

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



297

New cases in 24hrs



15,80,302

Total cases



28,038

Deaths



15,44,933

Recoveries

**GLOBAL UPDATE**



5,340,866

Deaths



271,944,764

Total cases

## COVID BOOSTER Vaccination to begin in 7-10 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will start administering Covid-19 booster shots in the next seven to 10 days, Health Minister Zahid Maleque announced yesterday.

He made the announcement at an event in the capital while receiving over 80 lakh doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid vaccine given by Japan and the UK under the Covax programme.

On Monday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina instructed the authorities concerned to prepare for administering the booster shots.

The World Health Organisation (WHO), however, has urged countries to vaccinate the unvaccinated population first before giving out booster doses.

Bangladesh has so far fully vaccinated 25.46 percent of its population, shows government data. The target is to inoculate 80 percent of the population.

At yesterday's event, the health minister said the government has a stock of four crore doses of Covid vaccines and another 1-1.5 crore people will be jabbed by the year-end.

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Naoki Ito handed 40.08 lakh doses and British High Commissioner in Dhaka Robert Chatterton Dickson 40.55 lakh doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine to the minister.

Health ministry's Senior Secretary Lokman Hossain Miah, Country Representative of Unicef Sheldon Yett and officials from the ministry and the embassies concerned were present in the event held at State Guest House Padma.

## Vaccines may be less effective against Omicron

Warns WHO, sees 'unprecedented' spread of the variant across globe

AGENCIES

The World Health Organization yesterday said preliminary evidence indicated that Covid-19 vaccines might be less effective against infection and transmission linked to the Omicron coronavirus variant, a day after a major US study said all three US-authorized vaccines appear to be significantly less protective against the variant.

The warning comes as the WHO on Tuesday warned Omicron was spreading at an unprecedented rate and urged countries to act. The WHO said the variant also carries a higher risk of reinfection.

The US study from researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), Harvard and MIT that has not yet been peer reviewed tested blood from people who received the Moderna, Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines against a pseudovirus engineered to resemble the Omicron variant.

It showed fully vaccinated people do not carry enough antibodies to prevent the new variant, but a booster dose restores most of the protection.

The WHO, in its weekly epidemiological update, said that more data was needed to better understand the extent to which Omicron may evade immunity derived from either vaccines or previous infection.

Omicron, first detected by South Africa and reported to the WHO on November 24, has a large number of mutations, setting alarm bells ringing since its discovery.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters the strain had been reported in 77 countries and "probably" spread to most nations undetected "at a rate we have not seen with any previous variant".

Omicron now accounts for around three percent of cases in the United States, a figure that is expected to rise rapidly as has been seen in other countries.

The United States is the nation hit hardest by the pandemic, and it crossed 800,000 known Covid-19 deaths on Tuesday, according to a Johns Hopkins University tracker.

Although Britain on Monday confirmed what is thought to be the world's first Omicron death, there is no proof yet that the variant causes more severe illness.

WHO expert Bruce Aylward strenuously warned against "jumping to a conclusion that this is a mild disease".

"We could be setting ourselves up for a very dangerous situation."

Europe is the global coronavirus hotspot, recording 62 percent of the world's total cases in the past seven days, while the five countries with the world's highest infection rates are all European.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen yesterday warned the Omicron variant of Covid-19 could become dominant in Europe next month, but said her 27-nation bloc had ample vaccines to fight the pandemic.



Students of Dhaka University's dance department demonstrating in front of the Raju Memorial sculpture, demanding justice for Elma Chowdhury Meghla, who they allege was killed in a domestic violence incident. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Mind fearless, head held high

FROM PAGE 1

But 50 years after its violent birth, Bangladesh has become a development paragon, representing a success story in most aspects.

From incredible economic growth, vast strides in education and public health to major contributions in culture and sports, Bangladesh has transformed itself into not just a leader amongst South Asia countries, but a truly global player.

Today, the nation is celebrating its independence, which was made possible by its charismatic leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who united the people in the epic struggle for freedom.

It was Bangabandhu who instilled the lust for freedom amongst the people of this land and the need to fight for it. About three million Bengalees were killed while 10 million refugees escaped systematic mass killings, rapes, lootings and arsons, and took shelter in India. India's supporting role was vital in winning independence.

When Bangabandhu took over the reins of the country, he was able to restore some stability. He ensured an exemplary constitution within nine months.

But before he could take the country towards realising the dreams of a "Sonar Bangla", Bangabandhu, along with most of his family members, was brutally assassinated in 1975.

The country then experienced

turmoil in the form of assassinations, coups, counter-coups and military rule. After a long period of instability and misrule, democracy was restored in the country through parliamentary elections in 1991.

Thirty years down the line, the country made spectacular economic and social progress despite unfavourable circumstances and constraints on resources.

A young workforce, higher participation by women in the labour force coupled with remittances by migrant workers, and spread of microfinance have played a significant role in the country's development.

Today the nation has much to celebrate.

With the average economic growth increasing steadily every decade since 1980, it has consistently outperformed its South Asian neighbours and is now on her way to becoming a middle-income country with millions having risen out of poverty.

The poverty rate had fallen to less than 20 percent before the pandemic from as high as 82 percent in the 1970s.

Now, Bangladesh's GDP per capita stands at \$2,227.

The country struggled to feed its 7.5 crore people five decades ago. Now, it is self-sufficient in food production even though the population has more than doubled.

Aid-dependence significantly declined from 14 percent of the GDP in

the 70s to less than 1.5 percent now.

Life expectancy is 72 years, much higher than neighbouring Pakistan and India.

With policy support of the government, Bangladesh has become a key supplier of readymade garments worldwide. This industry alone brings in about \$34 billion a year and employs millions, the lion share of which are women.

Another driver of the economy was manpower export. Around 10 million Bangladeshis are abroad seeking their fortune in countries in need of workers.

A considerable change has also come in infrastructure.

Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in terms of enhancing access and gender equality in primary and secondary education.

The country has met all three conditions for graduating from the grouping of the least-developed countries twice. The United Nations Committee for Development Policy has already recommended the country's graduation in 2026.

As Bangladesh celebrates the Golden Jubilee of Independence, it aims to achieve the status of a developed nation, under the leadership of Bangabandhu's daughter Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, by 2041.

This 50th year of victory has come with an added zeal as the nation is also celebrating the birth centenary of its founding father.

## A mother's doors never shut

FROM PAGE 1

Faruk never returned home. But Kulsum never forgot her son's request to keep the door open.

In a tin-roofed house near Government Women's College in the city, she still waits for her son.

"My mother never shuts the door or lets any of us do so as she thinks he [Faruk] would return someday. She felt that he might go away if he finds the door closed," Salma Rahman Happy, younger sister of Faruk, told The Daily Star.

Kulsum, now in her mid-90s, fell seriously ill three years ago. Ever since, she sometimes loses her normal sense, and utters Faruk's name, said Salma. "After she fell ill, our family is following what she has done all these years... We keep the door open," she said.

Second among eight siblings, Faruk was a valiant freedom fighter, who joined Chhatra League in 1966. The following year, he was elected president of Pirojpur Chhatra League.

On March 23, 1971, Faruk raised the national flag on behalf of Chhatra Sangram Parishad at the Shaheed Minar ground. He led the group who looted arms and ammunition from



government Malkhana (storeroom) on April 24, according to his family members.

As the war proceeded, the Pakistan occupational army entered Pirojpur on May 3 and started mass killing in Hular Hat, Machimpur and Krishnanagar villages. Soon they issued an arrest warrant for Faruk, said Moniruzzaman Monir, a freedom fighter from the district.

Faruk tried to go to India for training. On June 29, a local collaborator named Hanif identified him on a launch dock when he was on his way to Kuriana from Barishal.

The collaborator informed the Pakistan army, who captured him. The next day, Faruk was taken to the Wapda complex in Barishal city where they tortured him to death, said Monir.

The marauding army set up a torture cell and a mass killing ground at the

complex.

Abdul Haque, a freedom fighter who was in Wapda and managed to survive, told Faruk's family members after the war ended about the torture Faruk had endured.

"The Pakistan army found a national flag in my brother's pocket. They tied the flag to an iron rod and asked him to say 'Pakistan Zindabad'. My brother shouted 'Joy Bangla' instead," said Salma.

The army then pierced the iron rod in his head and charged him with bayonets. After killing him, they hung the body from a tree for three days, she said.

When Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman went to Pirojpur in 1973, he spoke about Faruk's bravery and the brutal killing, said Salma.

Bangabandhu also took off his coat and put it on their father, she added.

Faruk's bravery and sacrifice is a legend in the district, but that hardly had any effect on his mother.

"My mother has been holding a firm belief that my brother would return one day and so she had been keeping the door open. We will continue to do so as long as she is with us," said Salma.

## Cooking stove the killer

FROM PAGE 1

of cooking, according to the Health Effects Institute (HEI) study styled "Global Burden of Disease-Major Air Pollution Sources." The study report is scheduled to be released today.

Earlier, the HEI's State of Global Air survey said particulate matter (PM) 2.5 is the sixth highest risk factor for deaths globally, accounting for nearly four million deaths in 2019.

The burning of solid biofuels, such as wood for indoor heating and cooking, is a major source of PM 2.5, accounting for an additional 740,000 deaths, especially across South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the study said.

The study also finds that 770,000 deaths could have been prevented if people stop using solid fossil fuels like coal.

It said fossil fuel combustion, a major source of air pollution, contributed to more than one million deaths globally in 2017, more than 27 percent of all deaths from outdoor PM 2.5.

The report also said coal combustion

alone was responsible for half of those deaths, with natural gas and oil combustion accounting for the other half.

The study team, led by Erin McDuffie and Randall Martin of Washington University in St Louis, USA, and Michael Brauer at the University of British Columbia in Canada, provide the first-ever comprehensive global analysis estimating major sources of air pollution for every country in the world.

The new report noted that major sources of PM 2.5 can vary by country and region, and different parts of the world were impacted by air pollution in different ways.

While fossil fuel combustion made up most of the PM 2.5 across the industrialised nations of the global north, windblown dust was a major source of PM 2.5 in African countries.

Dr Pallavi Pant, senior scientist of HEI, said, "To improve air quality across South Asia, it is important to consider the major sectors that are contributing

to PM2.5 including energy production, residential cooking and heating, industries, transportation, waste etc., and design targeted measures to reduce emissions at source."

Abdus Salam, an air quality expert and a professor of the Department of Chemistry at Dhaka University, said cooking is one of the key concerns of indoor air pollution especially in rural areas as biomass is used widely.

"But coal is not largely used in cooking in Bangladesh," he said, adding that cooking behaviour should be changed to improve the situation.

He also said dust was another important PM 2.5 contributor that originated from construction activities, streets, as well as windblown particles.

The HEI is an independent, non-profit research institute funded jointly by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, industry, foundations, and development banks to provide credible, high-quality science on air pollution and health for air quality decisions.

## Not certain for all

FROM PAGE 1

Even though there is only about two weeks' time left, Narayan and NCTB member (Textbook) Prof Farhadul Islam do not see anything to worry about.

"We will be able to send all books,"

Narayan said.

**DELAYS IN TENDER, WORK ORDERS**

Printers are not so optimistic.

"We usually get work orders in July-August... But this year, we got 84 days' time to deliver textbooks of class-VIII-IX from November 9 [when the work orders were issued]," Textbook Printers and Marketing Association President Tofayel Khan told The Daily Star.

He said retendering process of pre-primary books was completed on December 8. "Winners are yet to get work orders."

"We are in a tough spot. According to our estimates, around 70 percent secondary textbooks will reach upazilas by January 1," Tofayel said.

However, NCTB Chairman Narayan said, "If you have 70 or 84 days to

deliver the books, it does not mean you will deliver all the textbooks on the last day of the deadline. You will need to deliver the books in phases. And the printers are doing that. We will get almost all books by December 31."

He said work orders for pre-primary textbooks would be issued soon. "They usually get 25 days' time to deliver. But this time we are likely to give them 10 days' time."

"The matter of delivering the pre-primary books is not a concern as these books are usually not given to students to take home. They are usually kept at schools," Narayan said.

NCTB sources said they needed to float fresh tender for pre-primary textbooks as there were some issues with papers for textbooks due to the pandemic.

Tender process for secondary textbooks was also delayed due to the pandemic. "During the initial tender, the printers unitedly quoted a rate 35 percent higher than that estimated. In the fresh tender, we got quotes 26

percent less than estimated," said Prof Farhadul.

The government is set to distribute over 34.70 crore textbooks to over 4.17 crore pre-primary, primary and secondary students.

Nearly Tk 1,100 crore will be spent on this.

**SUCCESS**

Narayan, and educationist and former NCTB member Inamul Haque Siddiki said the government has been successful in delivering almost all the textbooks to students on New Year's day since 2010, when the government started giving free primary and secondary textbooks.

Since 1991, primary students were getting half the textbooks free.

The government distributed 365.84 crore free textbooks between 2010 and 2021, earning praise from home and abroad.

The success of the distribution of free textbooks has led to significant improvements in enrolment in primary and secondary levels, as well as a decrease in dropouts, said Inamul.

বাংলাদেশের স্বাধীনতা ৫০ বছরে

বিজয়ের ৫০ বছরে

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