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A motorcyclist wedges his vehicle between a road divider and a bus in the middle of traffic on the capital's Topkhana Road. While road accidents are claiming lives every day due to reckless driving, violation of traffic rules continue unabated. The photo was taken yesterday noon.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Bus, launch fares likely to go up

Unvaccinated won't be allowed to man commercial vehicles, vessels

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government yesterday decided that only those vaccinated would be allowed to staff vehicles and vessels.

The sector has to face trouble if the decision is implemented, as the number of those who received the Covid shots is poor, say people involved in the business.

Another decision that buses and launches will have to operate at half capacity might push up the fares again. The owners have already hinted at that.

A Cabinet Division circular, issued yesterday, said the restrictions will be effective from Thursday, but it has empowered the authorities concerned to set the date from when the transport-related restrictions would come into force.

Following the sharp rise in Covid-19 cases, the government yesterday issued a set of restrictions to reduce virus transmission.

The circular said buses, trains, and launches would be operated at half capacity and drivers and assistants of all types of vehicles must have Covid-19 vaccination certificates.

The government in March 2020 and April 2021 imposed restrictions on carrying passengers in buses, trains and launches. At that time, bus and launch fares

were increased by 60 percent on condition that they would carry 50 percent their capacities. But the train fare remained the same.

Osman Ali, general secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Federation, said they have no exact data on how many transport workers have had the vaccines.

However, the number would be around 40 percent, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Osman said they had demanded the government take steps to job the transport workers at bus terminals on a priority basis as they have to deal with people.

But the government did not pay heed to their demands, he said, adding that if the government enforces the decision, the transport sector would face the scarcity of drivers.

Shah Alam, president of Bangladesh Noutjan Sramik Federation, said very few of their 2 lakh workers were vaccinated. Operations of launches would be hampered if the government wanted to implement the decision, he said.

Khondaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said it would be difficult to operate buses with 50 percent passengers without increasing bus fare by 50 to 60 percent.

Badiuzzaman Badal, senior vice president of Bangladesh Inland Waterways (passenger carrier's) Association, said, "We asked the authorities to talk to us before implementing any decisions."

The bus and launch fares were raised 28 percent and 43 percent respectively in November last year after the government increased diesel and kerosene prices by Tk 15 a litre.

Railways Ministry Secretary Humayun Kabir yesterday said they would sit today to decide when

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Star HEALTHLINE

Know your deshi 'superfoods':
THANKUNI LEAVES

STAR HEALTH DESK

Thankuni leaves or *Centella asiatica* is one of the most revered herbal medicines used in traditional home remedies in the subcontinent.

Commonly known as Asiatic pennywort, Indian pennywort, or thick-leaved pennywort, its usage can also be traced in traditional Chinese and Indonesian medicine.

Herbal practitioners claim the medicinal plant can boost brainpower, heal skin issues, and promote liver and kidney health.

Some of the benefits of the plant are:

— Various formulations of the plant (ointment, cream, and gel) can heal wounds.

— It may boost cognitive function, especially memory.

— It may help reduce anxiety and stress.

— Its positive effect on brain function may also make it an effective

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Checkmate by little geniuses

Slum kids with less than 3 months' training defeat FIDE rated players

FAISAL BIN IQBAL and SAKIB SUBHAN

With less than three months' training, Poly Khatun and Mim Akhter, children from the slums of Mirpur, have defeated internationally rated chess players.

The success of Poly and Mim, aged around 12 and 15, would undoubtedly be a source of delight for them, but it is as auspicious for Farhadur Rahman, the coach who armed them with the skills to achieve the feat.

It all started when Agami Education Foundation (AEF) — an NGO promoting basic education for the underprivileged children in Bangladesh — reached out to chess players Farhadur and Sadat Ibna Sultan, to teach the sport to underprivileged school children in the capital's Mirpur and Mohammadpur areas.

National chess coach Abu Sufiyan Shakil advised AEF in the initiative.

Farhadur teaches chess to underprivileged children at Shohag Shopnodhora Patshala

in Mirpur's Doaripara, while Sadat teaches at Switch Tahmina Banu Bidya Niketon in Mohammadpur.

The initial plan was to conduct a two-month course on chess, but Farhadur insisted that the programme go on for at least two years.

Soon, they taught their fathers the game, and they used to play at night during their free time. This practice helped Poly and Mim hone their skills.

"At first, I was asked to conduct classes for two months, but I wanted at least two years," said Farhadur. "My idea was not just to push chess as an extracurricular activity in these schools, but to get professional chess players from them. And fortunately, our efforts paid off, that too in just a few months."

The chess classes began

in October 2021. Most of the students were girls. Poly and Mim were among the first students, and they participated in the championships which started on December 29 and ended January 8.

Mim and Poly's mothers work as domestic help in the capital and their fathers earn money doing odd jobs, Farhadur said.

Eighth-grader Mim beat Sima Khatun, who has 1,152 rating points, while Poly, studying in fifth grade, defeated Sheikh Taposhi Tahura who has 1,194 rating points. Poly also played a draw against Fahmida Afroj, who has 1,102 rating points.

"Mim will get her rating next month, and we have entered Poly in another tournament, after which she should receive her rating too," Farhadur said.

The International Chess Federation (FIDE) provides rating to players based on the rated players they compete with and defeat.

Both girls were elated when they realised what they had achieved. Before being

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5 lakh yaba pills seized, Rohingya held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Rab-15 arrested a Rohingya for smuggling around five lakh yaba pills into the country in Cox's Bazar on Sunday night.

The arrestee is Sayedul Amin, 24, resident of Balukhali Rohingya Camp. The pills were recovered from Balukhali Pan bridge area, Rab officials said at a press briefing yesterday.

Acting on a tip-off, Rab-15 Company Commander Major Sheikh Yusuf Ahman said they were informed about a big consignment coming to Bangladesh through the Myanmar border near Balukhali. They then took position near the bridge.

The team of law enforcers had been following movements of a drug peddling team from 7:30pm. Around three hours later, they noticed the gang moving the contraband on an easy bike.

Sensing Rab's presence, all the smugglers except Sayedul fled, leaving the consignment on the spot.

During primary interrogation, Sayedul confessed to smuggling yaba.

The circular said buses, trains, and launches would operate at half capacity, and drivers and helpers of all vehicles must have Covid vaccination certificates.



Poly Khatun, a student of class five, makes a move against Grandmaster Enamul Hossain Rajib during a chess festival in the capital's Mirpur. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: FARHADUR RAHMAN

OMICRON SURGE

Britain puts pvt health firms on high alert

India begins booster campaign as Covid cases soar

AGENCIES

Britain yesterday put the biggest private health companies on high alert to deliver crucial treatments should Omicron overwhelm National Health Service hospitals in England.

The United Kingdom's death toll from the Covid-19 pandemic stands at 150,154, the world's seventh worst official Covid toll after the United States, Brazil, India, Russia, Mexico and Peru.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has bet on refraining from lockdowns to deal with the Omicron variant which in recent weeks has swept across the United Kingdom, albeit with death rates significantly lower than previous waves.

In a sign of just how stretched the

National Health Service could become, Health Secretary Sajid Javid ordered England's NHS to strike a 3-month deal with private health companies to allow patients to get treatments such as cancer surgery outside.

"Millions of patients have already got their tests and treatment quicker thanks to our existing deal with independent providers," said David Sloman, NHS England chief operating officer and Covid incident director.

"It also places independent health providers on standby to provide further help should hospitals face unsustainable levels of hospitalisations or staff absences," Sloman said.

The coronavirus has killed at least

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Hyginex Instant hand sanitizer

BEACON Pharmaceuticals Limited