



Boi mela begins today

Following health rules mandatory

DIPAN NANDY

The Amar Ekushey Boi Mela begins today with preparations still unfinished till yesterday afternoon.

It will be inaugurated virtually by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and open to the public from 8:00am till 9:00pm.

However, the scenes yesterday at the Bangla Academy premises and Suhrawardy Udyan showed a lack of preparations for the book fair.

The brick path leading to the fairground was incomplete, while the entrances were still unnoticeable. Many publishing houses did not finish setting up their stalls and the little mag corner was empty.

Mazharul Islam, chief executive of Anyaprokash, told The Daily Star that this year's fair, unlike other years, is beginning

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A man paints a sign with the words 'boi mela', which begins today. As preparations for the book fair remained unfinished till yesterday afternoon, people were in a rush to set up the fairgrounds in time for the inauguration, to be virtually done by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina this morning. The photo was taken at the Suhrawardy Udyan.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

UN discusses cases from Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances at its recently concluded session scrutinised 17 cases from nine countries, including Bangladesh.

These cases, sent to the group for urgent response since September 29, 2021, were examined under its "urgent action procedure" category, which requires immediate attention.

The other countries include Azerbaijan, Egypt, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, and Saudi Arabia, according to a recent press release by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Office also reviewed 727 cases from 23 countries, including Bangladesh, said the release.

It's previous annual report had said there are 76 unresolved cases from Bangladesh so far.

The group recently concluded its 126th session between February 7 and February 11 in Geneva.

It also reviewed responses from various governments to prompt intervention letters, general allegations and urgent appeals.

The experts also met relatives of disappeared persons, non-government organisations, state representatives and other stakeholders, said the release.

It also discussed prospective visits to Cyprus and Kenya this year to take action against such cases there.

Since 2013, the working group has been conveying its interest to visit Bangladesh, but to no avail.



Pneumonia in kids PREVALENCE, PREVENTION

STAR HEALTH DESK

Pneumonia is a respiratory infection usually caused by a virus, bacteria or fungi.

It is a leading cause of death in Bangladeshi children -- causing 13 percent of deaths among children under five, according to Unicef.

Pneumonia is more prevalent in winter because of more indoor air pollution, people tending to remain indoors and being in close contact.

The infection makes the lungs fill with fluid, making breathing difficult. On the other hand, a healthy child's lung fills with air when they breathe.

Children whose immune systems are immature, like newborns, or weakened by undernourishment, or diseases like HIV, are more vulnerable to pneumonia.

A 2020 forecast by Johns Hopkins University shows that, during the next decade, over 100,000 children under the age of five could die from pneumonia in Bangladesh. The forecast also

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RAISING FERTILISER PRICES

Govt in spot of bother

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque yesterday said the government is in a fix over increasing fertiliser prices to manage a huge amount of subsidy.

"We are well aware that a rise in fertiliser prices would have ripple effect on the economy. It will cause further sufferings to the farmers, increase production cost and ultimately, food prices as well. But at the same time this huge subsidy will hamper the development works," he told reporters at his Secretariat office.

"The subsidy allocation for fertilisers was Tk 9,500 crore for the 2021-22 fiscal year. But we have spent Tk 19,000 crore, and by the end this fiscal year, we will need Tk 28,000 crore if we are to sell fertiliser to the farmers at the current price."

He further said government high-ups have been working on how to manage the subsidy burden due to a two/threefold rise in imported fertiliser prices.

The prime minister is concerned about it, he said, adding, "The finance ministry is putting pressure in this regard as they are struggling with the budget," he said.

According to finance ministry officials, a decision is expected by March when the current budget is to be finalised.

The agriculture minister said the import cost of the widely used urea fertiliser has increased to Tk 96 per kg this fiscal, which was Tk 32 in the last.

The government is selling urea at Tk 16 per kg to the farmers at a subsidised price. He also said the government is providing subsidy on TSP, MOP and DAP fertilisers.

The demand for fertiliser this fiscal year is 57.5 lakh tonnes, of which urea accounted for the highest -- 26 lakh tonnes -- followed by DAP with 16 lakh tonnes, according to the agriculture ministry.

FERTILISER	IMPORT PRICE/KG (2020-21)	IMPORT PRICE/KG (2021-22)	PRICE AT FARMERS' LEVEL (PER KG)
Urea	Tk 32	Tk 96	Tk 16
TSP	Tk 33	Tk 70	Tk 22
MOP	Tk 23	Tk 54	Tk 15
DAP	Tk 37	Tk 93	Tk 16

Of the total annual demand for urea, state-owned factories provide around 8.77 lakh tonnes while the rest are imported.

Razzaque said they were spending the additional money from the block allocation in the budget.

Asked whether they are planning to reduce the subsidy, he said, "We are thinking about it. We are also monitoring the international market price of fertiliser."

The minister said they were taking inputs from intellectuals, civil society members, and economists on how to overcome it.

"We are also expecting people's opinion through media."

Quazi Shahabuddin, former director general of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, suggested that the government could increase the subsidy by trimming the revenue budget.

"At the same time, the government can slightly increase the price of fertiliser. But it should not be more than five percent."

COVID SHOTS

No papers needed for children

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

From now on, children aged between 12 and 17 will get Covid-19 vaccines without any documents, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said yesterday.

"We have 10 crore doses of vaccines in stock, but many have not taken vaccines yet ... so the children aged 12 [and above] will get vaccines without any birth certificates. They have to only provide name, age and mobile phone number [for on-the-spot registration]," he said.

The minister was speaking before he inaugurated kidney dialysis beds and an oxygen generation plant at the capital's Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital.

Starting from November 1 last year, around 1.45 crore schoolchildren from this age group out of around 1.5 crore have received the first dose of vaccine till Sunday, according to the

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LANGUAGE MOVEMENT IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Communist Party's role

SHAHIDULLAH KAISER

On January 27, 1952, Khwaja Nazimuddin, addressing an open session of the Muslim League Council, said only Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan. Waves of protest began, and the [Communist] party realised that a mass movement could be waged around the resuscitation of the language question.

The All-Party State Language Action Committee declared a general strike for February 21, 1952. But on the

afternoon of February 20, section 144 was imposed in Dhaka city. On the same afternoon, Action Committee met at the Awami League office in Nawabpur. Violation of section 144 became the focal point of the discussion.

Toaha, Oli Ahad, Dewan Mahbub Ali and Samad were informed initially through Taquiullah to press for violation of section 144. But they were told to accept the majority's decision if they failed to persuade others. After some initial discussions with others, it was understood that the Awami League and other members outside the party in the Action Committee were not willing to violate section 144.

In an emergency meeting, the [Communist]

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HINDU INHERITANCE LAW

HC questions 'discriminatory' rules

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday questioned the rules of a customary law that deprives Hindu females or daughters of inheriting their deceased father's properties.

The court issued a rule asking the government to explain why the relevant rules of the Usage of Dayabhaga School of Thought of Hindu Religion should not be declared unconstitutional.

In the rule, the court asked the authorities concerned with the government to show causes why they should not be directed to measures to remove inequality and discrimination between the Hindu male and female to inherit properties.

The HC bench of Justice Mamnoon Rahman and Justice Khandaker Diliruzzaman issued the rule following a writ petition filed by one Anannya Das Gupta challenging the constitutionality of customary law -- the Usage of Dayabhaga School of Thought of Hindu Religion -- that has deprived her of her father's properties.

Secretaries at the ministries of law; cabinet division and religious affairs; Hindu religious welfare trust, third joint district judge's court of Dhaka, Anirban Das Gupta, brother of petitioner Anannya Das Gupta and her mother Rakhi Das Gupta have been made respondents to the rule, Deputy Attorney General Bepul Bagmar told The Daily Star.

Writ petitioner's lawyer Khairul Alam Chowdhury told The Daily

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Locals and green activists observe Sundarbans Day by apologising to the mangrove forest for deforestation, poaching, and pollution. The activists held the programme next to the forest in Gangmari area of Mongla yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED