







NEWS









US Senate to vote Monday on Barrett nomination to Supreme Court

AFP, Washington

The US Senate will vote on Monday, eight days ahead of the presidential election, to confirm Judge Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, the Senate Majority Leader said Tuesday.

"We'll be voting to confirm justice-to-be Barrett next Monday,"

Republican Senator Mitch McConnell

"I think that will be another signature accomplishment in our effort to put on the courts, the federal courts, men and women who believe in the quaint notion that maybe the job of a judge is to actually follow the law," McConnell said.

Pregnant woman

out of the house and went into hiding

The family of rapist Parvez said the matter would be solved through "arbitration" and asked the victim not to file any case.

Meanwhile, the victim informed the Union Parishad chairman of Chhatarpaiya about the incident on Tuesday morning, but he did not take any step to resolve the matter.

The woman then filed a rape case with Senbagh Police Station on Tuesday

Tarequr Rahman, sub-inspector of the station, said there was one rapist and others filmed the incident.

"We have arrested three of them and are trying to arrest others, including

The victim's husband remained in hiding since the incident, police said. Another woman was raped at knifepoint in the same district early yesterday.

Quoting the victim, police said the 29-year-old woman is a wife of a Saudiexpatriate and a mother of two. She lives with her mother-in-law and children.

While she was sleeping with her children on Tuesday night, one of their neighbours, Mujibul Rahman Sharif,

said at a press conference.

32, entered her room early yesterday. When victim started shouting, the accused showed her a sharp weapon and

threatened to slaughter her children. He then raped the housewife and filmed it. He threatened that he would release the video on social media if she did not have sexual relations with him again.

The victim filed a case against the accused yesterday noon, after which police arrested the accused, said Md Anwarul Islam, OC of Chatkhil Police

Meanwhile in Satkhira, an eightyear-old girl was raped.

Quoting Fingri's victim's family members, police said a 13-year old boy, who the young girl was previously acquainted to, took the girl to a nearby garden and raped her.

The same night, the victim's mother filed a case against the minor boy, who was arrested, said Md Asaduzzaman, OC of Satkhira Sadar Police Station.

Contacted, the hospital's emergency unit doctor Tanvir Ahmed said they have found evidence of rape from the victim's body. Details would be known after completion of the medical tests.

(Our correspondents from Noakhali, Rangamati, Gazipur and Satkhira contributed to the report.)

Puja mandaps, temples

closed after the evening rituals (Sandhyarati) as the festival will be celebrated from today, said Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad and Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee yesterday.

The Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee organised the "Sharodio Durga Puja 2020" view exchange meeting in the capital's Dhakeswari temple yesterday.

The main ritual of the Durga Puja will start from today through Sasthi Puja while the celebration will end on October 26 through Vijava Dashami.

In between, special prayers will be offered tomorrow with prayers

pandemic. Apart from the Bhog Prasad of other Prasad distribution and will be organised this year along with the victory procession on the day of Vijaya

Dashami. Asked about the evening rituals Shailendranath (Sandhyarati), Majumder, president of the Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee, said, "Sandharati" usually starts around 6:00pm and it takes 20 to 25 minutes to complete the ritual.

Visitors won't be allowed to enter the temple or puja mandapa from the beginning of Sandhyarati. Only temple or mandapa related staffs will

remain inside the temple. This year puja will be held in 30,213 mandapas all over the country. In the Dhaka city, number of puja mandaps

is 232, which was 238 last year. In the view exchange meeting, Kishore Ranjan Mandal said different programmes of the Durga Puja will be broadcast live from the Facebook

page of the Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee and Dhakeswari National Temple so that devotees can participate in the related rituals from their home.

different puja mandaps and temples will be live telecasted on different TV channels so that the devotees along with their family members can watch the idols from their homes.

yesterday also issued a 22-point instruction for the devotees and visitors to follow which include not to organise any cultural event or arati competition and to avoid lighting.

The instructions also said all, for recovery from the coronavirus including the temple authorities and the visitors, must wear masks.

Earlier in the last week, Bangladesh Goddess Durga, no khichuri or Puja Udjapan Parishad said there would be no "Kumari Puja", one of the main attractions of Durga Puja.

> Mahishashur, appears to be riding on the back of a lion and accompanied by her children Ganesh, Kartik, Lakshmi and Saraswati with 10 weapons in her 10 hands.

> At the invocation of the devotees, she descends on the earth, stays for the next four days and leaves after slaying all evil forces and blessing the devotees.

> on a specific carrier and chooses another bearer for her departure. Her choice is seen to predict how the following year will fare for the world and its inhabitants.

HC orders PK Halder's

a petition filed by International Leasing and Financial Services Limited (ILFSL)

seeking necessary directive on this issue. Attorney General AM Amin Uddin represented the state while lawyer Mahfuzur Rahman Milon appeared for ILFSL during the court proceedings.

Halder, a former managing director of NRB Global Bank and Reliance Finance Limited, had earlier wanted to return home and repay the embezzled

In August, he wrote to ILFSL -- one of the four NBFIs -- saying he would return home and settle the liabilities with the firms if he was provided with proper

On September 7, ILFSL's counsel Mahfuzur submitted the letter with an application to the HC for its directive in

this regard. The same day, the HC ordered the firm to inform it when Halder would return home for settling his transactions and liabilities with the firm

According to Canadian media reports, Halder is now staying in Toronto. He is the director of P&L Hal Holding Inc, a Canadian corporation.

The three other NBFIs from which Halder allegedly embezzled huge sums are People's Leasing and Financial Services, FAS Finance and Investment, and Bangladesh Industrial Finance

Company. In an investigation, Bangladesh The idols and puja programmes in

Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad

According to Hindu scriptures and the Bangla almanac, Durga Puja is observed in synchronisation with the moon's cycle.

Durga, the slayer of demon

Every year, Goddess Durga arrives

Bank found that Tk 1,596 crore was transferred from ILFSL in violation of

the rules through 48 accounts of various organisations related to the directors and shareholders of the firm, according to BB officials.

Halder came under the spotlight during the anti-casino drives last year. The ACC opened an investigation into the alleged involvement of 43 people, including Halder, in the illegal casino

The government imposed a travel ban on him on October 3 last year. But he managed to flee the country.

The ACC on January 8 this year had filed a case against Halder on charges of illegally amassing wealth worth Tk 275

Following a petition filed by two depositors, the HC on January 21 directed the central bank and all private banks to freeze the accounts of Halder, his five relatives, former Bank Asia managing director Erfanudidn Ahmed and Halder's aide Uzzal Kumar Nondi

for allegedly misappropriating funds. The HC ordered the government to seize the passports of 20 people, including Halder, his wife Susmita Saha

and brother Pritish Kumar Halder. The court also directed the authorities not to allow transfer of any of their movable and immovable properties, including stock, cash and cars, to any persons or entities until the disposal of



A protester stands resolute as a tyre is lit on fire at the capital's Shahbagh intersection during yesterday's demonstrations against rapes and injustice.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Short-staffed BRTA failing to deliver and some 100 commercial vehicles institutional capacity and proper

theoretical training -- which was reduced to one day due to the Covid-19 pandemic -- to be "nonsustainable" and "very inadequate" to ensure safer roads.

Against the backdrop, the country is set to observe National Road Safety Day today. Being observed for the fourth time, this year's theme is "Mujib Borsher Shapat, Sarak Korbo Nirapad" (Promise of the Mujib Year is to make roads safe).

The main discussion programme will be held at BRTA headquarters. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will attend the discussion virtually.

THE PROBLEMS

In its annual performance agreement (APA) for the 2020-21 fiscal year, signed with the Road Transport and Highway Division, BRTA said a lack of manpower is its main problem.

The regulatory body performs its functions through 57 district and five metro offices.

It has 708 employees now against a sanctioned post of 823. In January 2013, BRTA made its biggest recruitment in recent times 149 people, including 50 vehicle inspectors. The country then had around 18.5

lakh registered vehicles. Nearly eight years later, the number has shot up to around 45.64 lakh but the BRTA could only recruit 19 people during that time and only one was a vehicle inspector. Now, 109 vehicle inspectors are struggling to deal with checking the

fitness of all vehicles in the country. In

the last fiscal year, with the help of 86

mechanical assistants they checked the fitness of 7.5 lakh vehicles. The inspectors are always under pressure and the quality of inspections is compromised often due to pressure. Moreover, the shortage of vehicle inspectors causes service seekers to

wait a long time for fitness certificates. BRTA has only one Vehicle Inspection Centre (VIC) at its Mirpur office to check some elements digitally (bus and trucks) are tested there every

Other vehicles have to be checked manually, which experts said could compromise safety as it leaves room for manipulation and irregularities. An automated system can get exact performance data of a vehicle's key safety features like headlights, brakes, and speed capabilities, which is almost impossible to do manually, they said.

"All these factors create an atmosphere where service seekers feel discouraged to come to a BRTA office with their vehicles for fitness clearance. Brokers take advantage of that situation," a BRTA official told this correspondent.

In the APA, BRTA mentioned the establishment of more VICs and their operation as a challenge. It also mentioned the lack of permanent structures, driving tracks, ramps, exam rooms, vehicles for testing aspiring drivers as other challenges.

"We have to hire places and manage classrooms and grounds of educational institutions for free to take these tests," another BRTA official

He said there are 68 driving competency boards, led by an additional district magistrate-level officer, to look after the tests. Due to the huge pressure of licence seekers over the last few years, all four boards in Dhaka (three metro circle offices and another district office) take tests every office day.

"Even after that, licence seekers have to wait for at least six months after submitting an application to possible for all board members to be present regularly. More boards can solve the problem," he said, wishing not to be named.

'WORK AS A REAL REGULATOR' Noted transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque said, "I can say without any doubt that it is not possible to

ensure road safety without ensuring

planning.

"We often talk about road safety, but we don't do what needs to be done," he told The Daily Star on

He said issuance of driving licences, fitness clearances and route permits for vehicles are very important factors in ensuring road safety. performing these 'Without

functions properly, meaning without doing the basic work, giving education to drivers and enforcing the law would not yield benefits," he

About the BRTA's training, he said, 'Such training is not sustainable and inadequate. Providing such training while keeping anomalies in the system would not work."

He emphasised on increasing the institutional capacity of BRTA by recruiting more professional manpower and introducing more technology to ensure quality in the process of issuance of licences, fitness and route permits.

Referring to a government move to outsource fitness clearances, he said the government can encourage the private sector and BRTA can work as a

"real regulator". WHAT THE AUTHORITIES SAY

BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder said they, through the Road Transport and Highways Division, have sent a proposal of 2,282 posts last year to the public administration ministry and that there will be a meeting over the issue next month.

"We hope our manpower-related problems will be solved take part in a test. Besides, it is not organogram is approved," he told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

Asked about the lack of infrastructure, he said works were underway for two separate projects under which a BRTA office/training centre with VIC facilities would be constructed in five major districts.

"We will implement the plan in all districts gradually," he added.

No final exams for class 6-9

teachers online or in person, following proper health guidelines. The class work will also be handed through TV and will be available on educational websites.

The short syllabus will be covered in 30 work days in November and December, she said.

Asked about the assignments, NCTB Chairman Prof Narayan Chandra Saha said students would have to answer questions based on what they learn in a particular week. "The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education will upload information on the assignment method on its website soon," he

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Education and Statistics (BANBEIS), there are about 1.05 crore students in class VI-IX across the country. Of them, about 87.32 lakh are in schools and the rest in

According to the academic calendar, their annual exams were scheduled to be held between November 28 and December 10.

Sources said the authorities were yet to decide on the annual tests of the primary (I-V) and class X students as well as this year's Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and its equivalent exams. MIXED REACTION

The government's decision on not taking the annual exams has triggered a mixed reaction among parents and educationists. Emeritus of Brac Professor

Ahmed, University Manzoor founder-director of same university's Institute Educational Development; Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education; and Prof Mazharul Hannan. president of Bangladesh Principals' Association, praised the decision, given the Covid-19 situation.

Manzoor was, however, skeptical about the skills and motivation of the teachers regarding handing and evaluating the assignments and identifying the learning shortcomings. "The government should introduce a guideline for

them [teachers]," he said. Rasheda said reaching out to all students would be a challenge. "Teachers should always be in touch with students and guide them accordingly," she said.

She also said students should continue studying no matter what as they have the books in hand. In this regard, monitoring by their guardians will be crucial, she opined. Former director of Dhaka University's Institute of Education

and Research (IER) Prof Siddiqur

Rahman, however, was not so pleased

with the government decision. "The students will be promoted with an incomplete syllabus. It will create trouble for them in the next grades," he said, adding that they would face difficulties especially in subjects like mathematics, science

and English. Abdullah Al Mamun, guardian of a student in a school in the capital's Malibagh, lauded the decision. "It is a positive decision. At this time it does not matter whether exams take place or not. The focus should be on the learning."

Ali Kawser, a guardian from Dhanmondi, said students study more during the final exams when many of them try to cover the entire syllabus. "This will not happen this time.

At the briefing yesterday, Dipu

Moni said students who have access to TV and online education would be able to complete the syllabus. Others will face some hurdles in doing so.

"We will have special classes for students who've lagged behind," she added.

SCHOOLS MIGHT NOT

REOPEN IN NOVEMBER Asked whether the educational institutions would reopen November, the minister said, "What do you think? Many countries that reopened their schools are now shutting them again. Besides, many were worried about Covid-19 during the upcoming winter ... We will discuss the matter with the National Advisory Committee on Covid-19 and

come up with a decision. "We will think about reopening schools when we see there are little or no health risks for students,

teachers and the guardians." She said it was not possible for anyone to say when the situation

would arise. The closure of schools for over seven months has led to the cancellation of exams and left academic calendars in disarray. Educational activities of about four crore students are being hampered due to the pandemic.

This year's HSC, its equivalent Primary Education Completion, its equivalent exams, Junior School Certificate and its equivalent exams have been cancelled. Dipu Moni hoped that the SSC

and HSC exams next year would be held as per schedule but added that the final decision would depend on the Covid-19 situation. She urged students to continue

studies under any circumstances.

Two killed as chunk of earth falls on them

They were razing hills illegally in Cox's Bazar Our Correspondent, Cox's Bazar

Two men, alleged members of soil lifting syndicates, were killed being crushed under soil and another sustained injuries while they were illegally razing a hill in Ramu upazila of Cox's Bazar.

The dead are Mujibur Rahman, 40, and Ali Ahmed, 29; and the injured is Rafiqul Islam, 38; said police.

KM Ajmiruzzaman, officer-incharge of Ramu Police Station, quoting locals, said the trio were residents of Ukhiarghona area in the upazila. They went to raze the hill with a soil

lifting machine on Tuesday night. At one point, a big chunk of soil fell on them, leaving Mujiur and Ali dead on the spot, he said, adding that Rafiqul

sustained serious injuries. Four more workers fled the scene

after the incident, the OC said. On information, police recovered the bodies and sent those to Cox's Bazar Zila Sadar Hospital for

autopsies. Police primarily gleaned that the deceased were members of a soil lifting syndicate, the OC said.

EU tells Britain to make up its mind as Brexit deal 'within reach'

REUTERS, Brussels

The European Union yesterday told Britain to make up its mind on Brexit, putting the onus back on London to unlock trade talks as the bloc's chief negotiator said an agreement was still within reach with 10 weeks to go.

A frustrated European Union and piqued Britain both exhorted each other this week to compromise to avoid a disruptive finale to the fiveyear Brexit drama that would add to economic pain from the coronavirus

"Time is very short and we stand ready to negotiate 24/7, on all subjects, on legal texts. The UK has a bit of a decision to make and it's their free and sovereign choice," European Council President Charles Michel told the European Parliament.

determine its level of access to the EU's internal market of 450 million consumers, adding: "This is just common sense." The EU's Brexit negotiator Michel

He said Britain's answer would

Barnier told the parliament an agreement was still "within reach" "Time is of the essence ... Along with our British counterparts, we must find solutions to the most difficult areas," Barnier said, in comments that

pushed sterling higher. London has this week refused to continue full negotiations, saying the EU

must "fundamentally change" its stance. The bloc sees this as bluff by Prime Minister Boris Johnson but has also extended an olive branch by talking up UK sovereignity, as well as the EU's openess to discuss intensively, across

the board and on specific legal texts.

Khulna, Barishal, Patuakhali.

Importers stare

FROM PAGE 1 docks in Chattogram, Narayanganj, Nagarbari, Baghabari, Nopara,

Importers are having to demurrage

\$15,000 to the foreign vessel owners for each day of waiting, officials said. Around 1.70 lakh tonnes of wheat, raw sugar and soybean oil imported by City Group are now onboard three

cargo vessels at Chattogram port.

charges ranging from \$10,000 to

The group's 20 lighter vessels loaded with around 40,000 tonnes of these goods are stranded at different docks. "If the work abstention continues

there would be serious disruption in the supply chain of the goods," said City Group Director Biswajit Saha. Abul Bashar Chowdhury, chairman of Chattogram based importing firm BSM Group, said if the supply chain

gets disrupted there will be further price hike of different commodities. The loss is manifold since consumers finally would have to bear the losses counted by the importers

and industry owners, he added. Seacom Group Managing Director Mohammed Amirul Haque said such strikes were unacceptable at a time when the government, entrepreneurs as well as the workers are trying hard to revive the country's economy.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Noujan

Sramik Federation's General Secretary

Chowdhury Ashiqul Alam said, "Our work abstention will continue until our demands are met." The workers demonstrated in Majhirghat area of Chattogram as well as at KDC area on the west bank of

Kirtonkhola river in Barishal yesterday morning. Our correspondents from Khulna

and Barishal contributed to the report.