

## Aid available for all journo in need

Says info minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Information Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday said government aid is available for all destitute journalists, even those who criticise the government.

"The state is for everyone. If the journalists, who criticise the Awami League-government, fall in the destitute category and come under our policy, this aid is open for them too. We've implemented it," said the minister.

He said this at a cheque distribution event at the Press Institute of Bangladesh in the capital.

A total of 200 journalists and their families were given Tk 2 crore 8 lakh and 50 thousand in 2020-21 fiscal from Bangladesh Journalists Welfare Trust (BJWT).

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Early-season mangoes have begun to arrive at the markets in the capital, as summer rolls on. Sellers say **Gopabhog** and **Gonindabhog** are now available, at a price of Tk 100-120 per kg. The photo was taken earlier this week from Jatrabari.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Inter-district commuters find lockdown workaround

Transport workers arrange private vehicles on sharing basis for them at Gabtoli

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Since the countrywide "lockdown" started from April 5 to curb the spread of Covid-19, construction worker Md Sumon has been unable to find any work.

So the Mirpur resident decided to go back to his home in Magura as it was getting difficult for him to stay in the capital without work. Besides, he could also celebrate Eid holidays with his family members at home.

On Monday afternoon, the 45-year-old went to Gabtoli inter-district bus terminal, hoping to find a bus service. But he could not, due to the ongoing restriction on movement of inter-district buses.

When he was about to return, some transport workers came up to him and offered to arrange transport for him on a microbus. But he has to pay additional fare and share the ride with other passengers, they informed.

"They said I have to pay Tk 1,500 if I want to go to Magura on a microbus but I'm bargaining with them to get the service at Tk 1,000," Sumon told this correspondent.

Like Sumon, many passengers who want to go to other districts are being offered such services by some transport workers of inter-district buses.

They arrange microbus, ambulance and private car for passengers and take commission from them.

Considering the current Covid-19 situation, the government extended the ongoing restriction on inter-district transport movement till May 16. But it has allowed public transport to operate within the cities from tomorrow. Launch and train services will also remain suspended till May 16.

During multiple visits to the Gabtoli Bus Terminal, this correspondent found a good number of people waiting for transport to go back to their home in northern and southwestern districts.

This newspaper also saw many transport workers talking to passengers, asking them about their destinations and negotiating fares. Once fixed, they are taking them to the vehicles -- some parked inside the terminal while others on the streets nearby.

Many staffers of bus companies said this has become a regular scenario at the terminal -- people waiting and hoping to find a transport to go back home, especially ahead of Eid.

To help them, they said, some transport workers came forward and started arranging microbus, ambulance and private car services.

But they are charging more than double the fare compared to bus fare, said passengers. Also, maintaining physical distancing remains a far cry as workers are more interested in filling up all the seats

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## The web should be more accessible for visually-impaired

Speakers demand at webinar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a webinar yesterday demanded special technologies and methods to make websites of different organisations more accessible to people with visual impairment.

They also said that although there are active web portals in 353 upazilas of 57 ministries of the country, most of the government web portals and company web pages in the country are not usable for persons with disabilities.

The webinar, titled "Web Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities" was organised by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), in collaboration with non-government organisation Young Power with Social Action (YPSA) and Bangladesh Visually Impaired People's Society (BVIPS).

Vashkar Bhattacharya, consultant on disability at the government's a2i

programme, presented a report titled "Web Accessibility Report by Identifying Gaps and Barriers with Recommendations and Guidelines" at the webinar.

Vashkar shared the common barriers that persons with visual impairments face, such as, they do not have access to appropriate keyboard, cannot read Bangla in the PDF file format or enter security and captcha code, or read tables and charts. There is no alternative text for the image and much more.

He also shared some adaptive technologies, such as mobile, screen reading software, screen magnifier, Braille display, and specific apps on smartphones for persons with visual impairments.

According to Vashkar, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in

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## Teachers harassed, syndicate meeting suspended at RU

RU CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi University (RU) administration suspended a syndicate meeting yesterday, after a hostile incident involving the university's teachers and Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) took place. During the incident, a number of teachers said they were harassed.

The syndicate meeting, which was supposed to be the last meeting of RU Vice-Chancellor (VC) Prof M Abdus Sobhan's tenure, was scheduled to be held at the VC's residence around 10:30am yesterday.

Members of RU Progressive Teachers' Society Against Corruption, however, took position near the residence in the morning to halt the syndicate meeting. They said they feared "illegal" recruitment would take place during the meeting.

Meanwhile, around 100 current and former leaders of BCL also took position in front of the residence.

As the teachers tried to enter the residence to meet the VC around 10:30am, the BCL men barred and harassed them in front of police and the university's proctorial body. Proctor Prof Lutfor Rahman was also harassed in the mob, as he tried to intervene, teachers said.

During that time, a BCL youth shouted at the teachers, saying "we will shoot you", which then created an hostile situation involving the teachers and BCL men, they said.

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Inter-district passengers get in a private car, arranged by transport workers, at the capital's Gabtoli Bus Terminal area.

PHOTO: STAR



Instead of keeping his eyes on the road, this motorcyclist was spotted checking his phone in the middle of the road. If that wasn't careless enough, the pillion is holding a helmet with one hand instead of wearing it, as she sits precariously on the moving vehicle while holding bags with the other. The photo was taken from the capital's New Market area yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Violating health rules Shopping mall closed for four hrs in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

China Town shopping mall in Dhaka's Paltan area was shut down for around four hours after its authorities failed to follow health safety rules yesterday morning.

Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity, an association of shop owners, shut down the market around 9:30am after its leaders found violation of health rules there.

"Many shopkeepers were seen without masks; shopkeepers and customers were seen using both gates for exit and entry, and maintaining no physical distance," Helal Uddin, president of the association, told The Daily Star.

He said, "We have adopted zero tolerance in this regard. There is no chance to operate any mall without maintaining health rules. We will continue our drives."

Helal, however, said they later allowed the authorities to open the market after they pledged to ensure health rules.

Meanwhile, two executive magistrates carried out drives against those violating health directives at Bashundhara City Shopping Mall and New Market area.

The drives began around noon. The executive magistrates visited shops and

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## UK, South African variants behind 2nd Covid-19 wave in Ctg

Finds limited-sample study

ARUN BIKASH DEB, Ctg

A study by researchers of Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (CVASU) found that mostly the UK variant and partly the South African variant of coronavirus are behind the second wave of Covid-19 in port city, which started in late March.

However, the Indian variant (B.1.617) of SARS-CoV-2, which is responsible for the raging second wave in India, was not found in any sample collected from both hospitalised and non-hospitalised Covid-19 patients in port city between March 28 and April 3.

In that period, 2,392 people were Covid-19 positive out of 17,023 tested, and 12 died.

"We initiated the study at the peak of the second wave to know

which variant of SARS-CoV-2 is behind infections in Chattogram," said Prof Dr Goutam Buddha Das, vice-chancellor of CVASU, who led the study. "We have found that mostly the UK variant and partly South African variant are behind the second wave in Chattogram."

"Sixty percent of the samples had traces of the UK variant, while thirty percent had the South African variant," he said.

"Although we have taken a very small number of samples, the significance of the study is that all those have been taken at random and covered different age groups, ranging between 22 and 65 years, of both male and female patients," he continued.

"The study will help in

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## Charbaria massacre, never to be forgotten

The first mass killing in Barishal region during 1971 war

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

By the time April of 1971 was coming to an end, the Pakistan army started to form an idea of Barishal as a bastion of freedom fighters. The onslaught first began on the 18th of that month. They attacked Barishal city with a barrage of bombs.

But a coordinated attack was yet to come. After the fall of Faridpur city on April 24, a large contingent of the occupation force started their march towards Barishal. The following day, on the 25th, they launched simultaneous operations by road, water, and air, according to historians and freedom fighters.

That day, the occupation force carried out a massacre at Charbaria union, killing around 47 people.

The story unfolded at Bhurghata point. As the Pakistan army reached the area, they suddenly came under attack from freedom fighters in Kotoksthal area. Five Mukti Bahini members and several Pakistani military personnel were killed in the clash, recounted freedom fighters of Barishal city.

The massacre at Charbaria began after Pakistan paratroopers on two helicopters landed in the area. At the same time, three gunboats started firing at

Junahar and Shaistabad areas. The freedom fighters rushed to set up camps at Mahabaj High School in Charbaria, to try to contain the Pakistan army on the river.

Flight sergeant Fazlul Haque, lieutenant Imam Al Mehdi, and habildar Panchanan Ghazi were in charge of the camps. The freedom fighters tried to take advantage of their position by anchoring two steamers named "Irani" and "Majvi" near Jhunahar and repelling the incoming Pakistan gunboats.

When the gunboats crossed Jhunahar and Taltali, the freedom fighters fired from Shaistabad and Charbaria. But soon, shells rained down from the gunboats. The freedom fighters were no match. The two steamers -- Irani and Majvi -- drowned fast.

Locals said no one was spared in the massacre. Everyone, from two-year-olds to 90-year-olds, were killed. There were 25 people who were injured from the gunshots, many of whom later lost their working capacity and died of various diseases. At least 200 houses were set on fire there, they said.

Abdul Mannan was a 10th-grader at the time. The Charbaria native had lost both his father Abdul Rahman and grandfather Ali Azim Khan in the atrocity.

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## Manage groundwater properly to save Barind from water crisis: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The government should take steps for proper management of groundwater to save the Barind region from scarcity of water, demanded speakers at a virtual meeting yesterday.

Arbitrary abstraction of groundwater is causing crisis of drinking water in the region covering 16 northern districts, they said, demanding review of the laws that hinders actions against the practice.

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (Bela), Rajshahi chapter organised the discussion titled "Steps to control arbitrary groundwater abstraction".

Bela programme coordinator AMM Mamun chaired the discussion while head of programmes Khurshed Alam moderated it. Around 50 discussants from different northern districts took part in the programme.

In his speech, Prof Chowdhury Sarwar Jahan of Geology and Mining Department of Rajshahi University, said the country's groundwater was never managed.

In the Barind region, extraction of groundwater has become unsustainable, he said.

"Demand for water for drinking, agriculture and industrial purposes is increasing whereas the groundwater is ceaselessly depleting in the aquifers," said the professor.

Prof ANM Wahid of Law and Justice Department at RU said there are flaws in the law that allows groundwater abstraction as taking legal actions against such permission is difficult for common people.

"The law should be reviewed and made people oriented through public hearings," he said. A separate law should be enacted to manage all the

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## Dr. Ekram Hossain Passes Away



We deeply mourn the passing away of Dr. Ekram Hossain, former secretary to the Government of Bangladesh, on 3rd May 2021. He began his career as a former CSP officer in 1960 after completing his education from the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka. Later, he went abroad for educational purposes and secured his PhD from Tufts University. He served as economic minister at the Bangladesh embassy in Germany in the 70s, advised the Saudi government and was secretary of several ministries of the Govt. of Bangladesh, notable amongst which was information, industry, and planning. Dr. Ekram also served as Chairman, National Board of Revenue, NBR. He served two terms as Rector PATC. His last post was Rector, PATC from 1997 to 2001.

He died of cardiac arrest on May 3, 2021 and leaves behind his wife, a daughter, grandchildren and a host of well-wishers. We, his family and friends pray for his soul.

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