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DHAKA-SYLHET HIGHWAY

Big plan for wider road

Key road to have 6 lanes under Ecne approved Tk 16,918cr project

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON

The government is going to upgrade the 209km Dhaka-Sylhet highway into six lanes, including service lanes on both the sides, under a Tk 16,918.59 crore project.

A total of 305 culverts, 66 bridges, seven flyovers, six railway over bridges and 26 footbridges will also be constructed under the project.

The Roads and Highways Department will implement the project, titled Dhaka-Sylhet Corridor Road Development, in six years, aiming to improve regional road connectivity and ensure faster and uninterrupted vehicular movement.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) approved the project in its yesterday's meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair. The PM joined the meeting through a video conference from the Gono Bhaban.

Of the total project cost, Tk 13,244.69 crore will come from Asian Development Bank (ADB) in loan money. The government will fund the rest, Tk 3,673.90 crore, said planning ministry officials.

Once implemented, the project will help expand the regional transport network, including the Asian Highway Network, BIMSTEC and Saarc corridors, and bring better mobility in trade and industry, the officials said.

"The road development project will open up road connectivity with Nepal, India, Myanmar and China. Our communication at the international level will get a boost," Planning Minister MA Mannan told reporters after the meeting yesterday.

"Bangladesh always turns its head and looks towards the west. Now this

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PHOTO: RAJIB RAHMAN



To 11-year-old Mohammad Sohel, his pet dog Moti means nothing less than family. It was impossible for the little boy to abandon his furry friend while shifting from a Rohingya Camp in Ukhiya to Bhasan Char yesterday. Although the authorities obstructed Sohel and his family from entering with the dog repeatedly, they refused to move forward without him. Finally, the child's cries melted the authorities' heart and they let Moti also become a resident of Bhasan Char with his family.

UN PEACEKEEPERS SAFETY

Bangladesh calls for better preparedness

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has called for greater preparedness for the safety and security of the UN peacekeepers.

"As the leading troop and police contributing country, with a large number of our troops deployed, ensuring the safety and security of our contingents is of paramount importance to us," Ambassador Rabab Fatima, permanent representative of Bangladesh to the UN, said on Monday.

There are about 7,000 Bangladeshi peacekeepers deployed in various UN peace missions.

While addressing the Special Committee on the Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) at the General Assembly, Fatima paid tribute to the peacekeepers for fulfilling their mandates in the midst of the pandemic and providing important support to the host nation's pandemic response efforts.

She suggested embedding emergency preparedness in the mandate setting and prioritising peacekeepers for Covid-19 vaccines.

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COVID MUTATION

Another UK variant causes concern

Experts say it can make jabs less effective

AGENCIES

Another new Covid variant with potentially worrying mutations has been discovered in the UK.

Like strains found in South Africa and Brazil, it carries a mutation that can make Covid jabs less effective. Scientists say at least 32 cases of coronavirus have been caused by this variant.

It comes amid alarm over several new variants of Covid which have spread in the UK since the end of 2020. The three of most concern emerged in Kent (B.1.1.7), South Africa (B.1.351) and Brazil (P.2).

The new variant, known as B.1.525, has been detected in 10 countries including Denmark (35 cases), the US (10), France (five), Spain (one) and Australia (two).

The latest addition, described by researchers at the University of Edinburgh, has similarities to the Kent strain, but with several additional mutations.

One of these is the E484K mutation, also found in the South African and Brazilian variants, and scientists believe it could make vaccines less effective.

It causes a change on the spike protein - found on the outside of the virus - that plays an important role in helping the virus to enter cells as well as the immune system's response to it.

Early studies have shown the E484K mutation is better able to hide from antibodies that kill the virus.

Vaccine companies have confirmed their job works less efficiently - but still to some degree - on this mutation.

It is one of the seven new variants reported in the US, leading to Dr Anthony Fauci to plead with Americans not to "let your guard down."

SEE PAGE 12 COL 2

Six to die for murder of 4 of a family

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A court in Kurigram yesterday handed death penalty to six people for killing four members of a family, including two children, in Diadanga village of the district's Bhurungamari upazila in 2014.

Judge Abdul Mannan of the District and Sessions Judge Court delivered the verdict, Public Prosecutor Abraham Lincoln told The Daily Star.

He said the six convicts handed the death sentence included Mamtaz Uddin, brother of one of the victims Sultan Mia. Besides, one of the convicts is absconding, he said.

The court, however, acquitted the seventh accused in the case, said the PP.

According to the case statement and court sources, a group of masked assailants stormed Sultan's

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City mice smarter than country mice



MAIL ONLINE

Mice living in built-up areas are smarter than rodents living in the countryside, new research reveals.

Streetwise mice developed improved problem-solving abilities because their coexistence with humans in cities forced them to become savvier, experts believe.

German researchers found that when presented with a conundrum, mice from the metropolis of Berlin were able to solve it 77 percent of the time.

However, mice captured from the rural area of Uckermark in Germany only managed to find a solution half the time (52 percent).

"Problem-solving ability could thus be a

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Infection rate drops to 2.68 percent

13 more die, 396 get Covid

UNB, Dhaka

The daily novel coronavirus infection rate in Bangladesh fell to 2.68 percent yesterday after the health authorities reported 396 new cases in 24 hours till the morning.

Thirteen new Covid-19 related deaths were also confirmed, taking the fatality count to 8,298.

So far, 541,434 cases have been confirmed in the country, said the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Bangladesh reported its first novel coronavirus cases on March 8 last year and the first death on March 18.

The daily coronavirus infection rate was 3.15 percent on Monday, while the overall infection rate stood at 13.97 percent.

The figure is likely to fall further as a countryside mass Covid-19 vaccination

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SHAFI DEATH

PBI looking for physical evidence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) is now on the search for physical evidence related to the death of former Hefajat chief Shah Ahmad Shafi.

After Shafi's death, his brother-in-law Mohammad Moin Uddin claimed that the death was a preplanned murder and filed a murder case on December 17 last year.

Hefajat-e-Islam Joint Secretary General and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Secretary General Mamunul Haque and 35 others were made accused in the case.

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PRAYER TIMING FEBRUARY 17

Fajr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5-25 12-45 4-30 5-57 7-15
JAMAAT 6-00 1-15 4-45 6-01 7-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



Iron rods for a building under construction occupy a part of the road while vehicles are illegally parked on the pavement, putting pedestrians' and motorists' lives in danger on Tongi Diversion Road in the capital's Moghbazar area. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Myanmar junta promises new elections

Protesters block train services as Suu Kyi faces 2nd charge

AGENCIES

Myanmar's military junta guaranteed yesterday that it would hold an election and hand over power, denied its ouster of an elected government was a coup or that its leaders were detained, and accused protesters of violence and intimidation.

The junta's defence of its February 1 seizure of power and arrest of government leader Aug San Suu Kyi and others came as protesters again took to the streets and as China dismissed rumours spreading on social media that it had helped with the coup.

"Our objective is to hold an election and hand power to the winning party," Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun, spokesman for the ruling council, told the junta's first news conference since overthrowing Suu Kyi's government.

The military has not given a date for a new election but has imposed a state of emergency for one year. Zaw Min Tun said the military would not hold power for long.

"We guarantee ... that the election will be held," he told the nearly two-hour news conference, which the military broadcast from the capital, Naypyitaw, live over Facebook, a platform it has banned.

Asked about the detention of Nobel prize winner Suu Kyi and the president, Zaw Min Tun dismissed the suggestion they were in detention, saying they were in their homes for their security while the law took its course.

He also said Myanmar's foreign policy would not

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