

COVID 'IMMUNITY'

90pc of world has it: WHO

Warns of new variants

AFP, Geneva

The WHO estimated Friday that 90 percent of the world population now had some resistance to Covid-19, but warned that a troubling new variant could still emerge.

Gaps in vigilance were leaving the door open for a new virus variant to appear and overtake the globally dominant Omicron, said World Health Organization director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"WHO estimates that at least 90 percent of the world's population now has some level of immunity to SARS-CoV-2, due to prior infection or vaccination," said Tedros, referring to the virus that causes Covid-19 disease.

"We are much closer to being able to say that the emergency phase of the pandemic is over — but we're not there yet," he told reporters.

Countries have reported 6.6 million deaths to the WHO, from nearly 640 million registered cases, the true numbers are feared to be much higher.

NUKE ARMS CONTROL US wants talks with Russia

AFP, Washington

The United States said Friday it was disappointed that Russia had postponed talks on nuclear arms control, voicing willingness to sit down despite high tensions over the Ukraine war.

Russia and the United States were set to meet from November 29 in Cairo on New START, the last major disarmament treaty between the world's two largest nuclear powers, in what would have marked rare contact since the February invasion of Ukraine.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said Russia "abruptly and unilaterally" postponed the week-long meeting and that any suggestion the US was to blame was "entirely false."

Russia's foreign ministry on Tuesday blamed US "toxicity and animosity" for the postponement of the talks and did not give a new date.

Signed in 2010 during a warmer period of relations, New START restricted Russia and the United States to a maximum of 1,550 deployed strategic nuclear warheads each — a reduction of nearly 30 percent from the previous limit set in 2002.



People wait in a long queue to be tested for Covid-19 coronavirus at an open nucleic acid testing site as many testing stations are shut down in Beijing, yesterday. Beijing residents yesterday cheered the removal of Covid-19 testing booths while Shenzhen said it would no longer require commuters to present test results to travel, as an easing of China's virus curbs gathered pace. PHOTO: AFP

Oil price cap will destroy Russia's economy

Says Ukraine as West agree \$60 per barrel cap for Russian oil

AGENCIES

Ukraine yesterday welcomed a \$60 price cap on Russian oil agreed by the EU, G7 and Australia, saying it would "destroy" Russia's economy.

The price cap, previously negotiated on a political level between the G7 group of wealthy democracies and the European Union, will come into effect with an EU embargo on Russian crude oil from Monday.

Poland had refused to back the price cap plan over concerns the ceiling was too high, before its ambassador to the EU confirmed Warsaw's agreement on Friday evening.

The embargo will prevent shipments of Russian crude by tanker vessel to the EU, which account for two thirds of imports, potentially depriving Russia's war chest of billions of euros.

"We always achieve our goal and Russia's economy will be destroyed, and it will pay and be responsible for all its crimes," Ukraine's presidential chief of staff Andriy Yermak said on Saturday on Telegram.

But a cap of "\$30 would have destroyed it more quickly," he added.

The G7 said it was delivering on its vow "to prevent Russia from profiting from its war of

aggression against Ukraine, to support stability in global energy markets and to minimise negative economic spillovers of Russia's war of aggression."

The White House described the deal as "welcome news", saying a price cap will help limit Russian President Vladimir Putin's ability to fund the Kremlin's "war machine".

However, the Kremlin yesterday said Russia "will not accept" the price cap.

TASS quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying Moscow had prepared for the price cap and was analysing it.

After suffering humiliating defeats during what has become the largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II, Russia began targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure in October, causing sweeping blackouts.

The Kremlin also indicated Moscow was in no mood for talks over Ukraine, after US President Joe Biden said he would be willing to sit down with Putin if the Russian leader truly wanted to end the fighting.

The White House, meanwhile, sought to pour water on the idea of talks as well on Friday, saying Biden currently has "no intention" of sitting down with Putin.



MYANMAR CRISIS 7 students sentenced to death: UN

AFP, Bangkok

The Myanmar junta handed out at least seven more death sentences this week, taking the tally of those on death row to 139, according to the United Nations.

Myanmar has been in chaos since Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government was toppled in a military coup in February 2021, ending the southeast Asian nation's brief period of democracy.

At least seven male university students were sentenced to death by a military court behind closed doors on Wednesday, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said in a statement, accusing Myanmar of using death sentences as a political tool to crush opposition. Local media reports said the university students were accused of involvement in a bank shooting.

Gas price hike

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In the keynote speech, Prof M Tamim, energy expert, said the country would need \$20.25 billion to import primary fuel for power generation by 2030. "But we need to forecast the demand properly and review the long-term plans every two years."

Energy expert Badrul Imam said it was good that the country was reducing electricity production from gas. Now it is 50 percent,

which was earlier 90 percent, he said.

"It is not true that gas reserve in our country is not enough," he added.

FERB President Shamim Jahangir presided over the seminar held in the city while Senior Secretary for the Energy and Mineral Resources Division Mahbub Hossain, Power Division Secretary Habibur Rahman, and Director General of Power Cell Mohammad Hossain also spoke.

AL won't sit idle

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University unit Chhatra League held at the base of Aparajeyo Bangla.

"They [BNP] claim that there will be no untoward incident. None but them will create untoward situation by carrying out arson attacks, bringing sticks and bombs. That is the reason why Paltan is their favourite spot," he said.

He also said that the BNP do not like Suhrawardy Udyan because the party does not believe in the spirit of the Liberation War.

"Today, I heard that BNP activists have come to the rally venue with bed-pillows, blankets and mosquito coils. Why? we did not shut down the transportation. I requested the transport leaders, and they assured me that they would keep their word," said the AL general

secretary. Quader said, "I know that after December 10 you will declare blockade programme, you will incite arson, terrorism. Shall we remain silent?"

Criticising a section of the media, he said, "Some media are like their [BNP] friends, they don't publish our news. This is such a big gathering, but you would not see any pictures of it. Had Mirza Fakhrul stood here and gave a speech, the whole picture would have appeared in some media."

Around two thousand leaders and activists of DU's 17 hall units started to throng the council venue after lunch.

At the council, he declared that committees of Dhaka metropolitan north, south, DU and central units will be declared together.

Pele moved

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re-evaluate his treatment for colon cancer on Tuesday and was later diagnosed with a respiratory infection.

"The medical staff diagnosed a respiratory infection, which has been treated with antibiotics. His response has been good and the patient, who is in the regular room, is stable with better healthy condition," the hospital said in a statement. "The former player still be hospitalized in the next days to maintain the treatment."

Pele took to social media on Thursday night to thank his supporters for their well wishes during his fight against cancer. He had a tumor removed from his colon in September 2021.

"Friends, I am at the hospital making my monthly visit," Pele wrote

on Instagram with a photo of a "get well soon" message displayed on buildings at the World Cup in Qatar.

"It's always nice to receive positive messages like this. Thanks to Qatar for everyone who sends me good vibes!"

Locked up

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On the day of her arrest, Bushra was placed on a five-day remand for interrogation after she was produced before a Dhaka court with a seven-day remand prayer.

AKM Habibur Rahman Chinnu, a lawyer for Bushra, said he sought her bail on November 16 but the court rejected it.

"The court on that day said that it is a murder case which is now under investigation," the lawyer said.

Family waits for closure with no hope in sight

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department, said he would be back the next day after finishing his exam. He never returned.

Then on November 7, his decomposed body was recovered from the Shitalakkhya in Narayanganj's Siddhirganj on November 7.

Fardin's autopsy suggests he was murdered. But a month on, there is no visible progress in the investigation, cruelly depriving the family of closure.

Nooruddin is at a loss over why someone would want to kill his meritorious son, who was a voracious reader.

"His wish was that at the time of death he would have only one identity — a reader. When I returned home from outside, my two younger sons would look for food in the bag. But Fardin would look for books and magazines instead. He would have been very upset if he didn't find books in my bag."

Fardin also loved maths, children and laughter and liked hardworking and thoughtful people.

"Even after the death of such a boy, I do not know why they spread false information."

Law enforcement forces also gave such information without proof.

"That is a big surprise...and some media are publishing it without

verification which is very painful. They are killing a family who is already dead. We lost our loved one and now they are stabbing us from behind."

It seems the investigation is stuck somewhere, Nooruddin said.

"We usually see that the main investigating agency takes the lead. But here, it's different. The shadow investigators are more vocal, which is surprising. They gave confusing information 24 hours after the body's recovery. Now they can't come with any concrete proof."

The two agencies also gave contradicting statements, he said, adding that the conduct of Buett authorities and teachers also surprised him.

"They are not raising voices to seek justice for my son, for their student. They don't know where the investigation is heading. The Buett authorities didn't even find it necessary to visit a bereaved family's home. When students can hold rallies, the teachers turned completely mute."

Nooruddin is still hopeful.

"I want to keep faith in our law enforcement agencies as they have some commendable record of cracking hard cases. But they should not confuse people with information that lacks credibility."

Until then, there would be no closure for Nooruddin and his wife Farhana Yasmin, both of whom had big dreams and hopes pinned on their firstborn.

"From my name, I put Noor to his name. Noor means light. We had thought that he would spread the light with his knowledge and wisdom and become an asset to the country. He was on the right track. But then this thing happened."

Nooruddin left his government job and pursued journalism as his profession. His wife Farhana Yasmin is a housewife. The couple had a dream that their three sons would change the face of the low-income family and soon their days of trouble are coming to an end.

To fulfil the dream, the family rented a house in Konpara of Demra — even though he owned a house in Narayanganj — to provide better education to his sons.

Fardin used to study on his own routine from the fourth grade. He would go to Bishwo Shahitto Kendro to read books from sixth grade and started giving tuition from class IX.

"Because of low income, we could not take care of him. Fardin actually made himself. He was a fighter, an indomitable genius, adaptable to any situation... Now, my most wonderful son is no more."

Noab pleads with govt to save newspapers

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hike in prices of different commodities including those needed for newspapers in such a way that this service sector has fallen flat.

"Although the price of newspapers increased a few days ago, the situation had not improved. It costs Tk 22 to create each copy of a newspaper. But the selling price is Tk 12, but 35 percent of it goes to the hawkers. [Newspapers] try to fill the gap with [revenues] from advertisements."

But for a vast majority of the newspapers, it is impossible to cope

with the difference between the production cost and selling price, it said.

"In this crisis period as well during the coronavirus pandemic, as a service industry, the newspapers did not get any declared incentives. Different taxes worsened the situation."

Moreover, different government institutions owe newspapers about Tk 100 crore for adverts and are not paying despite repeated reminders, it said.

"Noab has long been calling for reduction or abolition of

different types of VAT and taxes. Considering the overall situation, now the government has to take the responsibility to save the ailing industry. Otherwise, hundreds of thousands of journalists and other employees involved in the traditional profession will become unemployed, and finally, this service industry known as 'the fourth estate' will cease to exist in this country."

"The Noab expects the government's kind regards in the matter."

Economic crisis is not war driven

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current account balance as imports fell. Despite that, the reserves are depleting due to legacy payments.

"Some people are saying that Bangladesh will be like Pakistan and Sri Lanka as debt servicing will rise in 2025 to 2027. But, our dollar income also will rise then. It is an absurd argument," Rahman added.

Many a crisis has been created for rumours, said Ahmad Kaikaus, principal secretary of the prime minister.

For instance, a rumour was spread that banks do not have enough funds. This prompted the general public to withdraw about Tk 50,000 crore from the banking system.

Later, when people saw that the banking sector is able to provide funds, they are depositing the money back, Kaikaus added.

Bangladesh is still a domestic demand-driven economy, so the cost of doing business needs to be brought down and the interest rate adjusted, said Mustafizur Rahman, a

distinguished fellow of the CPD.

"Institutionalisation and good governance would be much more important now than before," he said, while criticising the government's decisions to allow four directors from the same family on a bank's board instead of two previously as well as increase their tenures from six to nine years.

He also criticised the government's move to bring back black money from abroad.

"Who prescribed it? These are not logically, morally, politically and economically justifiable," he added.

Defaulted loans are a serious problem for the banking sector, so the banks should work on bringing the volume down, said Mashhur Rahman, economic affairs adviser to the prime minister.

Though the economy recovered well from the pandemic, the industries are still suffering for gas shortage, said Md Jashim Uddin, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, adding

Govt having sleepless nights

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now using two "weapons" against the BNP to stop its movement — militancy and arson.

He said the government "creates militants and uses them against the BNP" whenever needed.

"We don't carry out arson attacks. You [government] do those things and blame it on the BNP."

The BNP faced criticism at home and abroad for arson attacks and violence centering the 2014 national election. Many people were burnt alive during that time.

Fakhrul asked police officials not to carry out any illegal orders of the "unelected" government as the police personnel are government employees and their salaries and other benefits are paid by taxpayers.

He said the people's backs were against the wall. He alleged that the ruling Awami League men were looting money in the name of mega projects.

Referring to media reports, he said the ruling party men have siphoned

off Tk 19 lakh crore abroad in the last 11 years.

The BNP leader asked the audience whether they would stand up to resist the tyranny of the government. The audience responded positively.

Fakhrul reiterated that there would no election in the country without a caretaker government system in place.

He said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina must step down and the Jatiya Sangsad must be dissolved.

Nazrul Islam Khan, BNP standing committee member, said people want a change and that's why ordinary people are also joining the party's divisional rallies alongside its leaders and activists.

He asked the BNP men to stay alert to the government's incitement to engage in violence. "Don't do anything without the directives of the party's high command."

Selima Rahman, another standing committee member of the party, said a one-point movement programme would be announced from the Dhaka rally to unseat the government.

that the factories are willing to pay more for uninterrupted supply.

"The tax to GDP ratio would not rise until the energy scam, the banking sector scam and money laundering are solved," said MM Akash, chairman of the economic department of Dhaka University.

The government is putting double effort to implement foreign aid-dependent development programmes as there is a huge amount in the pipeline, said Sharifa Khan, secretary of the Economic Relations Division.

The food, health and energy sectors are being prioritised in the government's decision-making, said Mamun Al Rashid, secretary of the planning division.

Zaidi Sattar, chairman of Policy Research Institute; Atiur Rahman, former governor of the Bangladesh Bank; Syed Mainul Ahsan, visiting fellow of BIDS; Tapan Kanti Ghosh, commerce secretary; and Anwar-Ul Alam Chowdhury, president of the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries, also spoke.

Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku, another standing committee member, said they fought the Liberation War to liberate the country and now they all were ready to wage another war to get people's rights back.

"In the month of victory, we will wage such a movement which will inspire people to dream of a new Bangladesh," he said.

Former Rajshahi city mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu said there were only two paths before them — die or to take to the streets to free the country from the government's misdeeds and misrule.

Ruhul Qudus Talukder Dulu, chief coordinator of the rally, said people would show "red card" to the government from the December 10 rally in Dhaka.

The BNP has been holding divisional rallies protesting price hike of essentials, gas and electricity, killings of party men and demanding "release" of Chairperson Khaleda Zia. Yesterday's rally was the last one held outside Dhaka.