




To help the capital's residents resist the coronavirus, Dhaka Wasa took an initiative of placing several hand washing facilities across various locations of the city. Only that most of them are lying out of order, with no water in the tanks and even the taps missing. This photo was taken yesterday from Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue near Karwan Bazar.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# Courts hamstrung by judge shortage

No new appointments to fill vacant positions; case backlog rising

	DIVISIONS	JUDGES	PENDING CASES	PER JUDGE
	Appellate	5	15,225	3,045
	High Court	91	4,52,963	4,923
	Lower Court	1,700	34.65 lakh	2,038

SOURCE: LAW LAB, AS OF DEC 31, 2020

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

With backlogs of pending cases piling up due to crisis of judges, the government does not seem to have any specific plan to appoint new judges to the Appellate and High Court divisions of the Supreme Court any time soon to increase the rate of case disposal.

Asked, Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star recently, "Of course, judges will be appointed to the Appellate and High Court divisions. It's a continuous process. When the posts of judges fall vacant, new judges are appointed."

He, however, did not say when and how many judges will be appointed.

Crisis of judges increased the case backlogs at the courts of the country in the last few years and Covid-19 pandemic restrictions turned the situation graver, causing immense sufferings to the justice seekers.

As of July 30, there are five judges including the chief justice in the Appellate Division (AD) and 91 in the High Court Division.

The chief justice will retire on December 31 this year.

But the number of cases pending with the AD is 15,225 while it was 4,52,963 with the HC till December 31 last year, according to a study report of Law Lab, a law-chamber that conducts research on legal and constitutional issues.

In 1974, the AD had five judges and the number of the HC judges was 12. The pending cases in the AD and HC at that time were 4,094 and 28,186 respectively.

The Law Lab collected the data from the reports published by the SC and from the parliamentary proceedings.

Across the country, the number of pending cases at different courts till December 31 last year was abysmally high – 39,33,186.

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# Development the priority, not nature!

Ruet authorities felling 50 old trees for construction projects

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

To make space for new administrative and academic buildings, authorities of Rajshahi University of Engineering Technology (Ruet) have felled around 50 trees recently, most of which are over half a century old.

This was done without taking mandatory approval from the Forest Department, divisional forest officer Ahmed Niamur Rahman told The Daily Star. "The Ruet authorities have not even informed the forest department about the tree-felling," he said.

Talking to The Daily Star, environmentalists said the felling of these old trees, including litchi, mahogany, and koroi -- all of which grew inside the campus since the university's inception in 1964 -- will leave a bad impact on the area's ecosystem.

During a visit to the campus yesterday, this correspondent saw labourers felling tree one after another. Till yesterday, the felling of at least 15 Krishnachura and Minjiri trees were almost complete.

Contacted, Ruet registrar Prof Md Selim Hossain said the project is being supervised by the offices of planning and development, and the superintending engineer of Ruet.

He said the campus has not undertaken any development works since the 1980s, but recently the government approved nearly Tk 600 crore worth of development projects for Ruet.

The felled trees will give way to ten multi-storied buildings, with the site in front of the Civil Engineering Faculty housing the administrative



PHOTO: STAR

Till yesterday, at least 15 Krishnachura and Minjiri trees were felled to make room for administrative and academic buildings at Ruet.

building.

Contacted, both superintending engineer Amit Roy Chowdhury and planning and development affairs director Zaglul Sadat refused to state anything on the matter.

Meanwhile, the university authorities were also found to have sold the felled trees at a lower than market rates.

Abdus Samad, a local timber trader, said he estimates each of them to go for Tk 50,000.

However, the campus authorities sold all the 15 felled trees for only Tk 1.27 lakh, this correspondent found.

Md Jalal Uddin, senior assistant director of security in the campus, said the trees were sold off to Ruet employee Golam Mostafa, following proper procurement rules.

It was Golam Mostafa who recruited labourers to fell the trees.

Meanwhile, Ruet registrar Prof Selim said the university has been planting around 1,000 trees on the campus in the last one year to

compensate for the felled trees.

However, experts said this stands for little.

Contacted, Prof AHM Mahbubur Rahman of Rajshahi University's Department of Botany said, "Planting new trees does not compensate for the felling of old trees," as it takes time for a new tree to fulfil the function of a much older one.

"Ruet and RU campuses are proud to have these trees. Other than providing oxygen for us, they play critical roles in the area's ecosystem," he said.

Mahbub Tunku, general secretary of Poribesh Andolon Oikya Parishad, said they have been noticing a "mad rush" for tree-felling in Rajshahi for development activities.

"We're not sure whether we need development of this kind, but we're sure we need these old trees," he said, adding that the authorities should plan development activities without harming the environment.

## 307 more hospitalised with dengue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 307 dengue patients were hospitalised in the last 24 hours till 8am yesterday.

Among the new cases, 63 are from outside the capital.

With the new cases, a total of 14,831 persons were hospitalised this year of whom 1,601 are from outside Dhaka, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

A total of 4,475 were diagnosed during the running month.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, 57 people have died of dengue infection in the country this year. Twelve people have died in July while 34 have died in August and 11 in September so far.

Of the deaths, 53 have died in Dhaka division, two in Chattogram and one each in Rajshahi and Khulna divisions.

At least 7,698 persons were diagnosed with dengue in August, 2,286 were hospitalised in July, 272 in June while 43 were infected in May.

Though most of the patients who were hospitalised have so far been released, 1,291 are still undergoing treatment at hospitals in Dhaka, and 199 outside the capital.

Amid the rise in dengue cases, DGHS on August 23 announced six hospitals in Dhaka dedicated to treating dengue patients.

## 4 bills passed in JS

### SHISHU HOSPITAL AND INSTITUTE BILL

- Will merge Shishu Hospital and Inst of Child Health; 30 beds dedicated for children from poor families
- Aims to improve healthcare services for children

### MEDICAL DEGREES (REPEAL) BILL

- Will abolish Medical Degrees Act 1916

### MEDICAL COLLEGES (GOVERNING BODIES) (REPEAL), BILL

- Will abolish Medical Colleges (Governing Bodies) Ordinance 1961

### KURIGRAM AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY BILL

- Will establish a new university in Kurigram
- Aims to develop agriculture in northern districts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four separate bills, including Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute Bill, were passed in parliament yesterday.

Three of the passed bills -- Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute Bill, The Medical Degrees (Repeal) Bill, and The Medical Colleges (Governing Bodies) (Repeal) Bill -- were placed by Health Minister Zahid Maleque.

Another passed bill, titled "Kurigram Agricultural University Bill", was placed by Education Minister Dipu Moni.

Besides, a bill titled "The Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provision) Act 2021" was placed in parliament, aiming to extend the tenure of the law for another five years (till 2026).

Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute Bill, which was passed by voice vote, aims to improve healthcare services for children.

It was designed in line with Dhaka Shishu Hospital Ordinance, 2008, which was promulgated during the caretaker government's tenure.

The draft law aims to merge Dhaka Shishu (Children) Hospital and Bangladesh Institute of Child Health to ensure better healthcare services for children. At present, Bangladesh Institute of Child Health is the academic wing of Dhaka Shishu Hospital.

Some 54 ordinances, out of 122, promulgated during

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## Amassing over Tk 12cr in 6 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Within six years of joining Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), the bank balance of an assistant director swelled to about Tk 12.84 crore.

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) deputy director Rafiquzzaman yesterday filed a case against the official in question, Farhanul Islam, and his brother Raihanul Islam over amassing around Tk 12.84 crore illegally.

As per the case statement, Farhanul joined BRTA's Noakhali circle in September 2012.

He maintains 10 accounts across three private banks, a public bank, and financial institutions.

He came to the spotlight after suddenly closing six of his accounts in 2019, which alerted the central bank and prompted an investigation, sources said. The inquiry was later transferred to ACC.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday evening, ACC filed five cases against Keya Group chairperson Abdul Khaleq Pathan, his wife, and three children for amassing about Tk 183.84 crore illegally and concealing wealth worth around Tk 96 crore.

In August 2017, ACC had arrested Pathan over swindling Tk 111.14 crore from Bangladesh Krishi Bank.



## Prof Golam Mowlah passes away

CITY DESK

Prof Dr Golam Mowlah, son of late Abdur Ruzzaque, passed away on September 14 in Dhaka. He was 73.

He died due to age related complications.

He left behind his wife Prof Dr Aleya Mowlah, daughter Naveem Mowlah, two grandchildren, relatives and well-wishers to mourn his death.

Dr Mowlah was founding vice chancellor of Cumilla University and a professor and former director of Institute of Nutrition and Food Science at Dhaka University.

His relatives, friends and well-wishers have been requested to pray for the salvation of his departed soul.

## 'It seems purposive'

Journalist organisations condemn BFIU move of seeking bank details of 11 journo leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Press Club and Dhaka Reporters Unity have condemned and protested the move of Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) that sought statements of bank accounts of elected members of different journalists' associations.

In an urgent meeting of the management committee of the press club, they said investigation can be launched on allegations against anyone under the existing act.

"But launching a probe only against the elected leaders of the organisations of a profession seems purposive," the committee said in a press release.

BFIU this week sent letters to banks seeking statements of 11 journalist leaders.

The list included 11 names from the six most important organisations representing journalists. They have been directly elected by thousands of journalists from all over the country, including Dhaka. This unprecedented act has tarnished image of journalist society and Jatiya Press Club, read the press release.

Saying that it has belittled social dignity and defamed journalist leaders publicly, they demanded immediate withdrawal of the decision.

In its press release, DRU executive committee termed the BFIU's move a threat against independent journalism.

"It would be logical, if the bank statements of the leaders of all organisations of professionals would have been summoned," it said.

The executive committee of DRU suspected involvement of corrupt bureaucrats behind it.

"It needs to be investigated whether there is an ill motive or Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit took up the matter upon the instigation of some quarter," they opined.

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Despite the rainfall of the last few days, the mercury picks right back up as the drizzles subside. To find respite, a few families got down into the Buriganga to swim around and teach their children the way of the water. This photo was taken recently from Basila bridge area near Mohammadpur.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON