

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,386
New cases in 24hrs



7,73,513
Total cases



11,934
Deaths



7,10,162
Recoveries



3,302,171
Deaths



158,737,426
Total cases

COMMUNAL POLITICS

If stronger in India, stronger here too

Say speakers at webinar on West Bengal polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A stronger divisive communal brand of politics in India will also make the same brand of politics stronger in Bangladesh, discussants said yesterday.

Speaking at a webinar, they urged all South Asian countries to work for secularism and against the divisive politics of religion.

Study Group on Regional Affairs organised the webinar on election results in neighbouring Indian states of West Bengal and Assam and its probable impact on Bangladesh.

Jahangirnagar University Prof Anu Muhammad said any kind of political, economic and cultural change in India has an impact on Bangladesh as it is the closest neighbour and friend.

If the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) politics of Hindu nationalism get stronger in India, religion-based politics will be stronger in Bangladesh, he said.

Anu Muhammad said they get a chance of discussing Indian elections, but it is unfortunate that "election in Bangladesh has been sent to museum".

Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad, said although the Trinamool Congress won the West Bengal assembly election for the third time in a row, the BJP gained a huge success in this election.

He said the BJP bagged only three seats in this assembly polls in 2016 and it increased to 82 this time.

The BJP-led alliance won Assam assembly polls for the second time in a row.

He said all have to think about how to stop the rise of communal politics in India. "We have to ensure that no minorities leave Bangladesh for India. It is probably a reason for the rise of communal politics in some places of India."

Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, former foreign secretary and ambassador, said it was a huge achievement for BJP in the latest assembly election in West Bengal. But the BJP got success in less number of seats in comparison to the last Lok Sabha election. "It proves that conscious Indian cast their votes, understanding the difference of issues of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections," he said.

The Bangladesh government's reaction to the elections was noticeable. It congratulated only Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee after she was sworn in as the chief minister of West Bengal, but did not yet send any congratulatory message to those who won in Assam, he said.

"The use of communalism in Indian politics has been increasing over the last 10 to 15 years. Many said communalism suffered a blow in West Bengal, but it is not sure whether it is permanent or temporary," Shamsher Mobin said.

Dhaka University Professor Amana Mohsin said she was worried because she was seeing the communalisation of politics across the globe, including India and Bangladesh.

She said by visiting a shrine of "Matua" community in Gopalganj's Orakandi on the first day of West Bengal election, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi just took the domestic agenda to another country. It was not right.

Journalist Amir Khasru, coordinator of Study Group on Regional Affairs, moderated the webinar.

Don't move, stay

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Conference Centre (BICC) in the capital.

Joining virtually from her official residence the Gono Bhaban, she called upon the countrymen to be patient thinking of the welfare of own self and family as well, saying "what else damage" will take place if one Eid is not celebrated staying at home.

She added, "So, don't move, stay at the places where you are right now and enjoy the Eid as you wish."

About the new variant of the Covid-19, the premier said a new virus variant has come which is more harmful and fatal, and urged all to wear masks and be careful about it to keep all protected.

She mentioned that people are dying in Bangladesh and elsewhere across the globe due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The prime minister said, "People are dying regularly in our neighbouring country. It is quite natural that whatever happens to our neighbor, it may have the chance to come to our country. So, we have to be protected well before and we have to move that way."

State Minister for Housing and Public Works Sharif Ahmed, Chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry Engineer Mosharrar Hossain, MP, its Secretary Shahid Ullah Khandaker, and Chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (RAJUK) ABM Amin Ullah Nuri spoke on the occasion from the BICC end.

PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus moderated the function from the Gono Bhaban site.

On behalf of the prime minister, the state minister later handed over the plot allotment letters to the people affected by the Purbachal New Town Project.

Earlier, a video documentary on the project was screened on the occasion.



Several hundred passengers crowded closely together, braving the scorching sun and the risk of Covid-19 infection, as they wait at the Shimulia ferry terminal in Munshiganj yesterday. Inset, people negotiating a fare with a private car driver near Kanchpur bridge in Narayanganj. People were paying up to Tk 1,000 to go to Cumilla in this way.

PHOTO: SAJJAD HOSSAIN AND AMRAN HOSSAIN

Khaleda can't go abroad

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Now, there is no scope for relaxing the condition. She cannot go abroad for treatment.

He further said Khaleda's jail sentence was suspended after her family submitted an application in this regard.

"The application was disposed of the moment the government granted it on the condition that she cannot go abroad. And therefore, there is no scope for the government to change its decision made on the application," observed Anisul, also a criminal law expert.

In reply to a question, the minister said he didn't know whether any convicted person was allowed to go abroad in the past for any purpose. Section-401 of the CrPc says,

"When any person has been sentenced to punishment for an offence, the government may at any time without conditions or upon any conditions which the person sentenced accepts, suspend the execution of his/her sentence or remit the whole or any part of the punishment to which he/she has been sentenced."

Earlier in the morning, the law minister sent the opinion to the home ministry through an official of his ministry.

The government on March 25 last year released Khaleda after suspending her jail sentence. Later, the suspension was extended twice and separate notifications were issued to this effect.

The notifications said Khaleda will receive treatment at home and she cannot go abroad during this period.

Metro rail trial run this month

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they were asked to complete their preparation by May 24. "The higher authority wants to start the test run this month," one of them said, wishing not to be named.

Another top official of the DMTCCL said the process may get delayed because not all the Indian engineers involved in the process could reach Dhaka.

"The process may be delayed as people's movement from India to Bangladesh remains suspended," he said, wishing anonymity.

The original implementation period of the project was 2012-2024. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina later directed that metro services from Uttara to Agargaon be made operational by 2019, and from Agargaon to Motijheel by 2020.

Failing to meet the deadline, the authorities in May 2019 said the project would be launched on December 16, 2021, as the country celebrates the golden jubilee of its independence.

But the authorities are unlikely to meet the deadline for early commissioning of metro rail in December this year due to the

pandemic. METRO SITE ABUZZ

The construction site of the much-anticipated metro rail in Uttara was buzzing with activities.

Some five to six workers were painting the rail tracks at Uttara North Station around noon on Saturday.

"We are giving the paint for the third and final time," one of the workers said as this correspondent reached there, climbing two floors of the station being constructed.

Three to four groups of workers were seen busy with other tasks.

On the first floor, some engineers and workers were busy working on one of the four escalators there. There will be stairs and elevators.

Overhead Catenary System (OCS), which consists of wires over the rail tracks, has already been installed. Commissioning of the OCS inside the depot and nearby lines have been done.

Engineers and workers were busy at Uttara Central Station too. Around 2,300 to 2,400 workers were employed in the first phase - between Uttara and

Agargaon.

The development takes place even as the country battles the second wave of Covid-19. It is likely that the country will enter the metro rail era next year.

The overall progress of the project was 63.26 percent in April.

The first phase from Uttara to Agargaon saw 84.79 percent progress and the second phase from Agargaon to Motijheel 59.78 percent. The installation of tracks and other equipment and procurement of cars saw 54.40 percent progress as of April, according to documents.

Thirteen out of 52 structures inside the depot, have been complete and the package witnessed 95 percent progress as of April.

A total 14.4km out of 20.10km viaduct is now visible and 10.50km of rail tracks have been set between Uttara and Agargaon. Besides, over 20km of rail tracks have been set inside the depot.

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SPEEDBOAT CRASH

Rab arrests owner in Keraniganj

Bss, Dhaka

Members of Rapid Action Battalion yesterday arrested the owner of the speedboat that caused an accident and claimed 26 lives in the Padma's Kathalbari point at Banglabazar in Madaripur's Shibchar upazila.

The accused Chan Mia was arrested from Keraniganj yesterday morning, said Commander Al Mayeen, director (law and media) of Rab.

On May 3, a total of 26 people, including women and children, were killed when a speedboat rammed a vessel.

Five others, including the driver of the speedboat, were also injured in the accident.

Rab would reveal further details later, the official said.

Covid death toll

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1. There has been a steady decline in the number of tests since April 28. The number of testes rose again over 20,000 on May 4, 5, and 6, according to corona.gov.bd.

The daily infection rate fell to 8.19 percent, which was 8.74 percent a day before, according to the DGHS.

The number of coronavirus-related deaths came down to as low as 50 after over a month on Wednesday.

Bangladesh saw 50 deaths on April 1 and it had kept rising since then.

The daily death toll soared to over 100 on April 16-19 and on April 25 but has been falling gradually since then.

According to the DGHS, 3,329 patients recovered in the past 24 hours, putting the recovery rate at 91.81 percent.

The country reported its first coronavirus cases on March 8 last year and the first death on the 18th of that month.

Sneaked in thru'

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them travelled to Dhaka through various means, probably leaving a trail of the virus along the way.

Asked, Professor Tahmina Shirin, director of IEDCR, said of the those infected with the Indian variant, a few are in hospital and the rest have probably completed quarantine.

She also said it is too early to say whether the variant has already spread in the community.

"We did not find transmission of the Indian variant among the people who do not have travel histories. Even if it may have already spread into the community, detecting that will take time."

She also said they have been conducting contact tracing and some more genome sequencing on people who recently returned from India.

Health officials and experts already warned that the presence of the Indian variant is a matter of serious concern and if people continue to disregard health guidelines, the situation will go out of control at a time when the country is just recovering from the second wave of the pandemic.

"It was predicted that the Indian variant will come to Bangladesh. We were able to delay it. But the way things are now, the situation will be very grave in the coming days," said Professor Nazrul Islam, member of the National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19.

Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of the pharmacology department at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said the variant has already spread to many parts of the world.

"So, banning entry from a single country will not bring any fruitful result. Our experience says we tried to ban the entry of people returning from UK to contain the entry of UK variant, but in the meantime the South African variant jolted the country's Covid situation."

Sayedur said there are two options - either to isolate Bangladesh from the rest of the world, which is not realistic, or to enforce 14-day mandatory institutional quarantine for all incoming passengers from abroad.

"We must strictly enforce quarantine. Many countries in the world are doing so."

Meanwhile, the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh yesterday issued a circular that no passenger from Nepal will be allowed to enter Bangladesh from today.

India's next door neighbour Nepal is facing a severe Covid-19 crisis as the Indian variant began showing up there as well, with a 1,200 percent increase in new infections, triggering hospital shortages, said International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The Nepal government said 44 percent of Covid-19 tests administered had come back positive last weekend. The country is reporting about 20 new cases per 100,000 people, a statistic similar to what India had two weeks ago.

The India variant known as B.1.617 was first detected in October last year.

It is far more transmissible than the virus's previous strains. Very recently, it was reported that the variant has three different subtypes with slightly different genetic mutations.

The subtype, B.1.617.2, found in Bangladesh, appears to spread quicker than two other subtypes detected by scientists in India.

India's crematoriums and burial grounds are overwhelmed by the devastating new surge of infections tearing through the populous country with terrifying speed, depleting the supply of life-saving oxygen to critical levels and leaving patients to die while waiting in line to see doctors, reports AP from New Delhi.

Virus scare lost in home rush

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that several hundred Dhaka-bound passenger buses were stranded since yesterday morning at different points of the Bangabandhu Bridge West Zone after police barred them. As the congestion increased, police released the buses.

Mosaddék Hossain, officer-in-charge of Bangabandhu Bridge West Police Station said a total of 26,223 vehicles crossed the Bangabandhu Bridge between Saturday and 6:00am Sunday.

Vehicles bound for the northern districts from Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur were on the rise, he added.

RUSH AT FERRY TERMINAL

Although ferry services on the Paturia-Daulatdia and Shimulia-Kathalbaria routes, gateways to 21 south and southwestern districts of the country, have been suspended during daytime, people in the thousands thronged the Shimulia terminal yesterday morning. The crowd only increased as the day wore on.

To manage the crowd, two ferries carrying a total of around 5,000 passengers along with some ambulances carrying patients crossed the Padma river yesterday, said Md Hilal Uddin, Mawa traffic police inspector.

People were falling over themselves in order to get on the ferries. In the first ferry, around 7:45am, it only took a few minutes for the vessel to fill up with passengers. The back of the ferry was so crowded that it could not depart.

Finally, police charged the crowd with

batons to control the situation.

In the afternoon, hundreds of passengers were waiting for a ferry. But local administration told them to go back.

Munshiganj Deputy Commissioner Moniruzzaman Talukder said daytime ferry services will be completely closed, even to ambulances, which have now been asked to use the Jamuna bridge. At night, only goods-laden vehicles will pass.

At least 350 goods-laden vehicles were waiting to cross the river in the Shimulia terminal area, reports our Munshiganj correspondent.

Some people boarded fishing boats and trawlers to cross the Padma river from near the terminal. Police then conducted a drive, seized 12 trawlers and detained 20 of its drivers and helpers from different points near Shimulia for violating government instructions, said Mawa Naval Police In-charge Sirajul Kabir.

A BGB platoon was deployed a kilometre ahead of Shimulia terminal to control the rush of holidaymakers. Personal vehicles and trucks are not being allowed to board the ferries.

At Paturia, five ferries operated to transport ambulances with patients and hundreds of people crossed the river, reports our Manikganj correspondent adding that no BGB team was seen in the terminal area yesterday but a police team was deployed there.

SHOPPING MALLS PACKED, ROADS CROWDED

In the capital, shopping centres and

malls were seen full of customers.

Visiting some major shopping malls and markets in Dhaka -- New Market, Chandni Chawk, Gausia, Noor Mansion, Chandrima Super Market, Bangabazar, Jamuna Future Park and Bashundhara City Mall -- yesterday, The Daily Star correspondents found customers pouring into the shops from 10:00am.

At most shopping centres, maintaining health and safety rules appeared a big challenge due to the heavy flow of customers.

There was not enough space inside most shops to maintain physical distancing. Shops of some popular lifestyle brands were crowded with shoppers while there were queues to enter few outlets.

During iftar, people were seen sitting in groups on the floors of Bashundhara City to have their meals.

In Gulistan and New Market areas, thousands were seen doing their Eid shopping on streets where no health rules were maintained.

Yesterday, heavy traffic congestion was seen on Mirpur Road, Technical area, New Market, Elephant Road, Bangla Motor, Panthapath, Farmgate and Karwan Bazar areas.

Traffic police said the crowd was heavier because shoppers and homebound people thronged the streets ahead of Eid.

[Our Correspondents in Munshiganj, Pabna, Manikganj and Tangail contributed to this report]