



Demanding justice for Feni madrasa student Nusrat Jahan Rafi, rights activists form a human chain in front of National Museum yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

'Killers must be treated as killers'

Sultana Kamal says at rally for Nusrat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rights activist Sultana Kamal yesterday demanded a special tribunal for quick disposal of the case filed over murder of Feni madrasa student Nusrat Jahan Rafi.

"The country must get rid of the culture of injustice, and the culprits involved in Nusrat's murder must be punished," she said while speaking at a protest rally in front of National Museum.

The killers must be treated only as killers, irrespective of whether they belong to the ruling party or opposition, Sultana Kamal added.

Jouno Nirjaton o Nari Nipiron Pratibad Andolon, a platform protesting sexual harassment against women, organised the rally. Later, leaders and activists of the platform brought out a protest procession that ended at the central Shaheed Minar after holding another rally.

Speaking there, Dr. Susanta Kumar Das, a professor at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, urged the government to take adequate measures so that concerned authorities could ensure justice for Nusrat.

"The government should set an example of justice through the trial of Nusrat's murder, so that none can dare to commit such type of crime in future," he said.

Abul Hossain, Dhaka Metropolitan unit president of Bangladesh Workers' Party, thanked the prime minister for her prompt initiatives to ensure justice for Nusrat.

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PM grieves Notre Dame cathedral fire

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed deep shock at the damage to the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris on Monday.

"We are terribly shocked and deeply saddened at the colossal damage to the Cathedral Notre Dame due to a catastrophic fire," she said in a message to President of France Emmanuel Macron.

The damage to this iconic cathedral is heart wrenching not only to people of France but for the entire humanity.

"With a deep sense of loss and grief, I, on behalf of the people and government of Bangladesh and on my own behalf, convey our profound sadness to you and to the people of France," reads the message.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of France," according to the message issued by the Foreign Ministry yesterday.

Impose higher tax on tobacco products

Speakers demand at press conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-tobacco campaigners and academicians yesterday demanded that the government impose higher tax on tobacco products -- both smoking and smokeless -- to increase the prices so that people are discouraged from using them.

They also demanded reducing the price category of cigarette from four to two, merging the price categories of bidi (locally made cigarette) into one, and imposing supplementary duty on all kinds of tobacco products, including jorda and gul.

They placed the demands at a press conference jointly organised by Bureau of Economic Research of Dhaka University (DU), Bangladesh Cancer Society and Bangladesh Tamak Birodhi Jote (an alliance of anti-tobacco organisations) at Jatiya Press Club.

Rumana Huque, a professor of economics at DU, said if tax is increased on tobacco products, the government will be able to earn substantial revenue. At the same time, usage of tobacco and deaths caused by it will reduce significantly.

In a keynote paper, she also said the current price structure of cigarettes is very complex as it has four categories -- low, medium, high and premium -- which should be reduced to two, low and high.

"Having many categories make the tax process more complex, creating a scope for tobacco companies to evade the duty. No country has so many categories like us," said Prof Rumana.

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Short-circuit caused FR Tower fire

Says state minister for disaster management Enamur Rahman

UNB, Dhaka

An electric short-circuit on the eighth floor sparked the deadly fire at FR Tower, said State Minister for Disaster Management Enamur Rahman yesterday.

"The fire spread to the ninth and 10th floors. A number of people died because of smoke on the 11th, 12th and 13th floors," he said after meeting his ministry's probe committee and representatives of various ministries.

Enamur admitted that the Fire Service and Civil Defence lacks equipment.

"We wanted to procure equipment worth Tk 1,000 crore but after Churihatta and FR Tower fires, we understood that this budget is insufficient," he said.

Seventy-one people were killed after a deadly blaze swept through several buildings in Old Dhaka in late February. Many of the capital's buildings are unplanned and lack proper firefighting equipment.

"We've realised that we need heavy machinery and a bigger budget to ensure fire extinguishing system," the state minister added.

CHAWKBAZAR FIRE

Building owners confess to renting out basement for chemical storage

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Two owners of Wahed Mansion -- from where the deadly Chawkbazar fire originated -- yesterday confessed to renting out the basement as storehouse for chemicals and other materials.

Md Hasan and Soheli alias Shahid, sons of Haji Abdul Wahed, gave confessional statements before separate Dhaka metropolitan magistrates, after officer-in-charge (investigation) of Chawkbazar Police Station Md Muradul Islam produced them before the courts.

Magistrate Sadbir Yasir Ahsan Chowdhury recorded Hasan's statement while Magistrate Md Saiduzzaman Sharif recorded Soheli's statement at their chambers.

After recording statements, the duo was sent to Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj.

Hasan told the magistrate he rented out his basement to a tenant five to seven years ago as a storehouse for chemicals. Hasan knew it well that his tenant kept chemicals at the storehouse. But he did not know chemicals would cause the deaths of so many people.

Soheli admitted that he rented his part of the basement for spray and other materials seven years ago. "I am now repenting my wrong decision for renting out my basement for sprays and other materials," said Soheli in his confessional statement.

The devastating fire broke out in Old Dhaka's Chawkbazar area around 10:40pm on February 20.

The duo was sent to jail on April 2 after their surrender before a Dhaka court seeking bail in the case.

On April 8, they were placed on seven-day remand each in the case for the incident that killed 70 people.

Stop use of Glyphosate herbicides

7 orgs serve legal notice on authorities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Seven rights organisations on Monday sent a legal notice to the government, to immediately stop import, use, marketing and sale of all herbicides and pesticides that contain hazardous Glyphosate, including roundup herbicides, for the security of people's health and environment.

In the legal notice, they also requested authorities concerned to withdraw and destroy already-imported and marketed herbicides and pesticides containing Glyphosate, and to cancel their registration.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

PM for renewed focus on traditional medicine

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called for popularising traditional medicine through a renewed focus on the age-old indigenous healthcare system, alongside conventional drugs, as she inaugurated the National Health Service Week 2019.

"We can't neglect treatment using herbal, ayurvedic, unani, and homeopathy medicines and should give more importance to their development to facilitate people in receiving treatment," she said at the event at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

The PM said Bangladesh has achieved huge success in producing standard conventional drugs and creating their demands abroad while "traditional medicine have a great value as well".

There is growing demand for herbal treatment across the globe, she said and stressed the need for extensive research to develop traditional medicine.

She also handed ambulances and SUVs, purchased with public fund during 2017-2018 fiscal, to facilitate emergency

healthcare services for people at grassroots level on the occasion.

She reiterated her government's commitment to take healthcare services to people's doorsteps, pointing out the initiatives taken so far for overall development in health sector.

Sheikh Hasina said setting up of community clinics across the country was a part of the commitment to bring all people under healthcare services.

The PM said around 14,000 such community clinics are currently rendering health care services to mothers and children and providing 30 different crucial medicines free of cost.

She regretted that such a basic health facility was closed down during the BNP-Jamaat government's tenure as it was initiated during Awami League's 1996-2001 term as government.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Zahid Maleque presided over the function while State Minister Dr Md Murad Hasan spoke on the occasion as special guest.

Health Services Division secretary gave the welcome address while representatives from World Health Organization (WHO) also spoke at the function.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visits the "Health Information System and eHealth" stall at Bangabandhu International Conference Center yesterday as part of National Health Service Week.

PHOTO: PID



Tens of ambulances stall in traffic jam on the road beside Dhaka Medical College Hospital every day. Hawkers dominate the footpaths and road-sides, narrowing the way and causing gridlock -- making it impossible for emergency patients to get to the hospital fast. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Settle Suprobhat's route permit plea within 30 days: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) to dispose of Suprobhat Paribahan's bid to restore its route permit within 30 days.

The bench of Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Md Ashraf Kamal passed the order following a writ petition filed by the bus company, challenging legality of BRTA's inaction to settle its application to restore permission for operating its 163 buses.

On March 19, a bus of the company ran over Abrar Chowdhury. The fatality, which pointed out yet again the unruliness in transport sector, drew widespread protests.

BRTA scrapped route permit for 163 buses of the company on March 20 saying they had no legal documents. Suprobhat placed an application before BRTA on April 1 seeking to restore its route permit, which they alleged was not heeded by BRTA.

On April 8, the company served a legal notice on BRTA in this regard, but BRTA did not respond. Suprobhat MD Ashraf Ali filed the petition on April 15.

HC order on govt to protect mangoes remains in force

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday upheld a High Court order that directed the government to monitor, through executive magistrates and law enforcers, mango orchards in Rajshahi and major harvesting areas to prevent spraying of toxic chemicals on mangoes.

Chamber judge of the Appellate Division of the SC Justice Md Nuruzzaman rejected a petition filed by the state seeking stay on the HC directive, considering that the petition was not placed properly.

The HC order will remain in force following the SC order, Deputy Attorney General ABM Abdullah Al Mahmud Bashir told The Daily Star.

He said following a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh, the HC on April 9 directed the Rajshahi divisional commissioner to take necessary steps in seven days in this regard.

The HC also ordered the authorities concerned to monitor markets and storehouses with surveillance teams so that harmful chemicals could not be sprayed on fruits, and submit a compliance report in 30 days, DAG Bashir said.

He said the state has decided not to move the stay petition after going through the contents of the HC directive.

Meanwhile, Advocate Manzill Murshid, who moved a writ petition before the HC for deploying police at mango orchards in Rajshahi region, said he is yet to get the certified copy of the HC order.

The attorney general's office filed the petition with the SC on behalf of the state on April 15, seeking a stay on the HC directive.