

NEWS IN *brief*

2 killed by train in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Two people, including a minor girl, were killed in separate incidents as trains hit them in Sirajganj yesterday.

The deceased are Abdur Rashid, 50, gate keeper of Kadda More level crossing near Shaheed M Mansur Ali Railway Station, and Meghna, 5, daughter of Abdul Manna.

Both are residents of Sadanandapur village under Sirajganj Sadar upazila.

Azhar Ali, station master of Shaheed M Mansur Ali Railway station, said Lalmonirhat-bound inter city Nilsagar Express hit Rashid near the level crossing at about 12 noon, leaving him injured critically. He died on the way to hospital.

Meghna was knocked down by Dhaka-bound Moitri Express from Kolkata at the station at about 4:00pm.

She succumbed to her injuries on the way to hospital.

Biology Olympiad kicks off on Friday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The first ever Biology Olympiad in the country will kick off through a regional competition in Faridpur on Friday, a press release said.

The regional competitions across the country will help screen out participants for the central Olympiad. The final winners from the different parts of the country will represent the country at the International Biology Olympiad (IBO), it added.

The daylong Olympiad at Faridpur will be held on the Government Yasin College ground from 10:00am.

The college Principal Prof AHM Ishak Mia will be present as the chief guest with biology Olympiad programme executive committee Chairman Prof Rakh Hari Sarkar in the chair.

Fobana award for Dhaka hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Japan-Bangladesh Friendship Hospital has been nominated for Fobana Outstanding Community Service Award 2012, says a press release.

It was selected for its contribution in providing free health care facilities to farmers and freedom fighters, rendering emergency health care services to the affected people during natural disasters, national vaccination programme and others.

The award will be handed over to the hospital at the 26th Fobana Convention to be held at Florida in the United States of America on August 31.

**BANGLADESHIS IN SAUDI JAILS
HC asks govt for report
on their legal status**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday asked the government to submit a report on how many Bangladeshi nationals were languishing in different jails of Saudi Arabia and their legal status before it by April 8.

During the hearing of a petition, the court also ordered the secretaries to the ministries of foreign and home affairs to state in the report what steps they had taken to bring the detained Bangladeshi nationals from Saudi Arabia back to the country.

The HC bench of Justice Mohammad Bazlur Rahman and Justice Md Habibur Gani passed the order following a petition filed by the human rights organisation Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK).

The ASK in its petition prayed to the court to direct the government to take necessary steps to bring the Bangladeshis back home from Saudi jails.

Earlier, following a report in a Bangla national daily on October 13 last year, the ASK filed a writ petition saying that more than 500 Bangladeshi nationals had been languishing in Dammam jail in Saudi Arabia.

In response to the writ petition, the HC issued a rule on October 17 last year on the government as to why it should not be directed to take measures to bring them back to the country.

It also asked the government to explain why its 'inaction' to bring them back from Dammam jail should not be declared illegal.

As the government did not make any reply, the ASK in January this year submitted a supplementary to the pending writ petition to the HC, seeking necessary directives from it on the government to bring the detained citizens back to the country, Barrister Saifur Rashid, counsel for the ASK, told The Daily Star.



PHOTO: ARMAN HOSSAIN

Awami League-led 14-party alliance forms a human chain in front of Bangabandhu Stadium in the city yesterday protesting the "conspiracy to foil the war crimes trial as well as democracy." The human chain programme blocked the road creating a huge tailback in the area.

Health system has 'collapsed'

AL-led alliance MPs tell House

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 20 lawmakers of the Awami League-led alliance in parliament yesterday described the sorry state of public hospitals and health centres at upazila and district level in their respective areas.

Deeply frustrated and aggrieved, they said people are not getting healthcare as service system in those hospitals has "almost collapsed" due to lack of doctors, staff, medical equipment, and ambulances.

Taking part in a question-hour session, some of the MPs even said they do not want to add to the "shame or embarrassment" for the minister raising the same issue in the House.

"Less than two years are left for the present government. But I don't know how the health minister will materialise his promises on improving health service in the country", senior AL leader Tofail Ahmed said, coming down heavily on the Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque.

Amid clapping of lawmakers,

another ruling party MP Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury told the minister, "Every time, you portray a rosy picture of the country's health sector. But the fact is the country's health management system has collapsed like it has in my Dinajpur district."

"I contacted him [health minister] many a time to address the poor conditions of Dinajpur hospital. Yet the situation remains same. People are facing immense sufferings due to lack of doctors and medical equipments".

While replying to lawmakers' queries, the health minister repeated the same answer—he assured the lawmakers of resolving the problems.

He, however, recognised the poor conditions of different government hospitals and said in his defence, "There are lack of doctors in the country and at this stage we do not have immediate solution".

He also said the government has moved to appoint over 6,000 doctors across the country.

Amid such words of the minister,

several MPs including Jatiya Party's M Hafizuddin Ahmed said that from the beginning he [minister] was saying of recruiting doctors and staff, but nothing significant has been achieved to this end.

Speaking during the question hour, Tofail Ahmed said there are only 20 doctors in Bhola hospital against 80 posts. "Earlier I had submitted a notice in parliament wanting the government to send some doctors in that hospital. But I was so surprised to see that instead of sending new doctor in that hospital, the ministry has transferred two doctors".

A disappointed Tofail added that people do not expect such behaviour from a government formed on the basis of a wholesale victory in the last election.

Muhibur Rahman Manik, an MP from Sunamganj, asked, "What do the three ministers [minister, state minister and health adviser] do in the health ministry? The country's health sector has plunged into darkness due to their [three ministers]

mismanagement".

In response, the minister said it was not fair to remind him of the same problems over and over again. "We are taking steps to resolve the problems", he said, adding that the ministry will take steps to bring balance in the number of doctors of the government hospitals in the country. During the question-hour, some aggrieved MPs later asked the minister, when he would complete those tasks when less than two years are left for the present government.

Also expressing frustration over the sorry conditions of the government hospitals were lawmakers including Moqbul Hossain of Pabna, M Israfil Alam of Naogaon, Benajir Ahmed of Manikganj, Mostak Ahmed Ruhil of Netrokona, AFM Maruf Saqlan of Nilphamari, Tahura Ali [elected from reserved seat for women], Shawkat Momen Shajahan of Tangail, Shah Jikrul Ahmed of Brahmanbaria, and Shafiqul Islam of Jhenidah.

**DU observes
inter-religious
harmony week**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several hundred students, teachers and officials of Dhaka University (DU) yesterday brought out a peace procession on the campus marking 'Inter-religious harmony week' announced by United Nations (UN).

Led by the university Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, the procession began at 10:30am at the base of Aparajeya Bangla and it paraded different streets on the campus and ended at Teachers Students Centre (TSC).

DU Centre for Inter-religious and Intercultural Dialogue (CIID) and Department of Biswa Dharma and Sanskrit of the university jointly organised the programme.



Bibliophiles crowd the stall of Dhaka Metropolitan Police at the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela on the premises of Bangla Academy in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Rly to get e-ticketing AMAR EKUSHEY BOI MELA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The railway ministry is going to introduce e-ticketing to check black marketing of railway tickets and make tickets more available to the passengers, reducing their plights.

A company will be appointed soon to introduce the new system, Railway Minister Suranjit Sengupta told reporters at Railway Bhaban in the city yesterday.

He said advance tickets will be sold three days ahead of travel instead of the current 10 days while one will be allowed to buy up to four tickets at a time, not 10.

The decisions will come in to effect from February 20.

There are widespread allegations that a good number of advance tickets go in to the hands of brokers, who then sell the tickets at higher prices to the passengers. A section of railway officers are engaged in this malpractice.

Suranjit also hinted that producing national identity cards might be made mandatory for buying advance tickets in future in a bid to stop black marketing.

"These are parts of our effort to improve the overall service of the railway sector," he said.

He said railway is incurring a loss of about Tk 750 crore every year, which has to be reduced.

Asked whether train fares will be increased to reduce this loss, he said passenger and freight train fares were not increased in the last 20 years although prices of everything, especially that of fuel, increased by several hundred percent during the period.

"We may hike the fares in future, but before that we must improve our services to the passengers," he added.

Cops' stall attracts visitors

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

With a view to enhancing interaction between law enforcers and common people, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), for the first time, has set up a bookstall at the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela.

Police constable Farhana Akhter, who was selling books in the stall, said they were getting good responses from the visitors and booklovers.

A Dhaka College student Shahidul Islam, who bought a book titled "Samadhan Law Guide" from the stall, said he had bought the book to know the basic laws.

Julhas Mallik, a Rajshahi University student, said he had purchased a book for his brother who was a police constable and would sit for an examination for promotion.

"This stall has been set up to promote the message that there is nothing to get afraid of police rather they are there to serve the people", Mohammad Jahangir Alam, in-charge of the bookstall, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are here to reduce distance between people and police," he added.

Books written by police personnel and related to the police laws, and magazines published by the police are available in the stall, set up at the southern part of the Bangla Academy premises.

A total of 110 new books arrived at the fair yesterday while gathering on the premises was usual like other working days. Discussion and cultural programmes were organised on the premises as per schedule.

FIRSTWEEK OF THE FAIR Meanwhile, as many as 727 new titles, covering a wide range of subjects, hit the book fair this year in the first seven days while the number was 551 last year in the same period. Books of poetry topped the list of new arrivals with 154 while novels got the second position with 129 titles.

The sales centre of Bangla Academy has sold out books of around Tk 13.5 lakh in the first week, which is higher than that of the previous years in the first seven days.

**2 US officials
due on Feb 12**

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Two senior officials of US State Department will travel to four South Asian nations, including Bangladesh, to consult on a wide range of issues with government and civil society leaders.

According to a media note issued by the spokesperson of the US State Department yesterday, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Maria Otero and Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert O Blake will travel to the South Asian countries from February 12.

Of them, assistant secretary Blake will pay a three-day official visit to Bangladesh on February 14-16 to participate in a series of education and university events.

On February 14, Blake will attend the Edward M Kennedy Commemoration at Dhaka University, the spokesperson said.

This commemoration will bring together eminent members of Bangladeshi society along with State Department alumni and youth leaders to celebrate American-Bangladeshi friendship and the 40-year anniversary of Senator Kennedy's visit to Dhaka in 1972.

Blake will also meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and other senior government officials and representatives of civil society.

According to the sources in Dhaka, Blake is expected to meet Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia.

The media note said Blake will also travel to Chittagong, where he will attend events at the Independent University Bangladesh and Asian University for Women, and participate in a certificate of completion ceremony for madrasa students who have held English language scholarships.

Assistant secretary Blake will also visit a Grameen Bank borrower's group site.

As per the schedule, Under Secretary Maria Otero and Robert Blake together will travel to Colombo on February 12-14.

Later, Otero will travel New Delhi on February 14-15 while Nepal on February 15-16.

**Female student
allegedly
commits
suicide in city**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A female university student allegedly committed suicide at her residence in the city's Bongshal area yesterday.

The deceased, Fahmida Akhtar Happy, 25, was a master's student of Jagannath University.

Sub-Inspector (SI) Akhter Hossain of Bongshal Police Station said, being informed by her neighbours, police reached Happy's residence at Nimali and found her body hanged from the ceiling fan in her room with a scarf.

Her sister Fatema Akhtar Lipi said she went to Dhaka University to attend her class in the morning and, on returning home around 1:00pm, she found Happy's room door locked from inside, quoted police.

Lipi saw her sister's hanging body through the balcony, police quoted.

The two sisters and their brother had been living at the flat for the last four years for studies purpose, said the SI.

The reason behind the death, however, could not be known.

The body was sent to Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue for autopsy.

WEATHER TODAY

Light rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light rain is likely to occur at one or two places over Rangpur division and weather is likely to remain dry with temporary partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country in 12 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Light to moderate fog may occur over the river basins of the country during mid night till morning, Met Office said.

Day and night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:49pm today and rises at 6:36am tomorrow.

Country's highest temperature 31.7 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sitakunda and lowest 09.7 degrees Celsius at Srimongal.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max:	Min:	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	28.1	15.7	51	42
Chittagong	29.0	16.0	78	55
Rajshahi	28.0	12.5	70	52
Rangpur	25.8	12.8	84	70
Khulna	29.2	16.0	80	58
Barisal	29.9	14.0	67	64
Sylhet	29.4	14.8	59	49
Cox's Bazar	30.3	16.4	63	40