

'A win for the environment'

Experts say about demolition of BGMEA building

HELEMI ALAM

Environmentalists yesterday termed the demolition of the much-talked-about BGMEA building a symbol of action against illegal structures that were constructed filling waterbodies or open spaces.

"This demolition will remain an example against illegal construction and filling up waterbodies," said Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela).

Rizwana said she hopes the government will take highest safety measures during its demolition work, so that safety of workers are ensured.

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SYMBOLS MATTER! With a boat (election symbol of Awami League) mounted on a push cart, supporters of party candidate for DSCC polls Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh distribute leaflets in New Market area yesterday. *Inset*, holding sheaves of paddy (BNP's electoral symbol) Ishraque Hossain campaigns in Kamrangirchar.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN, COLLECTED

Country enters e-passport era

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh yesterday became the first country in South Asia to enter the era of electronic passports.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina formally unveiled the e-passport and launched the automated border control management programme at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre (BICC) in the capital.

The Department of Immigration and Passport will start issuing the passports from regional passport offices in the capital's Uttara and Jatrabari, and from divisional passport and visa office in Agargaon, according to officials.

"General people will be able to apply for the e-Passport from today (Thursday)," e-Passport Project Director Brig Gen Saidur Rahman Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

General passports will be delivered in 15 days, while urgent passports will be delivered in seven days. In case of re-issue, applicants will get their passports within two days, said the project director.

"Initially, we will start delivering e-passports on a limited scale, and it will be started across the country gradually," he added.

Machine-readable passports will remain valid even after the e-passport inauguration, but will be phased out gradually, according to DIP officials.

TWO TYPES OF E-PASSPORTS

There will be two types of e-passports -- one with 48 pages and another with 64 pages, and their tenure will be five years.

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'Nothing to do with baul songs' Shariat Sarkar was arrested for a crime, PM tells House

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said baul singer Shariat Sarkar was arrested for his involvement in crime, and it has nothing to do with baul songs.

"As he was arrested, surely he was involved in some crime, or he was arrested as a crime was committed," she said in reply to a supplementary question from lawmaker Hasanul Huq Inu during the PM's question-answer session.

The premier said there is nothing wrong in singing baul songs.

"But if an individual baul singer gets involved in any crime, the law will take its own course. It has no relationship with the songs," she added.

Sheikh Hasina also counter-questioned if all baul singers are above the law, or whether it can be guaranteed that they would never commit any crime.

She advised baul singers not to do anything that put baul songs, which is a world heritage, under question.

The premier, however, said that if anyone commits any offence against baul singers, the government must take punitive actions against the culprits.

"Cutting off someone's hair or barring performance of songs is not acceptable at all," she said.

Police arrested Shariat Sarkar (40), a well-known baul artiste, in a case filed under the Digital Security Act on January 11 for allegedly making comments that hurt "religious sentiments."

During a concert in December, he allegedly criticised Muslim clerics who oppose singing, and challenged anyone to prove that music is forbidden in Islamic scripture.

One Mohammad Faridul Islam filed the case with Mirzapur Police Station on January 9, accusing Shariat of making the comments.

TOUGHER ACTIONS AGAINST CREATING ARTIFICIAL CRISIS OF ESSENTIALS

The prime minister also warned of tougher actions if someone is involved in creating artificial crisis of essential commodities in the market.

In reply to a query from Awami League MP Md Ebadul Karim (Brahmanbaria-5), the premier said some greedy profit-mongers often try to make undue profits and destabilise market by creating artificial crisis of essentials.

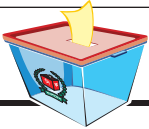
"Our government is well aware of this," she said.

Hasina, also the leader of the House, said, the mobile court drives are being carried out regularly to check prices of essentials, while district administrations in coordination with traders' associations are monitoring markets.

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DHAKA CITY

POLLS 2020



Businessmen rule the race

Only four out of 745 councillor candidates list politics as their profession on affidavits

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Businesspersons now find their representation in local government bodies more "lucrative" than before, as documents show about 67.5 percent of total councillor candidates are involved in business.

Ironically, only four candidates are politicians.

Of the 745 individuals contesting in 129 wards of Dhaka, 504 councillor candidates have mentioned their profession as business, reveals affidavits of the contenders submitted to the Election Commission (EC) recently.

Meanwhile, voters are also skeptical about the issue.

"Such involvement [of businessmen] creates doubt whether they will prioritise public interest," said Khandaker Enamul Haque, a banker.

Mahmudul Hasan, a stationary shop owner in Motijheel, said "Election is a business too! They [contenders] are investing now to reap benefits later."

PROFESSION			
Business	504	Lawyer	13
Homemaker	79	Landlord	10
Service	42	Politician	4
Social service	14	Others	79

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION			
Masters	55	8th, 5th grade	91
Bachelor	84	Self-educated	205
HSC	87	Literate	32
SSC	116	Others	75

In 2015, a total of 848 councillor candidates had contested in 93 wards for general and reserve posts.

Of them, 572 councilors had disclosed their profession as business in their affidavits.

Such widespread involvement of businessmen in local politics is a cause of concern, say some observers.

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Contribute to building Digital Bangladesh

President urges UGC, universities

UNB, Dhaka

President Abdul Hamid yesterday called upon universities and University Grants Commission (UGC) to take measures to build "Digital Bangladesh".

"I urge universities and UGC to take effective steps to rapidly implement the 'Integrated University Information Management Platform', including the introduction of e-governance courses in universities to build Digital Bangladesh," he said at the closing ceremony of a workshop at Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

Integrated University Information Management Platform and Unified University Management Software Application are initiatives which will allow exchange and sharing of services among students, teachers and all concerned, the president said at a previous event.

"University students, teachers, researchers, office-bearers and parents can enjoy the benefits from anywhere using this software," he said.

"It will create an environment of transparency and accountability as well."

President Hamid said initial plans have been made to identify and implement about 2,074 digital services of different ministries.

Mentioning the major role of teachers and researchers in preserving and promoting education quality, he said, "For a student, you [teachers] are the role-models. So, you've to play a more prompt, sincere and meaningful role in the acquisition, rearing, practice and distribution of knowledge."

UGC Chairperson Prof Kazi Shahidullah presided over the workshop's concluding session.



Pedestrians in Dhanmondi regularly walk beside a dug up part of Satmasjid Road, where one small misstep may result in an accident. City corporation is working to improve the utility lines but have not put barricades to keep everyone safe. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Publish ad asking SK Sinha to appear on Feb 20

Dhaka court directs authorities

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday directed authorities concerned of the government to publish advertisements in two national dailies asking former chief justice Surendra Kumar Sinha and 10 others to appear before it on February 20 in a graft case.

After getting reports on execution of arrest warrant, Judge KM Emrul Kayesh of the Senior Special Judge's Court of Dhaka passed the order.

On January 5, the same court issued arrest warrants against all the accused in the case, as they were shown "fugitives" in the charge-sheets.

The court also took cognisance of the charges against them in the case filed for allegedly misappropriating and laundering about Tk 4 crore from Farmers Bank in 2016.

On December 4 last year, Anti-Corruption Commission pressed charges against Sinha and 10 others.

The other accused are: the bank's former managing director AKM Shamim; Senior Executive Vice-President and former head of Credit Division Gazi Salahuddin; First Vice-President of Credit Division Swapan Kumar Roy; First Vice-President Shafiuddin Askary; former chairman of the bank's audit committee Mahbubul Haque Chisty and Vice-President Lutful Haque.

One Shahjahan of Tangail's Sreehoripur village, Ranjit Chandra Saha of the district's Jodunathpur village, Sinha's wife Santri Roy and nephew Niranjana Chandra Saha were also made accused.

ACC in October last year said it found evidence of fraud involving transactions of Tk 4 crore borrowed with fake documents by two businessmen, Shahjahan and Niranjana, from the bank. It said the money was deposited to Sinha's account.

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Pyramid scheme busted in Uttara

They lured jobseekers with false promises: Rab

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion on Tuesday raided a company in Uttara, which was stealing money from job-seekers through a pyramid scheme.

A pyramid scheme is a business model that recruits members via a promise of payments or services for enrolling others into the scheme, rather than supplying investment or sale of products.

Rab said the fraud gang has embezzled around Tk 1.03 crore through this scheme. Thirty people of the company were arrested.

The elite force raided Together Electric and Electronics Ltd, and found some 203 victims at the company's training centre. "This company lures unemployed youth, then takes money from them with the promise of a month-long training session and accommodation," said Mohammad Sajedul Islam Sajal, senior assistant director of Rab-4.

