

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



**1,049**  
New cases in 24hrs



**5,09,148**  
Total cases



**7,452**  
Deaths



**4,51,961**  
Recoveries



**1,769,365**  
Deaths



**80,954,346**  
Total cases

## PM christens Biman's new Dash-8 'Dhurbatara'

UNB, Dhaka

National flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines got a new Dash 8-400 aircraft to help it expand operations in the short-range, including domestic and South Asian destinations.



Prime Minister Hasina said Bangladesh's geological position will help it earn huge profits if it can establish communication with other countries around it.

"Steps have been taken to strengthen regional and international connectivity through Biman to further expand trade and commerce," she said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday formally inducted the Canadian 74-seater aircraft named "Dhurbatara" through a videoconference from her official residence the Gono Bhaban.

Biman procured three Dash 8-400 aircrafts under the G2G (government-to-government) agreement between Bangladesh and Canada.

The first one was inducted yesterday while two others will be included in a couple of months.

The opening function of the new aircraft was held at the VIP terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport where State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism M Mahub Ali was present with other Biman officials.

Prime Minister Hasina has named the new aircraft like the other new planes which have already been added to Biman's fleet.

Earlier, the national flag carrier received the first Dash 8-400 aircraft out of three made by De Havilland Aircraft of Canada.

According to a Biman press release, the Dash 8-400 aircraft equipped with eco-friendly and state-of-the-art facilities arrived on November 24.

With the new plane, the number of Biman's aircraft has increased to 19, including four Boeing 777-300ER, four Boeing 787-8, two Boeing 787-9, six Boeing 737 and three Dash 8-400.

**USING BIMAN TO BOOST CONNECTIVITY**

She mentioned that Bangladesh wants to further strengthen and expand trade relations with countries particularly in South and South-East Asia.

In this connection, Sheikh Hasina said that induction of new aircraft along with the old ones will help establish well-organised communication with the neighbouring countries.

And strengthening of the capacity of Biman fleet is a part of the move, she said, adding that two more Dash 8 Q-400 aircraft would be added to the national flag carrier in February next.

Sheikh Hasina said the government has been making Biman more capable with modern facilities as Bangladesh is first known in the International arena through the National Flag Carrier.

But she regretted that the expanded fleet of Biman remains idle due to the Covid-19 pandemic which grounded flights.

"This is the problem for the whole world," she said. "The whole world is in the same condition and in a position of standstill."

Three Dash 8-400 aircraft were ordered under a purchase agreement signed between the national flag carrier Biman and the Canadian De Havilland in 2018.

## Import eased as prices soar

RICE VARIETY	PRICE PER KG YESTERDAY	PRICE PER KG DEC 27, 2019
Fine rice (Nazirshail, Miniket)	60 to 65	45 to 60
Medium quality rice (Paijam, Lata)	53 to 60	40 to 50
Coarse rice (Swarna, China Irri)	46 to 50	30 to 35

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Of this, around five lakh tonnes are rice, according to food ministry officials.

Food Secretary Nazmanara Khanum said the authorities will fix how much rice an individual or a firm will be allowed to import so that farmers do not incur losses.

The importers have to take permission from the food ministry to enjoy the benefit of 25 percent import duty, she added.

Talking to reporters at the Secretariat yesterday, the agriculture minister blamed millers and wholesalers for the price hike of the staple.

"Usually, wholesalers and millers are the ones who increase rice prices. They had done this in the past and they are also doing this now," said the minister.

"In this peak season, they are buying paddy and rice on the one hand and increasing their prices on the other."

"We don't have that much shortage of food grain. But millers are trying to increase rice prices through manipulation. If we can ensure adequate supply of imported rice in the domestic market, there won't be much problem."

"As the rice price is high, the government is allowing the private sector to import rice under special consideration. The government will also import rice."

Rice will be imported from India, Vietnam and Indonesia, he

mentioned.

About millers' opposition to rice import on the grounds that it will cause losses to farmers, Razzaque said paddy is being sold for Tk 1,200 a maund and for around Tk 1,040 in some areas. Even if farmers get Tk 1,000 for it, they will not incur losses.

**PRICE HIKE**

Coarse rice, an indicator of the rice market, was sold for Tk 46-50 a kg yesterday, which was Tk 30-35 exactly a year ago, according to Trading Corporation of Bangladesh data.

The price of medium-quality rice rose by Tk 10-13 from Tk 40-50 and that of fine rice by Tk 5-15 from Tk 45-60 a year ago.

Mohammad Jasimuddin, a rice retailer at a market in the city's Mirpur-11, said the price of coarse rice, consumed mainly by low-income people, rose by Tk 2-2.5 a kg in the last couple of weeks. Different varieties of fine rice such as Nazirshail and Miniket also saw their prices rise by Tk 5 during the same period.

About the reason behind the price hike, the trader said the millers were claiming that this year's rice production is lower than last year's. Cashing in on the situation, many are now hoarding rice to make a quick buck.

Another rice retailer, Rahman Mia, in Mirpur-10 area, said he sold Swarna, a coarse rice variety, for Tk 45-48 two weeks ago. Now it is sold for Tk 50-52 a kg.

## Israel enters third nationwide lockdown

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel yesterday began its third coronavirus lockdown, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu voiced optimism that a "world record" vaccination drive will restore a degree of normality within weeks.

After a sharp resurgence of detected infections, Netanyahu's government announced three days ago that it would re-impose the strict measures that had previously helped limit transmission.

The lockdown, which began at 5:00 pm (1500 GMT) on Sunday, forces most people to stay within 1,000 metres (yards) of their home.

There are a range of exceptions, including grocery shopping, seeking medical care, attending legal proceedings or exercising.

A key difference in Israel's third lockdown compared to previous versions relates to schools, with students able to attend classes.

Instead of near total closures, Israel is keeping schools open but subject to limitations, with most children combining days in class with learning

from home.

The alleys of Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda open-air market, normally relatively dormant on a Sunday, were full of shoppers making last-minute food purchases before the lockdown kicked in.

A vendor in the market's Neeman spice store shrugged when asked whether they would be allowed to operate during the lockdown.

"As far as we're concerned, we're open," he said. "Nobody told us what's happening yet."

Israel meanwhile ploughed ahead with its vaccination campaign, which as of Sunday morning had reached 280,000 people who got their first shot of the required two.

"National pride: Israel is the world's champion in vaccinating!" Netanyahu tweeted Sunday, showing a chart indicating the Jewish state had the highest vaccinations per capita.

Speaking late Saturday, Netanyahu said Israel was hoping to vaccinate a quarter of its population, or roughly 2.25 million people, against coronavirus within a month.



Two Ansar members loading electronic voting machines onto a truck at the Barlekha upazila election office yesterday to be taken to 10 voting centres for today's Barlekha municipality elections. PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

## 24 municipalities go to polls with EVMs

Many voters clueless as to how to use the machines

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Twenty-four municipalities will go to polls today using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) amid confusion among voters about uses of the machines.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the Election Commission (EC) will conduct municipalities' polls in four phases this time. Today will be the first phase.

The battle of ballots is expected to be held between two arch-rival political parties -- Awami League and BNP -- although candidates of other political parties including Jatiya Party and Islami Andolan Bangladesh are contesting in it.

Mohammad Alamgir, senior secretary to the EC, told The Daily Star, "We have completed our preparations and believe that voting will be held peacefully."

The EC has also taken measures to prevent any kind of violence during and after the elections, he added.

Asked about the risks of holding polls during Covid-19 pandemic, he said health measures would be strictly followed.

Hand washing and sanitising facilities will be available at the poll centres, he added.

EC Joint Secretary Asaduzzaman Arzu said there was no scope of confusion regarding the uses of

EVM as the commission held mock voting and massive campaigns at the municipalities.

A total of 6.25 lakh voters are expected to cast their votes at those 24 municipalities in 22 districts, according to the EC.

A total of 93 mayor aspirants are contesting for the 24 posts, while 801 councillor candidates for 216 posts and 266 candidates for 72 women's reserve seats, as per the EC.

The 24 municipalities are: Panchagarh of Panchagarh, Pirganj of Thakurgaon, Phulbari of Dinajpur, Badarganj of Rangpur, Kurigram of Kurigram, Puthia and Katakhal of Rajshahi, Shahjapur of Sirajganj, Chatmohor of Pabna, Kokhsa of Kusthia, Chuadanga of Chuadanga, Chalna of Khulna, Betagi of Barguna, Kuakata of Patuakhali, Ujirpur and Bakerganj of Barishal, Gafarganj of Mymensingh, Madan of Netrakona, Dhamrai of Dhaka, Dirai of Sunanganj, Borolekha of Moulvibazar, Sayestaganj of Habiganj, and Sitakunda of Chhattogram.

Our correspondent in Moulvibazar reported that many voters of Borolekha were confused about how to cast their votes in EVM.

Seeking anonymity, a senior voter of Hatbanda area of the municipality said, there are many problems with voting.

"This time I have to vote using

the machine. I hear many things about voting through the machine. Wherever we put pressure, it will go to only one brand. If this is true then it is a matter of concern."

Our correspondent in Kushtia reported that many voters in Khoksa municipality were also confused.

One such voter Muktar Hossain, of Thanapara area of Khoksa municipality, said the new system was difficult for him to understand. BNP candidate Nafiz Ahmed Khan Raju said he could not campaign at the beginning but at the end he carried out his campaigns.

He was optimistic about winning if the vote in EVM was not rigged.

Awami League candidate Lecturer Tariqul Islam said EVM means peaceful voting. He hopes to win again considering the development works he has done.

According to Local Government Division, there are 329 municipalities in the country. The EC will hold elections to 224 municipalities. Tenures of these municipalities will expire by March 2021.

A total of 62 municipalities will go for vote in the second phase on January 15. And 64 municipalities will go for voting in third phase on January 30. Fourth phase of the election is likely to be held in mid-February.

## Spain ruling coalition divided over four-day work week

AFP, Madrid

Spain's coalition government is deeply split over a proposal to shorten the work week to four days to fight high unemployment sparked by the coronavirus pandemic.

The measure is being pushed by far-left party Podemos, the junior partner in Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's minority government which has ruled the eurozone's fourth largest economy since January.

Deputy Prime Minister Pablo Iglesias, the leader of Podemos, announced earlier this month that the labour ministry was looking into reducing work hours, saying this "could without a doubt favour the creation of employment".

He was responding during a TV interview to the proposal made by a far-left lawmaker that called for the

work week to be reduced to 32 hours from the current 40 hours.

"Work time requires a new concept which dares to challenge, as we do, the laws and customs of the working world," added Labour Minister Yolanda Diaz, also from Podemos, on Twitter.

The proposal comes as the New Zealand branch of Unilever earlier this month began a trial of a four-day work week for its staff in the country.

Germany's powerful IG Metall union has also floated the idea.

But in Spain the idea has been met with reluctance from the Socialists, the dominant party in Spain's first coalition government since its return to democracy in the late 1970s.

Budget Minister Maria Jesus Montero said the government "must not lose focus" from its main priority,

which is "to return to the growth rates which we had at the start of the pandemic".

Spain's heavily tourism-dependent economy had consistently outperformed much of Europe since it emerged from a five-year slump in 2013.

But the International Monetary Fund (IMF) sees the country's GDP slumping by 12.8 percent this year, in what would make it the hardest-hit nation among the world's advanced economies.

"I don't think this issue is a priority for Spain, given the current levels of productivity and competitiveness," said Social Security Minister Jose Luis Escrivá, in a reference to productivity levels well below the European average, partially due to the large proportion of small businesses.

## 57,390 grabbers feast on 770 rivers

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Dr Muzibur, however, told this correspondent that: "Despite the limitations, the eviction activities will continue and we will not bow down to any influential quarters."

He also said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has given them clear instructions to carry out the activities to save the country's rivers through evicting the river grabbers.

"Therefore, we don't have any reason to step back from the ongoing eviction programmes no matter how much influence the persons and organisations have," the NRCC boss added.

The NRCC in its report mentioned names of many individuals and organisations that grabbed the rivers.

The Daily Star withheld their names in this report because they couldn't be reached for comments.

According to documents placed in

the meeting, the number of grabbers in Dhaka division is 8,890. Of them, 7,387 have been evicted. The rate of eviction is 83.09 percent.

The Lobondoh river that flows through Gazipur city has narrowed like a ditch due to encroachment, the report said.

In the meeting, the JS body emphasised removing polythene from the bottom of the Buriganga.

The committee recommended the ministry to start the activities urgently with proper dredgers.

The committee asked the NRCC to take measures so that the High Court takes necessary steps to expedite the disposal of river occupants' appeals.

It was recommended at the meeting that the NRCC and BIWTA should take steps to recover the expenditure from the concerned persons and institutions during the eviction drive.

According to the NRCC report,

the number of total grabbers in Mymensingh division is 4,848 and 1,713 have been evicted.

In Chattogram, the number of grabbers is 18,537 while the number of evictions is 1,351.

At least 12,007 individuals and organisations have grabbed rivers in Khulna and the number of evictions is 5,609.

The number of grabbers in Sylhet division is 2,044 while the eviction rate is 17.9 percent.

In Barishal, 5,611 individuals and organisations grabbed the rivers and DCs of different districts evicted 793 grabbers.

In Rajshahi, the number of grabbers is 2,693 and 336 were evicted so far.

Deputy commissioners of different districts under Rangpur Division so far evicted 1,023 individuals and organisations. The number of grabbers is 2,707.

## Three killed, three wounded in Illinois shooting

AFP, Washington

Three people were killed and another three wounded Saturday in the US state of Illinois when a shooter opened fire at a bowling alley, police said.

A suspect in his 30s was in police custody.

Rockford city police urged people on Twitter to stay away from the area near the Don Carter Lanes bowling alley, as it was an "active situation" and officers were clearing the site.

The force posted on Twitter shortly after midnight: "37-year-old white male suspect is in custody. There are no others being sought at this time."

"It's still an ongoing investigation. We do have three individuals that are confirmed deceased," police chief Dan O'Shea earlier told a press conference near the scene of the shooting.

He said three other people had been wounded from the gunfire and were being treated at local hospitals.

He did not specify whether the shooter had a motive.

Don Carter Lanes posted a simple message on Facebook after the shooting asking people to "pray please."

Shootings are a frequent occurrence in the United States, but despite the scale of the gun violence efforts to address it legislatively have long been deadlocked at the federal level.

## Jihadists snatch dozens of loggers in Nigeria, kill 3

AFP, Kano

Boko Haram jihadists have seized around 40 loggers and killed three others in northeast Nigeria near the border with Cameroon, militia sources and residents told AFP on Saturday.

The hostages were rounded up by the insurgents on Thursday in Wulgo forest near the town of Gamboru where they went to collect firewood, the sources said.

The jihadists have increasingly targeted loggers and farmers in the northeast, accusing them of passing information to the military and local militias.

"A group of more than 40 loggers left Shehuri on the outskirts of Gamboru on Thursday and never returned by evening as usual," said militia leader Umar Kachalla, who was involved in the search.

"On Friday we mobilised men and went deep into the forest where we recovered three bodies identified to be among the loggers, without a trace of their colleagues."

The missing loggers were presumed kidnapped by the jihadists, who are known to maintain camps in the forest, said Kachalla, a view widely shared by other residents.

"We believe the men were taken by Boko Haram who have been attacking loggers in the forest," said another militia Shehu Mada.

"From all indication the three dead loggers were shot when they tried to escape as they all were shot from behind."

## No Covid vaccine

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"We have trained people and the storage for the vaccines along with the cold boxes for carrying them have been managed. A guideline has also been prepared. Those who are criticising do not have any information."

The shots will be enough to vaccinate everyone eligible.

"Around 37 percent of the population is aged below 18, there are 30 lakh pregnant women, and about one crore people are abroad. Everyone else will be vaccinated with the shots from the COVAX and Oxford."

He again said that the government was successful in tackling the pandemic, adding that Covid-19 vaccines will be tested in the country's labs in the future.

Meanwhile, 24 people have died from Covid-19 in the 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, according to a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services.

The total number of deaths reached 7,452 and the death rate was 1.46 percent as of yesterday.

At least 1,049 new infections were recorded in the 24-hour period, taking the total number to 5,09,148, added the release.

The new cases were detected after testing 12,650 samples. The positivity rate was 8.29 percent while the overall positivity rate as of yesterday was 16.05 percent.

With 1,473 new recoveries, the total number of people who recovered from Covid-19 stood at 4,51,961 and the recovery rate at 88.77 percent.

Of the 24 reported dead yesterday, 16 were men and the rest women.

Of them, one was aged between 31 and 40 years, one between 41 and 50, seven were between 51 and 60, and 15 above 60, added the release.