

## Make sure that Covid-19 directives are enforced: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed all authorities concerned to perform their duties properly to ensure that the government directives are implemented appropriately to battle the second wave of Covid-19 in the country.

"We've already issued some directives to check coronavirus. You all will have to pay special attention so that people follow the directives properly," she said while inaugurating the newly-constructed multi-storied head office of the National Security Intelligence (NSI).

The premier declared the 20-storied head office building open, joining the event virtually from her official residence Gono Bhaban.

She said her government is especially conscious of keeping the economic activities running, but saving lives is the first priority.

Hasina said various countries witnessed economic slowdown due to the coronavirus situation, but Bangladesh has been able to keep the economic pace running and its growth rate is higher than other South Asian countries.

"We'll have to maintain it (the trend of growth)," she said.



The PM asked all to raise public awareness so that people follow the health protection rules and guidelines.

"All will have to keep themselves protected and protect others. All of you who are in-charge will have to perform your duties properly," she said.

Hasina asked the NSI to work properly to check militancy, terrorism, drug and corruption in the country as the government announced "zero tolerance policy" against these social menaces.

"You will have to remain vigilant about these (social menaces) and take proper measures. You'll have to do whatever is necessary for protecting people's lives and properties, public interest and ensuring peace and security," she said.

"We want that you, every member of NSI, will perform your duties with honesty and sincerity being imbued with the spirit of patriotism," she said.

The PM also emphasised on maintaining the continuation of the country's development. "If we want to keep its continuation, we'll have to maintain peace and order in the country, fight coronavirus and simultaneously keep up the economic pace," she said.

Hasina said though the pandemic may

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## Century-old botanical wonder lies in neglect

HASAN MEER AND HELEMUL ALAM

Baldha Garden no longer bustles with life, as it used to in the past with a delightful array of exotic plants and trees.

Over the years, due to negligence of the authorities concerned, the garden, which had attracted plant lovers and botany students, has been left in a derelict state. High-rises surrounding it continue to cast ominous shadows on this century-old botanical wonder, leaving it with little air and even less sunlight -- the two important elements for its survival.

The trees and plants are left on their own to ward off pollution and human excesses, resulting in death of many plant species. The garden has also become a hub of anti-social activities, according to locals.

But it didn't use to be like this at all.

### THE GARDEN

It was set up by Narendra Narayan Roy Chowdhury, landlord of the estate of Baldha (now in Gazipur).

Narendra, a poet in heart, loved everything about nature -- from the rustling of leaves in the trees to the gentle ripples of water in a pond.

True to his love, he took an initiative to establish a garden in Wari which, at that time, was the city's wealthiest area. Supervised by the world's best curators from England, the garden was set up in 1909.

Narendra also dug up a pond (around nine-katha) there. Encircled by grille fences, the square-shaped waterbody -- Sankhanidhi -- has two mosaic ghats (landing spot).

There are tree tubs placed in the middle of the staircase enhancing the beauty of the area.

There are murals of flowers on benches next to it where one can sit under the shades of trees to take in nature's splendour. As the golden hue of the morning sun spreads over the reservoir, the garden's reflection also grows larger.

Narendra continued to expand the garden and never stopped looking after it until his death in 1943.

And what a collection he had! Baldha spans 3.38 acres of land and boasts eighteen thousand plant specimens of eight hundred



Once these reservoirs used to remain filled with lily pads. They are now replaced with algae, plastic bottles and dried leaves that has turned the water murky. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: HASAN MEER

different species, collected from different parts of the world.

### PRESENT CONDITION

After Narendra's death, the Forest Department has been looking after the garden since 1962.

But this exquisite garden is not being maintained at all.

During multiple visits over last month, this newspaper saw that the outer wall looked shabby while a rusty signboard depicting the history of the garden greeted visitors.

Some passers-by even discouraged these correspondents to enter, saying "it was not worth the visit due to its present condition".

The garden is divided into two parts -- Psyche (soul) and Cybele (name of a nature deity). Visitors are allowed to enter the Cybele part, which is open every day. The entry fee is Tk 20 per person.

Though there are signs along the walkway, urging people not to pollute the area or refrain from anti-social activities, no one seemed to pay heed.

Many of the rare exhibits were either locked or too dirty. There were plastic bottles, papers and cigarette stubs everywhere. A thick layer of dust covered many plants while some tubs were broken.

There were tanks with lotus leaves

that were filled with algae.

A disappointed Wari resident, Ashraf Amin, said, "Even around 15 years back, the pond was full of lotus and Amazon lilies. Its water has to be cleaned so that flowers can grow again."

His wife, meanwhile, was disturbed seeing the droves of youngsters occupying most corners of the garden in pairs.

"This is supposed to be a place that offers a green respite from our daily grind. It's sad, the way authorities are treating Baldha Garden," said Umme Salma, a private job holder.

Their five-year-old son was certainly bored seeing the condition of the place; he kept asking his father to leave.

This newspaper also tried to speak to some youths there -- many ignored the request, some became suspicious, while a few turned hostile.

When pointed out, the staff, finding whom turned out to be a challenging task itself, just tried to evade the responsibility.

Staff member Hafizul Islam blamed the lack of manpower behind the present condition.

He said there are eight staffers looking after the garden. "There used to be 12 of us, but some got

transferred to the botanical garden in Mirpur," he said.

Another staffer Md Mannan encouraged these correspondents to visit the Psyche part of the garden, which was not faring any better either -- with signs of mismanagement and lack of care being evident.

### RENOVATION PLANS

Contacted, Hoq Mahbub Morshed, director of botanical garden (Forest Department), said, "We have done some renovation work at Baldha Garden. Under the plan, we have set up walkway and cleaned the area. We will also renovate the building in the Psyche part of the garden along with other structures."

"There's also a reservoir in the garden, we are planning to do some renovation work there," he added.

About manpower shortage, he said the entire Forest Department is facing the crisis. "But we're hoping this issue will be resolved soon as we are looking into it," he added.

Regarding anti-social activities at the garden, the director said they are making sure that such activities do not take place. "However, some may take advantage of the situation but we try to remain alert in this regard," he added.

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## What kind of lockdown is it?

### Decision to keep Boi Mela open from 12-5pm draws criticism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

While the government has shut shopping malls and restricted movement of public transport fearing further surge in coronavirus cases, the decision of keeping Ekushey Book Fair open for visitors has caught flak.

Hours after the issuance of the circular, flurry of criticism flooded social media on the issue.

According to its circular, the cabinet division has imposed restriction on public transport and asked people not to go outside from 6am to 6pm in the next seven days.

On the other hand, Ministry of Cultural Affairs decided to limit the visiting hours at Amar Ekushey Boi Mela 2021 from 12pm to 5pm everyday until further notice.

They issued a notification in this regard.

A citizen wrote on Facebook, there should have some directives for law enforcers as how they would deal with visitors of book fair as mass transport is restricted.

Mentioning the book fair, another person questioned, "What kind of lockdown is this? Is the government really serious about spread of Covid-19 infection?"

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## Bill placed in JS to address hajj irregularities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Hajj and Umrah Management Bill-2021 was placed in parliament yesterday, in principle, to deal with irregularities and mismanagement in the sector.

State Minister for Religious Affairs Ministry Faridul Haque Khan placed the bill, which was sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the respective ministry for further scrutiny.

The parliamentary watchdog was asked to submit its report within 40 days.

Hajj and umrah management in the country has worked through a policy up to now. No legal

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## High Court directs Grameen Telecom to reinstate 28 sacked employees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed Grameen Telecom authorities to immediately reinstate its 28 employees who were terminated from their jobs earlier.

The HC bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Kamrul Islam Mollah came up with the order, after hearing a pending writ petition filed by Grameen Telecom Sramik Union, challenging the termination order.

Petitioner's lawyer Md Yousuf Ali told The Daily Star that Grameen Telecom on October 25 last year terminated 66 employees.

During the legal procedures, the HC on December 6 last year directed Grameen Telecom to immediately reinstate 38 employees out of the 66.

The same court yesterday ordered reinstatement of the rest of the employees, the lawyer added.



Workers move the heaps of watermelons that arrived at Barishal city from different upazilas of the district on boats. There has been a bumper harvest of the refreshing fruit, which may lead to lower prices for buyers. This photo was taken on Friday from the city's Port Road.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

## Four arrested for robbery in B'baria

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Police claimed to have arrested four members of an inter-district robber gang who robbed the houses of two expatriates after throwing crude bombs in Akhaura area of Brahmanbaria.

The four were arrested from different places in Brahmanbaria on Saturday, said Tanvir Haider Chowdhury, additional deputy inspector general of CID at a press briefing at its headquarters in the capital's Malibagh yesterday.

The arrestees are -- Nazim Uddin (36), Mahin Mia (22), Jahidul Islam Babu (24), and Kajal Chandra Shil (54).

Two robberies occurred on March 12 at two separate houses in Satpara and Dijoypur. Both households were of expatriates.

At Dijoypur, Saudi Arabia-returnee Siraj Miah's household members resisted the robbers, and at least five were injured as the criminals stabbed them.

The robbers then looted valuables including Tk 75,000 and mobile phones from the house in Dijoypur village. The victims filed a case at Akhaura police station.

The CID said that the gang has carried out robberies in different parts of the country including Brahmanbaria. There are four cases against Nazim Uddin at Belabo police station in Narsingdi on charges of robbery.

During the drive, three sharp weapons, two knives and a machete were seized from their possession.

Meanwhile in a separate incident, the CID arrested a man on charges of being involved in bail order fraud. He was arrested from Sonadanga area of Khulna on Saturday night.

The arrestee is Abu Bakkar, who was among two others released from Jashore Central Jail after forging the bail order in a case filed under the Narcotics Control Act.

## MAMUNUL'S CONFINEMENT IN N'GANJ

## Hefajat activists turn violent across country

STAR REPORT

Leaders and activists of Hefajat-e-Islam unleashed mayhem at different places across the country following confinement of a top leader of the organisation by ruling Awami League men at a resort in Narayanganj along with a woman on Saturday evening.

Hours after the incident, several hundred Hefajat men vandalised and launched arson attack on different offices and shops in Cox's Bazar's Moheshkhali upazila.

They even tried to attack a Buddhist temple in Kalamarchhara area of the same upazila, said locals and witnesses.

The violence erupted around 11pm on Saturday and went on till around 1am.

Additional law enforcers have been deployed in the area, said Md Abdul Hai, officer-in-charge of Moheshkhali Police Station.

Meanwhile in Sunamganj, around one thousand Hefajat activists were sued yesterday in connection with attacking Chhatak Police Station on Saturday night and injuring eight policemen.

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## Nor'wester uproots 30 'butterfly' street lights in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The nor'wester that swept over Rajshahi city yesterday uprooted at least 30 poles of the recently installed butterfly-shaped street lights of Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC).

The incident occurred only one and half months after installing the modern streetlights for the city's beautification, said RCC officials.

One Md Fahad Ibna Mahafuz livestreamed the fall of some of the poles, while he was travelling to Godagari upazila.

"The poles were falling one after another. I had to cancel my journey. I've never seen a scene like this before," he said.

"The wind was strong. The poles were damaged only at parts of the street where the storm blew over," said RCC Executive Engineer Rezat Hossain. "Otherwise, we left no weakness in construction of the base for installing the poles."

He said the base was made of stones and concrete ready-mix, bought from Ena Properties Limited.

The local met office in Rajshahi described the nor'wester as a medium storm that went on for one hour and 45 minutes in four stages since 3:55pm.

The office recorded the strongest wind during the storm to be 65 kilometres per hour.

The corporation installed a total of 174 poles in

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## Homebound journey ends in tragedy for four farm workers

### 11 killed, seven injured in road crashes

STAR REPORT

At least 11 people were killed and seven injured in road accidents across the country in the last two days, report our correspondent and a news agency.

In Keraniganj, four people were killed after a covered van hit a CNG-run auto-rickshaw near Tulshikhani bridge on Dhaka-Nawabganj road around 7am yesterday, said highway police.

One of the deceased was identified as auto-rickshaw driver Uzzal (27) of the district.

The covered van sped away after the incident, they said.

The victims -- all farm labourers -- had come to Dhaka from Rangpur for work. Hearing the news of lockdown, they were returning to their village, police said.

In Cumilla, three people were killed and four injured, after a sand-laden truck hit a battery-run auto-rickshaw near Palpara bridge of Sadar upazila around 9am yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Abdul Kader (75), Moti Mia (73) and Helal Mia (55) of the upazila.

Anwarul Haque, officer-in-charge (OC) of Cumilla Kotwali Model Police Station, said, "Two auto-rickshaw passengers died on spot, and another, Helal, died while under treatment at Cumilla Medical College Hospital [CuMCH]."

The injured -- auto-rickshaw driver Tofayel Hossain (15), Mannan Mia (70), Wadud Mia (70), and Ruk Mia (70) -- were taken to CuMCH. The driver was critically injured, hospital sources said.

According to family members of the deceased, six friends and neighbours of Chandpur village were going to Palpara bridge area for fishing.

Police seized the truck from Burichang area, but the driver and helper are yet to be arrested. Legal procedures are underway, and the bodies were handed over to families, said police.

In Munshiganj, three people were killed and three seriously injured after an unidentified vehicle hit a CNG-run auto-rickshaw at Tulshikhali area on Dhaka-Nawabganj highway in Sirajdikhan upazila around 8am yesterday, said police.

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