

BANGLADESH UPDATE



261
New cases in 24hrs



15,76,827
Total cases



27,986
Deaths



15,41,661
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



5,246,241
Deaths



264,072,624
Total cases

How India remembers the great statesman

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

It was an afternoon in February 1972, only two months after the birth of Bangladesh through a nine-month war against Pakistan.

The Indian armed forces that joined the millions of freedom fighters in liberating the country, were still in Bangladesh. Some of them were on patrol duty on Dhanmondi 32, the residence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in the capital.

Having returned from office for lunch, Bangabandhu saw the Indian soldiers outside the house. He went up to them and asked if they had lunch.

"Seeing their faces, he understood that they probably had not. He asked them to have lunch with him at his own house," according to a document of the Indian High Commission in Dhaka.

The Indian soldiers, stunned to see no less a person than the prime minister of Bangladesh himself, politely said they would eat when they went back to their unit.

Not accepting no for an answer, Bangabandhu, who

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2



PHOTO: INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION

Govt shelves plan

FROM PAGE 1

colleges took place on September 12 after 543 days of closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At first candidates of SSC and HSC exams of 2021 and 2022 attended classes every day.

Students of other classes were required to attend in-person classes twice a week.

Meanwhile, HSC and equivalent exams began yesterday amid strict adherence to Covid-19 health guidelines by candidates inside exam centres. But most guardians outside the centres were seen not following the guidelines.

Candidates sitting for the exam in Government Shaheed Suhrawardy College, Siddheswari Girls' College and other centres had to enter the centre after going through crowds as guardians gathered in front of the exam centres, ignoring instructions of maintaining at least three feet's distance from each other.

Dipu Moni said health guidelines were maintained inside the centres and that in many places, guardians were crowding outside. She urged all to maintain the Covid-19 health

guidelines.

The HSC and its equivalent exams started yesterday after a break of a year due to the pandemic. The exams for 2020 did not take place last year, with the results prepared based on the candidates' performance in previous public exams.

About 14 lakh students are taking part in this year's tests. Of them, 7.3 lakh are boys and 6.7 lakh are girls. About 11.4 lakh students are from the nine general education boards, 1.13 lakh under the madrasa education board and 1.48 lakh under the technical education board.

Meanwhile, at least 150 students of Biam College in Rangpur, under technical education board, sat for their HSC examinations with special permissions as they had not received their admit cards.

The Rangpur deputy commissioner's office made the special arrangement following the students' threat of agitation after they failed to get their cards till Wednesday afternoon, reported our Rangpur district correspondent.

Alesha Mart

FROM PAGE 1

"And those influential people are now harassing my staff," he said.

He also said they set a policy to refund those owed below Tk 1 lakh by them.

"We still have around 7,000 pending orders worth Tk 200 crore. Of them, around 3,900 are small. We are prioritising on refunding them," he said.

Manjurul also said they had already refunded about Tk 90 crore in the past several weeks and were working to refund Tk 200 crore to customers.

Alesha Mart, a subsidiary of Alesha Holdings Limited, was launched on 1 January this year to get a slice of the rapidly expanding online market by promising buyers faster delivery, quality products and hefty discounts with the slogan 'Click, Relax, Enjoy'.

But the buyers' satisfaction appeared to fade within six months of its operation. Many started complaining about delays in delivery despite making advance payments.

A customer said he made advance payment of over Tk 350,000 to Alesha Mart for three motorcycles in June, but he neither got the delivery nor the refund. Like him, many customers lodged complaints against the platform to the Directorate of

National Consumer Rights Protection for not getting products or refunds.

Alesha Mart is yet another platform which takes advance payments pledging hefty discounts and now limping to deliver products or refunds.

E-commerce platforms with Evaly model mushroomed since the middle of last year when the first lockdown for Covid-19 was lifted and they were taking advance payments with luring customers as much as 70 to 80 per cent discounts.

Like Evaly, Alesha Mart was the title sponsor for a few series of the Bangladesh Cricket Board.

Coming to a Facebook live yesterday, Sikder of the platform said all the customers would get their money back by January 30.

He urged the government to ensure security of Alesha Mart's staff.

On July 18, he said in a press conference that Alesha Mart gave a subsidy of Tk 350 crore in six months since its inception and made a profit of Tk 140 crore by selling products.

AHM Shafiquzzaman, chief of Digital Commerce Cell of the commerce ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday that Alesha Mart was making some refunds, but they want security since some people have beaten their staff member.

Now prime accused killed

FROM PAGE 1

in the city's Shingraish Beribadh area on November 30.

Seven people have so far been arrested in this case, said police.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team yesterday raided Beribadh area near Gumti river around 12:15am to recover illegal arms.

"Sensing police presence, miscreants opened fire around 1:15am. In retaliation, police fired back at the miscreants," said Porimol Das, sub-inspector of the Detective Branch of police in Cumilla.

"At one stage, the miscreants, except one, fled the scene. Police found him with bullet wounds and a pistol in his hand. Locals identified him as Shah Alam. He was rushed to Cumilla Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead."

Police recovered a firearm, several bullet shells and cartridges, said SI

Porimol, adding that two police officials were also injured in the incident.

Around 3:20am, the body was buried at the city's Tikkarchar graveyard in the presence of police. None of his family members were present.

The process of lodging a case was underway as of the filing the report around 9:30pm yesterday, said police.

The correspondent yesterday visited Shah Alam's residence, where he used to live with his mother Parul Begum, wife Ria Akter and a 13-month-old son. But no one was in the house.

Neighbours said Shah Alam and his family members have been in hiding since the councillor's murder.

Some locals said Shah Alam's mother Parul came to the house yesterday morning hearing the news of her son's death, but she left within moments.

Contacted over phone, Shah Alam's wife Ria Akter declined to make any comments.

13 sentenced to death

FROM PAGE 1

Mokdes, Mohammad Toton and Mohammad Saiful. They were also fined Tk 10,000 each.

In the early hours of the Shab-e-Barat on July 18, 2011, a mob killed the six youths near Aminbazar bridge and took their bodies to Keblarchar, more than half a kilometre off, on the instructions of police. They then called the villagers and said they caught robbers.

The mob started bludgeoning the six, without knowing the ill-fated youths had already gone beyond all pain and this was how the murder became known as an incident of mob beating.

Of the six, Towhidur Rahman Palash, Kamruzzaman Kanto and Ibrahim Khalil were students of Government Bangla College in Mirpur, Shams Rahim Shamam of Maple Leaf International School, Tipu Sultan of Teigaon College and Sitaf Jabi Munif of Bangladesh University of Business and Technology.

Only Al Amin survived the brutal attack, but he and the six other victims were accused in a robbery case filed by local trader Abdul Malek.

Later, Al Amin was cleared of the charges after police found that the victims were not robbers.

Following the development, Anowar Hossain, sub-inspector of Savar Police Station, filed a murder case against Malek and several others in connection with the incident.

During the investigation, 14 accused, including Malek, confessed to different magistrates about their involvement in the killings.

A judicial probe body submitted

its report on September 8, 2011 saying that they had found negligence by police in protecting the students, who had gone to Bardeshi village from the capital's Darussalam.

Eight policemen were suspended after the filing of the judicial probe report.

On January 7 of 2013, Investigation Officer Sharif Uddin Ahmed, an additional superintendent of police at Rab, pressed charges against 60 people in the case, excluding eight suspended cops.

The court on July 8 that year framed charges against the 60 accused.

REACTIONS

Speaking to reporters on the court premises, the family members of the victims yesterday expressed satisfaction over the judgement and urged the authorities concerned to execute it soon.

Abdul Kader Suruj, father of deceased Kamruzzaman, said they were satisfied with the verdict.

However, the relatives of the accused were seen bursting into tears outside the courtroom after the delivery of the judgement. They said they would challenge the verdict at the higher court.

One Taskin Ahmed said, "Twenty of the convicts are our relatives. We have been wiped out. What will I say after returning home?"

Rakib, a relative of the convicts, said: "My two uncles have been convicted, but they were not involved in the incident. They were not in the area on the day of occurrence of the incident. Even then they have been punished."

Going from bad to worse

FROM PAGE 1

Shamsul, also a former director of Buet's Accident Research Institute, told The Daily Star yesterday.

But after the Notre Dame student's death, it was found that a part-time cleaner of city corporation was driving the waste-transporting vehicle, he said.

Road accidents are rising, instead of dropping, due to the negligence and lack of accountability of the agencies concerned, he said.

At least 2,635 people were killed in 2,629 road crashes in 2018, according to police data.

A total of 3,502 people were killed in 3,701 road accidents just in the first eight months of this year.

However, different road safety organisations put the number as being much higher.

WHAT BRTA DATA SAYS
BRTA's 2020-21 annual report shows that a total 47.76 lakh vehicles had been registered with it till June 30 this year.

But BRTA issued a total 37.63 lakh licence to drivers in the same period, indicating that 10.13 lakh vehicles are being operated without licensed drivers.

The actual number of licence holders may be less than the amount of licences issued because many people collect more than one licence -- one for bikes or light vehicles and another for heavy vehicles, a BRTA official said.

Moreover, more than 10 lakh unregistered vehicles, including locally-made Nasiman and Kariman, are plying the country's roads, said people involved in the transport sector.

Following a High Court directive, BRTA in July 2019 said 4.79 lakh vehicles were operating without fitness clearances at the time.

The Daily Star could not learn the current status of the fitness clearances of vehicles, but BRTA's annual report said a total 6.75 lakh vehicles received fitness

certificates in the last fiscal year.

The number was 7.5 lakh in 2019-20 and 7.06 lakh in 2018-19, shows the data.

According to existing rules, motorcycles need not take fitness clearances. Cars, SUVs and minibuses have to take fitness clearances every two years, according to a new BRTA rule enforced from January last year. Earlier, those vehicles had to take fitness clearances annually.

All other vehicles have to go through fitness check-ups annually.

The BRTA official said biennial clearance for cars, SUVs and minibuses played a role in the drop in the number of fitness clearances.

He, however, said more than eight lakh vehicles are eligible to take annual fitness tests but around two lakh vehicles do not take it.

Unfit vehicles and drivers without proper training are considered major reasons behind road crashes.

BRTA data shows the Anabil Paribahan bus (Dhaka Metro-BA 15-0856) that hit Mainuddin had no route permit. Besides, the tenure of its tax token expired last month.

Another Anabil Paribahan (Dhaka Metro BA-15-1736) bus, which came under attack after Mainuddin's death, had no route permit, neither did a bus of Raïda Paribahan (Dhaka Metro-BA-14-9025), which was also attacked, had no route permit.

Route permits are mandatory for all buses, and have to be renewed every three years, under existing rules.

Jewel Dewan, managing director of Anabil Paribahan, admitted that some of their buses had no updated route permit. But they were operating those buses taking "slip" from BRTA.

The Daily Star tried to contact BRTA Deputy Director Md Shahidullah, who is also the member secretary of

the Metro Road Transport Committee which issues road permits in the capital, but he could not be reached.

BRTA in 2019 had found that around 90 percent buses and drivers of Suprohat Paribahan had been operating without necessary clearances.

A committee of BRTA carried out the investigation after a bus of the company killed university student Abrar Ahmed Chowdhury in Dhaka in March 2019, triggering student agitation.

Investigation into the July 29, 2018 accident that left two college students dead found that a race for passengers between three buses led to the accident and none of the three drivers had professional driving licences.

One of the buses of Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan did not even have the route permit, while the route permit and fitness of another expired months ago.

WHAT AUTHORITIES SAY

Road Transport and Highway Division's Secretary Nazrul Islam said BRTA's mobile court and police often check documents but these buses carry out operations "dodging" them.

"It's difficult to prevent them unless owners' association plays their due role," Nazrul told The Daily Star last night.

He said while it's true that many of the drivers of public transport have light licences but operate heavy vehicles, at least almost all drivers have licence.

Asked about the difference between licence-holders and registered vehicles, he said there are more than 30 lakh motorcycles.

"Most bikers outside Dhaka do not have licences. This makes the difference," he said.

Besides, he said, many of the registered vehicles are no longer on the streets, so the difference between licence holders and vehicles on the streets is not as big as it appears in the datashet.

Now father, 7-year-old son killed

FROM PAGE 1

ran them over, killing the two on the spot," said Kamrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Godagari Police Station, adding that they seized the bus, but the driver managed to flee.

In Dhaka, a 50-year-old woman was killed as she was hit by a speedy motorcycle in the evening. She was crossing the street in front of Ramna Park in the capital.

The deceased, Trishna Saha, went to the park for evening walks like every other day. When she came out of the park via gate-1 and tried to cross the street, a speedy bike hit her, said Kalpana Pal, who was with the victim, at that time.

Police seized the bike and detained the motorcyclist, said Ramna Police Station Sub-Inspector Julhas Uddin Bhuiyan.

Trishna was a diabetic patient and used to go to the park for evening walks every day, said Kalpana.

In another incident, Arju Begum, a RMG worker, was injured when a garbage truck having the sticker of Dhaka South City Corporation hit the 60-year-old woman in Mohammadpur after she got down from a bus, said Nazmul Hasan, sub-inspector of Mohammadpur Police Station.

However, both the city corporations of Dhaka were blaming each other for the incident.

In a press statement, Abu Naser, public relations officer of DSCC, claimed that DSCC does not have a vehicle with this number plate (Jashore Ta-1,236) and that if someone drives a vehicle using a DSCC sticker, it does not become a DSCC vehicle.

Dhaka North City Corporation also said it was not their vehicle.

Meanwhile in Faridpur, a bus driver

was killed and nine others were hurt on the Dhaka-Barishal highway at Banglakanda when the driver lost control and the vehicle fell into a roadside ditch.

Such fatal incidents are taking place at a time when students are demonstrating for safe roads in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

Around two weeks ago, the students started protests demanding their half fare at public transport.

In the last several days, two students and an employee of a newspaper were killed by a reckless bus and vehicles of two city corporations in the capital that triggered the protests for safe roads.

Although police allowed students to hold protests on roads for the last few days, they yesterday barred the students from demonstrating in Rampura, after two ministers said some vested quarters were trying to destabilise the country using the students.

"PROTESTS TO CONTINUE" Despite police obstruction, the demonstrators continued their protest yesterday. Police dispersed the students when they tried to gather for holding a human chain in Rampura in the morning.

A scuffle took place between female police personnel and two female students when they tried to gather near Rampura Traffic Police Box around 12 noon.

Shohagi Samia, a student of Khilgaon Model College who led the protest, alleged that protesters came to the Rampura Bridge area for a peaceful protest, but were turned away by police.

One and a half hour later, at least 100 students joined them on Rampura Bridge area and held a human chain and a protest rally there.

"No matter what obstacles we face, even if our lives are in danger, we will continue our protests," said Samia.

On behalf of the students, Samia said they would stage a protest on Rampura Bridge area today from 10:00am to realise their 11-point demand, including justice for two students killed in road accidents recently, safe roads and half fare for students at public transport.

Nurul Amin, additional deputy commissioner (Khilgaon zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told reporters that they permitted students for peaceful protests, but some infiltrators joined them to create chaos in the city.

MINISTERS' REMARKS CONDEMNED

On Wednesday, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader and Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud said the Rampura incident occurred around 10:45pm and it was found live on many Facebook pages, including Nirapad Sarak and Jamaat-backed Basher Kella.

The two ministers asked how they streamed live reaching the spot within 11-12 minutes and whether they were present on the spot before the incident occurred.

The ministers questioned relations between the two pages.

In a statement yesterday, a road safety campaigning group, "Nirapad Sarak Andolan", condemned the ministers' remarks saying that the allegation is baseless.

A Facebook page is spreading lies against them and that they would take legal steps, said the statement.

The road safety campaigning group lodged a complaint with Rampura Police Station last night.

Israel PM calls on US to halt Iran nuclear talks

AFP, Tel Aviv

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett yesterday called for an "immediate cessation" of resumed nuclear talks between Iran and major powers in Vienna, accusing the Islamic republic of "nuclear blackmail".

In a phone call with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Bennett, who has been a consistent opponent of the 2015 agreement the powers have been seeking to revive, called instead for "concrete measures" to be taken against Iran.

He said "Iran was carrying out 'nuclear blackmail' as a negotiation tactic and that this must be met with an immediate cessation of negotiations and by concrete steps taken by the major powers," a statement from his office said.

It said Blinken had updated Bennett on what had been happening in the talks since their resumption on Monday after a five-month hiatus.

The Israeli premier expressed concern about a new report from the UN nuclear watchdog issued during the talks which he said showed Iran had "started the process of enriching uranium to the level of 20% purity with advanced centrifuges at its Fordo underground facility".

A year after then US president Donald Trump pulled out of the nuclear agreement in 2018 and started imposing sweeping sanctions, Iran began a gradual suspension of its undertakings in the deal.

The countermeasures have seen Iran enrich uranium in greater quantities and to higher levels of purity than it had agreed, something Western governments are eager to end as quickly as possible.

Armed group attacks Mexican prison, frees inmates

AFP, Pachuca

An armed group attacked a prison in Mexico Wednesday, injuring two police officers and freeing nine inmates, security officials said.

The early morning assault on a prison in Tula in central Hidalgo state saw intruders break into the facility in vehicles and leave with nine prisoners, said a prison statement.

Local media reported the nine were members of a gang involved in fuel theft, kidnappings and extortion.

A police source, who asked not to be named, said the aim of the raid was to rescue the alleged founder of a criminal group called Pueblos Unidos.

Media reports said the armed band blew up a car elsewhere in the city as a distraction and then used an unspecified heavy vehicle to break down the prison gate.

Mexico has long been hit by a wave of violence linked to organized crime.

According to official figures, more than 300,000 murders have been recorded since December 2006, when the federal government launched a controversial anti-drug operation with the participation of the military.

Stern action

FROM PAGE 1

The Delta variant, which emerged in late 2020 and quickly became the most common variant in India, went on to cause a deadlier second wave of Covid-19 cases in Bangladesh.

INDIAN CASES

Indian health ministry said yesterday that two Covid cases of the Omicron variant have been detected in Karnataka. Both the patients are men aged 66 and 46, reports NDTV.

Of them, 66-year-old is a foreigner with a history of travel to South Africa, the 46-year-old is a health worker in Bengaluru. The first patient left India seven days after his results came back positive.

All people who came in contact with the two men have been traced and are being tested, Health Ministry's Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said, adding that both the cases are mild and there are no severe symptoms so far.

'ON ALERT BUT NOT IN PANIC MODE'

First detected in South Africa on November 25, the Omicron variant has 50 mutations that scientists say may allow it to spread more quickly and cause more breakthrough infections in vaccinated or previously infected people, though neither characteristic has yet been confirmed.

"All are concerned about Omicron. We are also on alert but not in a panic mode. As we know, it spreads very fast but shows mild symptoms. The symptoms are not as severe as in Delta cases," Maleque said, while urging the foreign returnees to act responsibly.

A total of 240 people returned from South Africa to Bangladesh in the last month and they are traceless now as they provided fake addresses and contact numbers.

The number of RT-PCR labs will also be increased at the HSI to increase testing capacities, he added.