

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



**1,159**  
New cases in 24hrs



**5,57,395**  
Total cases



**8,545**  
Deaths



**5,11,695**  
Recoveries



**2,662,303**  
Deaths



**120,241,447**  
Total cases

## PM commissions two new aircraft

Asks Biman to improve passenger services

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday commissioned two new Dash 8-Q400 aircraft in the Biman Bangladesh fleet, three months after the state-run airlines inducted one short-haul craft of the same brand which now enhanced the fleet strength to 21.

"... the more we can improve the passenger services [of Biman] people will be benefited and the country will be developed," the premier told the commissioning ceremony of the crafts.

She expected that these modern aircrafts would help Biman strengthen its domestic and regional connectivity. Sheikh Hasina urged Biman to perform its duties with all sincerity as the national airlines since millions of people had to shed their blood for Bangladesh's independence.

"We all have the responsibilities to brighten the country's image," she said and simultaneously asked Biman to take good care of every aircraft and maintain better passenger services.

"The services to passengers will have to be much better."

The premier reminded the state-run airline officials that 16 of its 21 aircrafts were brand new which were procured with public money that demanded extra attention to their proper maintenance.

With the Dash 8-Q400 planes, Biman would now be able to increase its communication with the neighbouring countries apart from developing it at the domestic level.

The ceremony took place at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport VIP Lounge while the premier joined the function through a virtual platform from her official residence the Gano Bhaban.

The premier said the government currently was constructing the third terminal at Shahjalal International Airport which would be ultramodern in type to handle wide-bodied planes in the country and improve passenger services.

She said the government is



upgrading Cox's Bazar airport to an international one as this airport could play an immense role on the international air route and help Bangladesh prosper more economically.

The premier said Biman earlier used to rent aircraft to carry hajj pilgrims but now takes them by own aircrafts.

She said the government is pulling Bangladesh ahead and will materialise the "Sonar Bangla" as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mohammad Mahub Ali chaired the ceremony, conducted by Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus while Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary Mohammad Mokammel Hossain delivered the welcome address.

A documentary on Dash 8-Q400 aircraft and Biman was also screened at the function.

Biman procured three Dash 8-Q400 aircraft under the G2G (government-to-government) agreement between Bangladesh and Canadian governments.

The fleet included four Boeing 777-300ER, four Boeing 787-8, two Boeing 787-9, six Boeing 737, and three Dash 8-Q400.

The national flag carrier received the Dash 8-Q400 aircraft from Canada's prominent aircraft-maker De Havilland Aircraft.

The first Dash 8-Q400 aircraft arrived in Bangladesh on November 24 last year, the second one on February 24, and the third one on March 4.

Sheikh Hasina herself named these "Akash Tari", "Shwetbalaka" and "Dhrubotara".

The other brand new aircrafts included by the government have been named Palki, Arun Alo, Akash Pradip, Raanga Pravati, Meghdoot, Mayurpankhi, Akash Beena, Hongshobalaka, Gangchil, Achin Pakhi and Sonar Tori in accordance with country's nature.



A view of the Airport Road in the capital's Uttara shows traffic at a standstill after portion of a launching girder of the Bus Rapid Transit project collapsed near the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. The photo was taken yesterday around 12:30pm.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Govt to ramp up measures

FROM PAGE 1

Directorate reported 18 new deaths from the virus, the highest for a single day in around three weeks.

The Covid-19 death toll in the country has reached 8,545.

Lately, the Covid-19-dedicated hospitals are witnessing a rise in the number of patients. The general hospitals are also getting an increased number of patients complaining of breathing difficulties, one of the symptoms of Covid-19.

Covid-19 transmission in the country started gradually slowing down in January, but deaths and transmission rates have been on the rise over the past few weeks.

The percentage of positive cases, known as positivity rate, rose to 7.15 percent yesterday, the highest in the last two months. It was 6.26 percent a day ago, and 6.62 percent on Friday.

Between January 20 and March 4, the positivity rate stayed below five percent.

The number of new cases was 1,159 against a total of 16,206 tests done in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday. The total number of confirmed cases now stands at 5,57,395.

Against this backdrop, the cabinet division in a circular instructed all the divisional commissioners, district commissioners, and the upazila nirbahi officers to enforce health safety rules strictly.

"Recently, the transmission and death rates have increased compared to that of the previous past few months. To check the infection rate, it is necessary to ensure that everyone wears masks and maintains health rules at every sphere," said the circular, signed by Deputy Secretary Shafayat Mahub Chowdhury.

On the other hand, the health ministry held a meeting with the divisional medical college hospitals yesterday where instructions were given to keep the hospitals ready and ensure high flow oxygen and personal protective equipment there.

The ministry held another meeting with the country's civil surgeons yesterday.

"Directives were given to introduce mobile courts against the health rules violators in all districts. We have asked to impose curbs on gatherings centring social, political, religious and cultural events," Health Minister Zahid Maleque told The Daily Star after the meetings.

He said people's reckless movement without following safety measures was mainly to blame for the surge in Covid-19 cases.

"People have to follow it. Otherwise, the situation will go out of hand," he warned.

He said, "From the discussions, we found that the positivity rate is above 10 percent in Narayanganj,

Dhaka, Cumilla and Mymensingh districts. These are the hotspots [of coronavirus infection] and the health officials were asked to find out the reasons."

The minister said they instructed the civil surgeons to enforce the "No Mask No Service" policy strictly.

**YOUNG PEOPLE BEING INFECTED MORE**

Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), yesterday said most of the new Covid-19 patients were young while most patients needed ICU support.

"With the earlier variant, we have seen that mostly patients with comorbidity contracted Covid-19 but now we are witnessing that young and healthy people are being infected," he said at a programme at 250-bed TB Hospital at Shyamoli in Dhaka.

The health DG said he did not get any request for ICU beds in the last two months for Covid-19 patients but over the last few days, he received numerous calls and the callers alleged that there was a shortage of ICU beds at hospitals.

"Be ready... Prepare all the ICU beds that you have for Covid-19 patients," he asked the TB hospital authority, while also pointing to other hospitals.

## Court accepts

FROM PAGE 1

suffered in custody from May 2 to May 4 last year.

The judge ordered the medical board to make a report within 24 work hours, containing information on the time when Kishore was tortured and injured, and to submit the report to the PBI officer who will investigate the case.

A specialist doctor from ENT department will lead the board, while two other specialists -- one from the orthopaedics department and another from the medicine department -- will be members of the medical board.

On March 10, Kishore filed the case with the same court under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act-2013, seeking redress. He did not mention the names of any law-enforcement agencies or officials, instead choosing to file charges against a group of unidentified people.

The judge also took the case into cognisance and recorded the statements of Kishore that day.

Kishore, who was prosecuted under the controversial Digital

Security Act (DSA), languished in jail for around 10 months. He got out on bail on March 4. After his release, he revealed to the media how he was brutally tortured before he was shown as arrested on papers in the case.

In the case statement, Kishore was picked up on May 2 last year by 16-17 people in plainclothes.

Kishore stated that he was kept in an unknown place between May 2 and 4 last year, and tortured.

"At one stage of the interrogation, one of the men got up and slapped me on my ears so hard that I lost consciousness for a while," the statement quotes Kishore as saying, adding that soon after he felt blood coming out of his ear.

They also repeatedly tortured Kishore with steel-plated sticks, according to the statement. He said he lost consciousness.

Kishore said he was tortured like this several times till May 4 after which he found himself in a Rapid Action Battalion office.

In the statement, he also said he was suffering from complications from the torture.

## No political or social

FROM PAGE 1

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sri Lankan President Nandasena Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, Nepali President Bidya Devi Bhandari and Bhutanese Prime Minister Lotay Tshering will be visiting Dhaka.

"Security will be provided in accordance with the VVIP security protocol at all the events [and venues] where guests will be attending and staying."

According to Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) officials, all flight operations will remain suspended for a short period when the state guests enter the air space of Bangladesh.

About those who are opposing the visit of Modi, Monirul said, "We are hopeful that their good sense will emerge."

**SHOPS TO REMAIN CLOSED**

All shops and shopping malls across the country will remain closed on March 17 on the occasion of Bangabandhu's birth centenary.

Drug, grocery, and other daily essentials stores will remain out of the purview of this decision.

Bangladesh Shop Owners' Association took the decision in a meeting yesterday to show respect to the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, according to Helal Uddin, president of the association.

## US orders emergency agency to help with child migrant surge

AFP, Washington

The Biden administration ordered the government's disaster emergency agency Saturday to help with a surge in migrant children crossing the southern border that has overwhelmed processing facilities.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas called upon the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to support an effort to temporarily house thousands of children who crossed the US-Mexico

border alone amid criticisms that authorities were holding them for long periods in overcrowded facilities.

The Health and Human Services (HHS) department is currently holding about 8,800 migrant children and the US Customs and Border Protection has hundreds more in their charge, with more arriving every day.

In February alone CBP detained 9,457 unaccompanied migrant children at the southern border.

## Accidents expose lack of safety

FROM PAGE 1

**THE INCIDENTS**  
DBRCL Managing Director Shafiqul Islam said the workers were on duty when a portion of a launching girder collapsed.

An investigation committee has been formed to find the reasons behind the accident, he mentioned.

Workers and engineers present at the spot said a part of the heavy equipment collapsed while it was being placed at a point between pier no 8 and 9 on the Dhaka-Gazipur road.

When this correspondent visited the spot around 1:00pm, he found that construction work on that part of the BRT-3 line was suspended and police put barricades around the spot, narrowing down the roads on both sides. This resulted in huge traffic jam on the busy roads, lasting several hours.

Seeking anonymity, an engineer working as a consultant for the project said the contractor -- China Gezhouba Group Co Ltd -- was not supposed to do loading, unloading and lifting of viaducts in daytime for safety of traffic.

Shafiqul, however, said the contractor is working day and night as they are lagging behind the deadline.

The contractor may not have informed the project authorities formally, but the authorities knew about the work in the daytime, he added.

ASM Elias Shah, project director for the segment being implemented by the RHD, echoed Shafiqul's opinion.

Hours before the accident, an under-construction pier cap of the project in Uttara collapsed early yesterday.

The pier cap, casting of which was done on Saturday night, collapsed as its support got displaced at some point, Shafiqul said.

Asked how the support got displaced, Shafiqul said, "Some of them [workers] said a truck hit the support while others said it got displaced on its own. The real cause will be known after investigation."

Visiting the spot, this correspondent found several workers were clearing the derbies of the pier cap in front of the Polwel Carnation Shopping Centre in Uttara. Three to four workers were seen guarding the area and a bamboo fence was put up around the site.

**PROBE COMMITTEE**

The seven-member committee, led by Joint Secretary of Road Transport and Highways Division Anisur Rahman,

will probe the two incidents, Shafiqul said.

It was asked to submit a report within seven working days, he told this correspondent.

**LONG DELAY**

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) approved the project in November 2012 for dedicated rapid bus service between Gazipur and Shahjalal International Airport. Once operational, it will be able to transport 20,000 passengers per hour.

The project was supposed to be completed at a cost of Tk 2,037.85 crore by December 2016.

But it got delayed due to various problems, including management of a massive quantity of industrial waste and huge traffic, said a report of the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division released in June last year.

Waterlogging in the project areas between Tongi and Joydebpur is another major reason for the delay in implementation, it mentioned.

The project eventually went through four revisions, taking the total cost to Tk 4,268.32 crore -- around 107 percent more than the original cost.

## At least 10 cases detected so far

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The person diagnosed with the strain had travelled to the country from the UK. Similar cases were found in Dhaka and Sylhet later.

But the Director General of Health Services (DGHS) did not reveal the matter until The Daily Star reported about it on March 10.

Experts fear that the UK variant could be one of the reasons behind the sudden rise in new cases and deaths in the country.

"The number of genome sequencing is very limited here because it's expensive. More genome sequencing is needed to know how far the UK variant has spread in the country," Prof Md Sayedur Rahman, chairman of pharmacology at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), told The Daily Star yesterday.

The government has to make special budget allocation and engage capable laboratories to make the process faster, he said.

People's reluctance to follow the health guidelines and a widespread misconception that vaccination means protection are also reasons why the virus has been spreading, he added.

"We are observing the rise in positivity rate, hospital admission and death rate. We have to expand the genome sequencing facilities and the antibody tests to see how the vaccine is working."

DGHS officials also said people dropping their guards after a steep decline in new cases are the reason behind the recent spike.

"We have not found any link between the UK variant and the sudden rise in infection. Rather, it is the carelessness of the people about maintaining health guidelines that contributed to the rise," Tahmina said.

According to the World Health Organization, 83 countries have reported cases of the UK variant.

Scientists say the UK variant may be up to 70 percent deadlier than the previous strains. Detected in September for the first time, it quickly became the dominant variant in the UK, said a UK government report in February.

India says it has found 242 cases of three variants -- mostly the UK one -- in the population, BBC reported earlier this month.

A New York Times report in late February said British scientists were increasingly finding the UK variant to be linked to a higher risk of death.

It also said the UK variant is linked to an increased need for hospitalisation.

Scientists estimate that the variant was being transmitted 35 to 45 percent more easily than other variants in the US, the report said.

## Rohingya man shot dead in Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Rohingya criminals have shot a man dead from the same community, over establishing supremacy between groups, in a refugee camp at Teknaf in Cox's Bazar, said police.

The dead is Mohammad Jubair, 21, an inhabitant of block C of Nayapara refugee camp.

Another Rohingya man -- Mohammad Jalil Prokash Sunia -- was also stabbed over the same issue, the law enforcers added.

He is now receiving treatment at Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital.

Confirming the incident, Cox's Bazar Armed Police Battalion-16 Commander (superintendent of police) Mohammad Tariqul Islam said members of a criminal Rohingya group [Patia group] in Nayapara refugee camp picked up Jubair from his residence around 11:00pm on Saturday.

Later Jubair, a member of another criminal group [Salman group], was gunned down, the official said.

Following this, members of Salman group picked up Jalil, a member of Patia group, and stabbed him around 4:00am yesterday, leaving him critically injured.

Police later rescued Jalil and admitted him to the hospital.

The law enforcers are trying to arrest the criminals in connection with the incident.

## It's a unique celebration of Bangabandhu's birth centenary

Says Razzak as he visits crops canvas in Bogura

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzak yesterday said that the portrait of Bangabandhu painted for the first time using the huge canvas of green paddy field will be a unique celebration of his birth centenary.

The minister said this while inspecting the 'Bangabandhu in Crops Canvas' project being implemented at Bhabanipur union in Sherpur of Bogura this morning.

"Just as Bangabandhu is in our hearts, we can hear the footsteps of Bangabandhu in the sky, air, green land, grain fields of Bengal," he said.

He said, "The way we are celebrating the birth centenary of Bangabandhu through various ceremonies will unite all the people of the country in his ideals. I think political stability is very important for the economic development of the country."

Through this picture, the greatest leader Bangabandhu will be represented to the whole world that how he was showed his tender to the land and farmers of this country, Razzak said.

Later in the afternoon, the minister participated as the chief guest in the national seminar titled 'Agricultural Revolution in Bangladesh: Sheikh Mujib to Sheikh Hasina' organised by National Agriculture at Bogura Rural Development Academy. The initiative of the project was taken by the national committee formed to mark the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and it was funded by a private company called National Agricare.

Fajul Siddiki, chief coordinator of the project, said they will send all documents of this project to the authorities of Guinness Book of World Record soon as per its requirements. If all goes well, they are hopeful that this mosaic will set a world record in the Guinness Book of World Records within next 17th march, he told our Bogura correspondent.

Earlier on March 9, two Bangladeshi representatives from the Guinness Book of World Records came to Bogura to inspect the crop.

At the end of the visit, they expressed their satisfaction and said that it is only a matter of time to set a record in Guinness book as the largest crop field mosaic of a single person.

## Shab-e-Barat

FROM PAGE 1

Arabic month of Shaban. Muslims offer special prayers, recite the Quran, and take part in other religious rituals.

## Russian police detain dozens of opposition deputies at forum

AFP, Moscow

Russian police on Saturday arrested around 200 opposition politicians and municipal deputies at a Moscow conference as authorities tighten the screws on Kremlin critics ahead of parliamentary elections.

A police raid on an opposition conference dedicated to running for municipal office came after President Vladimir Putin's top critic Alexei Navalny was jailed for two and a half years last month and more than 10,000 protesters detained across the country.