to shortage of doses caused by a yawning gap between supply commitments and actual delivery.

The vaccination campaign remained suspended for around a month earlier this year due to the sudden suspension of supply from Serum Institute of India, which manufactures the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

Besides, the government also did not get a quarter of the 6.8 crore doses by June this year, as promised by Covax, a global vaccine alliance. Covax has committed to supply all the doses by December this year.

It also could not continue the special vaccination drive that started on August 7 because of a shortage of doses. Gradually, however, the situation improved with supplies coming in from the US, China and Japan.

Around 2.48 crore people have got their first dose while around 1.65 crore people got both doses.

In Pirojpur, defying inclement weather, people started arriving to the vaccination centres in the morning.

"People are getting jabbed without any hassle. This time, the vaccination centres are close to their homes so

SHOTS ADMINISTERED BY DIVISIONS	
Dhaka	14,03,515
Chattogram	13,73,345
Rajshahi	9,27,000
Khulna	8,78,736
Rangpur	7,25,331
Mymensingh	5,18,019
Barishal	4,34,232
Sylhet	3,64,945
TOTAL	66,25,123

SOURCE: DGHS

there are no problems [reaching the centres]," said Md Nazrul Islam Sikder, a councillor of Pirojpur municipality.

In Barishal district, the presence of people seeking to get vaccinated was thin due to inclement weather.

Shyamal Krishna Mandal, assistant director of the divisional health office, said, "We have set an initial target of administering 5.10 lakh doses, but the target may not be achieved due to the weather."

He said in some places the turnout of vaccine seekers was good. The vaccination rate is better in rural areas than urban areas.

No more brokers

FROM PAGE 1

addressing a views-exchange meeting with leaders of Passport and Immigration Reporters' Forum (PIRF) at the DIP headquarters.

Asaduzzaman and Ataur Rahman, PIRF president and secretary, and DIP Additional Director General Selina Banu and other high officials of the passport department were present.

DIP officials said they planned to introduce the agents as many service seekers blamed the passport office after being fooled by brokers.

The brokers, on the other hand, remain unaccountable. A top DIP official, wishing not to be named, said the brokers were taking a huge amount of money from the service seekers.

"A section of the brokers are former and suspended DIP officials, who are well aware of the procedures of getting new passports or renewing them," the official said.

Sources said the DIP had already sought permission from the home ministry's Security Services Division (SSD) to appoint the agents.

The ministry took the proposal positively, the sources said.

The sources also said passport seekers would have to pay the agents certain fees for the services.

Contacted, SSD Secretary Md Mokabbir Hossain said many did not know how to apply online for passports and then they got cheated by brokers.

"We are planning to issue licences to agents. Once such agents are brought under a system, they can be held accountable," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

DIP officials said the agents would be appointed as per "passport agent" rules.

MRP ISSUANCE TO RUN FOR 3 MORE YRS

With the launch of e-passport services on January 22 last year, the issuance of machine readable passport (MRP) passports was supposed to stop.

DIP DG Ayub Chowdhury said, "We had planned to launch the e-passport services in all our offices abroad in June last year but could not do so because

of the pandemic. Now we're working in full swing to set up e-passport machines in all our missions.

"We have so far managed to introduce the e-passport system in five missions and it will be launched in eight others soon," he said, adding, "If no obstacle comes in our way and work goes on smoothly then we'll be able to launch e-passport services in all our missions within the next one year."

The five missions currently providing e-passport services are in Berlin (Germany), Athens (Greece), Washington DC (United States), New York (US) and California (US).

The eight other missions are in Seoul (South Korea), Bucharest (Romania), Dubai (UAE), Abu Dhabi (UAE), Muscat (Oman), Manama (Bahrain), Amman (Jordan) and Bagdad (Iraq), said officials.

DG Ayub Chowdhury said around 60 percent of the passport applications they get come from abroad while the rest are filed in the country.

"Once we set up e-passport machines in all our missions abroad, we will stop issuing MRP passports. But it still may take three more years," he said.

"Locally, we have already started discouraging applicants so that they don't apply for MRP passports. But we are still issuing such passports for various emergency reasons," he said.

The DG said they issued 67,364 MRP passports in the last 10 days. The DIP issued around 11.81 lakh e-passports since the launch of such passports till September 27 this year, said officials.

Regarding delays in providing e-passports, DG Ayub Chowdhury said, "We are having some issues over giving pre-appointments. Applicants need online appointment for taking passports from three out of 72 passport offices. The three offices are in Agargaon, Uttara and Jatrabari."

The issues stemmed from the fact that everybody was applying at the Dhaka offices, instead of those in their home districts.

"We have no problem or queue in the other 69 offices. People can

At Gazipur Community Clinic in Chadpasha union of Babuganj Upazila of Barishal district, our Barishal correspondent found that some vaccine seekers had come despite not registering for inoculation.

Although there were two assistants to register them, the registration rate was very slow due to server connectivity issues.

Anisur Rahman Sabuj, chairman of the Chadpasha union parishad, said 1,500 vaccine doses were allotted but 300 people were vaccinated till noon.

Visiting BM School in the city, it has been seen that only 30 people got their jabs till 1:00pm. A target of 500 shots was set at this centre.

In Munshiganj, hundreds of people thronged the vaccination centres, many without having registered, which created chaos in some places.

"Although 1,500 people were supposed to be vaccinated, about 3,000 people showed up. Many started fights to get vaccinated without following the serial numbers allotted to them. Police were then called in to bring the situation under control," Taniya Tamanna, secretary of the Mohakali union parishad in Munshiganj Sadar, said.

The situation was pretty similar in Balurchar union in Sirajdikhan upazila as around 5,000 people gathered at a centre where only 1,500 people were supposed to get the vaccine.

Abul kalam Azad, civil surgeon of the district, said, "All centres were overcrowded and people were eager to get jabs."

[Our correspondents in Pirojpur, Barishal and Munshiganj contributed to this report]

submit the application and provide the biometric data on a single day," he said.

The DIP official further said they were also facing problems in issuing new passports over delay in getting police verification.

Around 55,091 police verification reports are currently pending, he added.

According to rules, the reports should be submitted online within 15-work days for normal passports and seven days for the emergency ones.

According to DIP officials, some 25 passport officials have lost their job for having links with brokers in the last 12 years.

In a countrywide drive on September 5, some 500 brokers were jailed for different terms or fined during mobile court drives.

A good number of the brokers were engaged in passport-related activities, according to Rab, which participated in the drive.

Tunisia FM tells UN emergency measures aim to ensure 'democracy'

AFP, United Nations

Recent emergency measures strengthening the powers of Tunisian President Kais Saied were aimed at ensuring "an authentic and peaceful democracy" in the country, its foreign minister told world leaders Monday.

Saied on July 25 sacked prime minister Hichem Mechichi, suspended parliament and granted himself judicial powers.

On Wednesday, he followed up the move by announcing "exceptional measures" that allow him to rule by decree.

Some 2,000 Tunisians rallied in Tunis at the weekend to protest the steps.