

DHAKA-CHATTOGRAM ROUTE

High-speed rail in the offing

Journey time to be reduced to only 57 minutes, says railways minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is set to build a high-speed rail link between Dhaka and Chattogram which will reduce journey time to within 57 minutes, Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan told parliament yesterday.

"Work is going on at present to prepare a detailed design and feasibility study of the project," the minister said in reply to lawmakers' queries.

"The government upgraded the Bangladesh Railway Master Plan on January 29, 2018, under a technical assistance project for Bangladesh Railway SASEC Rail Connectivity Investment Activities," he said.

In reply to another query, the minister said the government had a plan to implement 230 projects at a cost of Taka 5,53,662 crore by 2045.

Sujan said as per the Bangladesh Railway Master Plan, the government would implement all the projects in six phases starting from July 2016 to June 2045.

Among other things under the master plan, the government will

construct a Dhaka-Chattagram via Cumilla/Laksam high-speed railway line, a subway on Dhaka-Tongi section and railway line from Dhaka to Paturia via Manikganj.

The minister also said the government would build the Sylhet Railway Station as a modern and international standard one.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday told parliament that a total of Tk 4,988.37 crore had been realised as toll from the Bangabandhu Bridge in the last twenty years till 2018.

On the other hand, the construction cost of the bridge was Tk 3,745.60 crore.

The minister, however, told the Jatiya Sangsad that the amount which was being realised as toll from the bridge was being used for repayment of the loan provided by development partners and to meet other costs, including maintenance cost of the bridge.

The loan provided for construction of the bridge would be fully returned by 2034, the minister added.



PHOTO: TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY/ PRABIR DAS

Vehicles illegally parked on a pavement along Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in the capital's Karwan Bazar yesterday. Inset, a man talks over a mobile phone while driving a pickup in Tejgaon area. A fortnight-long traffic discipline programme ended on February 2, but it hardly changed the city's traffic situation. Many keep violating the rules at will.



Student bodies

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Ambia factions of JSD Chhatra League are likely to partner with the BCL.

On the other hand, the BNP's student body Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal may not find any partner student organisation for the Ducusu polls. Political parties, with which the BNP allied before the December 30 national election, do not have student bodies.

Moreover, Jamaat's student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir, which might have partnered with the Chhatra Dal, is banned on the campus.

Left-leaning student bodies are likely to contest under the banner of Pragatishil Chhatra Jote while Islami Shashantantra Chhatra Andolan would contest alone.

Apart from these, Bangladesh Sadharon Chhatra Odhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad, which spearheaded the quota reform protests, is also likely to contest the polls.

Several TSC-based cultural bodies may contest under the banner of BCL-led Chhatra Sangram Parishad.

The BCL had never singlehandedly won the Ducusu polls since the country's independence.

"We held several meetings with some cultural organisations of TSC, we are also planning to include meritorious students of the university in our panel," said Saddam Hossain, general secretary of DU BCL.

Chhatra Dal's DU President Al Mehedi Hasan Talukder said, "We are preparing to participate in the election without forming any alliance."

Left-leaning alliance Pragatishil Chhatra Jote would include the Bangladesh Chhatra Union, Bangladesh Chhatra Federation, Chhatra Oikya Forum, Biplobi Chhatra Motiree and two factions of Chhatra Front.

Coordinator of the alliance Salman Siddique said student organisations that protest against the BCL's misdeeds would probably join them.

"We may include some quota reformists. Besides, we have already invited Adivasi Chhatra Parishad and Nipiron Birodhi Shiksharthi to join our tent," Salman added.

Nurul Huq Nurul, joint convenor of the quota reformist Bangladesh Sadharon Chhatra Odhikar Songrokkhon Parishad, said several political organisations have asked them to form an alliance, but they are looking forward to go solo.

Kazi Sujan, president of TSC-based Slogan 71, said that they will support whichever alliance upholds the spirit of Liberation War and students' rights.

SM Mahfuzur Rahman, chief returning officer of the Ducusu election, said an updated voters' list would be published soon as per the amended Ducusu constitution.

The election schedule will be announced by February 15, he added.

Ducusu was dissolved in 1998. Many later attempts to hold an election had failed since then. Following a Supreme Court verdict, the DU

authorities announced the Ducusu election would be held on March 11.

Schoolgirl

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The girl's uncle filed the case against the three the same day, the OC said.

"We have arrested the key accused Tushar and are looking for his accomplices," the OC added.

The girl's uncle said Tushar used to harass his niece on her way to school every day. Her family had recently complained to Tushar's parents. That is why he raped the girl, he alleged.

Cops place flurry of demands

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Parade held at the Rajarbagh Police Auditorium after Hasina inaugurated the Police Week 2019.

They also pressed for construction of a modern sports complex for police, costs for maintenance and fuel of motorbikes and upgraded allowance for traffic policemen as per the latest pay scale.

The premier at the programme lauded the police, saying the force had to work a lot to ensure holding of a participatory election on December 30, said sources. Hasina won a third consecutive term in a row as the Awami League bagged 257 seats alone in the election.

During the police week, the police high-ups are also likely to demand recruiting 70,000 to 75,000 more members, upgrading the rank badge of inspector general of police to four stars and forming a separate division for police at the home ministry.

A conference of the police high-ups with Hasina is scheduled to be held at the International Conference Centre at the Prime Minister's Office today. Later, they will hold two separate meetings with the home minister and different other members of the cabinet.

President Abdul Hamid will address high officials of police at the Bangabhaban tomorrow.

The police week will end on February 8.

DEMANDS PLACED

Abdul Ahad Khan, officer-in-charge of Gafargaon Police Station in Mymensingh, said the compensation for a civil official while in service is Tk 8 lakh if they die or get killed and Tk 4 lakh for grievous injuries.

But a police official gets Tk 5 lakh if they die and Tk 1 lakh for severe injuries.

He pressed for increased compensa-

tions for policemen.

Ahad further demanded that Tk 15 lakh in compensation if a policeman is killed in action and Tk 8 lakh for grievously injuries.

Md Safi, an assistant superintendent of police of DMP, called for a separate medical corps for the police force. He said doctors from outside are brought in for treating patients at police hospitals but they do not want to continue.

Presently, there is a separate medical corps in Bangladesh Army.

Mahbubur Rahman, an assistant sub-inspector from Kurigram, demanded rations for at least two persons of the family until the death of the policeman.

Every policeman now gets 35kg rice, 30kg flour, 8kg lentil, 8-litre oil and 5kg sugar every month for a four-member family. It varies if the number of family members is less than four,

Dhaka to sign pact with KSA February 14

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Chief of Army Staff Gen Aziz Ahmed, who is now visiting Saudi Arabia, disclosed this while visiting the newly constructed chancery of the Bangladesh embassy in Riyadh on Sunday.

He also gave a brief outline of the deal to the media, according to a press release from the embassy.

The principal staff officer of the Armed Forces Division would sign the Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation between Bangladesh and KSA on behalf of Bangladesh, diplomatic sources in Riyadh told The Daily Star yesterday.

The two countries agreed to ink the

agreement to give the current bilateral military relations a "permanent basis".

The sources said the defence deal, which is now ready for signing, was scheduled to be inked during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to the Kingdom on October 17 last year, but it was deferred as both sides agreed to discuss some adjustments.

Gen Aziz on Sunday held separate meetings with Saudi Assistant Minister for Defence Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Ayash and Saudi Chief of Joint Forces Gen Fayyad bin Hamed Al-Ruwaili and discussed various issues of mutual interest, said the press release.

The army chief said Bangladesh named four military officials, includ-

ing a brigadier general, for joining the Saudi-led Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC). The Bangladesh Army would continue its cooperation with the coalition, he added.

Aziz said signing of the defence deal would take the Bangladesh-KSA military cooperation to a new height.

He said he discussed with Saudi officials engaging members of the Bangladesh Army engineering corps in building various civil and military infrastructures and development works in the KSA. He also proposed engaging experienced doctors of Bangladesh Army in different areas of Saudi defence forces.

but if a family has five or more members, the quantity would still be the same.

Silvia Ferdous, a traffic sergeant of DMP, pressed for increase in their allowances.

They now get Tk 50 as driving and nursing allowances and Tk 15 for tailoring every month. She proposed increasing the allowance to Tk 150 for nursing, Tk 300 for driving and Tk 75 for tailoring.

Silvia further said the traffic officials receive 30 percent of their basic as allowance. But it is given as per the 2009 pay scale though they get salary as per the 2015 scale.

Sub-inspector Kamrul Alam said they don't have a sufficient number of motorbikes in the police force. "So we have to buy motorbikes and use it for government work," he said.

Kamrul also demanded maintenance and fuel allowances for their

Fifty structures

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welcome the administration's move. But the land could be occupied again, if not monitored regularly."

Nazrul Islam, assistant general manager of Karnaphuli Ship Builders Ltd, told The Daily Star that they removed some structures after an announcement was made through loudspeakers on Saturday and Sunday in this regard.

"We respected the court order and removed our structures the day before the drive," he claimed.

Commodore Kh Akhter Hossain, member (engineering) at Chattogram Port Authority, said they, along with other organisations, were removing the demolished structures.

"When both the banks will get rid of the illegal structures, the river will get back its original shape, facilitating entry of more ships into the river and unloading of goods from ships," he added.

In 2012, the HC ordered the district administration to conduct a survey to assess how much land of the Karnaphuli was grabbed and prepare a list of land grabbers.

After three years of survey, the administration submitted a report in 2016, saying that there were 2,109 illegal installations on the river bank.

On August 16 that year, the HC again directed the same authority to demolish the structures within six months and gave the grabbers three months to remove the structures on their own.

The organisation could not comply with the court order due to fund crunch. Finally, the land ministry provided it with the necessary fund to run the drive, said sources at the district administration.

Drones monitor

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emergence in wild populations," Pirotta and eight co-authors say in a paper published in an online open-access journal, Viruses.

The scientists collected whale blow samples from 19 humpback whales during the 2017 annual northward migration from Antarctica to northern Australia, they added.

The spray is collected in a petri dish attached to the top of a quadcopter drone, with a flip-lid opened by the craft's pilot as the drone flies above the whale.

The method is less invasive than using a boat to get close and collecting samples on a pole, Pirotta said, and represents an advance over past techniques that depended on samples from stranded whales or those killed for the purpose.

The whale spray collected by a drone contains DNA, proteins, lipids and types of bacteria.

"We can collect bacteria, in my case, to look at the types of bacteria living in whale lungs for an assessment of whale health," Pirotta said.

In this way, drones serve as an early-warning detection system to monitor potential changes in whales' health.

"We can adapt this method to other whale populations around the world not doing so well, like the North Atlantic right whale," Pirotta added.

An international ban on whaling took effect in 1986, but Japan, which says eating whale is part of its culture, last year said it would resume commercial whaling from July in its waters and exclusive economic zone.

Cancer treatment far beyond poor's reach

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upon hearing the news. I have spent a lot of money on tests and checkups. Now I don't know how to manage the treatment cost from my meagre earning," said the sixty-year-old, who works as a security guard in a private firm.

With every word, it was as if the reality of this situation had just begun to sink in. His sun-baked face, criss-crossed with wrinkles, turned gloomy.

Immediately after learning about the disease, Ershad visited a few hospitals in Dhaka for tests and checkups. But with a monthly income of Tk 7,500, he could not afford to take treatment in private facilities. He started going to NICRH for the last several months.

Apart from the treatment, he is now weighed down by treatment costs, along with the financial worries for his family.

Patients like Ershad represent the vast majority of cancer patients from lower and lower-middle income families who can barely afford their diagnosis and treatment. Many of them have to sell off their properties and spend their life's savings just to bear the cost of treatment.

Although there is no concrete data on the number of cancer patients in Bangladesh, doctors at NICRH estimate that the number could be between 12 lakh to 15 lakh.

INCREASING PATIENTS, INADEQUATE DOCTORS

The number of cancer patients is on the rise due to various factors, including

food contamination, unhealthy diet with low fruit and vegetable intake, lack of physical activity, obesity and infection, experts said.

Compared to the rising number of patients, the number of treatment facilities and specialist doctors are inadequate.

According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer's report last year, about 1.08 lakh people die, while 1.5 lakh people develop cancer every year in Bangladesh.

Currently there are around 200 cancer specialists in the country.

NICRH, the only specialised hospital for cancer treatment in the country, is the go-to place for patients in the low-income bracket. But with 300-bed, it is nowhere near enough because the number of patients seeking treatment there is on the rise.

According to the annual health bulletin of the Directorate General of Health Services-2017, the NICRH provided treatment to 1,91,000 outdoor, 4,813 emergency, and 8,365 indoor cancer patients in 2016.

Apart from the specialised hospital, there are only nine government medical colleges, which have logistics for cancer treatment, outside Dhaka. Although some private hospitals have been offering treatment in recent times through their oncology units, none of them specialise in cancer treatment. They are also too expensive for most patients.

Additionally, due to the constraints and a lack of confidence in the coun-

try's cancer treatment facilities, many patients, even those from the middle-income group, are going abroad for treatment.

Dr Mollah Obayedullah Baki, president of Bangladesh Cancer Society, said around 60-70 percent of the cancer patients take treatment in India and other countries like Singapore and Thailand.

However, the cost of treatment in India is almost equal to that of in Bangladesh, he added.

Even with the government hospitals providing medicines free of cost to at least 50 percent of the patients, families of many cancer patients are still unable

Cancer patients in the country 12-15 lakh	
1.08 lakh die from cancer every year	
1.5 lakh diagnosed with cancer a year	

to bear expenses and stop treatment halfway, said Muhammad Rafiqul Islam, assistant professor of the Department of Oncology of NICRH.

"We get many patients whose family's monthly income is less than Tk 5,000. How would they afford to get treatment in private hospitals?" he said.

The exact cost of cancer treatments varies depending on type and stage of cancer and the biological behaviour of the disease.

For example, the NICRH charges Tk 7,000-14,500 for a complete course of radiotherapy whereas private hospitals