

Nearly 82 lakh people addicted to illicit drugs

Says home minister citing study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly 82 lakh people in Bangladesh are addicted to illicit drugs, accounting for 4.88 percent of the country's population, said Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed yesterday.



"The emergence of new synthetic and semi-synthetic drugs has further intensified the problem. A large number of young people have become dependent on drugs and require immediate treatment," the minister said, citing a study supervised by the Department of Narcotics Control while speaking at a programme at the secretariat.

He said the government is working to improve and expand access to drug addiction treatment services.

Salahuddin said the number of beds has been increased at the state-run addiction treatment and rehabilitation centre in Tejgaon, Dhaka, as well as at

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PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Vendors occupy a large section of a road in Dhaka's Gulistan after taking over the footpaths, causing hardship for pedestrians and commuters. Despite repeated eviction drives, they keep returning to the area. The photo was taken recently.

Raise revenue, curb waste to avoid debt risk

Speakers urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh must broaden its tax base, improve public spending, and reduce dependence on borrowing to avoid rising fiscal risks, speakers said at a discussion yesterday.

The discussion, titled "National Budget 2026-27: Priorities and Perspectives", was held at East West University.

Speakers said the proposed budget for FY2026-27 prioritised education, health and social safety nets,

The government's plan to borrow Tk 1.12 lakh crore from the banking sector could crowd out private investment at a time when banks are already under pressure from non-performing loans and weak balance sheets.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, CPD Fellow

but weak revenue assumptions, poor implementation capacity, and banking sector vulnerabilities could undermine its goals without effective reforms and stronger institutional discipline.

Presenting the keynote paper, Prof Mustafizur Rahman, fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said the budget included several positive measures, including duty cuts, to facilitate exports and business activities.

He said the expansion of bonded warehouse facilities beyond the RMG sector could help diversify exports.

However, Prof Mustafizur said the budget's main weakness lay in its underlying assumptions, with the revenue target based on an unrealistic revised estimate for the outgoing fiscal year.

The government has projected total expenditure at Tk 9.38 lakh crore and revenue at Tk 6.95 lakh crore, leaving a deficit of Tk 2.43 lakh crore.

While the budget assumes revenue collection of Tk

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Vitamin A target far exceeds measles drive

Experts question 58 lakh gap in child estimates

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government is set to launch its nationwide Vitamin A Plus Campaign on June 28, targeting 2.40 crore children aged six months to under five years – 58 lakh more than the target set for the measles-rubella campaign for the same age bracket earlier this year.

During the measles-rubella campaign, conducted in phases in April and May, the government aimed to vaccinate 1.82 crore children. The health directorate later reported achieving 103 percent coverage of that target.

However, the rise in the target population within just two months has raised questions among public health experts about the reliability of the government's child population estimates.

Experts say such a gap between two nationwide campaigns targeting the same age group points to weaknesses in data planning and could undermine the effectiveness of public health interventions.

The discrepancy is particularly significant as Bangladesh continues to report around 1,000 new measles infections daily, despite authorities claiming to have exceeded the vaccination target during the measles-rubella drive.

At a press conference at the secretariat yesterday, State Minister for Health MA Muhith said Vitamin A capsules will be distributed through around 1,20,000 centres nationwide, including nearly 500 mobile centres at bus terminals,

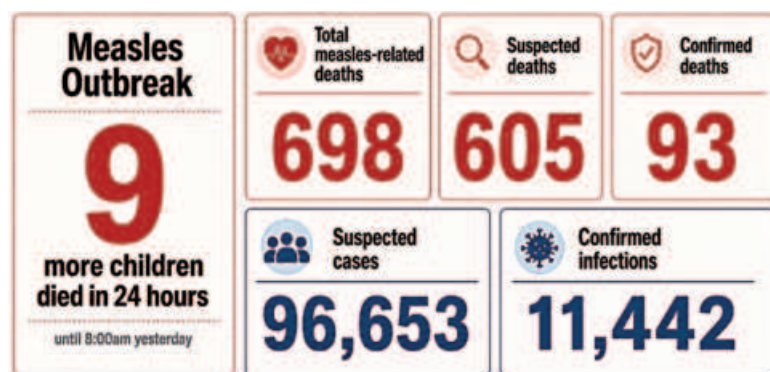
railway stations, and launch ghats, from 8:00am to 4:00pm.

In hard-to-reach areas across 58 upazilas, a four-day child-searching drive will be conducted after the campaign to identify children who were left out and provide them with Vitamin A capsules, he said.

Muhith also said a second round

rubella campaign first in 30 high-burden upazilas, then in four city corporations, and finally across the country.

The campaign targeted 1.82 crore children aged six months to under five years. By May 20, 1.83 crore children had been vaccinated, achieving 102 percent of the target,



of the campaign will be held in December.

The campaign, usually conducted twice a year, was last held in March 2025 and remained suspended afterwards due to funding shortages and procurement complications.

Health experts warned that such prolonged interruptions in holding these campaigns could increase malnutrition and weaken immunity, making measles infections more severe.

BIG GAP BETWEEN TARGETS
Amid an unprecedented measles outbreak, the government launched the emergency measles-

according to official data.

The government later continued the campaign, saying some children still remained out of coverage.

However, the target for the upcoming Vitamin A Plus Campaign for the same age group has now been set at 2.40 crore children.

Mohammed Eunus Ali, director of the Institute of Public Health Nutrition (IPHN), which is implementing the campaign, said the new target was based on updated data collected from civil surgeons' offices and city corporations.

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JULY ANNIVERSARY

11-party declares 36-day event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jamaat-led 11-party alliance yesterday announced a 36-day programme from July 1 to mark the second anniversary of the July uprising.

The programme was announced at a press conference at Jamaat's central office in Moghbazar by Hamidur Rahman Azad, assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami and coordinator of the alliance's liaison committee.

According to the schedule, seminars demanding implementation of the referendum verdict will be held in all districts and metropolitan cities from July 1 to 15.

On July 6, family members of those killed during the uprising will form a human chain in front of the Jatiya Sangsad

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Bring paramedics into health system

Experts say 10,000 trained personnel can help ease health worker shortage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Government officials, researchers, and public health experts yesterday called for formal recognition and integration of community paramedics into the national health system.

They said the country's pool of more than 10,000 trained paramedics could help address the chronic shortage of skilled health workers.

The call came at a discussion organised by Swisscontact Bangladesh's Astha Project, in association with BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, at a city hotel.

A BRAC study found that community paramedics achieved a 73 percent success rate in detecting foetal heartbeat, compared with 36 percent among general healthcare providers.

They performed better in pregnancy and blood testing, recording success rates of 81 percent and 57 percent respectively, compared with 46 percent and 33 percent among other providers.

"Bangladesh has been working to develop community paramedics for more than 15 years. The time has come to bring them under a regulated framework through official recognition," said Abdul Awal, team leader of the Astha Project.

Monjur Hossain, assistant director at the Directorate General of Family Planning, said paramedics could

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CNG-run auto-rickshaws struggle through a waterlogged road in Barishal city yesterday after heavy rainfall inundated parts of the area, causing hours of suffering for residents.

PHOTO: TITU DAS



FROM THE JS GALLERY

21,988 river grabbers in 64 districts

Shipping minister tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 21,988 illegal occupiers of the country's rivers have been identified nationwide, Shipping Minister Shaikh Rabiul Alam told parliament yesterday.

Responding to a query from Munshiganj-1 lawmaker Md Abdullah during the question-and-answer session chaired by Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmad, the minister said the National River Protection Commission had updated the list of illegal occupiers on December 23, 2025.

Deputy commissioners had been asked to verify the list and submit eviction plans, after which eviction drives will be carried out, he added.

In response to a query from Mymensingh-6 lawmaker Kamrul Hasan, Rabiul said Bangladesh has a total of 1,415 rivers, according to the official list of rivers published on April 14, 2025, on the websites of the Ministry of Water Resources, Bangladesh Water Development Board, and the National River Protection Commission.

The list was prepared with the assistance of multiple agencies, including divisional commissioners, district administrations, and river workers, he added.

Keep freedom fighters' allowance above all others

Fazlur Rahman tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Kishoreganj-4 BNP MP and freedom fighter Fazlur Rahman yesterday demanded that the allowance for freedom fighters be set at least one taka higher than that provided to any other group, including July uprising activists and the families of those martyred in the movement.

Taking part in the discussion on the proposed national budget for 2026-27 in parliament, he said he was a strong supporter of the July uprising.

He noted that the monthly allowance for freedom fighters remained unchanged at Tk 20,000, adding that families of those martyred in the July uprising receive Tk 20,000 a month, while injured participants receive monthly allowances of Tk 20,000, Tk 15,000 or Tk 10,000.

"Those who believe the Liberation War was the defining event in the country's history and

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'Prove graft claim against me, I'll resign'

Hasnat says in JS; asks where Bashundhara gets its power from

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Citizen Party (NCP) MP Hasnat Abdullah yesterday declared in parliament that he would resign if any investigation proves his involvement in corruption.

While giving a personal explanation in the House, Hasnat responded to remarks made earlier by BNP MP Akhtaruzzaman, who accused individuals of betraying the ideals of the July uprising and claimed that some who once rode rickshaws now drive a Prado after "selling the spirit of July".

Hasnat said the remarks were directed at him and others. "The DGFI, NSI, police, and military are under your control. I urge you, as someone holding such a responsible position, not to make unsubstantiated allegations. If an investigation proves that I was involved in even one taka of

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