



Romantics throng flower shops in Barishal yesterday to score their haul of roses and other flowers, ahead of the Valentine's day and Pahela Falgun set to be celebrated today. This photo was taken from the city's Sadar Road.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Amend University

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unwilling to adopt the uniform admission system.
MP Harun said the public universities are not being run fully following the 1973 ordinance, while most universities have no student union.

"But the university authorities talk about the ordinance when it comes to student admission and teachers' appointment. That's why I think this ordinance should be amended to make it time-befitting," he said.

Harun said the lakhs of students and their guardians have to go through serious sufferings during admission tests at different universities. "So, uniform admission test must be introduced from this year."

Earlier on January 23, the UGC announced that it would go for uniform admission test for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Bangladesh Bishwabidyalaya Parishad, an association of vice chancellors of public universities, decided at a meeting on Tuesday that all public universities would have a uniform admission test this year. However, VCs of DU, Buet, and JU did not attend the meeting.

For higher education, public universities remain students' top choice. But the number of seats is much smaller than the number of students seeking admission.

There are 39 public universities, which enroll some 65,000 students every year through separate admission tests. Last year, some 9.88 lakh students passed the HSC and its equivalent examinations under the 10 education boards.

Limit trans-fat use

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He also assured the government will try to execute the nine-point demand within a short time, as it is in the interest of public health.

"In order to regulate trans fat, we will also reform and update age-old acts if necessary," he added.

CAB President Ghulam Rahman said World Health Organisation (WHO), considering public health issues, recommended all countries to achieve the target of limiting trans fat use at two percent by 2023.

"Bangladesh government needs to give more focus on the topic, and collaborate with NGOs and consumer rights activists to meet the target," he said.

NHFB Founder and President Prof Brig (ret'd) Abdul Malik said trans fat in foods must be eliminated in order to reduce the prevalence of non-communicable diseases -- such as stroke, heart diseases and cancers -- in the country.

Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) Director General Muazzem Hossain, GHAI Country Coordinator Muhammad Ruhul Quddus, CAB General Secretary Humayun Kabir Bhuiyan and PROGGA Executive Director ABM Zubair also spoke at the programme, among others.

M Lutfullahil Majid no more

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former home secretary M Lutfullahil Majid passed away early yesterday, at the age of 80. He breathed his last at 5am at United Hospital, says a press release.

A career bureaucrat, Majid was also a CSP officer and ERD secretary. He left behind his wife, a son, daughter and a host of relatives and well-wishers to mourn his death.

His namaz-e-janaza was held at Gulshan Azad Mosque after Zohr prayers. He was laid to rest at Kalshi graveyard in Mirpur. All are requested to pray for the salvation of Majid's departed soul.



32 gold bars recovered at Dhaka airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Airport Armed Police Battalion (AAPBn) yesterday arrested a cleaning staffer with 32 gold bars weighing 3.7kgs and valued at Tk 1.85 crore, at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

Jonathon Barikder (34) was held from the Concourse Hall around 9:20am, said Alamgir Hossain, additional superintendent of the force.

"In primary investigation, Barikder said a co-worker gave him the bars and asked him to hand it over to duty in-charge Atique, for Tk 20,000," he said.

Don't deport

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Deporting them means the fate of their families in Bangladesh or Rakhine will only worse," he told The Daily Star by phone from Germany.

There are over a million Rohingya in Bangladesh, including about 7.5 lakh who fled a brutal military crackdown against them since August 2017. Thousands were killed, women raped and their houses burnt to ashes.

The Gambia, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Conference, filed a genocide case with the International Court of Justice -- the UN's highest court -- against Myanmar in December last year. The court ordered in January this year to stop genocidal acts in Myanmar's Rakhine State.

Nay San Lwin said Rohingyas are the victims of genocide and that the Saudi government should not do anything that can worsen the state of the Rohingyas.

A mistaken first day

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writers who talk about their new books, and the book-unveiling stage.

MH Khan Munna, a student of economics at Dhaka University, was seen with five friends in bright panjabis at Sangram Corner. "We know it's not Pahela Falgun, but we wanted to celebrate anyway as tomorrow [today] might be too hectic," he said.

Bangla Academy's Research, Compilation, Dictionary and Encyclopaedia Department Director Mobarak Hossain said the ministry of public administration had issued a notice in regard to the revised Bangla calendar.

"Many media houses reported the change; people should have noticed that earlier," he added.

Road accidents kill 5

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the spot.

In the second incident, three-year-old Tameem was crushed under the wheels of a battery-run three-wheeler at Nakaihat area yesterday around 2pm. Tameem died on the spot.

In Netrakona, a man was killed in a road crash at Gouripur Khalpar area in Kalmakanda upazila on Wednesday evening, reports our Mymensingh correspondent.

The victim was identified as Md Habibur Rahman Hobi (45), a tailor at local Bottola Bazar.

"Hobi was going home on a bicycle around 2.00pm on Wednesday. When he reached Gouripur Khalpar, a motorbike from the opposite direction crushed him, leaving him critically injured," said Md Mazharul Karim, officer-in-charge of Kalmakanda Police Station. Hearing his screams, locals rescued him and took him to Kalmakanda Upazila Health Complex. Later, as his condition deteriorated, he was referred to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, where he died in the evening.

Deaths continue

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Gowainghat, Jaintipur and Kanaighat upazilas.

Traders dig the earth around 200-250 feet deep, and cut river banks and hillocks, which is posing serious environmental threats to the region.

Eight rights activists from renowned organisations pressed a joint statement on January 22, in which they urged the local administration to take adequate steps to put an end to all this.

A taskforce led by the upazila administration of Companiganj is carrying out regular drives at different illegal extraction areas. The taskforce, consisting of members of Department of Environment, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), police and other agencies, are destroying stone extraction machines, locally known as "boma machine", shallow machines and other equipment.

In recent drives, they also blocked the road to Shah Arefin Tila, filled several pits with water and seized equipment worth crores of taka.

Suman Acharjee, upazila nirbahi officer of Companiganj, said, "After taking charge three months ago, I started strict regular drives to stop illegal extraction. Over the time, the frequency of stone extraction is reducing, and we will continue our drives until it stops completely."

Locals and activists, however, are not too optimistic.

Abdul Karim Kim -- general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon's (Bapa) Sylhet chapter -- said, "There is no sign of illegal stone extraction ending, which is gradually destroying the environment at large. Amid some drives of the taskforce, stone traders are continuing their operation, even at night, when workers are more at risk of death."

"A strong initiative by the government is the only way to stop illegal stone extraction in Sylhet," he said.

Meanwhile, stone traders along with transport workers are regularly protesting at Companiganj's Bholaganj and Gowainghat's Jallong, demanding authorities not interfere in their business.

Kazi Emdadul Islam, deputy commissioner of Sylhet, said, "Necessary steps to stop illegal stone extraction are being taken. Police should promptly arrest those who are responsible for the illegal activities and workers' deaths."

"The protest of transport and stone workers is completely baseless. We have asked them not to go on strikes or any protest," he said.

When asked about the probe body's list, the DC said, "We always raise the issue at our coordination meetings and urge all responsible authorities to work together to put an end to this by following the probe report's recommendations."

It is worth noting that authorities on

numerous occasions in the past have made promises, given excuses, and assured of stricter action.

In 2017, at least 32 people were killed while extracting stones. DoE had said they were dealing with a huge backlog of cases waiting to be heard at court. The then DC of Sylhet, Md Rahat Anwar, had said stricter action would be taken.

Last year, when the death toll had reached 50, DoE officials and the current DC said they were trying their best, stressing social and political initiatives to end the practice.

It is worth questioning why people are still getting crushed under the earth. Why is this illegal trade so persistent?

Abdul Karim Kim said, "Illegal stone extraction is a business worth hundreds of crores, and many who are responsible for stopping the activities are receiving money for not taking action. The beneficiary list includes local administration, law enforcement agencies, local council representatives to those even higher up the ladder."

"Lawyers and judges, who deliberately help stone extractors in court, also get some money in return," he said.

In reply, DC Emdadul said if authorities receive any specific accusations against influential individuals, they will take action. But officials can do nothing if vague allegations are put forth.

As far as the drives are concerned, Shah Shaheda Akhter, regional coordinator of Bela in Sylhet, said, "It's like The Tom and Jerry Show. Minutes after they conduct a drive, stone extractors resume their operation soon after. As far as we understand, the upazila administration doesn't have the ability to stop this anyway."

"The stand of police in these areas is questionable, and DoE doesn't seem too interested. If all agencies responsible remain silent, who will stop all this?" she said. "The situation will remain the same unless the government intervenes."

And when it comes to specific accusations, seeking anonymity, some residents of Companiganj claim that the upazila chairperson Shamim Ahmed is the key person behind this industry. Shamim, however, denied any involvement.

"I don't own any stone pit anywhere. Those who allege my involvement are basically my political opponents and their allegations are false," he said.

Recently, authorities seem to have ramped up their action against this illegal trade.

The HC on Monday gave a verdict which prohibited all forms of stone extraction at Shah Arefin Tila. Authorities conducted a drive at the site and ousted workers who were residing there unauthorised.

But the reality is still bleak. To regulate stone extraction, "The Mines and Minerals Rules 2012" was gazetted but to this day, all sections under the rules are being violated at all stone extraction sites.

470 to return home

FROM PAGE 3

Lebanon's mismanaged economy has been stagnant for nearly a decade. The crisis has deepened in recent months with an acute dollar shortage leading banks to restrict foreign currency withdrawals in the heavily "dollarised economy", reports Al Jazeera.

Scores of businesses have closed down and thousands of employees have been laid off or had their working hours and wages slashed. Meanwhile, prices of everyday goods have gone up, according to media reports.

Last year, the World Bank estimated that up to half of Lebanon's population could fall into poverty, up from 30 percent in 2018. "Unemployment, especially among youth, is already high and could further rise sharply," it cautioned.

Lebanon is also reeling from a political crisis. Thousands have been taking to the streets for over three months demanding a productive economy, an end to corruption and the ouster of sectarian leaders who have ruled the country since its civil war ended in 1990.

Rana Ahmed, a migrant worker from Brahmanbaria's Nabinagar upazila, applied under the special programme at the beginning of this month and have been

waiting for his repatriation.

Rana said he used to earn about US\$ 700 per month as a welder at a workshop in the city of Nahr Ibrahim. He lost that job in October last year after the workshop was shut down.

Now Rana, who needs to support his wife and two daughters back home, has to wait anxiously every day to be hired on a daily basis. This way he can work five days a month at best, Rana said.

"It's difficult to meet my own expenses with the current income. How can I send money home?" he added.

Abdul Kuddus, a Bangladeshi living in Beirut, said many Bangladeshis in the Lebanese capital were passing days without regular jobs for the last few months.

Kuddus, who is involved in a social media-based welfare platform for Bangladeshis in Lebanon, said many Bangladeshis who mostly work as cleaners used to earn about US\$ 400 a month.

With that income, they were able to send about Tk 20,000 every month back home after meeting their monthly expenses, he said.

However, income of such workers have down to half now and sending even Tk 10,000 back home is quite difficult for them, he added.

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