











Mystery shrouds deaths of 2 children in school

Parents of one say school to blame

Our Correspondent, Bandarban

The family of one of the two boys, who died after falling into a drainage pipe in their school, have accused the school authorities of negligence in duty in a case filed on Tuesday.

Abdul Quader Jilani, 12, and Mostafizur Rahman, 13, who were in sixth grade at Quantum Cosmo School and College in Lama, Bandarban, died on Monday, said acting headteacher Shariful Alam.

The school reopened about two months ago amid the pandemic with permission from the education ministry.

Mizanur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Lama Police Station, said, "It has to be thoroughly investigated how two sixth grader boys can die in a 13 inch

Mostafizur's father Bulbul Mostafiz told The Daily Star that corporal punishment was rampant in the school and he often saw bruises on his son's body after he came home from school.

"They [school authorities] are saying that the incident happened around 12:30pm on Monday, but they informed us at 3:30pm," Mostafiz said. Contacted, acting headteacher Shariful said the allegations were

The boys were playing in the rain on Monday around 11:30am on the school playground when they fell into a nearby drainage pipe, he said.

"Abdul Quader was rescued around 12:30pm and Mostafizur around 1:10pm," he added.

were taken to Lohagara Upazila Health Complex where doctors pronounced them dead around

Sub-inspector Aminul Islam Bhuiyan of the nearby Kayaju Para Police Outpost, said, "We were informed about the incident around 12:30pm... One of

Many beauticians who are, or were

forced to become, self-employed small

entrepreneurs, have been struggling

to survive during the pandemic that took the glow off the beauty business,

declared an industrial sector by the

RELUCTANT TO APPLY FOR LOANS,

To tackle Covid-induced shocks, the

government allocated a stimulus

package worth Tk 20,000 crore for

cottage, micro, small and medium

enterprises. A minimum of five percent

of the allocation, or Tk 1,000 crore, is

Tk 1,500 crore was announced this

January for such enterprises. Under

these stimulus packages, female

entrepreneurs could avail loans at a

Dipali, however, did not know how

subsidised interest rate of four percent.

to avail a small loan from banks like

many other female micro entrepreneurs,

raising the question as to how effective

A recent Centre for Policy Dialogue

(CPD) study found nearly 59 percent

of female entrepreneurs surveyed were

unaware of the stimulus packages for

cottage, micro, small and medium

Titled "How useful the stimulus

packages have been for women in

tackling the impact of Covid-19",

the telephonic survey of 70 female

entrepreneurs in 34 districts was

in 32 types of businesses -- including

beauty parlours, clothing, import

and export trade, manufacturing,

handicrafts, cosmetics, agriculture,

dairy, livestock, jewellery, food services,

packages were still reluctant to apply

for loans," CPD Executive Director Dr

Fahmida Khatun, who led the study,

told this newspaper. Only seven percent

of those surveyed said they had applied

The study found a wide range of

reasons including lack of information

regarding where to go, who to ask, what

to do, and how to apply for these much-

needed loans. The lengthy process and

worries about repayment were also

mentioned that they were discouraged

by bank officials who said there was no

such loan for women SMEs yet or no

order from the authorities to give loans

to women, or the extra hassle created by

bank officials discouraged them from

government's stimulus packages

were not designed with women in

mind, and hence, these have not been

completely successful in addressing

female entrepreneurs' needs during the

officer and managing director of

Persona, said those who run micro and

small businesses are currently having a

a formal loan because they lack the

confidence and documents required to

"They are reluctant to apply for

Kaniz Almas Khan, chief executive

Leaders in the sector said the

entrepreneurs

reasons for not applying for loans.

for loans under the stimulus package.

"Women who were aware of the

These female entrepreneurs worked

conducted in October 2020.

the stimulus schemes have been.

Another stimulus package involving

government last June.

ALSO UNAWARE

reserved for women.

enterprises.

and footwear.

Female

applying for a loan.

pandemic.

tough time.

avail loans," she said.

Stimulus schemes hardly

the two students was already taken to Lohagara Upazila Health Complex by the time I reached there.

"I also did not see the other student as I was far from the spot from where he was found," he said.

Inspector Md Alamgir of Lama Police Station said, "There were some injury marks on different parts of their bodies. The cause of their death will be known after an autopsy."

Lama Úpázila Nirbahi Officer Reza Rashid said, "Quantum school authorities did not tell us anything about the deaths. We will ask them why they hid the information and hold them accountable."

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, educational institutions across the country have been closed since March

"We started the residential activities of the school about two months ago with the approval from the Ministry of Education," said Shariful.

Mohammad Ismat Ullah, who is mentioned as the senior assistant secretary in the secondary and higher education division at the education ministry in the copy of the approval, told the Daily Star, "I gave the approval on the instructions of the education

The website of the Ministry of Education mentions Mohammad Ismat Ullah as the Deputy Secretary (Adjustment) of secondary and higher secondary division. This correspondent could not reach Education Minister Dipu Moni over the phone.

"The Ministry of Education has not informed us about this approval," Bandarban District Education Officer Sarit Kumar Chakma told the Daily Star.

On January 1, 2020, police recovered a hanging body of a class IX student from Quantum Cosmo School and

director of Bangladesh Bank, however

said many female entrepreneurs were

Dr Lila, who was directly involved

with the stimulus package for cottage,

micro, small and medium enterprises,

said as per the bank's data, female

entrepreneurs received 5.10 percent

of the total amount of the stimulus

package allocated for these enterprises,

BB data showed state-owned banks

disbursed only 14 percent of the

total amount allocated for women to

more than 65 percent of the female

entrepreneurs who received loans under

this scheme. The average loan size was

On the other hand, private

commercial banks disbursed 73 percent

of the amount to only 28 percent of

female entrepreneurs -- but the size of

each loan was an average amount of

around Tk 79 lakh in Islamic banks and

This means that a few women-

led comparatively larger enterprises

benefited the most from the stimulus

our micro entrepreneurs because their

problems are not similar to that of

medium enterprises," Dr Lila said at a

webinar in mid-April.

of the banks.'

"We have to pay more attention to

"They are mostly from the informal

"They have been taking loans from

sector and we must keep in mind that

they cannot be served through formal

NGOs and microfinance institutions at

interest rates of almost 24 percent, but

are not applying to banks to have loans

against seven to nine percent interest

"We need to look into the problems

egarding the supply and demand sides

Dr Fahmida recommended that

there be nationwide campaigns to

create public awareness on the stimulus

packages so that the general people

can clearly understand what kinds of

support the government is providing,

who is eligible for such support, and

liquidity support package for cottage,

micro small and medium enterprises

The status of the disbursement and

the lists of beneficiaries should be

made available for the public, to ensure

transparency and accountability, she

June 3, no new measures for cottage,

micro, small and medium enterprises

were announced, except that existing

packages be disbursed and banks meet

The finance minister also announced

that up to Tk 70 lakh of business

turnover of female SME entrepreneurs

will be exempt from taxation.

In the new budget, announced on

"The quota for women in the existing

how to obtain the support.

should be increased," she said.

Tk 29 lakh in non-Islamic banks.

However, the breakdown of the

complex terms and conditions."

entrepreneurs' burden.

she also said.

able to access loans.

until March 31 this vear.

Tk 3 lakh, she said.

The robot nurse

College student gives demo to doctors, officials

Sushanta Ghosh, Barishal

Robots have been seen assisting medical staff at Covid-19 hospitals across the world but it has never been

And when a robot, made by an 11th grader, gave a demonstration at Barishal's Agailjhara Upazila Health Complex on Monday, everyone inside the hospital was thrilled.

The machine, named Sebak (nurse) by the maker Shuvo Karmaker, successfully delivered a sanitiser and medicines to a patient. It also recorded the doctor's advice and showed it to the patient on its monitor.

"The way Sebak functions, it is clear that it can help doctors and nurses in treating Covid-19 patients," Bakhtiyar Al Mamun, upazila health and family planning officer, told The Daily Star after the demonstration.

He, however, said the robot was not like the high-tech robots with artificial intelligence being used at some healthcare facilities abroad to treat coronavirus patients. "We can work on this to make it better," he said.

Shuvo is optimistic about his latest project. "I built Sebak to serve patients," he said.

College in Barishal said that he designed the robot in such a way that it can feed patients and can also be used for disinfecting people. He also claimed that the robot can

also be used for providing oxygen support to patients, who grasp for air.

He said he built another robot Robin" in 2019, which is capable of answering different questions in Bangla and English. Besides, it can ask for help if there is a fire or a gas leak.

"I love working with robots. I dream that I will do more research



Eleventh grader Shuvo Karmoker poses for a photo with the robots that he had made. During a demonstration at Agailjhara Upazila Health Complex in Barishal on Monday, the robots surprised everyone with their ability to assist PHOTO: COLLECTED healthcare personnel.

future," he said.

There are around two dozen ways robots have been used during the Covid-19 pandemic, from healthcare in and out of hospitals, automation of testing, supporting public safety and public work, to continuing daily work and life, according to tech journals.

For instance, a cylindrical robot rolls into a treatment room to allow healthcare workers to remotely take temperatures and measure blood pressure and oxygen saturation of patients hooked up to a ventilator. Another robot that looks like a pair of large fluorescent lights rotated vertically travels throughout a hospital and will make more, better robots in disinfecting with ultraviolet light. A necessary support," said Hashem.

cart-like robot brings food to people quarantined in a 16-story hotel. Outside, quadcopter drones ferry test samples to laboratories and watch for violations of stay-at-home restrictions.

Barishal Civil Surgeon Monwar Hossain welcomed Shuvo's initiative Agailjhara Upazila Nirbahi Officer

(UNO) Abul Hashem, who attended the demonstration on Monday, said robots can play an effective role in serving Covid patients in various ways and reduce the possibilities of doctors and nurses being infected.

"We are proud of Shuvo's efforts and ready to provide him with

Two rail projects face uncertainty

Kaniz added cash incentives should north-east and north-west regions, be given rather than loans because this officials told this newspaper. would be more effective in easing the In this situation, the railways

ministry yesterday held a meeting to If medium enterprises were exempted discuss the developments and find out from value-added tax (VAT) for at least solutions regarding the two projects three years, they will be able to sustain and another one that also involves in the industry for the next few years, Dr Lila Rashid, former executive

It was presided over by Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan.

The meeting decided to send a letter to the Chinese authorities through the Economic Relations Division (ERD) for reviewing their decision regarding the Joydebpur-Ishwardi project, meeting sources told The Daily Star.

Besides, the BR will apprise the PMO of all issues relating to the Akhaura-Sylhet project in writing and project, they said. CHINA'S REFUSAL

TO FUND PROJECT

The Chinese Embassy in Dhaka recently informed the ERD that it evaluated the Joydebpur-Ishwardi double-line project through an independent agency and found some faults. And the Chinese government is now unwilling to fund the project.

The detailed investment estimation of the project is "missing and the unit cost is too high". Besides, the basis for prediction of the freight volume is not sufficient and the financial calculation does not reflect the actual situation, it

It also said revenue from the project will be low and there is uncertainty over debt repayment, sources said referring to the embassy's letter to the

China was supposed to provide Tk 8,756.75 crore for the Tk 14,250.61-crore project.

Talking to this newspaper, several BR officials said China's refusal to give the loan might have something to do with geo-politics.

Bangladesh's rail communication, especially the operation of freight trains with India, will get a boost once the double-line project is completed.

Besides, the Bangabandhu railway bridge project, which would link portions of the rail line, is being implemented with Japanese funds, and this project is being highlighted

"In this situation, China may lose interest in financing the project," a top BR official said seeking anonymity.

contact the railways minister, Railways Secretary Salim Reza and BR Director General Dhirendra Nath Mazumder over phone, but none of them responded. They also didn't reply to messages sent by this correspondent to their mobile phones. JOYDEBPUR-ISHWARDI DOUBLE

Delay in schedules of trains connecting the capital with the northwestern and southern regions have been all too common over the last few

The capital is linked to these regions by the single-line Joydebpur-Ishwardi section and the Bangabandhu Bridge.

On many occasions, the railways minister and BR officials said the problems regarding the delay in train schedules on this route cannot be resolved until the construction of a rail bridge and installation of the dualgauge double line from Joydebpur to

in January 2016 to construct a dedicated double-line rail bridge over the Jamuna river.

It then undertook the Tk 14,250.61-crore project in November 2018 to turn the 174-km Joydebpur-Ishwardi section into a dual-gauge double line. The deadline for completing the project is December

The BR completed negotiations with China Civil Engineering Corporation Construction implementing the project and the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase in December 2018 approved a Tk 11,586.68-crore proposal for the

application for the project to the Chinese Embassy in Dhaka through the ERD and gave reminders for the loan seven times in the last two

the BR asked the Chinese government to expedite the process of signing the loan deal, stressing the importance of synchronisation of the two projects --

the bridge and the rail line -- to get the desired benefits.

AKHAURA-SYLHET DUAL GAUGE The Ecnec in April 2019 approved the Tk 16,104.45-crore project to convert the metre-gauge railway line into dual gauge from Akhaura to the Sylhet section linking the capital to the Sylhet divisional headquarters.

The project titled "Conversion of Metre Gauge Rail into Dual Gauge in Akhaura-Sylhet Section of Bangladesh Railway" aims to convert 225km metre-gauge line into 239km dual gauge line by June 2025.

China is supposed to finance 66.16 percent of the total project cost.

Officials said all the procedures managing Chinese concurrence for funding, selection of contractor and approval of the negotiated pricehave already been completed but the project's huge cost appears to be an obstacle to its implementation as it's much higher than that of similar rail

PMO FOR SLASHING PROJECT COST

In October last year, the PMO formed a committee to review the negotiated contract prices of the two projects

along with another involving China. The other project -- Joydebpur-Mymensingh-Jamalpur dual gauge conversion project -- has not been approved by the Ecnec, and negotiation with China Railway International Group has not been completed vet.

As part of measures to bring down the cost of the Joydebpur-Ishwardi double-line project, the PMO in November last year directed the BR to slash Tk 1,495.52 crore (12.91 percent) from the project's contract price of Tk 11,586.68 crore approved by the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase.

It also asked the BR to reduce the cost of Akhaura-Sylhet project by Tk 3,354.31 crore which is 20.8 percent of the total outlay.

last year decided to discuss the PMO's decision with the Chinese contractors

Both the Chinese contractors

disagreed over the revised costs and conveyed it to the BR, according to

US Senate confirms first Biden judges to federal bench

The US Senate confirmed Joe Biden's first two judicial nominees onto federal benches Tuesday, helping the president fulfill his priority to bring greater diversity to the nation's courts.

vote as the newest judge for the US District of New Jersey. Hours later a second Biden pick, Regina Rodriguez, was also confirmed on a bipartisan vote, 72-28, to serve on

the US District Court in Colorado. "They are both highly qualified,

confirmation who also have bipartisan support, and I hope they will be rapidly confirmed as well. Democrats see Biden as seeking to

rebalance the judiciary after four years of his predecessor Donald Trump. The Republican ex-president left a

wide footprint on the courts, winning confirmation of more than 230 judges, three-quarters of whom are men and 85 percent of whom are white, according to the American Constitution Society. Trump openly declared to his voters

that he would choose conservative judges who opposed abortion and

defended gun rights.

influence, Biden is acting swiftly to fill as many vacancies as possible before next year's midterm elections, when Democrats risk losing control of the

"We're appointing really excellent judges who are diverse -- not only in race, and gender and LGBTQ and religion, but also in background," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Tuesday.

I think far more qualified than the narrow, rightwing people who Trump continued to pick.

Tortured abroad

With nowhere to go after landing at the Dhaka airport, the woman informed the Airport Armed Police Battalion about her helpless state.

She was later handed over to the BRAC Migration Program.

This is another example of the extreme persecution of our expatriate women workers in Saudi Arabia," Shariful Hassan told The Daily Star. He said there should be a proper

investigation into these incidents and that the household which employed her in Saudi Arabia should be investigated. If necessary, DNA tests should be done to find out the paternity of the child.

now is to keep the baby healthy and support the woman mentally. "We will then try to get her to her village home."

Shariful said they have seen 12 such incidents before. "We tried to stand

According to BRAC's migration programme, another female expatriate worker returned to Dhaka from Saudi Arabia on April 2 and left her eightmonth-old baby at the Dhaka airport.

On March 26, a woman from Narsingdi's Belabo upazila returned home from Saudi Arabia on March 26 with a son after having lost her

She had given birth in that state in a

On February 24, another female domestic worker was forced to return from Oman with a four-month-old

Upon arrival at the airport, she told the APBn that the father of her child was an Omani citizen. Torturing and abusing her, he handed her over to Oman police after she became pregnant. The mother gave birth while

On December 16 last year, another female migrant worker was forced to

From cop to drug

They had a connection that could help

SI used to buy the pills from Salahuddin for his own consumption then.

When Atiqul approached Salahuddin for getting the pills in bulk at a low price,

ccording to the charge sheet. Salahuddin became the middle man. Salahuddin and Mazed came to Dhaka several times to deliver the drugs

With his supply chain figured out, Atiqul started selling the drug to dealers in the capital. The investigation officer found at least four dealers -- Humayun Ahmed, Hasan, Shakil and Shahidul

to whom the SI sold yaba pills. According to Bandarban district oolice, Atiqul was suspended soon after

"On January 1, 2019, Atiqul joined Bandarban court as CSI. But he did not work there after taking leave on March 23 last year," said Md Monirul Islam,

"A departmental investigation is

department Prof Ziaur Rahman told The Daily Star, "Initially, the dope test system is very effective to prevent the law enforcers from narcotics use, but it should be done regularly.

Severe punishment must be taken ngainst those law enforcers involved in narcotics trade and drug use, Ziaur

New cases

in Rajshahi and 36.05 percent in Khulna The positivity rate was 59.34 percent

n Satkĥira, 29.3 percent in Chuadanga, 38.15 percent in Narail, 20.24 percent in Rajsĥahi, and 20 percent in Joypurhat districts.

to 12.33 percent from 12.12pc the previous day. A total of 2,537 people tested positive

same period. The total number of recorded deaths

There are restrictions in bordering areas because of the high transmission rates. The transmission is stable in those districts currently and we hope it will fall soon," Dr Nazmul Islam, spokesperson of the Directorate General of Health

The overall transmission has been on

Of those who were reported dead esterday, there were 17 men and 19

The national positivity rate remained below five percent in January and February. But the numbers began to rise from the second week of March amid slack enforcement of health safety

May before beginning to rise two weeks





City



The student of Amrita Lal Dey

more than the rail line project.

The Daily Star yesterday tried to

İshwardi. The government took up a project

The BR in March 2019 sent a loan

In its last letter in January this year,

The BR at a meeting on December 9 for the two projects.

railway officials.

AFP, Washington

Julien Neals, who is African American, was confirmed on a 66-33

and they represent the diversity that is one of the ultimate strengths of our

'Other nominees are awaiting

Determined to dilute Trump's

They are "much more diverse and

"Such incidents are very unfortunate.

Shariful said their primary challenge

by their side, but we need to raise our oices and policymakers should play a responsible role to prevent such incidents in future."

psychological balance.

ail in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

in the Oman deportation camp.

return home from Oman with her three-month-old child.

them get the pills. Atiqul met drug dealer Salahuddin when he was the in-charge of Sonarpara check-post in Cox's Bazar, the investigator said in his probe report. The

Salahuddin introduced the SI to Abdul Mazed, a boatman who smuggles the pills into Cox's Bazar from Myanmar,

o SI Atiqul, the probe report said.

his arrest.

court inspector of Bandarban.

underway ... ," Monirul said. Dhaka University's criminology

FROM PAGE 1 The positivity rates were 14.53 percent

In the same 24 hours, the overall positivity rate has also increased

for coronavirus across the country in the from Covid-19 was 12,949, as of

Services (DGHS), told a virtual briefing yesterday.

the rise since June 2, he said.

Six each were from Dhaka and Chattogram divisions. Six died in Rangpur division and one in Sylhet

The transmission rate fell in mid-

ago.

"Medium enterprises who applied for the loans did not get it due to the







