

ACC asks for admission details of 4 city schools

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a bid to curb corruption in school admissions, the Anti-Corruption Commission has asked information related to admission from four reputed non-government schools in the capital.

On December 20, it sent letters to the principals of the schools -- Viqarunnisa Noon School and College, Ideal School and College, Monipur High School and College and Rajuk Uttara Model School and College -- in this regard.

Signed by ACC Director Mir Md Zainul Abedin Shibly, the letters say a five-member team has been formed to investigate irregularities and corruption during admissions to different classes.

For the sake of proper investigation, the commission asked the principals to submit information on the number of vacant seats from class-I to class-IX, decisions of the committees

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Assam tense ahead of citizens list

REUTERS, Guwahati, India

India has mobilised around 60,000 police and paramilitary troops in Assam ahead of the publication of a list of citizens it says will be used to detect and deport "illegal immigrants" -- mainly Muslims -- from neighbouring Bangladesh.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took power in the eastern state of Assam for the first time last year, vowing to act against "illegal Muslim residents" who take away jobs from local Hindus.

On Sunday the state government will release a draft National Register of Citizens (NRC) after a census carried out for the first time since 1951.

The exercise could lead to communal tensions in Assam, which has the second highest percentage of Muslims of any Indian state. Muslims leaders have called the NRC a tool to make them stateless, likening themselves to Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya minority.

"The NRC is being done to identify illegal Bangladeshis residing in Assam," Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam's finance minister who is also in charge of the citizenship register, told Reuters.

"All those whose names do not figure in the NRC will have to be deported. We're taking no chances and hence all security measures have been taken."

Sarma said "Hindu Bangladeshis who faced persecution there" would be given shelter in India, in line with federal policy.

A spokesman for the Indian home ministry in New Delhi had no immediate comment.

Bangladesh's Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said Dhaka had no knowledge of any plans to deport people. "We didn't receive any information from the Indian government, neither formally nor informally."

To be recognised as Indian citizens, they must be able to produce documents proving that they or their family lived in the country before March 24, 1971.

"My grandparents and my parents were all born in India but today we are finding it difficult to provide documents to support our claims that we are Indians," said Asiful Rahman, a teacher at an Islamic seminary in a Muslim-majority district of Assam.

"Our parents and grandparents were illiterate and did not keep any

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Gas cylinder blast kills 1 in Gazipur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man was killed and two others were injured in a gas cylinder blast at a PRAN-RFL workshop in Gazipur's Kaliganj last night.

The dead, Masud Rana Monir, 35, was a worker of the workshop at Deopara. Identities of the injured could not be known immediately.

Mohammad Alam, officer-in-charge of Kaliganj Police Station, told The Daily Star that the blast took place around 9:30pm when the workers were working at the workshop.

Masud was killed on the spot, the OC said, adding that the injured were rushed to a local hospital.

Locals doused the fire before firefighters reached the spot.

The reason behind the blast could not be ascertained instantly.



Waste piled up inside Savar Tannery Industrial Estate in Hemayetpur and wastewater from the tannery estate flowing down to the Dhaleshwari river, right, yesterday.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Poisoning the Dhaleshwari

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would survive in that water.

Analysing data collected before and after the installation of the treatment plant, experts from the environment department and Buet found the river water contains all the chemicals used in tanneries to process raw hides.

"In the samples, we found all the heavy metals and other pollutants released from the tanneries. I am not sure whether the plant is unable to treat the waste or if they [the company] do not run it properly. But the Dhaleshwari has become much like the Buriganga," said a top official of the Department of Environment (DoE), asking not to be named.

The DoE test also found that the level of chemical oxygen demand (COD), biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and chromium in the water far exceeds the limit set by the Environment Conservation Rules 1997.

On December 3, a Buet lab test found the BOD was 224mg per litre against the permissible limit of 50; COD was 595mg per litre against the standard limit of 200; and chromium was four times the permissible limit.

"After processing the waste in the CETP, it is mandatory to disinfect the treated waste water with chlorine

before releasing it into the river. But currently, they are not using any chemical," said Sehly Sadeque, a chemist at Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC).

Contacted, Prof Delowar Hossain, a CETP consultant at the BSCIC, which is the implementing authority of the tannery project, said, "Yes we know the CETP is not working properly. We are trying to find a solution."

The CETP has two separate channels -- one for general waste and another for chromium-mixed water.

"But we have found a huge quantity of chromium in our general waste tank, meaning somebody released chromium-mixed water with the general waste. So, all the bacteria that are supposed to decompose tannery waste die due to the presence of high level of chromium," he said.

Sometimes, the Chinese company shuts the CETP to cut cost, another reason why the CETP fails to treat harmful substances, Delowar noted. "We have instructed them to operate the CETP round the clock."

Recently, the High Court ordered the BSCIC to make sure that the plant runs 24 hours a day.

Initial reports suggested the authorities did not incorporate the salt

removal unit with the CETP and so the plant was releasing waste containing salt into the river.

But Prof Delowar said chromium and other heavy metals were much bigger a problem than salt.

Contacted, Abdul Qaiyum, the international consultant for the Chinese company, denied that they were releasing untreated waste water into the river.

"The physical construction of the CETP is almost completed. Now we need to run the CETP properly. But currently we cannot do it as we have not got the bill of Tk 10 to 12 lakh that we submitted to the BSCIC a month ago," he said.

"We will solve all these problems once we get the bill," said Qaiyum, who was the director of the tannery project while serving at the BSCIC before joining the Chinese firm.

Ziaul Haque, the current director of the project, said that during the test run the Chinese company was supposed to buy chemicals and run the generator at their own expense and then submit the bill to the government. But they just recently submitted a partial fuel bill.

"We are going to disburse the bill soon," he said.

Asked, Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief

executive of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela), said it was not about money.

"We have money to build the Padma bridge. So money is not a problem here. It is a failure of monitoring and leadership. Out of seven generators of the CETP, they do not run four generators. The government should strictly monitor the operation of the CETP and make it operational," she said.

After changing the deadline eight times, the government set June 2018 as the new deadline for completing the construction of the CETP.

Six months before the deadline expires, the Chinese company is yet to import laboratory equipment, flow meter and panel box for sludge dewatering machine, sources said.

At present, 102 of the 155 tanneries are operating there in full swing, generating around 15 to 16 thousand cubic feet of waste every day, said Ziaul Haque.

The Tk 1,07,871 crore project under the BSCIC began in 2003. But before the CETP could be fully operational, the industries ministry pressured the tanners to relocate their factories to Savar from Hazaribagh.

Two siblings killed in elephant attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Two minor siblings were killed in an elephant attack in the district's Ukhia upazila early yesterday.

The victims, Yasin, 7, and Shamsul Alam, 5, are sons of Nurul Islam of Madarbania village.

Nurul said an elephant attacked his house around 4:30am and the tin-roofed house fell on his sons, who were sleeping at that time. His sons died on the spot.

He said they had been living in the village for long, but did not see any elephant before. As Rohingyas recently started living in forest areas, elephants lost their habitat and entered nearby villages.

Church attack

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fire on a store before heading to the church where he shot dead seven people including an officer.

Cellphone footage posted on social media appeared to show the bearded gunman wearing a bulky ammunition vest sprawled on a street, barely conscious, as people restrained his arms and then handcuffed him.

Police later cordoned off the crime scene as onlookers crowded around the church, while a forensics team combed the area.

Congealing blood could be seen at a guard post in front of the church.

The Islamic State group's affiliate in Egypt has killed dozens of Christians in church bombings and shootings over the past year, and has threatened further attacks against the minority.

Yesterday's attack came ahead of Christmas for the Copts, who celebrate it on January 7.

SERIES OF ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANS
Egypt's Coptic Christians make up about 10 percent of the country's 93 million people, and are the largest religious minority in the region.

IS claimed a suicide bombing of a Cairo church in December 2016 followed by bombings of two churches north of the capital in April.

A month later, IS gunmen shot dead about 30 Christians south of Cairo as they travelled to a monastery.

The jihadists are believed to have also carried out a massacre of Muslim worshippers in Sinai last month, killing more than 300 in an attack on a mosque associated with the mystical Sufi strand of Islam which IS views as heretical.

Egypt imposed a state of emergency following the church attacks and shootings, and President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi demanded the army confront the jihadists with "brutal force" following the mosque massacre.

The presidency yesterday said in a statement on the church attack that it would increase the "resolve to continue the path of cleansing the country of terrorism and extremism."

IS has been waging a deadly insurgency based in the Sinai Peninsula bordering Israel and the Gaza Strip that has killed hundreds of policemen and soldiers.

The jihadists have increasingly targeted civilians as attacks on the security forces have become more difficult.

The army has poured in thousands of troops backed with armour and jets in a bid to crush the Sinai-based jihadists, but attacks have continued.

The attack on the church came a day after six Egyptian soldiers were killed in a roadside bombing in the Sinai.

Last week, IS claimed responsibility for firing an anti-tank missile at a helicopter in a North Sinai airport as the defence and interior ministers were visiting.

The attack killed an aide to the defence minister and a helicopter pilot, but both ministers returned to Cairo unscathed.

Scientist develops self-healing glass

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Does this mean you will soon be able to repair those cracks in your smartphone with a quick press of the fingers? Or surreptitiously piece together a shattered beer glass dropped after one pint too many?

Well, not quite. Not now and in fact, not in the near future.

But it does open a window of opportunity for researchers to explore ways to make more durable, lightweight, glass-like items, like car windows.

In a lab demonstration for AFP,

Yanagisawa broke a glass sample into two pieces.

He then held the cross sections of the two pieces together for about 30 seconds until the glass repaired itself, almost resembling its original form.

To demonstrate its strength, he then hung a nearly full bottle of water from the piece of glass -- and it stayed intact.

The organic glass, made of a substance called polyether thioureas, is closer to acrylic than mineral glass, which is used for tableware and smartphone screens.

Other scientists have demonstrated

similar properties by using rubber or gel materials but Yanagisawa was the first to demonstrate the self-healing concept with glass.

The secret lies in the thiourea, which uses hydrogen bonding to make the edges of the shattered glass self-adhesive, according to Yanagisawa's study.

But what use is all this if it cannot produce a self-healing smartphone screen?

"It is not realistically about fixing what is broken, more about making longer-

lasting resin glass," Yanagisawa told AFP.

Glass products can fracture after years of use due to physical stress and fatigue.

"When a material breaks, it has already had many tiny scars that have accumulated to result in major destruction," Yanagisawa said.

"What this study showed was a path toward making a safe and long-lasting resin glass", which is used in a wide range of everyday items.

"We may be able to double or triple the lifespan of something that currently lasts for 10 or 20 years", he said.

Huge fire at Mumbai restaurant kills 14



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hospital told AFP.

Police said they were investigating the cause of the fire, and had filed a preliminary case against the restaurant's owners.

Five city officials have been suspended for negligence in connection with the fire, the Press Trust of India news agency reported, without giving further details. No one was immediately available to confirm the report.

The fire was extinguished in the early hours but an AFP reporter at the scene said the rooftop where the party was taking place had been gutted, with blackened ice buckets and ashtrays strewn around.

Eleven of the victims were women, and survivors said people had become trapped in the restroom when the fire broke out.

"The ladies' washroom was far away from the exit so many women died due to asphyxiation," Torel Thakur told AFP at the Bhatia hospital in Mumbai, where her husband was being treated for burns.

"Nobody inside the washroom could have survived."

Her husband Pratik Thakur described panicked scenes as the fire broke out.

"When the fire intensified, people were running and screaming for help and it was very chaotic," he said.

"Most of the people didn't know about fire exit and started jumping over each other."

UTTERLY DEVASTATED

Accidental fires are common across India because of poor safety standards and lax enforcement of regulations.

A fire swept through a sweet shop in Mumbai earlier this month, sparking a building collapse which killed 12

PHOTO: AFP

A general view of a building on fire where a rooftop party was being held in Mumbai early yesterday. The fire left at least 14 people killed.