

**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**



1,593
New cases in 24hrs



3,44,264
Total cases



4,859
Deaths



2,50,412
Recoveries



**GLOBAL
UPDATE**



946,718
Deaths



30,126,857
Total cases

Tweak rail design to let tall

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opposition from the BMBP authorities.

However, this will have no effect on the overall cost and duration of the project, PBRLP authorities claimed.

"The Cabinet Division has given us some instructions for redesigning and we are following those," PBRLP Director Golam Fakhruddin Ahmed Chowdhury told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

Both PMBP and PBRLP are fast-track projects.

Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA) is implementing the much-hyped PMBP at a cost of Tk 30,193 crore to connect the country's southwestern region with the capital via road and rail lines.

On the other hand, Bangladesh Railway is implementing "Padma Bridge Rail Link Project" to connect the capital with Jashore with a 169km rail line over the under-construction Padma bridge at a cost of Tk 39,246-crore.

The trains will use the lower deck of the 6.15km double-deck bridge and vehicles would use the road above.

But because rail tracks require much longer slopes than roads do, the rail lines will pass over the connecting roads on either side of the bridge.

And at the points, where the rail viaducts would be constructed over the roads, the standard clearance between the road and the lowest part of the viaduct should be 5.7 metres, so that all types of vehicles can operate smoothly.

Besides, a national highway needs to have a standard horizontal limit of 15.50 metres, officials said.

"But, thier [PBRLP] vertical and horizontal limits are shorter than what is needed on the national highway on both sides of the bridge," PMBP Director Shafiqul Islam told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

"They have deviated from the standard. I have informed the authorities about it," he said.

BBA Executive Director Belayet Hossain said if railway viaducts are built according to the current design, large lorries will not be able to use the bridge.

"The cabinet secretary sir has asked them [PBRLP] to redesign it," he told this correspondent.

The PBRLP held a meeting on August 19 to resolve the issue and a letter it sent to the authorities concerned shows some details of the problem.

The connecting road of the Padma bridge goes underneath the pier no 25(1) and 25(2) of railway viaduct at the Janjira end of the bridge.

When the contractor of PBRLP, upon informing PMBP authority, dug the road to install pile caps of the piers, PMBP on July 19 asked the contractor to stop the work and also sought documents about the vertical and horizontal clearance of the piers and the design of the crossing point, reads the letter.

The contractor stopped the work and the PBRLP sent those documents. The vertical limit between the bottom of the piers and connecting road is 5.51 metres and horizontal clearance between the two piers would be 9.65 metres, the letter mentioned.

The letter, however, mentioned the width of the connecting road as 9.36 metres.

But, the PMBP authority said the vertical and horizontal limit is not enough and those should be 6 metres and 15.5 metres respectively.

The letter mentioned that the design of the PBRLP was prepared taking the opinion from BBA in 2015 and the issue was discussed at the meetings of the interface committee of the both the projects.

Besides, construction of all piles of piers 25(1) and 25(2) and pier no 27 to 47 have already been completed. So it's

not possible to change the level of the rail lines, reads the letter.

The PBRLP authority, rather, suggested lowering the level of the connecting road to maintain the expected vertical limit and they would do it from their project.

But, the PMBP authority said the design is not acceptable at all. WHAT PD'S OF PBRLP AND PMBP SAYS

Golam Fakhruddin Ahmed Chowdhury said, "This is not a problem. We have received a requirement proposal, which we are adjusting now."

Replying to a question he said, "Deviation has occurred only regarding pier no 25, which is being fixed now."

Asked about Fakhruddin's claim, PMBP's Director Shafiqul Islam said, "No. This is not correct. Our objection is over the design of viaducts on both sides of the bridge and regarding both the vertical and horizontal limits."

Asked whether they have to change the design of all 21 piers (No 27 to 47) and reconstruct those, Fakhruddin said no. "We have to change only the pier no 25. There is no problem regarding the other piers."

The contractor has already been instructed to redesign the piers and it may take a maximum one month to do that, he added.

Regarding BBA and PMBP authorities' objection over horizontal clearance, Fakhruddin said, "We will try to divert the road."

Asked whether PMBP will accept the proposal, he said, "We will discuss the matter. We are talking with the BUET



PADMA RAIL LINK DESIGN FAULT



- 1 VERTICAL CLEARANCE 5.51 METRES**
(Should be minimum 5.7 metres)
- 2 HORIZONTAL CLEARANCE 9.65 MERES**
(Should be at least 15.5 metres)
- 3 ROAD WIDTH AT PRESENT 9.36 METRES**

experts in this regard and will definitely find a solution."

He claimed it would not have any impact on the cost and duration of the total project as works are going on at the other parts of the project.

BBA Executive Director Belayet Hossain and Railways Ministry Secretary Salim Reza and top officials of both projects will visit the project site today.

"Directives have already been given to solve the problem. We will go and see how to implement those," Belayet said.

Policy tangled in red tape

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"In a pandemic situation, the crucial thing is to make the right decision at the right time. We have limitations in PCR testing facilities. The decision of introducing an antigen test was a good one, but the way it was delayed is unacceptable," Muzaherul Huq, former regional advisor for South East Asia at World Health Organisation (WHO), told The Daily Star on Monday.

He said the government was delaying the process unnecessarily.

"Coordination between the [health] ministry and the DGHS is remarkable and observable. We all are seeing the lack of this coordination, which is putting people's lives at risk," he said.

The exercise of introducing the antigen test started in early July, but it is still going on.

Let's have a look at the process.

On July 5, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general of DGHS, sent a letter to the secretary of health services division, mentioning the urgency for forming a Covid-19 sample testing expansion policy.

In that letter, she mentioned that the DGHS had already prepared a draft policy and it could be approved with necessary guidelines on an emergency basis.

On July 7, the draft of the policy was submitted to the director general of DGHS.

The directorate sent the draft policy to the health ministry on July 9. Later, the ministry formed a committee of experts to prepare a sample testing expansion policy. The committee finalised its report incorporating opinions on August

4 and sent it to the health services division of the ministry.

An official of the division said, "After submitting the report, the committee came up with a presentation on August 18."

After incorporating meeting opinions, the draft was submitted to the ministry on August 23, the official said, preferring anonymity.

On August 31, the health ministry sent a letter, signed by Bilkish Begum, deputy secretary of the ministry, to the DGHS, asking the DG to send the final draft of the policy to the health services division.

Contacted, Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of DGHS, told The Daily Star that they were working on it and would send it back soon to the ministry.

At the end of last month, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said the government was going to take an initiative to start rapid antigen testing in public Covid-19 labs to diagnose the coronavirus.

Officials at the ministry blamed the DGHS for delaying the process.

"The health services division wrote to the DGHS to send the proposal to the ministry officially," said an official, wishing not to be named.

"If we get the proposal today, we will approve it within a day or two without any delay," he added.

A senior official of the ministry said basically the ministry officials have to pursue the DGHS officials repeatedly to get any update.

Preferring anonymity, he said, "It is already 14 days but the ministry is yet to get any reply. Tell me who is responsible?"



Imran, a Dhaka University student, petting a dog in TSC building area yesterday. The Dhaka South City Corporation authorities have recently taken away several vaccinated stray dogs from the university campus to the frustration of dog lovers and animal rights activists.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Onion added to the list of thorny issues

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imposed by India, which had a rapid ripple effect. Onion prices soared close to Tk 300 per kg from Tk 40, leaving people all at sea. They even had to cut back on consumption.

Bangladesh had to frantically rush to import onions from other countries, including Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan and China. It was also an embarrassment for the government and its friendly bond with India -- something that was reflected during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Delhi in early October last year.

While addressing an event in Delhi, where Indian Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal was present, the PM said she wished India had informed Bangladesh before the sudden halt in export of onions.

Speaking in Hindi, Hasina had said, "I had to tell my cook I have no other option but to have my food without onions. I would request India to please inform us beforehand while taking such an action. After all, we are neighbours."

Dhaka had learnt a lesson. During a commerce secretary-level meeting on January 15-16 this year, the Bangladesh side requested their Indian counterparts to consider not imposing export restrictions on essential food items required by Bangladesh. In case of any event that necessitated such restrictions, Bangladesh requested India to inform it ahead of time.

In a letter to the Indian High Commission in Bangladesh on Tuesday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said India's sudden ban on onion exports is a matter of deep concern and has undermined the earlier discussions

regarding restrictions over essential food items.

Analysts said the World Trade Organization does not encourage export-import bans but a country can take its decision based on its domestic demand and supply.

"However, if there is any understanding with a friendly country that one country will inform well ahead of time before any such decision that has implications on the friendly nation's market, it must be complied," said Prof Lailafur Yasmin of the Department of International Relations, Dhaka University.

"If that is not complied, one can easily question the level of friendship," she told this correspondent yesterday.

She said India is trying to deepen its relationships with neighbours and considers Bangladesh to be the first among them, but this policy is not reflected in some of the country's activities.

"This is not rationally driven. It reflects India's inconsistencies in terms of how it is dealing with Bangladesh," Prof Lailafur said, adding that the sentiment holds true especially at a time when Bangladesh is providing a host of vital facilities to India, including transit through Bangladesh to Northeast India and ensuring stability in India's Northeast by not sheltering insurgents from the Seven Sisters.

In contrast, the issues of Teesta treaty, which has not been signed yet due to India's domestic issues, and the rising trend of border killings remain thorny issues, she said.

Analysts said India and Bangladesh solved major issues like land and

maritime boundary disputes and they can surely solve all other issues if both sides are sincere and respectful with each other.

Centre for Policy Dialogue Executive Director Dr Fahmida Khatun said there would be no problem at all if India informed Bangladesh well in advance of such an export ban.

However, she said, as Bangladesh knows well that it has some shortage of onions, it needs to diversify the sources of onion import instead of depending mostly on India. Bangladesh has an annual shortage of some six lakh tonnes of onions and imports about 90 percent of it from India.

"Also, we don't have any acute shortage of onions this time to justify the price soaring so high. This has happened mainly because of dishonest traders," Fahmida Khatun said.

This means that the government needs to augment its market monitoring, she said.

INDIA FOREIGN MINISTRY 'REPENTANT'

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said Indian Ministry of External Affairs is very "repentant" for not informing Bangladesh beforehand while imposing a ban on the onion export, reports UNB.

"I heard that the Indian Ministry of External Affairs is very repentant. Because they didn't know about the sudden ban," he told reporters at his office soon after his return from Turkey.

Bangladesh expects a positive outcome regarding its request to withdraw the export ban on onions soon, he said.

PM lauds health ministry

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(APAs) with ministries and divisions for 2020-21 fiscal year.

The APA and Integrity Awards were also distributed at the virtual function held at the conference room of the public administration ministry. The PM joined the event from the Gono Bhaban through a video conference.

Hasina said many doctors, nurses and other health workers died when they were serving patients putting their lives at risk. "Our health workers don't sit idle."

Referring to huge criticism of the health ministry, she said many people say many things against the ministry. "There is a section of people who have the habit of criticising [government], but they themselves would do nothing."

The PM said her government has given permission to many private televisions and built the country as Digital Bangladesh.

She said those people had once criticised it (govt's move to build Digital Bangladesh), but now they keep spreading propaganda taking advantage of Digital Bangladesh. "I think it depends on self-confidence whether we are on the right path."

Hasina asked the government officials to work with self-confidence and not to pay attention to who says what.

"You will have to have confidence in yourself whether you are doing the right jobs. If you have this confidence, the people of the country will be benefited from your works."

She asked the public servants to stand beside the people as it is their duty to serve them.

The premier said her party came to power with people's mandate and that is why they were pledge-bound to the people. "So, it is the duty of all of us to serve the people."

Stating her pledge to build a corruption-free administration, the PM asked all ministries to take up their own plans over integrity and implement those properly.

Hasina said the government has adopted the integrity strategy to ensure transparency and accountability in the administration.

"We want to establish a corruption-free administration. Every ministry will have to take up its own plan over integrity.... such plans should also be there up to the lowest tier of the administration. These [plans] will have to be executed properly. If you execute these, you will be rewarded."

The PM said 17,075 government offices -- 51 ministries and divisions, 344 offices or agencies, 16,635 field-level offices and 45 public universities -- sign APAs, which results in ensuring accountability at every tier of the administration.

Senior secretaries and secretaries to the ministries and divisions concerned signed the APAs on behalf of their respective agencies.

Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque, on behalf of the PM, handed

crests and certificates to winners for their outstanding performance in implementing APAs and exercising integrity.

The Power Division was recognised with a crest and citation as the best performer in implementing APA in the 2019-2020 fiscal year while the agriculture ministry and the Energy and Mineral Resources Division as the second best and third best performers respectively.

Besides, seven other ministries and divisions received certificates in recognition of their outstanding performance in implementing APAs. The ministries and divisions are water resources ministry, ICT Division, information ministry, Rural Development and Cooperatives Division, fisheries and livestock ministry, Finance Division and Economic Relations Division.

Senior Secretary of Internal Resources Division Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem received the integrity award for exercising integrity as the senior secretary of Energy and Mineral Resources Division in the 2019-20 fiscal year.

The public administration ministry was recognised as the best in implementing the national integrity strategy successfully in the 2018-19 fiscal year.

State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain also spoke at the function, conducted by Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam.

MP Shahid's trial begins in Kuwait

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for taking bribes from Shahid.

Maj Gen Mazen Sheikh Mazem Al Jarrah, assistant under-secretary of the interior ministry in Kuwait, is also among the accused.

It was not clear if the Kuwaitis accused in the case were taken to the court yesterday.

Kuwait's Criminal Investigation Department arrested Shahid, an independent lawmaker from Luxmipur-2, and also the managing director and CEO of Marafie Kuwaitia Group.

He was accused of charging each foreign worker, mostly from Bangladesh, up to 3,000 dinars in exchange for taking them to Kuwait. Many of them, however, alleged they were not provided with the jobs and wages as promised.

Shahid has since confessed to bribing millions of dollars to Kuwaiti officials for recruiting Bangladeshi workers and getting contracts for his company.

In response to a complaint filed on February 16, Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission opened an inquiry into an allegation that Shahid amassed Tk 1,400 crore by trafficking people to Kuwait and laundered the money to different countries.

Sources said Shahid earned huge black money through his illegal business, which also included human trafficking, and spent crores to buy the ticket to become an MP in 2018 elections. The same way, his wife Selina Islam also became an MP from women reserved seat, the sources said.

As Shahid faces trial and can potentially be convicted, there are questions if his parliament membership would be cancelled.

"It is not a matter whether the trial process of an MP is holding at home or abroad. Our consideration is that if we receive any judgement and other related documents that an MP has been awarded more than two years' imprisonment on moral turpitude,

the Speaker will verify the documents and will take measures to vacate the seat," said Fazle Rabbi Miah, deputy speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad.

He added that the MP's membership in parliament would be vacated only if he is convicted on moral turpitude. But the parliament has nothing to do now as the trial goes on against the independent MP.

Eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik, also an expert of the country's constitution, also echoed the deputy speaker.

According to the Article 66 of the constitution, a person shall be disqualified for election as, or for being, a member of parliament who has been, on conviction for a criminal offence involving moral turpitude, sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than two years unless a period of five years has elapsed since his release.

There are also several other grounds for which an MP can lose his membership in parliament.

Age limit relaxed for all govt jobs except BCS

Bss, Dhaka

The government has relaxed the age limit for all government job seekers, except for those seeking jobs in Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS), considering the Covid-19 situation.

The public administration ministry yesterday issued a notification in this regard, asking government offices, which completed all procedures for publishing job circulars before March 25, but could not advertise due to the Covid-19 situation, to fix March 25, 2020 as the date of an applicant's maximum age in their recruitment advertisements (excepting BCS).

The ministry also asked the authorities concerned to take necessary measures in this regard.

US official's Taiwan visit

China says will make 'necessary response'

REUTERS, Beijing/Taipei

China will make a "necessary response" to a visit by US Undersecretary for Economic Affairs Keith Krach to Chinese-claimed Taiwan, and has lodged a complaint with Washington, the foreign ministry said yesterday ahead of his arrival.

Krach, who arrived in Taipei yesterday afternoon, is in Taiwan for a memorial service on Saturday for former President Lee Teng-hui, who was revered by many on the island and internationally as the father of Taiwan's democracy.

Krach is expected to meet Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen today.

Admin probe

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committee and Titas Gas authorities accountable for the blast.

The district administration submitted its probe report to Deputy Commissioner of Narayanganj Jashim Uddin 10 days after it started the investigation, reports our Narayanganj correspondent.

"The probe body prepared the report after talking to Titas Gas authorities, DPDC [Dhaka Power Distribution Company], mosque committee members and witnesses," said DC Jashim Uddin.

According to the district administration report, the blast was caused by accumulated gas inside the mosque from a leaked gas pipeline which was sparked from an electrical connection.

Stressing on the gas leakage, Titas Gas authorities, in their report, said neither the mosque committee nor the people in the area informed Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited about the leakage.

The probe committee of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited was headed by the organisation's General Manager Abdul Wahab, whereas the committee of Narayanganj district administration was led by Additional District Magistrate Khadiza Tahema Bobby.

The committee of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited submitted its report to the State Minister for the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources at the Secretariat yesterday.

In the report, they said the mosque committee detected smell of the gas leakage a few days prior to the accident but did not alert anyone. "So, they are responsible for the accident."

The 16-page probe report detailed the blast and also mentioned there was six leakages in the pipeline.

According to the report, two gas risers were shifted at the mosque by inexperienced welders and the visible portions of the risers were cut off without informing the authorities concerned.

From the leakages, gas accumulated inside the AC chamber and that may have come into contact with the electric spark.

The report also said that the gas pipeline was damaged during the construction of the mosque. The mosque also had illegal electricity connection.

Just before the blast, there was load-shedding and the moajin of the mosque switched the line which resulted in the fire, the report added.

The report also mentioned that the mosque committee did not take any approval from any authority while constructing the establishment.

Nasrul Hamid, state minister for the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, said, "None can avoid responsibility. DPDC is also investigating the incident of illegal electricity connection. "Mismanagement is the reason for such accidents. The mosque committee cannot avoid responsibility. Ministry will take a decision later after seeing all the reports."

Narayanganj Titas Gas Ltd has already suspended eight employees, including four engineers, over the incident that claimed 31 lives and left five more critically injured.

They have also been served with a show-cause notice asking for explanations why they would not be dismissed from their jobs.

The blast took place in Baitus Salah Jame Mosque following Esha prayers on the night of September 4.