

Covid vaccines to be collected no matter what

Says Obaidul Quader

UNB, Dhaka

The government will take necessary initiatives to procure vaccines from any source to save people's lives, road transport and bridges minister Obaidul Quader said yesterday.

"There's no need for any special relationship with anyone to manage coronavirus vaccines... the government will collect it from any source," he told reporters in the morning.

Earlier, Obaidul Quader, also general secretary of Awami League, paid homage to Shaheed Sheikh Jamal, son of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, by placing wreaths at his Banani graveyard marking his 68th birth anniversary.

The senior party leader paid homage on behalf of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina first and then for the party.

He said the biggest challenge now is to avoid the politics of blame game over dealing with coronavirus, the common enemy of all, irrespective of party affiliation.

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Only lower trunks of the 15 trees felled by authorities at Suhrawardy Udyan remain, and even those will vanish, as buildings and a road will take their place under a project to develop the premises. Experts have called for protecting the environment first, and then carrying out any development work.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

SUHRWARDY UDYAN

Greenery being erased for beautification!

Razing of trees, building concrete structures draws flak from experts, locals

SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

A project was undertaken to develop the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan and make it greener, but authorities are seemingly contradicting one of their own goals, as under the same project, they are felling old trees to construct buildings.

A number of signs can be seen at the historic grounds stating "Project to enhance the beauty and greenery of Suhrawardy Udyan is ongoing under Public Works Department". It is worth wondering whether building concrete structures at the expense of greenery, as sources are claiming, is "enhancing the beauty".

The project, which started decades ago, is currently in its third phase. Experts say if the government decides to cut down trees, it should consult them. Important aspects of the environment need to be protected first, and then authorities may go on with development.

Sources at the Ministry of Housing and Public Works said the trees were cut down without consulting experts.

This correspondent visited the spot recently and saw ongoing construction of six structures for making canteens. Three are in the west, two in the north-east, and one in the south-east parts of the park.

In the west, there were a number of trees that have been there for a long time. But they were cut down, and now, the area looks barren. According to eyewitnesses, 15 trees, planted in the 1970s, have already been felled.

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'Hefajat definitely has political ambitions'

Says home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday said Hefajat-e-Islam has done enough vandalism across the country.

"Land office, district commissioner's bungalows, police bungalows, police outposts have come under attack. They even vandalised Ustad Alauddin Khan Institute. After evaluating all these, we will reveal their true purpose," said the minister while addressing reporters at his Dhanmondi residence.

Technically, Hefajat is a non-political organisation, he said.

"But we see that Hefajat sometimes gets stuck in political entanglements and gets involved with identified militants and criminals who always act against the state," the minister said.

Putting everything together, they of course have political ambitions. Investigators found that there is an ill-attempt to create another Shapla Chattar-like incident using Hefajat, the minister said regarding recent spate of violence.

At least 17 people died during a three-day long mayhem that began on March 26 surrounding Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh marking the golden jubilee of the country's independence.

Asked why Hefajat chief Junayed Babunagari was not arrested even though he was an accused in cases, the minister said the investigation of the cases filed against him is still ongoing.

"Babunagari was arrested in 2013 after cases were filed against him. He was released on bail at the time," said the home boss.

Regarding the funding of Hefajat, he said, "The intelligence agencies are working to find those who did the financing. There are some leads but we do not want to announce right now. We will continue investigation for a few more days and then we will make an announcement."

"The money trail will be revealed in the investigation," the minister claimed.

Meanwhile, around 10 more people were arrested in the last 24 hours by law enforcers for their alleged involvement in attack, vandalism and arson in Brahmanbaria between March 26 and 28.

With the arrest, the total number of arrests now stand at 365 people in the district, reports our Brahmanbaria correspondent.

According to police headquarters, around 142 cases were filed and around 900 people were arrested in different areas of the country in connection with the incidents between March 26-28.

Dhaka's sound pollution triple of tolerable level

New laws to be enacted if needed, sees env minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka city is suffering from sound pollution three times of tolerable level. As a result, around half a crore people are at health risk, Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change Mohammad Shahab Uddin said at a programme yesterday.

He also said that if necessary, steps will be taken to enact new laws by amending the existing one in order to keep "silent zones" declared in the nine city corporation areas free from sound pollution.

The minister was speaking from his residence in the capital at a virtual workshop organised by the Department of Environment on the occasion of International Noise Awareness Day-2021.

He said "silent zones" were declared at all nine city corporations in locations where hospitals, educational institutions and administrative areas are situated.

"Various agencies including Department of Environment, police, city corporation, BRTA will work together to ensure all silent zones are free from noise," he also said.

The minister said Dhaka South City Corporation has been contacted to implement silent zone area around the secretariat. This project will be implemented after the Covid-19 situation becomes normal.

Shahab Uddin said according to the World Health

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Volunteers from Help Plus Mymensingh are always there for those who can't afford ambulances during this lockdown. In addition to arranging and paying for ambulances, they have so far carried out 15 burials since the start of the second-wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country.



Hope, in the form of help

M'singh volunteers help bury the dead in the critical days of the lockdown

MD AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Minara Begum died on Monday night. At 60 years old, she could no longer withstand the continuing suffering caused to her by a slew of old-age complications, including a deadly heart disease.

On Monday, the Ishwarganj native silently passed away at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH).

After her passing, her two daughters Sumi and Suraiya Akter, 27 and 25 years old respectively, fell into real crisis. With the strict lockdown in full effect, they could not think of a way to get the body to their remote village home in Ishwarganj. Although ambulances were available, their financial insolvency did not allow for that option.

Helpless, they stood beside their mother's dead body at MMCH.

Around 11:30 in the night, someone informed Alok Sarker of their situation. Alok is the vice-president of Help Plus Mymensingh, a volunteers' forum. Without wait, Alok called up Ali Yusuf, a prominent volunteer of the city.

Within an hour of this, Sumi and Suraiya were at home with their mother's body. Within this time, Yusuf had managed an ambulance and found a donor to pay for it, while Alok rounded up three more volunteers and accompanied the sisters on their journey.

Once there, the volunteers also offered to arrange for and bear the cost of Minara's burial, but the indebted family politely refused it, thanking them for all they've done already, Alok said while speaking to The Daily Star yesterday.

In another two hours, the volunteers

were back in the city, ready to attend to some other distress call. This organisation and efficiency of the volunteer networks in the city already has a reputation, and more plaudits soon flowed in for this particular act.

"It is a remarkably noble gesture. I thank the volunteers who came forward to support the helpless family," said upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Ishwarganj Md Zakir Hossain.

Saluting the volunteers for such a humanitarian act at such a critical time, the UNO said, "Their activities are exceptional beyond doubt. I appreciate the volunteers and seek their good health so that they can continue helping people like this."

At a time when people are in extreme fear to step outside, helping others seems like a far cry, said a neighbour of Minara. "That the volunteers would do all this for the family, braving the pandemic, shows how fearless they are with their mission."

Talking to this correspondent, Ali Yusuf informed they have already performed the burial rituals of 15 people from Mymensingh and Netrakona since the start of this second wave of Covid-19. And this is not just limited to Muslims, as six of the funeral rites were of people belonging to the Hindu community.

He also thanked the patrons who enable their organisation to keep up the good work, without even asking for recognition. For example, Minara's ambulance was paid for by an assistant professor of Department of Botany at Govt Ananda Mohan College who specifically asked not to be named.

Child rescued five days after abduction, three arrested in Savar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

Police yesterday rescued a nine-year-old boy from Manikganj, five days after he had been abducted from Karnapara in Savar.

The law enforcers also arrested three people for their alleged involvement in kidnapping Estefaq, a student of a local madrasa living at Karnapara with his family.

The arrestees -- identified as Habu Miah (40), Badsha (34) and Karim Byapari -- hail from Manikganj, confirmed Saiful Islam, inspector (investigation) of Savar Model Police Station, to The Daily Star.

A police team rescued the boy in a drive at Nabagram Bengur village in Manikganj, in cooperation with Rab-4 and Manikganj police around 4am, said the inspector.

Savar Model Police Station Sub-inspector Hamidur Rahman said the arrestees abducted Estefaq around 11am on Friday after enticing him to give him a pet bird. Later, they demanded Tk 1 lakh as ransom from his family over phone, he said.

"Following a GD filed by the family, we started investigation and were able to rescue him," said the SI. All accused confessed to their involvement during primary interrogation, said the police officer.

DEATH, INJURY OF WORKERS AT SS POWER I PLANT

Writ petition seeks judicial probe, halt of construction

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another writ petition was filed with the High Court yesterday seeking necessary directives in connection with the incidents of killing and injuring the workers of the SS Power I Plant in Banshkhali upazila of Chattogram since 2016 to April 17 this year.

Five rights organisations collectively submitted the petition as a public interest litigation seeking HC order on the authorities to conduct a judicial inquiry into the incidents of killing and to stop construction of SS Power I Plant, a coal fired power plant, in Banshkhali, till completion of the inquiry.

The petitioner organisations are -- Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Nijera Kori, Safety and Rights, and Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD).

In the petition, the organisations sought HC directive on the labour ministry to submit a report on the environment and the protection and safety and security of the workers of the power plant to the court.

They also requested the HC to direct the deputy commissioner and superintendent of police of

Chattogram to submit their inquiry reports on the incidents of killing and injuring workers to this court.

Petitioners' lawyer and chief executive of Bela Syeda Rizwana Hasan told The Daily Star that the five organisations in their petition urged the HC to issue a rule asking authorities concerned to explain why appropriate legal action should not be taken against the people who are responsible for killing and injuring the workers.

Rizwana Hasan said a total of 12 workers were killed and several were injured in different incidents at the power plant in Banshkhali in 2016, 2017 and April 17, 2021.

The HC has been requested to ask the authorities to show causes why they should not be directed to pay compensation to the families of the victims of police firing and why the agreement concerned for constructing the SS Power I Plant in Banshkhali should not be cancelled as there is no need for this power plant, Rizwana Hasan said.

The lawyer said the HC may hold hearing simultaneously on both the writ petitions over the incident of killing and injuring workers at the power plant, as Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) filed another

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The absence of public transportation on the capital's streets is making life hard for people who have to get out for work, as they are struggling to reach their destinations. This is creating crowding across the city's major thoroughfares. This photo was taken yesterday from Paltan intersection.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



Reliance Insurance gets New Chairman & Vice-Chairman

Mrs. Shahnaz Rahman and Mr. Rajiv Prasad Shaha were elected Chairman & Vice-Chairman, respectively of Reliance Insurance Limited at the company's 33rd Annual General Meeting held through a digital platform. The meeting was presided over by outgoing Chairman, Ms. Zakia Rouf Chowdhury.

Mrs. Shahnaz Rahman is the Chairman of Transcom Group which employs over 17,000 people. The business originated with tea plantations in 1885. The family of Mrs. Rahman has been recognized by the National Board of Revenue, Government of Bangladesh as "TAX ICON FAMILY" (Kar Bahadur Paribar) being one of the highest tax-payers of the country. In 2019, Mrs. Rahman was recognized as highest tax payer in Dhaka City Corporation.

Mr. Rajiv Prasad Shaha has been the Managing Director of Kumudini Welfare Trust of Bengal (BD) Limited and Kumudini Pharma Limited since January 2000. He is a member of Micro Industries Development Assistance and Service (MIDAS).