

Launch now aimed

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Once complete, the metro rail -- with 16 stations -- will be able to carry 60,000 people an hour, reducing travel time between Uttara and Motijheel to around 40 minutes. It now takes about two hours to travel the distance on a regular day.

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 this year when the country would be celebrating the golden jubilee of its independence.

But, physical work remained suspended for over two months last year due to coronavirus restrictions. The project authorities are still struggling to pick up the pace amid the second wave of the pandemic.

Despite these, two metro trains have reached Dhaka. At a programme on May 11, when first set of metro train rolled on the tracks on a test run, Road Transport and Highway Division Secretary Nazrul Islam said that they would fail to meet the December 2021

deadline.

After the programme, MAN Siddique had told this correspondent that the DMTCCL began the performance test and would continue it inside the depot and later on the tracks.

Citing examples from different countries, he said it takes from six months to a year, if not longer in some cases, to do the tests. After successfully completing the tests, the DMTCCL would hold trial runs for up to 10 weeks before formally launching the service, he said.

"Even in this situation, we are hopeful about starting installation of the rail tracks on the second phase, between Agargaon and Motijheel, from next month," he said.

The overall progress of the project was 64.91 percent in May. The first phase saw 85.74 percent progress and the second phase 62.52 percent. The installation of tracks and other equipment and procurement of cars saw 56.04 percent progress, according to the project's monthly progress report.

As per the time-bound action plan, the government would build a 128.74km metro rail network comprising six elevated and underground lines in Dhaka and its adjacent areas within 2030.



Farmers shout slogans before burning the copies of recent agricultural reforms bill (not in the picture) during a demonstration against the central government outside the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) office in Punjab's Amritsar, India, Yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

G7 strikes deal to tax

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years to agree a way to raise more revenue from large multinationals such as Google, Amazon and Facebook, which often book profits in jurisdictions where they pay little or no tax.

US President Joe Biden's administration gave the stalled talks fresh impetus by proposing a minimum global corporation tax rate of 15 percent, above the level in countries such as Ireland but below the lowest level in the G7.

Germany and France also welcomed the agreement, although French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said he would fight for a higher global minimum corporate tax rate than 15 percent, which he described as a "starting point".

German finance minister Olaf Scholz said the deal was "bad news for tax havens around the world".

"Companies will no longer be in a position to dodge their tax obligations by booking their profits in the lowest-tax countries," he added.

Irish finance minister Paschal Donohoe, whose country is potentially a big loser with its 12.5% tax rate, said any global deal also needed to take account of smaller nations.

Sunak said the deal was a "huge prize" for taxpayers, but it was too soon to know how much money it would raise for Britain.

The agreement does not make clear exactly which businesses will be covered by the rules, referring only to "the largest and most profitable multinational enterprises".

European countries have feared that a business such as Amazon could slip through the net as it reports lower profit margins than most other well-known technology companies.

Assange fiancee seeks safe haven for jailed WikiLeaks founder

AFP, Geneva

Julian Assange's fiancee joined forces Friday with the mayor of Geneva and the UN's torture expert to seek the WikiLeaks founder's immediate release from a British jail and safe haven in another country.

In January, an English judge refused to allow Assange's extradition to the United States to face charges for leaking secret documents.

The 49-year-old remains in custody in a London jail awaiting a US appeal against the decision.

Assange's fiancee Stella Moris teamed up in Geneva with Nils Melzer, the UN special rapporteur on torture, and Geneva mayor Frederique Perler to call for his release and the scrapping of extradition proceedings.

They urged international organisations based in the Swiss city to help free Assange, and called on Switzerland and other democratic nations to offer the Australian former computer hacker a refuge from potential further prosecution moves.

"My hope is that it will end today, it's being going on for too long, it's an absolute aberration that Julian is in prison at all," Moris, who has two children with Assange, told AFP.

"He won his case of extradition at the lowest level in January and he is still in prison, and he is prosecuted for journalistic activities."

The lawyer said her fiance was struggling in the "grim environment" of Belmarsh prison, the top-security jail in southeast London.

"He is surrounded by dangerous criminals, his interactions are with criminals or with prison guards. He is isolated a lot of the time, his health

is deteriorating and he hasn't seen his children since October."

Moris said she had not seen Assange since his January 6 court appearance.

Judge Vanessa Baraitser blocked his extradition to the United States for mental health reasons, but said that if released from custody pending the US appeal, there were substantial grounds to suspect that he might abscond.

If convicted in the United States, he faces a maximum sentence of 175 years in jail.

"Mr Assange still has an incentive to abscond from these as yet unresolved proceedings," said Baraitser.

Whilst on bail in 2012, Assange sought sanctuary in Ecuador's embassy in London, after Sweden issued an arrest warrant in connection with sexual assault allegations, which were later dropped.

He spent seven years inside the embassy until Quito revoked his citizenship in 2019. British police dragged him out and arrested him for jumping bail.

Assange is wanted in Washington to face 18 charges relating to the 2010 release by WikiLeaks of 500,000 secret files detailing aspects of military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Melzer told reporters in Geneva that Assange's case was "probably one of the biggest judicial scandals in history".

"He's told the truth about misconduct of powerful states, of powerful corporations, he has challenged the powerful who do their business in the shadows," said the special rapporteur, who does not speak for the UN but reports his findings to the global body.

Mamunul sent

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information during his remand. The information is being scrutinized. Details would be shared with the media through a press conference today (Sunday).

Earlier on April 3 afternoon, some ruling Awami League (AL) men kept Mamunul confined in a room where he went with a woman.

When the chaos was going on Mamunul claimed that the woman was his second wife, though AL men were not satisfied with the claim and alleged that Mamunul had an extramarital affair with her.

As the news of Mamunul's confinement spread, several hundreds of Hefajat men unleashed violence there and took Mamunul away. A total of five cases were filed against Mamunul and other Hefajat men in connection with the violence.

Later on April 30, the woman, whom Mamunul claimed as his second wife, filed a rape case against Mamunul with Sonargaon Police Station.

In the case statement, she alleged that Mamunul raped her over the last two years luring her to marry.

Besides, Hefajat men launched vandalism and arson attack on vehicles at Narayanganj's Shimrail area on Dhaka-Chattogram highway during a daylong hartal (shutdown) on March 28.

Later, police filed five separate cases with Siddhirganj Police Station and RAB filed another case in connection with the violence.

Mamunul and other Hefajat men were also made accused in these cases.

Police arrested Mamunul on April 18 from Jamia Rahmania Arabia Madrasa in Dhaka's Mohammadpur. Later on May 18, he was brought to Narayanganj from central jail for interrogation.

Turkish drone strike kills 3 civilians in Iraq refugee camp

AFP, ARBIL

Three civilians were killed yesterday in a Turkish drone attack on a refugee camp in northern Iraq in an area Turkish President recently threatened to "clean up", a Kurdish lawmaker said.

Rashad Galali, a Kurdish MP from Makhmur, told AFP the strike targeted "a kindergarten near a school" in the UN-supported camp that houses Kurdish refugees from Turkey.

"Three civilians were killed and two wounded," he said.

Earlier this week Erdogan compared Makhmur to the Mount Qandil region along Iraq's eastern frontier, where Turkey's outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has rear bases.

Delhi, Mumbai ease

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back on track now that the Covid-19 situation improving. We pray that the situation remains the same."

The government of Maharashtra state, which includes India's economic powerhouse Mumbai, announced a five-level plan to ease restrictions depending on infection rates and hospital bed occupancy.

In level-one areas -- with infection rates below five percent and hospital bed occupancy below 25 percent -- all shops, restaurants and malls will be allowed to reopen.

But level-five districts -- with infection rates over 20 percent -- will remain under severe movement restrictions.

Daily infections reported across India have dropped to about 120,000 from more than 400,000 in May, according to official statistics.

Deaths have also fallen, with 3,380 reported in the previous 24 hours, although this is widely seen as a major underestimate.

At least 344,082 people in the country have lost their lives to the coronavirus, which is now surging in parts of rural India.

Delhi reported about 400 new infections yesterday, down from about 25,000 daily cases when the lockdown

was announced seven weeks earlier.

The devastating surge was blamed on new virus variants and the government having allowed most activity to return to normal including mass religious and political gatherings.

India's vaccination programme meanwhile is making slow progress due to shortages, confusion and squabbling between the central government and state authorities.

So far about 180 million people, only 14 percent of the population, have received one dose, and 45 million, or 3.4 percent, two shots.

Globally, the coronavirus has killed at least 3,714,923 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1000 GMT yesterday.

The United States is the worst-affected country with 597,001 deaths. After the US, the hardest-hit countries are Brazil with 470,842 deaths, India with 344,082 deaths, Mexico with 228,568 deaths, and Peru with 185,813 deaths.

The World Health Organization estimates that the pandemic's overall toll could be two to three times higher than official records, due to the excess mortality that is directly and indirectly linked to Covid-19.

Pakistan is dead: Syed Nazrul

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Pakistan, they would be grossly mistaken. "Pakistan is dead and she cannot be revived. Free Bangladesh is now a reality. On behalf of the Bangladesh Government, I want to make it amply clear that the 75 million people of Bangladesh will not accept any hotchpotch political settlement. We had wanted a settlement but after the horrifying night of March 25 the question of a settlement does not rise," said the acting President.

COMMANDOS KILL 250 TROOPS IN BANGLADESH

Commandos of the Mukti Foj kept up their guerrilla activities on almost all fronts in Bangladesh and killed 250 Pak troops during the last few days according to the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. The freedom fighters killed 45 Pakistani troops in two encounters in the West Dinajpur sector today. At Teliapara, a number of Army vehicles were destroyed in explosion of mines laid by the Mukti Foj on the road. More than 24 troops were killed in the explosion. The West Pakistani Army had started frenzied operations in Dhaka to check guerrilla activities. During curfew hours, the soldiers cordoned off a particular area and conducted house to house searches. A large number of checkpoints had been set up by the Pakistani Army throughout Dhaka city. Pedestrians

were thoroughly searched at these posts and vehicles were also not spared. Most of the streets remained deserted. Curfew was still in force in Dhaka.

AMERICA, BRITAIN WITHDRAWING DIPLOMATS FROM E. PAKISTAN

The United States and Britain were withdrawing senior diplomats from Dhaka, foreign diplomatic sources said today.

American Consul General Archer K. Blood left for Washington June 3, 1971 and would not return, they said. Britain's deputy high commissioner, Frank Sargent would leave for London a week later they said. Neither had completed a normal tour of duty.

British sources would make no comment on the move of Sargent, who took up his post in Dhaka late last year. Blood was thrown into controversy following the Pakistan army's March 25 crackdown of the Bangladesh movement.

INDIA APPEALS IN MOSCOW

India's Foreign Minister, Swaran Singh, arrived in Moscow today, his first stop on a six nation tour to tell the world that India cannot cope with the influx of four million East Pakistanis fleeing across her borders.

Shamsuddoza Sajen is a journalist and researcher. He can be contacted at sajen1986@gmail.com

2nd shipment of 6 lakh

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for vaccines from different sources after India halted AstraZeneca vaccine export in March amid a massive rise in Covid-19 infections.

Bangladesh is in the process of signing an agreement with China to buy 1.5 crore Sinopharm vaccines. It is also negotiating with Russia to buy Sputnik V vaccines.

"It's sincerely hoped that our Bangladeshi brothers and sisters will get the most needed vaccines at an earlier date," Hualong wrote in another post on Facebook.

Meanwhile, the government is putting in its best efforts through diplomatic channels to "make things normal" and procure 15 million doses of Sinopharm vaccine from China as planned though the scenario looks "different" to some extent following price disclosure, reported UNB.

On May 27, the Cabinet Committee on Public Purchase approved a proposal for buying 15 million doses of Sinopharm's Covid-19 vaccine.

After the meeting, a Cabinet Division official told journalists that they would purchase the vaccine at

USD 10 per dose.

"The scenario looks different to some extent after the incident. We are doing our best to make things normal," a senior government official said.

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen had a meeting with the Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh, Li Jiming, and discussed the issue, among other things, explaining the whole scenario.

"Our ambassador in Beijing is trying desperately with the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He remains engaged," another official told UNB, mentioning that the price disclosure has given a lot of "inconvenience" to the Chinese company.

Revealing the contract price of the vaccine doses is against the "confidentiality and non-disclosure agreement" and the price for Bangladesh by Sinopharm is among the lowest in all countries, a diplomatic source said adding that the price also depends on who is procuring when.

Bangladesh has also written to relevant parties in China mentioning that it was an "unintentional" mistake to reveal the price of vaccine per dose.

3 electrocuted

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Rahman.

The victims were pronounced dead at Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 2:45pm.

Pakhi's mother Kulsum Akhter said her daughter was in class IV.

Sub-inspector Shariful Islam of Hatirjheel Police Station confirmed the incident.

'Harmful' apps

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to endure by said traffickers in India's Bengaluru. A video footage of the incident went viral on social media through TikTok.

Three girls had managed to escape from the human trafficking racket and return to Bangladesh. They have informed police that many other Bangladeshi girls are currently suffering in India.

Law enforcers have already identified Rifatul Islam Ridoy, known as "Ridoy Babu" on TikTok, who allegedly trafficked over 50 girls to India using the social networking application.

The Rab DG said, "A list of those involved in crimes using social media is being prepared."

"In this tech-savvy society, we need to use technology in a positive, responsible way..." he said while addressing a debate competition as the chief guest.

Debate for Democracy organised the debate titled "Misuse of Social Media to Increase Juvenile Crime" at the National Film Development Corporation.

"Law enforcement agencies have the capacity to crack down on such crimes," he said.

Addressing the programme, Mohammad Shahidullah, deputy commissioner of Teigaon Division Police, said no one will be allowed to commit crimes through social media.

"Those who misuse the mobile apps will not be spared. We will recommend closing down the apps [in Bangladesh]," he said.

On December 30 last year, a writ was filed with the High Court to shut down the applications named Bigo Live, TikTok, Likee for the safety and security of the young generation.

The writ petition asked why these apps should not be declared illegal and not be instructed to close operation.

The secretaries to the home ministry, and posts, telecommunications and information technology ministry, chairman of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), and the inspector general of police were made defendants.

Rezaul Masud, special superintendent (Cyber Intelligence and Risk Management) of the CID, told The Daily Star yesterday that they have a continuous monitoring process to check which applications are harmful for our society and are violating the law.

PHQ then sends a list of suspected social media applications to the home ministry. The list is then sent to the BTRC, requesting further action and the shutting down of the mentioned apps.

As TikTok has recently come to the fore as an app that is widely abused, police are now working to take action against such apps, he said, adding they have also sent a list to ban some games, including PUBG and FREEFIRE.

Third Eye created

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foreheads so they can browse injury-free on the go.

The device opens its translucent eyelid whenever it senses the user's head has been lowered to look at a smartphone. When the user comes within one to two metres of an obstacle, the device beeps to warn of the impending danger.

"This is the look of future mankind with three eyes," Paeng, a postgraduate in innovation design engineering at the Royal College of Art and Imperial College London, told Reuters as he demonstrated use of The Third Eye around Seoul.

"As we cannot take our eyes off from smartphones, the extra eye will be needed in future."

Paeng's invention uses a gyro sensor to measure the oblique angle of the user's neck and an ultrasonic sensor to calculate the distance between the robotic eye and any obstacles. Both sensors are linked to an open-source single-board microcontroller, with battery pack.

Paeng's demonstration of the device in Seoul this week garnered attention from passersby.

"I thought he looked like an alien with an eye on his forehead," Seoul resident Lee Ok-jo said. "These days many young people can get into accidents while using their mobile phone. This would be good for them."

Paeng said The Third Eye was meant as a warning, not a real solution for smartphone addicts who won't pay attention to where they are going.

"By presenting this satirical solution, I hope people would recognize the severity of their gadget addiction and look back at themselves," he said.