



Easiest way is to attack the critic

Shujan says on CEC's allegation against its secretary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) yesterday protested Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda's recent remarks about its Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar, saying the comments were "ugly, indecent, and untrue".

Speaking at a virtual press conference, members of Shujan, a citizens' platform advocating good governance, said the remarks by the chief of a dignified constitutional body such as the Election Commission have left them stunned.

About the CEC's allegation, Badiul said neither he nor his organisation or any of its representatives had discussions with the CEC regarding work.

He said no letter was issued from his organisation to this end. "These are absolutely fabricated and motivated remarks."

Terming the CEC "a villain", the Shujan secretary said he did not exercise his power to investigate alleged irregularities in the 2018 national polls.

He voiced concern that the newly enacted law on forming the EC would create room for appointments of such individuals as election commissioners in future.

Addressing an event at the EC office on Thursday, CEC Huda alleged that Badiul had been involved in financial irregularities while working with the ATM Shamsul Huda-led EC.

He also claimed that Badiul approached him for work several times and started criticising the EC as he did not get any work.

Reading out a written statement at yesterday's press

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CROUCHING IN COLD...
Covered in clothes inadequate for a cold wave, a middle-aged woman shivers on the Tejgaon railway station platform. The photo was taken yesterday. Related story on page 2.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

'We don't need this panic'

Ukraine president slams war cries; Biden to send troops to eastern Europe

AFP, Washington

US President Joe Biden is maintaining pressure on Russian leader Vladimir Putin over Ukraine after announcing a small troop deployment to eastern Europe even as top Pentagon officials backed a renewed push for diplomacy.

As Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged Western leaders to avoid stirring "panic" over the massive Russian troop buildup on his country's borders, Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron agreed on the need for de-escalation.

"We don't need this panic," Zelensky told a news conference with foreign media, expressing concern over "signals even from respected leaders."

He said he sought to avoid hurting his country's already battered economy.

Neither Putin nor his European and American counterparts had until now appeared ready to give ground in the weeks-long crisis, the worst in decades between Russia and the West.

But according to a Macron aide, Putin told the French leader in a call lasting more than an hour that he had "no offensive plans."

It comes after The United States on Thursday refuted key security demands made by Russia that includes Moscow's opposition to Ukraine's inclusion in Nato. Russia has also demanded a pullback of Nato forces deployed to eastern European and ex-Soviet countries that joined the alliance after the Cold War.

In Washington, Biden nevertheless said Friday he would soon send a small number of US troops to bolster the Nato presence in eastern Europe as tensions remain heightened.

Mental health services crucial

Study finds twice as many male students as females died by suicide last year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 101 students of tertiary educational institutions died by suicide last year and two in three of them were males, found a study.

Sixty-five of the deceased were male students, according to the Aachol Foundation study.

Experts opined that the figures reveal the dire need for better access to mental health services.

During the pandemic, increased social, financial, and family pressures were some of the major drivers behind the deaths by suicide of male students.

The data was revealed yesterday at a virtual press conference titled "The Shocking Upsurge in Suicide Cases among University Students: The Liability of Stakeholders", organised by the Aachol Foundation.

The study was prepared with data collected and compiled from approximately 50 newspapers and online portals.

At least 79 died by suicide in 2020. The organisation did not have concrete figures for the years prior to 2020 but said 11 tertiary-level students died by suicide in 2018 and 19 in 2017. The figures might suffer from underreporting, it said as a disclaimer.

Prof Kamal Chowdhury, programme director of Nasirullah Psychotherapy Unit, department of clinical psychology, Dhaka University, blamed the pandemic for the increased number of suicide cases.

At least 62 of the deceased were students of

public universities.

Another shocking finding was that Dhaka University had the highest number of such deaths, nine. Jagannath University had six and Shahjalal University of Science and Technology had five.

It was also found that 12 medical students (which make 11.88 percent of the overall data) had died by suicide last year.

According to the data, third- or fourth-year undergrad students made up over a third of all those who died by suicide, indicating that uncertainty, career-related worries, and social pressure were factors that led to frustration and mental health issues among students.

The monthly data show that the suicide rates in Bangladesh are higher in winter (14.85 percent) than in the summer (1.98 percent).

Tansen Rose, founding president of the Aachol Foundation, stated that the inability of students to adapt to an uncertain future may be classified as the primary catalyst of the deaths by suicide.

The study recommended incorporating mental health issues and services into primary health care.

Other recommendations include the inclusion of mental health-related lessons from primary to university levels, the establishment of a national hotline for those at risk, launching of a special app that allows anyone to quickly seek advice of a psychologist, providing basic mental health training to community clinic health workers, and lowering the cost of psychiatric counselling and medications.

Most migrants on boat were Bangladeshis

Says embassy in Rome after rescue op in Mediterranean

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 273 out of 287 migrants recently found on a boat in the Mediterranean have primarily been identified as Bangladeshis, according to the Bangladesh embassy in Rome.

The migrants were heading to Italy.

However, the embassy was yet to ascertain identities of seven individuals, reportedly Bangladeshis, who died of hypothermia while crossing the sea from Libya.

Arfanul Haque, labour welfare counsellor at the embassy, yesterday said their priority is to find out details of the deceased and send the bodies home.

Following their rescue, the Bangladeshis were taken into custody of Italian authorities at different centres, Arfanul said over phone, adding that Bangladeshi authorities already talked with some of the survivors.

Decisions regarding their fate will be as per Italian laws, he said.

There might be some minors but no female migrants were among those rescued. The boat also carried Egyptians, according to the embassy.

On getting information on January 25, the embassy has been in constant contact with relevant Italian authorities, reads a press release issued by the embassy on Friday.

Italian coast guard saw the boat some 18 miles off the coast of Lampedusa, an uninhabited island near Lampedusa, and rescue operations were conducted. Reuters reported quoting Prosecutor Luigi Patronaggio.

RMG worker critically hurt in acid attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A teenage girl fell victim to an acid attack at her home in Manikganj's Sattaria upazila early yesterday.

The victim is Sathi Akhter, 19, of the upazila's Dhankora Ferajipara area. She works for a readymade garment factory in Dhaka's Dhamrai.

Dr Arshad Ullah, superintendent of the 250-bed district hospital in Manikganj, said.

"Her face, including the trachea, and two hands were burnt with acid," he added. She was shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

According to the victim's family, Sathi's ex-husband Naem threatened to kill her after their divorce.



Garbage being burned on the old channel of the Buriganga, which has now turned into a landfill site by locally influential people. The mindless burning of waste takes place all across the country, which contributes significantly to the deteriorating air quality. The photo was taken in Kamrangirchar area recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Keep schools open: Unicef

UNB, Dhaka

Unicef has urged governments across the world to keep schools open to avert a learning catastrophe.

"As the Omicron variant continues to spread all over the world, we urge governments to do everything in their power to keep it from further disrupting children's education."

"An estimated 616 million children are currently affected by full or partial school closures... Investments in digital connectivity can help us make sure that no child is left behind."

The UN agency also urged all governments to ensure vaccination of all teachers and school staff members immediately.

PRE-POLLS VIOLENCE

One killed, 25 hurt in 2 dists

STAR REPORT

At least one person was killed in Jamalpur and 25 others were injured in Chattogram in pre-polls violence yesterday.

The dead is Bhola Sheikh, 60, brother of Nurul Islam Sheikh, member candidate of Jamalpur's Sarishabari upazila's Pingna union.

Mir Rakibul Hasan, Sarishabari Police OC, said Sujat Ali Suro's followers allegedly attacked Nurul's supporters at the Panchim Nalsandha Char area, he said.

Bhola died and 10 others were injured in the attack.

Some eight people were detained but no case was lodged.

In Chattogram, at least 15 people were injured in a clash between supporters of two rival chairman candidates on Friday night.

Sujon Dey, inspector (investigation) of Satkania Police Station, said the clash ensued between supporters of Awami League candidate Sarwar Uddin and independent candidate HM Hanif.

(Our correspondents in Mymensingh and Chattogram contributed to this report.)