

BANGLADESH  
UPDATE



305  
New cases in 24hrs



5,37,770  
Total cases



8,190  
Deaths



4,82,841  
Recoveries

GLOBAL  
UPDATE



2,314,911  
Deaths



106,167,293  
Total cases

DHAKA-SILIGURI TRAIN SERVICE

# Talk on launch this month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A delegation of Bangladesh Railway (BR) will visit India this month to discuss preparations for introducing a passenger train service between Dhaka and Siliguri, officials said.

Led by Shahidul Islam, divisional railway manager of BR Paksey Division, an eight-member delegation would take part in the “DRM-level Coordination Meeting” to be held in New Jalpaiguri of West Bengal from February 22-24, they said.

Railways Ministry in October last year announced that Bangladesh and India were planning to introduce a passenger train service on Dhaka-Siliguri route from this March as the restoration work of Chilahati-Haldibari rail link was nearly complete.

After 55 years, rail communication between the countries via Chilahati-Haldibari route resumed in December. Freight trains were supposed to be

regular since then, but that didn’t happen.

Contacted, Sardar Sahadat Ali, additional director general (operations) of BR, said a railway team would visit India and talk to officials there about various issues, including the launch of the passenger train service.

Asked if the launch would be possible by March 26, he said the date would be fixed upon discussion and completion of all other work.

Shahidul told The Daily Star last night that they would discuss “operational and commercial aspects” of the Dhaka-Siliguri passenger train and issues regarding freight train operations.

Passenger trains travel between Dhaka and Kolkata and Khulna and Kolkata, but they have been suspended since March last year due to the pandemic. Freight trains are still operating though.

## UK PM Boris Johnson

FROM PAGE 1

They also discussed joint events and dialogues on trade and investment, climate partnership, British Bangladeshi diaspora, and joint exercise between the two armed forces.

“We hope Prime Minister Boris Johnson will visit Bangladesh soon on the occasion of 50 years of Bangladesh-UK diplomatic relations,” she said during the bilateral meeting on Friday held to mark February 4, the day the UK officially recognised Bangladesh in 1972.

Saida Muna Tasneem said Bangladesh and the UK enjoy a special friendship which has only grown from strength to strength bilaterally and multilaterally since the hoisting of the flag of independent Bangladesh in August 1971 at the first Bangladesh diplomatic mission in London at 24 Pembroke Gardens.

UK Prime Minister Edward Heath also accorded a warm reception to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on January 8, 1972, she said.

She recalled Boris Johnson’s visit to Bangladesh in 2018 when he spoke strongly on the atrocities committed by the Myanmar military against the Rohingya. The UK is also playing a

pen holding role on the issue at the UN Security Council.

In response, Sir Philip said they would be delighted to join celebrations of 50 years of the UK’s historic relations with Bangladesh, including longstanding economic and development partnership, climate co-operation, and the vibrant Bangladeshi diaspora.

He reaffirmed UK’s commitments to continue to support Bangladesh on the Rohingya issue.

Sir Philip and Bangladesh High Commissioner Tasneem also discussed the possible dates of the 4th Bangladesh-UK Strategic Dialogue in London, which is expected to incorporate FCDO’s new mandate on development partnership as well as trade, investment, and defence cooperation.

High Commissioner Tasneem briefed the UK official about the successes of Bangladesh in containing the Covid-19 pandemic and stimulus packages, as well as the rapid vaccine rollout programme.

Sir Philip was pleased to hear that Bangladesh has already procured 30 million doses of the Oxford vaccine and initiated vaccination from January 27, 2021, the statement said.

## Military imposes internet blackout

FROM PAGE 1

democracy on Monday, just as lawmakers elected in national polls last November were due to sit in parliament for the first time.

Army chief Min Aung Hlaing seized power alleging voter fraud, although the electoral commission says it has found no evidence of widespread irregularities in the November vote.

The junta announced a one-year state of emergency and has promised to hand over power after new elections, without giving a timeframe.

Nobel Peace laureate Suu Kyi, 75, has been charged with illegally importing six walkie-talkies, while ousted President Win Myint is accused of flouting COVID-19 restrictions. Neither has been seen since the coup. Their lawyer said they were being held in their homes.

Australian professor Sean Turnell became the latest figure associated with Suu Kyi – and the first confirmed foreign national – to be detained.

“I’m just being detained at the moment, and perhaps charged with something. I don’t know what that would be,” Turnell, a longtime economic advisor to the Nobel laureate, told the BBC.

Online calls to protest the army takeover have prompted bold displays of defiance, including the nightly deafening clamour of people around the country banging pots and pans – a practice traditionally associated with driving out evil.

“We only want the elected government of the parties that won the election,” said a street vendor Kyi Lwin late Friday night.

“We reject this kind of military dictatorship.”

A civil disobedience movement has been building in Myanmar all week, with doctors and teachers among those refusing to work. Every night people bang pots and pans in a show of anger.

The coup has sparked international outrage, with the United States considering sanctions against the generals and the UN Security Council calling for the release of all detainees.

It has also deepened tensions between the United States and China, which has close links to Myanmar’s military. Secretary of State Antony Blinken pressed top Chinese

diplomat Yang Jiechi in a phone call on Friday to condemn the coup, the State Department said.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said a special envoy to the country had made “first contact” with Myanmar’s deputy military commander to urge the junta to return power to the civilian government.

State media in Myanmar reported Saturday that officials had spoken with diplomats the previous day to respond to the international outcry.

As protests gathered steam, the junta ordered telecom networks to freeze users out of access to Facebook, arguably the country’s main mode of communication.

“We strongly urge the authorities to order the unblocking of all social media services,” a Facebook representative said. “The people of Myanmar need access to important information and to be able to communicate with their loved ones.”

The platform had hosted a rapidly growing “Civil Disobedience Movement” forum calling for strikes at civil service offices and hospitals.

The military widened its efforts to stifle dissent on Friday when it demanded new blocks on other social media services including Twitter.

Norway-based Telenor yesterday said it had complied with an order instructing telecoms to shut down the country’s entire mobile data network.

“We have employees on the ground and our first priority is to ensure their safety,” a statement from the firm said.

Some internet-savvy users had managed to circumvent the social media block with VPN services but by midday online traffic had slowed to a standstill.

“People in Myanmar have been forced into a situation of abject uncertainty,” said Ming Yu Hah of Amnesty.

An expanded internet shutdown will put them at greater risk of more egregious human rights violations at the hands of the military,” she added.

The United Nations human rights office said on Twitter that “internet and communication services must be fully restored to ensure freedom of expression and access to information.”



Posters, asking people not to fear the vaccine and to protect themselves and their families by taking the shots, are placed before the rows of chairs at one of the vaccination centres at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Mass inoculation against Covid-19 starts across the country today.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Poor response poses a stiff challenge

FROM PAGE 1

There are 50 vaccination centres in Dhaka and 955 elsewhere.

On weekdays inoculation will take place from 8:00am-4:00pm.

A total of 204 teams of vaccinators will work in the capital and 2,196 outside.

However, health department officials at a press conference could not say when an android app for vaccine registration might be available on Google’s Play Store.

Asked why some people did not receive a confirmation text after registering online, Mizanur Rahman, director of the Management Information System (MIS) of the health directorate, said, “People who registered should have received the sms.”

People needing assistance for registering can go to the vaccination centres for support, he said.

“After registering at the centres, they will be asked to visit the centres the next day to get the shot,” he said. “Vaccine recipients will be notified via mobile phone sms for the second dose, and we have to keep a record.”

The government has some 70 lakh doses from three different batches. Shots from two of the batches will expire in April and the rest in June this year.

Officials didn’t say the exact expiry

dates.

The Directorate General of Health Services said the government has the capability to inoculate 3.60 lakh people a day.

Prof Sayedur Rahman, chair at the pharmacology department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), said the people’s response was dismaying, especially since the government has enough doses in stock.

“If we fail to vaccinate a certain percentage of people, the vaccine will be of little benefit. Vaccination must scale up across the country, especially in the big cities,” he said.

WHO SHOULD NOT TAKE VACCINES

At the press conference, Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora said, “Pregnant and lactating mothers, those who had a high fever in four weeks, and people allergic to any drug should not take the vaccine.”

Anyone infected with Covid-19 can take the vaccine 28 days after recovery. Those who took plasma therapy for Covid-19 must wait 90 days before taking a shot.

“These are information based on the available scientific data. These might change in future,” she said.

Bangladesh purchased three crore

doses of the Oxford vaccine called Covishield from Serum Institute of India. The first shipment of 50 lakh doses arrived here on January 25. Besides, the country received 20 lakh shots of the Covishield as a gift from the Indian government.

Bangladesh has the highest number of vaccine doses after India in South Asia.

The COVAX initiative for equitable global access to Covid-19 vaccines on Wednesday announced that Bangladesh would receive 12.79 million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine by June this year.

Nazmul Hassan Papon, managing director of Beximco Pharmaceuticals Limited, said the second shipment of the purchased Covishield from Serum was expected to arrive between February 21 to February 25, subject to government decisions. Beximco is Serum’s local agent.

“We are ready to import. Whenever the government asks us to bring the vaccine, we will import,” he said.

The country’s Expanded Programme on Immunization has over the years vaccinated children, but this time, the shots are for the adults.

The country has so far recorded 537,770 Covid-19 cases while the death toll reached 8,190 yesterday.

## Put them before people’s court

FROM PAGE 1

salariied people so that we can perform our responsibilities with honesty, competence, neutrality and patriotism.”

They added, “Our diligent labourer brothers and sisters don’t take part in corruption, nepotism or looting assets of the country. A handful of officials and staffers loot the resources of the country.”

The HC bench said the people have kept their faith in judges to look after their property. Therefore, the judges’ responsibility is to ensure that no frauds, hypocrites and cheats grab public property.

But it is crystal clear that the wisdom of the judge was not reflected in the verdict delivered by the lower court concerned. The judgment was not delivered on detailed grounds, the HC bench observed in the full text verdict.

The HC said the owner of the land worth around Tk 1,000 crore has not paid the holding tax of the municipality. There are no documents of electricity bills, and the owner has failed to show any certificate from local elected representatives.

The HC also said that the so-called claimant of the ownership of the land worth around a thousand crore has been able to build only a tin-shed house over the 40-50 years. Sree Madhob Chandra

Saha Poddar has failed to explain why he has been living in a rented house in Kalshi of Mirpur instead of living on his own land in Savar.

In the affidavit, he did not mention the holding number of his residence in Kalshi, which means the applicant (Madhob Chandra Saha Poddar) is in fact a fake.

Madhob has mentioned in the affidavit that his religion is Islam and by doing so, has committed forgery with the court, the HC said in the full text verdict.

The HC fined him Tk 1 crore for committing fraud with the court and scrapped the verdict delivered by the lower court concerned on November 2, 2020, in the case regarding the property.

The HC also directed the deputy commissioner of Dhaka to take necessary steps to establish a park titled “Khetra Mohan Savar Shishu Park” on the land for children.

The court asked the authorities concerned to send a copy of its verdict to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to draw her special attention to protect lands worth crores from looters and collaborators of Pakistan occupation forces.

They thanked Savar Thana Osohay Poribar Punorbason Bohumukhi Samobay Samity Ltd for initiating the

legal battle to protect and preserve the land in Savar.

Writ petitioner Habib-Un-Nabi, lawyer for Savar Thana Osohay Poribar Punorbason Bohumukhi Samobay Samity Ltd, told The Daily Star that his client is a lessee of the land at Gandharia Mouza in Savar, whose original owner Khetra Mohan went to India during India-Pakistan war in 1965. The property was then included as enemy property in line with the census list and subsequently the land was included as vested property.

Madhob Chandra Saha Poddar had gotten the order from the lower court concerned in their favour by submitting forged documents before it.

During hearing the writ petition, the HC called for the lower court records of the case and after examining the documents, it found that Madhob Chandra had gotten the verdict from the lower court concerned through forged documents.

The writ petitioner also prayed to the HC to pass necessary directives so that the land is protected and preserved properly, Habib-Un-Nabi added.

Madhob Chandra Saha Poddar’s lawyer Md Moniruzzaman could not be contacted for his comments on the issue.

## Bangladesh honours 2 journos in Kolkata

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He said Bangladesh is now moving forward maintaining the deep relations between the two nations.

Speaking at the event, Kolkata Press Club President Snehashish Sur said India, without the then journalists, would not have been able to know how Bangladeshis spent their days during that period.

He said a total of 13 journalists, including Dipak and Surajit, had sacrificed their lives during the Liberation War in 1971 and the Press Club published a book on this issue marking the 100 years of the foundation of the club.

Later, the information minister joined a lunch and discussion, organised by banglaworld.com.

BANGLADESH FILM FESTIVAL OPENED

India has said its relationship with Bangladesh has withstood the test of time and both countries have “charted a unique model for regional cooperation that is quite unparalleled in South Asia”, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

Speaking at the inauguration of the 3rd Bangladesh Film Festival at Nandan in Kolkata on Friday evening in presence of Bangladesh Information

Minister Hasan Mahmud, Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said the spirit of Liberation War spurred the India-Bangladesh relationship, which is the foundation of the bilateral relationship for the years to come.

He said both countries were blessed with history, culture, language and above all an ardent belief in freedom, justice and pluralism. He described the commonalities as the “bridge” to a future of peace and prosperity.

“The India-Bangladesh bilateral relationship has withstood the test of time, and even as the world undergoes great upheaval in the post-pandemic era, our relationship grows from strength to strength,” Shringla said.

“A great role in building the bilateral relationship and inspiring it to where it has come today can be traced back to none other than Bangladesh’s Jatir Pita Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman,” he added.

Shringla recalled that Bangabandhu – in his historic February 6, 1972 speech at the Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata on his way back home – had said “this victory [in the Liberation War] would not have been ours if the people of West Bengal,

Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya did not extend their unstinting support to my people... people of India rose to the occasion and they shared their food with my people. This victory would not have been possible if the government of India had not been behind us. What you have done, we can never repay.”

He said this year would see a plethora of events in both India and Bangladesh as well as in third countries and at the UN headquarters in New York, through which the two neighbours would jointly celebrate Mujib Borsho.

“The deep historical bond between our two nations has been etched in golden letters with the blood of our soldiers. It was protected and preserved by the sheer determination of our peoples,” Shringla, a former high commissioner to Bangladesh, said.

Inaugurating the film festival, Information Minister Hasan said the event would help deepen proximity of Bangladesh and West Bengal.

He said a film touches the feelings of people and that is why it plays an important role in building people-to-people communication.

## Derailments

FROM PAGE 1

Akhaura-Sylhet section between February, 2019 and this Friday. But many incidents of derailment go unreported.

On February 1, 2019, a freight train derailed in Sylhet’s Dakshin Surma area and a passenger train fell off the tracks on June 2, 2019 in Habiganj’s Sayestaganj. Another derailment was reported on June 24, 2019 in Moulvibazar’s Kulaura.

Two fertilizer-laden trains derailed in Moulvibazar’s Kulaura upazila on December 29, 2019 and November 11 last year.

Besides, oil-carrying freight trains derailed at Kulaura in September 15 last year, Moulvibazar’s Sreemangal upazila in November 7 that year and Habiganj’s Madhabpur upazila later on December 6.

According to a document received by The Daily Star, Meghna Petroleum Limited filed a claim of Tk 88.20 lakh in compensation from the Bangladesh Railway after the freight train derailment at Sreemangal on November 7 last year.

Four oil-laden wagons fell off the tracks in that incident. The wagons were carrying 99,720 litres of diesel and 39,231 litres of kerosene, worth Tk 87.27 lakh while the freight cost of these tankers was Tk 93.98 thousand.

THE CAUSES

As part of the Assam-Bengal Railways expansion initiative, rail tracks of the Akhaura-Kulaura-Karimganj (Karimganj is in Assam, India) were constructed in 1891-1896 and Kulaura-Sylhet rail tracks in 1912-1915, said BR sources.

Since then, the 179 kilometres Akhaura-Sylhet rail lines have been being repaired occasionally, but no major upgrade was ever done.

According to railway engineers, 13 rail bridges on the route are risky while parts of the tracks are through hilly terrain, full of blind bends and are not properly maintained.

Passenger trains on these tracks have a limit of 50-55km per hour or even slower in the risky parts; while the freight trains have to travel at 40km per hour or even slower, railway engineers said.

Shubaktogin, chief engineer (east zone) of Bangladesh Railway, said, “Apart from risky tracks and hilly terrain, there are a number of reasons behind the derailments. The whole section badly needs a major revamp.”

CONVERSION PROJECT

To revamp the section, a project to convert the metre-gauge railway line into dual-gauge from Akhaura to Sylhet was planned years ago.

In September 2015, the rail authorities signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with a Chinese company for the project.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) in April last year approved the project that was estimated to cost Tk 16,104 crore.

But the project is being further delayed as the Prime Minister Office (PMO) on September 30 last year formed a committee to review the negotiated contract cost.

BR Joint Director General (engineering) Md Romzan Ali, assigned to oversee the project, said, “The project is still under planning and we can see that it will take time to get the final approval. The work will begin only after that.”

[Mohammad Suman from Chattogram contributed to this report]

## Daily Covid cases

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The overall death rate was 1.52 percent.

At least 417 Covid-19 patients recovered during the 24-hour period.

With this, the total number of recoveries rose to 482,841 and the recovery rate stood at 89.79 percent.

Among the eight deceased, six were males.

Two were aged between 31 and 40 years, one was between 41 and 50, one between 51 and 60 and four were above 60 years old, added the release.

## Ask delegation

FROM PAGE 1

all Bangladesh units and individuals involved in peacekeeping missions,” said Louis Charbonneau, Human Rights Watch UN director.

The Bangladesh Chief of Army Staff General Aziz Ahmed is scheduled to meet with high-level UN officials next week with the aim of increasing Bangladesh’s role in UN peacekeeping.

Reacting to the Al Jazeera investigation, the Bangladesh military said that the equipment was for an “army contingent due to be deployed in the UN peacekeeping mission”.

The UN on February 4 denied that it was deploying such equipment with Bangladeshi contingents in UN peacekeeping operations.

The seven rights bodies are Human Rights Watch, International Federation for Human Rights, The Asian Human Rights Commission, the World Organisation against Torture, The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, Robert F Kennedy Human Rights, and Eleos Justice.