



Mercury may drop over the next two days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The temperature at night may fall further in the next two days, said a government weather bulletin.

Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) yesterday came up with the weather forecast in its two-day weather outlook.

The bulletin was released at 6:00pm last evening.

The bulletin said, "Night temperature may fall by one to three degrees Celsius and day temperature may rise by one to two degrees Celsius over the country."

"Weather may remain mainly dry with the temporary partly cloudy sky over the country."

The bulletin also said, "Moderate to thick fog may occur over the river basins and light to moderate fog may occur elsewhere over the country during midnight to morning."

Yesterday's lowest temperature was recorded at 8.9 degrees Celsius at Tetulia in Panchagarh.



A bus carrying passengers at full capacity, ignoring the government's January 10 directive for all public transport to operate at half capacity. Most of the buses in the capital violated the restriction yesterday -- the first day of the order coming into effect. The photo was taken in front of the National Press Club.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

Follow curbs or brace for a disaster

Warns health minister

OUR CORRESPONDENT, MANIKGANJ

There has been an alarming rise in Covid-19 transmission and the situation will be disastrous if the government's 11-point restriction is not followed, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said yesterday.

"The government is not imposing a lockdown as it causes the country to suffer," he said while inaugurating a CT-scan machine and a dialysis unit at Manikganj Sadar Hospital yesterday.

He made the comment a day after Covid cases crossed the 4,000 mark -- the highest since August 26 last year.

According to the health officials, the latest spike is caused by the highly-transmissible Omicron variant.

Health guidelines are not being observed properly in many places, including the Dhaka International Trade Fair, Maleque said, adding, "This is a matter of concern... There is no substitute for wearing masks. We have to wear masks if we want to avoid contracting the disease."

Urging everyone to get vaccinated, he said, "Everyone needs to be inoculated. We have no shortage of vaccines, and around 14.25 crore people, including 70 lakh schoolchildren, have already been jabbed."

The government directives, in effect from last Thursday, include: People must wear masks at all public places, including at shops, shopping malls and restaurants; vaccination certificates must be shown at restaurants or hotels; trains, buses and launches must operate at half capacity; and all kinds of social, political, religious gatherings and rallies will remain suspended till further notice.

Buses disobey govt order

Rail complies with the instruction to ply at half capacity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bus operators blatantly ignored the government directive to operate at half capacity yesterday -- the first day of the order coming into effect.

Many buses in the capital were seen with standing passengers, while most of the staffers disregarded health rules, including the directive to wear masks inside public transport.

Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) buses were also seen plying with standing passengers -- clearly violating government restrictions.

Although transport operators said they were operating buses at full capacity after "getting verbal directives" from the authorities concerned, no such order was issued till last night.

Launch operators operated as usual, meaning the cabinet division's directives on half-capacity operation has not yet been enforced in the water transport sector as well.

Only Bangladesh Railway (BR), the state-run transport agency, yesterday started carrying passengers at half capacity and tried to maintain health safety guidelines inside the trains.

On January 10, the cabinet division issued an 11-point directive, including one that says all public transport must operate at half capacity, to curb the recent rise in Covid-19 transmission.

On Wednesday, transport leaders at a meeting with Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) demanded that the government change its decision and allow them to operate at full capacity.

However, on Wednesday, BRTA reiterated the order that from yesterday (Saturday) all public transport will have to run at half capacity.

But Dhaka Road Transport Owners' Association on Thursday told its members to operate their

vehicles at full capacity, saying the ministry concerned has "verbally" informed them that the government would allow it.

Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners' Association, another major association of bus owners who operate on inter-district routes, also informed it members to operate their vehicles at full capacity.

"Inter-district buses plied at full capacity... Enforcing half capacity operation for public transports while keeping everything [businesses and workplaces] open will create havoc," a top leader of the association told The Daily Star yesterday.

Speaking to this correspondent, a BRTC bus staffer said, "The government had earlier issued a directive to carry passenger of half capacity but that was not approved later. So, we are carrying passengers as usual."

BRTC Chairman Tazul Islam could not be reached over phone for comments.

Khandaker Enayet Ullah, general secretary of Dhaka Road Transport Owners' Association, said they have operated buses with full capacity following a "verbal decision" of the ministry concerned.

About standing passengers and violations of health safety guidelines, he said BRTA mobile courts are supposed to take action against the those who violate the rules.

Meanwhile, BIWTA has not fixed any date from when launch owners would start following the restrictions and instead wrote to the shipping ministry to change the decision of operating at half capacity.

"Launches were operating as usual. We have given priority to maintaining health safety guidelines," Zainal Abedin, joint director of BIWTA at Sadarghat said.

ROHINGYA GENOCIDE CASE

Hearings to start from Feb 21 at World Court

REUTERS, DAKAR/THE HAGUE

Representatives of Myanmar's junta are expected to challenge the jurisdiction of the World Court to hear allegations the country committed genocide against its Rohingya minority in a fresh round of hearings from Feb 21, the attorney general of Gambia, which brought the case, told Reuters on Friday.

"A hybrid hearing (is) set to commence on the 21st of February, 2022," Gambian Attorney General Dawda Jallow said.

He added that Aung San Suu Kyi, who led Myanmar's defence at the first public hearings in 2019 but has since been deposed by the military, had been formally replaced as its top representative in the case.

A hybrid hearing is a procedure where some of the participants are present in person and others participate online due to Covid-19 measures.

More than 730,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar after a military-led crackdown in 2017, and were forced into camps across the border in Bangladesh. UN investigators concluded that the military campaign had been executed with "genocidal intent".

Since the February 1 coup last year, the military government has been fighting for international recognition and could be eager for the opportunity to show themselves as Myanmar's legitimate representatives at the UN's top court.

The next step in ICJ proceedings is Myanmar's challenge to the jurisdiction of the court.

DU TEACHER MURDER

Key accused placed on a 3-day remand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, GAZIPUR

A Gazipur court yesterday placed the key accused on a three-day remand in the Sayeda Ghaffar Khaleque murder case.

Gazipur Metropolitan Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Mehedi Pavel Sweet passed the order.

Accused Anwarul Islam, 25, was an assistant mason who worked at the under-construction building owned by the victim in Gazipur.

Fahim Azad, assistant commissioner (prosecution) of Gazipur Metropolitan Police, said police produced Anwarul before the court seeking a 10-day remand for him. "After a hearing, the court placed him on a three-day remand."

Sayeda Ghaffar was a professor of Dhaka University's Institute of Nutrition and Food Science. She retired in 2016. Her husband Kibria Ul Khaleque was also a DU teacher.

Contacted, the victim's son Sayeed Ifthekhar Bin Jahir said, "Construction work of our new building was going on at the Dhaka University Teachers' Housing Project in Kashimpur and my mother used to live in a rented home nearby to look after it."

"She went missing on the evening January 12 [Wednesday]. That night, we filed a general diary with Kashimpur Police Station."

On Friday morning, police arrested Anwarul, 25, from Gaibandha.

"As per Anwarul's confessional statement,

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Facebook faces \$3.2b UK class action over market dominance

REUTERS, LONDON

Social media giant Facebook, now known as Meta Platforms, faces a 2.3 billion pound plus (\$3.2 billion plus) class action in Britain over allegations it abused its market dominance by exploiting the personal data of 44 million users.

Liza Lovdahl Gormsen, a senior adviser to Britain's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) watchdog and a competition law academic, said she was bringing the case on behalf of people in Britain who had used Facebook between 2015 and 2019.

The lawsuit, which will be heard by London's Competition Appeal Tribunal, alleges Facebook made billions of pounds by imposing unfair terms and conditions that demanded consumers surrender valuable personal data to access the network.

Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, the law firm representing Lovdahl Gormsen, has

notified Facebook of the claim.

Facebook said people used its services because it delivered value for them and "they have meaningful control of what information they share on Meta's platforms and who with."

"In the 17 years since it was created, Facebook became the sole social network in the UK where you could be sure to connect with friends and family in one place," Lovdahl Gormsen said.

"Yet, there was a dark side to Facebook; it abused its market dominance to impose unfair terms and conditions on ordinary Britons, giving it the power to exploit their personal data."

Lovdahl Gormsen alleges Facebook collected data within its platform and through mechanisms like the Facebook Pixel, allowing it to build an "all-seeing picture" of Internet usage and generate valuable, deep data profiles of users.



The construction work for Dhaka's first elevated expressway continues in full swing as the authorities concerned aim to deliver a portion of the project, from the airport to Tejgaon, by December 2022. The photo was taken in Banani recently.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ