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10 NEW LOCOMOTIVES FROM S KOREA

## 'Breach of contract' under scanner

The train engines brought here without proper inspection; remain unused since September

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

A South Korean company has supplied 10 locomotives to Bangladesh Railway allegedly violating some clauses of the contract, creating an impasse over the official handover of the train engines.

The locomotives have been lying idle at a railways workshop in Chattogram's Pahartoli for the last four months. It has happened when the BR is struggling to run its operation with a huge number of outdated engines.

The metre-gauge diesel electric locomotives -- bought under a project worth around Tk 300 crore -- arrived at the workshop after they were unloaded at the Chattogram port early September.

Later in its report, a commissioning committee said the technical specifications of three capital components of the

supplied locomotives did not match the specifications mentioned in the agreement.

Those components include alternators, compressors, and traction motors, show railway documents obtained by The Daily Star.

For example, the agreement sought alternator model TA12-CA9, but the South Korean company -- Hyundai Rotem Company (HRC) -- shipped alternator model TA9-12CA9SE, according to the documents.

Railways officials said the two models are different in terms of horsepower output.

Besides, as per a government plan, all the rail tracks in the country would be converted into dual gauge within a few years. The government had instructed the BR to purchase locomotives which could be used on both metre-gauge and broad-

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



People reluctant to wear masks are somewhat ubiquitous across the country. But the fact that almost no one seen in the photo, taken yesterday at Masalong Bazar, Rangamati, has a face covering is simply alarming.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Number of new cases drops to 8-month low

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 684 people tested positive for the Covid-19 in the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the lowest in around eight months, reported the health directorate.

With the latest figure, the number of total positive cases rose to 515,184.

A total of 9,701 samples were tested in 180 Covid-19 testing labs across the country in those 24 hours. The positivity rate was 7.05 percent while the overall positivity rate stands at 15.85 percent.

In the preceding seven days till Friday, the number of Covid-19 tests decreased by 6.97 percent compared to the previous week.

In the same 24 hours, SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



AYESHA KHANAM (1947-2020)

## A fighter till her last breath

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad president and freedom fighter Ayesha Khanam -- a guardian of the women's movement in Bangladesh, who dedicated her life to the rights of deprived, oppressed and disenfranchised women -- breathed her last early yesterday.

She was 74.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## New strain, new worry

Experts say RT-PCR testing in Bangladesh hardly capable of detecting new Covid strain

GOLAM MORTOZA

The RT-PCR tests done to diagnose coronavirus infections in Bangladesh are not likely to detect the new strain identified in the UK. On top of that, no one can say for sure if the new variant is similar to the ones found here in Bangladesh.

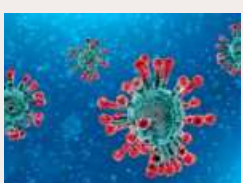
Eminent experts Bijon Kumar Sil and Khandaker Mehedi Akram said the number of new cases might rise if the new strain identified in the UK reaches Bangladesh.

Both of them are currently researching the mutation of coronavirus -- Sil in Singapore and Akram in the UK.

Three members of the government's advisory committee on coronavirus response recently told The Daily Star that they did not know whether the country's RT-PCR testing facilities have the capacity to detect the new strain.

"Currently, the RT-PCR tests are doing two-gene diagnosis. This system may not detect all the mutations of coronavirus. The chances that the new strain can be detected in the existing system are slight. It is being discussed whether to change the RT-PCR testing," said Sahana Banu, head of virology at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital.

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▶ New strain 70 percent more contagious than original one

▶ 'Three genes' tests should be introduced in Bangladesh to detect the strain

▶ It's not confirmed whether the new strain was detected here

▶ Scientists yet to ascertain whether vaccines are effective against the new strain

▶ Current vaccines are not applicable for those aged below 18, but they might be at risk of being infected by the new strain

▶ New vaccine trials should be introduced for those below 18

RAPE CASE INVESTIGATION

## Delays put justice at risk

SHARIFUL ISLAM

Two schoolgirls lost their way back home in the capital's Badda from an outing on the night of February 8 last year. Wandering on the road for a few hours, they came across one Emon Hossain.

Emon, 30, sacked organising secretary of Badda Thana Krishak League, promised the girls, both aged around 13, to take them to his home nearby, saying they were like his daughter who is of their age and can stay the night safely with her.

Convinced, the girls agreed to go without knowing the danger lurking for them.

Emon instead took them to a warehouse at a secluded place in Badda where he along with his accomplices Abdur Rob, 32, and Md Kabir, 30, raped them, according to the mother of one of the schoolgirls. She filed a rape case against the three with Badda Police Station on February 10.

Eleven days into the incident, police arrested all three accused.

Yet, it took nine months to submit the charge sheet although the Women

and Children Repression (prevention) Act stipulates 60 working days for police to complete a rape case probe -- which a court may extend for another 30 days.

There are many more examples of such delays.

A top official at Dhaka Metropolitan Police headquarters said in the first of week of November that they could not submit charge sheets in at least 10 gang rape cases, even in eight to 12 months.

The cases were filed with Badda, SEE PAGE 10 COL 2

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