

BANGLADESH UPDATE

178

New cases in 24hrs

15,71,013

Total cases

27,895

Deaths

15,34,825

Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

5,063,114

Deaths

250,438,829

Total cases

Deliver due services to expatriates

Hasina to diplomats

UNB, London

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked Bangladeshi diplomats to work sincerely so that the expatriates across the world can avail of proper services from them.

"You need to deliver proper services to the expatriates and look after their wellbeing," she said.

The PM said this while virtually inaugurating the extended chancery premise of Bangladesh High Commission in London from her place of residence here.

Hasina said the people of Bangladesh across the world are contributing to their homeland and the countries they are living in. The traditional diplomacy no longer exists as it has turned into economic diplomacy, she added.

She asked the diplomats to blend diplomacy with trade and commerce, investment expansion and Bangladesh's development.

Now no one can attain development alone, the PM said, adding that a comprehensive effort

is needed. "Every foreign mission has a big responsibility to highlight Bangladesh and its history and culture."

Hasina also asked the authorities concerned to discuss and take measures to increase export and investment, and accelerate socio-economic development.

She said the government is working to this end following the foreign policy laid out by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"Bangladesh is no longer a backward country, as it's moving ahead attaining the status of a developing nation. It has to be turned into a developed country upholding this status," Hasina added.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and High Commissioner Saida Muna Tasneem also spoke on the occasion.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud, PM's Private Industry and Investment Adviser Salman F Rahman were, among others, also present.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Tyres burning on the Link Road in Cox's Bazar as Sramik League activists blockaded the road soon after the district Sramik League president Zahirul Islam Shikdar got shot dead by unknown assailants. Road communication between Cox's Bazar and Chattogram remained suspended for nearly two hours due to the blockade.

Silent heroes of 'Surokkha'

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incentives to Covid-hit people. The proposal was initially submitted to the Tangail district administration.

Later, the government took up the idea nationally and brought the five programmers to Dhaka to work on the Central Aid Management Systems (CAMS).

Under the CAMS, around 50 lakh families got the financial assistance

hassles," ASM Hosne Mubarak, one of the programmers, told The Daily Star.

The programmers said they had overcome some challenges to develop the system.

"Bringing at least 12 crore people to the vaccination campaign and managing all the data for this huge population was a very tough task. The main challenge was to verify the applicant's identity through the NID

Harun Or Rashid.

It takes a few minutes for vaccine registration with the applicant needing a National ID and a few clicks. Once the registration is done, the user gets an SMS and the application is transferred to the vaccination centre concerned automatically.

A person can download the vaccine registration card. After getting the first jab, the user's vaccine status is instantly updated and the date of the second jab is also automatically fixed.

After completing the two doses, a person can download the vaccine certificate at their own convenience. Besides, there is a QR (quick response) Code so that any authority anywhere in the world can verify the person's vaccination history.

Abdullah Bin Salam said, "There were a number of cyberattacks to interrupt the service but till now the attackers could not do anything."

The programmers said for the last nine months they have been working round the clock as there is no additional manpower to look after the system.

They said young programmers have a tendency to go abroad for better fortunes, adding that the government can avert it by incentivising them.

NM Zeaul Alam said, "The young programmers did a tremendous job and they had done it going beyond their regular job description. This is inspiring for others. We are trying to incentivise them so that they get encouraged."

Harun

Abdullah

Mahbub

Mubarak

Salam

last year.

After the success of the project, the team grew confident and started working on vaccine management system.

At the beginning of this year, they presented the system to the government. It got the vetting from the National Covid-19 vaccine committee, which gave some inputs and allotted three weeks to complete the system.

The system was finally launched on January 25 this year.

"We worked together and there was no leader in the project. As our vision was fixed, we just focused on our work. We are happy that people are getting the benefits of it without any

database," said Harun Or Rosid.

He said that managing the huge traffic in the server at a time was also challenging as the government doesn't store its data on Amazon Web Services or Google Cloud like other private companies, considering the security of the people's privacy.

"To overcome this challenge, we used National Data Server," he added.

He said that time constraints and limited resources were their biggest enemies.

"We got only three weeks to develop the app. It was like the maximum output using the minimum resources. We are happy that the app runs smoothly even after a record of six crore hits in a single day," said

Public burden heavier now

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Chowdhury, secretary-general of Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, told The Daily Star.

Under the new bus tariff, the fare -- which does not include the tolls -- for a trip from the capital's Gabtali to Barishal through Faridpur would go up to Tk 555 from Tk 438.

Similarly, within the city, a bus trip from Mirpur Zoo to Notre Dame College that previously cost Tk 33 would set the passenger back by Tk 41.

The fares have been hiked unilaterally by the government, the transport owners and the workers' leaders without considering the people's interest, Chowdhury said.

Particularly unfair are the new launch fares, which were determined considering the operation cost of just a handful of luxurious launches, according to Chowdhury. "The expenses are not the same for most of the other launches."

Besides, the majority of the launch journeys are upwards of 100 kilometres, so the passengers' costs would effectively rise more than 35.3 percent.

Chowdhury demanded the government cancel the new fares and set logical and acceptable tariffs.

The new bus fares came after a meeting that went on for more than

five hours yesterday between an 11-member government committee led by Bangladesh Road Transport Authority Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder, a good number of transport leaders, representatives from the energy division and the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation.

At the meeting, the transport leaders proposed to raise the bus fares by as much as 44 percent, a bid that was shot down by the government officials.

This caused the transport leaders to step outside of the room several times and hold separate meetings among themselves.

Before a final decision was reached, the government officials, including Mazumder, were seen talking over the phone.

After the meeting, Mazumder said the bus operators pushed for a 47 percent hike in fares but the committee recommended a raise of about 27 percent considering both the people's interest and the transport associations' demands.

The new tariff would not be applicable on vehicles that run on CNG, petrol and octane, and for enforcement, the BRTA would be running mobile courts, he said.

The bus fare hike was necessary and overdue, said Khondaker Enayet Ullah,

secretary-general of the Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association.

Apart from the price of fuel, the other operational costs have gone up since May 2016, when the inter-district bus fares were last fixed, he said. The bus fares for Dhaka and Chattogram were last fixed in September 2015.

However, the associations of goods-carrying vehicle owners and workers said they will continue their ongoing strike until the government slashes the price of diesel, meaning the impasse created by the energy ministry's decision on Wednesday continues.

The leaders of the associations said none from the government talked to them over the issue as of last night.

"We will continue our strike until the fuel price is cut down and the recent hike in tolls for two bridges is revoked," said Tajul Islam, member secretary of Bangladesh Truck, Covered Van, Tank Lorry, Prime Mover Owners and Workers Coordination Council.

Mokbul Ahmed, president of the Bangladesh Covered-Van Truck Prime Mover Goods Transport Owners Association, another platform of owners of goods laden vehicles, said they would not call off the strike, which began on Friday as well, until the problem over fuel price hike is solved.

MISSING HEALTH MINISTRY FILES

Probe body gets five more days

Nothing conclusive yet, says CID after interrogating 9 staffers and a contractor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The probe committee, formed to investigate the missing case of 17 purchase-related files from the health ministry, has got five more days to submit its probe report.

A three-member committee was supposed to submit its report by Thursday.

As it could not yet finish its task by the deadline, it was asked to submit the report by Thursday, confirmed one of the investigators Ahsan Kabir, joint secretary (procurement) at the ministry's medical education and family welfare division.

On October 30, the health ministry formed a three-member committee, headed by administration wing Additional Secretary Md Shah Alam,

to probe into how the files went missing and asked the body to submit its report in five working days.

Meanwhile, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police so far interrogated at least nine staffers of the health ministry and a Rajshahi-based contractor, but still could not find anything conclusive over the missing files.

The staffers and Rajshahi-based contractor Nasimul Gani Toton were released from the CID headquarters in Dhaka.

"We have nothing conclusive to say. The ministry is investigating the incident," said Azad Rahman, additional superintendent of police (CID), adding that they would investigate further and interrogate more people if needed.

Left helpless

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got on," she told this correspondent.

After her exam at the Eden, she came to Farmgate on a rickshaw, hoping to find a bus. But the BRTC buses were crammed with people.

On the third day of the transport strike, commuters were seen standing precariously on the bumpers of the red buses.

"I can't afford to hire an auto-rickshaw. I'll have to wait until I can get on a bus," said Rashida after waiting for an hour at Farmgate.

Like her, thousands of commuters, particularly office goers in the capital, suffered a lot due to the countrywide transport strike.

Many, including students, rode on

rickshaw vans and trucks to commute.

The BRTC buses could carry only a fraction of the commuters.

The capital's main thoroughfares were filled with rickshaws.

Tapashi Chakrawarti, a private firm employee, left her home in Khilkhet in the morning to catch a bus. "It seemed people were fighting to get on the buses. I waited for about two hours. Then I hired an auto rickshaw, spending Tk 300," she said, adding that the regular bus fare is only Tk 25.

Transport owners and workers called the strike after the government on Wednesday night raised the prices of diesel and kerosene by Tk 15 to Tk 80 per litre, citing a hike in global prices.

Italy lets 800 migrants stuck at sea disembark

AFP, Rome

Italy on Saturday agreed to let 800 migrants including hundreds of minors and five pregnant women disembark after they were stuck at sea aboard an overcrowded vessel.

German charity Sea Eye told AFP it had received permission to dock at Trapani in Sicily, just hours after a fellow charity delivered it urgently needed relief supplies, including food and blankets.

The Sea Eye 4 ship had already been carrying nearly 400 people pulled to safety at sea when it raced to the rescue of another 400 people crowded onto a wooden boat on Thursday.

Since then it had been appealing to the government in Rome to allow it to dock.

There were over 200 minors, including "many children under the age of 10" on board, the NGO said in a statement. More than 200 people had been treated at the onboard hospital.

"Our crew is working at the limits of what is humanly possible," Sea Eye chairman Gorden Isler was quoted as saying, ahead of the port assignment.

"The ship must be allowed to dock immediately to ensure the safety of all those rescued and the crew".

The Ocean Viking, a charity vessel run by SOS Mediterranee, was also looking for a port for over 300 people it has rescued, bringing the number of migrants seeking to disembark in Italy to over 1,100.

The country is one of the main points of entry into Europe for migrants from North Africa, mainly from Libya and Tunisia, with tens of thousands of people seeking to cross the central Mediterranean each year.

Under previous interior minister Matteo Salvini's "closed ports" policy, European states had to agree to take a certain number of rescued migrants before the charity ships were allowed to dock.

Isler said "negotiations on the distribution of the rescued" should be conducted after the migrants land.

Nearly 55,000 migrants have disembarked in Italy this year, compared to just under 30,000 last year, according to figures from the interior ministry.

2 killed, 20 hurt

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polls, which began in June.

At least 15 of them have been killed ahead of the second phase of the polls.

On November 2, Chief Election Commissioner Nurul Huda said the commission was embarrassed at the election violence. He also expressed his concern over the matter.

In Cox's Bazar, Jatiya Sramik League leader Jahirul Islam Sikder, 45, who sustained bullet wounds in an attack on Friday night, died at a hospital in Chattogram yesterday.

Unidentified assailants shot Jahirul and his brother Kudrat Ullah Sikder, incumbent member of Jhilanja Union Parishad in Sadar upazila, while they were chatting at Kudrat's office.

Kudrat, also general secretary of Jhilanja union unit of Awami League, is contesting for member post this time as well.

The victims' family members and fellow politicians blamed Kudrat's rival candidate Liakat Ali, a BNP activist, for the attack.

Liakat could not be reached for comments. His phone was found switched off.

Sheikh Munir Ul Gias, officer-in-charge of Cox's Bazar Sadar Police Station, said they were trying to arrest the attackers.

A large number of AL men demonstrated blocking roads in Cox's Bazar yesterday afternoon, demanding the killers' punishment.

In Narayanganj, a man was shot dead on Saturday night. Locals said he was killed over rivalry centring union parishad polls in Ruppangj upazila.

The deceased was identified as Abdur Rashid Mollah, 35, brother-in-law of a member aspirant in the upazila's Morapara union.

Locals said one Awlad Hossain is contesting for a member post of the union, but supporters of his rival candidates vandalised his election camps a few days ago. One of the rival candidates is backed by local upazila parishad vice chairman Sohel Ahmed Bhuiyan. Awlad and his brother-in-law Abdur Rashid Mollah went to Sohel's office to complain against the rival candidate on Saturday night.

At that time, Awlad and Sohel engaged in an altercation. At one stage, Sohel's bodyguard opened fire on Abdur Rashid, said Abir Hossain, assistant superintendent of police in Narayanganj (Circle-3), quoting locals. Critically injured Rashid was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), where on-duty doctors declared him dead.

Police have arrested five people in this connection. But no case was filed till yesterday evening, said Humayun Kabir Mollah, inspector (investigation) of Ruppangj Police Station.

Sohel could not be reached for comments as his phone has been found switched off since the incident. In Munshiganj, at least 10 people were injured in a clash between the supporters of AL-nominated chairman candidate and party rebel at Sologhar union of Sreenagar upazila yesterday.

Azizul Islam is running for chairman with AL's electoral symbol boat while rebel candidate Moazzem Hossain is contesting the polls as an independent. Both groups locked in a clash in front of Azizul's house in Bhuchitra area around noon yesterday leaving at least 10 people injured, said Aminul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Sreenagar Police Station.

On information, police and administrative officials rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control, the OC added.

In Pirojpur, a local Jubo League leader was shot and four other AL men were wounded during a clash between two AL groups at Sangkarpasha union under Sadar upazila yesterday. The bullet-hit person is Faysal Mahbub Shuvo, 32, general secretary of Pirojpur town unit Jubo League.

Locals said Shuvo along with his followers electioneered on behalf AL-nominated candidate chairman candidate in Sangkarpasha Tofazzal Hossain Mallik yesterday afternoon. On their way back home, supporters of AL's rebel candidate swooped on them in Mallickbari Bus Stand area, triggering the clash.

Contacted, the district's additional superintendent of police Mollah Amzad Hossain confirmed that the clash took place. In Pabna, at least five people were injured in attacks carried out Saturday night allegedly by rival candidates following a feud over the upcoming union parishad elections in Sujanganj upazila.

Shaheen Chowdhury is competing for chairman post of Sagarkandi union with boat symbol while another local AL man Taiyab Ali as an independent. Taiyab alleged that houses of his several supporters came under attack and four motorbikes were burnt by the followers of Shaheen Chowdhury on Saturday night.

However, Shaheen denied the allegation and claimed that his rivals were spreading propaganda against him. Rather, some of his supporters came under attack by his rivals on Saturday evening.

Contacted, Md Rowshan Ali, OC of Aminpur Police Station, said both the groups have filed complaints against each other for launching attacks.

In Sirajganj, alleged supporters of the AL-nominated chairman candidate in Shialkole union assaulted some reporters while they were covering a press conference jointly organised by four independent candidates in Shialkole Bazar area yesterday morning.

[Our correspondents in the districts contributed to this report]