

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



1,837
New cases in 24hrs



4,32,333
Total cases



6,194
Deaths



3,49,542
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,323,025
Deaths



54,691,405
Total cases

Soumitra cremated with state honours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Legendary Bengali actor Soumitra Chatterjee was cremated yesterday evening and a gun-salute at Kolkata's Keoratala Burning Ghat.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, leftist politicians Biman Bose, Suriya Kanta Mishra, along with thousands of Chatterjee's fans and admirers, joined the funeral procession.

The procession started from Nandan in Rabindra Sadan, considered the hub of Bangla theatre, reported Indian newspapers.

Soumitra Chatterjee passed away in Kolkata yesterday. He was 85. The Dadasaheb Phalke awardee was hospitalised over 40 days after testing positive for coronavirus.

He later tested negative for the virus, but the condition of the veteran actor remained a matter of concern owing to co-morbidities and advanced age.

Soumitra's body was brought out of Belle Vue Clinic hospital around 2:00pm and taken to his residence in Kolkata's Golf Green. His body was then taken to the Technician Studio in Tollygunge, where his long-time colleagues paid their last respects.

Babunagari picked

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secretary general.

Moulana Muhibullah Babunagari was made chief of the advisory body, which accommodated 20 advisers.

Before this committee, Junayed served Hefajat as secretary general, while Nur Hossain Qasemi was amir of Hefajat-e-Islam's Dhaka unit.

A central committee of 151 members was also formed during the council.

The meeting was held around two months after the death Hefajat Amir Ahmed Shafi, who passed away on September 18.

The new committee excluded almost all who were pro-Ahmed Shafi, including his son Moulana Anas Madani.

Apart from him, Moulana Mainuddin Ruhi, joint secretary general of the former committee, Mufti Faizullah, founding joint-secretary general of former committee, Mufti Moulana Abul Hasnat Amini, nayeb-a-amir, Anas Madani, publicity secretary and Moulana Kolimullah and joint secretary general of former committee, could not make it to the new committee.

The committee list was, however, not made public till the filing of the report on Sunday evening.

Asked, Moulana Meer Edris, a member of the council preparation committee, did not say why those who held posts earlier in the committee were omitted this time, but asked journalists to wait for further development.

Hefajat sources told The Daily Star that Junayed Babunagari, Nur Hossain Qasemi, and leaders of Khelafat-e-Majlis, basically shaped the committee. Junayed was made amir as he has the biggest influence on Hathazari Madrasas compared to other leaders.

Soon after the council, Moulana Mainuddin Ruhi told this newspaper that this committee is completely illegal as it did not follow organisation regulations.

Race against time

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that the students get the textbooks by the beginning of the New Year despite uncertainty over school reopening.

"We have started sending primary textbooks to the upazilas and only a nominal number of secondary books were sent to upazilas," NCTB Chairman Prof Narayan Chandra Saha told The Daily Star.

"As we started late in the process of awarding tender and work order, we have set a target that all books will reach the upazilas by December 26," he said.

This year, around 35.36 crore textbooks will be printed and distributed among 4.16 crore students of pre-primary, primary and secondary levels. Of them, around 10 crore books are for government students.

The government, however, will not arrange its "Textbook Festival", held on January 1 every year, due to the pandemic.

"The festival is important but it will not be wise to hold such festivals that could create a health risk," said Education Minister Dipu Moni recently.

According to the NCTB chairman, it is still not decided how students will receive the books.

THE DELAY

NCTB officials blamed the Covid-19 pandemic for the delay in initiating the tender process, issuing work orders, and other necessary tasks related to the printing of such a large number of textbooks.

Usually the tender process ends by April-May, and winning bidders receive their work orders by June-July and start printing books in August.

The textbooks are ready in October and almost all new textbooks reach students by January 1, the first day of the new academic year.

"But this year, the process of awarding tender and giving work order was completed in July and August because of the pandemic,"

Narayan said.

There was a 66-day shutdown from March 26 across the country to curb the spread of the virus.

And even after the shutdown was lifted, the board could only work with 25 percent of its manpower due to government orders about attendance of officials and employees at offices for several more weeks.

A section of NCTB officials, however, were sceptical about the quality of the textbooks as several printing companies combined to bid for the tender.

These companies got the work at about 25 to 30 percent lower than this year's bidding price of the estimated printing cost of textbooks.

Asked about the matter, the NCTB chairman said they will supervise the quality of books. "We will not give scope for anyone to give lesser-quality books."

TEXTBOOK DISTRIBUTION HISTORY

SINCE 2010, the government started distributing free textbooks to both primary and secondary level students at the very beginning of the academic session.

Previously, the government used to distribute free textbooks only at the primary level, which turned out to be difficult for many students belonging to low-income groups or disadvantaged communities.

A set of textbooks would cost between Tk 1,000-1,500.

Besides, printers would often create an artificial crisis by not printing and distributing books on time. In some cases, books used to hit the stalls in March-April or even later that year.

In the last 10 years, the government has handed out over 331.38 crore copies of textbooks to students.

The success has led to significant improvements in enrolment at the primary and secondary levels, as well as a decrease in the dropout rate at both levels, say NCTB officials.

People like him are rare in film industry



Aparna Sen

My family and I had known Soumitra babu from when I was in my mid-teens. He often came to our house and addressed my father as "dada" and my mother as "boudi". As time passed, we did many films together and became good friends.

We used to talk about literature, film and various other art forms. He taught me a lot about acting, especially when it came to shooting and blocking, which helped me most when I became a director.

He used to tell me to consider technology a friend -- the light, microphone and camera make up half of our craft and the other half was our own performance, according to his philosophy of a good shot.

People like him are rare in the film industry -- he could write poems, perform elocution, write scripts, direct and, it goes without saying, he could act. His demise will always remain an irreparable loss.

His devotion was unparalleled



Bobita

To me, Soumitra Chatterjee was a guiding light.

I had the privilege of working with him in 1972 when I was about 15. Only two of my films had been released at the time. Being on the set with two legends, Satyajit Ray and Soumitra, made me anxious and excited at the same time.

There was no word in the first shot of Ashani Sanket. After the shot was over, he praised me in a way that made me forgot all my worries.

We were filming during Eid once, I was feeling down being away from friends and family. He noticed that I was trying to hold back my tears. A huge feast, with lots of firecrackers and delicious food, was what he had in store for me that evening.

I met Shoumitra every time I visited Kolkata. He was my friend, confidante and guardian angel. He will continue to hold a special place in my heart.

Soumitra a guardian of Bangalee culture



Goutam Ghose

Soumitra Chatterjee was a guardian of Bangalee culture. It is an irreparable loss. Although my senior, he was more like a friend. A man of high morals, Soumitra dominated all spheres of culture.

He was very famous, but believed in simplicity. I had the privilege of doing four films with the legend. After every shot, he asked me whether it was perfect, insisting on a retake if it was anything less.

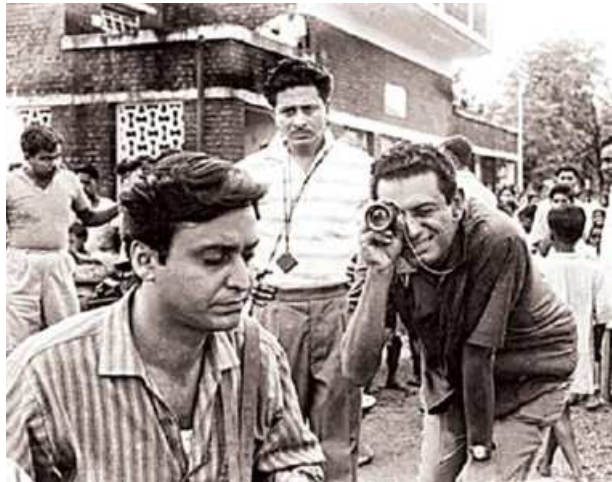
Soumitra placed great value on homework -- he would not shoot without proper preparation. This is why retakes were rarely needed.

His sense of humour was unbelievable. He used to gossip with the entire unit during shooting.

Once, on our way to the Marrakech Film Festival, when we reached the airport in France, Soumitra wanted to smoke. When I said I didn't have matches, he brought out two matchsticks from his socks!

I cannot fathom that he is no more. I feel bad that I could not say goodbye one last time.

The trio spoke to The Daily Star's Mohammad Al-Masum Molla after the demise of Soumitra Chatterjee. Log on to www.thedailystar.net for their complete reactions.



The last of the legends bows out

FROM PAGE 1

Naseeruddin Shah once said was "stylelessness and lack of acting" was the quintessentially intelligent actor.

During a career spanning over six decades, Soumitra, a gem discovered by master director Satyajit Ray, donned several hats -- actor, poet, essayist, elocutionist and playwright, and play director.

He was the last of the Mohicans in Bangla cinema, whose outlook and thinking were shaped by the tumultuous decades of the 1943 Bengal famine, the 1946 communal riots and newly independent India's socio-economic and political turmoil.

Born in 1935, Soumitra spent his initial years in Krishnanagar in West Bengal's Nadia district. As his father was in theatre, acting ran in Soumitra's blood.

It was during his childhood that he was introduced to the world of stage acting through family stage performances by his grandfather and father Mohit Chatterjee.

Soumitra's father had taken part in the Indian freedom movement and the actor's grandfather, who espoused radical nationalism, was jailed during the British rule.

As the actor recalled in an interview, his home hosted several noted freedom fighters and social reformers like Bagha Jatin (Jatindranath Mukherjee), Annie Besant, Subhas Chandra Bose, Sarojini Naidu, Dr Rajendraprasad and Kaji Nazrul Islam.

While his father brought him to the stage, it was his mother Ashalata Devi who injected in him an early interest in literature. The parents together shaped the formative years of the great actor.

But it was a play by the doyen of Bengali theatre Sisir Bhaduri, which Soumitra had gone to watch during his college days in Kolkata, that was the turning point in his life as he decided to become an actor.

Soumitra shifted to Kolkata in 1951 after passing his matriculation examination from Howrah Zilla School and took admission in City College on Amherst Street in north Kolkata. There, he was exposed to an exciting cultural landscape of West Bengal as he came close to writers like Shakti Chattopadhyay, Sunil Gangopadhyay and Amitabha Dasgupta, who would often meet at the Coffee House in College Street.

It was in Kolkata that Soumitra came in touch with Satyajit Ray at the Senate Hall of Calcutta University,

where a reception was being held for the director and his unit after the success of "Pather Panchali".

One evening in 1956, Nityananda Dutta, Ray's Assistant Director, introduced him to Ray at his residence. The director was scouting for someone to play the role of Apu in "Aparajito". But Ray found the actor a bit too old for the role.

Soumitra, however, did not have to wait long to break into Ray's world.

His handsome frame and manner of dialogue delivery impressed Ray, who roped him in to play Apu in "Apar Sansar", the third movie in the Apu trilogy, alongside Sharmila Tagore.

There was no looking back for Soumitra after that.

Who can forget the picture of a breaded young man, who lost his wife, carrying his son on his shoulders? It is one of the most abiding images of Bangla cinema.

Soumitra found a mentor in Ray and the partnership saw the actor in 14 films and two documentaries of the master director. From Amal in "Charulata", to the adventure-loving young man in "Araney Dindratri" to the private sleuth Prodosh Mitter aka Felu, in "Sonar Kella" (1974) and "Joy Baba Felunath" (1979), Sandip in "Ghare Baire", to the tenacious swimming coach in Koni, the actor's repertoire includes a wide range of characters in commercial and art house films.

The relationship between him and Ray ended with the director's death in April 1992. By that time, the collaboration between the two produced one of the greatest chapters of Bangla cinema through 14 films -- "Devi" (1960), "Abhijan" (1962), "Charulata" (1964), "Araney Din Ratri" (1970), "Ashani Sanket" (1973), "Hirak Rajar Deshe" (1980), "Ghare Baire" (1984), "Ganashtaru" (1989) and "Shakha Prashakha" (1990).

Such was the effect of Ray-Soumitra collaboration that many film analysts have often been compared with the duo to the likes of Akira Kurosawa-Toshiro Mifune, Max von Sydow-Ingmar Bergman and Marcello Mastroianni-Federico Fellini.

Soumitra never let go of an opportunity to express his gratitude to Ray.

"I don't know what I would have done if he were not there. Most of my dreams would have remained unfulfilled had I not met him. He

[Ray] was an inspiration for me and would always remain alive in me. Manik da [Ray's nickname] had been a mentor for me," he said on several occasions.

Soumitra also worked with other legendary directors of Bangla cinema, such as Mrinal Sen, Tapan Sinha, Tarun Majumdar and Goutam Ghosh through roles in "Kshudhita Pashan", "Akash Kushum", "Kaalbela" and "Ganadevata".

Soumitra's role of the dashing handsome, swashbuckling, horse-riding grey character Mayurbhan in Tapan Sinha's "Jhinder Bondi" would always remain etched in anyone's memory.

Age failed to wear down Soumitra. Even at 80, he displayed his acting prowess in national award-winning film "Mayurakshi" (2017), "Bela Sheshe" (2015) and "Posto" (2017).

His success in cinema notwithstanding, the stage remained Soumitra's first love. His famous rendition of William Shakespeare's King Lear in Suman Mukhopadhyay's Raja Lear earned him accolades, while Soumitra himself wrote more than 15 plays and directed more than 30.

"I always loved direct interaction with the audience. Theatre is in my blood. If given a second chance, I would still opt for nothing less than acting on stage," he once said in an interview.

Idealism is something that was in Soumitra's DNA.

A leftist known for his proximity to Marxists and former chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, Soumitra was on several occasions outspoken on contemporary issues such as intolerance and the demonetisation exercise in 2016.

In 1970s and 80s, he turned down the Indian government's Padma Shri award twice, and in 2001 he refused the national award for best male actor in protest against the alleged "biased attitude" of the award's jury.

Any Bangla film aficionado in the modern era could instantly recall Soumitra's immortal delivery of the dialogue: "fight Koni, fight", while playing the role of a swimming coach egging on his swimmer-student in the 1984 film "Koni."

The actor's fans had been echoing the same dialogue over the last 40 days as he battled for life due to post-Covid complications, which took away one of the greatest personalities of Bangla cinema.

Ancient statue of Hermes dug up in Athens

AFP, Athens

The head of an ancient statue of the Greek god Hermes has been unearthed during excavations for sewage system improvements in central Athens, the ministry of culture said Sunday.

The "original artwork dating late 4th century BC or early 3rd century BC" is in good condition, a statement said.

The marble head, found just 1.3 metres (four feet) under the pavement on the busy Aioulou street on Friday, "depicts the god in a mature age and is obviously a part of a herm", the statement added.

Hermes or Hermas are sculptures, usually of the head of Hermes, and sometimes a torso, which were set on a squared column erected at road crossings as signs.

Baksal idea

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of comments such as he had moved to establish a one-party rule and wanted to cling to power, said Hasina.

"When the Father of the Nation formed Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League, he wanted to unite the whole nation. He had called for unity, taking people of all classes along.

"But criticism started in such a way...it was unfortunate that he was brutally killed... he could not finish his work."

Hasina mentioned that Bangabandhu had told the House during the 4th amendment to the constitution on January 25, 1975, that the new system was a democratic one where the deprived ones would have the right to vote.

Bangabandhu wanted to bring changes to the electoral system to make the elections free from muscle power, arms and black money so that people from the grassroots level could get elected, she added.

RU journo sent

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journalist community. The purpose of these cases is to harass campus reporters, and also an attempt to protect the people whose actions the journalists write about, they said.

On October 24, 2015, Kazi Zahidur Rahman, a teacher of computer science and then resident teacher of Shaheed Suhrawardy Hall, filed the case against 16 news organisations following reports that he allocated seats in exchange for money.

Bappy was then the RU correspondent of one of the accused organisations 24bdtime.com.

Sub-inspector Momin of Matihar Police Station pressed charges against eight people in the case on September 29, last year.

Arrest warrants were issued to them after they failed to appear before a local court, he added.

Samrat siphoned

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Rapid Action Battalion arrested Samrat, the then president of Dhaka South unit Jubo League, and Arman, ex-vice president of the unit, from Cumilla, raiding a house near the Indian border on October 6 last year.

Samrat came under the spotlight after Rab busted his illegal casino business at different sporting clubs in the capital. He was expelled from Jubo League following his arrest.

Covid-free

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centres in Dhaka and in Chattogram.

Though negative certificate for inbound passengers has been made mandatory earlier, many are not complying. The new decision will stop such practices, Habibur Rahman, spokesperson for the DGHS, who was with the DG during the visit, told The Daily Star.

A circular in this regard may be issued within days, he added.

Sources said the issue of making Covid-19 certificate mandatory was discussed in the cabinet recently.

NEW DEATHS

Twenty-one more people died from Covid-19 in the country during the 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, said a DGHS press release.

With this, the total number of deaths has now reached 6,194 and the death rate stands at 1.43 percent.

Some 1,837 new infections were recorded in the meantime, taking the total figure to 4,32,333, added the release.

Around 14,060 samples were tested across the country during the time.

Meanwhile, 1,693 Covid-19 patients recovered in the 24 hours.

The number of recoveries stands at 3,49,542 and the recovery rate is 80.85 percent.

Of the 21 deceased, 17 were males. One was aged between 41 and 50, two were between 21 and 30, four between 51 and 60, and 14 others were above 60 years, said the release.