

BANGLADESH UPDATE

703
New cases in 24hrs

15,60,155
Total cases

27,635
Deaths

12,21,588
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,835,667
Deaths

236,869,706
Total cases

PCR TEST AT AIRPORT

Results not so rapid

80 migrants miss flight

RASHIDUL HASAN

There seems to be no end to the woes of the stranded 20,000-odd UAE-based Bangladeshi expatriates.

Now that the government has made the rapid PCR testing facilities at the airport operational from September 29, a new problem has cropped up: the six labs are not providing the test results, mandatory for boarding a UAE-bound flight, in good time.

Subsequently, the UAE-domiciled Bangladeshi nationals, who are impatient to return to their host country after being stuck here since May 12 as a result of a flight ban from Bangladesh by the Gulf nation, are missing their flights.

For instance, on Monday, 80 UAE-bound passengers, most of whom are migrant workers, could not board their scheduled Etihad Airways flight as their rapid PCR test result did not come through, according to the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) authorities.

The Gulf state had imposed a flight ban from Bangladesh on May 12 following a huge spike in cases in the preceding weeks and the emergence of the highly transmissible Delta variant of the coronavirus.

While the ban was lifted on August 4, it came with a condition for entry: negative results from PCR test done 48 and six hours before departure.

Such a rapid test result stipulated by the UAE government is possible if there are testing facilities at the airports, which none in Bangladesh had then.

The government took a while to set them up at the Dhaka airport, but it now appears they are not functioning as efficiently as they should, The Daily Star has learnt after speaking with a host of UAE-bound expatriate Bangladeshis.

"They are taking a long time to give us the test result. If we cannot get the test result two to three hours before our flight, we are at risk of missing our flight," said Aminul Islam, a UAE-bound migrant worker.

Mohammad Nabi, another UAE-bound passenger, said some of his acquaintances have missed their flight even after arriving at the airport nine to ten hours before take-off to give samples for the rapid PCR test, which

cost Tk 1,600 for all but the migrant workers.

The UAE-bound passengers said they need to stand in ten separate queues for the Covid-19 test at the facilities set up inside Terminal-1 of the airport.

Despite these sufferings, they are at risk of missing their scheduled flights, they said.

Many passengers are arriving after the check-in counter had closed because of the delay in getting their rapid PCR test result, said officials of different UAE-bound airlines.

By and large, airlines close their check-in counter an hour before the departure of international flights.

"If there were one or two passengers, we could still arrange for them to board the flight. But if the number of passengers is too many, we can't do anything," said an official of an airline on condition of anonymity as he is not authorised to speak with the media.

The entire process of getting a Covid-19 test at the airport is very badly managed, he said.

"Passengers are simply not given their test results considering their flight times."

Even then, their problem does not end: they have to stand in another queue for online verification of the test result.

"This is causing waste of time," he added.

Contacted, Touhid-ul Ahsan, executive director of HSIA, blamed the six healthcare facilities that were allowed to set up the labs at the airport and the health department for the UAE-bound passengers' hardship.

The six rapid PCR labs at the airport are being run by Stenz Health Care, CSBF Health Centre, AMZ Hospital, Anwar Khan Modern Medical College and Hospital, ZH Sikder Women's Medical College and Hospital, Gulshan Clinic and DMFR Molecular Lab & Diagnostics.

Ahsan went on to advise the UAE-bound passengers to arrive at the airport with enough time in hand.

"Arriving at the airport at least six to eight hours before the scheduled flight schedule will not cause such problems to the UAE-bound passengers," he added.



President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Bangabhaban yesterday. The prime minister visited the president's official residence around 6:30pm and apprised him of the outcome of the 76th United Nations General Assembly, which Hasina attended recently, and the overall activities of the government. The president congratulated the PM on being awarded the "SDG Progress Award" and spoke appreciatively of her role at the UNGA. The PM left the head of state's residence around 8:00pm.

PHOTO: PID

Fear and loathing in refugee camps

FROM PAGE 1

"When we should have been united for a common cause, we stand divided. We can't trust each other," said Zakir, who claimed to have left around 100 acres of land in Myanmar in 2017.

Such is the distrust among the commoners that Zakir rarely talks to his next-door neighbour who came from a place around 35km away from his home in Myanmar.

A majority of the refugees said most of the armed gangs in the camps belong to Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) which saw Mohib as an opponent.

Human Rights Watch in a statement yesterday said at least a dozen activists sought protection from the UN refugee agency after Mohib's killing because of renewed threats from armed groups, including the ARSA.

According to officials of different law enforcement agencies, at least 10 Rohingya groups are engaged in at least 12 types of crimes, including killing, abduction, rape, drug trafficking and robbery.

Some of the gangs are known as "Salman Shah Group", "Putia Group", "Munna Group", "Hakim Group", and "Jokir Group", the refugees said.

Since August 2017, at least 226 Rohingyas were killed and some 1,298 cases were filed accusing 2,850 individuals, mostly in connection with possession of drugs and firearms.

Three battalions of armed police (APBn) maintain law and order in the refugee camps where over a million Rohingyas have been living since the mass influx of 2017.

Contacted, Commanding Officer Naimul Huq of APBn-14 said, "The camps are so congested that whenever we launch a raid, they [the criminals] just move from one camp to another and disappear into the crowds."

The camps are fenced with barbed wire, but many holes big enough for people to pass through the fence can be seen.

"Rohingyas made at least 12 holes on the fence. Whenever we fix one, they make another. The government is making a walkway along the fence. Once it is done, patrolling officials will stop trespassing," he said.

The APBn CO added that most of the crimes happen at night after 8:00pm and poor lighting in the camps make the law enforcers' task even more difficult.

Naimul said two more battalions of armed police, one in Cox's Bazar and in Bhasan Char, will be deployed soon.

A DAY IN THE CAMP
The Rohingya settlement in Cox's Bazar is a facility with around 50 watch towers. Anyone entering the camp has to go through an elaborate security check-up.

This correspondent had to obtain permission from the additional refugee relief and repatriation commissioner and the commanding officer of APBn-14 before entering Noukar Math camp on October 2.

Three youths gossiping in front of a grocery store said everything was fine in the camp. After a long chat, when this correspondent offered to treat them at a nearby tea stall, they refused.

"If I go and have tea with you, I will be identified as a traitor and a rat of the law enforcers. I will be in trouble," a 25-year-old Rohingya, told this correspondent, looking around nervously.

Criminals are everywhere in the camp and they keep an eye on the movement of the Rohingyas. If you are on their list, you are in trouble," he said.

"Everything seems calm in daytime. After sunset, the situation becomes completely different," he said, adding that no one has the courage to speak up against the criminals.

Mohammed Faisal, a resident of in Lambashia camp, said, "Rohingyas should have been united. But we are fighting amongst ourselves and are getting weaker."

About 750,000 Rohingyas fled a military crackdown in Myanmar in the weeks following August 25, 2017, and joined about 300,000 other Rohingyas who fled earlier waves of violence and took shelter in Cox's Bazar.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Tuesday said Bangladesh forces will shoot to stop arms, drugs and human trafficking at the border with Myanmar.

"I had a discussion with the home minister yesterday [Monday] about the current situation at the border and [we] decided that we will open fire in future. Only then the crimes... will stop," he said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Monday said many Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar were involved in drug trafficking.

No bill payment if internet down for 3 days straight

BTRC stands beside consumers, issues directives penalising ISPs for downtime

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Broadband users will not have to pay any bills for a month if their internet connection remains down for three consecutive days, said the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission.

The BTRC sent a directive in this regard to all the internet service providers on Tuesday.

According to the new directive, if the internet service goes down for a whole day, 50 percent of the monthly bill will be waived. Previously, the waiver would have been applicable for a continuous disconnection for seven days.

If the internet outage continues for two consecutive days, users will pay 25 percent of the bill. Previously, this was applicable for a 14-day disconnection.

If there is no internet for three straight days, no bill will be taken from the customer for the whole

month, said the BTRC. Earlier, a customers would have received the full waiver if the internet was down for 20 consecutive days.

The latest directive came a month after a uniform countrywide rate became effective, meaning a customer in Dhaka and a customer in a remote village elsewhere will pay the same price for the same level of broadband internet consumption.

Under the package that guarantees five MBps (megabytes per second) of speed, the monthly bill will be a maximum of Tk 500.

The bill will be a maximum of Tk 800 for a speed of 10 MBps and Tk 1,200 for 20 MBps, according to the BTRC.

The new rates will remain in place for five years.

According to BTRC data, there were 10.05 million broadband internet users in Bangladesh till the end of August this year.

Catch those who looted banks'

FROM PAGE 1

Justice Mustafa Zaman made the observation after DAG Amit Das Gupta opposed the bail petition and said that the embezzlement case is under investigation.

Without accepting the opposition from the DAG, the HC bench granted bail to the five for one year.

The accused are: Ranjit Kumar alias Ranjit Kumar Roy, Provas Chandra Roy, Komol Chandra Roy and Fulmoni Rani of Naoabos village of Kurigram's Fulbari Police Station and Nikhil Chandra Barman of Angaria village of Bhurungamari Police Station of the same district.

Petitioners' lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir told the HC that his clients were poor and completely innocent.

A gang of organised criminals sent money to their bank accounts to misappropriate it, he said. The people from disadvantaged backgrounds have been implicated in the "false" case and they are the victim of circumstances, he added.

Shishir was dealing with the case pro-bono.

The jail authorities will release them after receiving the copy of the HC order which may take a few days, he added.

Contacted, DAG Amit Das Gupta told this correspondent that the government appeal before the Supreme Court's Appellate Division

challenging the HC bail order. The government is trying to arrest the other accused of the case who are on the run, he added.

Mohammad Rezaul Hoque, manager of Sonali Bank Ltd, Sreepur branch in Gazipur, lodged the case with Sreepur Police Station against nine people, including the five petitioners, on June 16 this year.

In the case statement, it has been mentioned that the accused have misappropriated government funds amounting to Tk 2.46 crore through five bank accounts belong to them.

The five accused petitioners were arrested on July 3.

Lawyer Shishir said the actual culprits and accused of the case -- Bazlur Rahman, accounts officer of Sonali Bank's Sreepur branch, its master-roll staff Tanvir, auditor Md Ariful Islam and their accomplice Shahana Akter -- are absconding.

They are an organised criminal gang, he said, adding that the criminals have allured the five farmers of Kurigram -- Ranjit, Provas, Komol, Fulmoni and Nikhil -- to open bank accounts, saying that they will be given pandemic financial assistance.

After they opened bank accounts, the perpetrators called them to Sreepur branch of Sonali Bank to withdraw the money on July 3 when the police arrested them, the lawyer added.

FB 'operating in shadows'

FROM PAGE 1

shadows, hiding its research from public scrutiny, it is unaccountable," said Haugen, a former product manager on Facebook's civic misinformation team. She left the nearly \$1 trillion company with tens of thousands of confidential documents.

"The company's leadership knows how to make Facebook and Instagram safer, but won't make the necessary changes because they have put their astronomical profits before people. Congressional action is needed," Haugen said.

In an era when bipartisanship is rare in Washington, lawmakers from both parties excoriated the company, illustrating the rising anger in Congress with Facebook, which also owns Instagram and WhatsApp.

Senator Dan Sullivan, a Republican, said he was concerned how Facebook and subsidiaries like Instagram affected the mental health of children. "We're going to look back 20 years from now and all of us are going to be like, 'What the hell were we thinking?'"

Haugen revealed she was the person who provided documents used in a Wall Street Journal investigation and a Senate hearing on Instagram's harm to teenage girls. She compared the social media services to addictive substances like tobacco and opioids.

Panel chair Senator Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat, said Facebook knew that its products were addictive. "Tech now faces that big tobacco jaw-dropping moment of truth," he said.

He called for Zuckerberg to testify before the committee, and for the Securities and Exchange Commission and Federal Trade Commission to investigate Facebook.

"Our children are the ones who are victims. Teens today looking in the mirror feel doubt and insecurity. Mark Zuckerberg ought to be looking at himself in the mirror," Blumenthal said.

Blumenthal said after the hearing that he would want to ask Zuckerberg why he rejected recommendations to make products safer for users.

Zuckerberg, in his post, said Facebook would not stop researching its societal impact. But he wrote that Congress needed to update rules to make clear the legal age for teens to use

internet services, how to verify their ages and where to "balance teens' privacy while giving parents visibility into their activity."

SHARES UP
Facebook's shares rose 2% on Tuesday to close at \$332.96, roughly 13% below the record closing high on September 7.

Coming a day after Facebook suffered an hours-long outage, Haugen pointed to the outage in her testimony: "For more than five hours Facebook wasn't used to deepen divides, destabilize democracies and make young girls and women feel bad about their bodies."

As lawmakers criticized Facebook, the company's spokespeople fired back on Twitter and in statements, arguing that Haugen did not work directly on some of the topics being raised.

"We don't agree with her characterization of the many issues she testified about," Facebook spokeswoman Lena Pietsch said.

Senator Marsha Blackburn, a Republican, accused Facebook of turning a blind eye to children below age 13 on its services. "It is clear that Facebook prioritizes profit over the well-being of children and all users," she said.

Last week, Antigone Davis, Facebook's global head of safety, defended the company in front of Congress and said that it was seeking to release additional internal studies in an effort to be more transparent about its findings.

Senator Maria Cantwell, chair of the Commerce Committee, said she would write Facebook to insist that it not delete documents related to Myanmar's persecuted Muslim minority Rohingya. An aide said she would ask for broader retention of documents.

A US federal judge last month had ordered Facebook to release records of accounts connected to anti-Rohingya violence in Myanmar that the social media company had shut down.

Haugen said she would encourage "oversight and public scrutiny" into Facebook's content recommendation algorithms and their consequences. She suggested creating a dedicated body within the federal government to oversee social media companies.

Blumenthal said he might want to hold an additional hearing to discuss

national security issues related to Facebook.

Haugen said Facebook had also done too little to prevent violence.

Facebook was used by people planning mass killings in Myanmar and the January 6 assault on the US Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald Trump who were determined to toss out the 2020 election results.

Senator Edward Markey, speaking to the absent Zuckerberg, said during the hearing: "Your time of invading our privacy and preying on children is over. Congress will be taking action."

No more cuts

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Usually the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and equivalent examinations take place in February while the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and equivalent tests in April.

But the Covid-19 pandemic has delayed the exams this year.

Dipu Moni at the event said they have received the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) report titled "Secondary education programme: Governance challenges and way out" that alleged that the secondary education sector is mired in various forms of corruption and irregularities, including illegal financial transactions for the appointment of head teachers and officials in other roles.

"We are reviewing the TIB report and will hold a press conference in this regard very soon."

On September 29, TIB unveiled the study and said unauthorised financial transactions -- between Tk 3.5 lakh and Tk 15 lakh -- take place for the appointment of head teachers or assistant head teachers for a school.

The head teacher or assistant head teacher needs to pay the amount to local political leaders, members of school managing committees or governing bodies, said researchers. Illegal transactions of Tk 5,000 to Tk 5 lakh have also taken place for the transfer of teachers, their inclusion to the Monthly Pay Order benefits, during schools' academic approval, school inspections, etc.

Marma people in panic a day after man burnt alive

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

Panic has gripped Marma villagers of Master Para in Khagrachhari's Ramgarh upazila as one of their community members was burnt to death.

On Tuesday, Chai Thowai, 65, an indigenous man of the village, was first injured with a brick and then put on fire after pouring petrol on him, said police.

The accused Mohammad Sharif, of the same village, was arrested the same day. He admitted his involvement with the murder.

Mrasa Thowai Marma, karbari (village chief) of Master Para, said, "Around 70 Marma families are passing sleepless nights after the gruesome murder."

The accused belongs to one of the five to six Bengali families in the area who started living there around 20 years ago, he added.

Raihan Kazemy, additional superintendent of Khagrachhari police (Ramgarh circle), said, "This is a pre-planned murder of an innocent indigenous man in the hills."

Police are investigating why Sharif killed a man who is known as an innocent person in the village, he added.

Sharif purchased the flammable fuel from a local shop saying it was for his motorcycle whereas he did not own any, the police official said.

Meanwhile, the victim's daughter Ma Ma Ching Marma said "On Sunday, some unidentified criminals set fire on our house by pouring petrol but fortunately we were able to douse the fire."

"Following the fire incident, we filed a general diary with Ramgarh police station on Monday."

She also said that Sharif brutally killed her father, a day after they filed a general diary following the incident of setting fire on their house.

WHO okays

FROM PAGE 1

countries and almost a quarter are in Nigeria alone, according to 2019 WHO figures.

Symptoms include fever, headaches and muscle pain, then cycles of chills, fever and sweating.

Findings from the vaccine pilot showed it "significantly reduces severe malaria which is the deadly form by 30 percent," said Kate O'Brien, Director of WHO's Department of Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals.

The vaccine is "feasible to deliver", she added and "it's also reaching the unreached... Two thirds of children who don't sleep under a bed net in those countries are now benefiting from the vaccine."

Many vaccines exist against viruses and bacteria but this was the first time that the WHO recommended for broad use a vaccine against a human parasite.

The vaccine acts against plasmodium falciparum -- one of five malaria parasite species and the most deadly.

"From a scientific perspective this is a massive breakthrough," said Pedro Alonso, Director of the WHO Global Malaria Programme.

'GLIMMER OF HOPE'
Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO regional director for Africa said yesterday's recommendation "offers a glimmer of hope for the continent which shoulders the heaviest burden of the disease."

The estimated cost of malaria in sub-Saharan Africa is over 12 billion dollars a year, Alonso said at a news conference following the announcement.

Before the newly recommended vaccine can reach children in need, the next step will be funding.

"That will be the next major step... Then we will be set up for scaling of doses and decisions about where the vaccine will be most useful and how it will be deployed," said O'Brien.

Gavi vaccine alliance said in a statement after the WHO announcement that "global stakeholders, including Gavi, will consider whether and how to finance a new malaria vaccination programme for countries in sub-Saharan Africa."

The fight against malaria received a boost in April when researchers from Britain's Oxford University announced that their Matrix-M vaccine candidate had become the first to surpass the WHO's threshold of 75-percent efficacy.

Germany's BioNTech, which developed a coronavirus vaccine with US giant Pfizer, also said it aimed to start trials for a malaria vaccine next year using the same breakthrough mRNA technology.

The WHO also hopes this latest recommendation will encourage scientists to develop more malaria vaccines.

The RTS,S/AS01 is "a first generation, really important one," said Alonso, "but we hope... it stimulates the field to look for other types of vaccines to complement or go beyond this one."