

# Govt to allow formal edn for Rohingya kids

Rights activists, UN hail the move

AFP, Dhaka

Rohingya children living in refugee camps will be allowed to receive a formal education after a change of heart by government in a move welcomed by right activists and UN.

Nearly one million Rohingya, including more than half a million children, live in the squalid and crowded camps near the southeastern border with Myanmar, where many had fled from in 2017 after a brutal military crackdown.

The children were previously barred from studying the curriculums used in Bangladesh and Myanmar, and instead received primary education in temporary learning centres set up by the UN children's agency UNICEF.

"We don't want a lost generation of Rohingya. We want them to have education. They will follow Myanmar curricula," Foreign Minister AK Abdul

Momen told AFP yesterday.

The decision came after a meeting of a national taskforce set up by the government.

Local media reported that a pilot programme involving more than 10,000 students would be launched soon, with UNICEF and Dhaka jointly designing the curriculum.

The refugee children will be schooled in Myanmar history and culture up to age 14, and will also receive skills training so they can take up jobs back in Myanmar when they return home, the foreign ministry said.

"I can't express my joy with words ... generations of Rohingya hardly had any education in their homeland in Myanmar as they were discriminated there and were robbed of their citizenship," Rohingya youth leader and human rights activist Rafique bin

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Aided by locals, firefighters douse a fire that broke out at a building on M Saifur Rahman Road in Moulvibazar town yesterday. Five of a family, including a three-year-old girl, were killed in the incident.

PHOTO: STAR

# 11 killed in road crashes

3 youths among them; train hit their motorbike at unmanned level crossing in Gopalganj

STAR REPORT

At least 11 people were killed and 14 others were injured in separate road accidents in six districts yesterday.

In Gopalganj, three youths died after a train hit a motorbike at an unmanned level crossing in Kashiani upazila yesterday afternoon.

The deceased were identified as Yeasin Sharif, 18, Sohan Talukder, 23, and Abu Raihan, 17. All three were residents of the upazila.

Azizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kashiani Police Station, said the accident happened in Bishwanathpur area around 2:30pm when a Rajbari-bound train from Kashiani hit their motorcycle.

One of them died on the spot while the others were declared dead after they were rushed to the local health complex, he said.

Almost two-thirds of the level crossings under Bangladesh Railway have no designated gatemen, resulting in soaring number of fatalities.

In Moulvibazar, two people were killed and four others were injured in a head-on collision between a pick-up van and a CNG-run auto-rickshaw at Baurbagh area in Sadar upazila

yesterday morning.

The deceased were identified as Muzahidur Rahman, 34, and Al Amin, 25.

The accident took place when a Sherpur-bound pick-up van collided with the auto-rickshaw coming from the opposite direction at around 7:00am, leaving Muzahidur dead on the spot and five others injured, said Md Shahin Ahmed, an official at Moulvibazar Fire Service.

The injured were taken to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital, where Al Amin succumbed to his injuries, the fire official added.

In Habiganj, two people were killed after a truck ran over a CNG-run autorickshaw on Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Baganbari area under Bahubol upazila early yesterday.

The deceased are Abdur Rakib, 35, and Akhter Miah, 45, said KM Moniruzzaman Chowdhury, OC of Shaistaganj Highway Police Station.

In Chattogram, two people, including a woman, were killed and more than 10 were injured after a passenger bus fell off into a roadside ditch in Raozan upazila yesterday morning.

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# No answers



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Their father Taslim Hossain, a small businessman in Badda, sometimes visits the children but not at their aunt's house. He is an infrequent presence in their lives.

After the incident, he took away Mahir once, saying the boy would now be living with him. Taslima's relatives brought him back.

Joynab has now enrolled Tuba into nursery at Shishu Mela, a nearby kindergarten school. Tuba started attending school on January 19.

On July 20 last year, Taslima went to Badda Uttar-Purba Primary School to inquire about the admission process in hopes of getting Tuba admitted there. The mob apparently suspected her of being a child kidnapper.

Videos taken on mobile phones and CCTV footage, which went viral, showed some young people kicking, striking, and trampling the 40-year old woman, amid a gathering of several hundred people, most of whom played the part of silent spectators.

The killing, which triggered huge outrage in the country, took place at a time when incidents of mob attacks on people labelling them "child kidnappers" suddenly saw a rise, following rumours about the Padma bridge authorities needing human sacrifices at the construction site.

At least eight people were killed while a couple of dozen others were injured in mob beatings at different places across the country in July last year.

According to rights body Ain o Salish Kendra, 65 people were killed in mob beatings last year -- with the highest number of victims, 25, reported in Chattogram division, followed by 22 in Dhaka division.

After Taslima's death, Titu filed a case with Badda Police Station against 400 to 500 unknown people.

Titu said he has already left his job as he frequently has to appear in court and his absence may help the arrestees get bail.

But police are yet to complete the probe and submit a charge sheet. After the January 22 deadline passed, February 20 was set as the new deadline to submit the probe report.

Around a month and a half ago, the charge of investigation was handed over to the Detective Branch from Badda police who had earlier arrested 14 people in connection with the killing.

Contacted, DB Senior Assistant Commissioner Nazmul Hasan Firoz, the supervising officer of the case, said they have identified at least three others who took part in the mob beating. They are trying to collect their detailed particulars in order to arrest them, he said.

The DB officer also said since the case is a sensitive one and stirred huge outcry across the country, they were sincerely investigating it in order to submit a flawless probe report.

He further said they were investigating whether there were any other reasons behind the murder and if there was any negligence on the part of the school authorities.

"We hope we will be able to submit the charge sheet in the soonest possible time," he told The Daily Star on January 23.

On August 18 last year, Taslima's sister Nazmun Nahar Nazma and Titu also filed a writ petition with the High Court seeking its directive on authorities concerned of the government to give Tk 1 crore in compensation to the victim's family.

The writ is pending for final hearing, Titu said.

"We demand quick completion of the investigation for the sake of justice," he said.

# Mega projects may suffer

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the authorities have locked down Wuhan city, the epicentre of the outbreak, and several other cities for two weeks. There are now strict transport restrictions in and out of those areas.

In Bangladesh, the government have directed the authorities concerned to screen anyone coming from China. In the last nine days, around 3,000 people were screened at the capital's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport after they arrived from China.

No coronavirus case has been detected in Bangladesh.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Dewan Abdul Kader, an executive engineer of the Padma Bridge Project, said about 1,100 Chinese nationals work at the Padma Bridge and related projects and at least 250 of them were on leave.

He said they asked the Chinese nationals not to go back to their workplace within two weeks from January 22.

Those in Bangladesh were asked not to visit China for now, he said. "We have made the decision taking the current situation into consideration."

Golam Fakhruddin Ahmed Chowdhury, project director of the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project, said almost half of the Chinese officials, engineers and workers involved in the project went on leave.

"We are discussing the [coronavirus] issue, but haven't made any decision," he said.

Replying to a query, he said, "The project may be hampered a little [if the situation does not improve]."

Another official said some 800 Chinese nationals work are employed under the project.

The authorities of Bangladesh China Power Company Limited, which is constructing the 1320MW Payra Thermal Power Plant in Patuakhali, has extended the leave of several hundred Chinese employees by a week.

"The authorities may extend the leave further if the situation does not improve," Shahid Ullah Bhuyan, manager (Facility) at the BCPCL, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said around 2200 Chinese nationals, including officials and engineers, work under the project and around 40 percent of them either went

on leave or left the workplace after the completion of a part of the project work.

Many, who are on leave, were supposed to return at the end of this month, but the project authorities extended the leave due to the situation in China, he added.

Shahid feared the leave extension would hamper the project activities.

Asked, Mofizur Rahman, director of another project involving Chinese nationals, said they were awaiting government decision in this regard. "We've asked them to take precautionary measures."

The project is aimed at constructing a single line dual gauge railway track from Dohazari of Chattogram to Cox's Bazar.

He said no employee from China returned to the worksite recently.

An RHD official linked to the Dhaka Bypass Road Project said only two of 50 Chinese nationals working in the project are now in Bangladesh.

"They were supposed to return later this month or early next month. But in this situation, I think their return may be delayed," he told this newspaper.

# EU wants Myanmar to follow ICJ order

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crimes committed against the Rohingyas during a military campaign since August 2017, when some 750,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh. UN's Independent Fact-Finding Mission said the crackdown had genocidal intent, while the UN described it as "a classic example of ethnic cleansing".

The ICJ decision came in response to a case filed by The Gambia in November, accusing Myanmar of crimes under the UN Genocide Convention.

"The EU welcomes these important first steps towards acknowledging the severity and scale of the violence that occurred, the gross violations of human rights and the disproportionate use of force by Myanmar's military and security forces.

"We hope that Myanmar will use these opportunities to make further progress on its democratic transition

towards a society where the rights of everyone are fully recognised and protected."

The EU has consistently stressed the importance of accountability for the crimes committed in 2016-2017 in Myanmar's Rakhine State, said the statement.

The EU also recalled that on 20 January, the Commission of Enquiry established under the authority of the President of Myanmar concluded that war crimes, serious human rights violations and disproportionate use of force took place during the security operations conducted by Myanmar's military and security forces between August 25 and September 5 2017.

The EU said it also welcomes and shares the expression of sympathy for all victims by the President of Myanmar. "This now needs to be followed up

with concrete actions."

As recommended by Myanmar's own Commission of Enquiry, there must now be adequate follow-up investigations, in line with international standards, the EU said.

Credible action must be taken to bring to justice those responsible for these serious violations, especially by Myanmar's security forces, it said.

"We also welcome the recommendations for institutional reforms within Myanmar's defense forces to prevent the recurrence of human rights violations."

The EU said it stands ready to support the Myanmar government in any efforts to address the root causes of the multifaceted conflict in Rakhine State, to implement in a comprehensive manner the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission and to achieve peace within Myanmar's borders.

# Big test for EC

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takes a lot of time to print. All these cause sudden closure of the voting."

EC insiders said the VVPAT was not included in the EVMs defying the advice of Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, who led the technical committee formed by the commission.

Asked, Prof Jamilur said, "Meeting minutes were never circulated and conveyed to the chairman of the committee, which is I."

Election Commissioner Brig Gen Shahadat refused to comment regarding the matter.

**EVM IN ELECTION**

The EC first used EVMs in the Cumilla City Corporation polls in 2012. In the 2015 Rajshahi City Corporation election some machines had stopped working on election day, prompting the EC not to use them further. Instead, the EC took up an around Tk 4,000 crore project to buy new EVMs.

In the December 30, 2018 parliamentary polls, the EC used EVMs in six constituencies, including Dhaka-6.

During the commission's dialogues ahead of the general election, 35 of the 40 registered parties, including the BNP and its allies, opposed the idea of EVM use.

The rest five -- the ruling Awami League, its allies Workers Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal faction led by Hasanul Haq Inu and Bangladesheser Sanyabadi Dal (M-L) and Zaker Party -- supported EVM use.

After the December 2018 general polls, new EVMs were used in some polling stations in different city corporation elections, by polls, and upazila polls.

**CONCERNS**

The BNP has all along been opposing the commission's move alleging that the system enables the government to engineer elections.

"The EVM is nothing but a silent, automated and directed method for vote stealing," BNP standing committee

member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said.

"They took power through the voter-less and candidate-less polls in 2014 and by stuffing ballot boxes the night before election day in 2018. It was part of a conspiracy to snatch the voting rights of people.

"The EVM is a new system to snatch the voting rights of people," he said. He criticised the EC for not having paper trail system.

CPB Dhaka North City Corporation mayor candidate Sajedul Haq Rubel said, "Voters fear that EVMs will facilitate digital rigging."

An EVM consists of two connected units, a control unit and a ballot unit. The BNP leaders raised questions about the security of the ballot unit.

A voter needs to use his/her fingerprint for verification at the control unit. Once verified, the ballot unit opens but anyone can then cast the vote intimidating the voter, they said.

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury said, "If a booth is forcefully captured, it is not the fault of machines." Law enforcers will be able to keep the law and order under control.

Transparency International Bangladesh Trustee Hafizuddin Khan, Election experts like Prof Tofail Ahmed and Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar, all expressed concern over the EC's hurried decision to use EVMs in all polling centres of the city polls.

Tofail pointed out that 8 to 10 countries, including India, Brazil, the Philippines, and Mexico, are using EVMs. "Brazil and India went through a rigorous trial-and-error process and had modifications done to the machines to meet their needs," he said.

Over the last few years, countries like Germany, the Netherlands and Ireland had stopped using EVMs, he added.

"Why did the commission suddenly decide to spend nearly Tk 4,000 crore to buy EVMs when there was no budgetary

allocation for such purchase and when at least 12 registered political parties, including the BNP, opposed their use?" Badiul said.

Tofail and Badiul also questioned the election officer's power to override the EVMs control units in case the machines failed to verify the identity of a voter with the fingerprint.

EC Senior Secretary MD Alamgir said election officers will be able to override the EVM for only one percent of the voters. "There is no scope of irregularities."

**PUBLICITY OF EVM**

Tofail and Hafizuddin came down heavily on the EC for not conducting enough publicity programmes to educate voters about how to use EVMs.

Several voters told The Daily Star that they had no idea how to cast their votes via the EVMs and that they were unsure if their votes would be valid.

Brig Gen Shahadat said they held EVM exhibitions in all polling centres yesterday and would hold a mock voting tomorrow in all centres.

"We are also airing TV commercials, running ads in newspapers, holding awareness programme at schools to make the voters aware," he said.

The EC has readied 35,000 EVMs. One machine will be used in each of the 14,600 polling booths and another one will be on standby.

There will be two army technicians in each of the 2,468 polling centres on election day.

He said there was nothing to worry about the use of EVMs in these polls. The elections would be smooth and all would be able to cast votes.

"There is no scope for silent vote rigging. We had used the EVMs in the parliamentary, local government, and city corporation elections. Voters or candidates did not raise such allegations," Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda said on January 6.

# Fire kills 5

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sent those to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsies.

The dead are Subash Roy, 65, owner of the footwear outlet; his daughter Priya Roy, 19; his sister-in-law Dipti Roy, 48; his brother-in-law's wife Dipa Roy, 35; and Dipa's daughter Boishakhi Roy, 3.

# A top-class

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Corporation (DSCC). For issuance of birth and death certificates and trade licences, he promised to introduce a one-stop service for prompt delivery.

He is also considering whether to launch round-the-clock hotline services at the DSCC offices for people to lodge complaints that would be addressed promptly.

He will launch a set of 100-day priority programmes to resolve the pressing public issues.

Holding taxes will be fixed through discussions with the city dwellers, he said.

By coordinating with Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority and other utility service providers, the city corporation will be able to provide safe water and improved sewerage and drainage to the residents, he said.

Son of former mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Ishraq said he would establish community centres and modern gymnasiums in each ward.

The gymnasiums and parks will have primary health check-up centres. Besides, there will be breastfeeding corners at every DSCC office and day-care centres in every ward.

He wants to install escalators at footbridges and introduce bus services for freedom fighters, elderly, physically challenged and underprivileged people.

There will be skywalks in different areas, he added.

The corporation will give special attention to protect people from vector-borne diseases like dengue and chikungunya.

Markets of perishable goods will be set up at entrances of the city.

To combat air pollution, he said effective measures, including mist blowers, will be introduced.

The official activities will be conducted through softwares to get rid of bureaucratic tangles, he said.

There will be designated parking lots for cars and separate lanes on the streets for two-wheelers, he said.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, standing committee members Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, Mirza Abbas, Prof Emajuddin Ahmed, Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Dr Zafarullah Chowdhury and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President ASM Abdur Rob, were present at the press conference.

# Not more than

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to 6 percent this month from the previous 8-9 percent, a move that has prompted a flurry of savers to withdraw their funds. The savers are looking to park the funds with banks that are yet to bring down their interest rate.

As per the ABB decision, banks will not follow the six percent interest rate for deposit pension schemes (DPS), where savers park a specific amount of money every month and get a lump sum after a certain period.

To facilitate banks to charge 9 percent for loans from April, the finance ministry on January 20 instructed the autonomous, semi-autonomous and government companies to keep 50 percent of their surplus funds at 6 percent interest rate with private lenders.

The remaining half of their deposits will go to state banks, which can offer no more than 6 percent interest.

The private banks would get government funds in line with their paid-up capital.