

BANGLADESH UPDATE

306
New cases in 24hrs

15,68,563
Total cases

27,841
Deaths

15,32,468
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,983,862
Deaths

245,563,601
Total cases

PROTECTING INTERESTS OF THE NATION Remain ready for highest sacrifice PM calls upon members of army

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the members of the Bangladesh Army to remain always ready to make the highest sacrifice to protect the interests of the nation.

"I believe the Bangladesh Army will remain ever ready for the highest sacrifice in any national need alongside protecting the country's sovereignty," she said.

The prime minister was addressing a function of the Bangladesh Army virtually from her official residence the Gono Bhavan.

The function was arranged to give the national standard (national flag) to 10 units and hand over the new flag to Mujib Regiment and Rowshan Ara Regiment of the Bangladesh Army at the Artillery Centre and School at Halishahar Cantonment in Chattogram.

Hasina said the Bangladesh Army has been playing a significant role in building the nation with their works in facing natural and manmade disasters as well as socio-economic and infrastructural development alongside protecting the country's sovereignty.

She mentioned their important role in the development of the country's communication system and facing the Covid-19 pandemic.

On behalf of the prime minister, Chief of Army Staff General SM Shafiqul Islam handed over the national standards to the respective commanders of 4, 12 and 20 field regiments artillery, 5 Air Defence Artillery, Riverine Engineering Battalion, 1 and 2 Signal Battalions, Army Aviation group and NCO Academy as well as reintroduced the flag to the commanders of the Mujib Regiment and Rowshan Ara Regiment Artillery.

Myanmar doing little

FROM PAGE 1

He expressed alarm over the country's recent exposure to the relatively "new" drug crystal meth.

Like yaba, crystal meth, a highly addictive drug, is mostly smuggled into the country from Myanmar through the border in Teknaf and Ukhia upazilas of Cox's Bazar, and Naikongchhari upazila of Bandarban, officials said.

Rohingya refugees are often the ones carrying the rather expensive drug across the border, while transport workers also bring them to the city, they said, adding that the volumes being smuggled appears to have increased.

At the fourth bilateral meeting between the DNC of Bangladesh and Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) of Myanmar on December 15 last year, Myanmar's officials claimed that they had seized around 16.8 tonnes of ice from January 1 to November 30, 2020.

The DNC also handed over a list of 49 clandestine labs in Myanmar to CCDAC, hoping that they would take stern actions to stop yaba smuggling into Bangladesh.

However, yaba menace was not stopped. This year till August, law enforcers and DNC officials seized 2,34,02,115 yaba pills so far. In 2020, the quantity was 3,63,81,017, according to DNC's annual report.

The CCDAC earlier also claimed that ice and other forms of amphetamines were mainly smuggled in from China

and Thailand to Myanmar.

This year alone, officers recovered more than 15kg of ice in several raids in Dhaka, Chattogram and Cox's Bazar.

The smuggling of codeine-based syrup Phensedyl, through various border points with India, is another headache for Bangladesh.

The DNC DG said they have already taken necessary steps to combat the menace. In the previous DG-level meeting, they had given a list of Phensedyl factories and warehouses along the Indian border to its Indian counterpart. Yesterday, the NCB officials told them that they have demolished those.

Despite that, 3,50,241 bottles of Phensedyl were seized in 2021 till August. In 2020, it was 10,07,977 bottles.

"Phensedyl trafficking has decreased this year. May be these are now being smuggled from other factories and warehouses apart from those on the list we had given," he said.

In the DG-level talks yesterday, the DNC chief said that they emphasised on the smuggling routes into Bangladesh and shared details with Indian counterparts.

India assured the DNC of taking actions based on the information, he added.

"We have also informed that hemp and heroin are being smuggled into Bangladesh from India, who assured us of taking actions."

Ferry flips in Padma

FROM PAGE 1

People on the ferry were able to get off, he said.

Three vehicles out of 17 trucks and covered vans were also able to disembark the ferry as it slowly tipped over, Zillar Rahman, deputy general manager of BIWTC, said. Seven of the vehicles were recovered later, leaving seven still submerged, he added.

"Rescue operations are still going on with a salvage vessel," he told The Daily Star around 8:00pm.

Replying to a question, he said, "Rescuing vehicles from under water is a very tough job and it is not possible to say when we will be able to complete the rescue operation."

He also said there were some motorcycles on the ferry which sank when the accident happened.

While anchoring at Pontoon 5 of the terminal, the ferry named Shah Amanat tipped over at 9:35am with at least 14 vehicles still on it.

BIWTC chairman Tajul Islam, who visited the spot, said they could not ascertain the reason behind the incident.

A high-powered committee has been formed to unearth the reason. They will start work today and upon completion of the probe, they will know the cause of the accident, he added.

"However, the master of the ferry told us that he could sense the ferry was tilting towards one side while in mid river. Then he sped up and took the ferry to the bank," the chairman told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We thank him for his quick

thinking," the chairman said.

However, some passengers claimed the vessel sank as water entered it due to a leak in the hull.

The ferry was built in 1980 and its lifetime expired a year ago. It has since been running on temporary permission of 45 days, said the chairman.

The ferry had started for Paturia from Daulatdia terminal of Rajbari district around 9:00 am with 17 trucks, a covered van and four motorcycles on board.

PROBE COMMITTEE FORMED
The shipping ministry yesterday formed a seven-member committee to investigate the incident.

Led by Sultan Abdul Hamid, additional secretary (development) of the ministry, the committee was asked to submit its report within seven days, reads a shipping ministry circular.

The committee was also asked to look into the other recent ferry accidents and make recommendations to improve ferry services.

The other members of the committee are: Rafiqul Islam Talukder, director (ICT) of BIWIA, Captain Sayeed Ahmed, nautical surveyor and examiner of shipping department; deputy director of local government, Manikganj; Zobiair Ibn Awal, associate professor of naval architecture and marine engineering department of Buet; Jasim Uddin, superintendent of River Police of Faridpur region and Rashedul Islam, director (technical) of BIWTC.

[Our Manikganj correspondent contributed to this report]

Over 66 lakh to get second jab

FROM PAGE 1

Besides, around 13 additional people also received jabs on the next day. The DGHS official, however, said nothing about them in yesterday's briefing.

Meanwhile, the DGHS said seven people died from Covid-19 in the 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday.

With this, the total number of deaths from the disease reached 27,841.

At least 306 new infections were recorded during the period, taking the total number of confirmed cases to 1,568,563.

The new cases were detected after testing 19,951 individuals' regimens. Yesterday's positivity rate was 1.53 percent and the overall positivity rate was 15.31 percent.

In those 24 hours, at least 288 Covid-19 patients recovered taking the total number of recoveries to 1,532,468.

Of the seven reported dead, three were men and four women.

added the release.

Meanwhile, the United States will supply more 35 lakh jabs of Pfizer vaccines to Bangladesh, read a press release issued by the US Embassy in Dhaka yesterday.

With this, the total number of vaccines supply to Bangladesh as a gift from the USA will reach 1.5 crore.

"The United States is pleased to donate another 3.5 million Pfizer vaccines to Bangladesh. We have also provided specialized training to hundreds of Bangladeshi health workers to help them safely administer these Pfizer vaccines among children ages 12 and up," said Ambassador Earl Miller.

This delivery of Pfizer vaccines is part of the broader commitment by the United States to lead the global Covid-19 response by providing one billion doses of Pfizer vaccine around the world -- free of charge -- through 2022, according to the press release.

With this vaccine delivery, the total US government Covid-19 assistance to Bangladesh exceeds \$121 million.



A fire fighter inspects the damage caused by a fire that broke out at this residence in the capital's Gulshan yesterday. Four people, including a couple and their two-year-old son, suffered burn injuries. The fire broke out around 11:30am and eight firefighting units doused it around 1:15pm.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Starting point of cascading delay

FROM PAGE 1

The project implementing agency has to carry out the feasibility study for assessing the practicality of any proposed project worth above Tk 25 crore. Any delay in completing the feasibility study leads to delay in starting the main project, the officials and experts pointed out.

At present, the BR is implementing 37 projects worth Tk 1,41,941.59 crore, most of which is loan money from various countries, including India, China, Japan, and South Korea, as well as from the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Of the 37 projects, 26 have been revised at least once. Four of those projects were taken at least a decade ago, but those are yet to be completed.

Eminent transport expert Prof Shamul Hoque said additional time can be given for a study project but there should be "logical grounds" for it. It is because poor feasibility study hampers project implementation, leading to time extensions and cost escalations.

"Sadly, time extensions and cost escalations are too frequent despite the feasibility studies, which is not acceptable at all," said the teacher of Buet's civil engineering department.

"The consultants who conduct the studies must be held accountable for the delays so that such delays can be prevented."

THE NINE PROJECTS

The nine projects were taken to do feasibility studies for different potential projects. Six of them are funded by the government. The three others are technical assistant projects and funded by the ADB.

One of them is the Sunamganj project. Although its feasibility study project was launched in January 2019, the project announcement had come long before that.

In 2012, the then railways minister Suranjit Sengupta announced that rail tracks would be expanded from Chhatak to Sunamganj Sadar upazila. Then, BR carried out a preliminary study.

The move, however, did not see any progress till January 2019, when the planning ministry approved the study project and October 2020 was fixed as its deadline.

However, it was July last year when the BR was able to sign a contract with a China-Bangladesh joint venture firm to do the work. And, the project witnessed only 25 percent progress till August this year.

In the meantime, Planning Minister MA Mannan and other lawmakers from Sunamganj locked into a feud over the alignment of the proposed rail lines.

Recently, the project deadline has been extended till June next year.

Project Director Mohiuddin Arif blamed complexities over fixing the alignment and the Covid-19 pandemic for the delay.

In September 2018, the BR took up a project for conducting a feasibility study and preparing a detailed design for building tracks between Chuadanga's Darshana via the district's Damurhuda and Mujibnagar in Meherpur at a cost of Tk 12.48 crore. The deadline was August 2020.

In March last year, BR signed a contract with an Australia-Bangladesh joint venture company for the job and the project witnessed only 54.42 percent progress till August this year.

Project Director Ariful Islam said they were done with the feasibility study and were now busy with the detailed design. "We are hopeful about completing the work within December this year as per the revised deadline," he told The Daily Star on October 2.

He said the Covid-19 pandemic caused some delays.

In 2018, the BR took up another project, titled "Study for Important Projects of West Zone" for carrying out feasibility studies and fixing alignments of three rail tracks and a rail bridge.

The deadline of the Tk 9.92-crore project was June 2019. The work witnessed 52.5 percent progress till August this year and the deadline was extended till June next year, meaning the project would take four and a half years, instead of one and a half, to end.

Again, in March 2018, a project was taken for carrying out feasibility studies for building a rail line connecting the under-construction Bay Terminal in Chattogram's Patenga with the railway network.

The deadline of the Tk 4.53-crore project was March 2019. It saw 25.5 percent progress till August this year. So, the deadline was revised till June 2022.

Technical Assistance for Dhaka-Chattogram-Cox's Bazar Rail Project Preparatory Facility, a project involving Tk 121.64 crore and funded by the ADB, was supposed to be implemented between July 2015 and June 2019.

After several revisions, a new deadline was set for June 2022.

Also, the deadline for "Technical Assistance for Rolling Stock Operations Improvement of BR" was extended by one year and the new deadline is June 2022.

Besides, a feasibility study project for construction of a new rail line from Gobra of Gopalganj to Pirojpur and Bagerhat was cancelled midway after the deadline -- January this year -- expired.

The two other feasibility projects are

progressing on schedule. One of them is for the construction of a carriage maintenance workshop in Rajbari while the other is for "Technical Assistance for Railway Connectivity Improvement Preparatory Facility", according to project documents and officials.

PROJECT GUIDELINE VIOLATION
Initiation of a development project, its approval and revision are done as per a 2016 government guideline.

As per Section 4(1) of the guideline, feasibility study is a must for any investment project with an estimated cost of more than Tk 25 crore. According to Section 4(3), a feasibility study project, if necessary, can be revised only once.

Section 4(4) says the deadline of a feasibility project can be extended for six months if the revision is required on a "logical ground".

The minister or state minister concerned can approve a revision proposal if the cost involving the revision is below 15 percent of the total project costs. If it is more than 15 percent of the total cost, the permission has to be taken from the planning minister.

Regarding technical assistance projects, Section 7(1) of the guideline says such projects cannot be revised more than twice.

But deadlines of four BR feasibility projects were extended by more than six months. The deadline of a technical assistance project was extended by three years while another by one year, shows documents.

WHAT BR OFFICIALS SAY

Asked, BR officials said the lengthy process of appointing consultants for feasibility studies was a major reason behind the delays. In at least two cases, it took up to one and a half years to appoint consultants after projects were approved.

Changes in alignment of proposed rail lines following "pressure or persuasion" from local influential people is another major reason, they said.

BR Director General Dharendra Nath Mazumder said reasons behind the delays vary from project to project, but changes in the alignment and the Covid-19 situation are the main reasons.

Asked about the violation of the project guidelines, he said, "How can we go against the guidelines? I think you are wrong."

A BR official, however, said they take "special permission" from the Planning Commission in some cases as the planning ministry guidelines does not mention what should be done when any project is revised more than once.

GULSHAN FLAT FIRE Two-year-old, parents among four burnt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four, including a couple and their two-year-old son, sustained burn injuries of varying severity after a fire broke out at their flat in the capital's Gulshan yesterday.

The injured were undergoing treatment at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery.

The injured are: DM Rafiqul Islam Razib, 35, manager of the corporate branch of a private bank, his wife Maliha Anha Urmi, 32, their son Masrur Md Rafin, and house help Moni, 35.

Urmi sustained 70 percent burns, Rafin and Moni 30 percent burns while Razib sustained two percent burns.

The condition of all except Razib were critical, said Aiyub Hossain, resident surgeon of the institute.

The fire originated around 11:30am on the first floor, where the family lives. Eight firefighting units doused it around 1:15pm, said Lima Khanam, duty officer of Fire Service and Civil Defence Headquarters.

The cause of the fire could not be determined immediately, she said.

Razib sustained only minor injuries as he was in another room when the fire broke out. He was getting ready to go to office, Imdadul Haque, Razib's uncle, told reporters at the hospital.

1,600 BNP men sued

FROM PAGE 1

At least a dozen people were injured in the clash in front of the BNP's Nayapaltn headquarters on Tuesday following a rally protesting communal violence in the country.

The BNP and the police blamed each other for the clash.

Meanwhile, the BNP yesterday alleged that the government was implicating its leaders and activists in cases filed over recent communal violence with a view to clear the field ahead of the next parliamentary election.

Speaking at a press conference at the party headquarters, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir claimed that at least 60 cases have so far been filed against 15,096 people over the recent communal violence and police have arrested 146 BNP men.

"After any incident, the government always files cases against BNP leaders and activists with a view to repress and eliminate its opponents. In the same way, BNP leaders and activists are now being framed in cases filed over the attacks on Puja mandaps."

Fakhrul said the main purpose of the government is to harass BNP leaders and activists and keep them away from the coming polls. "We think Awami League has been doing this all the time to survive in politics."

The BNP leader said the media, however, have exposed that ruling party men were involved in those incidents. "They [AL] are dividing the nation and destroying communal harmony only to achieve their political objectives."

Fakhrul said none of his party leaders and activists, including Barkatullah Bulu, was involved in communal violence.

He alleged that a false case was filed against Bulu over the communal violence in Noakhali by taking the deposition of a Jubo Dal activist under section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure forcefully through torture.

"We think it is an attempt to harass BNP leaders and activists, including Barkatullah Bulu and Kamakhya Chandra Das."

Fakhrul demanded immediate withdrawal of all cases filed against BNP men and fair and impartial investigations into those incidents.

He claimed that the government is now filing cases against BNP men as it wants to dispose those of as soon as possible.

"The home ministry has already enlisted the cases that need to be settled quickly so that our leaders cannot join elections."

Tigers surrender

FROM PAGE 1

over the park and top-scored with 61 off 38 balls while David Malan remained unbeaten on 28 as England reached the target with eight wickets in hand and 35 balls to spare.

Left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed picked up the wicket of Roy before Shoriful Islam got rid of Jos Buttler for a run-a ball 18 as Bangladesh couldn't put up a fight against a high-flying English side.

It was yet another sorry batting display from the Tigers earlier, with Liton Das failing to utilise another opportunity scoring just nine runs and in-form Naim Sheikh departing for five.

Bangladesh were dealt a further blow when Shakib Al Hasan was dismissed by Chris Woakes, thanks to a magnificent catch by Adil Rashid at short fine-leg as the Tigers managed to score 27 for three in the Powerplay.

Mahmudullah and Mushfiqur Rahim's 37 runs in the fourth-wicket stand could only avert the humiliation of being bundled out for a small total as there was no significant performance with the bat from the Tigers.

Mushfiqur was trapped leg-before while trying a reverse-sweep off the bowling of part-time leg-spinner Liam Livingstone after a team-high of 29.

Mahmudullah, after trying too hard with the bat, saw his confused calling result in the run-out of Afif Hossain at a crucial time.

Interestingly Nasum struck the first six of the innings and made it a couple against Rashid in the 19th over, eventually remaining unbeaten on 19 off nine balls. If it continues in the same manner, things may not change much for Bangladesh in the next three Super 12 matches as Russell Domingo and his charges need serious work to change their fortune in the mega event.