

Passenger train

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Commission in Dhaka told The Daily Star.

The last trip of Maitree Express, which operates between Dhaka and Kolkata, left Dhaka yesterday with 51 passengers, said Liton Chandra Dey, manager of Dhaka Cantonment Station, where the immigration process is done.

A total of 138 passengers were supposed to go to India but only 51 Indians were allowed by the Indian immigration authorities, Liton told The Daily Star yesterday.

Bangladeshi passengers with special passports would be allowed to go to India but no such passenger was on yesterday's departure list, he added.

A total of 284 passengers were supposed to come to Bangladesh by Maitree Express from Kolkata yesterday, Liton said. He could not confirm whether all returnees are from Bangladesh.

A railway official said Bangladesh was yet to take any steps to suspend the arrival of Indian citizens here.

The Maitree Express operates

on Saturdays, Mondays, Tuesday, Wednesdays, and Fridays. It has 456 seats and during peak season, the train leaves Dhaka full of passengers while at other times it leaves with at least 300 people, Liton said.

But, the number of passengers fell significantly in the last 15 days, he added.

Operation of Bandhan Express, which operates between Khulna and Kolkata on Sundays and Thursday, will also remain suspended, Mia Jahan said.

EXPORT-IMPORT TO CONTINUE
However, operation of freight trains between Bangladesh and India will continue.

Usually, two freight trains operate daily between the neighbouring countries, ADG Mia Jahan said.

Besides, export-import through different land ports with India will also continue, report our district correspondents.

Although passengers' transportation through Benapole Land Port was suspended from Friday, export-import via the country's largest land port continued yesterday,

Benapole Customs Revenue Officer (Cargo) Rashedul Islam said.

However, Indian nationals in Bangladesh and Bangladeshis in India were allowed to go to their countries, reports our Benapole Correspondent.

Around 3,100 Bangladeshi passport holders, who were in India, returned and 531 Indians left Bangladesh yesterday through this check post, Benapole Check Post Police Immigration Officer-in-Charge Ahsan Habib said.

Besides, passengers with transit visa for Bhutan and Nepal and those who hold official passports, diplomatic visas, UN passports, and SAARC visas will be allowed to enter India.

A medical team at Benapole check post tested around 1.60 lakh passengers till yesterday with a thermal scanner. No one was found with coronavirus, Dr Abdul Majid of the team said.

Rashedul Islam said 395 trucks of goods have been imported from India yesterday while 159 trucks of goods were exported from Bangladesh to India.

Meanwhile, the import-export

of goods through Sonamasjid land port in Chapainawabganj also remained active, reports our district correspondent, quoting Harunur Rashid, general secretary of C&F Agents Association of the port.

BIMAN SUSPENDS SOME FLIGHTS
Biman Bangladesh Airlines yesterday suspended its flight to Kathmandu for March 15 and 17, after the Himalayan country stopped on-arrival visas over the fear of the coronavirus spread.

However, the national flag carrier will operate a flight on March 19, Tahera Khandaker, deputy general manager (Public Relations) of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, told The Daily Star.

Further decisions on flight operation to Nepal will be taken later, she said.

Besides, the airlines authorities also suspended its Bangkok flights scheduled for March 16, 23, 30, due to the lack of passengers, she said.

Biman also suspended multiple flights on four domestic routes -- Cox's Bazar, Saidpur, Rajshahi and Jashore --, between March 15-19, for the same reason she added.

Bill Gates leaves Microsoft board

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critical condition," said Tahsin al-Khafaji, spokesman for Iraq's Joint Operations Command.

The US-led coalition said three of its members were also wounded in the attack.

Iraq's military said it had found another 24 missiles at a nearby launching site and had detained the owner of the plot of land as well as security forces from an adjacent checkpoint for questioning.

The US-led coalition's surveillance capabilities have been impaired by cloudy weather in recent days, which a US official said may have contributed to the attackers' readiness to launch the rockets during the day instead of under the cover of night.

Taji is overcrowded with members of the US-led coalition helping Iraq fight jihadist remnants, after units were moved to the air base from other installations.

It came three days after a similar attack on the base killed two American military personnel and a British soldier -- the deadliest such incident at an Iraqi base in years.

The US responded Friday with air strikes on arms depots it said were used by Kataeb Hezbollah, an Iran-aligned faction within the Hashed.

At least five members of Iraq's security forces and one civilian were killed, none of them members of the Hashed, according to Iraq's military.

Iraq has long feared it would get caught in the spiralling tensions between Iran and the US, its two main allies.

They dramatically spiked in late 2019 when a US contractor was killed in a rocket attack on a separate base in northern Iraq, leading to retaliatory American strikes on Kataeb Hezbollah.

Days later, a US drone strike killed Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani and Hashed deputy chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

Iran launched ballistic missiles at US troops in Iraq while the Iraqi parliament voted to expel all foreign soldiers from its soil, a decision that has yet to be implemented.

Some 5,200 American troops are based in Iraq as part of the US-led coalition helping local troops root out the remnants of the Islamic State group.

Top US military and civilian officials had long expressed frustration that Iraq's government was not doing enough to prevent rocket attacks targeting US troops and diplomats.

BSMMU offers

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provide treatment and medical tests without cost to outdoor patients on the day.

Apart from these, a children's painting competition will be held at the Teachers and Students Centre on the Dhaka University campus, said a press release of the BSMMU.

As part of the programme, wreaths will be placed at the mural of Bangabandhu on the premises around 7:45am on March 17.

A blood donation drive will begin around 9:30am.

Teachers and officials of the university will start marching towards the Dhanmondi Road 32 residence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman around noon to pay their tributes.

Six killed

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directions. The tailbacks eased around 6:00pm following efforts by members of Bagerhat Fire Service and Civil Defense, Katakhal Highway Police Station and Fakirhat Police Station.

Fakirhat OC said they were trying to trace the drivers of the two vehicles.

The bodies of the victims were at the upazila health complex and highway police station till filing of this report.

to benefit from Gates' "technical passion and advice" in his continuing role as a technical advisor.

"I am grateful for Bill's friendship and look forward to continuing to work alongside him," Nadella said.

Gates left his CEO position in 2000, handing the company reins to Steve Ballmer to devote more time to his charitable foundation.

He gave up the role of chairman at the same time Nadella became Microsoft's third CEO in 2014.

Regularly listed among the world's richest people, William H. Gates was a geeky-looking young man when he and Paul Allen co-founded Microsoft in 1975.

Gates grew up in Seattle with two sisters. His father William was an

attorney and his late mother Mary was a schoolteacher and chairwoman of United Way International.

He began programming computers as a 13-year-old student, and fell in love with the machines.

Among the tales told about Gates is that while working on school computers, he tinkered with programming to put himself in classes made up mostly of girls.

With his parents' blessing, Gates dropped out of Harvard to start "Micro-soft" with his late childhood friend Allen.

A key move was to focus on licensing software to computer makers in numerous "partnerships" that resulted in affordable machines being available to the masses.

As the personal computer market

grew, Microsoft became the world's top software company. Its virtual monopoly led to a much-publicized antitrust trial, in which the company managed to avert a break-up but had to endure years of government monitoring.

Gates went on to turn his attention from software to fighting disease and other humanitarian challenges with his wife, under the auspices of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

"This move is not surprising to the Street as Gates has continued to focus more on his myriad of philanthropies across the globe over the past decade," Wedbush analyst Daniel Ives said in a note to investors.

"Gates is a historic figure in the technology world and his legacy at Microsoft will be felt in Redmond for decades to come."

in agriculture sector to bring about a green revolution. He adds that in the immediate phase, the government plans to reach the position existing at the time of Pakistan occupation army's crackdown and then take up the short-term programme. Under the long-term programme the agriculture sector will be the part of socialistic planning which would involve among others the consolidation of fragmented lands, introduction of cooperative farming and ownership of land by tillers. The minister also informs that Tk 180 crore has been allocated for sinking of 22,000 tube-wells aiming at irrigating 35 lakh acres of land.

SOURCES: March 16, 1972 issues of Dainik Bangla, The Daily Ittefaq, Azad, Morning News, The Bangladesh Observer and Purbodesh.

Indian Army withdraws

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army personnel leave Dhaka for India. The final pull-out began on March 12 after a ceremonial farewell parade at Dhaka Stadium.

FRENCH PRESIDENT POMPIDOU'S MESSAGE

George Pompidou, president of the French Republic, in a message to President Justice Abu Sayed Chowdhury hopes that the friendship and cooperation between France and Bangladesh will be fruitful. He recalls the painful events through which the personality of the people of Bangladesh has affirmed themselves. The message also hails Bangladesh government's declared policy and adds that this underlines Bangladesh government's desire to work in the country as well as among nations

in favour of democracy, justice and peace.

NO JEDDAH TEAM WILL BE ALLOWED

A foreign office spokesman of the Bangladesh government says that the government will not allow a delegation of the Muslim countries come here if the delegation members are from those countries which have not yet recognised Bangladesh. The spokesman adds that the delegation members named among others from countries like Algeria, Tunisia and Malaysia. Among these countries only Malaysia has recognised Bangladesh.

3-PHASED PROGRAMME FOR GREEN REVOLUTION
Agriculture Minister Sheikh Abdul Aziz says that the government plans to implement a three-phased programme

Dust on leaves paints grim picture

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emission from the city's vehicle and dust.

Contacted, Prof Mohammad Kamruzzaman Majumder, director of CAPS, said the dust accumulation by leaves are higher in those areas that have high frequency of vehicular movement.

During the night time, vehicles move very fast spreading dust in relatively larger areas than the ones moving slowly, he said.

"Apart from this, unplanned and uncoordinated street digging is one of

the major main reasons for spreading dust," he added.

HARDEST HIT FOR DHAKA TREES
The survival chances of street-side trees in Dhaka dropped by 30 per cent due to pollution, read a report of SN Applied Sciences journal that was published on October 12 last year.

The study was jointly conducted by botany and chemistry departments of Dhaka University.

During the survey in 2017 and 2018, the researchers collected samples of Debdaru, Mehagani and Jackfruit trees from the roadsides of

Farmgate and Gulshan, residential areas of Dhanmondi and Uttara, and Botanical Garden.

Prof Abdus Salam of the university's chemistry department, said, the capital city had a small number of trees and if the pollution continues trees would be threatened.

"Trees are stressed in the high pollution areas. We have not found any tree yet that performs better in polluted areas," he added.

He then said that immediate steps should be taken to save the lives of humans and trees.

briefing at the IEDCR in the capital's Mohakhali. (The Daily Star holds the names of the expatriates and their exact locations for their safety)

Free Wi-Fi

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vehicles and many other things can easily be done with the system, the ADC added.

On March 10, State Minister for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Zunaid Ahmed Palak visited Sylhet in order to see the progress of the project.

During the visit, the state minister declared that Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital (SOMCH) would be the country's first digital hospital with health management automation system.

The 900-bed hospital is the largest of the region.

Himangshu Lal Roy, deputy director of SOMCH, said, "Once the automation starts, we will be tracking all the records of a patient and will preserve those under a unique code. The records can be availed from the server when needed.

"Under the project, providing healthcare will be easy and the patients will be benefited through the system."

Journo taken from home

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herself, according to the report.

The report made the DC angry, said Ariful's colleagues, adding that Ariful, 36, also wrote several other reports on alleged irregularities by the district administration.

Talking to The Daily Star, Ariful's wife Mitu said they were about to go to sleep around 11:45pm on Friday when "seven to eight Ansar members, accompanied by two to three magistrates" stormed into their home and started beating her husband.

"When I tried to protect my husband, they threatened to beat me up as well," she said.

"When I asked them what did my husband do, they didn't give me any answer. At one stage, they handcuffed my husband and dragged him out of the home. He was taken to the DC office, where he was beaten up again," Mitu said.

She alleged that Ariful was tortured as he wrote on corruption and irregularities by the district administration, involving the DC. "This is why the DC is angry with my husband."

She feared Ariful might be tortured in jail as well.

Quoting Mitu, Bangla daily Prothom Alo reported that while beating up Ariful, one of the men said, "You are causing disturbance".

Contacted, DC Sultana said a drive was conducted on Ariful's house in Kurigram town's Vocational intersection area around 12:10am yesterday. During the drive, the taskforce members found a bottle of alcohol and 150gram marijuana in Ariful's possession, which is why he was arrested.

Later, the mobile court sentenced him one year in jail, she said.

She termed the allegation against her baseless and claimed that she was not aware of the drive beforehand.

Talking to this correspondent, local lawmaker (Kurigram-2 constituency) Panir Uddin Ahamed claimed Ariful was implicated in a false case.

He also said he would discuss "different irregularities of the DC" in parliament.

Meanwhile, Farhad Hossain, state minister for the public administration ministry, said the divisional commissioner of Rangpur was asked to look into the incident. "Necessary steps would be taken within a day or two," he said, reports Prothom Alo.

CONFUSION OVER THE DRIVE

The Prothom Alo also reported that the district administration and officials of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) at Kurigram district office came up with contradictory statements about the anti-narcotics drive on Ariful's home.

DC Sultana said the drive was conducted as asked by the DNC. "The taskforce conducted the raid as usual. A magistrate from the district administration, some police members, five Ansar members and three members of narcotics department constituted the team which carried out the drive," she said.

Abu Zafar, assistant director of DNC's Kurigram office, said he was not

in the area when Ariful was arrested. He said he came to know about the drive from one of his colleagues -- Inspector Zahid -- only around noon yesterday.

"Zahid told me that he was asked by the district administration to join the drive on Friday night," said Abu Zafar, reports Prothom Alo.

PROTEST

In a joint statement, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) expressed concern over Ariful's arrest.

They also voiced concern over several recent incidents of harassment and repression on journalists.

"A vested quarter is trying to create a rift between journalists and the government," said the statement.

Kurigram Press Club General Secretary Ataur Rahman Biplob said, "We demand Ariful's unconditional release. We will continue the protest if he is not released in 24 hours," he said. Leaders of BFUJ and DUJ threatened a tough movement if the demand was not met.

JAILING ILLEGAL: TIB

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday termed illegal the jailing of Ariful at midnight, saying such a blatant misuse of a law goes against the constitutional commitment of rule of law and is tantamount to ignoring the press freedom.

In a statement, it said people would lose confidence in the administration and the government if those involved in such a despicable incident is not investigated immediately.

Referring to news reports published in the media, TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said, "There are specific rules and directives from the highest court on running mobile courts in the country. According to those, it is illegal to run a mobile court after picking up any citizen from home at night."

(Our Lalmonirhat correspondent contributed to this report)

Italians in China caught between two epidemics

AFP, Beijing

Sara Platto's mother in Italy called her "crazy" for staying in Wuhan even as the virus-hit city was quarantined in January. Now she's offering advice to people back home on how to cope.

Platto, who lives with her 12-year-old son at the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic, rejected four offers of evacuation from the Italian government after refusing to abandon her two cats and deciding it was safe enough to stay in China.

"It's not Ebola," Platto, who works at Jiangnan University, told AFP.

She has spent more than 50 days cooped up at home, taking turns with her son to use one computer for online classes and work.

Italians enduring China's health crisis and draconian measures that have left them effectively housebound for weeks now find themselves watching similar scenes unfold at home.

Locate journalist Shafiqul

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media. Kajol, editor of a biweekly newspaper, went missing a day after the case was filed.

His son Monorom Palak said his father left home for office around 3:00pm on Tuesday and as he did not return by 10:00pm, the family members called him only to find that two of his mobile phones were switched off.

Kajol's family suspects that he was abducted and has urged authorities concerned to help ensure his safe return.

The family on Wednesday filed a general diary with Chawkbazar Police Station in this connection.

"Bangladeshis should not live in fear of abduction if they share something on Facebook," Adams said in the statement, adding "The government needs to seriously investigate the many cases in which family members allege that the victim was picked up by security forces but whose whereabouts remain unknown."

The HRW said the international community and Bangladesh civil society have repeatedly called on the government to repeal the vague and overly broad segments of the Digital Security Act, which "facilitates abuse".

In the statement, the HRW said Bangladesh authorities had a history of arbitrary detentions and forced disappearances. While some people are later released or formally taken into custody, officials have in some cases said they were killed in alleged gunfights with the security forces or in crossfires.

Many of these victims were targeted as members of the political opposition. In recent years, however, there have been cases in which security forces have disappeared individuals in what appear to be the result of personal retribution by members of the ruling elite, it added.

Meanwhile, the CPI, a New York-based NGO that promotes free press and defends the rights of journalists, issued an alert saying Bangladesh authorities should spare no effort to locate Kajol.

"The disappearance of journalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol is especially

concerning after he was named in a dubious defamation complaint filed by a member of parliament under the draconian Digital Security Act," said Steven Butler, CPI's Asia program coordinator.

The Amnesty International issued an "urgent" appeal for the Bangladesh government to launch an independent investigation to determine the fate and whereabouts of Kajol and keep his family fully informed at all times, and ensure he is immediately released if under state custody.

US sees new pressure point as coronavirus hits Iran

AFP, Washington

After months of piling pressure on Tehran, the United States is seeing an unexpected new variable -- the novel coronavirus, which has taken a substantial toll not just on Iran but inside its government.

US policymakers are asking whether deaths within the regime are widespread enough that they could alter decision-making -- although a deadly rocket attack Wednesday in Iraq, which Washington blamed on Iran, showed at least that the cycle of conflict between the countries is not abating.

COVID-19, which has infected tens of thousands of people around the world, has hit Iran's government unusually hard, with a number of senior politicians and officials killed or infected by the disease including a vice president, a senior adviser to the foreign minister and a powerful cleric.

General Kenneth McKenzie, head of Central Command which covers the Middle East, said the United States believed the impact was worse than the more than 500 deaths reported -- the world's third highest toll after China and Italy -- and said US policymakers were assessing the political ramifications.