

Edu institutions likely to reopen in March: Quader

UNB, Dhaka

Road Transport and Bridges Minister and Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said the government may reopen educational institutions in March, considering the situation upon consultation with experts.

He said this at a programme marking the distribution of winter clothes among cold-stricken people, organised by Relief and Social Welfare Sub-Committee of Awami League.

The minister joined the programme virtually from his official residence.

The Awami League general secretary said, "A visible success has been achieved in advancing democracy and in institutionalising it in Bangladesh, as the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Election Commission and other institutions are working independently."

Mentioning that Bangladesh has set an example in the world in controlling the global pandemic and coping with natural disasters, he said Sheikh Hasina's wisdom, determination, courage, honesty and hard work are lauded in today's world.



Tara Mia rides his bicycle through Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in the capital, with two orange seedlings secured on the passenger seat. An avid rooftop gardener, he bought the seedlings for Tk 320 each to add to his expanding collection of fruit and flower plants.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Sharp rise in motorbike accidents in 2020: report

Nearly 5,000 killed despite lower number of road crashes, says Nirapad Sarak Chai

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although the number of road crashes have somewhat decreased, largely due to pandemic-induced restrictions on public transport, motorcycle accidents witnessed a sharp rise in 2020 compared to the previous year.

At least 4,969 people were killed and 5,058 were injured in 4,092 different types of accidents last year, according to road safety campaign Nirapad Sarak Chai. People killed in rail and riverine incidents were also included here.

Ilias Kanchan, chairman of the road safety movement, revealed the information at a press conference at Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Nirapad Sarak Chai, which has been campaigning road safety since 1993, came up with the data after analysing reports published in different national dailies, online news portals, TV channels, and information from its branches across the country.

The actor turned road safety activist said 3,800 people were killed and 4,954 were injured in 3,232 road crashes.

Besides, 129 people were killed and 31 were injured in 108 rail-related accidents and 212 were killed and 100 were injured or went missing in 70 riverine accidents last year, he said.

The organisation added 20 percent to the numbers as many incidents do not get reported or the injured die at hospitals, making the total number of death 4,969, he said.

"The number of road accidents in 2020 is fewer than the previous two years. But, we should not claim this as a small number, because 2020

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Look for alternative sources vaccine: BNP urges govt

UNB, Dhaka

Stating that the government's shortsightedness has created uncertainty over collecting a vaccine, BNP yesterday urged it to promptly find an alternative source.

"This government does not have minimum responsibility towards people, as it has been in power without their votes. Now an uncertainty looms over having a vaccine due to their (the government's) shortsightedness and plundering policy," said BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain.

Speaking at a press conference, he said, "We strongly demand the government make its position clear on vaccine collection, pricing, storage and distribution system as soon as possible, to clear the uncertainty. We also call upon it to find a quick alternative source for vaccine collection."

BNP's six-member committee on coronavirus vaccine, formed last week and led by Mosharraf, arranged the press

conference at the party chairperson's Gulshan office.

Mosharraf, a former health minister, said the government can reach an understanding with China, Russia and other potential vaccine manufacturers to collect their vaccines.

He said both the vaccines of Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech are not suitable for Bangladesh due to its preservation problem. "Russia has already approved its Sputnik-V coronavirus vaccine while China has approved its Sinopharm vaccine and started vaccinating their people."

"We can look for alternative vaccines that are being recognised by the World Health Organization and international bodies after trial in different parts of the world... our country could have got the vaccine at a lower price had we been able to negotiate with producers of vaccines now being administered in different parts of the world. We urge the government to

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LDA demands removal of CEC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Left Democratic Alliance (LDA) yesterday called on the President to constitute Supreme Judicial Council to investigate allegations of corruption against Election Commission officials and remove them from their positions.

They also said at a rally that Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda and other commissioners are "guilty of moral turpitude", as ballot stuffing took place on the night prior to December 30 national election, and there were allegations of corruption against them.

Leaders and activists yesterday went to besiege the Election Commission with the demand of the CEC's resignation. Police barred them in front of Department of Environment, about 500 metres west of the EC office at Agargaon.

Barricaded by police, activists of LDA, a platform of eight left-leaning organisations, held an impromptu rally there.

LDA coordinator and Communist Party of Bangladesh leader Abdullah Al Kafee Ratan urged President Abdul Hamid to form Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) investigate allegations of corruption against the commission.

"You [President] should remove them [commissioner]. CEC and other commissioners are guilty of moral turpitude, it is now your moral duty to remove the commissioners

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Though not at full capacity, people are visiting Ramna park, for what is winter in Dhaka without afternoons at parks? However, this still doesn't excuse the need for masks and other social distancing requirements. The photo was taken recently.

Parkgoers stepping out, but cautiously

MH HAIDER, Star Lifestyle Desk

In the otherwise concrete jungle of Dhaka city, the greenery of its parks stand out, both in terms of scenery and the functions they serve. They are places where citizens can jog or take a stroll, or take a break from the hectic city life.

The parks of Dhaka become especially popular during winter. As the temperature is suitable for strolls, people throng parks in their neighbourhood, and even ones that may be further than a walking distance.

Despite the ongoing pandemic, the same can be said about this winter, albeit with a bit of adjustment for context. Even though Dhaka's parks aren't attracting as many people as they did pre-pandemic, attendance figures are still up compared to the early days of Covid's onslaught.

For example, the parks around Dhanmondi Lake remain buzzing, especially during evenings, albeit at a lesser scale compared to regular times.

"I have diabetes. Taking light strolls is the most convenient and enjoyable exercise for me," Naim Bin Zahur, a Dhanmondi resident said. "It [Dhanmondi Lake] is actually much less crowded compared to pre-pandemic days though," he added.

Rafiqul Islam Babla, Councillor of Ward-15 (DSCC) and General Secretary of Dhanmondi Thana Awami League, pointed out that people have become weary of being stuck at home, which

contributes to the steady inflow of people at the lake.

"The most we can do is try to ensure that health guidelines are maintained. I, along with park staffers and volunteers, have distributed masks, raised awareness around the area, and instructed restaurants in the area to take a strict stance on health guidelines," said Babla, whose office is adjacent to the lake.

In the meantime, Ramna Park has taken some drastic measures, including limiting visiting hours and taking up a no-mask-no-entry protocol.

"Many people still come to Ramna Park, but the liveliness of the place is not the same as before," Sadia, a regular at the park, told this correspondent.

But the same cannot be said of everyone. Even though walking, strolling, or jogging at the parks are their favourite pastime -- or calls of necessity -- some would rather just stay home this winter. Sadequur Rahman, who frequently visited Ramna Park before the pandemic, said, "How can I jog with a mask on? It is very uncomfortable. But I understand the necessity and have chosen not to go there at all."

"I don't want to risk it," said Nafis Hossain, a 43-year-old resident of Wari. "I used to go to the Balda Garden for morning walks every day. I feel like it's different from all the other parks. It's smaller, simpler and more picturesque. I love it from my heart. But during the pandemic, I'd rather just go to the rooftop and get some freehand exercise."

Moudud doing better, but still hospitalised

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health condition of hospitalised BNP Standing Committee Member Barrister Moudud Ahmed is improving, party Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir informed journalists after visiting him yesterday.

"I have visited him. His situation has improved. I even talked to him and he said he was feeling good," Mirza Fakhrul told journalists.

He said he has talked with physicians who told him a pacemaker will be installed in Moudud's chest today.

On December 29 last year, Moudud Ahmed was admitted at Evercare Hospital in the capital after falling sick.

He was suffering from low haemoglobin levels in his blood.

SCHOOL AT HISTORIC BUILDING IN CTG HC orders halt of demolition

STAR REPORT

The High Court yesterday issued a status quo order for a month on demolition of Shishubagh School building, a historical structure carrying memories of anti-British movements at Chattogram's Rahmatganj.

The HC also issued a rule, asking authorities concerned of the government to explain why their failure to protect the structure should not be declared illegal. In the rule, the court also asked the government to show causes as to why it should not be directed to protect and preserve the structure as a heritage property.

The HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Md Khairul Alam came up with the order and rule, after hearing a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Masud Alam Chowdhury, seeking necessary directives to protect the building.

Khairul submitted the petition as a public interest litigation to the HC, following a report published in the Bangla daily Azadi on January 4 about the demolition of Shishubagh School, where around 500 students from playgroup to fifth-grade study under 20 teachers.

The building was established by Barrister Jatindra Mohan Sengupta,

then leader of Congress and anti-British movements, around 250 years back, and it was turned to Shishubagh School in 1970, petitioner's lawyer Hassan MS Azim told The Daily Star.

Deputy Attorney General Tushar Kanti Roy, who represented the state, told this correspondent that M Farid Chowdhury, a local influential man, and his men bulldozed a part of the historical structure on January 4, after obtaining a decree from the lower court over the building's ownership.

Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad leader Rana Dasgupta and others prevented them from demolishing the building, and it cannot be demolished following the HC order, he said.

Meanwhile, Rana, also a prosecutor of International Crimes Tribunal, yesterday submitted a memorandum to the administrator of Chattogram City Corporation (CCC), seeking his cooperation for urging the government to take steps to turn Jatindra Mohan Sengupta's house into a museum.

Poet and journalist Abul Momen was with him among others at that time, Rana said.

"We submitted the memorandum to CCC Administrator Khorshed Alam Sujon...to turn the house into a museum, as per Ministry of Cultural

Affairs' decision on July 9, 2018, and declare the house and surroundings as a heritage site, as per Antiquities Act and Article 24 of the Constitution," he said.

Rana said the administrator expressed solidarity with the demand and assured them of all out cooperation, adding, "The administrator said he would send a demi official letter to the government tomorrow."

The Daily Star talked to Farhad Chowdhury, elder son of M Farid Chowdhury, who went to demolish the house on Monday, after obtaining a court order.

Asked, Farhad said they were termed as land grabbers by some media organisations, but they did not go to grab any land.

"We got court order over the land's ownership, and the court ordered government officials concerned and police to help us get the property. We went there after a long legal battle," he said. "So, how can they call us land grabbers?"

Asked, Farhad said his father had an agreement with Milan Sen, the property's inheritor, to buy the land in 1980, but Milan was "dillydallying" to provide registration, and so, his father

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'Reconsider limiting expats' investments against govt bonds'

Non-resident Bangladeshis urge authorities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Non-resident Bangladeshis yesterday urged the government to reconsider its decision of "limiting" expatriates' investment opportunities against some government savings instruments.

Leaders of NRB CIP Association during a "meet the press" event at a city hotel urged the government to consider re-introducing the previous system.

They said the government has recently set Tk 1 crore or its equivalent in foreign currency as the maximum collective investment for expatriates against wage earners' development bond, US dollar premium bond and US dollar investment bond.

They said if a limit is imposed on expatriates' investment against bonds then the ill practice of sending money through illegal channels could rise, and this might affect the country's foreign reserves negatively.

Earlier, expatriate Bangladeshis had been investing against government bonds through formal channels, since there was no limit of investment against those savings instruments, said Mahtabur Rahman, president of the association.

He said expatriate Bangladeshis in Middle Eastern countries, who get pension benefits following retirement after 20-30 years of employment, need to bring their benefits to the country.

"These expatriates consider investment against government bonds as safe investment," he added.

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Students queue up to receive their new books for the next grade at Tejgaon Govt Girls' High School. Although premises of educational institutions remain closed, online classes are ongoing during the pandemic. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BUS FIRE CASES

178 BNP men get anticipatory bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday granted anticipatory bail to 178 BNP leaders and activists including Juba Dal vice presidents Abdul Baten Shamim and Rabiul Alam till February 7 in 13 cases filed for setting buses on fire in Dhaka on November 12 last year.

The HC also asked the accused to surrender before the lower court concerned on expiry of their anticipatory bail.

The HC bench of Justice Md Habibur Gani and Justice Md Riaz Uddin Khan came up with the orders after hearing 36 petitions filed by the accused BNP leaders and activists.

Earlier in the day, the accused appeared before the HC bench for bail.

Lawyers Kayser Kamal and Gazi Kamrul Islam Sajal appeared for the accused petitioners while Assistant Attorney General Mahfuzur Rahman Likhon represented the state.

Police filed 13 separate cases with different police stations in Dhaka on November 12 and 13 after several buses were torched in the capital on November 12.