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17 project directors of BR changed

Ministry hopes it will speed up implementation of schemes

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

In a rare move, the railways ministry yesterday changed the directors of 17 projects of Bangladesh Railway, aiming to facilitate their quick implementation.

The ministry made the decision to execute the prime minister's directive for taking steps to ensure "one project, one project director," officials said.

However, 15, out of the 17 project directors, have to carry out their new roles as additional charges along with their main tasks, due to shortages of necessary manpower, they said.

In this regard, two circulars were issued yesterday, the last day to inform the Prime Minister's Office about the measures respective ministries and agencies took to implement the PM's directives, they added.

"We have already informed the [PMO] after executing the prime minister's directives," Khaled Hussain, joint secretary (development-2) of railways ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday.

As per the existing rules, each development project will have a permanent project director.

In a letter sent to different ministries and agencies, including Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division, on January 20 this year, the PMO said it has

found that an official of the Road Transport and Highways Division was working as PD of 14 projects.

Two officials were PDs of 13 projects each, five officials were PDs of 10 or more projects each, while 38 officials of the Local Government Division were PDs of at least two or more projects each, reads a IMED document.

The PMO said similar pictures were found in the ministries of power, energy and mineral resources, railways, water resources, and housing and public works.

"The prime minister termed it 'worrying' and gives directives to take immediate action," reads the IMED document, citing the PMO letter.

In this situation, the railways ministry yesterday made the changes in project directors, three officials of the railways ministry and BR told this correspondent.

The BR is now implementing 36 development and three technical assistance projects at a cost of Tk 1,41,883.70 crore.

Several BR officials have to discharge their responsibilities as PDs in more than one projects, which is considering as one of the obstacles to proper implementation of the projects, office sources said.

"However, changes of so many PDs in a single day is a rare incident," a BR official

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Plant pots being brought in to Dhaka on boats from Shariatpur. As many city dwellers take up rooftop or indoor gardening as a hobby, such pots are in great demand in the capital; they sell for Tk 80 to Tk 90 in wholesale markets. The photo was taken near the Buriganga.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Small garment factories struggle for survival

The dearth of work orders from international retailers and brands to small and medium-sized garment factories is so acute that many entrepreneurs are looking for buyers to sell units and exit the industry for good. The units had faced abnormal delays in payment from buyers, order cancellation and suspension and non-availability of loans from the stimulus package since the outbreak of the deadly virus.

STORY ON B1

US reaches 5 lakh deaths from Covid

Mumbai imposes fresh curbs as fears of new wave grow; Italy's virus cases rising again

AGENCIES

The US death toll from the coronavirus topped 500,000 yesterday, according to an NBC News tally — a milestone that underscores the grave threat the virus still poses even as more people are vaccinated.

The coronavirus has killed more than 2,462,000 people worldwide, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. More than a fifth of all deaths worldwide have occurred in the the US, which has less than five percent of the global population.

President Joe Biden last month warned that "well over" 600,000 people in the US could die from the virus.

"It's terrible. It is historic. We haven't seen anything even close to this for well over a hundred years, since the 1918 pandemic of influenza," Biden's chief medical advisor Anthony Fauci told NBC's "Meet The Press."

"It's something that is stunning when you look at the numbers, almost unbelievable, but it's true," Fauci added.

Meanwhile India, the world's second worst-hit nation in terms of infections, passed a bleak threshold yesterday by registering its 11 millionth case following a renewed rise in cases.

Fresh restrictions on gatherings came into force in the western state of Maharashtra, home to financial capital Mumbai, which has logged almost 52,000 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray said he was "worried about the severity of a second wave if it hits the state."

The vast nation's inoculation drive is creeping slowly, and India's Serum Institute -- the world's biggest vaccine maker -- has urged other countries to be "patient," saying it has been told to prioritise the home market.

In the capital New Delhi, vegetable vendor Radhakeshri Negi spoke for many around the world, telling AFP: "I am fed up of corona."

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Probe takes back seat as cops busy ensuring calm

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Four days have passed but police are yet to arrest anyone in connection with Noakhali's Companiganj violence that killed a journalist and wounded around 19 others.

Police said they collected CCTV footage to identify the criminals.

A chaotic situation is prevailing in the area. So, law enforcers are now prioritising law and order to ensure public security, said police.

The clash on February 19 was between two factions of ruling Awami League over establishing supremacy in Companiganj. One group was led by Abdul Quader Mirza, younger brother of AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, while the other was led by Mizanur Rahman Badal, organising secretary of upazila unit AL.

Both the groups used firearms in the clash and police also fired around 10 to 12 bullets to bring the situation under control.

A day later, journalist Borhan Uddin Muzakkir, 30, of online portal Barta Bazar, who was hit by bullets while covering the incident, died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

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Yellow penguin sighted for the first time in S Atlantic



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A yellow-and-white penguin with no black on it has been spotted for what is thought to be the first time ever.

A wildlife photographer captured shots of the "never before seen" bird among thousands of black-and-white penguins on a South Atlantic island.

Yves Adams said: "I'd never seen or heard of a yellow penguin before. There were 120,000 birds on that beach, and this was the only yellow one there."

Adams, from Belgium, was leading a two-month

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Seven more deaths, 366 Covid cases reported

UNB, Dhaka

The novel coronavirus has claimed seven more lives and infected another 366 people in Bangladesh in 24 hours till yesterday morning.

With the latest figures, the death toll from the virus in the country rose to 8,356 and the caseload to 543,717, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

In a handout, the DGHS said the daily Covid-19 infection rate in Bangladesh increased to 3.30 percent

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PRAYER TIMING FEBRUARY 23

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:20 12:45 4:30 6:03 7:30
JAMAAT 5:55 1:15 4:45 6:07 8:00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

NBR asks banks for account info of BB ex-deputy governor, ED

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Board of Revenue has asked banks for detailed information of all types of accounts and transactions of five people, including former Bangladesh Bank deputy governor SK Sur Chowdhury, present Executive Director Md Shah Alam and their spouses.

The move comes just two weeks after a close associate of PK Hader, a fugitive accused of a money laundering case, confessed to a Dhaka court that two high-placed BB officials had assisted them to conduct the financial scams.

Bangladesh Bank withdrew Shah Alam from the responsibility of monitoring two departments for his alleged connection with PK Halder following the confessional statement.

Shah Alam was relieved from his duties at the central bank's Department of Financial Institutions

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Onlookers surround the wreckage of an ambulance that collided with a bus on Barishal-Dhaka Highway in Rampotti area of Barishal's Babuganj upazila. A newborn was killed and 15 other people were injured in the accident. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Italian envoy killed in DR Congo attack

AGENCIES

Italy's ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo was among three people killed yesterday when a UN convoy came under attack in the troubled east, DRC sources and the Italian government said.

Luca Attanasio died of his wounds after a World Food Programme (WFP) convoy came under gunfire near Goma while he was on a field trip, a senior diplomatic source said in Kinshasa.

The Italian government confirmed Attanasio's death and said an Italian policeman, Vittorio Iacovacci, as well as a driver it did not identify, had also died.

President Sergio Mattarella lashed what he called a "cowardly attack."

"The Italian republic is in mourning for these servants of the state who lost their lives," he said in a statement.

Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio expressed his "great dismay and immense sorrow", breaking off from a meeting in Brussels with EU counterparts to make an early return to Rome.

"The circumstances of this brutal attack are not yet known and no effort will be spared to shed light on what happened," Di Maio said.

Attanasio, 43, had been representing Italy in Kinshasa since 2017, first as head of mission, and then as ambassador from October 2019.

The envoy suffered "gunshot wounds to the abdomen" and was taken to a hospital in Goma in critical condition, the diplomat in Kinshasa said.

The DRC's army said its troops were searching the area for the assailants.

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