

BANGLADESH  
UPDATE



1,545  
New cases in 24hrs



3,93,131  
Total cases



5,723  
Deaths



3,08,845  
Recoveries

GLOBAL  
UPDATE



1,131,506  
Deaths



41,189,138  
Total cases

## US Senate to vote Monday on Barrett nomination to Supreme Court

AFP, Washington

The US Senate will vote on Monday, eight days ahead of the presidential election, to confirm Judge Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, the Senate Majority Leader said Tuesday.

"We'll be voting to confirm justice-to-be Barrett next Monday,"

Republican Senator Mitch McConnell said at a press conference.

"I think that will be another signature accomplishment in our effort to put on the courts, the federal courts, men and women who believe in the quaint notion that maybe the job of a judge is to actually follow the law," McConnell said.

## Pregnant woman

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out of the house and went into hiding himself.

The family of rapist Parvez said the matter would be solved through "arbitration" and asked the victim not to file any case.

Meanwhile, the victim informed the Union Parishad chairman of Chhatrapaiya about the incident on Tuesday morning, but he did not take any step to resolve the matter.

The woman then filed a rape case with Senbagh Police Station on Tuesday night.

Tarequr Rahman, sub-inspector of the station, said there was one rapist and others filmed the incident.

"We have arrested three of them and are trying to arrest others, including Parvez."

The victim's husband remained in hiding since the incident, police said.

Another woman was raped at knifepoint in the same district early yesterday.

Quoting the victim, police said the 29-year-old woman is a wife of a Saudi-expatriate and a mother of two. She lives with her mother-in-law and children.

While she was sleeping with her children on Tuesday night, one of their neighbours, Mujibul Rahman Sharif,

32, entered her room early yesterday.

When victim started shouting, the accused showed her a sharp weapon and threatened to slaughter her children.

He then raped the housewife and filmed it. He threatened that he would release the video on social media if she did not have sexual relations with him again.

The victim filed a case against the accused yesterday noon, after which police arrested the accused, said Md Anwarul Islam, OC of Chatkhil Police Station.

Meanwhile in Satkhira, an eight-year-old girl was raped.

Quoting Fingri's victim's family members, police said a 13-year old boy, who the young girl was previously acquainted to, took the girl to a nearby garden and raped her.

The same night, the victim's mother filed a case against the minor boy, who was arrested, said Md Asaduzzaman, OC of Satkhira Sadar Police Station.

Contacted, the hospital's emergency unit doctor Tanvir Ahmed said they have found evidence of rape from the victim's body. Details would be known after completion of the medical tests.

(Our correspondents from Noakhali, Rangamati, Gazipur and Satkhira contributed to the report.)

## Puja mandaps, temples

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closed after the evening rituals (Sandhyarati) as the festival will be celebrated from today, said Bangladesh Puja Uddjapan Parishad and Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee yesterday.

The Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee organised the "Sharodio Durga Puja 2020" view exchange meeting in the capital's Dhakeswari temple yesterday.

The main ritual of the Durga Puja will start from today through Sasthi Puja while the celebration will end on October 26 through Vijaya Dashami.

In between, special prayers will be offered tomorrow with prayers for recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

Apart from the Bhog Prasad of Goddess Durga, no khichuri or other Prasad distribution and will be organised this year along with the victory procession on the day of Vijaya Dashami.

Asked about the evening rituals (Sandhyarati), Shailendranath Majumder, president of the Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee, said, "Sandharati" usually starts around 6:00pm and it takes 20 to 25 minutes to complete the ritual.

Visitors won't be allowed to enter the temple or puja mandapa from the beginning of Sandhyarati. Only temple or mandapa related staffs will remain inside the temple.

This year puja will be held in 30,213 mandapas all over the country. In the Dhaka city, number of puja mandaps is 232, which was 238 last year.

In the view exchange meeting, Kishore Ranjan Mandal said different programmes of the Durga Puja will be broadcast live from the Facebook

## HC orders PK Halder's

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a petition filed by International Leasing and Financial Services Limited (ILFSL) seeking necessary directive on this issue.

Attorney General AM Amin Uddin represented the state while lawyer Mahfuzur Rahman Milon appeared for ILFSL during the court proceedings.

Halder, a former managing director of NRB Global Bank and Reliance Finance Limited, had earlier wanted to return home and repay the embezzled money.

In August, he wrote to ILFSL – one of the four NBFs – saying he would return home and settle the liabilities with the firms if he was provided with proper security.

On September 7, ILFSL's counsel Mahfuzur submitted the letter with an application to the HC for its directive in this regard.

The same day, the HC ordered the firm to inform it when Halder would return home for settling his transactions and liabilities with the firm.

According to Canadian media reports, Halder is now staying in Toronto. He is the director of P&L Hal Holding Inc, a Canadian corporation.

The three other NBFs from which Halder allegedly embezzled huge sums are People's Leasing and Financial Services, FAS Finance and Investment, and Bangladesh Industrial Finance Company.

In an investigation, Bangladesh

Bank found that Tk 1,596 crore was transferred from ILFSL in violation of the rules through 48 accounts of various organisations related to the directors and shareholders of the firm, according to BB officials.

Halder came under the spotlight during the anti-casino drives last year. The ACC opened an investigation into the alleged involvement of 43 people, including Halder, in the illegal casino business.

The government imposed a travel ban on him on October 3 last year. But he managed to flee the country.

The ACC on January 8 this year had filed a case against Halder on charges of illegally amassing wealth worth Tk 275 crore.

Following a petition filed by two depositors, the HC on January 21 directed the central bank and all private banks to freeze the accounts of Halder, his five relatives, former Bank Asia managing director Erfanuddin Ahmed and Halder's aide Uzzal Kumar Nondhi for allegedly misappropriating funds.

The HC ordered the government to seize the passports of 20 people, including Halder, his wife Susmita Saha and brother Pritish Kumar Halder.

The court also directed the authorities not to allow transfer of any of their movable and immovable properties, including stock, cash and cars, to any persons or entities until the disposal of the case.



A protester stands resolute as a tyre is lit on fire at the capital's Shahbagh intersection during yesterday's demonstrations against rapes and injustice.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Short-staffed BRTA failing to deliver

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theoretical training -- which was reduced to one day due to the Covid-19 pandemic -- to be "non-sustainable" and "very inadequate" to ensure safer roads.

Against the backdrop, the country is set to observe National Road Safety Day today. Being observed for the fourth time, this year's theme is "Mujib Borsher Shapat, Sarak Korbo Nirapad" (Promise of the Mujib Year is to make roads safe).

The main discussion programme will be held at BRTA headquarters. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will attend the discussion virtually.

### THE PROBLEMS

In its annual performance agreement (APA) for the 2020-21 fiscal year, signed with the Road Transport and Highway Division, BRTA said a lack of manpower is its main problem.

The regulatory body performs its functions through 57 district and five metro offices.

It has 708 employees now against a sanctioned post of 823. In January 2013, BRTA made its biggest recruitment in recent times -- 149 people, including 50 vehicle inspectors.

The country then had around 18.5 lakh registered vehicles. Nearly eight years later, the number has shot up to around 45.64 lakh but the BRTA could only recruit 19 people during that time and only one was a vehicle inspector.

Now, 109 vehicle inspectors are struggling to deal with checking the fitness of all vehicles in the country. In the last fiscal year, with the help of 86 mechanical assistants, they checked the fitness of 7.5 lakh vehicles.

The inspectors are always under pressure and the quality of inspections is compromised often due to pressure. Moreover, the shortage of vehicle inspectors causes service seekers to wait a long time for fitness certificates.

BRTA has only one Vehicle Inspection Centre (VIC) at its Mirpur office to check some elements digitally

and some 100 commercial vehicles (bus and trucks) are tested there every day.

Other vehicles have to be checked manually, which experts said could compromise safety as it leaves room for manipulation and irregularities. An automated system can get exact performance data of a vehicle's key safety features like headlights, brakes, and speed capabilities, which is almost impossible to do manually, they said.

"All these factors create an atmosphere where service seekers feel discouraged to come to a BRTA office with their vehicles for fitness clearance. Brokers take advantage of that situation," a BRTA official told this correspondent.

In the APA, BRTA mentioned the establishment of more VICs and their operation as a challenge. It also mentioned the lack of permanent structures, driving tracks, ramps, exam rooms, vehicles for testing aspiring drivers as other challenges.

"We have to hire places and manage classrooms and grounds of educational institutions for free to take these tests," another BRTA official said.

He said there are 68 driving competency boards, led by an additional district magistrate-level officer, to look after the tests. Due to the huge pressure of licence seekers over the last few years, all four boards in Dhaka (three metro circle offices and another district office) take tests every office day.

"Even after that, licence seekers have to wait for at least six months after submitting an application to take part in a test. Besides, it is not possible for all board members to be present regularly. More boards can solve the problem," he said, wishing not to be named. 'WORK AS A REAL REGULATOR' Noted transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque said, "I can say without any doubt that it is not possible to ensure road safety without ensuring

institutional capacity and proper planning.

"We often talk about road safety, but we don't do what needs to be done," he told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

He said issuance of driving licences, fitness clearances and route permits for vehicles are very important factors in ensuring road safety.

"Without performing these functions properly, meaning without doing the basic work, giving education to drivers and enforcing the law would not yield benefits," he said.

About the BRTA's training, he said, "Such training is not sustainable and inadequate. Providing such training while keeping anomalies in the system would not work."

He emphasised on increasing the institutional capacity of BRTA by recruiting more professional manpower and introducing more technology to ensure quality in the process of issuance of licences, fitness and route permits.

Referring to a government move to outsource fitness clearances, he said the government can encourage the private sector and BRTA can work as a "real regulator". WHAT THE AUTHORITIES SAY BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder said they, through the Road Transport and Highways Division, have sent a proposal of 2,282 posts last year to the public administration ministry and that there will be a meeting over the issue next month.

"We hope our manpower-related problems will be solved once the organogram is approved," he told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

Asked about the lack of infrastructure, he said works were underway for two separate projects under which a BRTA office/training centre with VIC facilities would be constructed in five major districts.

"We will implement the plan in all districts gradually," he added.

## Two killed as chunk of earth falls on them

They were razing hills illegally in Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Two men, alleged members of soil lifting syndicates, were killed being crushed under soil and another sustained injuries while they were illegally razing a hill in Ramu upazila of Cox's Bazar.

The dead are Mujibur Rahman, 40, and Ali Ahmed, 29; and the injured is Rafiqul Islam, 38; said police.

KM Ajmiruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Ramu Police Station, quoting locals, said the trio were residents of Ukhiarghona area in the upazila.

They went to raze the hill with a soil lifting machine on Tuesday night. At one point, a big chunk of soil fell on them, leaving Mujibur and Ali dead on the spot, he said, adding that Rafiqul sustained serious injuries.

Four more workers fled the scene after the incident, the OC said.

On information, police recovered the bodies and sent those to Cox's Bazar Zila Sadar Hospital for autopsies.

Police primarily gleaned that the deceased were members of a soil lifting syndicate, the OC said.

## EU tells Britain to make up its mind as Brexit deal 'within reach'

REUTERS, Brussels

The European Union yesterday told Britain to make up its mind on Brexit, putting the onus back on London to unlock trade talks as the bloc's chief negotiator said an agreement was still within reach with 10 weeks to go.

A frustrated European Union and piqued Britain both exhorted each other this week to compromise to avoid a disruptive finale to the five-year Brexit drama that would add to economic pain from the coronavirus crisis.

"Time is very short and we stand ready to negotiate 24/7, on all subjects, on legal texts. The UK has a bit of a decision to make and it's their free and sovereign choice," European Council President Charles Michel told the European Parliament.

He said Britain's answer would determine its level of access to the EU's internal market of 450 million consumers, adding: "This is just common sense."

The EU's Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier told the parliament an agreement was still "within reach".

"Time is of the essence ... Along with our British counterparts, we must find solutions to the most difficult areas," Barnier said, in comments that pushed sterling higher.

London has this week refused to continue full negotiations, saying the EU must "fundamentally change" its stance.

The bloc sees this as bluff by Prime Minister Boris Johnson but has also extended an olive branch by talking up UK sovereignty, as well as the EU's openness to discuss intensively, across the board and on specific legal texts.

## Importers stare

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docks in Chattogram, Narayanganj, Nopara, Nagarbari, Baghabari, Khulna, Barishal, Patuakhali.

Importers are having to demurrage charges ranging from \$10,000 to \$15,000 to the foreign vessel owners for each day of waiting, officials said.

Around 1.70 lakh tonnes of wheat, raw sugar and soybean oil imported by City Group are now onboard three cargo vessels at Chattogram port.

The group's 20 lighter vessels loaded with around 40,000 tonnes of these goods are stranded at different docks.

"If the work abstention continues there would be serious disruption in the supply chain of the goods," said City Group Director Biswajit Saha.

Abul Bashar Chowdhury, chairman of Chattogram based importing firm BSM Group, said if the supply chain gets disrupted there will be further price hike of different commodities.

The loss is manifold since consumers finally would have to bear the losses counted by the importers and industry owners, he added.

Seacom Group Managing Director Mohammed Amirul Haque said such strikes were unacceptable at a time when the government, entrepreneurs as well as the workers are trying hard to revive the country's economy.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Nounjan Samik Federation's General Secretary Chowdhury Ashiqul Alam said, "Our work abstention will continue until our demands are met."

The workers demonstrated in Majhighat area of Chattogram as well as at KDC area on the west bank of Kironkhola river in Barishal yesterday morning.

Our correspondents from Khulna and Barishal contributed to the report.