

BANGLADESH UPDATE

329

New cases in 24hrs



15,79,325

Total cases



28,028

Deaths



15,44,150

Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

5,320,609

Deaths



270,161,252

Total cases

No need to worry about Omicron

Says health minister, two cricketers doing well

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said that there was no reason to be worried about the Omicron variant of the coronavirus as there was no evident transmission from the two infected cricketers in the country.

"Both the players are doing well. There is no reason to worry about the Omicron variant," he said while addressing an event at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday.

The hospital authorities organised the event marking the inauguration of a newly installed oxygen plant that was donated by India. Indian High Commissioner Vikram Kumar Doraiswami was also present there.

On Saturday, the health minister said two players of Bangladesh women's national cricket team, who tested positive for Covid-19 last week, were infected with the Omicron variant.

He also urged citizens to take Covid-19 vaccines as soon as possible if not received already.

Praising the Indian government for installing the oxygen plant at DMCH, the minister said, "India extended its helping hand during the 1971 war. Both countries will continue cooperation in future."

Speaking at the event, Vikram Kumar Doraiswami said, "India will stand with Bangladesh as a friendly country. India and Bangladesh are like a family."

The oxygen plant that India helped set up at DMCH can produce 960 litres of oxygen per minute, Brig Gen Md Nazmul Haque, director of DMCH.

Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of health services, said, "We have collected 30 oxygen plants like this one and we will get 40 more soon."

Meanwhile, the DGHS reported six deaths due to Covid-19 and 329 new cases in the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

With this, the total number of casualties due to Covid-19 reached 28,028.

An equality in question

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researcher gets the same fund as a junior teacher for a completely different research project," said a teacher of journalism and media studies department, preferring not to be named.

"It may even happen that a lecturer has a very good research proposal and is capable of doing better work... so, the fund should be fixed on the basis of research proposal and topic," said the teacher.

Prof Sheikh Tawhidul Islam, director of JU Institute of Remote Sensing and GIS, told this correspondent, "You can never disburse an average amount of fund among all teachers. It's totally contradictory to the values of research work as all research fields are not equal."

"It is happening because we don't understand the importance of research. Such a practice can in no way fulfil the purpose of research which is to create new knowledge or enhance someone's expertise on a subject through development of scientific theories, concepts and ideas and spreading the knowledge among students," he said.

As her attention was drawn to the JU's fund release, University Grants Commission (UGC) member Prof Dil Afroza Begum said, "There is no scope for giving funds for research this way. There has to be competition and funds should be given on the basis of a proposal's merit."

She, however, said the UGC was not aware about the fund disbursement system in JU. "We will ask the VC about the issue and take necessary steps accordingly, if needed."

Meanwhile, several teachers said the fund handed to teachers was insufficient in many cases. They demanded a hike in the fund allocation for research.

"The university should realise where it should put the money," said a teacher.

FUND DISBURSEMENT

Prof Dr AA Maman of physics department is one of the leading scientists in the country with 417 publications run by prominent research journals across the globe, and 15,000 citations.

He got Tk 75,785 for research work in the fiscal 2020-21.

Each of the 17 other teachers of the department, including four lecturers, received the equal amount after applying for the fund that year, show university documents.

Interestingly, the JU authorities released the same fund for teachers of science and arts faculties, although their fields of research are completely different.

Last year, 380 teachers got the fund -- totalling Tk 2.87 crore -- from the university budget.

In the current fiscal year, the number of teachers nominated for the funds is 381. This time, each recipient will get Tk 1.1 lakh as the university syndicate set aside around Tk 4 crore for this purpose in June.

The university received an annual budget of Tk 266.24 crore this year, show documents. Most of the money comes from the UGC while the rest from JU's own fund.

The situation was slightly different in the fiscal 2019-20. The fund varied from faculty to faculty.

For example, a teacher from the social science faculty got Tk 89,987 while those in the biological faculty were handed Tk 81,928 each.

Tk 86,696 was handed to a teacher from the business faculty.

The year before, the fund was equal for all teachers, irrespective of their faculties and positions.

There are six faculties and four institutes in the university, established in 1970.

According to several teachers, the authorities hardly keep track of whether the research papers are published in the international peer reviewed journals and that most papers end up in the journals of the respective department or journal.

An associate professor, preferring

anonymity, said, "Whenever the university announces the budget every year, all eyes are fixed on the research fund allocation. The teachers expect a rise in the amount every year."

'COMMITTEE NAME ONLY'

Headed by the vice chancellor, a committee named 'Research Fund Allotment Committee' is responsible for the entire process -- starting from evaluating the research proposals to selecting the candidates and disbursing the money.

All faculty deans are the members of the committee.

The process starts with the university authorities posting a notice, asking teachers to submit research proposals, said Prof Mozammel Haque, dean of arts and humanities faculty and one of the members of the committee.

After getting the notice, teachers prepare their proposals and submit them to the registrar office via their respective chairmen and relevant faculty's deans.

Once approved, respective faculties organise seminars where teachers place their papers along with presentations. Then they submit their papers to the university and the authorities distribute the money.

A teacher of the social sciences faculty said, "It's a committee in name only. Because whoever submits a proposal, the committee accepts it."

Asked about the process, Prof Mozammel said, "Now we don't do any evaluation after getting the proposals. A seminar is held at every faculty prior to the submission."

He could not provide any documentation on rejection of any project proposal.

Prof Mozammel said the university authorities used to distribute the research funds under three categories -- A, B, and C -- several years ago.

But then came the question of "fairness" in the process as some teachers with low-quality research proposals would get them granted under 'A' category by using political influence, making the researchers with quality work feel humiliated, he said.

"But as the university authorities started distributing equal funds, the teachers are happy now," he claimed.

Experts think this should not be the practice.

"This process is unfair. It does not ensure fairness," said Prof Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan of Dhaka University's International Relations department.

"Because this fund is intended to inspire researchers, it should be distributed in accordance with their research abilities," he said, referring to the existing practice in JU as the "failure of the university's administrative leadership" to ensure the coordination of the disbursement system.

Dhaka University authorities usually disburse research funds among teachers on the basis of research proposals and evaluation by a committee. The funds are given under two categories: professors and associate professors in the first category while the second one for the assistant professors and lecturers, said Prof Tanzimuddin.

A top official of Jahangirnagar University, on condition of anonymity, said it would be difficult for the JU top authorities to change the allocation system as doing so would make many teachers unhappy.

"The top officials like deans, senate and syndicate members are elected from the votes of the teachers. Making any harsh decision will put an impact on the vote bank.

"Therefore, as long as the election system exists, the top officials will not modify this system. Ultimately, no one wants to become unpopular," he official said.

Asked, JU VC Prof Farzana Islam said, "We will look into the matter soon."

"There should be healthy competition among teachers in terms of research," she said without going into the details.

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6 or MRT Line 6, the elevated rail line

is being constructed between Uttara Sector-3 and Motijheel at the cost of

around Tk 22,000 crore.

Once completed, it will be able to

transport 60,000 people per hour and

would reduce travel time from Uttara to Motijheel from about two hours to only 40 minutes.

A total of 24 trains would be

operating on the route when it would be fully functional.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

MAN Siddique said the construction of a viaduct up to Doyel Chattar in Dhaka University would be finished

within this month and the entire 20.10km viaduct would be complete

within January next year.

He said eight trains have already reached Bangladesh, of which seven are in the depot, while one will arrive at the depot from Mongla today. Two more trains will reach by January.

He added they are conducting different performance tests on the all the trains that reached the depot so far.

After the tests, they would carry out integrity and trial runs without passengers.

"We will complete all tests by September next year and take three months for other preparations to start commercial operations from December 16."

The first phase -- Uttra-Agargaon section -- is 11.73km long and has nine stations.

ABM Atifur Rahman, project

manager (package-8) of DMTC, said the train that was operated between Uttara and Agargaon yesterday was the second train to have reached the depot and was operated by an operator from Delhi Metro Rail Corporation.

The overall progress of the fast-track project was 73 percent till November this year.

The first phase saw 89.88 percent progress and the second phase -- from Agargaon to Motijheel -- 71.82 percent.

The installation of tracks and other equipment, and procurement of cars saw 68.80 percent progress, according to the project's monthly report.

The authorities have already started working to extend the line up to the Kamalapur Railway Station.

TeleTalk launches 5G service

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is introducing the service on an experimental basis in six areas in the country -- the Prime Minister's Office, Parliament, Secretariat, Bangabandhu Museum on Dhanmondi 32, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's birth place in Gopalganj's Tungipara, and the National Martyrs' Memorial in Savar.

The network will be rolled out at the district level gradually and TeleTalk has a plan to deploy 200 5G sites by next year.

Sajeeb Ahmed Wazed, the prime minister's ICT affairs adviser, inaugurated the 5G service virtually as chief guest.

Mustafa Jabbar, minister for posts and telecommunications, was present as the special guest of the programme, which was chaired by lawmaker AKM Rahamutullah, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the telecom ministry.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also gave video message at the programme.

However, private operators, including Grameenphone and Banglalink, are expected to roll out the 5G network next year after the auction for spectrum in March.

Through 5G connectivity, Bangladesh joins more than 60 other countries that availed the technology.

It promises to provide data speed at least 20 times faster than 4G and underpins the great advances of the next era, from self-driving cars and augmented reality to smart cities and artificial intelligence, according to Reuters.

The technology is expected to bring higher-quality streaming and the ability to livestream to bigger audiences.

"Today, we are only taking the first step towards 5G. There is still a long way to go..." said Md Shahab Uddin, managing director of TeleTalk

Bangladesh Limited.

For more than 21 years, Huawei has been playing a responsible role as one of the family members of Bangladesh's ICT ecosystem, said Zhang Zhengjun, chief executive officer of Huawei Bangladesh.

"We have always been there to support our customers' needs with the key vision of building a fully connected, intelligent Bangladesh. Huawei Bangladesh is extremely proud to be a part and partner of this historic moment when Bangladesh is going to enter the 5G era."

Huawei has been playing an instrumental role in deploying 5G technology around the world, said Simon Lin, president of the Asia Pacific region of Huawei.

"Bangladesh, I believe, will also get benefited from our state-of-the-art technology for expediting the adoption of 5G technology."

People ready to make ours

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Bangladesh would be a developed country in 2041. The biggest thing is that our soldiers for building Bangladesh: Beneficiaries are All People).

DIGITAL DEVICE EXPORT

The PM said if digital devices can be produced and exported properly, it may exceed all other sectors, including RMG, in earning foreign currency.

Noting that now the garment export is the biggest source of foreign currency, she said her government has a target to promote production and export of digital devices and create the scope for the meritorious students to flourish their talents in this sector.

"I think if we can produce and export these digital devices, it'll surpass all sectors," she said, adding that the government has a target to increase the export earnings to \$5 billion in the digital device sector by 2025.

Talking about the Awami League's electoral pledge to build Digital Bangladesh, Hasina said she is no longer worried about the fulfilment of her Vision-2041 of turning Bangladesh into a developed and prosperous country since many youths received the awards and now got the scope to flourish their talents.

"I can say from today I don't have to worry anymore... we've already advanced far in the way to build a technology and knowledge-based society. Inshallah, Bangladesh will move forward," she said.

"Soldiers are being created to take the country forward," she said, extending her sincere thanks to her ICT Affairs Adviser Sajeeb Wazed Joy, Palak and all other concerned in this regard.

Hasina said the services that her

government wanted to provide the people with the help of technology are rendered in Bangladesh. "It has been possible to reach this service from our city corporations to the very grassroots level of a village," she said.

The PM said her government reduced the price of internet bandwidth to less than Tk 400, which was Tk 78,000 during the BNP government. "We're going to introduce 5G," she said.

Mentioning that some 18.13 crore mobile SIM are used in Bangladesh alongside 13 crore internet users, Hasina said internet services are available in almost