



A car catches fire on the Farmgate-Khamarbari intersection in the capital yesterday afternoon, apparently from an engine misfire. The driver and passengers of the vehicle -- which was being used for a ridesharing service -- managed to get out safely, before fire fighters doused the flame.

PHOTO: FAHD MANNAN

'Khaleda not getting proper treatment'

Says Mirza Fakhrul after meeting BNP chief at court

JNU CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday expressed concerns over the health of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, and said doctors are not providing proper treatment to her.

"Khaleda Zia told me she is not well. We are very concerned about her health. Her blood tests have not been conducted yet. She is diabetic, but has not received any treatment for it," he said while talking to reporters in front of Old Dhaka Central jail, after meeting with Khaleda during the hearing on charge-framing in connection with the Niko graft case.

Around 12:30pm, the BNP chief appeared at the court of Judge Sheikh Hafizur Rahman, inside Old Dhaka Central Jail.

Upon her arrival, Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Public Prosecutor Mosharraf Hossain Kajol inquired about her health condition, to which Khaleda replied "I am not well," reports bangla daily Prothom Alo.

Apart from Mirza Fakhrul, Khaleda also spoke to party leaders Zainul Abedin, Mir

Nasir and Khandaker Mahub Hossain.

Fakhrul sat beside her till the end of the hearing at 1:35pm.

In response to a reporter's question afterwards, Fakhrul said they did not discuss any political issues in the meeting, and mentioned that Khaleda is concerned about her bail.

During the hearing, Khaleda dismissed the allegation that she missed the hearing on charge-framing in Niko graft case on February 20 as she "overslept".

She said, "I was ready to appear before the court. However, authorities did not produce me to it, and said I skipped the hearing for my sleep."

On February 20, jail authorities said Khaleda Zia could not be produced before the court as she "did not wake up from sleep".

At the hearing, BNP standing committee member Moudud Ahmed, an accused in the case, argued that all accused should be released from the case.

"There is nothing in the case about me -- no documents or witnesses. I gave my opinions when I was in the charge of the

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MPO INCLUSION

Non-govt college teachers call work abstention

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Non-government teachers in colleges under the National University (NU) are going to observe work abstention from today, until their inclusion into the "Monthly Payment Order (MPO)" system is announced.

The teachers' platform -- Bangladesh Besarkari College Honors-Masters Shikkhak Shamity -- made the announcement at a human chain in the capital's Jatiya Press Club yesterday. Over 200 teachers from different districts of the country formed the human chain.

Saiful Islam, general secretary of the association, said the education ministry did not include them in the "Manpower Structure and MPO Policy-2018", though they had given several memorandums to the ministry in this regard.

"We have been living an inhuman life since the establishment of National University in 1992, so we will continue countrywide work abstention until our demand is met," he said.

Saiful claimed the NU is approving honours and masters courses at many new colleges every year,

without taking any initiative to include them in the MPO.

"Whenever we talk to the authorities of NU and the education ministry, they say nothing can be done without the direction of PM," he alleged.

Saiful urged the PM to meet their one-point demand considering this "helpless condition" of the teachers.

The body's Organising Secretary Sukomal Sen said about 3,500 teachers of 203 non-government colleges are now depending on students' tuition fees to get a paltry salary.

"It is true that students' education would be hampered due to our work abstention, but we will continue it so that the government pays heed to the one-point demand," he said.

Nekabbor Hossain, president of the association, said "The government had introduced 1.35 lakh new teacher posts in the amended Manpower Structure and MPO Policy in 2018, but is yet to include us there."

He urged the PM to take prompt initiatives so that they could get rid of the "cursed life".

Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia agree to stop 'visa trading'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia have agreed to stop "visa trading" that heavily increases recruitment cost and contributes to debt bondage and forced labour abroad.

The agreement came at a meeting between Imran Ahmed, Bangladesh's state minister for expatriates' welfare and overseas employment, and Saudi deputy labour minister Dr Abdullah bin Naser bin Mohammed Abu Thunain in Riyadh.

"In a meeting, the two ministers agreed to stop visa trading," said a statement issued by the Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh yesterday. Imran Ahmed left for Saudi Arabia on March 1 and is scheduled to return on March 10.

The visit of the minister comes at a time when labour recruitment from Bangladesh to the Kingdom is significantly decreasing. A total of 5,51,308 Bangladeshis went to the Kingdom in 2017, which came down to 2,57,317 last year.

Besides, many Bangladeshis, who were working there under "free visas", were also deported in recent months. Some returnees told The Daily Star they had valid visas but were still detained and deported.

Bangladesh embassy officials in Riyadh said it is illegal for foreign workers who are contracted for one company, to work for another. In previous years, law enforcers were not strict enough but in recent times, they are strictly enforcing the law as the authorities are now prioritising employing Saudi workers amid economic stress.

Hundreds of Bangladeshi female workers are also returning home every month following alleged abuse by Saudi employers and brokers.

According to the Bangladesh Embassy statement, the two ministers discussed various aspects of labour affairs, including protecting workers' rights and addressing the problems of female domestic workers in Saudi Arabia.

Asked about the issues, Syed Saiful

Haque, chairman of migrant rights non-profit WARBE Development Foundation, said it's a laudable initiative by the state minister for expatriates' welfare to have raised the issue of visa trading and protection of migrants' rights.

The workers going abroad for jobs should not pay any fees, but the reality is that layers of brokers -- both at home and abroad -- and even employers charge fees for work visas. This encourages some unscrupulous people to set up "name-only" companies and have visas approved just for making money, he said.

When the workers arrive in the destination country, they find themselves jobless or are allowed to find jobs elsewhere, which is illegal, Syed Saiful Haque said.

"This has been a perennial problem for many years, but nothing could stop it," he said, adding that Saudi Arabia is a country where law is generally strictly enforced.

Saudi Arabia should issue a decree,

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ABUSE OF POWER

HC sentences Rajuk stenographer to 11 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a rare move, the High Court yesterday convicted and sentenced a former stenographer of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) to 11 years' imprisonment, around two years after he was acquitted by a lower court in a corruption case.

The HC also ordered the former stenographer, Md Shafiullah, to surrender before the lower court within 15 days.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice KM Hafizul Alam came up with the judgement after holding hearing on an appeal filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) challenging the lower court verdict.

The HC also scrapped the verdict delivered by the Special Judges Court-7 of Dhaka that acquitted Shafiullah of graft charges on November 21, 2017.

According to the case filed by ACC with Motijheel Police Station on October 10, 2013, Shafiullah abused his power and damaged documents on planning and records for

constructing multi-storey buildings.

Deputy Attorney General AKM Alimuddin Manik told The Daily Star that the allegations against Shafiullah have been proven before the HC.

He said the HC sentenced Shafiullah to 11 years' imprisonment in three sections of Bangladesh Penal Code and the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1997.

Shafiullah was sentenced to two years' imprisonment in two sections of Bangladesh Penal Code each and seven years' imprisonment in the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1997, and the sentences will be enforced concurrently; therefore, he will serve seven years in jail, he said.

DAG Manik said that Shafiullah will have to serve jail term if the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court does not stay the HC verdict.

He also said this is a rare verdict, as the HC sentenced an accused who was acquitted by the trial court in a corruption case.

Barrister AKM Fakhrul Islam appeared for Shafiullah.



With Ramadan just a few months away, these rotten dates, seized by a mobile court of Rapid Action Battalion, were found in a cold storage in Old Dhaka's Soarighat area yesterday. Around 3,000 maunds of the iftar staple were confiscated during the drive, led by Executive Magistrate Sarwoer Alam.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



After a round of festivities surrounding literature, workers dismantle stalls, the day after Ekushey book fair ended. Book lovers will have to wait a year until the fair returns. The photo was taken yesterday from Bangla Academy premises.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

One-minute 'blackout' to mark Genocide Day

UNB, Dhaka

For the third successive year, the government has decided to observe a one-minute "blackout" on the night of March 25, marking Genocide Day.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal came up with the information after a meeting at the conference room of the ministry in presence of top officials of law enforcement agencies on observing Genocide Day on March 25 and Independence Day on March 26.

The "blackout" programme will be observed for one minute from 9pm on March 25, he said.

Everyone will switch their lights off. The information about the programme will be disseminated through media. Additional security measures will also be taken on the occasion, said the minister.

However, establishments of emergency services will remain out of the purview of the programme,

said Asaduzzaman.

Besides, measures will be taken to ensure security at National Martyrs' Memorial, Martyred Intellectuals Memorial at Rayerbazar and Suhrawardy Udyan, he said.

A march-past programme will be held at Bangabandhu National Stadium to observe Independence Day, the minister added.

The minister also said that there will be arrangements for transporting the foreign diplomats.

Medical services, water supply and utility services will be ensured for holding the programmes peacefully, he said.

Special meals will be provided in jails, hospitals and orphanages marking the day.

In 2017, the government officially declared March 25 as "Genocide Day", commemorating "Operation Searchlight" -- carried out by the Pakistan Army to curb the Bengali independence movement.

FORGERY TO SELL SIBLINGS' LAND Woman sentenced to 13 years' jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced a woman to 13 years' rigorous imprisonment in a case filed for selling 6 decimals of land that belonged to her brothers and sister, by making forged documents in 2012.

Judge Dr Shaikh Golam Mahub of the Special Judge Court-6 of Dhaka handed the sentence in presence of the convict, Syeda Shahana Lucy.

The court also fined her Tk 75 lakh, in default of which she will get three more years in jail.

The court acquitted four others including a retired sub-registrar as the charges brought against them were not proved.

According to the prosecution, Lucy made some forged documents in the name of her deceased mother Amena Khatun, in absence of her three expatriate siblings, in 2012.

Later, she sold the land to a Bangladeshi expatriate living in US, Syed Selim Ahmed, at Tk 1.5 crore, showing her elder sister Syeda Shahriar Begum as the seller, on December 17 of 2012.

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