

**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**



1,234
New cases in 24hrs



506,102
Total cases



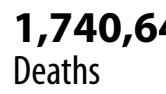
7,378
Deaths



446,690
Recoveries



**GLOBAL
UPDATE**



1,740,640
Deaths



79,199,641
Total cases

Uphold country's dignity at the global stage

PM asks the army

Bss, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the army personnel to prepare themselves in such a way so that they can uphold the country's dignity in the global arena.

"Our army personnel have to work at home and abroad. So, you have to be efficient in every aspect. You should always remain careful to uphold the country's dignity wherever in the world you will go," she said.

The premier was addressing a programme virtually from the Gono Bhaban marking the President Parade-2020 of the cadets of the 79th BMA Long Course.

Bangladesh Army organised the ceremony at the parade ground of the Bangladesh Military Academy in Bhatiyar, Chattogram.

Mentioning that Bangladesh achieved victory through the Liberation War under the leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Hasina said, "You [army personnel] have to prepare yourselves in such a way that you can move around the world holding your head high and upholding the country's dignity."

She greeted the fresh cadets for being commissioned as officers of Bangladesh Army upon completion of the training course.

The PM gave directives to the army personnel, particularly the freshers, to work for the welfare of the country's people. "We want you to always stand beside the people and contribute to improving their livelihoods."

Describing the day of passing out parade as an important day for the cadets, Hasina said, "You are going to join Bangladesh Army today as commissioned officers. So, you should always keep in mind that you have to love the country and perform duties for the country. You have shouldered huge responsibilities of safeguarding the country's independence and sovereignty through taking the oaths."

Bangabandhu had said the most important things in life are honesty, dutifulness, commitment and zeal to

love the country, she said. "You have to discharge your duties keeping the advice in mind."

Briefly highlighting the measures taken by her government for the overall development of Bangladesh Army, the PM said the government has formulated "Forces Goals 2030" in light of the "Defence Policy" adopted by the Father of the Nation in 1974.

Hasina said after assuming office, her government established new military units, including new infantry divisions, brigade units and training institutes, for overall development of the army.

She said her government has created a scope for women to join the army. Bangladesh Army, including its female officers, has been working in UN peacekeeping missions with reputations, the PM added.

The premier appreciated the army personnel for standing by the people during the Covid-19 pandemic putting their lives at risk. She prayed for the salvation of the souls of the army men who died of the virus and conveyed deep sympathy to their bereaved families.

Describing herself as a family member of Bangladesh Army, Hasina said her younger brothers Sheikh Kamal and Sheikh Jamal were members of the force while her youngest brother Sheikh Russell also wanted to be an army officer.

Wishing every success of the cadets, she asked them to love the country and its people and perform their duties accordingly so that the country can move towards prosperity.

On behalf of the PM, Chief of Army Staff Gen Aziz Ahmed distributed various prizes among the winners. The army chief also thanked the premier for joining the programme.

Battalion senior under officer of the 79th BMA Long Course, Md Mahmudul Hasan, was awarded with the "Sword of Honour" as the best all round cadet and "Army Chief Gold Medal" for his best performance in the military subjects.

The cadets also took formal oaths on the occasion. Bangladesh Army arranged a spectacular parade marking the occasion.



Tin-roofed mud houses amid the greenery of Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary in Cox's Bazar. Jafar Alam, a local lawmaker and also a member of the parliamentary standing committee on environment and forest, has recently proposed that 600 acres of this reserve forest be turned into khas land so that it can be leased out to the locals. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA YOUSUF

Gambling with greenery

FROM PAGE 1

is part of Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, established in 1986.

A cluster of villages have developed there over the decades.

By a stretch of brick road around 2km long, as seen by this correspondent during a visit on November 25, there were dozens of shops, tea stalls, homes, madrasas and mosques -- a setting as far as possible from the dense forest it once was.

The wave of people settling on this forestland started with 16 families whom the government rehabilitated at Villager Para of Harbang in 1952 after a cyclone devastated Cox's Bazar coastal areas such as Moheshkhali and Kutubdia, leaving many homeless.

Khurshed Alam, 50, whose parents were among these first inhabitants, told The Daily Star that only around 3,000 people in the area constitute the families and descendants of the cyclone victims.

The rest of the inhabitants are those who settled here from other parts of the country and whose relatives soon followed, he said. In the nearly 70 years since, the population now stands at approximately 20,000, he added.

"As it is no longer forestland, the government should allow us to live here legally," Khurshed opined.

Many of the residents of Villager Para settled on the land before it was declared a wildlife sanctuary in the late '80s, but it was declared a reserve forest during the colonial era. As such, it is still protected by the forest department.

The State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950 prevents forestland from being leased out, and in 2018, a land ministry circular requested the district deputy commissioners not to lease out any protected forest, given the scarcity of forestland.

Villagers said they have been living on the forestland peacefully, with no hostility between them and forest department officials.

This peaceful co-existence is now threatened by the MP's proposal, said

a Forest Department official.

On condition of anonymity, he said if the status of the forest is changed, there is no guarantee that these villagers won't be evicted from the land as there might be a hidden agenda behind the proposal.

The Daily Star has previously reported on multiple instances of disputed forestland, mistakenly or intentionally classified as khas land, making it vulnerable to land grabbers or leased out to corporations and local influentials for commercial purposes. **MP'S PROPOSAL**

On receiving the DO letter from the lawmaker, Cox's Bazar district administration asked the Chakaria upazila administration to investigate the matter in March.

In June, the surveyor of Chakaria upazila land office prepared a report in favour of the move to de-reserve the forest, citing no flora and fauna there.

The report, a copy of which The Daily Star obtained from the land office, stated there was no plantation by the Forest Department on 594 acres of the wildlife sanctuary.

The investigation team found 931 homesteads, 110 acres of agricultural land, 7.70 acres of vegetable fields, 73 betel leaf gardens, nine mosques, two madrasas and a primary school in the area. It also recorded 2,986 voters who received smart cards from the Election Commission in the area.

While Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary has been heavily degraded over the years, the Forest Department's reforestation projects are underway there.

In September, the district administration asked the Forest Department whether they had any reservations regarding the change of status.

Abu Naser Mohammed Yeasin Neyaz, divisional forest officer (DFO) of Wildlife and Nature Conservation Division of Chattogram, told The Daily Star on November 28 that they strongly protested the move that seeks to legalise forest grabbing.

"The district administration could easily have rejected the move, rather they are only seeking our opinion regarding this. Their land office recommended in favour of changing the reserve forest status, an approach that absolutely frustrated us," he said.

The DFO further said the land office's report is based on wrong perceptions about what constitutes forestland.

"It cited that there were no trees on the land but all forestland doesn't have to be densely forested. Some open space, or grassland, is also required for wildlife to roam around on. They mistook the open land as deforested area."

He added the Forest Department opposes the move as significant forest cover in the region, and in the country in general, has been lost already.

"We can't allow this move to proceed in such a situation."

Md Mostafa Javed Kaisar, revenue deputy collector of Cox's Bazar district administration, who is also overseeing the matter, confirmed to The Daily Star that they sent a letter to the forest department to know whether they have any reservation regarding this.

As it is documented as Forest Department land, it is not possible to lease it out until the status is changed, he said, adding that thousands of families lived there.

Jafar Alam, in a written statement on December 9, told The Daily Star that some five decades ago the people now living there had their homesteads devastated by a cyclone. They then took shelter on this land.

He said he considered the matter from a "humane" approach, as the people in the area have long been demanding this. "As the people's representative, I listened to them and sent the DO letter."

He added, "This is the only reason which drove me to write the DO letter asking the authorities if something could be done for the people. I have no other intention behind this."

CASES UNDER DIGITAL SECURITY ACT Give training to cops to finish probe in 75 days

HC orders IGP

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The High Court has directed the inspector general of police to take steps necessary to train officers to complete investigating cases filed under the Digital Security Act in 75 days.

"The investigation officers must take permission from the [cyber] tribunals concerned in order to continue investigations of the cases filed under the Digital Security Act, 2018 after 75 days of their filing under section 40 of the act," the HC said.

"But, it was noted that investigations of many cases, including those filed against [photojournalist] Shafiqul Islam Kajol, under the act were not completed in the stipulated period and the probes of the cases continued without permission from the tribunals.

"That is why, the inspector general of police is directed to take necessary steps and to provide training to police officers concerned to this effect."

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetullah Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman came up with the directive and observation in the full text of its verdict that granted bail to Kajol in two cases filed under the Digital Security Act.

The full text was released yesterday after judges of the bench signed it on December 22, court sources said.

Kajol will be released from jail after a copy of the HC verdict reaches the jail authorities, his lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

The HC bench led by Justice M Enayetullah Rahim on December 17 granted bail to Shafiqul Islam Kajol as the investigators failed to take permission from the cyber

tribunal to probe the two cases within 75 days.

Deputy Attorney General Sarwar Hossain Bappi told the court that the investigation officer did not take permission because they did not know the relevant provision.

Jyotirmoy told the HC that his client, who is a renowned photographer, had been abducted and kept confined for 53 days. Kajol has been languishing in jail, while the probe goes on, which is a violation of the law.

The accused petitioner has the right to life as per the constitution and therefore, he may be granted bail in the cases, Jyotirmoy told the court.

On November 24, the same HC bench had granted bail to Kajol in one of the three cases filed under the Digital Security Act. Jyotirmoy told the court that the investigations of the two cases were illegal as the probes had to be concluded within 75 days of filing of the cases.

Ruling Awami League lawmaker from Magura-1 Saifuzzaman Shikhor filed one of the three cases with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station on March 9 against Kajol and 31 others, alleging that the accused had defamed him by publishing a report on the crimes of expelled Narsingdi Juba Mahila League general secretary Shamima Nur Papiya.

The two other cases were filed against Kajol on March 10 and 11 with Hazaribagh and Kamrangirchar police stations. One was filed by Hazaribagh unit Juba Mahila League leader Yasmi Ara Belly and the other by Sumaiya Chowdhury Banna, a member of Bangladesh Juba Mahila League's central committee.

UK, EU reach landmark deal

FROM PAGE 1

"We will be an independent coastal state," he said. "We will be able to decide how and where to stimulate new jobs."

Britain's parliament will vote to approve the trade deal with the European Union on Dec. 30, Johnson said.

The chief EU negotiator, Michel Barnier, was able to say for the first time in four long years: "The clock is no longer ticking."

While the last-minute deal prevents the most acrimonious ending to the saga on Jan. 1, the United Kingdom is set for a much more distant relationship with its biggest trade partner than almost anyone expected at the time of the 2016 referendum.

A deal had seemed imminent for almost a day, until haggling over just how much fish EU boats should be able to catch in British waters delayed the announcement of one of the most important trade deals in recent European history.

The UK formally left the EU on Jan. 31 but has since been in a transition period under which rules on trade, travel and business remained unchanged until the end of this year.

The details of the accord have yet to be made public, but if the sides have struck a zero-tariff and zero-quota deal, it will help to smooth trade in goods that makes up half their \$900 billion in annual commerce.

It will also support the peace in Northern Ireland - a priority for US

President-elect Joe Biden, who had warned Johnson that he must uphold the 1998 Good Friday peace agreement.

Even with an accord, some disruption is certain from Jan. 1 when Britain ends its often fraught 48-year relationship with a Franco-German-led project that sought to bind the ruined nations of post-World War Two Europe together into a global power.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said she was "confident" that the deal was a "good outcome."

"We will quickly be able to determine whether Germany can support today's result of the negotiations," she said in a statement, adding that her cabinet would meet Monday to review the accord.

"I am very confident that we have a good result."

Former British prime ministers David Cameron and Theresa May, who both resigned over Brexit in recent years, welcomed the news.

"Trade deal is very welcome," Cameron said on Twitter, adding it was "good to end a difficult year with some positive news".

In her own message, May added: "Very welcome news that the UK & EU have reached agreement on the terms of a deal -- one that provides confidence to business and helps keep trade flowing."

But in a worrying sign for United Kingdom, Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon yesterday said it was time for Scotland to be "an independent, European nation".

No need to panic over new strain

FROM PAGE 1

SARS-CoV-2 variant, identified through viral genomic sequencing, may spread more rapidly between people.

In response, at least 40 counties closed their borders or cancelled flights from the UK, in efforts to curb further spread of the virus.

Yesterday, State Minister for Civil Aviation Md Mahub Ali, however, said Bangladesh's air communications with the UK would continue as usual until further notice.

As many as 165 passengers from the UK landed at Sylhet Osmani International Airport yesterday and headed home after they showed Covid-19 negative certificates to the airport authorities.

Studies are currently underway to determine whether the new strain found in the UK is associated with any changes in the severity of Covid-19 symptoms, antibody response or vaccine efficacy.

"A total of 17 mutations have been reported in the new strain found in the UK. Only one of those has a bit of similarity with the identified mutations in Bangladesh," Dr Marufur Rahman, deputy programme manager, Center for Medical Biotechnology of DGHS's Management Information System (MIS) told The Daily Star yesterday.

The BCSIR study team, led by Dr Salim Khan, analysed data on 263 cases of genome sequencing collected from different areas in eight divisions between May 7 and July 31 this year, said BCSIR officials.

The study suggested that the Covid-19 mutation rate (12.6 percent) in Bangladesh was higher than the global average of 7.23 percent, they said.

Dr Mushtuq Hussain, consultant of

the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), said, "If the new variant was found here two months ago, there has not been much changes in the virus's behaviour. The transmission rate has been in a certain range."

Dr Mahbuba Zamil, head of virology at the Institute of Public Health, echoed his statement.

"The record of the transmission rate does not suggest anything exceptional," she said.

VIRUS MUTATION

A mutation is a change in the virus's genome: the set of genetic instructions that contain all the information that the virus needs to function, according to GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, a public-private global health partnership.

Mutations can have a negative or positive impact on the virus's ability to survive and replicate, depending on where in the virus the genome mistakes occur.

Mutations can also change the characteristics of a virus, causing the original virus to either weaken or become more aggressive.

To replicate, a virus uses a host cell where it leaves its genetic elements. This results in millions of copies of the virus in the human body cell.

However, errors can creep in during this process when the virus replicates and such types of incidents are called mutations of the virus.

As a mutation creates new subtypes of the virus, it makes the development of an effective vaccine or drug against it very difficult.

These different variants also explain why a virus can trigger waves of infections of varying severity in different regions of the world, and why infections can also progress very differently in different people, say researchers.

Reshuffle in top tier of bureaucracy

Confusion over Biman MD's appointment as railways secy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Public Administration Ministry in a gazette yesterday announced that some of the top bureaucrats have been transferred.

The gazette mentioned that Biman Managing Director and CEO M Mokabbir Hossain was among the officials transferred. But the ministry issued a similar gazette about an hour later without mentioning Mokabbir.

The official did not answer the phone when The Daily Star called to ask him whether he had been transferred to the Railways Ministry, as the gazette mentioned.

According to the gazettes, Mokammel Hossain, additional secretary at the Public Administration Ministry, had been transferred as the secretary of Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry.

M Mohibul Haque, current senior secretary at the Civil Aviation Ministry, said he will retire once his contract ends on January 5, next year.

Ramendranath Biswas will be the member (secretary) at the Planning Commission. He was an additional secretary at the finance division.

Mostafa Kamal will be the new chairman (secretary) of the Land Reform Board and Mostafizur Rahman will be the land secretary.

Ex-state minister AKM Jahangir passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former state minister for textiles and jute AKM Jahangir Hossain died at B a n g a b a n d h u Sheikh Mujib Medical University yesterday. He was 66.

Jahangir, who was also a former member of the parliament from Patuakhali-3 constituency, and his wife tested positive Covid-19 on December 2.

His body will be buried at their family graveyard in Patuakhali today.

Before burial, his body will be kept at his house in Mazar Road area of the capital's Gabtoli for people to pay their last respect to him.

Jahangir left behind his wife, son, daughter, a host of relatives and well-wishers to mourn his death.

He remained the Member of Parliament from his constituency for four times and became state minister for the Ministry of Textiles and Jute in 1998.

He was also a member of incumbent Awami League central executive committee. Between 1981 and 1983, he was the general secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra League.

President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and many others expressed their grief over the demise of their party colleague.

In a condolence message, President Hamid said Jahangir played a very courageous role in various democratic movements.

The prime minister, in her message, recalled the struggles and organisational skills of Jahangir.

A vacuum has been created in the political arena with the death of Jahangir, she said, adding that she prays for the salvation of the departed soul.

She also conveyed her deep sympathy to Jahangir's family.

Besides, AL General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Law Minister Anisul Huq, Planning Minister MA Mannan, Land Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, and other ministers and AL leaders expressed their deep condolences over the death of Jahangir.

Christmas today

FROM PAGE 1

Christian community on the occasion.

They called upon the members of the Christian community to celebrate the holy day maintaining health rules.

In his message, the president called upon all to consolidate the long-standing tradition of religious harmony in the country.

About Jesus Christ's contribution to the society, Hamid said Jesus taught people in a peaceful position with love, compassion, forgiveness, affection, empathy and the establishment of justice.

He urged all to work unitedly to build a happy, prosperous and non-communal Bangladesh, envisioned by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Betar and private TV channels will air special programmes marking the day.