

**Release jailed Minu Akhter immediately**

*HC orders Ctg prison authorities*  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the authorities concerned of Chattogram jail to immediately release Minu Akhter, who has been serving jail sentence instead of convicted Kulsuma Akhter in a murder case.

The court also ordered law enforcers to arrest Kulsuma, who was sentenced to life-term imprisonment in the Kohinur Begum murder case.

While hearing an appeal and petition filed in connection with the case, the HC summoned three lawyers from Chattogram's Nari O Shishu Nirjatton Daman Tribunal and its lawyer-assistant (clerk) to appear before the court on June 28 to explain whether there was any fraudulence or their involvement in sending Minu to jail instead of Kulsuma.

The three lawyers are public prosecutor of Chattogram Nari O Shishu Nirjatton Daman Tribunal MA Naser and his junior lawyers Nurul Anwar and Bibekanda, and lawyer-assistant is Md Saurav, Minu's lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir told The Daily Star.

He said the four have sent the relevant appeal documents of Kulsuma to lawyer Iqbal Hossain for moving it before the HC. The HC bench of Justice Jahangir

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**It must be great news for residents of the capital's Azimpur that Dhaka South City Corporation is constructing a 'modern' market in their neighborhood. But if those elected to ensure public interest violate it, as is evident by the strewn-about construction material on the footpath and road, then who does one complain to? DSCC ward-26 councillor is supervising the project, as announced on a board on the site, inset. The photos were taken yesterday.**

**Indian variant could turn Khulna division into Covid-19 hotspot**

*Healthcare system not ready for threat*

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

People of Khulna division are at great risk of being infected with the Indian variant of coronavirus, as six of its districts have borders running for a total of 284 km with India, which is struggling to control the Covid-19 surge and the new variant -- B1617.

Numerous people are crossing the border illegally, without going through medical procedure, and coming into the country to avoid the 14-day mandatory quarantine.

Besides, most of the people stranded in India are coming back through Jashore's Benapole and Chuadanga's Darshana -- both of which are in Khulna division.

Jashore, a bordering district, is currently hosting a large number of people coming from India through Benapole land port, after Bangladesh closed its border with the neighbouring country on April 26 to stop the fast-spreading Covid-19 variant from entering the country.

Despite the risk, the district has no central oxygen system, the most important facility for serious Covid-19 patients, at its 250-bed general hospital.

The hospital is currently supported by 265 small and big oxygen cylinders. Each cylinder can supply oxygen for up to one hour, said Dr Arif Ahmed, resident medical officer of the hospital.

He also said installation work of a central oxygen system is ongoing, but the oxygen tank is yet to be imported from India.

The general hospital has recently started three intensive care unit (ICU) beds with minimum facilities.

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**BUDGET FOR HEALTH SECTOR**

**Increasing allocations not enough: speakers**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Increasing allocations for health care in the national budget will not suffice; there is a need to restructure the sector, speakers at a post-budget discussion said yesterday.

The issue of increasing capacity of the health sector should be addressed to ensure comprehensive and effective response to the ongoing pandemic, they said in the virtual discussion, organised by Bangladesh Health Watch (BHW) and Unnayan Shamannay.

In his keynote, Dr Atiur Rahman, former governor of Bangladesh Bank and chairperson of Unnayan Shamannay, said, "Policymakers have been rightly cautious about increasing budget allocations for health, considering the spending efficiency. Yet, they could have been a bit braver considering the current situation."

He said that the vaccination campaign for Covid-19 should be the first priority, rather than any other economic issue, for now.

"Because of the strong macroeconomic base Bangladesh is currently enjoying, the country need not worry too much about deficit financing, growth rate, etc. Rather the focus now should be on collecting adequate vaccines to inoculate 60-70 percent of the population within the next fiscal year," Dr Atiur said.

He opined that getting the vaccines in time will require smart diplomacy and support from international development partners.

Moderated by BHW Convener Dr Mushtaque Raza Chowdhury, experts from different organisations spoke on the budget and problems in the health sector at the event.

"The share of health in the total budget has been hovering around 5 percent of the total budget, which needs to be significantly higher. More concerning is the fact that authorities concerned are not managing to efficiently spend the subpar allocations," Dr Mushtaque said.

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**Road accidents kill three people**

STAR REPORT

Three people were killed in two separate road accidents in yesterday, report our correspondents.

In Mymensingh, two farmers were killed after being crushed by a sand-laden truck in Gafargaon upazila.

The victims were identified as Manik Mia (33) and his neighbour Masum Mia (17), both of Khorshid Mahal village under Gafargaon.

Quoting locals, Officer-in-Charge of Pagla Police Station Mohammad Rasheduzzaman said Manik and Masum were working in a field when the truck crushed them, killing both on the spot around 6am.

Police rushed to the spot and recovered the bodies. The truck driver managed to flee the scene with the vehicle.

A case was lodged with the police station in this regard.

In Jhenaidah's Kaliganj upazila, a bicyclist was killed in a road crash. The victim is Jihad Hossain (18) of Helai village under the upazila. He worked in a clothing shop in the upazila town.

OC of Kaliganj Police Station Mahfuzur Rahman said the accident occurred around 11am when Jihad was returning home from Kaliganj town.

As he reached the Muslim Bakery area, a speeding truck ran him over, leaving him dead on the spot.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy. The truck was seized but the driver escaped, police said.



PHOTO: STAR

**Swapna repeatedly tried to get back inside her burning house, only to be restrained by nearby volunteers. After surviving three fires at the slum, yesterday's took away all her belongings, including furniture, gold ornaments, and even the month's rent.**

**Dreams burnt to ashes**  
*Fire guts over 500 shanties at Mohakhali slum*

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Nazma Begum Swapna has spent half of her life living in Mohakhali's Sattola slum.

Living here since 1997, she has worked as a house help and built up her home with furniture and other necessary household items almost from scratch.

In these 24 years at the slum, she has witnessed four fire hazards.

For the first three times, Swapna had managed to save all her valuables from the blaze.

But she wasn't as lucky this time around. The fire that broke out at the slum early yesterday originated just beside her home. She lost everything.

Swapna narrated the painful story while talking with this correspondent yesterday, when he visited the slum around 7am.

She was found screaming and crying standing beside the debris of her burnt down house. She was repeatedly trying to go inside the house, but volunteers were restraining her for her own good.

"Last night, I went to bed around 12:30am. Suddenly, I noticed there's a fire in my back room. I heard people screaming 'fire', and I knew I had to get out. I tried to save our valuables, but they were so hot I couldn't touch them," Swapna had pain her voice.

She and her husband Abul Kalam, a day-wage worker, knew they had to get out immediately. Let alone their furniture, they couldn't even get a hold of the gold ornaments. They even had to leave money behind.

"Just yesterday, I kept Tk 4,000 in the house as rent. The money has been burnt,

along with a tola of gold," she said.

Like Swapna, Monu Mia, a cleaner of Dhaka North City Corporation, also lost everything to the fire.

"When the fire spread in the slum, I was at Karwan Bazar on duty," he told this correspondent. "By the time I reached the slum, all my furniture and other belongings were gutted," he said.

Monu had toiled hard to save Tk 70,000 to build a house at his ancestral village in Patuakhali, but that dream won't be realised now, he told The Daily Star.

Along with Monu and Swapna's, over 500 shanties were gutted in the fire, before 18 firefighting units brought it under control around 6:35am, Niaz Ahmed, deputy assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defense, told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, some locals claimed the fire fighters were late to reach the spot. Asked, Niaz said they rushed to the spot as soon as they heard about the fire.

"We faced barriers on the way due to narrow corridors and people's gathering, as the residents of the shanties were busy bringing out their valuables from the burning houses," he said.

It also took time to douse the fire as the slum had turned into a gas chamber due to its illegal gas connections, the official said.

As of the filing of this report, fire service officials had not been able to ascertain a reason behind the fire's origination.

A five-member probe body has been formed in this regard with fire service deputy director Noor Hasan as chief, said officials.

**Uber adds CNG auto-rickshaws in the capital**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ride-sharing service Uber has included CNG auto-rickshaws as part of its array of vehicles available for ridesharing in Dhaka city.

Accessing the app earlier yesterday, users noticed a 'CNG' option popping up alongside the regular UberX, Premier, Moto and UberXL options, when choosing a destination within Dhaka.

Since 2017, a faction of CNG auto-rickshaw owners and drivers have been campaigning to join the ride sharing services, citing a decline in the number of passengers.

Earlier in 2019, Uber had launched CNG auto-rickshaw services in Chattogram.

**Don't allow profiteering from vaccine procurement**  
*18 eminent citizens urge govt*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent citizens yesterday condemned what they said was some quarters becoming active in profiteering from Covid-19 vaccine procurement.

"We think that since the government is fulfilling its responsibilities over vaccine import and inoculating people, there is no scope of any intermediary role, and we expect that the government will take appropriate steps in this regard," a statement signed by 18 renowned personalities said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has appealed to relax the intellectual property rights of vaccine production at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other forums, which is for the benefit of all human beings across the world and all should be vocal about it, said the statement.

At the same time, it is very important to implement vaccine production by capable domestic manufacturers in the country, the statement said.

"For Bangladesh, there is no alternative to tackling the pandemic without vaccine production. We hope that the government will take steps to implement domestic production with a 'wartime-like' urgency," it added.

They lauded Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her role in acquiring vaccines from India at the beginning, and later when India was unable to deliver vaccines due to its domestic Covid-19 crisis, from China and Russia.

The signatories are: Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, Hasan Azizul Huq, Prof Anupam Sen, Ramendu Majumdar, Ferdousi Mazumder, Justice Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik, Abed Khan, Prof Abdus Selim, Mofidul Hoque, Mamunur Rashid, Dr Amjad Hossain, Dr Fauzia Moslem, Dr Rashid-E-Mahbub, Dr Kamrul Hasan Khan, Prof ABM Faroque, Shahriar Kabir, Nasiruddin Yousuff and Prof Muntassir Mamon.

**Man arrested for 'embezzling' Tk 10cr gas bill**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rab claimed to have arrested a man who allegedly embezzled Titas gas bills worth Tk 10 crore, instead of depositing the money to national treasury after collecting it from customers.

A team of Rab arrested Omar Faruk from Chattogram early yesterday, more than four months after he went into hiding on January 23, said Mozammel Haque, commanding officer of Rab-4.

The Rab official said Faruk used to run an agent banking service in Mirpur-2 and collected utility bills from nearly 1,500 customers.

He cleared the electricity and water bills in time but did not deposit gas bills for about two years, Mozammel said at a press briefing at Rab media centre in Dhaka.

This came to light after Titas Gas authorities announced to disconnect gas lines of the customers, who protested the move, claiming they regularly paid the bills through agent a banking service run by Faruk.

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**ARMANITOLA FIRE**

**Court grants bail to two accused**

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday granted bail to two people in a case filed over the devastating fire that killed six people in old Dhaka's Armanitola in April this year.

They are -- Mostaq Ahmed Chisty, owner of Haji Musa Mansion where an unauthorised chemical warehouse was located; and Terekuzzaman.

Dhaka's Additional Metropolitan Magistrate Md Hasibul Haque passed the order after the duo surrendered before the court and sought bail in the case, court sources said.

Earlier, five other accused -- Mostafizur Rahman, Mohammad Mostafa, Bappy, Ashraf Hossain and Saidul Islam -- got bail in the case from the court on different dates.

The fire broke out at a chemical storage facility on the ground floor of the six-storey building around 3:15am on April 23.

Six people were killed, while several were injured in the fire.

Later, police filed a case with Bangshal Police Station against eight named and 15 to 20 unnamed people, following the incident. Law enforcers arrested only Mostafizur Rahman from Bogura's Nandigram area and Mohammad Mostafa from the capital's Uttara on April 26.

The following day, they were placed on a three-day remand in the case.



**The drainage system in Old Dhaka is so dysfunctional that water resulting from Sunday's rainfall had not receded till 11am yesterday on Nazira Bazar's Kazi Alauddin Road. So, even on a rainless day, commuters had to wade through the murky water.**

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

**Surf Excel inspires children to plant trees**

CITY DESK

This World Environment Day, washing powder brand Surf Excel has come forward to inspire children to do something positive for the environment, which started with initiatives like planting trees, said a press release.

On Saturday, Unilever announced this initiative by going live on Facebook. Alongside Unilever, the organisation Footsteps was also present with Surf Excel.

The rapid rate of pollution worldwide today is dangerous, and primary reasons behind pollution are thoughtful deforestation and unplanned city development. This can be horrendous for future generations. That is why, Surf Excel and Footsteps have collaborated for the initiative "Daag Ektu Laguk, Tobu Poribeshta Bachuk", which means "Why mind a few stains, if they save the environment".

On World Environment Day, children along with their parents participated in the event by planting trees from their homes. As a part of the initiative, Surf Excel and Footsteps provided plants, pots, and soil for planting along with detailed guidelines to all participants beforehand.

Surf Excel hopes that all members of the new generation answer to this call and take at least one positive step to protect the environment.

Apart from this, the organisers have also said the world is adapting to technology very fast. And trees are decreasing even faster than that. The initiative stems from the hope of solving this problem by using technology.

The objective of the initiative is to directly make an impact in protecting the environment by taking realistic measures for creating awareness, said senior representatives of the brand.