

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,799
New cases in 24hrs



4,92,332
Total cases



7,089
Deaths



4,23,845
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



1,624,631
Deaths



72,981,335
Total cases

A teacher at last

Woman who topped the recruitment test finally gets to be primary school teacher after 12 years; five officials apologise to SC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five government officials yesterday apologised to the Supreme Court's Appellate Division for failing to comply with its order to appoint a woman as a primary school teacher in 15 days.

The woman, Beauty Begum, scored the highest in primary school teachers recruitment test in Gaibandha in 2008, but did not get the job.

After she launched a legal battle, the Appellate Division on August 3, 2017 directed the officials to recruit her to the post in 15 days.

Her lawyer Altaf Hossain said the inaction to hire his client by the given time was tantamount to the contempt of court.

The five officials include then director general of the Directorate of Primary Education Dr Abu Hena Mostafa Kamal, who is now the defence secretary.

Yesterday, they appeared in person before a three-member bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Justice Muhammad Imman Ali, and apologised unconditionally through submitting two separate petitions before the bench.

The apology petitions mentioned that the government has now appointed Beauty Begum in line with the order.

Her lawyer Altaf Hossain told this correspondent that the government issued an appointment letter on Thursday and Beauty would join work without delay.

After accepting the apology, the apex court pardoned the officials and disposed of a contempt of court petition filed against them, Altaf added.

The other officials are primary education directorate's Deputy Director Md Ramzan Ali, Gaibandha Primary Education Officer Aminul Islam, Gaibandha Sadar Education Officer Md Abdus Salam, and Assistant Thana Education Officer Masumul Islam, he said.

Attorney General AM Amin Uddin represented the state while lawyer Shafique Mahmud Pushpa appeared for the officials during the virtual hearing.

The apex court bench on December 7 summoned the five officials.

The top court passed the order while hearing a contempt of court rule issued earlier against the officials. The apex court issued the rule on March 2 this year following the contempt of court petition filed by Beauty, who stood first in the test for the post of primary school teacher.

Lawyer Altaf Hossain said the government officials recruited Nazma Sultana, who had the second highest score in the exam.

The lower courts concerned, the High Court, and Appellate Division at different times had ordered the officials to recruit Beauty Begum to the post.

New rail line to link northern

FROM PAGE 1

regarding where the line will be connected [with the Indian railway] in the border," DN Majumder, additional director general (infrastructure) of the BR, told The Daily Star.

"The aim of constructing the rail line is to boost regional connectivity," he added.

Currently, India, Bhutan and Nepal are connected with Bangladesh via Banglabandha port through roads.

Extension of the railway from Panchagarh to Banglabandha will create a scope for rail communication with India and therefore, with Nepal and Bhutan, the officials said.

In 2018, the BR took up a project titled "Study for Important Projects of West Zone" for carrying out its feasibility study and prepare alignments for three rail lines and a bridge in the railway's western zone.

"Consultants have submitted three alternative routes for the Panchagarh-Banglabandha section, and one of them were finalised at today's meeting," a BR official said.

Now, the BR will appoint a consultant to prepare a detailed design, tender documents and a Development Project Proposal (DPP), he said, adding that they hope to complete these works within this fiscal year.

"Once approved, it would take two years to implement the project," the official said wishing not be named.

Asked about cost of the proposed project, he said, "That can be learned after completion of the detailed design."

Although, the government formally opened the Bangladesh land port in May, 2004, Bangladesh-Nepal transit through Banglabandha was introduced in September, 1997.

Trade between Bangladesh-India through the Banglabandha-Phulbari (in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal) border began in January 2011.

The port is being used for goods transported among Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in November 2015 directed the Railway Ministry to build rail line between Panchagarh and Banglabandha.

She gave the directives after a report was placed before the cabinet saying that operation of heavy trucks and trailers from the port to other parts of the country was causing damage to roads, specially the Mahananda Bridge, according to the project document.

On an average, 5,812 passengers have left Bangladesh for India through this port every month in the 2019-20 fiscal year, even though the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative impact on passengers' movement, according to the Bangladesh Land Port Authority.

The port earned Tk 2.33 crore in last fiscal year, its report shows.

A BR official said the nearest railway stations -- New Jalpaiguri and Rangapani -- in India, is about 6.5 kilometers.

The railways minister yesterday asked BR officials to talk with their Indian counterpart for settling the necessary issues, he said.

There were eight railway interchanges between Bangladesh and India during the period of an undivided India.

Of the eight, four interchanges -- Benapole-Petropole; Darshana-Gede; Rohanpur-Singabadi and Biral-Radhikarpur -- are now operational.

Another interchange -- Chilahati-Haldibari -- will be revived on December 17, when the prime ministers of both countries, India and Bangladesh, would inaugurate it.

Works for the revival of another interchange -- Shahbajpur-Mahishasan -- are now going on while a new interchange between Alkhaura-Agartala is also now under-construction.

Nation vows to safeguard

FROM PAGE 1

He said the fundamentalist forces were able to reach their present position due to the patronising and compromising attitude of successive governments.

The noted political analyst said the present Awami League government's compromising attitude towards Hefajat-e Islam, which opposes the construction of sculpture of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, is also responsible for the rise of fundamentalist forces.

Abul Quasem Fazlul Haq, another political analyst and a former Dhaka University professor, said, "We should not put all the blame on our enemy. We should also do our self-criticism and go for our soul-searching for not fulfilling the dream of the country's martyred intellectuals and letting the rise of fundamentalist elements over the years."

"Our political parties and its leaders lack this sincerity of doing self-criticism. They speak on this issue with the interest of their parties and individuals," he added.

He said in absence of democracy, people are rushing towards religion and a section of religious leaders are taking this opportunity to gain their political interest through misleading people.

Fazlul Haq said, "Our political leaders don't have nationalistic thinking. That's why they rush to different embassies with different issues."

To mark the Martyred Intellectuals Day, elaborate programmes were held nationwide to commemorate the December 14 tragedy.

The nation observed the day to commemorate those intellectuals killed systematically by the Pakistan occupation forces and their local collaborators at the fag-end of the country's Liberation War in 1971.

Just two days ahead of the country's victory on this day 49 years ago, the Pakistan occupation forces with the help of their local collaborators -- Razakar, Al-Badr and Al-Shams -- killed the most prominent intellectuals of the country.

As many as 200 illustrious sons of the soil, including professors, journalists, doctors, artists, engineers and writers, were abducted from their home blindfolded between December 10 and 14 in 1971.

They were taken to torture cells in Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Nakhlaipara, Rajbarah and other locations in the city. Subsequently, they were put to death en masse at different killing grounds, most notably Rayerbazar and Mirpur, in a bid to cripple the newly emerging Bangladesh intellectually.

Among the martyred intellectuals of December 14 were Prof Munier Chowdhury, Dr Alim Chowdhury, Prof Muniruzzaman, Dr Fazle Rabbi, Sirajuddin Hossain, Shahidullah Kaiser, Prof GC Dev, JC Guhathakurta, Prof Santosh Bhattacharya, Mofazzal Haider Chowdhury, journalists Khandaker Abu Taleb, Nizamuddin Ahmed, SA Mannan (Ladu Bhai), ANM Golam Mustafa, Syed Nazmul Haq and Selina Parvin.

Since then, the day is being observed as the Martyred Intellectuals Day.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid rich tributes to the martyred intellectuals in the morning.

The day was observed on a limited scale due to fresh surge of the Covid-19 cases.

Paying tribute to the martyred intellectuals, Obaidul Quader, AL general secretary and also road transport and bridges minister, called upon the pro-liberation forces to build a united resistance to root out the communal forces from society.

Police charge truncheons on activists of different parties who gathered at Paltan intersection in the capital yesterday and started chanting anti-government slogans creating traffic jams.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

UN projections show high hope

FROM PAGE 1

Bangladesh was included in the LDC list in 1975. In 2015, it crossed the threshold of the World Bank-defined lower middle-income country and became eligible for graduation in 2018.

A country must cross the threshold on two of the three criteria in two consecutive triennial reviews to be considered for the graduation.

The CDP will scrutinise Bangladesh's progress towards the graduation for the second time at its triennial review in February next year. The country's official graduation from the LDC category will take place after a three-year transition period.

If the country maintains its position in the three categories for the next three years, it will be recognised as a developing country in the UN General Assembly in 2024.

PER CAPITA INCOME

According to the UN's graduation threshold, the GNI per capita of a country has to be \$1,230 or above. Bangladesh's GNI per capita is now \$1,640, according to the government's status report.

The GNI per capita is the value of a country's final income in a year, divided by its population. It reflects the average income of a country's citizens.

The UNCTAD estimates that in this criterion, the distance of Bangladesh from the graduation threshold was more than 50 percent between the years 2000 and 2009.

Riding on robust macroeconomic fundamentals and strong growth of exports and remittances, the country reported a consistently improving performance against the per capita income criterion, it said.

A continuous rise in the GNI per capita guaranteed that Bangladesh exceeded the graduation threshold for the very first time in 2018, said the UNCTAD assessment.

"In the year 2021, Bangladesh will be at 142 percent of the graduation threshold," said the assessment.

"This suggests that Bangladesh is likely to fulfil graduation criteria in terms of per income at the next triennial review in 2021."

In 2018, the country scored 104 percent of the graduation threshold.

HUMAN ASSETS INDEX (HAI)

In terms of the HAI, a country must have a score of 66 or above. Bangladesh has performed better than it did in 2018 as its score has risen to 75.3 from

72.8, according to the government's status report.

The HAI is an indicator of nutrition, health, adult literacy and secondary school enrolment rate.

Mentioning that a steady progress has been observed in Bangladesh in this criterion, the UNCTAD estimates that the country will stand at 114 percent of the graduation threshold in 2021.

It said the country's score was 45.3 in 2003 and then it exceeded the graduation threshold in 2018 with a score at 111 percent of the threshold.

The key indicators underpinning the evolution of the HAI include child (under five) mortality rate, maternal mortality ratio, prevalence of stunting, gross secondary school enrolment ratio, adult literacy ratio and gender parity index for gross school enrolment ratio.

In terms of child mortality, the country has achieved remarkable success as the under-five mortality rate fell to 31 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2019 from 222 in 1971, 138 in 1991, 82 in 2001 and 46 in 2011, said the assessment.

"Over these decades, extensive changes have occurred in health policy related to maternal health and newborn care- with an emphasis on the integration of delivery of services and interventions targeted at underserved populations-, which could partially explain reduced child mortality."

It further said mortality declines can be also explained with improved coverage of effective interventions to prevent or treat the most important causes of child mortality.

The maternal mortality has decreased significantly over the years, though it remains higher than in developed countries. Between 1990 and 2017, the maternal mortality rate in Bangladesh decreased from 574 to 173 (per 100,000 live births), a remarkable 70 percent decrease in three decades, it said.

The UNCTAD said the gross secondary school enrolment rate has increased, albeit in a volatile manner, over the years.

However, it is still relatively low (72.6 percent in 2019), particularly when compared to other South Asian LDCs.

ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY INDEX (EVI)

In the EVI criterion, a country's score has to be below 32. Bangladesh's score

is 27.3 against 25 two years ago, said the status report of the government.

The EVI is a composition of indicators like instability of agricultural production and exports of goods and services and share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in gross domestic product. The lower a country scores in this index the better it performs.

The UNCTAD assessment said Bangladesh's performance under the graduation threshold relevant to this criterion demonstrated sustained improvements between 2012 and 2015 triennial reviews, with the EVI score hitting a plateau thereafter.

The EVI score of Bangladesh in 2018 was 25.2, which was 127 percent relative to the graduation threshold. The provisional value relevant to this criterion for 2021 triennial review is estimated to meet graduation threshold at 117 percent, it said.

The assessment said the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector displayed sustained growth in labour productivity, even though its contribution to value -- as well as its employment share -- has declined.

Although exports played an important role in its growth trajectory for Bangladesh, the heightened dependence on the readymade garments sector remains a source of concern in the long term, it cautioned.

BANGLADESH WILL RESPOND

Finance ministry officials said the government disagrees with some of the observations of UNCTAD and will send its opinion to them shortly.

After receiving Bangladesh's opinions, UNCTAD will present the assessment during a meeting in January next year where a group of CDP experts will discuss the country's position.

Upon getting the experts' view, the CDP will hold the triennial review on February 7, 8, and 9 and recommend Bangladesh's name for the graduation if the country passes the assessment.

If Bangladesh gets out of the LDC bloc in 2024, it will be given a three-year transition period before it loses duty-free and quota-free market access to the European Union under the Everything but Arms initiative for LDCs, according to the CDP.

The officials said the representatives of BGMEA and FBCCI requested keeping the duty-free export facilities and other benefits for Bangladesh until 2030, considering the economic fallout of the pandemic.

It's even worse during pandemic

FROM PAGE 1

number of complaints reported to those clinics, run by the Human Rights and Legal Aid Services Programme.

Among the complaints received, those of "non-compoundable criminal offences" were also higher this year compared to last year -- 2,412 in 2020 versus 1,739 in 2019. "Non-compoundable criminal offence" includes grave criminal acts like rape, attempt to rape, and domestic torture.

The data shows that rape complaints rose by 63 percent on average (excluding May and September which showed slight dips).

Meanwhile, "Polli Shomaj", the organisation's ward-level units, reported over 2,000 more incidences of violence against women and children across 54 districts, this year than they did last year.

"Polli Shomaj" groups include women members from all wards of a union council and they undertake activities such as stopping child marriages.

According to data provided by Brac, Polli Shomaj prevented 371 child marriages between January and September in 2019, while 97 incidents of child marriage were reported by community members. During the same time period in 2020, they prevented 646 incidents of child marriage, while community members reported 146 incidents of child marriage.

The crisis worsened from July, the data shows.

"We saw a rise in underage marriages and domestic violence," said Md Abdul Haq, a programme organiser from Damarhuda in Chuadanga, who is working for Brac's Community Empowerment Programme.

"People were home and unemployed. The families are going through poverty. Since the men are home, they are constantly interfering

in the women's domestic duties, leading to altercations. The girls are home and not working or studying, so they are being seen as a burden," described Hai.

"In the last year, I stopped five underage marriages in Damarhuda. There were also four or five such marriages I could not prevent. All the brides were 13 or 14," he added.

"Domestic violence has also increased. I had to intervene in a marriage, where a 17-year-old bride was being tortured for dowry of Tk 1 lakh. The husband beat her up and broke her arm. Then she was beaten up again by a mob led by a woman her husband was having an extra-marital affair with, and she needed to be hospitalised," narrated Hai.

Special attention must be paid to adolescent girls, especially those between 10 and 18 years, recommended a media brief circulated by Brac.

Post-Covid-19 cooperation to be on agenda

FROM PAGE 1

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said yesterday, announcing the summit officially.

India and Bangladesh have continued to maintain regular exchanges at the highest level, the ministry said.

Hasina paid an official visit to India in October last year. Modi delivered a video message on the historic occasion of "Mujib Borsho" in March this year.

The two leaders were in regular touch with each other during the Covid-19 pandemic, the MEA said.

On Sunday, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said Bangladesh will raise all the big issues, including water and border, during the virtual summit.

Talking to reporters at his office, the minister said a number of "quick-impact" projects would also be inaugurated.

Momen, however, said the month of Victory would come up prominently in the meeting because it is also a victory for India as they helped Bangladesh achieve the victory in 1971.

He remembered the contributions of the then governments of India and the United Kingdom for bringing Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman back home alive.

The minister said Bangladesh and India are witnessing a golden chapter in their relations. "The two countries

have set an example by resolving issues like LBA and maritime boundaries through dialogue and discussion."

Responding to a question, Momen said a Swadhinata Sarak will be opened on March 26 next year marking the 50 years of Bangladesh's independence.

Bangladesh has invited the Indian premier to visit the country on March 26 in person to jointly celebrate the Independence Day of Bangladesh. The Indian side accepted the invitation in principle.

In March this year, the two premiers joined a virtual meeting of Saarc countries on cooperation to deal with the Covid-19 situation in the region.

Two die after falling sick in shipbreaking yards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two employees, including a security guard, of two shipbreaking firms in Chattogram's Sitakunda upazila died yesterday morning after falling sick at their workplaces.

The deceased -- Kranti Tripura, 25, of Janata Steel Yard, and Jolendra Chakma, 24, of Mother Steel -- were from Khagrachhari district.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Janata Steel Yard Manager Md Sohel said Kranti was a security guard at their firm. He was not feeling well after having dinner on Sunday night.

As his condition deteriorated, he was rushed to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) where he passed away around 4:00am, added Sohel.

Abul Kashem, owner of Mother Steel, said Jolendra fell ill yesterday morning. He died "after being taken to CMCH".

ASI Md Hamid of CMCH Police Box said a patient was sent to the hospital from Sitakunda shipbreaking yard in the morning.

Abdullah Al Sakib Mubarrat, deputy inspector general (Chattogram directorate) of Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishment, said he visited the two firms, talked to witnesses and found that the deaths were not caused by any accident.

ASI Mohammad Kaiser of Sitakunda Police Station said they had no information about the deaths of two employees at the shipbreaking yards until yesterday evening.

5 sentenced to death get acquitted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday acquitted all five people, who were sentenced to death by a lower court in Netrokona, in a case filed for the abduction and gang rape of a teenage girl in 2002, as the allegations brought against them were not proved beyond reasonable doubt.

The HC bench of Justice S M Emdadul Hoque and Justice Bhishmadev Chakraborty delivered the verdict after hearing the appeals of the convicted accused and the death reference (lower court documents) of the case.

The HC acquitted the five on the grounds that there was no evidence of rape in the medical report, no eye witnesses of the incident and due to inconsistencies in the statements made by the victim and her witnesses, Deputy Attorney General Md Mozammel Haque Rana told The Daily Star.

He, however, said the government will move an appeal before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court challenging the HC verdict.

On Jul 20, 2002, the girl was allegedly abducted and gang raped in Durgapur upazila's Kalikabar village while she was heading to a relative's house, according to the case documents.

The district and sessions judge's court of Netrokona on February 25, 2015, sentenced the five accused to death.

The accused are Shamim, Vikon Rongdi, Tikon Rongdi, Tapash Shema and Rup Miah, who is absconding, of Netrokona's Purbadhala upazila.

The district court also fined the accused Tk 25,000 each.

Lawyers Fazlul Hoque Khan Farid, AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon, Bazlur Rahman and few others appeared for the accused.

4 men

FROM PAGE 1

Police arrested the main accused Miraj Hossain, 26, yesterday after the victim's father filed a case with Ramgati Police Station against Miraj and his three unnamed accomplices, said Mohammad Solaiman, OC, of the station.

The woman was admitted to Laxmipur Sadar Hospital.

According to the victim's family, the incident took place around 2:30am when all in the house were asleep.

The four stormed the house breaking the door and tied up and confined most of the family members to a room.

They took the woman to another room. As she tried to resist the rapists, they beat her up.

Hearing family members' screams, locals rescued them and informed the police.

Sadman, medical officer of Ramgati Upazila Health Complex, said the woman was admitted to the health complex with evidence that she had been raped and injury marks. She was later moved to Laxmipur Sadar Hospital for better treatment, he said.

The OC said police were trying to identify and arrest the other accused.