

## All secondary schools to have 2-day weekends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All the secondary educational institutions in the country would get a two-day weekend – Friday and Saturday – each week from the next year.

Education Minister Dipu Moni made the comment yesterday while talking to journalists after attending a programme at The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB).

She went to NCTB to distribute textbooks among the students of 62 secondary schools in which piloting a new curriculum will take place.

The upcoming curriculum also proposed a two-day weekend instead of just Friday.

Many of the schools in the capital already have weekends on Friday and Saturday.

Earlier, Dipu Moni said that they have prepared a new curriculum so that students can learn things on their own and implement their knowledge.

She said that the new curriculum was framed in a way that students would have the ability to identify problems and ways of solving those.

The students will also have capacities of critical thinking and have others skills.

## UK links threat to Taiwan with Ukraine response

REUTERS, London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday said that if Western nations failed to fulfil their promises to support Ukraine's independence, it would have damaging consequences worldwide, including for Taiwan.

"We do not fully know what President Putin intends, but the omens are grim," Johnson told a security conference in Munich.



A long tailback yesterday afternoon on the Mayor Mohammed Hanif Flyover, which was built for easy and hassle-free entry to and exit from the capital. The photo was taken in Hatkhola area of Old Dhaka.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

### CHURIHATTA FIRE TRAGEDY

## An outcome of greed and negligence

‘Pearl’ owner arrested while fleeing the country

MUNTAKIM SAAD and EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

Despite being aware of the threats to life and property, Hazi Wahed Mansion owners still rented out the residential property to set up five warehouses for flammable materials in order to make extra profit.

The charge sheet pressed against eight people, including the two owners of Wahed Mansion and owners and staffers of Pearl Trade International said the 2019 Churihatta fire tragedy, which claimed 71 lives, occurred due to of the greed and negligence of both the building owners and warehouse tenants.

Abdul Qayyum, officer-in-charge of Chawkbazar Police Station and the investigation officer of the case, brought charges of culpable homicide causing death by negligence and mischief by fire or explosive substance with intent to destroy property under the sections 304, 436, 427 and 34 of the penal code.

If found guilty, they may face five to 10 years or life term with fine or both.

However, Khurshid Alam Khan, a noted criminal law expert, told The Daily Star yesterday, "The murder charges should be included in the probe report in such cases, but the investigator did not do so here... If the court thinks the murder charges should be included in the case, it can do so while framing charges."

Among the eight charge-sheeted

accused, four were arrested while four others surrendered before the court at different times.

All the accused are now on bail.

They are building owners – Hasan Sultan, 55, and his brother Hossain Sultan Soheli, 47; Pearl International owners – Imtiaz Ahmed, 39, Mohammad Jawad Atir, 35, Mohammad Mozammel Iqbal, 36; their staffer Mozaffar Uddin, 34; and their business partners – Md Nabil, 45, and Mohammad Kashif, 50.

After the fire incident on this day on 2019, Pearl International's owners and staffers went into hiding for nearly two and a half years.

On September 22 last year, police arrested one owner Imtiaz from Benapole port while he was trying to flee the country, the IO said.

The two brothers of Wahed Mansion, Hasan and Hossain, surrendered before the court nearly two months after the incident and gave statements under section 164.

**1 BUILDING, 5 WAREHOUSES AND AN EXPLOSION**

Hasan, in his statement, said five units of the building, including the basement were rented out to warehouses.

On the first, second and third floors, there were four warehouses and four residential units. Three of the warehouses were rented out to Imtiaz.

Hasan said the deed copy was burnt in

the fire so he could not specify the tenants' addresses, adding that he saw the company owners for the last time when he rented out the floors to them five years ago.

Their managers Taher and Mozaffar used to pay the rent and he saw brothers Kashif and Nabil visiting the warehouses.

The other part of the first floor was rented to one Modasser, who owns scotch tape and energy lightbulb businesses.

Hossain, in his statement, said he rented out the basement to one Hasan Soheli Shamim, who stored colour and powder there.

The Fire Service and Civil Defence's probe body found the warehouses on the first, second and third floors contained huge quantities of body spray, air freshener, aerosol, gas lighter, fuel, etc.

The fire started on the first floor.

The Criminal Investigation Department of police found ethyl alcohol, butane, isobutene, propene, butoxyethanol, glycol ether, diethyl phthalate, propylene and polyethylene – all flammable – among the seized products found on the spot.

The department of explosives said an electric spark was first created during the polybag sealing in a machine and then it came in contact with the flammable substance, igniting the explosion.

**WRONG ADDRESSES, CHASING FUGITIVES**

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## SI killed in hit-and-run

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

A sub-inspector of highway police was killed in a hit-and-run near Daudkandi Toll Plaza in Cumilla yesterday.

Jahangir Hossain, 45, was maintaining traffic movement on Meghna-Gumti bridge on Dhaka-Chattogram highway when he was hit by a vehicle, said Jahirul Haque, officer-in-charge of Daudkandi Highway Police Station.

Police have yet to identify the driver or the vehicle.

**18-year-old dies after being hit by train**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

An 18-year-old girl was killed yesterday after being hit by a train in Kulaura, Moulvibazar.

Pushpi Deb, daughter of Shasanko Deb of Rautgaon area, died on the spot as the Parabat Express hit her near Longla train station.

Police said it was not clear whether it was an accident or death by suicide.

## Covid deaths lowest in 29 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health directorate reported 13 deaths from Covid-19 yesterday, the lowest since January 21.

Officials also reported 2,150 new cases, raising the total confirmed cases to 19,31,304.

The new cases were detected after testing 24,696 individuals.

Of those reported dead, seven were males and six females.

## Bangladeshi shot dead in Johannesburg

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A Bangladeshi man was shot dead yesterday at his shop in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Golam Mostafa, 36, who was from Kabilpur area of Noakhali's Senbag, went to South Africa in 2014, said his elder brother Kiran.

Mostafa owned a shop in Johannesburg with another Bangladeshi. Local miscreants shot him and looted valuables from the shop after failing to extort him, Kiran added.

The family urged the government to bring back his body.

## UK PM responds to ‘partygate’ probe

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has submitted his response to a police questionnaire relating to Downing Street parties that may have breached coronavirus regulations, his office said Friday.

Police are investigating claims Johnson attended gatherings that may have violated Britain's strict distancing and virus prevention rules.

Public outcry over the so-called "partygate" scandal has left Johnson fighting for political survival. Several MPs from his Conservative party have publicly called for his resignation, although he denies any wrongdoing.

## A slogan ever

FROM PAGE 1

The nine-month war in 1971.

The Cabinet Division has drawn up a proposal for making "Joy Bangla" the national slogan. The proposal will be placed before the cabinet by March 7 for approval, said sources.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already consented to placing the proposal before the cabinet, they added.

Once approved, the slogan would be used at all state functions and assemblies of academic institutions. Those holding constitutional posts and all government officials will have to utter "Joy Bangla" at the end of their speeches at government programmes and on national days.

According to the summary of the proposal, the High Court on March 10, 2020 directed the government to take necessary steps to make "Joy Bangla" the national slogan.

The HC bench of Justice FRM Nazmul Ahasan and Justice KM Kamrul Kader, while delivering the verdict on a writ petition filed in 2017, ordered the authorities concerned to submit a report on the progress of complying with its directives through the Supreme Court registrar general's office within three months.

It said "Joy Bangla" is the slogan of independence and national unity.

Historians said during the mass upsurge in January 1969, students

under the banner of Sarbadaliya Chhatra Sangram Parishad (All Student Parties Resistance Council) started chanting "Joy Bangla" instead of "Pakistan Zindabad".

Students also chanted "Amar Desh Tomer Desh, Bangladesh Bangladesh".

"Students started to use Joy Bangla slogan in 1969. But it became a universal slogan of the country during the Liberation War. It was also used as a greeting at that time," historian Muntassir Mamoon said yesterday.

The slogan helped Bangladeshis get united and fight against Pakistani regime.

According to The Indian Express, Joy Bangla slogan was first used during anti-British movement. Anti-British hero Purnachandra Das, a school teacher from Madaripur, was imprisoned and tortured by British rulers for his anti-British regime movement.

National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam composed the poem "Purna Abhinandan" in 1922 upon a request from Kalipada Roychowdhury on the occasion of the release of Purnachandra Das.

The poet used the words "Joy Bangla" in the fifth stanza of the poem:

Joy Bangla'r purnochondro, joy joy adi ontorin,

Joy juye juye asa senapoti, joy pran ontihin.

The main theme of the poem was rebellion against colonialism, oppression and exploitation.

## Back in trade stained with blood

FROM PAGE 1

The Daily Star tried to reach the owners, Md Hasan Sultan and Md Hossain Sultan alias Soheli, who live in Wahed Mansion, right above the basement warehouse, but to no avail. The building's security guard keeps the gate shut tight.

The guards are also allegedly keeping the gate shut to the family of the previous security guard, who died in the inferno, and have been trying to extract compensation from the owners of the warehouse.

Fifty-five-year-old Sujal Haque was the security guard and caretaker of Wahed Mansion, and he died on the spot in the explosion.

"My father worked for them for four years. He was their employee, they should give some sort of compensation," said his daughter Bibi Hazera who came to the location as recently as Friday. "When we try to meet the owners, we are turned away."

## Did nothing to undermine

FROM PAGE 1

"I investigated a land acquisition scam in Cox's Bazar. The owner of the land was harassed and local gangs of every tier used to extort him. I tried to stop this," said the former deputy assistant director of the ACC.

"I also took measures to confiscate ill-gotten properties and wealth worth between Tk 40 and 50 crore for the government exchequer. I had also investigated a syndicate involved in giving illegal gas connections and corruption

Hazera's husband Md Ibrahim had also perished in the inferno, leaving her alone with two young daughters. The 32-year-old used to run a paan-cigarette shop in front of Wahed Mansion. Along with Ibrahim died his cousin Md Anwar Hossain, who had come to the city 10 days ago.

**LITTLE OR NO COMPENSATION**

In April, 2019, forty private banks deposited cheques worth Tk 30 crore in the government's national relief fund for the victims, according to a report The Daily Star ran on April 4 that year.

None of the families have seen any of that money, claimed the families.

Meanwhile, out of the 72 people who died, the families of only 21 received some compensation from the government.

Sixteen families took jobs as city corporation cleaners, earning Tk 500 on the days of work cleaning streets of the capital.

Three families got shops.

Two families got Tk 2 lakh as monetary compensation.

In addition to this, the families of six more people among those critically injured in the fire received either cleaning gigs with the city corporation or Tk 2 lakh.

"We have heard that a huge fund [deposited in the national relief fund] was collected for us. I wish they would distribute that to us, or loan that to us," said Nasiruddin, who leads a collective of victims' families.

Nur Nabi Parvez, the son of the security guard killed in the explosion, had chosen to work as a cleaner, but says that he can hardly make ends meet.

"I can earn at best Tk 10,000 a month. Friday is an off-day so I get no money. It is the same with government holidays. I have wife and a son, three unmarried sisters and mother to take care of. The house rent itself costs Tk 7,000."

Prior to his father's death, Nur Nabi worked as

a trader, while his father supplemented his income with Tk 7,000 monthly.

When Sayeed Khokon, the former mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation, promised them jobs, textile engineer Khalilur Rahman Miraj saw a glimmer of hope.

His brothers Masud Rana and Mahbubur Rahman Rana had a small mobile accessories store and had both perished in the fire.

"But then I learnt that cleaning jobs are all they are giving. I want something better befitting my degree," he said.

Abdul Mannan, a storekeeper, said he lost Tk 14 lakh worth of goods in the fire but received compensation worth Tk 2 lakh only. "I have not been able to restart my business since then."

Inadequate, or non-existent compensation, and another looming fire hazard – that is how one can sum up three years of the Churihatta blaze.

## Search panel

FROM PAGE 1

Earlier in the day, the six-member committee shortlisted 20 people for its final list of 10 for the five EC posts. The 20 names were not disclosed.

"At today's meeting, a preliminary list of 20 people has been made from the proposed names after scrutinising the candidates' qualifications as per the [relevant] law. The final list will be ready at the next couple of meetings," Md Shamsul Arefin, Cabinet Division secretary (coordination and reforms), told journalists after the panel's fifth meeting at the Judges' Lounge of the Bangladesh Supreme Court Building.

He said the committee would hold its next meeting at 4:30pm today at the same venue.

Sources said the panel had a detailed discussion on whether or not it would disclose its picks. All members agreed that there were no legal obligations to publish the names.

The newly passed Election Commission law also does not mention anything about disclosing the names, a committee member said, requesting anonymity.

The member also said they were shortening their list based on the candidates' honesty, courage and track record in service.

After the formation of the search committee on February 5, it asked political parties, professional bodies and individuals to submit names for the upcoming EC. The tenure of the one led by KN Nurul Huda expired on

February 14.

The panel then held meetings with eminent citizens, election experts and media personalities in four phases to get their suggestions and opinions on the EC appointments.

Many of the invitees recommended that the panel disclose all the names proposed. They also said the committee should publish the names of its picks before sending the nominations to the president.

They argued disclosing the names would ensure transparency in the process, saying people would be able to give opinions on the candidates.

Later, all the 322 proposed names were published on the Cabinet Division's website. It was found ex-bureaucrats, followed by educationists and jurists, dominated the list.

Later, the list was cut down to 50.

The BNP and some other opposition parties did not propose any names, citing no confidence in the search committee. They also observed the president cannot appoint the CEC and other commissioners without consultation with the prime minister, who is the head of the ruling Awami League.

As per the EC law, the committee will propose 10 names – two names against each post – to the president, who will then appoint the CEC and other ECs.

The Cabinet Division is giving secretariat support to the search panel, which has to forward its nominations to the president by February 24 as per the law.