

## HC petition says Mahbubey Alam too old to be AG

Hearing on Feb 23

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday set February 23 to hear on a writ petition that challenged the legality of Advocate Mahbubey Alam holding the Office of the Attorney General.

SC lawyer Eunos Ali Akond filed it last month.

The bench of Justice Tariq ul Hakim and Justice Md Iqbal Kabir set the date after Eunos placed the matter before the bench.

As per the petition, Mahbubey Alam was appointed Attorney General under Article 64 (1) of the Constitution, which says the appointee has to be qualified to be an SC judge. The age limit of an SC judge is 67 years and thus Mahbubey Alam cannot hold the office any more, since he has turned 71 this year, the petition said.



With the metro rail construction taking up around 60 percent of the road, maintenance work of fibre optic cables is eating up precious space on a street in Purana Paltan. Not only this, the work is also being done unsafely, with unprotected cables being piled by the side and no safety signs in sight.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## New agreements to boost bilateral ties with Qatar

Says state minister Shahriar Alam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and Qatar are going to sign four to five agreements soon to further boost bilateral relationship between the two countries, State Minister for Foreign Affairs M Shahriar Alam said yesterday.

The countries are working on a “cooperation model” under which Qatar can provide its resources and funds while Bangladesh can utilise its workforce, the state minister told reporters after the first Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) between the two countries held in Dhaka.

“Qatar has a very small population. They cannot manage or look after everything by themselves regarding overseas business,” he said.

If Bangladesh government or a large business group come up with projects in future, then Qatar can invest, he added.

At the FOC, the countries elaborately discussed establishing of a mechanism on how Qatar’s fund can be invested in profitable trades in Bangladesh, said Shahriar, who led the Bangladesh delegation.

“The main issue is to increase trade cooperation,” he added.

Qatar’s per capita income is among the world’s highest while the present Bangladesh government has created an investment-friendly environment in the country, he said.

Qatar Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi headed his country’s delegation at the meeting, which took place for more than two hours at the state guest house Meghna.

Bangladesh arranged a successful trade fair “Made in Bangladesh” in Doha at the beginning of January. Beside Bangladeshi traders, many Qatari entrepreneurs attended the fair, said Shahriar.

He said they are expecting to sign the new agreements in the next three to four months.

One of the agreements will be for “repatriation of sentenced persons”, he said.

If any expatriate Bangladeshi commits crime and subsequently gets sentenced in Qatar, then the agreement will help bringing the convict back to Bangladesh to serve jail sentence here, he said.

Bangladesh has such agreement with other countries, he added.

Qatar is home to some 3.5 lakh Bangladeshis who are involved in various occupations, Shahriar said.

The two countries have “almost finalised” an agreement for visa-free entry of diplomats and other officials. There will be an agreement on “avoidance of double taxation”, he also said.

The delegates further discussed about cooperation over elections of different international bodies, including that of the United Nations.

How the two countries can enhance high-level visits was also discussed, Shahriar said.

The state minister said the expatriates’ welfare ministry will strongly work with its Qatar counterparts to widen job opportunities for Bangladeshi workers in the Gulf country.

CHILD HEALTHCARE

## Cabinet okays draft law to improve service

BSS, Dhaka

The cabinet yesterday approved in principle, the draft of a law keeping a provision of merging Dhaka Children Hospital and Bangladesh Institute of Child Health, with the aim to provide better treatment facilities to children.

The approval came from a regular weekly meeting of the cabinet with Prime Minister Sheikh in the chair at the Prime Minister’s Office.

Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam made the disclosure at a news briefing at following the meeting.

“Dhaka Children Hospital was established as an autonomous body in 1977. It has no basis in law as it was formed under ‘Dhaka Children Hospital Ordinance, 2008’ by the then caretaker government,” he said.

The draft law has recommended to form a 12-member board of directors to run the hospital as an autonomous body in a proper manner, he added.

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METRO RAIL

## Mock-up on public display soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In order to inform people about the metro rail -- a new mode of public transport in Bangladesh, a mock-up of the coach will be displayed soon.

The display will start at the Metro Rail Exhibition & Information Center in the capital’s Uttara next month.

There, people will be able to learn about the looks of the inside of the train and the ticket-buying process, MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd (DMTCL), told The Daily Star yesterday.

DMTCL, a government-owned company, is implementing the metro rail projects. Mass Rapid Transit (MRT)-6, which is first among six such projects, is the route between Uttara Third Phase and Motijheel.

Siddique said they brought the mock-up coach from Japan on December 26 last year and kept it inside the under-construction exhibition and information center at Uttara’s Diabari.

“Today [Monday], we have unpacked the [mock-up] coach and installed it at the base of the exhibition centre, so that other incomplete work can be done smoothly,” he said.

All work will be completed soon and the mock-up coach will be opened for public late next month, he said.

Besides, they will set up a mechanism there so that people can have first-hand experiences like how to buy tickets at a station, he added.

Construction work of the Tk



A mock-up coach of the metro rail was installed at the Metro Rail Exhibition & Information Center in Uttara yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

22,000-crore MRT Line-6, which began in 2016, has made 40.36 per cent progress as of January, and is expected to be opened to the public on December 16, 2021, coinciding with the golden jubilee of the country’s independence.

Once completed, the rail service, which has 16 stations, will be able to carry 60,000 passengers per hour, reducing travel time from Uttara to Motijheel to at least less than an hour from the current two hours.

More than nine kilometres of the 20.1km long viaduct is now visible

and work is continuing on the remaining ones.

Meanwhile, the government has decided to extend the line -- now under construction from Uttara to Motijheel -- up to Kamalapur Railway Station so that people can avail the rail service directly from the country’s largest railway station.

The topographical survey for it has already been done and now a “social survey” is being conducted. After completing the extension work, the total length of the rail route would be 21.26km with 17 stations.

## Adding a touch of history

SAYED MOHMUD ULLAH



Thousands of book lovers’ footsteps graced Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday, a venue for Amar Ekushey book fair. But this site has witnessed significant historic events, most importantly, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s speech on March 7, 1971.

Aspecialcornerofthefairhighlights the words of Bangabandhu’s speech. Titled “Shangram” corner, this area celebrates the Father of the Nation’s illustrious life and work.

Visitors are learning more about the country’s history and achievements through these exhibits

set up near Mukto Moncho at the Udyan. There is another corner titled “Arjan Chatter,” which lists the achievements of the country starting from 1997.

“Ekushey book fair is generally revered as the biggest festival for books, but these new corners and exhibits really added more value to the fair,” said Tanbir Hasan Shaikat, a member of Dhaka University Central Students’ Union (Ducs).

The festivals at Shangram corner include Bangabandhu’s statement against Ayub Khan’s “basic democracies” on June 25, 1962; formation of Sorbodolijo Chatra Sangram Parishad O Danga Committee on March 11, 1964;

presentation of six-point demand on February 5, 1966; Agartala Conspiracy case of 1968 and so on.

“These initiatives will help the public learn more about the history of our country,” said Shaikat.

Visitors were keenly observing these special corners, while many took photos and selfies as well.

At Arjan Chatter, fair authorities set up a total of 13 festoons including establishment of Payra port at Patuakhali on November 19, 2013; inauguration of Mayor Mohammad Hanif Flyover on October 11, 2013; establishment of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant at Ishwardi on October 2, 2013; verdict of Bangabandhu murder on January 28, 2010 and so on.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS, RASHED SHUMON

Large, bright posters at Sangram and Arjan corners of the book fair have proven to be a great way to learn about the country’s history and achievements, alongside taking a few photos.

OVERVALUING SPORTS EQUIPMENT

## Former civil surgeon embezzled Tk 41 lakh: ACC inquiry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Exaggerating prices of sports equipment several times higher, former Sathkira civil surgeon Dr Towhidur Rahman misappropriated about Tk 41 lakh from public fund, found an ACC inquiry.

The price of a Tk 2,200 football was inflated to Tk 5,000. Similarly, a cricket bat’s value was shown at Tk 15,000, at least three times higher than the actual price, said officials of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

Already facing cases for procurement anomalies, Towhidur bought 20 footballs and 50 cricket bats for a Medical Assistant Training School (MATS) and Institute of Health Technology (IHT) in 2017-18 fiscal.

“Towhidur didn’t wait for approval from DGHS [Directorate General of Health Services] to procure these,” said an inquiry official.

Meanwhile, ACC Director Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya said the commission has already approved filing of two cases in this regard.

The anti-graft watchdog will sue Towhidur Rahman and Benevolent Enterprise owner Shahinur Rahman for misappropriation.

ACC sources said Towhidur sought allocation on December 31, 2017 from the director of DGHS for procuring sports and medical equipment and furniture.

Even before getting allocation, the former civil surgeon floated tender for supply of footballs, cricket bats and balls, gloves, stumps, pads, helmets on February 15, 2018.

He gave work order to Benevolent Enterprise on May 15, 2018. Nine days later, it supplied all the equipment and submitted two separate bills each worth Tk 50 lakh, document shows.

After deducting VAT and income tax, then civil surgeon approved his bills and paid him about Tk 89 lakh.

An expert team comprising Directorate of Sports members visited both MATS and IHT and inspected quality of those items on September 26, 2019.

An ACC official said, “They found that the actual price of the sports equipment supplied to MATS is Tk 23.69 lakh and IHT is Tk 23.88 lakh.” “Both contractor and civil surgeon misappropriated Tk 41.42 lakh,” he added.

ACC deputy assistant directors Ferdous Rahman and Shahidur Rahman investigated the incident, which was supervised by Deputy Director Shamsul Alam.

On September 9 last year, a Sathkira court sent Towhidur to jail in another graft case filed over misappropriating Tk 16.61 crore.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare allocated the money in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 fiscal years for procuring various medical equipment for hospitals and health complexes.

But, the then civil surgeon Towhidur, who retired in February 2019, allegedly embezzled the money by issuing fake documents of procurement. ACC sources said Towhidur is now on bail. The Daily Star could not reach Towhidur and Shahinur for comments.

GENDER-DIVERSE POPULATION

## 98pc face stigma, harassment: report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The gender-diverse population of Bangladesh have been facing a wide range of violence, including sexual assault and rape by members of the mainstream community, forced marriages, abuse from family, denial of inheritance and much more, a study has revealed.

Some 98 percent of the population faces harassment, stigma, and discrimination, while 97 percent of them face police entrapment and harassment in public places, said the study, titled “Political Economy Analysis for Gender Diverse Communities in Bangladesh”.

Bandhu Social Welfare Society, a non-government organisation working for the rights of the sexual minority, organised a programme to disseminate findings of the report at The Daily Star Centre.

The study was conducted among 346 respondents in five districts -- Chattogram, Dhaka/Gazipur, Mymensingh, Narayananj and Rajshahi between January and April last year. Aged between 15-65, they included sex workers, dancers, activists, students, service holders, entrepreneurs and others.

Prof ASM Amanullah from Dhaka University presented the paper, moderated by Md Moshir Rahman, deputy manager of Bandhu.

According to 98 percent of respondents, policymakers and stakeholders are not sensitised about them, their culture and behaviour, the study showed.

Although the third gender was recognised by the government in 2013, they have continued to face extreme discrimination in every aspect of their lives -- from accessing healthcare services, education, safe living spaces, public transports to constitutional rights.

The study also revealed that 82 percent of respondents have no permanent income. A vast majority of them have no permanent jobs or do not get any formal job due to their behaviour, lack of education, and adverse attitude of the society.

Although the third gender has been

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