



Workers set up boundary pillars on Buriganga river land right beside a power plant owned by late Dhaka-14 lawmaker Aslamul Hoque in Basila. The National River Conservation Commission in a report, as per a High Court directive, recommended its eviction and the pillars were supposed to be set up after recovering the grabbed river land. However, work seems to be going on in full swing while authorities of the power plant have not only fenced the area but also planted trees on the river land. Meanwhile, a signboard beside the river says the land is entitled to a bank. The photos were taken on Saturday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



BIWTA pillars to 'legitimise' grabbed land on Buriganga

21 acres encroached by late MP not recovered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) is erecting boundary pillars along the foreshore of river Buriganga in Basila without recovering the much-talked about 13 acres of river land and eight acres of foreshore that had been grabbed by a late lawmaker.

Once BIWTA completes the work, it would legitimise the river grabbing by the company of recently-deceased Dhaka-14 MP Aslamul Hoque for a power plant.

As per a High Court (HC) directive on October 22, 2019, National River Conservation Commission (NRCC) jointly prepared a report along with seven other government agencies that recommended the land be recovered and restored to its original state, as nearly 14km of the river is dying due to earth filling to construct a power plant.

However, within six months of the report, BIWTA is demarcating the river boundary, leaving around 500 yards of space from the water.

joint director of BIWTA. BIWTA is implementing the second phase of demarcation pillar installations along the Buriganga, Turag, Balu and Shitalakhya river banks, spending Tk 848.55 crore since 2019.

While visiting the area on Saturday, it was seen the contractors were setting the pillars along the water line, which were ideally supposed to be set up after recovering the grabbed land.

Moreover, power plant authorities have already fenced the area and planted coconut trees on the grabbed land.

Asked about the eviction drive on grabbed land in the private economic zone, the joint director said they had sent a letter to the shipping ministry, but were yet to get any feedback.

"Now we are setting up pillars. But if the government decides to recover the land, we will conduct drives," he said.

Contacted, NRCC chairman Ali Kabir said if BIWTA violated the rule, they will be solely responsible for this.

Dr Mujibul Haq, its former chairman, was in charge of preparing the report that was submitted to the HC.

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CONTAINING COVID-19 TRANSMISSION

Guidelines thrown out the window in public transports of port city

ARUN BIKASH DEY, CIG

Public vehicles in Chattogram city are defying government instructions for movement during the pandemic in every way possible.

Not only are they boarding passengers up to full seating capacity, but also taking up standing passengers. On the contrary, they are realising double fare too, that the government set for vehicles boarding up to half of their capacity.

According to government instructions, public vehicles are supposed to board passengers only up to half of their sitting capacity. To cover up for the loss in revenue, the government also allowed to charge 60 percent additional fare.

In addition, no passenger would be allowed to board without face masks, while the seats have to be sanitised at the beginning of every trip, the guidelines say.

However, passengers in the port city have alleged that other than overcharging, none of the other guidelines are being followed. As a result, altercations between passengers and transport workers have become a common scene everyday.

According to health experts, if health guideline are not followed in public transports, the pandemic situation may further deteriorate in the city.

Epidemiologist Prof Dr Shakeel Ahmed, in-charge of Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases lab, told The Daily Star following health guideline should be ensured in public transports to contain the pandemic.

This correspondent saw passengers standing inside different public vehicles in Chawkbazar, Muradpur, Bahaddarhat, Sholohahar Gate No.2, Oxygen, and Karnaphuli Shah Amanat Bridge areas. In addition, almost two-third of the passengers were seen without face masks.

Sources said around 1,000 mini buses and 2,000 human hauliers ply on 12 routes in the port city.

"Health guidelines are not being followed in the buses. Passengers are standing very close to each other, while most of them are without masks," passenger Debdulal Das told this correspondent.

He had boarded a minibus at Chawkbazar to go to his workplace yesterday.

"When I protested the additional passengers, the conductor misbehaved with me," he said.

Abdus Sattar Roni, general secretary of South Chattogram Passengers Welfare

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Public transports across the port city are overflowing with passengers, despite the government directive to carry no more than half capacity.

PHOTO: STAR

164 Bangladeshis rescued from Mediterranean

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Libyan coast guards have rescued and detained 439 migrants, including 164 Bangladeshis, from the Mediterranean Sea as they were trying to go to Europe.

Bangladesh mission in Libya confirmed the incident to The Daily Star yesterday.

The coast guards on two ships rescued the migrants from several boats in the sea on Thursday. All the migrants are African and Asian.

A Libyan navy spokesperson said they were taken to Tripoli Naval Base after rescue. Later they were handed over to the immigration authorities.

Currently, they are kept at a shelter camp.

Embassy of Bangladesh in Libya Chargé d'affaires Gazi Md Asaduzzaman Kabir said they were aware of the development.

Till May this year, the coast guards rescued 9,216 migrants who were trying to go to Europe through the sea. At the same time last year, 7,100 people were rescued by the coast guards.

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Laws there, but not commitment

Speakers tell discussion on ecosystem restoration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government needs to show its commitment in conserving the country's environment and restoring its ecosystem, speakers said at an online discussion yesterday.

Though there is a sufficient number of relevant laws, policies, and rules regarding environment conservation, they need to be enforced effectively, the speakers said.

The association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) and Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) along with The Daily Star organised the discussion on "Ecosystem Restoration: Necessary Laws and Policies in Bangladesh".

During her presentation, BELA Chief Executive Syeda Rizwana Hasan said Bangladesh is one of the top countries in terms of declining waterbodies.

There are 29 rivers which have been facing acute pollution, while in 48 districts there are 49,162 instances of forest land grabbing. Moreover, uncontrolled sand and stone lifting has also reached an alarming level, she said.

"Laws are not being implemented due to absence of commitment," she said, adding, there are some laws which required amendment.

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Nasim's first anniversary of death observed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The first death anniversary of veteran Awami League leader and former minister Mohammed Nasim was observed yesterday with different programmes maintaining health guideline protocols for Covid-19.

The programmes included milad and doa mahfil, discussion, distribution of food and wheelchairs among the poor and physically challenged.

Family members of Nasim paid tributes to him by placing wreaths at his grave at Banani graveyard.

The former AL presidium member and spokesperson of AL-led 14-party alliance died while undergoing treatment at Bangladesh Specialized Hospital at Shyamoli on June 13 last year.

Nasim, son of son of Shaheed Captain M Mansur Ali, one of the organisers of

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EID-UL-AZHA AMID PANDEMIC Cattle markets, animal sacrifice in designated spots only: minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

LGRD Minister Md Tazul Islam yesterday asked authorities concerned to take necessary steps and ensure that makeshift cattle markets are set up only in designated places maintaining health guidelines during the upcoming Eid-ul-Azha.

"Makeshift cattle markets will be set up only at approved locations in the city corporations, municipalities, upazilas, and union parishads. Any unapproved cattle market will not be accepted," said the minister at an inter-ministerial meeting held at the conference room of the Local Government Division.

The meeting chaired by the minister was held to discuss the preparation of waste management during the upcoming Eid.

The minister said the delta variant of Covid-19 had wreaked havoc in India, and it has already been found in some bordering areas of Bangladesh.

"So, we have to set up makeshift cattle markets taking

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'Proposed budget makes tobacco more affordable'

Speakers say, demand raising tax on all products

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The proposed budget for FY 2021-22, if passed, will make tobacco products even more affordable and increase its use among the youth and poor, said lawmakers, economists and public health experts at a virtual programme yesterday.

This would put public health under considerable threat and benefit only tobacco companies while making the government lose opportunities of earning additional revenues, they said.

The event was organised jointly by PROGGA (Knowledge for Progress) and Anti-Tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA).

In its analysis of tobacco tax related measures in the proposed budget, PROGGA drew the attention to the fact that the proposed budget has kept the prices and taxes on the low and medium tier cigarettes unchanged which respectively constitute around 72 and 16 percent of Bangladeshi cigarette market.

The prices for 10 sticks of high and premium tier cigarettes have been raised by only Tk 5 and Tk 7 (5.5 percent hike),

setting the prices at Tk 102 and Tk 135 respectively.

The increase (5 percent) is very negligible compared to the increase in per capita income of the country (9 percent). Hence, the proposed budget would make all types of cigarettes even cheaper, they said.

It has also come up in the budget reaction that the existing faulty multi-tiered ad-valorem tax structure is also increasing the tendency to switch to cheaper cigarette brands. As a result, the government is losing the opportunity of earning a huge amount of revenue from price brands.

Speakers said implementation of budget proposals of anti-tobacco organisations, i.e. increasing prices of all tobacco products through imposing specific taxes will encourage 1.1 million people to quit smoking, prevent premature deaths of 390,000 current adults and 400,000 current youth, and earn Tk 3,400 crore in additional revenue from cigarettes as supplementary duty, health development surcharge and VAT.

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Four killed, 17 injured in road accidents

STAR REPORT

Four people were killed and 17 others injured in road accidents in places including Dhaka yesterday, according to our correspondents.

In the capital, pickup driver Abdul Jalil Molla was killed and several others were injured after a car hit the vehicle in Banani early yesterday.

At least 15 labourers from Mohakhali were heading towards Airport area on the pickup when the accident occurred around 12:45am.

The recklessly-driven car hit the pick-up, leaving at least seven injured, said Abdur Razzak, an auto-rickshaw driver, who witnessed the incident.

Critically injured Jalil was rushed to Kurmitola General Hospital and later to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead, said Razzak, who took Jalil to hospital.

Nur-e-Azam Mia, officer-in-charge of Banani Police Station, said they seized the car but its driver fled. The body was sent for autopsy, he said.

At Bangabandhu Bridge, two people were killed and 10 others injured as a bus hit a truck in the bridge's west zone.

The deceased are Moju Miah (33) and Md Nozrul Islam (35).

Bangabandhu Bridge West Zone Police Station OC Mosaddek Hossain said the accident took place at pillar-18 around 3am, killing both on spot.

Vehicular movement through the bridge remained halted for one hour, before police and fire fighters removed vehicles from the bridge, he said.

In Natore, a rice mill worker died on the spot as a truck ran her over at Garmatiarea in Baraigram. The deceased was identified as Hasna (47).

Bonpara Highway Police Station OC Shafiqul Islam said the accident occurred around 10am when she was crossing a road.

Police later arrested the truck driver Mohammad Shiplu but his assistant managed to escape.

Police sent the body to Natore Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

In-person exams start at Cumilla University

OUR CORRESPONDENT, CUMILLA

The authorities of Cumilla University have started holding in-person examinations -- postponed due to Covid-19 situation -- from yesterday, maintaining health guidelines.

Confirming the development, Nurul Karim Chowdhury, deputy controller of examinations of the university, said students of different batches have started sitting for the final and mid-term exams yesterday.

The authorities earlier held classes online, he added.

Besides, starting from 9am, the administrative activities continued till 5pm.

Nurul Karim, also acting controller of examinations, said, "The final exams (semester final) of different departments -- management, marketing, accounting, statistics, ICT, English and public administration -- have started."

Four buses of the university have been running since yesterday morning

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Students of Cumilla University returned to their campus yesterday after over a year, as the authorities began conducting in-person exams maintaining health safety guidelines.

PHOTO: STAR