



Once these felled logs and branches used to be a part of healthy vibrant trees, which were cut for “beautification” at Suhrawardy Udyan. Like these, many more trees will soon be replaced by structures, inset, in the name of developing the premises.



PHOTO: COLLECTED/STAR

# Don't want concrete structures at greenery's expense: protesters

## Legal notice served on govt to halt work in 48hrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Protesting an ongoing construction project at the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan, as part of which many old trees are being felled, green activists and students held a rally at Shahbagh yesterday.

They demanded a stop to tree felling and instead, planting 10,000 trees during the upcoming rainy season.

The project was undertaken to develop the Udyan and make it greener. However, activists said the authorities concerned are seemingly contradicting one of their own goals, as under the same project, they are felling old trees to construct buildings. Meanwhile, social media has also been flooded with protest against the authorities' move.

The project -- Shawdhnata Stambha Construction Project in Dhaka Third Phase -- worth Tk 265.44 crore started in January 2018.

Its implementation organisations are the Liberation War ministry, Public Works Department and Dhaka South City Corporation.

According to officials, under the project, seven public toilets, walkways, food stalls, pond, underground parking lot, underpass and a mosque will be constructed.

Experts, however, said whether building concrete structures at the expense of greenery, as sources are claiming, is really “enhancing the beauty”.

During yesterday's protest, filmmaker Sudip Sajib said the balance of nature at the park has been damaged in the name of beautification. “Who will take this responsibility?” he said.

Those responsible [for cutting trees] should be brought to book through a fair probe, he added.

Mir Arshadul Hoque, a former student of Dhaka University who protested tree cutting around two

years back at the Udyan, said the authorities should plant more trees at the park to recover the damage they did by cutting trees.

He said they cut the trees during the “lockdown” so that people won't be able to know about it. He also alleged that some officials were financially benefited for it.

“I have counted 50 to 60 trees which were felled in the last couple of days. They even tried to hide their misdeed,” he said. “We don't want food stalls, concrete structures at Suhrawardy Udyan at the expense of greenery.”

This newspaper visited the spot recently and saw the ongoing construction work 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.

On the western side, a number of old trees were felled and the area now looks barren. According to witnesses,

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# GIRL'S DEATH IN GULSHAN FLAT

## Activists make 9-point demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Demanding an impartial investigation and fair trial in the case of a college girl who was found dead at a Gulshan apartment, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) and National Committee for Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls and Social Injustice expressed grave concern over the increasing level of violence and abuse against women and girls in Covid-19 pandemic.

The two rights groups organised a press conference yesterday, where BMP central committee assistant general secretary Advocate Masuda Rehana Begum presented a keynote paper.

She said the deterioration of social values, lack of rule of law, delayed justice, weak implementation of law and corruption have been working as major key factors behind social injustice and violence against women and girls.

“Criminals are repeatedly getting away with crimes. The death of the young girl in Gulshan is a reflection of that,” she said.

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# UGC allows online exams for public univs

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The University Grants Commission (UGC) yesterday allowed public universities to hold exams online, considering students' interests and also reducing session jams.

The regulatory body urged all universities to maintain the quality and international standards of the tests while holding it online amid the pandemic.

Public universities will be able to conduct exams online in line with decision of their academic councils, deans' committees or other bodies concerned, UGC Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah told The Daily Star.

He made the comments after holding a meeting with vice chancellors of all public universities to discuss the process of holding online exams.

“None can say when the Covid-19 situation will end. We have to learn how to live adapting with it. There are some issues like sessions jams,” he added.

Shahjalal University of Science and Technology VC Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed said all the universities agreed on to hold the online exams.

In April, the education ministry formed a committee to prepare a draft guideline on how to hold online exams at public universities. The committee presented their guideline at the meeting.

One of the committee members and UGC member Prof Muhammed Alamgir said they would send the recommendations to the education ministry soon.

The ministry itself can issue a directive regarding the matter, or they can assign the UGC to take steps regarding online exams at public universities, he said.

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# HIGHER STUDIES IN USA

## Visa delays leave students worried

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Thousands of USA-aspirant students are worried about the future as visa-related services have been halted in Bangladesh amid Covid-19 related restrictions. Despite securing scholarships and funding for their degrees, the students remain unsure whether they will be able to pursue higher education in the United States.

The aspiring students submitted a memorandum to the prime minister and the state minister of foreign affairs last Monday in this regard. The memorandum was signed by 350 students.

They appealed to the PM and state minister to take the necessary steps to resume US student visa service maintaining health regulations.

The US embassy, Dhaka website reads, due to the ongoing countrywide lockdown imposed by the government of Bangladesh, the embassy has cancelled all visa appointments from April 5 to May 16, 2021.

Until yesterday, interview slots were open only on December 23, which would be past most students' admission dates. Classes will start in May for summer semester students and August for fall semester students.

“We need adequate interview slots in the months of May, June, and July,” read the memorandum.

Yesterday evening, the US embassy opened around 300 visa slots between May 17-25. The appointments were taken up within a few minutes, and the majority of students are still waiting for future appointment dates.

Meanwhile, three student representatives met Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen at his residence.

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# 'Govt serving one company's interest'

## Says GM Quader about import of Covid-19 vaccine

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government did not keep any alternative source for importing Covid-19 vaccine to serve business interest of a particular company that have gained a huge profit, alleged Jatiya Party Chairman and Deputy Leader of the Opposition GM Quader yesterday.

It seemed that crores of taka are being misappropriated in the name of importing the vaccine through the company, he said.

In a statement, the JP chairman said now uncertainty has been created over vaccine management. “As a third party, a company has made profit of crores of taka but the guarantee of getting vaccine has not been ensured,” he said.

GM Quader said according to media reports, a particular company that imported Covid-19 vaccine gained profit of Tk 77 for each ampule of vaccine. A stock market's website report says, it has earned Tk 38.367 crore by importing 50 lakh doses of vaccine from January to March.

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# 17 YEARS INTO AHSANULLAH MASTER KILLING

## Wait for justice gets longer

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Justice could not be delivered even 17 years after the grisly murder of Awami League lawmaker Ahsanullah Master as appeals in case are still now pending with the apex court.

The procrastination of case proceedings and wait for justice may take few more years because the regular judicial functions of the top court remain suspended for the Covid-19 pandemic.

Amid the harsh reality, the 17th death anniversary of Ahsanullah Master, a veteran freedom fighter and lawmaker from Gazipur-2 constituency, is being observed today.

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court is yet to start hearing on appeals filed against the High Court verdict in the case, although they were filed a few years ago.

Advocate Khandker Mahub Hossain, principal defence counsel of the case, told The Daily Star that the Appellate Division is now hearing and disposing of the death reference and appeals of 2013.

The appeals and death reference in Ahsanullah Master killing were filed in 2016 and, therefore, they will be heard and disposed of few years later if they come up before the apex court maintaining serials, he said.

He said he will not place the appeals

of his clients (convicts who are now in jail) before the Appellate Division for their quick hearing as it will not bring any benefit for them. “The Appellate Division will hold hearing on the appeals and death reference maintaining the serials.”

Khandker Mahub said his clients will have to serve in jail till the apex court deliver its verdict in the case.

Deputy Attorney General Bishwajit Debnath said the Appellate Division is now virtually holding the appeals filed against the ad-interim orders of the High Court Division.

The apex court is not hearing the appeals filed against the full verdicts of the High Court due to Covid-19 pandemic, he said, adding that the appeal hearing in Ahsanullah Master murder case will be held when they will be included in the hearing list of the Appellate Division.

On May 7 in 2004, assailants killed Ahsanullah Master and Omar Faruq Ratan, a student, and wounded 17 others in a staccato burst of fire on a rally of Swachhasebak League at Noagaon near the lawmaker's house in Tongi.

His brother filed the case next day, against 19 people, including Nurul Islam Sarkar, a Jubo Dal leader.

On April 16 in 2005, a Dhaka court

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# Eight returnees who fled hospital didn't carry Indian variant

## Shows genomic sequencing report of their Covid-19 samples

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Eight Covid-19-positive Bangladeshis, who had returned from India and then fled from quarantine at Jashore General Hospital, were not infected by the Indian variant of coronavirus, according to the genomic sequencing report prepared by Jashore Science and Technology University's genome centre.

“Samples of eight returnees were processed and sequenced to check for the Bengal strain. Results didn't show the expected strain, rather one of mixed origins -- California, US, and Mexico,” said Prof Anwar Hossain, the university's vice-chancellor.

“We will sequence samples of the other 10 India-returnees to check for the strain,” said Prof Anwar, a microbiologist and head of the university's coronavirus testing facility.

Meanwhile, Prof Tahmina Shirin, director of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), said they have also recently received samples of the returnees, who are undergoing treatment at Jashore General Hospital, for testing.

Genomic sequencing of the samples by IEDCR was not done yet, as there are certain requirements to fulfil for conducting the procedure, she said.

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Taking advantage of the authorities' lax approach, residents of Sylhet city are flouting health guidelines left and right. After a period of relatively limited activity, people and vehicles have come down to the streets in numbers, putting the entire region's health under risk.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR



MINI BYTES

Twitter attempts to get into news subscription service by acquiring Scroll

ZARIF FAIAZ

Scroll, a \$5-per-month subscription service that eliminates advertising from participating news outlets, is the latest addition to Twitter's acquisition spree. Twitter is developing a new subscription package that will include Scroll, the newly acquired Revue newsletter service, and other Twitter-developed services.

The Scroll service is a clever hack that tells websites not to serve you advertisements by using third-party cookies or browser extensions. It's not exactly an ad-blocker, but it does give a portion of your subscription fee to the websites you visit that participate. It will no longer welcome new signups now that it has been purchased by Twitter.

Scroll CEO Tony Haile says one of the reasons he sold his business is that “Twitter's goals are bigger than people suspect”.

However, it's unclear what Twitter plans to do with Scroll. Twitter is undoubtedly developing a subscription package that will bundle a number of services, but only Twitter knows what will be included, how much it will cost, and who will share in the revenue.

“Scroll will become a meaningful addition to our subscriptions work as we build and shape a future subscription service on Twitter,” said Mike Park, Product Manager of Twitter, in a blog post.

VP of product Mike Park teases

Twitter's plans in an announcement message, implying that Scroll will be integrated directly into a more robust subscription that will, in part, be sending slivers of money to Revue newsletter authors.

Scroll says that its users donate more money to news organisations through subscriptions than they would through ad views. Applying the model to freelance newsletter authors will provide an entirely new set of incentives for media experts to consider.

Another choice is a service that competes with Apple News in several respects. It could be a feature inside the Twitter app itself — or even a potential news reading app — rather than a web tech hack that blocks advertising at the browser level.

Twitter is attempting to capitalize on its prominent position in the online lives of many journalists and newshounds. Scroll, according to Haile, aims to transform Twitter into a “great gathering of people who love the news and pay to sustainably support it.”

Twitter has been attempting to find ways to monetise its services without interfering with the real-time flow of information that has been its defining feature. With Scroll, individual subscriptions, packs, and news reading experiences can all be mixed and matched. In order to put together a cohesive service and then justify it to potential customers, Twitter will have its job cut out for it.