

Are we going to be a nation that accepts political violence as a norm? ... We cannot allow ourselves to be that kind of nation.

US President Biden on Capitol riot anniversary

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

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16 PAGES PLUS TOGGLE : Tk 12.00



B1

Mobile financial services on a role



P5

Mayur river at death's door



P11

Djokovic fighting deportation



P7

'Dozens' killed in Kazakhstan unrest



Construction of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Railway Bridge over the Jamuna is going on in full swing. Once built, the 4.8km dual-gauge double-line bridge -- some 300 metres upstream of the Bangabandhu Bridge -- would be the largest dedicated rail bridge in the country. The Tk 16,781 crore project witnessed 36 percent progress until December and is scheduled to be completed by August 2024.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

ELECTION COMMISSION

Huda, Talukdar at daggers drawn again



"If there were no votes, from where did 75 percent turnout come?"

Chief Election Commissioner Nurul Huda



"In the battle for votes, we only have the battles now. no votes."

Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukdar

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Chief Election Commissioner Nurul Huda and Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukdar have once again traded barbs in public.

Huda yesterday said Mahbub "is intentionally spreading falsehood, with an agenda to defame the Election Commission".

He was referring to Mahbub's comment that violence was an integral part of the ongoing union parishad elections and that violence and elections cannot happen simultaneously.

"In the battle for votes, we only have the battles now. no votes," he said on Wednesday, when at least 11 people got killed during the fifth phase of the UP polls, taking the toll from polls-time violence to at least 87.

At an event in the capital, Huda said, "He [Mahbub] always says such things... These are lies and irrelevant. It's propaganda. He says these to scandalise the Election Commission.

"If there were no votes, from where did 75 percent turnout come?" Huda asked.

The commission is not responsible for the violence and deaths during the polls, he said. "The individuals running for posts and their followers are responsible. Violence happens outside the polling centres."

Violence is not happening due to the administration's weakness, the CEC said, adding that sometimes the administration officials and police get injured or even killed.

Mahbub refused to comment on Huda's allegations, when contacted yesterday.

This is not the first public spat between Huda and Mahbub.

At an event marking the National Voters' Day on March 2 last year, Mahbub said a fair and equal chance of succeeding was not ensured for everyone while the local government elections turned into "a model of irregularities" due to violence, polling centre takeovers, and vandalism of Electronic Voting Machines.

Soon afterwards, Huda, who was present at the event, said, "Mahbub Talukdar is doing everything he can to disgrace and undermine the Election Commission. He does not work in the interest of the Election Commission. He has his own interests and motives."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

10 new cases raise Omicron spectre

Cabinet discusses Covid spike; experts urge immediate curbs

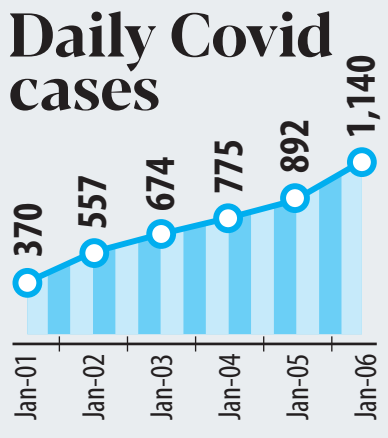
MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN AND MOUDUD AHMED SUJON

The government considers stepping up vaccine campaign, lowering the age limit for booster doses and preventing gathering of unvaccinated people at public places to contain the spike of Covid cases.

It also considers not allowing anyone to enter restaurants and shopping malls and board buses and trains without vaccine certificates.

Besides, it will make receiving at least one dose of a Covid vaccine mandatory for school children above 12 to attend classes in person.

The steps were discussed at the cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, yesterday when the country witnessed a 27.8 percent increase in daily coronavirus



cases. The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) has logged 1,140 fresh cases, saying the positivity rate rose to

4.86 percent.

Besides, 10 new Omicron cases were reported yesterday, taking the confirmed total number to 20, according to Germany-based global database GISAID.

In such a situation, an expert has warned that the Omicron variant would spread at the community level if health rules are not followed immediately and strictly.

Talking to The Daily Star, Prof Tahmina Shirin, director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), said, "We are detecting new Omicron cases every day [through genome sequencing]. Contact tracing does not suggest that the variant has started community transmission, but it will soon."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7

Murad's wife calls 999

Says disgraced ex-state minister tortured her, files general diary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Murad Hassan's wife Jahanara Ehsan yesterday filed a general diary accusing him of torturing and threatening to kill her.

The wife of the disgraced former state minister for information and broadcasting called the national emergency hotline in the afternoon seeking police's help, said Saiful Islam, inspector (investigation) of Dhanmondi Police Station.

Ten police officials rushed to their home in Dhanmondi around 3:15pm, he said. Later, Jahanara filed the GD with the police station.

In the diary, Jahanara said she has been married to Murad for 19 years and has two children with him. She alleged that she was tortured both physically and mentally by her husband. He even threatened to kill her, she said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Bike numbers and RISK RISING

40pc without licence; riders flouting rules, lacking training make roads more prone to crash

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

With the country witnessing a sharp rise in the number of motorcycles over the last several years, around 40 percent of bikers are riding the two-wheelers without licences, making roads more prone to accidents.

Some 50.13 lakh vehicles have got registered with Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) till last year since the Independence -- 35 lakh among those motorcycles.

BRTA issued licences to 21.28 lakh motorcycles so far, meaning 13.72 lakh bikers or 39.21 percent do not have licences.

There are many bikes, especially in the district and upazila levels, which are not registered at all, meaning the number of bikers without licences could be greater, sector insiders said.

Besides, the bikers lacking training, manoeuvring and violating traffic rules often result in road crashes, leading to deaths and injuries, say experts.

"There is a direct link between the number of motorcycles and road accidents. If the number of bikes increases further, road crashes would increase too, for sure," Prof Hadiuzzaman, director of the Accident Research Institute (ARI) of Buet, told The Daily Star on Monday.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Why so many BIKES?

- ❖ Shortage of public transport
- ❖ Perineal traffic congestions in major cities
- ❖ Emergence of ride-sharing service
- ❖ Easy availability



ACCIDENT TREND

Year	Number of crashes	Deaths	Injured
2021	994	1,168	454
2020	958	1,097	423
2019	1,108	1,198	670
2018	819	953	608
2017	620	722	373

REGISTRATION TREND

Vehicles	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Motorcycle	3,75,252	3,11,016	4,01,452	3,93,545	3,25,876
Bus	1,517	2,395	3,558	2,755	3,757
Minibus	392	620	835	436	491
Private car	16,049	12,403	16,779	18,222	21,952
Truck	5,789	4,719	8,318	12,644	10,329

RISKY RIDE

1,168 people killed in 994 road crashes involving bikes last year

418 killed in road crashes last month; 178 of them in bike-related accidents

Survey finds a biker in Dhaka city changes lane six times a minute
Bikers often drive recklessly

SOURCES: ARI OF BUET; BRTA; ROAD SAFETY FOUNDATION; EXPERTS