



Clockwise, from left: Masks on and legs up -- two students of Dhaka Polytechnic Institute replace handshakes with a feet bump, careful not to spread any germs when greeting each other. Meanwhile, amid price hike of masks in many shops following the first confirmed cases of coronavirus in the country, Khukumoni Somaj Kollan Songstha, a charitable organisation, is making masks with fabric, which they distributed for free to passers-by at Farmgate overbridge. Although health authorities say those who aren't ill don't require masks, people are still using them from caution, as evident from passengers of all ages wearing masks at Airport Railway Station yesterday.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS, PALASH KHAN

PM to open country's first expressway to public tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country's first-ever expressway from Dhaka to Faridpur's Bhanga upazila will be opened to public tomorrow, aiming to ensure better connectivity between the capital and southern districts through Padma Bridge.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the 55km four-lane highway, with a service lane on both sides, on the day through video conference from Gono Bhaban, officials said.

However, users will get full benefits of the expressway once construction work of Padma Bridge is completed, which is scheduled to be finished in June, 2021.

After that, those travelling by road from the capital will be able to reach Bhanga, which is a 75km journey, within an hour, officials said.

The project of Roads and Highways Department (RHD) was implemented by Bangladesh Army.

The government took the project to widen the 55km two-lane Dhaka-Bhanga road into four lanes in May

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DIGITAL SECURITY ACT Manabzamin editor among 32 sued for 'defamation'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, editor-in-chief of Bangla daily Manabzamin, and 31 others have been sued under the Digital Security Act, on the charge of "publishing false news and circulating it on social media".

Saifuzzaman Shekhor, a ruling party lawmaker from Magura-1, filed the case with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station on Monday night, said Shujanur Islam, an SI of the police station.

Shekhor alleged that Manabzamin published a report on expelled Jubo Mohila League leader Shamima Nur Papia with false information, without directly mentioning names but implicating several MPs.

When it was shared on social media, the other accused mentioned his name, the case said.

Shujanur, investigation officer of the case, said the lawmaker alleged that the accused published the story and shared it on social media, and thus defamed him to gain ill interests.

"We did not mention names of anyone in our report. So there is no scope of defaming anyone," Matiur Rahman Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

Al Amin, a reporter of the daily who wrote the report, was also accused.

LABOUR MIGRATION

Hold 'dalals' liable for malpractices: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday said the government needs to recognise intermediaries, locally known as "dalal", by bringing changes to laws to hold them accountable for malpractices in the country's labour migration sector.

They said the intermediaries are mostly responsible for irregularities and high migration costs and their presence is rampant at different tiers of the recruitment process, but inadequate government initiatives have left them unaccountable.

Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) in association with Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) organised the discussion on "Review of Migration-Related Policies and Laws: Perspective of Human Rights, Labour Rights and Women Rights" at The Daily Star Centre.

Presenting a research paper, BILS Deputy Director (research) Manirul Islam said the government should review the Overseas Employment and Migration Act-2013, as the law does not recognise intermediaries.

Manirul said the country's other major migration-related legal instruments, including the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act-2012 and Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy-2016 should also be reviewed to ensure "consistency and coherence" among the laws and policies.

Presence of the intermediaries could be seen from rural areas to the offices of recruitment agents in Dhaka, said Israfil Alam, chairman of Bangladesh National Parliamentarians' Caucus on Migration and Development.



Participants at the discussion, held at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

However, they do not have any accountability. They neither exist in law nor do they abide by any code of conduct or policy, he said while chairing the discussion.

Israfil said although they have repeatedly urged recruitment agents to provide intermediaries with identity cards, the agents did not comply with such requests. "The government also failed to hold them accountable."

Migrant workers and their families will not be able to reap benefits as long as middlemen or intermediaries are not held accountable for their activities, he said, adding that migration cost in Bangladesh is among the highest in the world.

Israfil, an Awami League lawmaker, said the government should undertake an initiative promoting the slogan "employers' pay model", in which all migration costs will be borne by foreign employers.

Pointing to the migration sector's contribution to the country's economy, MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam said everybody -- including government and non-government stakeholders working in the sector -- has a common goal, which is to ensure safe and dignified migration.

On the plight of female migrant workers, she said female workers are returning home regularly and telling harrowing stories.

"We have to deal with this more seriously," she said, adding that the government should continuously hold dialogues with receiving countries, to make them follow their own laws and other international legal instruments while dealing with Bangladeshi workers.

Proper implementation of policies and agreements can end sufferings

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KHALEDA ZIA'S RELEASE SC lawyer appeals to president, PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Supreme Court (SC) lawyer yesterday appealed to the president and prime minister to release BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia from jail on humanitarian grounds, ahead of the birth centenary celebrations of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Advocate Eunus Ali Akond sent two applications to President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, requesting them to pardon Khaleda Zia and release her from jail -- saying that Khaleda is gravely ill.

As per the preamble of the constitution and its articles 11, 48 (3) and 49, the president can commute the jail sentence of any convict on advice from the prime minister, Eunus Ali Akond told this newspaper yesterday.

He said he sent the applications to the president and PM by post yesterday for the clemency and release of Khaleda.

The BNP chief landed in jail after being sentenced to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case by a special court in Dhaka on February 8, 2018.

On October 30, 2018, the High Court enhanced her punishment to 10 years in the case after dismissing her appeal.

DHAKA TODAY

CONFERENCE
Women in Politics: Together for Equality
Organiser: Democracy International
Venue: Six Seasons Hotel, Gulshan-2
Time: 11am

Organiser: Samajtantrik Chatra Front, Dhaka University Unit
Venue: Ducus, University of Dhaka
Time: 3:30pm

SESSION
Sister Library: Reading Together, Reading Women
Venue: Goethe-Institut Bangladesh
Time: 5:30pm

FILM SCREENING
Hakan's Journey to Peace
Organiser: Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal
Venue: IEB, Ramna
Time: 4pm

WORKSHOP
On Research and Publication
Organiser: YOUNG
Venue: EMK Center
Time: 3pm

DISCUSSION
On the relevance of Karl Marx in today's world

PHOTO OF THE DAY

SK ENAMUL HAQ



Three young flower sellers girls pose with their tuberose garlands, all smiles for the camera, after this photographer obliged to their request for a picture. The photo was taken recently at Hatirjheel.

MONEY LAUNDERING CID claims it has evidence against Papia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives yesterday claimed to have found "important money laundering evidence" against expelled Jubo Mohila League leader Shamima Nur Papia and are preparing to file a case against her.

"We have already accumulated some evidence and are now completing the paperwork. Once it is finished, we would lodge a money laundering case against Papia," Intiaz Ahmed, deputy inspector general of Criminal Investigation Department (CID), told The Daily Star.

The official, however, refused to disclose details of the evidence they found.

"We first investigated her involvement in money laundering and are now moving for the next action," added the DIG.

Earlier, Rab arrested four people -- including Papia -- from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport and a five-star hotel in Dhaka on February 22.

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Goldsmiths' life expectancy much lower than average

Finds BSMMU study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The average life expectancy of goldsmiths in Bangladesh is 59, in stark contrast with the national life expectancy of 72.3 years, according to a study by the Department of Public Health and Informatics (DPHI) at BSMMU.

Some 45 per cent of them suffer from cardiovascular diseases and 20 per cent suffer from cancer, said the study, titled "Cause of Death in Goldsmith Workers of Bangladesh: Findings from Verbal Autopsy".

The study findings were unveiled yesterday during a workshop at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

Md Khalequzzaman, associate professor of DPHI, along with Mohammad Tanvir Islam of the internal medicine department of BSMMU conducted the study.

Twenty deceased goldsmiths selected as the sample of this research were residents of Mohammadpur, Hazaribagh, Lalbagh and Tanti Bazar areas of Dhaka, Shivalaya upazila of Manikganj and Nagarpur upazila of Tangail.

About 3 lakh people are working as goldsmiths, said the study.

Of the 20, 55 per cent died of cardiovascular diseases, including ischemic heart disease and stroke, the study showed.

The study also found that three out of four (75 per cent) of the sample suffered from two or more non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Some 65 per cent had hypertension, 50 per cent had diabetes, 35 per cent had heart diseases, and 20 per cent had kidney diseases.

It further revealed that 70 per cent of the deceased goldsmiths were regular smokers, and 20 per cent of them consumed smokeless tobacco. Half of them were regular alcohol users.

The researchers recommended awareness programmes

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