

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



**1,659**  
New cases in 24hrs



**4,12,647**  
Total cases



**5,983**  
Deaths



**3,29,78**  
Recoveries



**1,214,202**  
Deaths



**47,527,956**  
Total cases

BHASAN CHAR

## 4-layer protection for key island

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Just about the size of Cumilla town, the island of Bhasan Char in Nokhali's Hatiya sub-district has four layers of protection from natural disasters like cyclone.

The young island emerged out of steady sedimentation in 2006 and currently boasts a spanking new modern settlement that could accommodate 100,000 Rohingyas.

Bangladesh government had spent around Tk 3,100 crore in developing the island, building infrastructure and putting in place a protection system against extreme climate events under project delegated to Bangladesh Navy.

About two hours by boat from Noakhali district town, Bhasan Char is slightly south west of Sandwip in the Bay of Bengal close to the mouth of the Meghna river.

A number of development and international organisations questioned its safety and protection from natural disasters when the Bangladesh decided to relocate Rohingyas there.

"The embankment had been constructed after studying history and data of the last 176 years," Abdullah Al Mamun Chowdhury, project director, told The Daily Star.

The outermost rim or the first line of defence is the "Screen Break water" -- a string of strong pillars along 2.5 km out in the sea to break off strong current and waves. This is followed by gravels and geo bags.

Then, there is a layer of planned mangrove plantation almost half a kilometre deep which leads to the main 9ft-high 12-km embankment of the island.

Construction work is ongoing to raise the height of the embankment to

19 feet.

The south and northwestern side of the embankment is protected by natural mangroves.

The entire island also saw an intense mangrove afforestation initiative as a means of protection against cyclones and storm surge.

According to information provided by project officials, waves surged up to 4-5 feet high during cyclones, Foni, Bulbul and Amphan.

They point out that the embankment would thus be adequate to protect the inhabitants.

Besides, each of the 120 cyclone shelters are built on plinths at 12 feet from the ground and can hold 1,000 people with 200 heads of cattle.

The defence for Bhasan Char, according to project officials, will be adequate to protect them against extreme weather events based on the analysis of weather models of the 176 years.

Chinese construction company Sinohydro has worked on a flood-defence embankment and HR Wallingford, a British engineering and environmental hydraulics consultancy, is advising the project on "coastal stabilisation and flood protection measures".

Mohammad Jahangir known as Fakir told The Daily Star that there is a number of islands in Noakhali area but none is not so much protected.

"I used to live in Subarnar Char. My family is still living there. But that island was not that much protected," Fakir, in his 50 years, said.

Amzad Hossain another inhabitants of the island and chief Fakir saying earlier during the high tide, some parts of the island went under water but now it is stopped.



A line of pillars on the embankment of the Bay of Bengal is seen at Bhashanchar island in Nokhali's Hatiya upazila. The four-layer embankment has been built after analysing the data of the last 176 years to protect the inhabitants of the island. The government plans to relocate 100,000 forcibly displaced Rohingyas to this island from the mainland camps of Cox's Bazar. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

## Pro-people politics goes off the track

FROM PAGE 1

Bangladesh carried out the brutal massacre on 15 August. After that, our journey was [backwards] towards a communal state. But that journey has changed directions and [people] have fought for that change. In that process, the Awami League has been in power three times. They are in power for a long time.

But why the changes made during the journey backwards still be even there? This is what I mean by 'sudden'. It was not supposed to be. Bangabandhu's Bangladesh, the independent Bangladesh is non-communal and humane. Why is that Bangladesh stumbling again and again?

My concern is the people-oriented politics that we did and that had been going on suddenly went off track. I have seen elections during the Pakistan period, still see elections now. The current election is an election without the involvement of the people.

If someone jokes that it is a state election, it is very difficult to refute with logic. I wonder why the country will run in the style of non-people democracy. It is here where we have strayed from the path of Bangabandhu.

DS: Is the mooted idea of "development or democracy" an inner essence of that deviated path?

PB: Development and democracy are two sides of the same coin. They are not contradictory. Development without democracy is temporary, the foundation is weak. Bangabandhu's motto was that the constitution will be the guiding principle for the executive branch, the judiciary, and parliament to run the country. But we are not walking that path now.

DS: Voter-less election applies to military dictatorships as they do not have a public base. But the Awami

League is a party that has a mass base. They are the biggest political party. So, what is the logic behind considering them isolated from the people?

PB: It is unfortunate that a true opposition political party with the spirit of the Liberation War has disappeared. The BNP is largely responsible for that. It is still a big question whether the Jamaat-loyal BNP can carry out that responsibility. If they do not resolve this, it is difficult to say whether the BNP will exist in future.

DS: The BNP won only six seats in the last parliamentary elections.

PB: The big question is whether that election was held. I saw the election in 1970, I am still observing. I have not seen such spineless and obedient Election Commission like the current one, not even in 1970.

DS: You are talking about the BNP. But there were times people thought the leftist parties will emerge as the third political force in the country. Why did they fail?

PB: They are only to be blamed for that. They must find out why they failed to get the people on board. They will be successful only when they will be able to bring the non-communal forces closer in the spirit of the Liberation War and create an alternative. Otherwise, I do not see any possibility of success.

DS: Why do you think the Awami League is isolated from the people?

PB: The Awami League is working a lot like a military government. The grassroots power of the Awami League is not being utilised. They are running the country with the support of the administration.

DS: This Awami League has repealed the indemnity act, tried the killers of Bangabandhu. The party has also tried and punished the war criminals. Why have they failed to keep up the good

work?

PB: These are definitely major successes of the Awami League. The trial of the killers of Bangabandhu was barred by the indemnity act. To repeal the act and then bringing the killers to justice is an historic event for the nation. They are failing to keep up the good work because bureaucracy is now controlling politics. The political exercise based on people's desire and fine-tuned through debate in parliament involving the ruling party and the opposition is currently absent.

DS: The Awami League is saying that the country is moving forward, development is on-going, the country's financial condition is improving, and they are equipped to take on any challenges.

PB: It is a fact. Considering the condition 20 years ago, our economy has grown and many development activities have taken place. But if we want a sustainable development, we need cohesion between the three pillars of the state, we need accountability. It is only then the benefits of the development can reach the grassroots.

DS: The Awami League leaders, including its general secretary, are repeatedly saying that our healthcare system is of international standard.

PB: The healthcare system is so good that our president, ministers, members of parliament, and affluent people need to go outside the country for treatment. It is very unfortunate. We need to think from a neutral's perspective. Addressing a problem does not mean criticising the Awami League. Not only that, our education system might collapse in future, and the symptoms are there. It is a national crisis. It is not wise to say everything is all right. It is about time to do something.

Log on to [www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net) for the full interview.

## US election matters

FROM PAGE 1

Easing immigration laws will, however, mostly benefit Latinos and Indians, who make up a large portion of the immigrant population in the US, said Touhid.

He said traditionally, the US monitors democracy, human rights, labour rights and issues annual reports on that to create pressures for improving the indicators. This is a regular process and is not affected by who's in power.

Asked if there will be any change in how the Trump administration had tried to advance the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) during his tenure, the foreign policy expert said one of the objectives of the IPS is to counter China with which US has been in a tough trade war.

US-China relations have reached the lowest in decades recently over the origin of coronavirus, tariffs, tension over Taiwan, Hong Kong and the South China Sea. The US Secretary of State last month visited India, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Earlier, he joined a security dialogue with the foreign ministers of Australia, India and Japan in Tokyo. A military agreement was also signed between India and the US.

US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun also visited Bangladesh and spoke of more trade and investments as the US wants to have Bangladesh on its side under the IPS, which speaks of a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific Ocean.

Touhid said Bangladesh, at this moment, is not in a position to be part of a zero-sum game to choose between China and the USA. It will have to have relations with both the world powers and US will surely understand it.

Bangladesh welcomes US investments but also expects duty-free access for the

RMC products to its market. However, that is unlikely because of strong African lobby in the US, he said.

Will the tough anti-China policy remain the same if Biden wins? Prof Lalafur Yasmin, of the International Relations department at Dhaka University, said trade war between the US and China has been in place for quite some time. This will continue, but its pattern could change if Biden wins.

In fact, China is also investing in export-oriented industries in other countries to avoid US tariffs, she said.

Lalafur thinks Bangladesh's relations with foreign countries now do not depend solely on others but on Bangladesh as well, because Bangladesh has secured a position for its sustained growth, skilled workforce, infrastructure development, large market and the geo-strategic location between South and Southeast Asia.

About US immigration policies, she said the US, for its own interest, should ease immigration policies. Otherwise, it will lose its edge on research and development in all sectors in the future.

"If it has tight immigration laws, Bangladeshi students will be migrating to other countries for education, which is actually happening now," she said.

Some foreign affairs analysts think the US already faces an image crisis because of Trump's approach towards foreign policy, including withdrawal of the Paris Agreement on climate change, handling of the Covid-19 pandemic and rhetoric on immigrants and African Americans.

"If Trump wins, the US' traditional power on speaking for human rights and democracy of other countries will wane," a foreign affairs analyst said.

## UGC loan for 41,501

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8,000 as the amount is enough to buy a smartphone.

Contacted, UGC Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah said, "We're considering to provide Tk 8,000 to each student who needs the financial assistance to buy the phones, from our own resources."

He said they would meet today to discuss the matter.

Talking to this correspondent, UGC member Prof Muhammed Alamgir said an announcement in this regard would come in a day or two.

Lists of students requiring the money to buy the phones for getting connected to the classes have already been prepared by the universities concerned.

"We will give the money to the universities and they will disburse it among the students. The universities will take steps to collect the installments and pay us the money back."

"We've decided that Tk 8,000 is enough to buy a smart phone through which a student can join online classes from home," he said, when he was asked why the amount was revised.

The UGC boss said it would be interest-free loans and the universities concerned would fix the installment amount and repayment procedures. "If any student fails to pay the loan money, they won't get their educational certificates and won't be allowed to take part in their convocation."

He refused to comment when he was asked why the government hadn't disbursed the money yet.

Like schools and colleges, public universities have been taking classes online since they were closed in March to stem the spread of coronavirus.

A huge number of students, however, could not join the classes for having no smartphones or laptops, which they can't afford.

In such a situation, the UGC in August asked the public universities to prepare lists of students who can't come online for not having smartphones.

**14PC STUDENTS NEED THE DEVICE**  
Thirty nine public universities sent lists of 41,501 students who need the assistance. The total number of students at the universities is 3,04,414.

Authorities of the universities said on average 14 percent of their students would need the assistance to buy the smartphones.

A university in Netrakona sent a list, saying 20.39 percent of their 201 students would need the money. It is the highest percentage among the universities, said a UGC member.

Khulna University of Science and Technology, on the other hand, had the lowest percentage. Only 3.36 percent of their 5,860 students need the assistance.

Dhaka University authorities said 19.89 percent of their 43,000 students require the money to buy the phones. Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology seeks assistance for 19.18 percent of 7,500 students, Jahangirnagar University for 17.80 percent of 12,921 students, Jagannath University for 15.63 percent of 19,230 students, Chittagong University for 15 percent of 25,000 students and Rajshahi University for 12.40 percent of total 38,257 students.

Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Bangladesh University of Professionals and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Aviation and Aerospace University sought the assistance for less than 10 percent of their students.

## America holding

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It is possible that it could be days before the result is known, especially if legal challenges focused on ballots sent by mail are accepted in the event of a tight race.

There was a sense of anxiety among voters and concern about possible unrest after a campaign with heated rhetoric. There were buildings boarded up in anticipation of possible protests, including in Washington and New York city. A new fence was erected around the White House.

Polls opened in some Eastern states at 5:00pm BST (1100 GMT). Voting will end in Alaska around 12:00pm BST today. The most closely watched results will start to trickle in after 6:00am BST (2400 GMT) when polls close in states such as Georgia.

The two candidates have spent the final days barnstorming half a dozen battleground states, with Pennsylvania emerging as perhaps the most hotly contested. Biden has made at least nine campaign stops in Pennsylvania between Sunday and election day.

Biden made another appearance yesterday morning in Pennsylvania. Speaking to supporters using a bullhorn in Scranton, the city where he was born, Biden returned to some of his familiar campaign themes, promising to unite Americans and "restore basic decency and honor to the White House."

Appearing on Fox News yesterday morning, Trump said the crowds he saw on Monday during his frenetic last day of campaigning gave him confidence that he would prevail.

"We have crowds that nobody's ever had before," said Trump, who has been criticized by Democrats for holding packed rallies in defiance of social-distancing recommendations during the pandemic. "I think that translates into a lot of votes."

The voting caps a campaign dominated by a pandemic that has killed more than 231,000 Americans and put of people millions out of work. The country this year also was shaken by protests against racism and police brutality.

Biden, who has framed the contest as a referendum on Trump's handling of the pandemic, promised a renewed effort to combat the public health crisis, fix the economy and bridge America's political divide.

Trump has downplayed the pandemic, saying the country is "rounding the corner" even as numerous states set single-day records of new infections in the final days of the campaign.

More than 100 million Americans voted early either in person or by mail, motivated not only by concerns about waiting in lines on election day amid the pandemic but also by extraordinary levels of enthusiasm after a polarizing campaign. More than 60 million of those were cast through mail.

Opinion polls suggest more Democrats voted early, whereas more Republicans waited until election day.

The record-shattering total is nearing three-quarters of the total 2016 vote, according to the US Elections Project at the University of Florida. Experts predict the vote could reach 160 million, exceeding the 138 million ballots cast in 2016.

On election day, while there were long lines in some places, in many states lines were shorter, perhaps a reflection of the massive early vote.

In McConnellsburg, Pennsylvania, about a dozen voters lined up, bundled in jackets and hats on an unseasonably chilly morning.

"He's a bit of a jerk, and I appreciate that," Martin Seylar, a 45-year-old welder who had just finished his shift, said of Trump, his preferred candidate. "He doesn't get everything that he says done, but the way I see it is he's trying, versus where everybody else blows smoke at us."

In Detroit, Republican voter Nick Edwards, 26, cast a ballot for Biden but voted for Republican candidates for Congress.

"Honestly, decency in the White House," Edwards said when asked about his main concern. "When someone leads the party, they need to hold those values, as well. I don't think Trump encompasses that."

Some crucial states, such as Florida, began counting absentee ballots three weeks ahead of election day and could deliver results relatively quickly on election night. Due to this state policy, the initial results from Florida could favor Biden due to the high volume of early ballots. If there is a "blue mirage," it will fade as more in-person ballots from election day are tallied.

Like Florida, the initial results from other swing states like North Carolina and Ohio could favor Biden because the states began to scan early ballots weeks before election day. A truer picture of the vote will emerge as more ballots are tabulated.

Others including Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin are barred from processing the vast majority of mail ballots until election day, raising the possibility of a prolonged vote count that could stretch for several days. Pennsylvania will accept mail-in ballots up to three days after the election if they are postmarked by Nov 3.

If the presidential race depends on the outcomes in these states, America could be waiting for days.

Trump's top domestic security official yesterday urged voters to be patient in waiting for election results after reports that the president could rush to claim victory.

"Voters should be patient while waiting for the outcome of this year's election," said Chad Wolf, the acting secretary of homeland security. "It is important to recognize that this process may require time."

Trump reportedly told confidants that he would declare victory late on election night if it looked like he was ahead in the voting, though he denied the accusation.