

**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**



1,861
New cases in 24hrs



4,85,965
Total cases



6,967
Deaths



4,10,452
Recoveries

**GLOBAL
UPDATE**



1,580,300
Deaths



69,507,519
Total cases



PM reiterates call for co-op on regional development

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed the need for regional development and cooperation, reaffirming that Bangladesh follows its policy -- "Friendship to all, malice to none".

"I believe in regional development and cooperation," she said when Indian High Commissioner Vikram Kumar Doraiswami met her at the Gono Bhaban.

PM's Deputy Press Secretary Hasan Jahid Tusher briefed reporters after the meeting.

Recalling India's contributions to Bangladesh's glorious War of Liberation in 1971 and also post-war reconstruction of the country, Hasina said as far as Bangladesh is concerned, all Indians are united in their voice, which was exemplified during the ratification of the much-desired Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) in Indian parliament.

At the meeting, the Indian envoy conveyed his government's support to Bangladesh's candidature for the South-East Asia Regional Office (SEARO) of WHO.

Referring to the ongoing process to deliver 30 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine through Serum Institute to Beximco, Doraiswami said they were also willing to increase the capacity of the Bangladeshi health professionals for an effective delivery of the vaccine.

To establish "Golden Bangladesh" as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Indians are willing to be part of Bangladesh's development journey, he said.

The Indian envoy briefed the premier about the forthcoming activities to commemorate "Mujib Borsho" marking the birth centenary of Bangabandhu, 50 years of Bangladesh's independence and establishment of Bangladesh-India diplomatic ties.

He also mentioned that all Indians, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, possess good wishes for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and all the Bangladeshis.

The PM thanked and conveyed her regards to her Indian counterpart Modi.

PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus and Military Secretary Maj Gen Naqib Ahmed Chowdhury were present. **PM SEEKS MORE INVESTMENT**

Hasina yesterday invited South Korea to invest in Bangladesh, particularly in the Hi-tech Park.

She said this when newly appointed Ambassador of South Korea to Bangladesh Lee Jang-kuen met her at the Gono Bhaban.

During the meeting, the premier sought Korea's continued support to help Bangladesh ensure sustainable and dignified repatriation of Rohingya to Myanmar.

In another meeting with Swiss Ambassador to Bangladesh Nathalie Chuard at the Gono Bhaban, Hasina yesterday urged Switzerland to increase its investment in Bangladesh.

Focusing on the immense potential for investment in Bangladesh, the PM said the country has a highly skilled large young generation.

Expressing interest to cooperate with Bangladesh in developing human skill, Nathalie Chuard said Switzerland is ready to extend all sorts of cooperation to the Bangladesh government's efforts for skill development.

She said Switzerland is ready to offer any type of assistance in implementing the Vision-2041 and the Delta Plan-2100 of Bangladesh.

Hasina welcomed the new ambassador and assured her of extending all cooperation during her stay in Dhaka.

Moments of joy

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although it was hard to see the installation work from afar due to poor visibility.

One end of the bridge's is located at Mawa point of Munshiganj and the other point is located at Fajira point in Shariatpur.

"Now, our area will see huge infrastructural development quickly. For example, our road from Dhaka to Mawa has been widened because of the bridge. It's a great achievement for us," said Awlad Hossain, a fish trader at Mawa kitchen market.

Siraj Bepari, a local, said, "We hope to see huge industrialisation centring the bridge and highways. There will be huge employment opportunities for people of this area."

Another resident of the area, Shajahan Miah, said, "Mawa has now become a tourist spot. The number of visitors will rise because of the bridge."

Some commuters said the bridge will see an end to the harassments they face at the speedboat terminal as recently the fare of crossing the river on speedboat has increased to Tk 200 from Tk 140.



Clockwise from left, engineers working on the Padma Bridge construction hold two Bangladesh flags on the floating crane while celebrating the installation of the last span of the bridge around noon yesterday. The festive atmosphere also spread among journalists who boarded boats and trawlers to witness the historic occasion.



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ/ COLLECTED

Bangladesh tells a story

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all lay the iron will of the prime minister to complete the bridge regardless of the cost.

The bridge had been transformed into a national challenge when World Bank, ADB, JICA and IDB injudiciously and without much self-examination refused to extend fund due to "corruption intention" charges that later proved unfounded. It was definitely the highhandedness and arrogance of the donors that moved them into such one-sided action. But it did tremendous damage to our image and reinforced the stereotype of a corruption ridden Third World country, the forever "basket case".

It was that "arrogance" and "highhandedness" and damage to our prestige that Sheikh Hasina decided to challenge. The disappointment

of not having the bridge must have been tremendous but it was the deep wound to our self-respect that drove Sheikh Hasina to withdraw our loan application in 2013 and declare "We will have to shrug off our begging mentality", following on her earlier decision to build the bridge with our own resources.

Many thought her decision was reckless and feared diversion of our scarce resources from more urgent sectors. But Sheikh Hasina held firm. Whether the bridge that cost Tk 30,193 crore, originally estimated to cost Tk 10,161 crore, is fully justified is a question to be determined by auditors. For the PM it was the national prestige that held supreme and nothing else mattered.

One of the things that I admire most

about her is her constant urging that we hold our heads high, that we prove to the world that our abilities are no less than that of others, that we never lose the confidence that we can survive and face challenges howsoever formidable. This is a very important message particularly for a country that many thought was not viable, that we would drown under our own weight of deficiencies. For a people known more for their external dependencies than for their internal capabilities the Padma Bridge stands today as a symbol of proving all the above to be fundamentally wrong.

Some may say why is building a bridge such a big deal? Pay the price and the competent companies will build it for you. Such critics miss the point that technical projects sometimes acquire larger than life symbolic values -- values

premier immediately after the span was installed, sources said.

Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam, who served as bridge division secretary for eight years, yesterday said, "It [Padma bridge] is now physically complete ... I think by June 2022, we will open the Padma bridge ... This is a great achievement."

WHAT'S LEFT?

Roadway deck and railway stringers are being installed now.

Of the 2,917 roadway slabs of the bridge, 1,333 have been installed as of yesterday while 1,942 railway slabs out of 2,959 have been installed.

Besides, some other work including installation of electricity and gas transmission lines have to be completed before opening the bridge for the public.

Grit and glory

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The span was then slowly taken towards pillars-12 and -13 at the Mawa end.

There was a little uncertainty as there was fog yesterday morning but visibility improved as the day progressed. When the sun emerged around noon, the entire span was glimmering in the sunshine.

As the work progressed, over 100 reporters and photographers documented everything from trawlers and speedboats from a safe distance.

Apart from taking photographs and footage for their respective media houses and going live on Facebook and YouTube, many were seen taking selfies with the bridge in the background.

A crew member of a TV channel had painted his face like a tiger and held the national flag in his arms. He was

celebrating in a manner usually seen when Bangladesh cricket team, known as the Tigers, achieved something very big.

"This is a big deal for the people of the southwest. They have been enduring huge sufferings [to cross the Padma river]," Aynal Mridha, a trawler driver said as the last span was being installed.

The 25-year-old from Munshiganj recalled, "I had to carry a dead body in my trawler as the ambulance it was in could not cross the river due to unavailability of ferries."

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said, "The prime minister, defying all challenges, proved that Bangladesh is a nation of warriors. We can do it."

Quader, also the general secretary of the ruling Awami League, informed the

Govt hints at fresh stimulus

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Despite sluggish external demand, the country has managed a moderate growth in fiscal year 2019-20 with its domestic demand. The provisional growth has been 5.24 percent against an original target of 8.2.

The revenue to GDP ratio declined to 9.40 percent in fiscal year 2019-20 from 9.91 percent the previous year. Moreover, NBR Taxes to GDP ratio fell to 7.68 percent from 8.60 percent.

Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) President Nihad Kabir said, "In June-July, the recovery was good, but the second wave of Covid has been a matter of concern. Some sectors have yet to become fully active."

Ninety percent of the small businesses have reopened, but the demand and prices of commodities dipped, she said.

The government needs to provide both policy and financial support and the packages may need expansion. The major goal should be to keep wage employment going, she added.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, Centre for Policy Dialogue research director, said coverage of the social safety net programmes need to be expanded as some 17.5 million new poor have been created due to the pandemic.

He said the social safety net programme like Vulnerable Group Feeding has covered only 33 percent of those eligible for the programme. The urban poor also need to be covered by the safety net.

"We need to consider how the unemployed, the people of ethnic minorities and chams can come under the safety net," Moazzem said.

The first batch to be here in early January

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Hasina, the health minister also said, "There are many countries that could not manage the [Covid-19] vaccine yet."

Meanwhile, with the latest 37 deaths from coronavirus in the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the total number of deaths reached at 6,967, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The death rate was 1.43 percent of the total infection.

In the same 24 hours, a total of 1,861 new infections were recorded, taking the total number of infections to 485,965.

Against a total of 16,600 tests in those 24 hours, the positivity rate was 11.44 percent while the overall positivity rate stood at 16.60 percent.

Meanwhile, new 4,486 Covid-19 patients have recovered in those 24 hours.

The total number of recoveries rose to 410,452 and the recovery rate at 84.46 percent.

Among the 37 dead, 28 were men and nine women.

Three aged between 31 and 40 years, three between 41 and 50, eight between 51 and 60, and 23 were above 60 years. **'NEED SUPPORT FOR BIO-MEDICAL DEVICE INVENTION'**

The government is not systematically supportive to the local initiatives to develop and introduce bio-medical devices for medical sector, speakers at a discussion said yesterday.

The government should patronise the local genius or technology as if country's need for different bio-medical devices can be met locally, they urged in an online discussion on coronavirus socio-economic challenges organised by the alumni association of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET Alumni).

Engineer Qazi M Arif, publication and communication secretary of BUET Alumni, said they innovated PPE sterilisation box and personal respirator for doctors to give a hand in fighting Covid-19 emergencies.

"We approached; but neither the government nor the private sector showed eagerness to promote these," he said in response to the call by Prof Mohammad Shahidullah, president of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19. Urging the BUET Alumni, Prof Shahidullah said, "Covid-19 has unfolded the weaknesses of our health system... It has shown how we are incapable of meeting our need of medical devices. I would like to urge BUET Alumni to take initiative to come forward in this regard."

He also praised the government for implementing their recommendation on ensuring supply of oxygen and PPE to the hospitals. "But sorry to say [the government] has not heeded our recommendation on public health issue."

He stressed on ensuring nobody

entering country without Covid-19 negative certificate.

"Another problem is the DGHS does not provide real-time information on hospital bed vacancy for people," he added.

About vaccination, he said there is good progress, but it is not known "what should be done if adverse effects arise two or three months later."

In a presentation, Engineer Qazi M Arif highlighted their charitable activities including distribution of medical equipment, financial support to poor BUET students and staffs, food aid to poor villagers, development of medical equipment by BUET faculty, 24-hour telemedicine service for all and awareness campaign.

Presided over by Engineer Muniruddin Ahmed, acting president of BUET Alumni, Prof Satya Prasad Majumder, vice-chancellor of BUET, DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam, Director General of DGHS Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, President of BGMEA Rubana Haque, Rotary International's Bangladesh Governor Rubayet Hossain, President of the Editors' Guild Mozammel Babu, Bangladesh Scouts Senior Leader Prof Nizamuddin Ahmed, BRAC's Director Liakath Alai, Asian Development Bank's Senior Project Officer Farhat Jahan Chowdhury, and UNDP's Program Specialist Arif Abdullah Khan spoke at the seminar among others.

US concerned

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violence, human trafficking and illegal drug trading, it said.

The US said it appreciates Bangladesh's hosting of the nearly a million Rohingya. At the same time, the Bangladesh government needs to demonstrate respect for the human rights of refugees in Bhasan Char, including freedom of movement, by facilitating refugees' ability to move to and from Cox's Bazar.

Refugees on Bhasan Char should have access to livelihoods and basic services, such as education and health care, Brown said.

With the UN and likeminded donors, the US has asked for Bangladesh to accept the UN's offer of thorough and independent technical and protection assessments to determine the safety, feasibility, and desirability of relocating refugees there, the US official said.

The US also calls again upon Myanmar to create the conditions conducive for Rohingya refugees' voluntary, safe, and dignified return.

"We are coordinating closely with the international community, in consultation with affected communities, to promote such efforts," Brown said.

The US, the leading contributor of humanitarian assistance to the Rohingyas, said it also supports the pursuit of comprehensive solutions for Rohingya refugees and internally displaced persons.

"We encourage the government of Bangladesh to continue coordinating with the international community to ensure funding for this crisis response and to work toward durable solutions in a manner that is consistent with international norms and respects the human rights of each individual."

Salim Khan no more

ZAHID AKBAR



Sangeeta founder Salim Khan, who produced albums for almost every major singer in the 1980s and 90s, died with Covid-19 yesterday at Impulse Hospital in the capital.

He was 55.

His record label released albums by Bari Siddiqui, Subir Nandi, Tapan Chowdhury, James, Ayub Bachchu, Momtaz, Baby Nazneen, Asif Akbar, Hasan, Aankhi Alamgir and many other singers.

Salim's father Abdus Samad founded Samad Electronics, which made copies of English and Hindi songs, which was the trend in Patuatuli market. Around 1985, Salim took its helm and established Sangeeta.

Sangeeta was regarded as one of the pillars of the growing music industry of the era, and eventually, the words "Published by Salim Khan" became an emblem of prestige for a record.

Even though Sangeeta's main office was in Patuatuli, a new office was opened in Paltan for the musicians' convenience.

"Salim Khan was a humble person," singer Kumar Bishwajit said. "I have been featured on countless mixtapes by Sangeeta. My solo album Shreshtho Gaan from the 90s is especially memorable."

The singer added that he became quite close to Salim when working with the MIB, an association of music producers.

Manam Ahmed of Miles wished peace for the departed soul. "Our albums were published by Sangeeta. We trusted it. Even though Protasha and Protisruti were first released by another label, both albums were later re-released by Sangeeta. I have many great memories with Salim. His death is a great loss. Wherever he is now, I wish him well."

Lyricist Delwar Arzuda Sharf worked for Sangeeta from 2000-2011. "I started with Baby Naznin's Duchokhe Ghum Ashena. Then I wrote Dolly Sayantani's Ontore Bahire Tumi, mixtape Prem Janena Bondhu Amar and Fazlur Rahman Babu's Indubala. I am indebted to Sangeeta and Salim bhai for the opportunity," he told The Daily Star.

Songwriter and album cover designer Niaz Ahmed Angshu said, "I first met Salim Khan while working on LRB's Shopno. He was super excited about the new album and its promotion. He never said no to anything Bachchu Bhai suggested."

The growth of Bangladeshi music in the 80s and 90s owes a lot to Salim.

Hefajat now wants

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can be resolved in an amicable way," Mahfuzul Haque, a top Hefajat leader and also secretary general of the Madrasa Education Board (Befaq), said at the briefing.

Asked when the meeting with the prime minister could be held, Mahfuzul said the date is yet to be determined.

"We are communicating to hold the meeting. We are optimistic of holding the meeting in short time," he added.

Maulana Nurul Islam, naye-e-amir of Hefajat-e-Islam, read out a statement at the press conference.

The statement demanded the withdrawal of the sedition cases against Hefajat Amir Junayed Babunagari, its Joint Secretary General Mamunul Haque and Naye-e-Amir of Islami Andolon Bangladesh Syed Faizul Karim.

On December 7, two sedition cases were filed with the Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Court against the trio.

One of the cases was filed by Muktiuddho Moncho President Aminul Islam Bulbul with the court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Satyabrata Sikder.

Bangabandhu Foundation founder Moshir Mameul filed the other case against Mamunul with the same court.

The magistrate took the cases into cognisance and recorded statements of the complainants.

The court directed the deputy inspector general of Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) to investigate the cases and submit two separate reports to it by January 7.

The cases mentioned that the statements made by Babunagari, Mamunul and Faizul was tantamount to sedition.

In the written statement, Hefajat leader Nurul Islam called for the government to control those who are speaking against Islam.

Otherwise, he said the country's religious-minded people will be forced to take to the streets to stop these "evil forces."

Nurul said Hefajat-e-Islam is urging the government to shun the path of spreading idolism and going against the belief and education of Islam.

Pointing to the recent vandalism of an under-construction sculpture of Bangabandhu in Kusthia, he said Hefajat wants punishment of those involved in the incident through proper investigation.

However, he said they have doubts about the released pictures of the suspects in this incident.

Hefajat-e-Islam Joint Secretary General Mamunul Haque and other leaders of the organisation were present at the press conference.