

## 39 more Covid cases in 24 hours

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh reported 39 more Covid-19 cases in the 24 hours till yesterday morning.

With this, the country's total Covid caseload rose to 20,46,542, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The official death toll from the disease remained unchanged at 29,478, as no new fatalities were reported during this period.

The daily case test positivity rate stood at 7.04 percent, as 554 samples were tested, said DGHS.

## Teen found dead in Chattogram

UNB, Ctg

The throat-slit body of a 16-year-old autorickshaw driver was recovered from a paddy field in Charlokka under Karnaphuli of Chattogram yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Md Arif of Moheshkhali of Cox's Bazar.

Police said Arif went out with his autorickshaw from a garage on Thursday afternoon.

Locals informed police after seeing the body. OC Jaheer Hossain of Karnaphuli Police Station said the body was sent to CMCH morgue for autopsy.

## Cold brings misery

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The surge in winter patients has resulted in increased pressure on doctors and nurses at the district hospital, while a bed shortage has forced some patients to receive treatment on the hospital floor.

A total of 62 children are currently receiving treatment at Kurigram General Hospital for cold-related diseases, while 59 patients are admitted to the diarrhoea department.

Zulekha Begum, a nurse at the hospital, said, "With the surge in cold-related illnesses, we are managing increased patient pressure daily."

Dr Shahinur Rahman Sardar of Kurigram General Hospital, said most of the people seeking medical treatment are from the rural areas.

Despite the official distribution of winter clothes one month ago, the supply falls significantly short of the demand, compelling locals to resort to burning straws to cope with the cold.

Abdul Hai Sarker, relief and rehabilitation officer, said over 42,000 blankets have been distributed across nine upazilas in the district, and a request for 30,000 additional blankets has been submitted.

Subal Chandra Sarkar, officer-in-charge of the district's Agro-Meteorological Observatory, said the dense fog is expected to persist for two to three days.



Farmers planting tobacco seedlings across new lands in Lalmonirhat to expand the yield from the previous year. Despite the risks of long-term damage to soil and the environment, farmers are going for tobacco production to gain more profits, with incentives from six tobacco companies. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

### EXPANDING TOBACCO CULTIVATION

# Farmers give in to lure of profits

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Despite the risks to soil and the environment, tobacco companies are encouraging farmers in Lalmonirhat to expand tobacco cultivation this year. Influenced by previous profits, farmers are now choosing new areas for planting tobacco seedlings.

This shift may lead to challenges in growing essential crops like food grains, vegetables, and mustard, potentially resulting in decreased acreage and production in the district.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension, approximately 25,000 farmers in five upazilas of Lalmonirhat cultivated tobacco last year on 9,500 hectares of land.

There are offices and warehouses for six tobacco companies in Lalmonirhat, and their representatives are in direct contact with the farmers



to help them with tobacco free loans, they added.

"I cultivated tobacco on four bighas of land at a cost of Tk 84,000 last year, producing 28 maunds of tobacco, which was sold at Tk 7,000 per maund, earning me a profit of Tk 1,12,000," said farmer Nurul Islam of Kalkina village under Kaliganj upazila.

"This year I have prepared eight bighas of land for tobacco cultivation," he added. Farmers Abed Ali of Karnpur

village under Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila and Srikanta Barman of Bhelabari village under Aditmari upazila also said they are including more lands for tobacco cultivation this year.

"Tobacco cultivation, however, requires more labour. Every family member has to work in the field," Abed Ali added.

Hamidur Rahman, DAE deputy director in Lalmonirhat, said since the government has not banned tobacco cultivation, the DAE cannot directly ask farmers to stop cultivating tobacco.

Farmers are only being made aware of the harmful impacts of tobacco cultivation and consumption, he said.

"Though the farmers are getting temporary profit from tobacco, in the long run, it will cause serious damage to the soil and environment, along with threatening food production," Hamidur added.

## ONION FARMING IN JASHORE

# High prices prompt more cultivation

MOHSIN MILON, Benapole

Farmers in Jashore are expanding their commercial cultivation of onions this year, expecting a better yield and higher profits than the previous year.

The high demand and good price for onions in the market have encouraged the farmers to cultivate the crop on more lands this year, said agriculture officials.

Winter onion cultivation in eight upazilas of the district has been targeted on 1,500 hectares of land this year, compared to 1,200 hectares last year, said Sushanto Kumar Tarafdar, deputy director of Department of Agricultural Extension in Jashore.

Also, summer onions of N-53 variety were cultivated on 300 hectares of land, and harvest has begun as well. Around 2,500 farmers in the district have been given agricultural incentives,



including fertiliser and seeds, for the production of N-53 onion variety, he also said.

The number of farmers receiving incentives may increase next year as more are showing interest in onion cultivation in Jashore, he added.

The off-season cultivation of summer onion has been particularly good in Chougachha, Jhikargachha, and Sadar upazilas.

"I planted onions on 66 acres of land at a cost of around Tk 70,000. I have started harvesting the crop, expecting a yield of around 120 maunds. Hopefully, I will fetch a good profit," said farmer Golam Mustafa of Hazrakhana village under Chougachha upazila.

Meanwhile, with new onions coming to the markets, the price has started to come down.

"Wholesale new onions are being sold at Tk 70-80 per kg and old onions at Tk 130-140," said Kamal Hossain, a wholesaler in Jashore's Kalibari area.

## 17 more hospitalised with dengue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 17 dengue patients were hospitalised in the last 24 hours till yesterday morning.

The total number of cases this year rose to 607, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

Total deaths are four so far and all of them were from Dhaka.

A total of 279 dengue patients are still undergoing treatment at various hospitals across the country.

Last year, the country witnessed 1,705 dengue-related deaths and a total of 3,21,179 reported cases.

## Shrinking rivers

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"Due to a lack of income, we are in a dire straits to support our families," said Majidul Islam, a boatman at Shimulbari ghat on Dharla River in Kurigram.

Boatmen Hazrat Ali at Begumganj ghat on Brahmaputra river and Bulbul Islam on Jinjiram river echoed them.

"I have been plying boats for 35 years. Now I am at a standstill, with no earnings.... I don't know what to do if I leave this profession," said boatman Mansur Ali at Bamondanga ghat on Dudhkumar river in Kurigram.

"As there is no water in the Teesta river, we can

## Will strengthen

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the ambassadors and high Commissioners of almost all countries, including the US, UK and EU envoys, were present. They all went to congratulate the current government," said the newly-appointed foreign minister.

Responding to a question, he said, "Ministry of Information was a challenge. I met that challenge with your [journalists] help. It's [foreign ministry] definitely a challenge in the global context and the fact that there are wars going on in different parts of the world now," said the foreign minister.

## Voter turnout can't

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**Jasmine:** The election appeared one-sided, with only a few out of the 28 participating parties emerging victorious. Those elected on Jatiyo Party tickets benefitted from the government's decision to not field any ruling party candidates in those seats.

Even for argument's sake if we agree 40 percent of the votes were cast, it still means 60 percent people didn't vote. So, the percentage of people not voting remains higher anyway.

Personally, I think only around 22 to 25 percent of voters participated.

**DS:** The EC claims there were no major irregularities or violence in the election. What's your take?

**Jasmine:** I've noticed irregularities through media reports. But the media didn't cover all the centres due to limitations. Besides,

the dominance of one party might mean there wasn't any necessity to commit significant irregularities.

**DS:** Do you find any similarity between this election and others in the past?

**Jasmine:** In terms of vote percentage, it is similar to 2014. Besides, it also has similarities with the elections of 1986, 1988, and February 15, 1996.

**DS:** What's the best way to organise a free and fair election?

**Jasmine:** A non-partisan government is the only way to hold a fair election. So far, our political culture has not developed enough to hold elections under a partisan government. The Election Commission is very important, but their ability to ensure a fair election is greatly constrained by the significant influence of the government.

## Dhaka seeks

FROM PAGE 3

of the special envoy to Myanmar. The special envoy, during the meeting, briefed the Ambassador of his meetings with the SAC Chairman, government officials and other stakeholders in Myanmar.

Alounkeo shared the ASEAN Chairman's views on the implementation of the five-point consensus, the issues related to the repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar from Bangladesh.

The ambassador and the special envoy have agreed to closely working on the issue throughout 2024.

Kittikhoun is a Laotian diplomat who served as minister to the Prime Minister's Office during 2016-2020 and as Lao Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York during 1993-2007.

## It was the best election ever

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a position in the government. It is a fact that ballot boxes were stuffed the night before election day.

**DS:** That makes the previous election questionable, doesn't it?

**Abdul Mobarak:** You know the word 'fait accompli' (a thing that has already happened or been decided before those affected hear about it, leaving them with no option but to accept it). What's done is done.

**TDS:** What's your thought on election manipulation under democratic governments?

**Mobarak:** I do not support it. It should not happen. That's why I give special thanks to the Election Commission for holding such a fair election.

**TDS:** But the main opposition was not even there...

**Mobarak:** Opposition parties may not participate

even in the future, but that does not mean that we will not hold elections. Congress and the Muslim League did not participate in the first election in this subcontinent in 1920, but that did not prevent the then government from arranging the election.

**TDS:** Should we compare the present election with an example from the colonial era?

**Mobarak:** Certainly... these are the lessons from our history. Even Maulana Bhashani did not participate in the election of 1970.

**TDS:** But there was no question about the fairness of 1970 election.

**Mobarak:** Some people will always raise questions, but questions should be logical.

**TDS:** How do you see our political future?

**Mobarak:** The political parties are becoming morally bankrupt.

**TDS:** But you termed the latest election the best election.

**Mobarak:** The latest general election is the best possible election that can be arranged in Bangladesh. It is my firm opinion as a former election commissioner.

**TDS:** Then who is responsible for political parties going morally bankrupt?

**Mobarak:** The responsibility lies with the political leaders.

## One-party

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rejected the new parliament and the cabinet from all fronts.

"The defeated candidates are now publicly saying who has been taken to the polls with how much money. The cat is slowly coming out of the bag. All the misdeeds of the ruling party are getting exposed," he claimed.

## Families trapped in saline water

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patients monthly, most of them suffering from different diseases caused by saline water.

Over 300 people come to Bagerhat 250-Bed District Hospital daily said hospital sources.

"These diseases can be avoided if the people drink and use water free from salinity," said Dr Asim Kumar Samadder, superintendent of the hospital.

### PROFITING OUT OF A HEALTH CRISIS

The Department of Public Health Engineering and different NGOs are working to provide safe, non-saline

water among the people in this region through harvesting rainwater, digging ponds, and installing Pond Sand Filter (PSF).

However, some people's representatives and influential persons have been asking for Tk 3,000 to Tk 5,000 as bribes from each family to provide the facility, alleged residents of Gulishakhali and neighbouring villages.

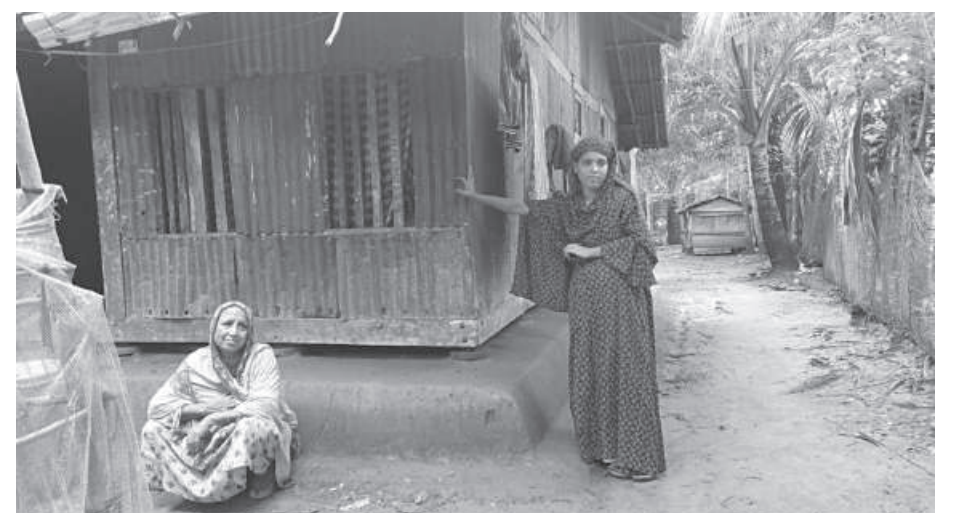
"We could not get water tanks for harvesting rainwater, as we could not pay the money. We are poor. How will we arrange the money?" said a female

resident of Gulishakhali.

None of them, however, wanted to disclose names of the persons demanding bribes from them.

As per government rule, each beneficiary must pay Tk 1,500 to get a water tank. Jayanta Mallick, executive engineer of DPHE in Bagerhat.

"Usually, peoples' representatives of different local union parishads prepare lists of beneficiaries. We don't know anything about asking for bribes. If anyone files a complaint, we will take necessary legal action upon investigation," he added.



Like many others, Putul Akhter and her mother-in-law Shefali Begum suffer from a myriad of health problems due to using saline water for household chores and consumption.

PHOTO: STAR

### ADDENDUM

#### IPO OF BEST HOLDINGS LIMITED

This is for the information of all concerned that Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) has issued a letter no. BSEC/CI/BB-24/2022/06 dated January 09, 2024 regarding subscription limit for the application amount for general public in the IPO of Best Holdings Limited. The update is mentioned below:

**Application Amount: BDT 10,000 or its multiple but not exceeding BDT 15,00,000 (BDT Fifteen Lac)**

Please note that, **subscription will open on January 14, 2024 and close on January 18, 2024.** This is for your kind information.

Sd/-

**Md. Abul Kalam Azad**  
Company Secretary  
Best Holdings Limited

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