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BANGLADESH UPDATE

1,476
New cases in 24hrs

3,37,520
Total cases

4,733
Deaths

2,40,643
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

925,689
Deaths

29,029,736
Total cases

Metro not by next year

Unlikely to be completed by revised deadline as contractor seeks one-year time extension

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Wait of Dhaka dwellers for the maiden metro rail service could linger as a contractor responsible for implementing the first phase of the much-hyped project sought a one-year extension due to the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic.

This means the opening of the metro rail, one of the largest infrastructure development projects of the country, is likely to be deferred.

Overall, the project has progressed only 49.15 percent till date with only 5.9km out of 20.10km of the structure is ready for laying railway tracks.

The first phase of the project was targeted to be completed by 2019.

However, despite initial delays and struggles to speed up the construction works due to Covid-19 pandemic, the metro rail authorities have not yet changed its completion deadline of December 2021.

Italian-Thai Development Public Company Limited, the Bangkok-based construction company responsible for building metro line and stations from Uttara to Agargaon, recently sought the time extension as their contract period expired on August 31, officials said.

The company's request for time extension comes at a time when works of package 3 and 4, which constitute most of the first phase, witnessed 73.55 percent progress till August.

The metro rail authorities, however, claimed that the Italian-Thai contractor did not propose an escalation cost

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Hundreds are seen crowding in front of the Dhaka City College in the capital around noon yesterday as admissions get underway in different colleges across the country. Many of the guardians and aspiring students are not wearing masks, and the sheer force of their numbers led to traffic jams in the area.

PHOTO: RASHED SUMON

He siphoned off Tk 195cr to Singapore, Malaysia

CID on Samrat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expelled Juba League leader Ismail Chowdhury Samrat, one of the "casino kingpins" in Dhaka,



siphoned off Tk 195 crore to Singapore and Malaysia with the help of Enamul Haque Arman, another leader of the ruling party's youth wing, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police found in an investigation.

The CID filed a case against the duo under the Money Laundering Act with Ramna Police Station yesterday, Jisan Haque, ASP (media) of CID, confirmed the matter.

In its investigation, the CID found that Samrat, 49, had visited Singapore 35 times, Malaysia three times, Dubai two times, and Hong Kong once between 2011 to

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- ➔ Overall progress of the project **49.15%** till August
- ➔ First phase of the project sees **75.5%** progress
- ➔ Second phase witnesses **42.5%** progress
- ➔ Only **5.03%** progress in the last five months
- ➔ Out of **20.1km**, **5.9km** viaduct ready for installing tracks
- ➔ Work on none of the **16** stations completed till date
- ➔ Current deadline for completion **December 2021**



Daily deaths from Covid still in 30's

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Deaths caused by Covid-19 rose to 5.81 percent compared to the previous week as Bangladesh entered the 37th week of the first detection of coronavirus case, said a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) yesterday.

In the past 24 hours till 8:30am yesterday, 31 Covid-19 patients died. Of them, 28 died in hospitals and three in their homes.

With this, the total number of deaths rose to 4,733 which is 1.40 of all cases detected so far.

At least 1,876 people tested positive for the viral infection, raising the number of confirmed cases to 3,37,520.

Against a total of 12,999 tests in those 24 hours, the positivity rate was 11.35 percent, according to the press release.

This week, the

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Digital access dismal in rural Bangladesh

BIGD study on 6,500 households finds about half of them have access to neither computer nor Net

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly three-quarters of rural households in the country have low level digital access and skills, finds a survey of Brac Institute of Governance and Development.

The survey showed that about 49 percent of the households have no access to a computer and 54 percent do not have access to the internet. Although 96 percent of rural households own a mobile phone, a majority (59 percent) do not have access to a smartphone, according to the findings.

In recent years, Bangladesh has achieved commendable progress in digitising many of its public services to make them more accessible and cost-effective, said a BIGD press release yesterday.

However, the recent study by the BIGD titled "Digital Literacy in Rural Bangladesh" shows that rural households are still lagging behind in adoption and use of e-services due to lack of proper access to information and communication technology (ICT) and the skills needed to operate devices.

This persistent "digital divide" between rural and urban households in Bangladesh

- ➔ **72%** rural households have low digital access
- ➔ **61%** rural households are categorized as Low Skills
- ➔ **54%** rural households have no internet access
- ➔ **49%** rural households have no computer access
- ➔ **59%** rural households have no smartphone access
- ➔ Mymensingh, Rangpur, Sylhet divisions have lower level of digital access

continues to hinder the successful expansion of the country's e-government system.

In a webinar yesterday, Dr Wasel Bin Shadat, senior research fellow at BIGD, presented these findings from the study.

Surveying 6,500 rural households from across the country, the study was the first of

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Six leaks filled mosque with cooking gas

Finds fire service probe into Narayanganj blast

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Six leakages in gas pipeline and around 17 percent of the mosque air filled with methane gas caused the blast in Narayanganj, finds the probe of fire service and civil defence.

The probe report mentioned electric sparks ignited the gas.

The explosion claimed 31 lives and several others sustained serious burn injuries.

"Blast happened due to gas leakage. After the accident, we found around 17 percent of the mosque was filled with methane gas," Brig Gen Md Sazzad Hussain, director general of fire service and civil defence, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the committee would submit the report on Thursday and they were now finalising the report.

The four-member probe body, led by Lt Col Zillur Rahman, director (operations and maintenance of fire service and civil defence), was formed on September 4.

The committee talked to locals, the authorities of Titas Gas Ltd, the mosque committee, and the power supply division to unearth the reason behind the blast.

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Border guards meet delayed as BSF plane has hiccups

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The biannual director general-level talks between Border Guard Bangladesh and Indian Border Security Force, scheduled to start yesterday, was postponed as the BSF delegation failed to reach Dhaka.

"The BSF delegation could not fly to Dhaka today at the final stage due to technical glitches in their own aircraft," a BGB press release said yesterday.

The BSF team was supposed to travel on their own aircraft due to the suspension of Dhaka-Kolkata/Dhaka-Delhi flights till September 30. The meeting was supposed to end on September 18.

The revised schedule of director general-level talks (DGLT) has not yet been confirmed, added the press release.

BGB DG Maj Gen Md Shafeenul Islam was supposed to lead the Bangladesh side while newly-appointed DG of

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Gas bubbles forming in this roadside drain near Alam Market in the capital's Jurain. A gas line runs parallel to this drain and the leaking gas has created an overpowering odour, but no action is being taken despite complaints from locals. This photo was taken on Saturday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Flawed system, misgovernance cripple Titas

Say energy experts

SADI MOHAMMAD ALOK

Some Titas gas company officials are more interested in corruption than providing service to consumers and this leads to casualties due to explosions, energy experts said, while reflecting on the recent Narayanganj mosque fire that has so far claimed 32 lives.

They said people are suffering due to the greed of the dishonest and corrupt Titas officials who are thriving on a flawed system under the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources.

"Titas has turned into an enemy of the people. The situation has come to a point that we think if Titas does not give us any service, we will be safe," Prof M Shamsul Alam, energy adviser to the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB), told The Daily Star.

"We are forced to pay Titas officials. We are giving them money in bribes, paying extra charges due to price hikes of gas and at the same time they are providing gas through an illegal network," said the energy expert, adding that gas has been leaking from around 70,000 points in Dhaka city due to poor quality and illegal gas supply.

"We have to pay through our lives [at times] due to their corruption," said Prof Alam.

Dhaka University professor Badrul Imam echoed Alam's statement.

"They are not committed to their work. The illegal network of gas pipelines is their creation and general people are suffering for that," said Imam.

The illegal gas lines are just ticking time-bombs, he said.

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