

HEFAJAT'S VIOLENCE

No 'real Islamic scholar' arrested

Says state minister for religious affairs at parliament

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Religious Affairs Ministry Faridul Haque Khan yesterday told parliament that no real Islamic scholar was arrested centering Hefajat-e Islam's violent activities in late March in protest of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit in Bangladesh.

He said the "so called power hungry" Islamic scholars who were involved in conspiracy against the state and anti-social activities have been brought under the law.

The state minister was responding to BNP MPs Harunur Rashid and Rumeen Farhana, who during discussion on a Bill sharply criticised the government for wholesale arrest of Islamic scholars during the government's ongoing crackdown against Hefajat leaders for their involvement in violent protests from March 25 to March 27.

The state minister said everyone knows what Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is doing for Islam in this country. He said no real Islamic scholars or alem-ulema have been arrested or prosecuted.

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The premises of Sir Salimullah Muslim Hall at Dhaka University is covered with a carpet of moss that has grown in over a year, as the once-buzzing campus has been in slumber due to Covid-19. When students finally return to the dormitories to resume their paused academic lives, they will probably be greeted with equal parts of familiarity and alienation. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

IN-PERSON EXAMS AT RU

Lockdown leaves students hanging

ARAFAT RAHAMAN, RU

Thousands of students of Rajshahi University (RU), who were expecting to sit for their final examinations on university campus, are in uncertainty due to the lockdown imposed in Rajshahi.

RU authorities in a virtual meeting on June 3 decided to allow departments to start exams of 2019 from June 20 and of 2020 from July 4 in person. It also decided to keep RU's residential halls closed.

Upon receiving permission, around 10 departments started taking measures. Students also started heading for Rajshahi.

But on June 10, the Rajshahi administration decided to impose a complete lockdown from June 11 to midnight of June 17, as Covid-19 was spreading rapidly in different areas.

After the lockdown was imposed, RU authorities immediately issued a notice to close university offices till June 17.

This set of decisions caused confusion among students and teachers.

Sanchita Akter, a student of history department, expressed her frustration in a Facebook post and said, "We've already come to Rajshahi, after hearing the exam dates. But it seems like authorities will reschedule. What can we do now?"

A student of finance department said, "We were eagerly waiting to sit for exams. We had even started preparing, after authorities announced the dates. But as the situation worsened, we won't be able to visit Rajshahi."

This correspondent talked to seven department heads, who were preparing to take exams between June 20-25. Some of them said they have already postponed the exams, while others said they did not take any decision yet but have been observing the situation closely.

Prof Zahid Hossain, chairperson of finance department, said, "We have

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BRAC SURVEY ON RECRUITMENT IN RETAIL SECTOR

Women, persons with disabilities neglected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Retailers in Bangladesh are reluctant to hire women and persons with disabilities because of safety and security issues, and the perception that women have limited capacity to endure physical strain, found a recent survey.

Only 2 percent of retailers are willing to hire persons with disabilities, it revealed.

Retail employees work for an average of 11 hours a day in a single shift. They mostly can avail annual leaves but are not usually granted maternity or paternity leaves, it found.

Only half of the workplaces have policies to protect their employees from sexual harassment.

The baseline survey was conducted by Innovation Consulting Ltd, commissioned by Brac's Skills Development Programme (SDP), to create employable skills and decent work opportunities for the marginalised youth.

The survey's findings were shared yesterday at a webinar titled "The future of

skills and employment in the retail sector", organised by SDP.

The survey also reveals existing skill gaps of salespeople engaged in the sector. For example, 68 percent of employers said their salespeople are unable to meet sales targets; 54 percent stated the salespeople lack communication skills; and 64.6 percent mentioned that their sales staff's knowledge of products is inadequate.

The survey, conducted under SDP's "Progressing the retail sector by improving decent employment (PRIDE)" project and funded by IKEA Foundation and UBS Optimus, interviewed 720 respondents, who were employers and employees in the retail sector in Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna and Sylhet.

Identifying mindset and social barriers as the most important problems in the sector, Shaheen Khan, chief executive officer of Geemcon Food and Agricultural Products Ltd, said a shift in culture and mindset is required for people to come and

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Rajshahi police open free oxygen bank for Covid-19 patients

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) yesterday created a "Police Covid Oxygen Bank" to serve Covid-19 patients who require oxygen.

The bank was formally launched at RMP's temporary headquarters at Shah Makhdom police station premises, with a store of 50 oxygen cylinders.

The capacity would be raised gradually, RMP Commissioner Abu Kalam Siddique said while inaugurating the initiative. He said police would provide oxygen cylinders free of cost to patients.

"We decided to open the bank, considering those who were unable to collect a cylinder. We will provide oxygen to people who need it," he continued.

"We will not only provide cylinders, but also deploy forces to take them to patients and refill them when necessary," he added.

Anyone can avail the service by calling RMP's control room at 01320063998.

RMP has trained at least 10 of its staffers to handle the cylinders, and police officials said they would increase the number of staffers for conducting activities of the bank.

In his inaugural speech, the RMP commissioner said no other hospital but Rajshahi Medical College Hospital has a central oxygen supply, and it is already facing the pressure of patients.



PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

Since waste collection is still a manual process, health risks it poses for conservancy workers is significant, especially when they don't wear gloves, shoes, or masks to protect themselves. As a result, many complain of diseases contracted from the work. This photo was taken from Chattogram city's Lalkhan Bazar area.

No safety gears for CCC conservancy workers

Around 3,700 cleaners exposed to health risk

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Even amid the pandemic, hundreds of conservancy workers in port city take to the streets to clean up the waste produced in the day. However, they continue to collect the waste without using any safety equipment, putting them at risk of being infected by various diseases.

The cleaners alleged that their appointment authority -- Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) -- did not provide them with protective gears. As a result, they were compelled to work this way.

On the other hand, the CCC officials concerned claimed that they did give those to workers but they "do not want" to use them.

Waste collection in port city is mostly based on manual labour. The workers collect household waste then carry those to the nearby collection spot, from where the CCC vehicles take those to landfills.

At present, there are 3,700 conservancy workers under CCC. Of those, 1,700 are permanent workers and the rest work on daily wage basis.

According to CCC officials, the city produces around 2,500 tonnes of waste every day.

While visiting different areas yesterday, this correspondent found that almost 90 percent workers were working without any safety equipment such as masks, gloves or shoes.

A few of them were seen wearing masks. Conservancy worker Hridoy was seen

collecting waste at city's Askar Dighir Par. He was dumping household waste in his rickshaw-van for taking those to a nearby collection spot.

Hridoy said the CCC officials did not give him any safety gear.

"I work on daily wage basis. As I'm not a permanent worker, I cannot really demand masks, gloves or shoes from the authority. I know there are health risks, but I am too poor to afford those," he said.

Meanwhile, Ajoy Das was seen collecting waste in Chawkbazar area. Echoing Hridoy he said he had been suffering from skin diseases for many days.

"I took treatment at the outdoor of Chattogram Medical College Hospital. The doctors advised me to maintain hygiene but my profession does not allow me to do so," said Ajoy.

Contacted, Prof Dr Sujat Paul, head of medicine department at CMCH, said conservancy workers were at risk of being infected by various skin and chest diseases if they continue to work without taking any safety measures.

"They may even suffer from diarrhoea, typhoid and jaundice," he said.

Contacted, Dr Mahfuzur Rahman, convener of Public Health Rights Protection Committee, Chattogram, said CCC should modernise the garbage management system, rather than relying on manual process.

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War crimes accused former lawmaker MA Hannan dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former Jatiya Party lawmaker MA Hannan, who was facing trial for allegedly committing crimes during the Liberation War, died of cancer yesterday. He was 86.



Hannan died at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University yesterday morning, Rezia Sultana Chaman, a prosecutor of International Crimes Tribunal, told The Daily Star.

He was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital on June 5 after he fell ill in Kashimpur Central Jail, said Jailer Rabiul Islam, adding that he was admitted to BSMMU the next day.

On June 7, Hannan tested positive for Covid-19, the jailer said. Hannan's body has been kept at DMC morgue for autopsy.

Hannan, former lawmaker from Trishal (Mymensingh-7 constituency), his son Sajjad, and six others from Mymensingh were made accused in a case filed for

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First Delta variant cases in Ctg found

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Researchers have detected Chattogram's first cases of the Covid-19 Delta variant, which was first found in India.

According to them, none of the two patients infected with the Delta variant had a history of visiting India recently and they also did not come into close contact with any symptomatic Covid-19 patients.

They have also not ventured outside Chattogram in a couple of months, said the researchers. They believe this may be a sign that the Delta variant of Covid-19 may have started community transmission in Chattogram.

The researchers led by Dr Al Forkan, professor of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Department of Chittagong University went for genome sequencing of 42 samples collected from seven laboratories in Chattogram including CU lab, Chattogram Medical College Hospital lab, Chattogram General Hospital, Imperial Hospital and Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University in the last week of May.

"We have found 33 samples of Beta (South African) variant, four of Alpha (UK), three of Eta (Nigerian) and two of Delta (Indian) variant," said Dr Forkan.

"It's for the first time that Delta variant has been detected in Chattogram," he said.

"We have contacted both the patients -- a 52-year-old male living in Fatikchhari upazila and a 32-year-old female residing in the port city. They said they did not visit India

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Bangabandhu Lounge opens at Bangladesh Permanent UN Mission

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen inaugurated the newly established Bangabandhu Lounge at the Bangladesh Permanent Mission to the UN in New York on Monday.

The lounge, which houses a rich collection of books, photos, documentaries, and graphical display on the life and work of the Father of the Nation, has been set up as part of the observance of Bangabandhu's birth centenary.

"It demonstrates Bangabandhu's trust and faith in multilateralism; particularly the UN," said the minister while inaugurating the lounge, according to a statement of the permanent mission.

At the inaugural event, Momen expressed his interest to contribute to the lounge with more books and display materials.

The lounge was set up last year, but could not be formally inaugurated due to pandemic.

"This lounge will serve as a reminder of

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HC halts recruitment of six teachers to JU

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday stayed the process of recruitment of six teachers for Jahangirnagar University's philosophy department till June 20.

The court also asked JU authorities to submit relevant documents regarding appointments of the teachers through their lawyer by the date.

The bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman passed the order during hearing a writ petition filed challenging the JU authorities' move to recruit the six lecturers.

Lawyers Aneek R Haque and Syeda Nasrin appeared for the writ petitioners while Deputy Attorney General Arobinda Kumar Roy represented the state and lawyer Kumar Debul Dey argued for JU.

JU authorities issued a circular on February 11 for appointing six lecturers to its philosophy department.

Four teachers of the department -- Prof Dr Mohammad Kamrul Ahsan, Prof Dr ASM Anwarullah Bhuiyan, Prof Md Zakir Hossain and Assistant Prof Abdus Satter -- on June 10 filed the writ petition with the HC, challenging the circular.

They said JU authorities issued the circular when the country was not under lockdown situation.

After four months into issuance of the circular the applicants during a lockdown on June 7, 2021 suddenly received a text message to attend virtual viva voce on June 12 for the appointment and therefore, the whole department and the petitioners had no idea about it, they said in the petition.



A homeless mother of two sits on a bed made of discarded PVC sheets on a pavement, watching a video on her phone. She does not have a roof over her head, or possibly the guarantee of the next meal, but the availability and affordability of technology have made entertainment accessible to her. The photo was taken from Chattogram city's CRB area earlier this week.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

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GRAFT CASE

Former Barishal city mayor granted bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday granted ad-interim bail to former Barishal City Corporation mayor Ahsan Habib Kamal, who was sentenced to seven years imprisonment in a corruption case, clearing the way for him to walk out of jail.

The HC bench of Justice Md Salim granted bail to Ahsan Habib Kamal for six months following an appeal filed by him, challenging the trial court verdict that sentenced him to seven years in prison.

In the appeal, Ahsan Habib also sought bail from the HC.

Habib's filing lawyer Shanjid Siddique told The Daily Star that there is no legal bar stopping his client's release from jail following the HC order.

The HC granted bail to Habib as he is sick, and he will not misuse his bail, the lawyer said.

Lawyers Muhammad Yusuf Hossain Humayun and Md Ruhul Qudus Kazal also appeared for Habib while lawyer AKM Farhan argued for Anti-Corruption Commission.

The court of Barishal Divisional Special Judge Mohsinul Haque on November 9 last year sentenced Habib and four others to seven years in prison in a corruption case filed over embezzlement of Tk 45 lakh.

The court also fined Kamal, former fisheries affairs secretary of BNP central committee, and one Zakir Hossain, a contractor, Tk 1 crore each.