

**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**



1,267
New cases in 24hrs



4,99,560
Total cases



7,242
Deaths



4,35,601
Recoveries

**GLOBAL
UPDATE**



1,687,855
Deaths



76,374,736
Total cases

Positive branding to boost investment, create jobs

Says foreign minister

UNB, Dhaka

With positive branding, foreign investment flow will increase significantly in the country contributing to job creation, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said.

“We want to change the wrong perception about Bangladesh completely. We want to help the world know that Bangladesh is a land of opportunities with its vibrant economy,” he told reporters after inaugurating “Bangabandhu Gallery and Library” at State Guesthouse Meghna.

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen was also present.

Momen said Bangladesh is sometimes described as a poverty-stricken country and hard hit by natural disasters like cyclones. Bangladesh wants complete change of such narratives.

He said the government has taken up various programmes through its 78 missions abroad to brand Bangladesh positively.

“We have opened Bangabandhu Corners in 68 missions of 78 missions

abroad. Bangladesh and Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman are inseparable,” Momen said.

The foreign minister said the young people of the country will get many opportunities once investment in Bangladesh keeps growing.

“Nobody can stop Bangladesh. We are walking towards building Sonar Bangla by 2041,” he said.

On December 17, the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Street at Port Louis, Mauritius was inaugurated.

The naming of the street is a testimony of friendship between the peoples of Mauritius and Bangladesh, said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This is also a testimony to the acceptance of a syncretic vision that Bangabandhu had for not only his own country, but for all the countries and all the nations of the world, said the ministry.

Bangladesh is celebrating the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman which will continue till December 2021; and will celebrate 50 years of Bangladesh’s War of Liberation in 2021.

US planning to close last consulates in Russia: report

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump’s outgoing administration is planning to close the two remaining US consulates in Russia, media reports said Friday, as President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take office amid high tensions with Moscow.

The US will close its consulate in the far eastern city of Vladivostok and suspend operations at its post in Yekaterinburg, CNN reported, citing a December 10 letter sent to Congress

from the State Department.

The move comes in “response to ongoing staffing challenges for the US Mission in Russia in the wake of the 2017 Russian-imposed personnel cap on the US Mission and the resultant impasse with Russia over diplomatic visas,” the report said, citing the letter.

Ten diplomats assigned to the consulates will reportedly be relocated to the US embassy in Moscow, while 33 local staff will lose their jobs.

1 year since his passing

FROM PAGE 1

known to all as Brac.

At first it was just a small relief and rehabilitation effort carried out in a remote area of Sylhet division. Over the last 47 years, it expanded itself to provide services to over 100 million people in 12 countries of Asia and Africa.

“Brac now stands as a unique ecosystem interweaving microfinance, social enterprises, university, bank and multidimensional investments targeting the development of the poor and marginalised people,” stated a press statement circulated by the NGO on the occasion of his first death anniversary.

Sir Fazle was honoured with numerous national and international awards for his achievements in leading Brac, the statement added.

These include the Yidan Prize for Education Development in 2019, LEGO Prize in 2018, World Food Prize in 2015, Spanish Order of Civil Merit in 2014, Inaugural WISE Prize for Education in 2011, David Rockefeller Bridging Leadership Award in 2008, Inaugural Clinton Global Citizen Award in 2007, UNDP Mahbubul Haq Award for Outstanding Contribution to Human Development in 2004, Olof Palme Prize in 2001 and Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community

Leadership in 1980.

The press statement further added that in 2010, Sir Fazle was appointed Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George by the British Crown in recognition of his services to reducing poverty in Bangladesh and internationally. In addition, he was honoured with a Dutch Knighthood in 2019.

Sir Fazle was a member of the Group of Eminent Persons appointed by the UN Secretary-General in 2010 to advise on support for the Least Developed Countries.

In 2014 and 2017, he was named one of Fortune Magazine’s World’s 50 Greatest Leaders.

The many honorary degrees received by him include those from Princeton University (2014), the University of Oxford (2009), Columbia University (2008) and Yale University (2007).

“All the members of the Brac staff, in their commemoration, remember the eternal source of inspiration that the founder will continue to be in their life. They have pledged to stand beside the poor and marginalised communities and work hand in hand to build equality for all,” the NGO said.

The event will be commemorated online through discussions hosted online.

Investigate the EC for graft

FROM PAGE 1

individuals involved in the allegations.

In the letter, the citizens mentioned that members of the EC, under KM Nurul Huda’s leadership, have committed misconduct and irregularities, including spending Tk 2 crore for delivering speeches as “special speakers” and Tk 8.08 crore in recruiting staffers for the Commission.

Three commissioners have also allegedly been using cars in violation of relevant rules.

The letter also said the EC has committed gross misconduct and irregularities in buying and using the electronic voting machines, and in holding the 11th parliamentary election, and also elections to Dhaka North and South city corporations, and Khulna, Gazipur, Sylhet, Barishal and Rajshahi city corporations.

With the letter, they attached relevant documents regarding the allegations.

They spoke of the allegations at a virtual press conference yesterday.

Dr Shahdeen Malik, one of the signatories, told the press conference that the present EC, after its formation in February 2017, has been involved in financial corruption, irregularities and gross misconduct.

He said the SJC (led by the chief justice) can probe the allegations against any constitutional post-

holder, including the EC. “We believe the allegations against the present Election Commission will be found true in the probe.”

Another signatory, Dr Iftekharuzzaman, told the press conference that the current EC has broken the record of corruption, irregularities and misconduct compared to that of previous ECs.

The commission can voluntarily step down from office on ethical grounds, he said, adding that both the president and the prime minister can consider the allegations against the EC and take necessary action.

Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar said the EC has betrayed the blood of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and freedom fighters and let down democracy by committing corruption and irregularities and misconduct.

The signatories include Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury, M Hafizuddin Khan, Dr Akbar Ali Khan, Advocate Sultana Kamal, Ali Imam Mazumder, Dr Hameeda Hossain, Prof Moinul Islam, Khushi Kabir, Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar, Dr Shahdeen Malik, Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Dr Shahidul Alam, Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Prof Anu Mohammed, Dr CR Abrar, Prof Tofail Ahmed, Prof Asif Nazrul, Dilip Sarker and Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua.



Firemen and onlookers in front of the wreckage of a bus after it was hit by a train on a level crossing near Joypurhat town yesterday morning.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

12 killed as train rams bus

FROM PAGE 1

while 10 bus passengers were found injured.

There were other passengers in the bus, but they managed to get out before the collision.

Md Javed, a witness, said the bus driver tried to drive through the level crossing although the approaching train was whistling continuously.

The gate of the crossing was open and the gateman was not there, he said.

Alamgir Jahan, officer-in-charge of Joypurhat Sadar Police Station, also said the bus driver drove through the gate since it was kept open.

The gateman was absent, he said.

Citing preliminary investigation, Shahidul Islam, divisional railway manager of Bangladesh Railway (Paksey Zone), however, said although the gateman, Nayon Miah, was present there, he failed to discharge his duty.

“So we have suspended him. Further actions will be taken upon receiving an investigation report,” he told The Daily Star last night.

The bus driver is also responsible for the accident, he added.

He further said a four-member probe committee, led by Nasir Uddin, divisional transport officer of railways (Paksey), was asked to submit its report on the incident in three working days.

“We hope to get the report earlier,” he said.

Talking to this paper earlier in the day, Sardar Sahadat Ali, additional director general (operations) of BR, said, “The level crossing in Puranpoil is authorised and manned. The probe will determine who was at fault.”

Six of the 12 deceased could be identified till last night. They are: Mamunur Rashid, the bus driver, of Harail village in Joypurhat Sadar upazila, Ramjan Ali of Hitmi village, Sarwar Hossain of Panchbibi upazila in Joypurhat, Sazu Mia of Chawk Billa village, Babu Mia of Bijoykandi village in Raninagar upazila of Naogaon.

Faruk Hossain, Ziaur Rahman Zia of Panchbibi, and Julhas Islam of Matikata village of Tangail, were among the injured, who were being treated at Joypurhat Modern Hospital. Shaheedul Islam, divisional railway manager (Pakshi) of BR, said railway communication on the route

was snapped after the accident. The communication was restored around 3:00pm, he added.

Talking to The Daily Star over the phone, he also said Nayon was appointed as gateman on a temporary basis.

Replying to a question, he said he heard that the gateman was absent when the accident happened. “Action will be taken if the probe body finds this to be true.”

Meanwhile, Joypurhat deputy commissioner’s office also formed a three-member committee, led by Md Reza Hasan, additional district magistrate, to find the cause of the accident.

It was asked to file its report in three working days.

The DC office would pay Tk 20,000 to each of the victims who died.

Deputy Commissioner Md Shariful Islam and Superintendent of Police Salam Kabir of the district visited the spot after the accident.

On July 10 in 2006, at least 32 people travelling on a bus was killed as a train hit it at a level crossing in Akkelpur upazila of Joypurhat.

Chaos at bar council exams

FROM PAGE 1

citing the pandemic. They had been demanding the authorities hold viva voce exam only.

“Our exam started at 9:00am. About one hour later, we heard a hue and cry and saw some examinees protesting. They went from one exam hall to another and drove us out,” said a candidate at Mohammadpur Kendriya College.

The protestors took away answer scripts and set those on fire, he added.

Another examinee Shihab Kausar said, “I was in an exam hall on the fourth floor of the college building... the invigilators said they would not take the exam amid such a situation and asked us to submit our answer scripts around 10:30am, even though the test was supposed to end at 1:00pm.”

“We went to the centre but could not sit for the exam. We demand the authorities hold a re-examination,” he said.

The test was held at nine examination centres in the capital, but a section of examinees also reportedly boycotted the exam and prevented others from sitting the exam at Mohammadpur Mohila College, Government Mohammadpur Model

School and College also, police and examinees alleged.

Sub-Inspector Newton Mridha, a duty officer of Mohammadpur Police Station, said some students staged protests at the centres, entered exam halls, and prevented others from taking the exam.

Police rushed to the two exam centres and brought the situation under control, the SI told The Daily Star.

At Dhaka Mohanagar Mohila College, some students boycotted the exam and tried to force others to do the same.

“We brought the situation under control and the exam was held there,” said Mamunur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Sutrapur Police Station.

Contacted, Attorney General AM Amin Uddin, also the chairman of Bangladesh Bar Council, said they would take necessary steps after receiving reports from the exam centres.

“We are yet to receive the detailed report on the situation of the exam centres. I hope we will have the report soon and make necessary decisions in this regard,” he told The Daily Star.

Around 13,000 candidates were scheduled to participate in the written test at the exam centres set up at nine

educational institutions from 9:00am to 1:00pm yesterday.

The enrolment committee of the Bar Council on November 25 had fixed December 19 for the written test.

The written test for advocateship was scheduled to be held on September 26. But the schedule was deferred due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

A section of candidates had been staging protests demanding the authorities enroll them in Bangladesh Bar Council as lawyers through holding viva voce test only.

They had organised a sit-in near the residence of Law Minister Anisul Huq in the capital’s Banani on November 17 to press home their demand.

On the same day, another group of candidates held demonstrations and formed a human chain at the capital’s Shahbagh intersection.

They had observed token hunger strike in front of Jatiya Press Club for several days demanding the authorities give them auto pass in the written exam as Bangladesh Bar Council failed to hold the test on time.

Meanwhile, Supreme Court Bar Association Secretary Md Ruhul Quddus Kazal in a statement yesterday condemned and protested the “anarchy” at the exam halls.

19 univs gear up for uniform tests

FROM PAGE 1

universities in different parts of the country every admission season just to be able to sit for the tests.

However, Dhaka University, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), Rajshahi University, Jahangirnagar University and Chattogram University opted out of the system.

But Buet recently showed interest in participating, said Prof Muhammed Alamgir, member of the University Grants Commission (UGC).

After yesterday’s meeting at Jagannath University, it’s VC Prof Mijanur Rahman told The Daily Star that there would only be multiple choice questions in the exams and a student would get a score between 0 and 100.

“It was also discussed whether the test should be held when there are fewer Covid-19 cases,” he said.

Students of science, humanities and business, who want to switch to other disciplines, will no longer be required to sit for an additional exam, he added.

Barishal University VC Prof Sadequul Arefin said the minimum GPA required for science students would be seven, combining the SSC and HSC results. The requirements for business students would be 6.5 and humanities students 6.

Anyone with a GPA below 3 in either exam will not be eligible, he said.

Sadequul added that it would be up to the individual universities to decide whether to take SSC and HSC

results into their consideration in the admission process.

Also, it will be up to the individual universities to decide whether to give a chance to second time admission seekers, according to Mijanur and Sadequul.

They added that humanities students will need to answer 40-mark Bangla, 35-mark English and 25-mark ICT 25 questions. Business students will get 25-mark accounting, 25-mark management, 13-mark Bangla, 12-mark English and 25-mark ICT questions.

A science student will get 10-mark English, 10-mark Bangla, 20-mark Chemistry, 20-mark Physics and 20-mark questions on any two subjects from ICT, mathematics and biology.

The 19 public universities are, Jagannath University, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Khulna University, Begum Rokeya University, Islamic University, Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Noakhali Science and Technology University, Comilla University, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Jessore University of Science and Technology, Pabna University of Science and Technology, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University, University of Barishal, Rangamati Science and Technology University, Rabindra University, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Digital University, Sheikh Hasina University, and Bangamata

Sheikh Fojilatunnesa Mujib Science and Technology University.

On January 23 last year, the UGC announced that it would hold a uniform admission test in the 2020-2021 academic year. In February, it was decided in principle that universities would hold the admission test in a method called cluster system.

Public universities remain the students’ top choice. But the number of seats is way lower than that of the students.

About a million students pass the HSC and its equivalent exams every year, and the public universities enrol around 65,000.

As of last year, 32 of the 39 public universities held separate admission tests, and the remaining seven agricultural universities held a uniform admission test.

Alamgir said that seven agricultural universities will form a cluster of agriculture universities.

Chattogram University of Engineering and Technology, Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology and Khulna University of Engineering and Technology, in principle, decided to form another cluster. Buet authorities have shown interest in joining this cluster.

UGC officials said Bangladesh University of Textiles, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Aviation and Aerospace University, and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University have also shown interest in joining this cluster.

“We will sort the matter out very soon,” Alamgir said.

Kurigram’s Rajarhat records lowest 6.6 degrees Celsius

UNB, Dhaka

The lowest temperature, 6.6 degrees Celsius, was recorded in the country yesterday at Rajarhat of Kurigram, according to Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

A mild to moderate cold wave is sweeping over Mymensingh, Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions and the regions of Tangail, Faridpur, Gopalganj, Srimangal, Jashore, Kushtia, Barishal and Bhola, it said.

The country’s highest temperature, 29.0 degrees Celsius, was recorded in Teknaf.

Night temperature may fall slightly in Khulna, Barishal, Chattogram, and Sylhet divisions. It may remain nearly unchanged elsewhere in the country, said the bulletin of Met office yesterday.

Weather may remain dry with partly cloudy sky.

There could be moderate to dense fog at places over river basins and elsewhere in the country from midnight until morning.

Biden team warns of security risk after Pentagon halts briefings

AFP, Washington

The incoming administration of President-elect Joe Biden warned Friday of risks to national security after it said the Pentagon suddenly halted briefings for the transition team.

Yohannes Abraham, executive director for the Biden transition team, said he was “concerned to learn this week about an abrupt halt in the already limited cooperation there.”

President Donald Trump, who is refusing to acknowledge his election loss to Biden, until recently held back from allowing government agencies to cooperate with Biden’s team, as is the custom.

On Friday, Trump’s acting defense secretary, Chris Miller, said in a statement that the two sides had a “mutually agreed upon holiday pause” on briefings with military officials.

Abraham said this was not true.

“There was no mutually agreed upon holiday break,” he told reporters, warning that “a failure to work together could have consequences well beyond” Biden’s inauguration in January.

The latest stumble in what is traditionally a carefully choreographed handover of power between outgoing and incoming US administrations comes as Washington reels from a massive, possibly Russian state cyber attack.

“There’s no time to spare,” Abraham said.

Trump has yet to give a direct statement on the hacking breach or to comment on allegations by senior politicians and private cyber security companies that it was carried out by Moscow.

Abraham said the attack was of “great concern” and that under Biden cyber attacks will meet a response inflicting “substantial cost.”

According to Abraham, the Biden team has “hope and expectation” that the Pentagon briefings will recommence “immediately.”

Erdogan tells Merkel Turkey wants to turn over new leaf

AFP, Ankara

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday told German Chancellor Angela Merkel in a videoconference call Turkey wants to turn over a new leaf with the European Union, the Turkish presidency said.

EU leaders meeting in Brussels last week decided to draw up a list of Turkish targets for sanctions over Ankara’s unilateral actions and provocations” in the eastern Mediterranean, believed to be rich in energy resources.

“President Erdogan during the meeting said Turkey wants to open a new page in its relations with the EU, as he thanked Merkel for her constructive contributions and efforts on Turkey-EU relations,” the presidency said.

Erdogan said there was a new “window of opportunity” for Turkey-EU relations to strengthen but some countries were “trying to create a crisis” that would damage “this positive agenda”, it added in a statement.

He did not name which countries but Turkey has been at loggerheads with EU member states Greece and Cyprus -- backed by France -- in the eastern Mediterranean.

Turkey and Greece previously agreed to discussions over the disputed waters but nothing concrete has taken place.