

BANGLADESH UPDATE **499** New cases in 24hrs **15,62,958** Total cases **27,699** Deaths **15,24,467** Recoveries **GLOBAL UPDATE** **4,869,944** Deaths **238,818,136** Total cases

CHILDREN AGED 12-17 DGHS preparing for vaccination

STAR REPORT

Once the Directorate General of Health Services completes preparations, the education ministry will decide when, where and how children aged between 12 and 17 will be inoculated against Covid-19, DGHS Additional Director General Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora said yesterday.

The health directorate has been taking preparations in this regard, she said while inaugurating a vaccination centre for Jahangirnagar University on the campus yesterday, reported our JU correspondent.

"The World Health Organization has approved only one vaccine for children aged 12-17 years and we have the stock of that vaccine. We are preparing for its administration," she told journalists after the inauguration.

Replying to a question on the vaccination target, she said around 20 percent of the country's total population received at least one dose of Covid-19 vaccines. The current target is to vaccinate 80 percent of the population.

According to DGHS data, around 11 percent of the population were jabbed

with both doses.

"The World Health Organization has not approved any third dose of vaccines yet. If it approves that, Bangladesh will follow the procedures," Sabrina said.

She urged those with no NID cards or birth certificates to collect any of the identification documents to take the shots. "Vaccine recipients are given certificates and that is why the NID card is necessary. The registration process was designed that way."

The DGHS has, meanwhile, reported that 11 people died from Covid in 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday. With this, the death toll in the country rose to 27,699 and the death rate stood at 1.77 percent.

In those 24 hours, another 599 infections were recorded, taking the total number of cases to 15,62,958. Against 23,193 samples tested during the 24-hour period, the positivity rate was 2.58 percent, shows DGHS data.

At least 634 Covid patients recovered during that period, taking the number of recoveries to 15,24,467. The recovery rate was 97.53 percent.

Among the 11 deceased, two were men and nine were women.



Fishermen are busy repairing boats near Kuakata beach in Patuakhali as they prepare for going back to the sea after the end of an ongoing ban on catching fish in the rivers and the sea. The government imposed the 22-day ban on October 3 midnight to protect mother hilsa during its breeding season. The photo was taken a couple of days ago.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Not coming down soon

FROM PAGE 1

India is the largest source of onions for Bangladesh. Over in the neighbouring country, the price of onion soared to Rs 55 a kg from Rs 30 last week, reports The Times of India.

And yet, the commerce ministry's own data suggests there is an adequate supply of the locally grown root vegetable, which begs the question: why the skyrocketing prices?

In the past month, the price of the homegrown onion soared 55.9 percent and the imported one 47.1 percent, according to data from the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

Yesterday, onion was selling for Tk 70-75 per kilogram in the local markets.

In fiscal 2020-21, about 21 lakh tonnes of onion was produced against the target of 8.2 lakh tonne. This is supplemented by imports of another 7 lakh tonne.

Bangladesh's annual demand for onion is 25 lakh tonnes.

Of the locally-grown produce, 4.2 lakh tonne remains in stock.

"The traders are holding on to the stock and are releasing them slowly," said a vegetable trader at the capital's Kawran Bazar wholesale market.

About 1,500 tonnes of onion will be released from the Chattogram port soon for taming the skyrocketing prices of the item in the local markets, Ghosh said.

The commerce ministry has sent a letter to the National Board of Revenue to withdraw the 5 percent duty on the import of onion to amp up the supply of the vegetable in the markets.

Moreover, the government is trying to import onion from Myanmar to meet the demand, he added.

In a similar vein, the price of soybean oil has edged up 3.8 percent and that of palm oil about 5 percent over the past month.

Yesterday, a litre of soybean oil was selling for Tk 135-140 and palm oil for Tk 125-130.

The price of edible oil went up in the local markets because of a price hike in the international markets, according to Ghosh.

Of Bangladesh's annual demand of 20 lakh tonne for edible oil, 90 percent is catered by imports.

In the international market, the price of palm oil has gone up 14.7 percent in the past month and 65.4 percent in the last year.

However, the price of soybean oil has dropped 3.5 percent in the international market in the past month. It went up 19.9 percent in the

last year.

The price of sugar has gone up too. A kg of the sweetener is now selling for Tk 79-80, up 29.2 percent year-on-year, according to TCB data.

Both Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi and Ghosh attributed the rise to a price hike in the international markets, on which the country is fully dependent to meet the annual demand of 18 lakh tonnes.

In the international markets, the price of sugar has spiralled 7.3 percent in the past month and about 47.2 percent in the last year.

Every year, the state-owned sugar mills process about 30,000 tonnes of sugar from the cane.

But wholesalers at Kawran Bazar told The Daily Star that the cane sugar is out of market.

The price of sugar may decline soon as the government has taken measures, Ghosh said, without elaborating on the measures taken.

Lentil, another widely-consumed item, has become dearer in the past year: its prices have gone up from 16.5 percent to 29.6 percent, according to data from the TCB.

In the local markets, it is now selling at Tk 90-110 a kg, some Tk 5-10 more than last week.

Bangladesh's annual demand for lentils is 5 lakh tonnes, of which 74 percent is met through imports.

"Importers are holding on to the stock," said Md Russel, the manager of Bismillah Store in Kawran Bazar.

For wholesalers like Russel, the price hike of commodities is cutting deep.

"People have simply cut back on their consumption," he said.

Previously, he would log in sales of at least Tk 1 lakh a day. That has now come down to Tk 40,000-50,000 -- insufficient to meet his overheads.

Like Russel, the other sellers in Kawran Bazar are crestfallen as their sales have crashed with the price spiral.

Save for dates, duck eggs, medium-grain rice, the prices of all products have crept up in the past week.

When viewed against the 22 percent price hike of liquefied petroleum gas, the fuel of choice for cooking in most households in the face of scarcity of piped gas connection, one must wonder how the low- and middle-income groups are getting by with their fixed income.

In August, inflation stood at 5.54 percent, up 18 basis points from the previous month, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Bureaucrats take the most

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As the "odd system" still remains in place, DIP employees who have the required skills are not getting the opportunity they deserve, he said.

THE PROPOSAL

The government decided to create passport and visa wings in different missions abroad in 2012 following a home ministry proposal.

In a letter to the prime minister on June 6 that year, the home ministry proposed that the government set up special wings in 24 missions as machines for issuing Machine Readable Passports (MRPs) and Machine Readable Visas (MRVs) had already been installed there.

But due to a lack of experienced manpower, those were being of no use, the letter read.

"The officials of the Department of Immigration and Passport are experts and experienced in passport and visa processing. If these experts and experienced people are employed in the missions abroad, better services can be provided to visa and passport seekers."

To that end, the home ministry proposed creating 366 posts in 66 missions.

Following the PM's approval on June 26, 2012, the home ministry on July 3 requested the public administration ministry to create posts for the passport and visa wings.

The public administration ministry on September 16, 2012, approved creation of 73 posts in 19 Bangladeshi missions.

But the home ministry gazette issued on June 17, 2014, read the first secretary posts would be filled up by senior assistant secretaries and "the posts will be reserved for home ministry officials".

The Daily Star has obtained copies of all the government orders and the home ministry's proposal approved by the PM.

Since 2015, around 40 DIP staffers have been recruited as administrative officers and office assistants-cum-computer operators for the wings, said sources in the DIP admin wing, adding that the rest are from the home ministry.

Major Gen Mohammad Ayub Chowdhury, director general of DIP, told The Daily Star that the output of

the services would not be optimum if the right person does not get the right position.

Anyone not familiar with the process of passport enrolment will not understand technical issues like biometrics and photographs, he explained.

"For example, a passport is pending for vacant verification -- anyone who does not have the knowledge will not understand that it means the passport requires a police verification report," said the DG.

Asked why passport officials were not appointed to the top positions in the wings, the DG said it is the government's decision. "But I will say that if the passport officials were selected for the posts, the quality of the service would have improved."

Zahid Hossain, joint secretary (Immigration-1, 2, security branch, and immigration-1 Section) of home ministry's security service division, told The Daily Star last week that the passport and visa wing is an extension of the home ministry.

The first secretary posts in the wings are for admin cadre service officials and they are sent to this assignment for a four-year term, he said, adding that both DIP and ministry staffers get the rest of the technical positions.

When told that DIP officials and staffers are supposed to get all these posts as per the first proposal approved by the prime minister, he declined to make any comment. "This is in accordance with the rules," he claimed.

He also said they send officials and staffers to these posts through an open competition.

"Before sending people to the missions, we issue a circular, and interested candidates apply for the positions. Every time, over a hundred officials apply and around 20 get selected," added Zahid.

However, a number of DIP officials claimed there were no rules in the previous orders that only cadre officials were eligible to apply.

"We at least want the opportunity to apply for the positions and would accept it if we are announced disqualified," said a high official of DIP.

Asked how much money the establishment of the wings involved, an official from the ministry and two DIP employees said it was not possible to provide this estimate at this moment and the spending varies from mission to mission.

The first secretary of a passport and visa wing at a mission abroad would get his or her basic salary in US dollars.

Alongside, he or she would get a \$1,414 foreign allowance and a \$436 entertainment allowance per month.

A \$20,000 yearly education allowance would also be sanctioned for the official whereas a three-room house and 90 percent medical expenses would be arranged by the government.

Once a year, the delegate would be facilitated with air tickets for a maximum of five members of his family, according to home ministry sources.

'SUBVERTING THE CAUSE'

Speaking on the issue, Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International, Bangladesh, said, "This is a blatant example of undue advantage usurped by the admin cadres depriving the deserving professional candidates, in this case relevant officials of the passport department."

This also undermines the underlying rationale for the prime minister's approval, which was obtained on the basis of submission of specific commitment to sending officials with expertise and experience in serving in the passport department.

It shows how a section of public officials take openings for foreign postings as an opportunity of profiteering rather than serving the purpose. The quality of delivery of the services in the offices concerned abroad will suffer, he added.

"On the other hand, the whole episode will be a source of frustration and disincentive for the genuinely deserving officials involved in the work of passport delivery, and demoralise them," he added.

Iftekharuzzaman said this must not be allowed and those responsible for "subverting the cause of a good initiative" with the highest level approval should be held to account for abuse of power.

MIGRANT JAILED FOR 20YRS BD mission files appeal before Saudi court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh mission in Jeddah yesterday filed an appeal before a Saudi court on behalf of Bangladeshi migrant worker Abul Bashar, who was sentenced to 20 years in jail for carrying illegal amphetamine pills into the Gulf country.

Aminul Islam, labour welfare counsellor at the Bangladesh Consulate General in Jeddah, confirmed the matter over phone this evening.

According to a letter of the consulate general, the appeal was filed through the jail authorities concerned.

Bashar's family in Bangladesh said that his sentence was unjust, adding that he was forced by an employee at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) in Dhaka to carry a package containing the illegal drugs while leaving Bangladesh in March this year.

Bashar, 40, from Barishal's Mehendiganj, was sentenced on September 26 in a case filed by the Saudi authorities, according to a letter of the Bangladesh Consulate General in Jeddah.

DRIVER MURDER Killers still unidentified

Investigators checking CCTV footage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law enforcers are still clueless about the motive behind the murder of Sajal Kumar Ghosh whose decomposed body was recovered early Sunday from a Sport Utility Vehicle two days after he went missing.

Following a GD filed on Saturday by the SUV owner, police traced the vehicle at an alley in the capital's Tejaon Industrial Area tracking Sajal's last mobile phone call and found his nude body lying in the rear seat.

Sajal, a father of two, was the driver of the vehicle. He joined UDC Construction Limited 10 years ago and drove the car of the company's Managing Director Kalam Hossain, said victim's younger brother Aloy Kumar Ghosh.

After dropping his employer at his Dhanmondi residence around 3:00pm on Thursday, he headed for Mohakhali to park the vehicle at a garage there. Since then, he had remained missing.

Police said they collected CCTV footage of surrounding areas of the spot from where the body and vehicle were found. They were checking the footage to identify those who were in the vehicle.

"We are confirmed that the car was driven to Tejaon two days before the body was recovered. We are trying to identify others who were in the car along with the victim," Abul Kalam, officer-in-charge of Tejaon Industrial Area Police Station, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are yet to identify anyone involved in the murder and find out the reason behind it," he said.

He said since the killers did not take away anything -- the victim's mobile phone, wallet and the car -- it seemed the killers might be known to him and he might be killed over personal enmity.

Sajal's family depends on his earnings, his brother Aloy said.

Meanwhile, Aloy filed a murder case with Tejaon Industrial Area Police Station on Sunday against unknown accused.

Hasina seeks Russia's help

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said the Rosatom DG also expressed his country's willingness to continue support to Bangladesh's power sector.

Hasina said the Rooppur power plant is the first nuclear power plant in Bangladesh which is being built with the help of Russia.

She emphasised the importance of maintaining appropriate security measures in the plant and asked the Rosatom DG to train Bangladeshi manpower in this regard.

The PM appreciated Russia for extending help to construct the first-ever nuclear power plant in Bangladesh.

Talking about the Covid-19 pandemic, she said it has slightly slowed down the Bangladesh's overall development, and the country is now in the process of recovery.

She recalled with gratitude the assistance and cooperation of the then Russian Federation during Bangladesh's Liberation War and rebuilding the war-ravaged country.

Alexey Likhachev highly appreciated Hasina's strong support and guidance towards Rooppur power plant and said the cooperation

between the two countries has entered into nuclear field. "Bangladesh will become a nuclear energy power by 2023," he said.

About the completion of the ongoing project, Likhachev said the timeline may be adjusted.

Regarding training, he said they will train Bangladeshis to run the plant and will also give attention to social development in the project area.

The Rosatom DG said more than 20,000 Bangladeshis are working in the project while some local companies have been tasked with various jobs on sub-contracts. "They're remarkable," he said.

He also praised and thanked the science and technology ministry and Atomic Energy Commission for its all-out support and cooperation.

He thanked the health ministry for its cooperation in vaccinating 90 percent of the Russian people working in the project.

Science and Technology Minister Yeafesh Osman, Ambassador-at-Large Mohammad Ziauddin, PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus and Secretary of Science and Technology Ministry Ziaul Hasan were also present.

Trio wins Nobel Economics Prize

FROM PAGE 1

Card won half of the 10-million-kronor (\$1.1 million, one million euro) prize for work focused on the labour market effects of minimum wages, immigration and education.

The Canadian-born professor at the University of California in Berkeley was caught off guard by the nod.

"I don't think I would have been a very high probability," he told the Nobel Foundation, explaining that he was talking to them wearing pyjamas.

In natural experiments, researchers study the result of chance events or policy changes on groups of people, unlike other experiments where scientists have control over their subjects.

Card's studies from the early 1990s, where he evaluated the effects of a raised minimum wage in New Jersey, showed for example that raising the minimum wage does not necessarily lead to fewer jobs.

Focusing on fast-food workers, Card used eastern Pennsylvania, which has similar labour market, as a control group.

Card also used other natural experiments -- such as the sudden influx of 125,000 Cubans to the US in 1980 -- to study the impact of immigration and education.

"We now know that the incomes of people who were born in a country can benefit from new immigration, while people who immigrated at an earlier time risk being negatively affected. We have also realised that resources in schools are far more important for students' future labour market success than was previously thought," the Nobel committee said.

However, data from a natural experiment are difficult to interpret.

For their work helping to solve that methodological problem, the other half of the prize went jointly to Angrist, 61, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Imbens, a 58-year-old professor at Stanford.

In research they conducted in the mid-1990s, they demonstrated how

"precise conclusions about cause and effect can be drawn," and specifically what conclusions can be drawn.

REVOLUTIONISING WORK

The framework they developed has been widely adopted by researchers who work with observational data.

"By clarifying the assumptions necessary to establish a causal relationship, their framework has also increased the transparency -- and thus credibility -- of empirical research," the committee said.

"I was absolutely stunned to get a telephone call," Imbens told reporters during a phone interview following the announcement.

"Josh Angrist was actually the best man at my wedding so he is a good friend, both professionally and personally, and I'm just thrilled to share the prize with him and David," he added.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte congratulated the Eindhoven-born economist.

"A world achievement with a Dutch touch. Congratulations!" Rutte said in a tweet.

The three laureates "have revolutionised empirical work in economics. They have shown that it's indeed possible to answer important questions, even when it's not possible to conduct randomised experiments," Nobel Committee member Eva Mork told reporters.

'FALSE NOBEL'

Last year, the honour went to US economists Paul Milgrom and Robert Wilson for their work on theories of auctions as well as inventing new auction formats.

The Economics Prize is the only Nobel not among the original five prizes set out by the will of Alfred Nobel, who died in 1896.

It was instead created through a donation from the Swedish central bank in 1968, and detractors have thus dubbed it "a false Nobel".

Just like this year, the Economics Prize has generally been male-dominated. It

has only been awarded to two women since it was first awarded in 1969: Elinor Ostrom in 2009 and Esther Duflo in 2019.

The only woman to win a Nobel Prize this year is investigative journalist Maria Ressa of the Philippines, who shared the Peace Prize with Dmitry Muratov of Russia for their work promoting freedom of expression at a time when liberty of the press is increasingly under threat.

Record low voter turnout mars Iraqi parliamentary polls

AFP, Baghdad

Turnout hit a record low for parliamentary elections in war-scarred Iraq, early figures showed yesterday, amid widespread disillusionment about a political elite seen as inept and corrupt.

Sunday's vote was moved forward from 2022 as a concession to an anti-government protest movement that has demanded deep reforms in the oil-rich yet poverty-stricken country.

But in the end voter participation hit a new low in Iraq's fifth election since the 2003 US-led invasion that ousted dictator Saddam Hussein with the promise of bringing freedom and democracy.

Preliminary turnout was just 41 percent, based on results from 94 percent of voting stations, the election commission said -- below the 44.5 percent recorded in 2018.

"There's general apathy. People just don't believe that elections matter," said Iraqi researcher Sajad Jiyad of the Century Foundation think-tank.

"The weak turnout is a warning. It is not only the legitimacy of the next prime minister that is in question, but also the legitimacy of the government, of the state -- of the entire system."