

## Be careful, Indian variant is deadlier: Obaidul Quader

BSS, Dhaka

Awami League General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday warned people of the danger of the Indian coronavirus variant and urged all to remain conscious in maintaining health guidelines properly.

"Indian variant of Covid-19 has been found in Bangladesh. Our little bit of negligence may cause danger. Under the circumstances, we all should remain careful," he said while addressing a discussion and relief distribution ceremony. From his official residence, Quader virtually joined the discussion titled "Mujib Barsho and what to do in facing deadly Covid-19 crisis" arranged by Bangabandhu Diploma Engineers Council.

Mentioning that neighbouring India is now struggling to battle a vicious wave of Covid-19, he said though India is famous for oxygen production, the country is now in acute oxygen crisis and people's sufferings know no bounds.

Even footpaths in India have turned into crematorium while the experts warned that third wave of the Covid-19 is likely to hit India, he said, adding that Bangladesh is getting danger messages from India.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



In Dhaka, all it takes is some light rain for heavily-used roads to get waterlogged. This photo was taken yesterday near New Market.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Parks in Dhaka aren't green enough as it is

Experts cite recent survey; say authorities didn't take urban dev committee's opinion about dev work at Suhrawardy Udyan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities concerned behind the recent development project at Suhrawardy Udyan -- including the tree-felling which caused a public outcry -- did not take the Urban Development Committee's opinion before launching the project, said speakers at a webinar yesterday.

Moreover, according to law, public parks and open spaces cannot have more than five percent concrete area, whereas the plan for Suhrawardy Udyan has 37 percent concrete area, claimed architects.

In the planning dialogue organised by Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP) titled "Park Development Project and Nature-Environmental Protection", speakers said the character of the udyan is being changed for excessive infrastructure, which is a result of deprioritising nature and environment while preparing its planning and design.

BIP demanded inclusion of relevant professionals such as urban planners, architects, urban designers, engineers, horticulturists, ecologists, and sociologists in the preparation of a new project.

They said this tendency to devalue the environment and people's interest is not only restricted to the Suhrawardy Udyan development saga, but has become a regular practise throughout the country.

As a result, concrete and grey areas are increasing while greenery and public space are decreasing at an alarming rate.

Presenting the results of a recently conducted survey, BIP general secretary Adil Muhammad Khan said in the proposed design of Suhrawardy Udyan, the percentage of infrastructure, concrete, and grey area is 37 percent.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

## 'Their plan was to attack police, BGB'

Four 'Ansar al Islam' men arrested in Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Counterterrorism unit officials yesterday claimed to have arrested four members of militant outfit Ansar al Islam from Mohammadpur area of the capital.

Their plan was to attack police or Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) members in Dhaka or Sylhet and then leave the country for Afghanistan, said Md Asaduzzaman, chief of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit.

The members of the Al-Qaeda inspired militant outfit also conducted reconnaissance for the planned attack, he said while addressing reporters at the media centre of DMP.

The arrestees are Jasimul Islam Jack (25), a student of Atish Dipankar University of Science and Technology in Dhaka; Abdul Mukit (29), a teacher of Markajus Sunnah Al Islamia Madrasa in Habiganj's Nabiganj; Aminul Haque (20), a student of Al Hidayah Islamic Institute in Sylhet, and Sajeeb Ikhtiar (20), an undergraduate student of

Sunamganj Government College.

Based on information, a team of counterterrorism unit arrested the four from Basila on Saturday evening, the CTTC chief said. Police also seized a machete, five cellphones and a laptop from them.

During interrogation, the arrestees told police that they communicated through a messenger chat group. A month back, the arrestees attacked manager of a hotel in Sylhet, said the police official.

There were around 10 members in the group who planned to carry out violent activities. Two of their members have already moved to Afghanistan, said Asaduzzaman.

Asked about the reason behind going to Afghanistan, he said Ansar al Islam claims they have affiliation with Al-Qaeda and they are the sub-continental wing of the outfit. "Maybe that's why they wanted to go to Afghanistan. But we are not sure," he said.

A case was filed with Mohammadpur Police Station under Anti-Terrorism Act.

## BR officer held for embezzling Tk 1.5 cr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A railway officer was arrested in Chattogram on Saturday night on charges of embezzling Tk 1.5 crore.

The arrestee was identified as Faisal Mahub, a junior auditor at the accounts department of Bangladesh Railway (East Zone).

A team of Railway Nirapatta Bahini (RNB) arrested him following a written complaint of Deputy Financial Advisor Shahjahan, said Salamat Ullah, inspector of RNB (East Zone).

BR sources said Faisal manipulated salaries of the employees through fraudulence in the last one year from May 2020.

Railway officials said the salaries and allowances of railway staff have been paid from the sale of tickets at the respective stations for the last 150 years. The railway authorities are using a software to pay the salaries amid the pandemic.

They said Faisal took a one-month training in this regard. Taking advantage of this opportunity, he used to make fake bills in the name of the employees and transfer them to his four bank accounts.

Railway Divisional Accounts Officer (East Zone) M Shahjahan said, "A case has been filed against Faisal with Khulshi Police Station for embezzling railway funds."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

## Legal battle underway to protect Suhrawardy Udyan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some Supreme Court lawyers and rights organisations have initiated a legal battle in order to protect the historic grounds of Suhrawardy Udyan in the capital and preserve its natural beauty.

Two SC lawyers yesterday filed a contempt of court petition with the High Court against the government officials concerned on charge of clearing trees and setting up restaurants at Suhrawardy Udyan ignoring the HC's 2009 verdict.

Lawyers Mahubul Islam and Ripan Barai submitted the contempt of court petition to the office concerned of the HC seeking its directive on three government officials to cancel the activities of cutting trees and constructing restaurants at Suhrawardy Udyan.

The three officials are Liberation War Affairs Secretary Tapan Kanti Ghosh, Public Works Department's Chief Engineer Md Shamim Akhter and Bangladesh's Chief of Architects Mir Manzur Rahman, petitioners' lawyer Manzill Murshid told The Daily Star.

It has been prayed in the petition to the HC to issue a contempt of court rule against the three officials for cutting trees and setting up restaurants in Suhrawardy Udyan in violation of the 2009 HC directives, he said.

Manzill Murshid said the HC may hold hearing on the contempt of court petition any day.

Earlier on Thursday, the lawyer (Manzill) sent a legal notice to three officials asking them to stop the activities of clearing trees and setting up restaurant at Suhrawardy Udyan within 48 hours.

Following a writ petition, the HC on July 7, 2009 directed the government to identify and preserve all the important historic places related to the republic's Liberation War and to set up memorial monuments at the historic places at Suhrawardy Udyan maintaining international standard so that people from home and abroad can pay homage to martyred freedom fighters.

The HC had ordered the government

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

## Victim-blaming prevails as state failed to protect citizens: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers during a webinar yesterday said malpractice of 'victim blaming' prevailed in the society since the state failed to protect its citizens from oppression and injustice.

They said victim blaming was also deeply rooted in patriarchal values, and called for collective effort to bring a change in this regard.

The webinar, titled "The Culture of Victim Blaming", was arranged by Dhaka University in association with Anthropublic, Light Hour with Wara and MGR.

Addressing the webinar, eminent rights activist Sultana Kamal said when the state and society cannot protect its citizens from oppression and injustice, they blame the victims to hide their inability.

"Unfortunately, our state and policymakers always compromise when it comes to protect the rights of women," she said.

Prof Sadeka Halim, dean of DU's social sciences faculty, said patriarchy was so deeply rooted in the society that when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared victims of sexual abuse in the Liberation War as birangana, he faced protest.

Referring to the fact that birangana were recognised only in 2014-15, she said, "We should think... how women en masse are treated in our society."

Umme Wara, assistant professor at DU's criminology department, stressed that the discriminatory nature of relevant law could be responsible for the prevalence of such malpractice.

She also stressed the need for reform in the Evidence Act-1872.

Children are taught in the textbooks that certain jobs that require a lot

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

## 'Manabatar Bazar' relaunched as mobile market

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A day after vowing to continue their relief work in alternative ways, after being refused a venue for their popular food-aid initiative -- a free kitchen market called "Manabatar Bazar" --, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) relaunched a mobile variant of the initiative yesterday in Barishal city.

"Manabatar Bazar" will now roam around the city handing over essential food items to the poor amid the pandemic, said organisers.

On Saturday at a press conference at the party office in the city, BSD alleged that vested quarters were obstructing their relief works.

"We are victims of a nefarious conspiracy. We are not allowed to use any venue to distribute relief from," BSD convener Imran Habib Rumon said. "We have been forced to turn the 'Manabatar Bazar' into a mobile market."

"At scheduled times, the vans will take the free mobile market to different spots of the city," he said.

At 11 in the morning yesterday, the mobile market began its day. Packed

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



From the very start, working class people started flocking to Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal's 'Manabatar Bazar' -- now a mobile initiative -- to collect essential food items for their families for free. This photo was taken from Barishal city's Ashwini Kumar Town Hall area.

PHOTO: TITU DAS



A significant portion of the Moghbazar-Kakrail road is being dug for development works. Though this was less of a problem during the "strict" lockdown, now that movement guidelines are relaxed, commuters of the street are suffering massively due to the obstruction.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Six more metro rail coaches reach Mongla

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As part of the second consignment, six more coaches of metro train have reached Mongla port.

The Belize-flagged ship MV Ocean Grace, which started from the Japanese port of Kobe reached the jetty of Mongla port yesterday noon.

According to the Mongla Port Authority, the unloading of these coaches from the port jetty has started.

Earlier, on April 21 morning, MV Ocean Grace left Kobe Seaport for Bangladesh with six coaches as part of the second set.

With this, two consignments of metro train have reached Mongla port. Earlier, on March 31, the first set of metro train with six coaches reached Mongla port. They were later taken to Dhaka by river.

The ship's local shipping agent Ancient Steamship Company Limited General Manager Ohiduzzaman said the Belize-flagged ship "MV Ocean Grace" arrived at Mongla port with six coaches.

"We have already released 4 coaches," he added.

ABM Arifur Rahman, project manager of Contract Package-08 of Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Company Limited, said 24 passenger train coaches will be imported

SEE PAGE 4

## Increase tobacco tax in upcoming budget

Speakers urge govt to contain its use

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government needs to increase price of tobacco products by imposing tax in the upcoming national budget to contain its use, said speakers at an online discussion yesterday.

Besides, rigorous awareness campaign on the danger of tobacco use and banning its cultivation and production are required to control its use among the country's adult population, they said.

Voices for Interactive Choice and Empowerment (Voice) with support from Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK) organised the discussion on "Necessity of Increasing Tax on Tobacco for Public Health Safety".

Addressing the discussion as chief guest, Planning Minister MA Mannan said he will propose imposing higher tax on tobacco products during upcoming pre-budget meeting.

He said the prime minister has pledged to turn the country tobacco-free by 2040 and the government has been working to achieve the goal.

Chairing the event, noted economist and Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation Chairman Qazi Kholiuzzaman Ahmad said research in high tobacco-cultivation districts Kushtia and Bandarban found cultivation of onion or garlic there could yield two to three times higher profit.

He said there is a need for increasing awareness campaign against tobacco use so that young population avoid consuming tobacco products. At present, 35.3 percent of the country's adult population is abusers of tobacco products, said Zayed Siddiki, project coordinator of Voice, while presenting a concept paper.

He said about Tk 22,000 crore is collected as fiscal-yearly revenue from tobacco sector whereas people spend over Tk 30,000 crore for treatment of

SEE PAGE 4