

**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**



1,666
New cases in 24hrs



4,77,545
Total cases



6,838
Deaths



3,95,960
Recoveries

**GLOBAL
UPDATE**



1,539,673
Deaths



67,207,884
Total cases

RELOCATION TO BHASAN CHAR

Businesses eye boom as Rohingyas arrive

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA back from Bhasan Char

Javed Iqbal lived in Oman for 11 years and returned to Swandip in 2016 with a plan to settle down in the country.

When he heard about the huge construction work going on in Bhasan Char for the relocation of one lakh Rohingya refugees, Javed along with a few friends came to the island as there was no restriction at the time.

"I thought if I could open a grocery shop, I could earn something because around 14,000-15,000 people were working in the island every day," he told this correspondent in front of his grocery shop.

He opened a grocery shop and started doing business but when the project was complete, the construction workers left.

"Over the last year, I was eagerly waiting for the Rohingyas, for the island to get new life."

There are 63 shops in Bhasan Char Bazar. Apart from grocery shops, there are mobile servicing shops, barber shops, poultry shops and a separate kitchen market.

Shop owners said the advantage of the shops in Bhasan Char is they do not have to pay rent.

They had taken permission from the project authorities to build the shops.

Like the islands of Hatiya and Swandip, shop owners brought goods to Bhasan Char through trawlers from Chattogram and Noakhali.

Hailing from Subarna Char of Noakhali, Mohammad Atikullah came to this island in 2017 as a day labourer.

He used to load and unload construction materials and did the job for a month.

He then realised that a vegetable shop would be a good income source as there was no such shop on the island.

He talked to project officials and opened a small vegetable shop.

"Although my home is very close to Bhasan Char, I did not go back for the first 18 months as the business

was going well," he said.

He had vegetables brought from Noakhali via trawler every day.

"My people bought vegetables from Noakhali and then loaded these in the trawler. I received it at Bhasan Char, and did my transactions through bKash," he said.

Atikullah said as Rohingyas have started arriving, the business will be pick up day by day. Other shopkeepers in the island were similarly excited by the prospect of their businesses thriving with the arrival of the population for whom the island has gotten new life.

Riaz Uddin, a grocery shopkeeper in Bhasan Char, said the island had turned into a small town before their eyes, and if one lakh Rohingyas come, it would turn into a big city and their business will be good.

They, however, fear that if Rohingyas get involved in business, they may be cornered as the Rohingyas are now the majority in the island.

They are now cautiously observing the situation and do not want to say anything on record.

A shopkeeper, wishing not to be named, said, "We provided services to the people in the last three years. We sacrificed a lot but if we don't get allocation in the bazars constructed inside the housing area, it will be frustrating."

Commodore AA Mamun Chowdhury, project director of the Ashrayan-3 Project (the official name of the Bhasan Char project), said those who provided services earlier and have shops in the existing Bazar will get priority in the shops inside the housing area.

He said these people have served like a "one-stop service" in any emergency and they stood beside the project since the beginning.

"Rohingyas have no scope of getting involved in business," he said.

Two bazars inside the housing area have already been prepared and the construction work of another is going on. Those who are doing business in the existing bazar will get priority there, the commodore said.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Students join a protest rally led by Bangladesh Chhatra League around the Raju Memorial Sculpture in Dhaka University yesterday. The rally was protesting the recent vandalising of Bangabandhu's sculpture in Kushtia.

Govt warns of tough action

FROM PAGE 1

terming it anti-Islamic.

Talking to journalists at his office at the Secretariat yesterday, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said the government would not allow anyone to create anarchy in the country in the name of opposing installation of Bangabandhu's sculpture.

Without mentioning the name of Hefajat-e-Islam, he said, "We won't let anyone create anarchy. If they think they are very powerful, they are wrong."

In reply to a query whether the government will review its decision to install Bangabandhu's sculpture at Dholaipar, the minister said, "It is the government's jurisdiction whether it will review its decision or not. Our job is to maintain law and order. I will take necessary measures to ensure that."

The minister said sculptures of Al-Biruni and Ibn Battuta are seen in different Muslim countries, and no one is vandalising those.

"We have been saying that the sculptures are not meant for worshipping. These are for preserving his [Bangabandhu's] memory."

Asked about the protection of sculptures all over the country, the

home boss said they are taking the issue very seriously.

At a virtual meeting of Narsingdi district AL, the party's General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said the desecration of Bangabandhu's sculpture in Kushtia was an unforgivable crime.

Issuing a warning to the fundamentalist groups, he said, "A lot has happened... stop now."

"I have kept our leaders and activists under control up till now. If there are any excesses, the Awami League activists will not sit idle at home."

Display and preservation of the portrait of the Father of the Nation are protected by the country's constitution, Quader noted.

"Disrespect for Bangabandhu's sculpture means disrespect for the constitution... Whoever is involved in this [vandalism of Bangabandhu's sculpture] must be punished."

Bangabandhu means the existence and independence of the country and desecration of his sculpture means an attack on the spirit of the Liberation War, he added.

Quader called upon the pro-liberation forces to unite against the

evil communal forces.

In the meantime, the parliamentary standing committee on the Liberation War affairs ministry asked the authorities concerned to bring to justice all those involved in vandalising Bangabandhu's sculpture.

At a meeting of the committee at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday, Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque said those who were responsible for this would not be spared, according to meeting sources.

Talking to reporters at his office at the Secretariat, LGRD Minister Md Tajul Islam said the perpetrators have to face stern action.

The government is cautiously monitoring the situation, he added.

PROTESTS

Bangladesh Chhatra League yesterday staged demonstrations on the Dhaka University campus, protesting the Kushtia incident.

Hundreds of BCL leaders and activists gathered at the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) and chanted slogans, demanding arrest and exemplary punishment to all those involved in the incident.

BCL units in various parts of the country also held protests and made the same demands.

Plan to operate electric trains

FROM PAGE 1

"Therefore, electrification is the trend of railway development," it added.

Currently, BR operates diesel trains and it would need to buy electric locomotives for the line.

BR engineers said the introduction of electric trains would reduce operation and maintenance costs and it would be environment friendly.

The cost of an electric locomotive is much less than a diesel one while operational cost of electric trains would be less. BR has to pay a huge amount for diesel, a BR engineer said.

Besides, a diesel engine has around 40,000 parts, including a lot of moving ones. An electric motor has fewer moving parts thus maintenance cost would be less, the engineer said, wishing not to be named.

BR DG Md Shamsuzzaman said they would introduce electric trains gradually.

"This project [PBRLP] will have provision for electronic traction but we are yet to decide whether it [electric traction] would be introduced now or later," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked when they would decide on the matter, he declined to comment.

He, however, said the contractor's proposal could change.

BR is implementing the PBRLP to connect the capital and Jashore with a 169km rail line via the under-construction Padma bridge. The project cost is Tk 39,246 crore and Exim Bank of China is providing Tk 21,036.70 crore in loans.

The physical work of the fast-track project began on July 3, 2018, and is scheduled to be completed in June 2024. Some 28 percent of the work has been done, as of October.

THE REPORT

In December last year, the BR told China Rail Link Group that the government intends to run electric trains on the Dhaka-Padma bridge-Jashore line and the contractor carried out the study, railways sources said.

As per the original design of the project, trains could run between

Dhaka and Bhanga junction at highest 120kmph and between Bhanga junction and Rupdia in Jashore at 160kmph.

The estimated cost for electrification at these speeds would be \$424.31 million, around Tk 3,578 crore, the report says.

If the design was changed so that trains could run at 160kmph on the entire line, the estimate costs would be \$525.33 million, which is around Tk 4,454 crore, read the report.

"Through the study, it can be concluded that the electrification upgrading of the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project is feasible," read the report.

The contractor suggested that the project authority "make a decision as soon as possible to plan the one-time electrification transformation of the whole line.

Finishing the project at the same time is preferred for reduced interference to the operation of the existing line and safety risks, it added.

In a separate letter sent to the project authorities, the contractor said the electrification upgrading work on the project will affect the current design and site construction.

It suggested that BR should confirm their proposal as soon as possible to avoid delays in construction and abandoning of completed work.

A participant of Saturday's workshop said experts present there found the report "incomplete" and asked the contractor to add some more data before a final decision is made.

In 2016, BR had moved for a feasibility study for installing a system to power electric trains on the Narayanganj-Dhaka-Chattogram corridor. But the project proposal never saw the light of day.

However, while inaugurating Benapole Express in July last year, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the government has a plan to introduce electric and high-speed trains to make railway services better and faster.

PM for stronger cooperation

FROM PAGE 1

impressive economic recovery from the pandemic.

Hasina and Tshering joined the event virtually from Dhaka and Thimphu.

Hasina said the pandemic has opened our eyes to the new realities that "we must consider while we strive to move forward."

"The world is countering the new and deeper fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic..."

Terming the PTA signing event a historic moment for Bangladesh, she said Bangladesh has signed its first-ever Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with any country in the world and it is also the first country that recognised Bangladesh as a sovereign and an independent country.

She wished that the Preferential Trade Agreement will contribute to further consolidating bilateral relations.

"The next 50 years will witness sustained development and happiness of citizens of our region."

The PM said Bhutan has a special position in the hearts of all Bangladeshis, and a permanent place in the history of Bangladesh.

"The unwavering support of His Majesty the Third King and the people of Bhutan to our War of Liberation in 1971, and your country's recognition of the blood-soaked independent Bangladesh, evokes powerful emotions in our hearts even today."

Besides, she said Bangladesh and Bhutan share ancient linkages, common cultural values, traditions and geo-political realities.

"Today, the areas of our cooperation are many, including trade, tourism, hydro-power, climate change impacts, health, bio-diversity, agro-processing, agriculture, ICT, education, water resource management and much more."

Hasina said it is time that the two countries make their extraordinary relations even more meaningful for mutual benefits and for the overall development and well-being of its citizens and that is the spirit with which both countries have signed today [yesterday] the Bangladesh-

Bhutan PTA.

"Under this agreement, a wide range of products from Bangladesh and Bhutan can find duty-free entry into each other's markets. The agreement also has provision for including an additional list of products through mutual consensus," she said.

Once the agreement comes into force, Hasina said she believed that more people in Bangladesh can have access to fresh Bhutanese apples and oranges, while the fashion-conscious people of Bhutan can choose from more varieties of quality apparels from Bangladesh.

"Infrastructure projects in Bangladesh can further benefit from boulders from Bhutan, while Bangladeshi pharmaceuticals can enhance contribution to the health sector in Bhutan," she added.

Hasina and her Bhutanese counterpart Tshering jointly opened the logo to celebrate the 50 years of relationship. Bhutan recognised Bangladesh on December 6, 1971.

They also cut cakes in their places to celebrate the signing of the PTA and the 50 years of relationship.

Hasina said there are many ways Bangladesh can cooperate with Bhutan, and Bangladesh is always ready to do it.

In this connection, she said Bhutan can use Bangladesh's waterways.

"Our waterway link has already started. We're developing our Chilmari and Pangaon ports. Not only that, if Bhutan wants, it can use any of our seaports -- Chattogram, Mongla, and Payra."

She also said Bangladesh is developing Saidpur Airport for regional use, and Bhutan can also use that.

"We're opening Chilahati railway and that'd be another opportunity for Bhutan."

In his speech, Bhutanese PM Tshering congratulated his Bangladeshi counterpart for successfully handling the coronavirus situation in Bangladesh.

"We can see Bangladesh is making a very impressive economic recovery from the pandemic."

"Bangladesh is always very close to

my heart," said Tshering, expressing his desire to deepen friendship and cooperation with Bangladesh.

He said despite multiple challenges, Hasina successfully carried forward the vision and legacy of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"People of Bangladesh will remember you forever," said Tshering. The Bhutanese PM said the historic occasion came when Bangladesh is celebrating the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and 50 years of Bangladesh's independence to be celebrated next year. "I feel fortunate to be part of the history."

He said he spent seven years in Mymensingh Medical College and three years in Dhaka and during the period, Bangladesh became his second home.

"We all know the contributions and sacrifices that you [Hasina], your family and many others who joined today [made]," said Tshering.

With the signing of the PTA, Bhutan will enjoy duty-free export of 16 products, in addition to the already existing 18 products to Bangladesh.

Likewise, 10 more products from Bangladesh will enjoy duty-free export to Bhutan, in addition to the already 90 existing products.

Currently, Bangladesh-Bhutan trade operates under the Bilateral Trade Agreement signed in 1980.

Romanians head to polls in shadow of pandemic

AFP, Bucharest

Romanians began voting in parliamentary elections yesterday, with the governing pro-European liberals tipped to win despite criticism for their handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

Polling stations opened at 7:00 am (0500 GMT) and are scheduled to close at 9:00 pm (1900 GMT), when an exit poll will be published by the local media.

EC cancels results

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known as Nixon Chowdhury, was backing Kawsar.

After the election, Mujibur publicly threatened the deputy commissioner of Faridpur and the upazila nirbahi officer of Charbhadrashan for deploying an "excessive" number of magistrates for the by-polls.

At different public rallies the day before the election, on election day, and during the victory rally, Mujibur and Kawsar used abusive language and made false and defamatory statements about the DC, the UNO, and the magistrates.

Mujibur, however, refuted the allegations.

After his statements went viral on social media, the EC formed a three-member probe committee.

Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda on October 13 said Mujibur had violated the electoral code of conduct.

On October 15, the EC filed a case against Mujibur for violating the electoral code of conduct.

The Cabinet Division on October 12 sought punitive action over the violations of the electoral code of conduct. It wrote to the Prime Minister's Office, the Parliament Secretariat, the Election Commission Secretariat and other authorities concerned to that end.

Vandals were

FROM PAGE 1

Panch Rastar More in Kushtia Municipality were damaged.

Investigators identified the two after going through footage from CCTV cameras on nearby streets, a bank, and an ATM booth, Superintendent of Police SM Tanvir Arafath told the briefing.

The footage showed two men, carrying small backpacks, and clad in pajama, panjabi and prayer hat, attacked the sculpture with iron rods at 2:16am and then left the area within a minute.

Police officers on Saturday afternoon talked to two other students of the madrasa who gave them the names of the suspects. The officers raided the madrasa in the evening and found the two teachers, Alamin and Yusuf, who admitted that the boys returned to the madrasa after damaging the sculpture and told them what they had done. The teachers then sent them home the next morning, the SP added.

Officers arrested the suspects at their village homes in Daulatpur Mirpur upazilas within hours.

Police have filed a case under the Special Powers Act 1984 and the duo will be taken to court today.

Meanwhile, a Supreme Court lawyer yesterday filed a writ petition with the High Court, seeking its directives on the government to protect and preserve all sculptures, including those of the Father of the Nation, across the country.

Uttam Kumar Lahiri submitted the petition as a public interest litigation to the HC, also praying to the court to order the director general of Bangladesh Islamic Foundation and Khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque to take necessary steps so that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is not brought into religious matters in any manner.

Uttam's lawyer Nahid Sultana Juthi said Bangabandhu is the architect of the independence of Bangladesh and his sculpture is a symbol of the independence, and therefore, his sculpture must be protected and preserved.

The respondents are bound to protect all the monuments under Article 24 of the constitution, she told The Daily Star.

Secretaries to the ministries of home, Liberation War affairs, religious affairs, inspector general of police, director general of Bangladesh Islamic Foundation and Khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque have been mentioned as respondents in the required directives, she said.

The HC might hear the writ petition today, she added.

In Barishal, law enforcers beefed up security to protect the sculptures of Bangabandhu yesterday morning.

There are 14 murals and sculptures in the city and policemen will be deployed round the clock to protect them, said Barishal SP Saiful Islam.

Activists of Awami League and its front organisations marched the streets denouncing fundamentalists.

[Our correspondents in Kushtia and Barishal contributed to the report]

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Editor, publisher of local daily sued under DSA

FROM PAGE 1

published the report and uploaded it on its online version on November 28.

The newspaper editor, publisher and five other employees were sued for publishing the report and 11 other people for sharing it on

Facebook.

Chowdhury Mumtaz Ahmed said, "We published the report in our newspaper following all ethics of journalism, and then it was shared on social media. If the councillor thinks that the report is fake or defamatory, he could've followed

formal procedures to give a statement against the report. He rather chose to harass us with the case.

"Journalists are being harassed everywhere under the Digital Security Act and this a fresh attempt. Neutral investigation can reveal the truth that in no way can

we be accused under the law in this regard," he said.

Contacted, Abdul Kaiyum Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Shahporan Police Station, said, "We are investigating the incident. It will take some time to give further details."