

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



266
New cases in 24hrs



15,73,214
Total cases



27,934
Deaths



15,37,224
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



5,135,387
Deaths



255,505,403
Total cases

Bangladesh assumes IORA chairmanship

Bss, Dhaka

Bangladesh yesterday assumed chairmanship of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) while Russia was added as new dialogue partner at its 21st Council of Ministers' meeting.

"This event is very special for Bangladesh as this time in Dhaka we assumed the chairmanship of the IORA ... and we are very pleased to have the number of ministers in-person, even amid the pandemic," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told the media yesterday evening at a briefing after concluding the meeting at Hotel InterContinental.

IORA is an inter-governmental regional organisation with 23 member states and nine dialogue partners aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian Ocean region.

More than 15 IORA member states with 11 ministerial-level delegations joined in-person while others joined virtually.

Under the theme of 21st Council of Ministers, "Harnessing the opportunities of the Indian Ocean sustainability for inclusive development", Bangladesh proposed "IORA-Dhaka Development Initiative (IORA-DDI)" for inclusive regional development.

The foreign minister said the meeting established a working group on disaster risk management under the coordination of India. "We also finalised IORA guidelines for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief," he said.

At a strategic dialogue on Covid recovery, all IORA members emphasised on getting Covid vaccine equally for reasonable price.

Momen said Bangladesh also reiterated its position regarding Indo pacific region saying that Dhaka would like to see open, free, and inclusive

Indian Ocean without any particular dominance.

He said IORA would chalk out its own vision of the Indo-Pacific based on international law and shared prosperity for all.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Comoros Dhoihir Dhoulkamal, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of South Africa Pandor, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka Prof GL Peiris, Minister of Livestock and Fisheries of Tanzania Mashimba Mashuri Ndaki, Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries of Tanzania Abdullah Hussein Kombo, Minister of State for South Asia, United Nations and the Commonwealth of FCO Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, Chief Administrative Secretary of Kenya Ababu Namwamba, Permanent Secretary of Madagascar Ratsimandau Tahirimiakadaza,

State Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Somalia Belal Mohamed Cusman, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of USA Kelly Keiderling attended the Council of Ministers in-person.

Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stressed the need for making best efforts to develop blue economies by the IORA members.

She said this while a delegation of 12 IORA member countries had a meeting with her at the PMO, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told newsmen.

Hasina also put emphasis on strengthening the bilateral relations among IORA countries.

She said, "Though there are enormous potentials, our intra-region investments are modest. There is ample scope for expanding the bilateral trade and investment relations among the IORA member countries."

Latifur, Shahnaz

FROM PAGE 1

11 in two categories --- individuals and companies -- to motivate people to deposit due taxes and encourage more people to pay taxes.

Among journalists, MA Malek, the editor of Chattogram-based daily Dainik Azadi, Faridur Reza, the managing director of Channel i, and Abdul Muqeed Majumdar, a director of Channel I, were also named as highest taxpayers for the income year 2020-21, according to a notification of the NBR.

In the print and electronic media category, Somoy Media and East West Media Group were also named as the highest taxpayers.

The NBR is expected to honour top taxpayers with cards at a ceremony next week.

This is the second consecutive year Latifur and Shahnaz topped the list of highest taxpayers.

Latifur passed on July 1, 2020, and he has been named as one of the top taxpayers in senior citizen category for income in the fiscal year 2019-20.

While Shahnaz becomes one of the highest taxpayers in woman taxpayer category. She was recognised as the highest taxpayer among women in Dhaka city earlier.

This does not ends here.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) declared Transcom Group Founder Latifur Rahman's family as "Kar Bahadur" or tax icons family along with 83 other families from across the country in 2017. Latifur was announced one of the largest taxpayers in the senior citizen category in the year 2015-16.

Besides, Latifur and Shahnaz, The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam, Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman has been named as the highest taxpayers in journalist category for the sixth consecutive year.

The NBR also named two sister concerns of Transcom Group-- Mediastar and Transcraft-- the owning companies of Bangla daily Prothom Alo and its printer Transcraft -- as the top tax paying firms in the print and electronic media category.

The two companies have been getting the recognition as highest taxpayers since fiscal year 2015-16, when the NBR decided to broaden the list of the largest taxpayers to honour them with 'Tax cards' in order to encourage compliance among taxpayers.

The tax administration launched the initiative to honour taxpayers since the fiscal 2010-11 in two categories -- individuals and companies -- with the objective of motivating people to deposit due taxes and include more people to pay taxes.

Among journalists, Editor of Chattogram based daily Dainik Azadi MA Malek, Managing Director of Channel i Faridur Reza and its director Abdul Muqeed Majumdar also named as highest taxpayers for income year 2020-21, according to a notification of the NBR.

In print and electronic media category, Somoy Media Ltd and East West Media Group also named as highest taxpayers, according to the NBR notification.

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At least 1,000 arrested since Ethiopia state of emergency: UN

Afp, Geneva

The UN voiced alarm on Tuesday at surging arrests in Ethiopia since the country introduced a state of emergency on November 2.

The United Nations human rights agency said most of those detained in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa as well as in Gondar, Bahir Dar and other locations were of Tigrayan origin.

"According to reports, at least 1,000 individuals are believed to have been detained... with some reports putting the figure much higher," spokeswoman Liz Throssell told reporters in Geneva.

The arrests have occurred since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government declared a state of emergency two weeks ago, when Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) fighters threatened to march on the capital.

Lawyers have also said that thousands of Tigrayans have been arbitrarily detained since the announcement of the measures, which allow the authorities to detain without a warrant anyone suspected of supporting "terrorist groups".

Among those arrested since the

state of emergency was declared are a number of UN staff.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres reiterated his call for the immediate release of the employees in a statement from his spokesman Stephane Dujarric Tuesday evening.

"As far as the Secretary-General is aware, the staff members are being held without charge, and no specific information has been provided regarding the reasons for their arrest," Dujarric said.

Throssell said 10 local UN staff as well as 34 drivers subcontracted by the UN were still being held.

"We call for all those still in detention to be immediately released," she said, adding that if that does not happen, "a court or other independent and impartial tribunal should review the reasons for their detention, or they should be formally charged".

She acknowledged that it was "challenging" for the remaining UN rights agency staff to do their work, adding this was why "we have reports of at least 1,000 people detained, but we're not in a position to give a more definitive number".



A farmer smiles as he harvests his paddy from a field that has turned golden at Mollargaon of Sylhet Sadar upazila yesterday. Many farmers are happy to have gotten a good harvest, but there is still that worry whether they would get a good price for their produce.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Deprived of help for no documentation

FROM PAGE 1

percent of the micro and small businesses owners could not recover their losses during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, only 9 percent of micro and small business owners said that they received stimulus packages.

"These incentives are not for us," said Md Amjad Hossain, a merchant of bed sheets and pillows in Dhaka's Gausul Azam market.

Shorn of stimulus and riddled with debt, he had to close down his shop and sell off all his assets to survive. He is now getting by by peddling kitchen tools in bus terminals.

"It was destined that the micro and small businesses stimulus package would not get the stimulus package -- these entrepreneurs do not have proper documentation to apply for the funding," said Selim Raihan, executive director of SANEM.

The Daily Star spoke with a host of financial institutions that lend to the cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises and all spoke of a common factor that has deprived those businesses of not just stimulus funds but also formal financing.

"While disbursing loans we found that many micro and small entrepreneurs do not have necessary documents such as trade license, TIN certificate, income tax return etc -- they have to get these documents from different authorities," said Md Saifuddin Shamim, head of SME, IDLC Finance, one of the big SME lenders.

The government should have a central repository system for such entrepreneurs from where they can avail all the necessary documentation,

Shamim added.

When asked what the government is doing to reach out to struggling micro and small entrepreneurs, Abdul Latif Bakshi, senior information officer of the ministry of commerce, said: "The central bank issued regulations for sanctioning loans to all banks. Those who want to get the benefit of the stimulus packages must comply with those regulations. For further queries, you should talk to Bangladesh Bank spokesperson."

Contacted, Serajul Islam, executive director and spokesperson of the BB, acknowledged that the bulk of the CMSME stimulus funds went to the medium-sized enterprises.

To get the stimulus funds, the business owners must have some minimum documentation, which the majority of them do not have.

"We are working with the SME Foundation to sensitise small and micro business owners about the necessity and process of having proper documentation," Islam added.

The SME Foundation has arranged eight regional fares for micro and small entrepreneurs where they learned about the processes of getting proper documentation and banking services, said its Chairperson Masudur Rahman.

Raihan recommends providing cash incentives to the small and micro business owners to rescue them from their current despair.

"In our five round of surveys, we did not see any improvement on the indicators that act as barriers for small entrepreneurs to access the stimulus package," Raihan said, while urging the government to eliminate the barriers for small and micro-entrepreneurs to

accessing the rescue funds.

Rahman also called for increasing the share of small businesses in the stimulus package.

In the last two phases of disbursing stimulus package, the SME Foundation could provide funds only to 100,000 SMEs whereas the number of total SMEs according to 2013 statistics is more than 7.8 million.

"Besides, we have to rely on banks to disburse the funds, which requires lengthy and complicated procedures for the small and micro-level business owners," he added.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, recommended engaging the non-governmental organisations in disbursing stimulus packages to ensure transparency.

The NGOs that are working on microcredit can reach families living in the remotest part of the country, so they would be able to successfully disburse the package to small and micro-entrepreneurs, she said.

Whatever the government decides to do, it must act now or else more than 20 lakh small businesses are staring at a similar fate like Basudeb, according to Helal Uddin, president of Bangladesh Shop Owners' Association.

At least 40 lakh small businesses are saddled with debt, which they incurred by taking loans out of desperation from local usurers who set high-interest rates.

"Stimulus package from the government did not reach most of these small businessmen, and banks were not interested in grant them loans."

Poor spend 139pc of monthly income

FROM PAGE 1

For private hospitals, the amount shot up to Tk 47,230.

The government hospitals spent Tk 6,076 for each patient on average, it said.

Besides, the prevalence of dengue was higher in DSCC areas -- 2.27 percent -- compared to DNCC areas (1.37 percent), BIDS Research Fellow Abdur Razzaque Sarker said while presenting the study paper.

The study found that the societal cost of treatment per dengue case in Bangladesh was Tk 39,893 (\$479), which was lower than the average cost of dengue per episode in Thailand (\$573), Malaysia (\$947), Indonesia (up to \$1,250), Venezuela (\$627), Brazil (\$676), and Panama (\$1,065).

The cost in Bangladesh was, however, higher than that in India (\$432.2), Pakistan (\$358) and Sri Lanka (\$32 to \$330). The study also found dengue prevalence to be higher in households

with gardens.

Besides, the risk of dengue infection was 2.21 times higher for people who did not use mosquito nets compared to those who used them.

The dengue prevalence was higher (4.33 percent) for those who lived on the 5th floor and above, the study also found.

The habit of cleaning refrigerator water trays irregularly posed 2.82 times higher risk of dengue infection than those who cleaned them regularly.

As dengue prevalence was higher in DSCC areas than in DNCC areas, special attention should be paid to the densely-populated areas under DSCC, said Razzaque in the study's recommendation.

The other recommendations included that the authorities concerned must spray mosquito repellents regularly, particularly in densely-populated residential areas, and routinely remove stagnant water to

destroy larvae of Aedes mosquitoes.

Binayak Sen, director general of BIDS, who moderated the programme yesterday, said a lack of urban primary health care in all wards was creating problem for city dwellers.

Talking about the high treatment costs in private hospitals, he said cost of bed was exorbitantly high and that the government should properly regulate the sector to address such issues.

As his attention was drawn to the study findings, Manzur Chowdhury, entomologist and former president of Zoological Society of Bangladesh, said, "Apart from paying hospital bills, families need to buy mosquito repellents and nets during the dengue season. Besides, overuse of the repellents causes harm to the lung."

He also said only steps from the authorities were not enough to protect people from dengue. "People also should act responsibly and keep their surroundings clean."

72 hour time limit not in full judgment

FROM PAGE 1

accused, including Apan Jewellers owner's son Shafat Ahmed, of the rape case.

Based on the verbal recommendation, almost all the news media reported that the police were asked not to record any rape case after 72 hours of the sexual violence.

Immediately after the judge delivered the verdict, the defence and prosecution lawyers briefed both the print and electronic media about the 72 hours' timeframe for registering any rape case.

The recommendation of Judge Qumrunnaher drew flak from different quarters and sparked protests and also stirred the social media, and met with a huge outcry and nationwide rage, leading to her suspension from judicial duties.

Against this backdrop, Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain relieved Judge Qumrunnaher of her duties on November 14. She was also withdrawn from the tribunal and attached to the law ministry the same day.

Law Minister Anisul Huq also told media that the observation made by the judge was totally illegal and unconstitutional as there was no time limit in the criminal justice system for

recording the case against this criminal offence.

About the missing of the recommendation in the full text verdict, whose photocopy is available to the media, Anisul and Supreme Court officials yesterday refused to comment.

Anisul told The Daily Star that he was yet to receive and see the full text of judgment delivered by Judge Qumrunnaher.

"The full text of any court verdict is not supposed to come to my office as the judiciary is independent. The verdict may be sent to the chief justice. If the chief justice receives the full text verdict, then wait for his decision. I cannot say anything more than this now," he said.

Contacted, SC Registrar General Md Ali Akbar and its Spokesperson Md Saifur Rahman told this correspondent that they don't know about the full text of verdict delivered by Judge Qumrunnaher.

They also refused to say anything about the action taken against the judge by the chief justice.

In the 49-page verdict, the judge said, "This tribunal has seen a lot of rape cases of adult victims who are already accustomed to sexual relations come up for trial where victims are medically

examined many days after the alleged incident.

"When the case is filed long after the incident, no clues could be found to prove the sexual violence on the victim."

"If the matter is taken care of at the time of filing the case and if that victim undergoes medical tests within 72 hours (as the opinion of medical officers of many cases) and any signs of rape are found properly and if it is proved through forensic tests, it becomes an important document in a rape case."

"Then the sentence of a person accused in a rape case could be secured and justice could be served according to that."

The judge also said, "If both the adult victims [of Banani double rape case] had been medically examined soon after the incident or within earliest opportunity, then there would be signs of rape in favour of the prosecution or even they filed the case on the following day or immediately after the incident, the police could still find the injury marks of sexual violence on their face, cheeks or other parts of their bodies and that would be the documentary evidence. The truth of the incident could not be confirmed as it was filed after a long 38 days from 28-03-2017 and also absence of circumstantial evidence."

Daily Covid deaths, new cases increase

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The numbers of deaths and new cases of Covid-19 have increased as the health directorate reported six deaths and 266 new cases yesterday.

The previous day, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) reported two deaths and 213 new cases of Covid-19 in the country.

With the latest figure, the total number of deaths reached 27,934 and the total cases to 1,573,214. The death rate was 1.78 percent.

Against a total of 19,670 tests, the positivity rate was 1.35 percent.

Of the deceased yesterday, two were male and four were female.

Two aged between 51 and 60 years while four were between 61 and 70.

In the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, a total of 257 Covid-19 patients have recovered from their illnesses, raising the total number of recovered patients to 1,537,224. The recovery rate was 97.71 percent.

On March 8 last year, the DGHS reported the first three cases of Covid-19 in the country.

Since then, the country witnessed two waves of coronavirus transmission.

Fuel price hike

FROM PAGE 1

balance it?" she said, asking all to consider it.

KHALEDA'S TREATMENT

The PM said she has given enough facilities to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia by allowing her to stay in her home and receive medical treatment.

"She [Khaleda] has been allowed to stay in her residence and receive medical treatment by exercising the executive authority I have. The rest is a legal matter," she said, replying to a question if she would take any initiative for the treatment of ailing Khaleda.

"Isn't it enough that Khaleda Zia was allowed to stay in her residence instead of prison and receive treatment there?" questioned the PM.

In a counter question, she asked the journalist whether he would receive a person with a garland who had tried to kill him and rewarded the killers of his family members by giving them jobs in different missions abroad and by not bringing the perpetrators to justice.

Hasina said Khaleda made Col Rashid, a killer of Bangabandhu, the opposition leader in parliament through the February 15 election in 1996, and she also gave accused Khairuzzaman a job in the foreign ministry and sent him to foreign mission as an ambassador.

Khaleda also promoted another killer of Bangabandhu, Pasha posthumously, who was in the army and ensured all retirement and other benefits for his family, she said.

Hasina said after the August 21 grenade attack, Khaleda had remarked that she carried the grenades in her vanity bag. The Awami League was not allowed to discuss the attack in parliament, even for a single day, though 22 people were killed and many others injured.

Before the Kotalipara bomb plot, Khaleda had commented that Hasina can never be the opposition leader, let alone the prime minister. "She thought I would die," said Hasina.

"Even then we are not inhumane [like them]. This is why she has been allowed to stay in residence by applying my executive authority.... I showed humanity for such an inhumane person," she said.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1

improved since she was admitted to the hospital's Coronary Care Unit.

"Her [Khaleda] haemoglobin is fluctuating and blood sugar is still very high with chronic kidney disease and decompensated liver disease. The medical board is trying their best to treat her," AZM Zahid Hossain, Khaleda's personal doctor, told The Daily Star.

He also said the 72-year-old former premier has heart issues along with arthritis and other old-aged complications.

When asked how her health was, Zahid said, "She is under treatment at the CCU. So you understand."

He said the BNP chairperson needed better treatment and she should be sent abroad immediately as the medical board was suggesting.

Khaleda has long being suffering from arthritis, diabetes, as well as dental and eye problems. In April this year, she contracted coronavirus. She recovered while under treatment at home, but as other health complications cropped up, she was admitted to Evercare Hospital on April 27.

When she developed health problems, she was placed in the CCU and remained there for almost two months. She returned home on June 19. Khaleda was admitted to the hospital on Saturday night and moved to the CCU on Sunday, nearly a week after she was discharged from the same healthcare facility.

On October 12, she was admitted to the hospital as her temperature had started fluctuating. At that time, a lump was found in her body and she was in the hospital for around three weeks.

Khaleda was sent to jail on February 8, 2018, in a corruption case. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, she was given temporary release on certain conditions on March 25 last year. The term of her release has been extended four times so far.