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Bangladesh soldiers set to patrol streets as national Covid lockdown looms

Tuesday 29 June 2021, by [Agence France-Presse](#) (Date first published: 29 June 2021).

Majority of country's 168 million people will be confined to their homes by Thursday, with authorities readying military to enforce strict measures

Bangladesh authorities are preparing to enforce a sweeping national lockdown to combat a deadly resurgence of Covid-19 infections, with public transport networks closing and soldiers ready to patrol the streets.

Thousands of people were stranded in the capital, Dhaka, as authorities halted almost all public transport, leaving commuters to walk, sometimes for hours, in the sweltering summer heat.

The government's cabinet secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said troops would be deployed from Thursday to help enforce the lockdown. "The armed forces will be on patrol. If anyone ignores their orders, legal action will be available to them," he told reporters late Monday.

Most of the South Asian nation's 168 million population will be confined to their homes by Thursday as part of the restrictions, with only essential services and some export-facing factories allowed to operate.

The South Asian nation reported pandemic highs of more than 8,300 fresh infections on Monday and 119 deaths on Sunday. Officials blame the recent spike on the highly contagious Delta variant first identified in neighbouring India.

The lockdown announcement sparked an exodus of migrant workers from the capital Dhaka to home villages on Sunday, with tens of thousands cramming into ferries to cross a major river.

The staggered implementation of the lockdown rules left thousands of workers in Dhaka to walk to their offices on Monday. Large columns of people were seen walking on the main roads early Monday. Workplaces will be shut from Wednesday.

Bicycle rickshaws were allowed to operate in a last-minute government concession late Sunday, but prices soared to unaffordable levels, commuters said.

"I started walking at 7am. I could not get any bus or any other vehicles. I can't afford a rickshaw ride," Shefali Begum, 60, who was going to her daughter's home in central Dhaka, said.

Restrictions on activities and movement were imposed across Bangladesh in mid-April as cases and deaths jumped to their highest levels since the start of the pandemic.

Infections declined in May but started to rise again this month, sparking the harsher restrictions.

The country has reported nearly 900,000 infections and just over 14,000 virus deaths, but experts say the actual toll could be much higher due to possible underreporting.

More than two-thirds of new virus cases in Bangladesh's capital were of the Delta variant, a recent study by the independent Dhaka-based International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research reported.

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The Guardian

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