

## Positively

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on the remaining two.

The under-construction rail link between Haldibari in West Bengal and Chilahati in Bangladesh would revive the old Siliguri-Sealdah rail route through Bangladesh, taken by the Darjeeling Mail, Shringla said.

The Indian foreign secretary highlighted the connectivity issues while delivering the keynote address at a webinar on "Self-reliant India: Reimagining the North East India in terms of Employment and Skill" recently.

He said a new railway link between Akhaura in Bangladesh and Agartala and Tripura was under construction.

Nationals of the two countries cannot only travel on board the Maitree and Bandhan express to each other's countries, but also on buses plying between Shillong and Dhaka and between Agartala and Kolkata via Dhaka, he added.

"We are upgrading the infrastructure of land customs stations for enabling smooth cross-border movement of goods and people," Shringla said.

He said the potential of mutually beneficial resources and of generating common economic spaces was evident in another area -- energy.

Bangladesh currently imports 1,160 MW power through adjoining states in India, the Indian foreign secretary added.

"We are also looking at exporting the surplus hydropower potential of the North East to Bangladesh and Myanmar."

Shringla said there has been considerable augmentation of the inland water transport that links India's North East to Bangladesh.

He said 20 port townships are planned along the Brahmaputra and Barak river systems to enhance inland water connectivity. "This could galvanise multimodal linkages in the entire region."

Goods are transhipped to the North East through Ashuganj inland river port in Bangladesh and further through Akhaura-Agartala by road.

Recently, the first container of goods was moved from Kolkata to Agartala, using the newly-established India-Bangladesh agreement permitting the use of Chattogram port for India to transport goods to and from North East India.

A new waterway connecting Tripura to Bangladesh was also operationalised recently with the first ever export consignment from Bangladesh reaching Tripura through the waterway.

The Indian foreign secretary said a strong, stable and prosperous North East is key to building a self-reliant India.

## Viking chess!

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The pieces were part of a strategic board game called Hnefatafl, which is similar to chess and was popular with the soldiers in teaching strategy on the battlefield.

The set is expected to sell for £1,000 when it goes up for auction at London-based Dix Noonan Webb (DNW) next Tuesday, September 15.

One of the experts at DNW said the detectorist brought the Viking gaming pieces into the auction house in a plastic bag, unsure of their significance.

Bott had been collecting items for two decades at the site, and had also found coins, strap ends, brooches, mounts and lead weights dating to the 9th century.

"He thought they were weights but I have been to Oslo Museum and seen examples of Viking games and these pieces resembled that," said Nigel Mills at DNW.

## Daily deaths

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death rate is 1.4 percent of all confirmed cases.

With the latest cases, the total number of confirmed cases rose to 336,044, said a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Bangladesh is now at the 15th place in the world on coronavirus case count, according to worldometers.info. France, the UK and Saudi Arabia are in the 13th, 14th and 16th spots respectively.

A total of 10,723 tests were carried out during the same 24-hour period. The percentage of positive tests (positivity rate) was 11.96 percent.

During the same period, 2,247 patients recovered from novel coronavirus, taking the number of total recovery to 238,271. The recovery rate is nearly 71 percent of all confirmed cases in the country.

Among those who died in the 24-hour period were 23 males and 11 females. One of them passed away at home and the rest at hospitals, the press release said.

One of the dead was from Mymensingh division, four were from Khulna, five from Rajshahi, seven from Chattogram, and the highest 17 were from Dhaka division.

In 24 hours till 8:30am yesterday, a total of 1,153 Covid-19 patients were admitted to general beds while 286 to ICU beds in hospitals designated for coronavirus patients across the country.

With another 338 people taken to institutional isolation centres during the same 24-hour period, the total number of people in institutional isolation rose to 18,326, the DGHS said.



People reading books as they wait for their turn at a salon in Sarpukur village in Aditmari upazila of Lalmonirhat. Jamal Hossain, a student, supplies books to 30 such salon-based mini-libraries in the district with money earned from part-time jobs.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

## A beacon with books for all

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Now an honours student of history at Lalmonirhat Government College, he continues to supply books free of cost and monitor these salon-based libraries.

Each of the 30 salon-based libraries get 10 different books every week and there is clamour for more books as well as more of these mini-libraries in local salons.

Jamal is currently trying to buy more books and set up more of these mini-libraries but doesn't have the funds to do so right away.

"I have a plan to run at least 100 salon libraries in five upazilas in this district, but I need time as I don't have the ability right now," he said.

The son of a farmer, Jamal is doing all this with the money he earns from tuitions and the help of his friends in managing the libraries.

Choosing salons as the base for these libraries was also for a social good, as Jamal saw it.

"I saw people gathered in the salon all the time, spending their time idly, so I decided to set up a library in there where people can also learn something during that time," he said.

Salon owners seem to agree.

Sukumar Chandra Sharma, a salon owner in Tipar Bazar area carrying Jamal's library books, said that his establishment and customers both benefit.

"In the past, customers in my shop used to smoke to pass the time but now they spend time reading books instead," he said, adding it made for a better atmosphere inside. He himself also reads the books when at leisure.

"Customers in my salon are happy to have the opportunity to read books," said Sanjay Kumar Sharma, owner of another salon in the same area. "They want more."

Nando Kumar Shil, an owner of a salon at College Road in Lalmonirhat Sadar, said, "Now, we don't spend our leisure time doing nothing, but rather reading books which makes us knowledgeable."

"I told Jamal to set up a library in

my salon several times but I'm not getting the opportunity yet," said Bhabesh Chandra Sharma, a salon owner at Kakina village of Kaliganj upazila.

Schoolteacher Nur Islam of Bhadai village said, "We benefit as the salon library provides us with different books, playing an important role in broadening our knowledge."

"I enjoy the opportunity of reading books while at the salon."

Delwar Hossain, a fellow college student, said he and several other friends help Jamal run the salon-based libraries. They also come together to read books and newspapers in the library at Tipar Bazar, Sarpukur, where this all began.

## Erosion halts ferry service in Shimulia

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Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), the government body to operate the services, then decided to operate five small ferries and shut down the operations of large RO-RO ferries due to navigability crisis.

Later at night, the ferry terminal saw havoc due to erosion, said government officials concerned.

"If this situation continues, it would be difficult to protect the terminal," said Harif Ahmed, deputy assistant engineer of BIWTA.

The government's other body, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC), responsible for maintenance of ferry terminals was contacted. Their assistant manager Prafulla Chauhan said operations of large RO-RO ferries have been shut

down due to navigability crisis and strong currents.

Meanwhile, around 50 vehicles are waiting at the Shimulia ferry terminal to cross the river. However, there is a huge flow of people, who were crossing the river by launches and speed boats.

However, ferry services on another major route Paturai-Daulatdia were normal yesterday, said officials concerned.

Abdus Sattar, assistant general manager (Marine) of BIWTC Aricha Regional Office, said 16 of the 19 ferries are in operation on this route.

"However, we are facing huge pressure of vehicles as ferry operations on the Shimulia-Kathalbari route is facing disruption," he told The Daily Star, yesterday afternoon.

(Our Manikganj correspondent contributed to the story.)

## Teargas fired during migrant protests on Greek island of Lesbos

AFP, Greece

Greek riot police fired tear gas at protesting asylum seekers on Lesbos island yesterday as tensions simmered following the catastrophic fire that ripped through Europe's largest migrant camp this week.

Thousands of asylum seekers have been sleeping rough on Lesbos since Wednesday when the Moria camp was destroyed in apparent arson attacks, with families huddling under blankets and sleeping in doorways or by roads.

Clashes occurred on Saturday near a new temporary camp built by Greek authorities where hundreds of young men gathered to protest, some throwing stones at riot police who responded with tear gas.

A fire set there earlier in the day near a police blockade had to be extinguished by the fire brigade.

"Freedom!" said one handwritten sign held up by a protester. "We want to leave Moria," said another.

"We were protesting peacefully against the new camp and the police threw tear gas against us. My baby had the gas in her eyes!", Zola, a Congolese woman carrying her 5-month-old baby, told AFP.

"In Moria we could come and go but this (new camp) will be like a prison".

Some people suffering from respiratory problems because of the tear gas were taken away in ambulances, according to the migrants.

"Three people have fainted and were taken to the hospital", Papouch, a Congolese man, told AFP.

- Tensions -  
Round-the-clock efforts to find temporary shelter for over 11,000 people made homeless by the destruction of the Moria camp were still inadequate, rights groups said.

"As thousands are now left sleeping rough in the hills around Moria or on the streets, tensions between local residents, asylum seekers, and police are increasing," Human Rights Watch warned in a statement on Saturday.

The Moria camp, which had been regularly criticised by the UN and rights groups for overcrowding and its dismal sanitary conditions, burned down in successive fires on Tuesday night and Wednesday.

Officials have blamed migrants for the blazes, the first breaking out

shortly after 35 people tested positive for coronavirus and were facing isolation measures.

Many of the mostly Afghan asylum seekers have spent months in desperate conditions on the island, hoping in vain to be allowed to cross tightly shut European borders.

Greek Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi on Saturday said the new camp, a few kilometres (miles) from Moria at a location near the sea, would open later on Saturday with capacity for 3,000 people.

"Rapid tests for coronavirus will be conducted at the entrance," Mitarachi told Skai TV.

Alexandros Ragavas, a spokesman for the migration ministry, said vulnerable asylum seekers would be the first to be housed.

"We will give priority to families. It will be tents of six and the camp will be separated by ethnicities. The process of moving people will start today," he told AFP.

- Local objections -

Local volunteer groups have faced difficulty in supplying asylum seekers with food and water.

"We are sleeping in the dirt or on the road under the open sky," a

group of migrants from the former camp said on Facebook, noting that some people had even found shelter under the trees of the local Greek cemetery.

Sleeping on the roadside and in parking lots, men, women and children have made use of whatever they can find in nearby fields, pinning tarpaulins on tree branches and reeds in a bid for privacy and protection from the beating sun.

The local mayor has rejected efforts to build new temporary camps as "unrealistic" and residents have tried to stop the construction of new camps by setting up roadblocks.

Army and fire service helicopters have been used to bypass the barriers.

"Any thought to rebuild this sort of thing should be forgotten," Mytilene Mayor Stratis Kytelis told Antenna TV on Friday.

"The island's society cannot take any more... for reasons of health, social cohesion, national security," Kytelis said.

The plight of the stranded families has prompted other European countries to offer to take in hundreds of asylum seekers, particularly unaccompanied youngsters.

## Four held in Monpura over rape of schoolgirl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Police have arrested four youths in Bhola's Monpura upazila over gang-raping a schoolgirl 10 days ago.

Law enforcers produced the four before a Bhola court yesterday seeking their remand for three days each in a case filed in this regard.

The arrestees -- Md Shakib, 18, A Karim, 19, Jobayer Hossain, 18, and Md Shamim, 19, -- are from Monpura union in the same upazila.

Police said the 15-year-old girl went to visit her aunt in Monpura from Dhaka's Keraniganj upazila during the Eid-ul-Azha holidays last month. The eighth grader had been staying there since then as her school was closed.

Around 10:00pm on September 7, the girl went out of her aunt's home to use the toilet. At that time, the four arrestees, along with six others, intercepted her and took her away on a motorcycle forcibly.

According to law enforcers, the accused first took the girl to the second floor of a newly constructed four-storey building of Monpura High School and gang-raped her.

As the daybreak was getting nearer, the accused took the girl to Andipar High School by a motorcycle. They again gang-raped the teenager there before fleeing.

Hearing her crying for help, some locals rescued the girl from the school premises on September 4 morning and sent her home.

The girl's aunt said they were under pressure from some local public representatives for "settling the matter locally". Police came to know about the incident from some locals on Thursday.

Monpura OC Shakhawat Hossain said they picked up the four youths from different places in Monpura upazila on Thursday and Friday.

The victim's aunt filed the rape case with Monpura Police Station on Friday, accusing some unidentified youths.

Police took the girl into custody on Friday. She was sent to Bhola Sadar Hospital yesterday for medical examinations.

## 7 saved

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Before joining as the Belkuchi UNO, he was the assistant commissioner of land in Sirajganj Sadar upazila where he also worked against the child marriage.

## N'ganj blast

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injured in the explosion and of them, 31 have died so far.

"On completion of the investigation, we will submit the report to a lower court," said the DIG, who along with his team visited the mosque around 11:00am.

Asked about primary findings of their investigation, he said it seems that the explosion occurred due to accumulated gas.

It can be confirmed after further investigation, he added.

Evidence are being collected from the spot, he said, adding that, "We will talk to the locals and the evidence will be examined at our forensic department. We will complete the investigation within the shortest possible time after examining the evidence and other probe reports."

It is suspected that the explosion was caused due to an accumulation of leaked gas from an underground Titas Gas pipeline after it came in contact with an electric spark.

Titas Gas has suspended eight of its officials and staffers in connection with the blast. During digging, officials noticed two holes in an underground gas pipe adjacent to the mosque.

Meanwhile, the condition of all five Narayanganj mosque explosion victims currently undergoing treatment in the ICU of Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery is somewhat better than before but still in danger, doctors said.

"Some of them have lesser burn injuries. But as all the five patients suffered inhalation burns, we can't consider them to be out of danger," Dr Partha Sankar Paul, resident surgeon of the institute, told reporters yesterday.

Of the five, Sheikh Farid suffered 50 percent burn injuries, Abdul Aziz 47 percent, Kenan Hossain Bappi 30 percent, Amzad 25 percent, and Sifat 25 percent, according to hospital sources.

## Mujib-Indira

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The Liberation War posed a major problem and the government allocated a Tk 25 crore for a massive test relief programme to provide easy employment to the rural people.

13 LAKH BIGHAS OF KHAS LAND IN PROCESS OF DISTRIBUTION

Thirteen lakh bighas of khas land available with the government are now in the process of distribution among the landless peasants of the country discloses Land Reforms and Revenue Minister Abdur Rab Seraniabab today. Each landless peasant family would be given four and a half bighas. In addition to this, another chunk up to three bighas might be allotted to deserving applicants in char areas where selected candidates should undertake cooperative farming and establish homestead by the farm, he adds.

SOURCES: September 14, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Dainik Ittefaq.

## Five Indians detained near Tibet released

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It reported that the men had trespassed and that Chinese officials had "detained, warned and educated" them.

Relations between China and India have been unusually tense since hand-to-hand fighting involving clubs and rocks at a disputed border area in June that killed 20 Indian soldiers, with an unknown number of Chinese casualties.

Tens of thousands of troops from each side have since amassed across the disputed border.

On Tuesday, following reports that five Indians from the state of Arunachal Pradesh, which borders China's Tibet, had gone missing, an Indian minister said that the Chinese People's Liberation Army confirmed they had been found in China.

Their disappearance coincided with a border confrontation in the western

Himalayas, during which both accused the other of firing in the air.

The nuclear-armed neighbours have long observed a protocol avoiding the use of firearms in the undemarcated frontier, though violence has erupted in the past.

On Thursday, Chinese State Councillor Wang Yi and Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar met in Moscow and agreed to de-escalate the border tensions.

"The two Foreign Ministers agreed that the current situation in the border areas is not in the interest of either side. They agreed therefore that the border troops of both sides should continue their dialogue, quickly disengage, maintain proper distance and ease tensions," a joint statement said.

Global Times editor-in-chief Hu Xijin said on the Chinese state network that China-India relations

were stabilising. Observers of China's foreign relations often watch Hu's messages on social media to gauge sentiment from Beijing policymakers.

"It seems that the successive meetings between the Chinese and Indian defence ministers and foreign ministers have played a positive role in cooling down the situation," Hu wrote.

"In addition, the People's Liberation Army defended every inch of the country's land, and the Indian Army ultimately failed to take advantage of it."

India and China have differing perceptions of what constitutes the Line of Actual Control - the de facto border - that runs through the disputed territory on their Himalayan border.

The disputed and undemarcated 3,500km (2,175-mile) border between India and China stretches

from the Ladakh region in the north to the Indian state of Sikkim.

The two nations fought a border war in 1962 that also spilled into Ladakh and ended in an uneasy truce. Since then, troops from opposing sides have guarded the undefined mountain border area, occasionally brawling.

India unilaterally declared Ladakh a federal territory and separated it from Indian-administered Kashmir in August 2019, ending its semi-autonomous status and straining the already prickly relationship between New Delhi and Beijing.

Prior to the latest diplomatic breakthrough between the two sides, India had banned dozens of Chinese apps, including popular video-sharing app TikTok, and has placed restrictions on Chinese investments amid the backlash against Beijing following the deadly border clashes.