

All intercity trains to go back on tracks this month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Railway (BR) has decided to resume operation of all intercity trains gradually in between August 16 and 30.

Authorities took decision yesterday, over two months since resumption of rail operation on limited scale from May 31.

"Total 34 intercity trains are now in operation. We will resume operation of all 100 intercity trains between August 16 and 30," BR Director General Md Shamsuzzaman told The Daily Star yesterday.

However, health safety guidelines will remain the same, meaning BR will carry only 50 percent passengers of its capacity and will sell tickets online, a rail ministry official said.

Decision on other trains would be taken later, he said, wishing anonymity.

BR resumed operation on limited scale from May 31, with eight pairs of intercity trains at first and later adding 11 pairs. Two were later closed due to lack of passengers.



Vines grow on the sunshade of a building in the capital's Mirpur, slowly covering the window underneath as the floors of this building remain empty, presumably as its residents have left the capital to ease the financial burden of living in a big city. Juxtaposed to the unbridled growth stand carefully maintained potted plants in an upscale apartment complex in the background, the inhabitants of which are likely a little more fortunate during these trying times. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Don't disburse research funds as allowance: UGC

Also asks VCs to ensure teachers don't work elsewhere sans approval

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

At least 10 public universities are distributing research fund among all their teachers as "research allowance", while many of the teachers are giving classes at private universities without prior approval from authorities, officials of University Grants Commission (UGC) said.

Against this backdrop, UGC in a statement yesterday asked authorities of public universities to ensure that all teachers abide by service rules and take permission before working with other educational institutions and running their own businesses.

UGC also asked public universities to utilise funds allocated for research properly. The statement said UGC had sent three separate letters to vice-chancellors of 45 public universities regarding the matter.

"Teachers should take prior permission before working anywhere and the authorities of universities must know where they are working," UGC chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We also want accountability on how the allocated money for research is being spent, and what kind of research is going on," he added.

UGC in the statement said it allocates public money for universities for research, who then distribute the fund after scrutinising submitted project proposals, following a review.

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Indigenous, not ethnic minorities

Speakers at Adibashi Forum webinar call upon govt for constitutional change

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rights activists, left-leaning politicians and civil society members yesterday called upon the government for bringing constitutional change to recognise the country's ethnic minorities as "indigenous".

Addressing a webinar marking the United Nations-declared "International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples", they said such recognition of the ethnic minorities was integral to ensure and uphold their due rights and well-being.

They said despite being citizens of the country and part of its diverse culture, ethnic minorities have been deprived of their rights, especially land right, while several of their mother tongues were facing extinction.

The webinar was part of a daylong programme, organised by Bangladesh Adibashi Forum (BAF), upholding the day's significance.

The speakers urged the government to take effective steps to fully implement the 1998's peace accord signed between the government and

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BNP leaders concerned over 'killings by police'

UNB, Dhaka

BNP standing committee has voiced deep concern over the growing incidents of "killings by police" in the country.

In a virtual meeting on Saturday night, members of the BNP policymaking body also decided to hold a press conference soon on the murder of retired army major Sinha Md Rashed and extrajudicial killings, said a press release yesterday.

They said incidents of extrajudicial killings and violation of human rights by law enforcers are increasing alarmingly.

They also expressed worry over the murder of ex-army officer Sinha Md Rashed and deaths of other people in police custody over the last five years, saying incidents of filing false cases, and arresting and harassing people using the Digital Security Act are on the rise in the country.

They also said the Digital Security Act is

being used to snatch freedom of press and freedom of speech and suppress dissents.

"The current government is conspiring to stay in power and establish a one-party system of government in an undemocratic way," the BNP leaders observed.

They also discussed the country's Covid-19 situation and accused the government of failure in containing its spread due to "negligence and indifference."

They expressed condolences over the death of its vice chairman and former minister Abdul Mannan, and deaths of other leaders from coronavirus.

Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain, Moudud Ahmed, Jamiruddin Sircar, Rafiqul Islam Miah, Mirza Abbas, Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, Selima Rahman and Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku joined the meeting.

'Political identity can't be shield for any wrongdoer'

Warns Obaidul Quader

Bss, Dhaka

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said the government has a strong stance against those involved in irregularities and corruption, as it believes that political identity cannot be someone's shield for doing any misdeed.

"Sheikh Hasina has proven that political identity cannot be a shield for any wrongdoer," the Awami League general secretary said at a virtual briefing after joining a regular views-exchange with Gopalganj road zone, BRTC and BRTA officials through videoconference from his official residence in Dhaka.

The minister said the government has carried out drives in different sectors including health and these drives would continue in the days to come.

Pointing to BNP, the minister said Bangladesh became "world champion in corruption" during the opposition party's tenure.

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For over a month, footpaths on the capital's Satmasjid Road have remained in this condition, leaving pedestrians no other option than to hop, skip and jump over debris. City corporation workers are doing such renovation work in many parts of Dhanmondi, which locals say are in a haphazard manner.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

ABRAR FAHAD MURDER CASE

Hearing on charge framing Sept 2

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday set September 2 for hearing on the charge framing against 25 Buet students accused in Abrar Fahad murder case. Judge Abu Zafar Md Kamruzzaman of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 of Dhaka set the date.

Earlier, the tribunal set April 6 for hearing but it was not held as the regular activities of the court remained closed then due to coronavirus pandemic.

On October 7 last year, Abrar, a second-year student of Buet, was beaten to death by a group of Buet unit Chhatra League activists in a dormitory.

Abrar's father Barkatullah filed a murder case in this regard on October 7 with Chawkbazar Police Station.

Eight accused gave confessional statements before magistrates, narrating the horrifying torture, last year.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Cybercriminals on the prowl

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

With people mostly staying home and spending more time online due to the ongoing pandemic, a group of criminals are active and swindling crores of taka through duping them on social media.

Online gambling, job offers, selling or buying foreign currencies, special offers on products and sending gifts worth million dollars -- are some of the techniques these perpetrators were found using for deceiving people, according to law enforcers.

In just one month, law enforcers have arrested over 50 people over online scams.

AFM Al Kibria, deputy commissioner of cyber crime unit of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit, told The Daily Star that as people are now spending more time on online platforms, a group of unscrupulous people are taking advantage of that.

"Earlier, around 15 to 20 people used to complain about cyber-related issues. After the pandemic, we have started receiving some eight to 10 more complaints daily," he said. He further said

law enforcers are looking into each complaint and taking appropriate measures.

On July 27, police's Detective Branch (DB) arrested two persons -- Shakil Khan (22) and Jubayed Hasan Richi (32) -- from Dakkhinkhan area of the capital for their involvement in online gambling.

"Arrestees are members of organised rackets, who swindled around Tk 13 crore through their mobile financial accounts from many by operating an online casino," Abdul Ahad, deputy commissioner of DB police of Wari Division, told The Daily Star.

On July 26, a team of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested Mithun Sarker (29) from Faridpur for selling fake VIP SIM cards.

Mithun used to post in social media that he has VIP SIMs. Once someone agreed to buy one, he asked for the full amount (Tk 15 to 20 thousands) first through mobile banking accounts and told the buyer to visit the customer care.

After getting the money, he used to block the customers' numbers.

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ABANDONED PROPERTY RULES

Oikya Parishad seeks halt on its finalisation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Oikya Parishad yesterday demanded suspension of formulating and finalisation of Bangladesh Abandoned Property (Control, Management and Disposal) Rules, 2020, under the Vested Property Return (Amendment) Act.

The alliance condemned the move, saying the initiative of formulating rules in a hurried manner without handing over property to the owners is "purposive and against the people's interests."

The Vested Property Return (Amendment) Act was adopted in the parliament in 2001 and several positive amendments were done between 2011 and 2013, the coalition of religious minorities in the country said.

Although some steps were taken to make the "positive amendments" into "negative amendments", it was not successful due to the interference of the prime minister, general secretary of the Parishad Rana Dasgupta said through a press statement.

He said with a view to foiling the good intentions of the prime minister, a dishonest group of bureaucrats has taken initiative to finalise the "so-called rules" within a month to achieve ill motives, the statement said.

He also said in 2018, a similar move was taken but the bureaucracy backtracked in the face of the protest of the people.

The press statement demanded immediate implementation of the High Court's directives regarding the Vested Property Return Act.

DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

Didarul Islam denied bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday again rejected a bail petition of Didarul Islam Bhuiyan, an activist of a platform called "Rastrachinta", in a case filed against him under the Digital Security Act.

Judge KM Emrul Kayesh of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka passed the order after his lawyer submitted a petition seeking bail against the rejection order of the lower court.

On June 16, Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Jasim rejected both the remand and bail petitions of Didarul and three others and allowed police to interrogate them at jail gate for two days within seven working days.

During the hearing, the defence lawyer told the court that their client was arrested on May 5 and have been in jail custody since then. Didarul was implicated in the case as part of a conspiracy to harass him and so, he should be granted bail, the

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Three beggars, each with a different physical disability, say they often travel together on a battery-operated vehicle to reach their destinations. Although a bit risky to move about in such a way, such camaraderie is a pleasant sight. This photo was taken from the capital's Segunbagicha.