



A Bengal tiger looks up, almost aware of its photo being taken, during a midday dip in the waterbody beside its cage at Mirpur zoo. With no crowds in the zoo for months, animals are spending a quiet but playful summer by themselves.

SHIFTING RAIL MINISTRY FROM RAIL BHABAN

Secy denies decision, minister has no idea

Meeting minutes about decision on website

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Around nine years after its formation, the railways ministry has decided to transfer its office from Rail Bhaban, the headquarters of Bangladesh Railway, to the secretariat, according to a ministry document.

However, the ministry's secretary denied the decision, while the minister says he has no idea about it.

The ministry will write to the housing and public works ministry seeking allocation of office at secretariat, as it has been facing office space crisis at Rail Bhaban, according to point 3.7 of the meeting minutes, that was available on the ministry's website till last evening.

The decisions came at the monthly coordination meeting of the ministry held on August 5. This was the first meeting after February due to the Covid-19 outbreak; and also the first meeting for Salim Reza, who joined the ministry as its secretary on May 5.

"Officers are struggling to get office space as the ministry is situated at only one floor of Rail Bhaban. The problem would be intensified once the manpower of the ministry is increased," it said.

"Besides, a letter has to be sent to the

housing and public works ministry to shift the ministry to the secretariat, to maintain its distinctness," reads the minutes.

Secretary Salim Reza, who chaired the meeting, said: "We didn't take any such decision [to shift the office]."

When asked about the meeting minutes, the secretary did not give any direct answer. "Where will we get office space? New building has to be built [inside secretariat] for office space. We didn't take any such decision."

Contacted, Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan said, "I have no idea about any such decision. I don't know what incident happened that prompted [to take such decision] to shift ministry from Rail Bhaban to secretariat."

When this correspondent referred to the meeting minutes, the minister said: "A wrong decision might have gone [to the website]. I have to check it."

Bifurcating the then communications ministry, the government on December 4, 2011 established the railways ministry. Since its inception, the ministry has been operating from Rail Bhaban.

At the beginning, a small wing of the ministry was at the secretariat, but later

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EASING DHAKA'S GRIDLOCK

10 U-loops by Dec: Atiqul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka North City Corporation mayor Atiqul Islam yesterday said construction works of 10 U-loops -- stretching from Tejgaon to Uttara -- will be finished by December.

The mayor made the comment while visiting the sites to observe the progress of the project.

He said earlier, traffic congestion in front of Rajlakhsni and Jasim Uddin Road in Uttara was a regular occurrence, but after a U-loop was opened, commuters are now getting benefited.

He said though the initiative to construct the U-loops was taken by late mayor Annisul Huq in 2016, the work got stuck after his death.

Atiqul said he had a commitment to implement all the initiatives of the late mayor and after assuming office in his first term, this became one of the priority projects for him.

He said there were several obstacles relating to land-related complications

and some other issues, but they have overcome those. "We had to purchase land of the Roads and Highways Department, which turned out to be a time consuming process," he said.

After completion of the project, people -- traveling from Tejgaon to Uttara -- will be able to save plenty of commuting time.

DNCC initially took the decision to build 22 U-shaped loops along a 36-kilometre stretch of Dhaka-Gazipur Road to ease traffic congestion. A feasibility study was carried out at the time, and the number was brought down to 11 as Ashulia and Gazipur are under other administrations.

Mayor Atiqul said they will also conduct a drive against cables set up haphazardly from October 1. He said they gave the operators till September 30 to shift the illegal wires. The mayor said they will also conduct drives against illegal posters, banners and advertisement boards.

Among others, Chief Executive Officer of DNCC Abdul Hai and chief engineer Brig Gen Amirul Islam accompanied the mayor during the visit.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Janmashtami marked across the country

BSS, Dhaka

Janmashtami, the celebration of Sri Krishna's birth and one of the major festivals of the Hindu community, was celebrated yesterday in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country with due religious fervour.

The day was a public holiday.

Amid the Covid-19 outbreak, this time all rituals and programmes were arranged inside temples maintaining health guidelines as a decision was taken to cancel all types of processions and rallies marking the festival.

The decision was made recently at a virtual meeting of the district and city units of Bangladesh Puja Uddyan Parishad.

In separate messages, President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina greeted members of the Hindu community on the occasion of Janmashtami.

"Communal harmony is our great heritage. We will have to keep intact the mutual amity and harmony with united efforts," the president said in his message.

The prime minister in her message said, "Bangladesh is a country of communal harmony where people of all caste and creed have been living peacefully for ages. Our constitution has guaranteed equal rights for all..." she said.

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Engage youths in decision making to achieve SDGs: TIB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has called for ensuring active participation of youth in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by involving them in making decisions, formulating policies and strategies, setting action plans and implementing them.

TIB has also emphasised ensuring transparency in the political process by eliminating political malpractices and demanded an end to the arbitrary application of the controversial sections of the Digital Security Act and other similar laws, so that young people can rise above all fears and express their views.

In a press release yesterday, the organisation drew the attention of the government and authorities concerned

Re-excavation goes in vain

Two Khulna rivers fill up within a year

UNB, Khulna

The Bhadra and Shalta rivers in Khulna's Dumuria upazila have filled up in just one year after re-excavation that cost Tk 46.25 crore. Sever

However, the authorities blame silt from the upstream and cutting off the Teligati and Tiabunia embankments of Kharinia.

There is now little water left in the rivers. Soil kept on the banks after re-excavation was washed away by rainwater.

Locals said the rivers were vibrant even 15 years ago when many people depended on them for livelihood. The rivers also played an important role in economic development.

But a 30km stretch of Bhadra and Shalta were eventually filled with silt. As the rivers started to fill up, illegal encroachment began.

Influential people built houses, rice mills, saw mills, markets, multi-storey buildings and other structures by filling up the river.

This led to the permanent closure of the area's drainage system. Now even light rains trigger waterlogging, said locals.

According to Water Development Board (WDB) sources, a project worth Tk 76.25 crore was approved at the Ecne meeting in September 2016 for dredging the two rivers. The project implementation period was set for 2018-2019 fiscal year. The works are implemented through tenders in nine packages.

Under the project, an 11.7km stretch from Dighalia to Dumuria Bazar in the southern part of Bhadra River and 9.8km stretch from Teligati to Dumuria Bazar in the northern part were excavated.

Besides, the Shalta River was connected to the Shailmari River by digging a 9km stretch.

'GONE TO WASTE'

Aminul Islam, a resident of Bamundia village, said soil removed from the rivers was kept on the banks but it was washed away by rainwater.

The project was supposed to build two sluice gates at Dighalia and Teligati at a cost of Tk 30 crore, but they were not constructed.

Mofizur Rahman, a resident of Shobhana village in Dumuria, said river water is not used for

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NETRAKONA TRAWLER CAPSIZE

Life jacket made mandatory for all waterway passengers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

After 18 people drowned in a recent trawler capsize in Netrakona's Madan upazila, the local administration asked leaseholder of Uchitpur Trawler Ghat and trawler owners to arrange for mandatory life jackets for all passengers.

On August 5, 48 people were on the trawler that capsized, enjoying a post-Eid get-together programme. The victims were mainly teachers, students and guardians from villages in Char Sirta union of Mymensingh Sadar upazila.

Following the capsize, fire service and civil defence divers rushed to the spot and recovered the bodies, says Sub-Inspector of Madan Police Station Shamsul Islam.

At least 30 people managed to swim ashore, the police official added.

The ferry-ghat leaseholder and trawler owners have been asked to arrange for life jackets and round-tubes within a week, said Bulbul Ahmed, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) in Madan.

Additionally, the ferry-ghat authority was directed to carry maximum 25 passengers in large trawlers at a time during monsoon, and small trawlers will not be used during this time, said the UNO.

If the directives are not followed, stern action will be taken against the leaseholder

and trawler owners, he warned.

Talking to this correspondent, leaseholder Khaireul Bashar Akanda said they have so far arranged 50 life jackets and 200 round-tubes for boatmen and passengers.

Generally, hundreds travel through the ghat for different haor destinations in Netrakona, Kishoreganj and Sunamganj. But now, the rush of passengers has lessened since the accident, Bashar said.

However, urging proper protection for passengers -- Netrakona Shikkha, Sangskrit, Paribesh O Bochitra Rokhha Committee -- a social and environmental organisation, and Madan Press Club jointly formed a human chain at Uchitpur Ferry Ghat yesterday.

"We pressed a five-point demand that included ensuring lifesaving materials for all passengers and recognition of Uchitpur Tourist Spot following necessary government guidelines," said Prof Md Nazmul Karim Sarker, president of Rokhha Committee.

Meanwhile, Netrakona district administration formed a four-member probe committee, headed by Madan UNO, to investigate the accident. The committee was asked to submit a report within seven working days.



Newspaper hawkers and those affiliated with the industry in Chattogram are now dealing with a new financial burden on top of the ongoing one brought on by the pandemic. As publication of five local newspapers remains halted since July 29 centring a protest, their livelihood has taken a considerable hit. This photo was taken yesterday from the city's GEC intersection.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN