



Discarded plastic collected from all over the city is brought to “galai” factories in Lalbagh and Kamrangirchar. Here, the plastic is burned and turned into lumps, which are then sold by the kilo. Most of the staffers at these factories are older women, who work for meagre sums of Tk 300-350 a day, without any safety gears. If they ever come into contact with the fire, they simply dip the affected area into a bucket of water. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Save Tetultala playground

Locals call upon PM
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Residents of Ward-17 in Dhanmondi under Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) yesterday demanded the prime minister save their 50-year-old playground and keep it open for all.

Local police installed barbed-wire fences around Tetultala playground in January.

“There is no other place for our kids to play. We have been going to the field for the last 50 years. But on January 31, the local police station set up barbed wires to construct their new station on the field, and we heard that they purchased the land for Tk 28 crore,” said Syada Ratna, coordinator of Tetultala Math Rokkha Andolon, at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity.

She said they do not know how the authority purchased land that has been used as an open space for decades.

Ratna said according to the law, changing characteristics of a playground, open space and waterbody is illegal.

At the conference, Iqbal Habib, joint secretary of Bapa, said in the proposed Detailed Area Plan, Tetultala playground is not earmarked as a playground. However, in sub-zone-17 (Dhanmondi, Zigatola, Kalabagan and Kathalbagan) they proposed keeping sufficient open space for the areas.

23 high-polluting tanneries to face music

Move to protect Dhaleshwari from Savar Tannery Estate’s untreated waste

RASHIDUL HASAN

Twenty-three tanneries that are causing high levels of pollution are set to be shut down, a parliamentary body said yesterday.

Meanwhile, utility services of seven tanneries have already been disconnected over environment pollution, stated the parliamentary standing committee on environment, forest and climate change ministry at a meeting at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

All of these tanneries operate under Savar Tannery Estate, which comprises around 120 tanneries.

“Braving various obstacles, we were able to take action against Savar Tannery Estate, shutting down several tanneries,” Saber Hossain Chowdhury, chief of the parliamentary watchdog, told reporters after the meeting.

“There will be no compromise on the issue of environmental pollution,” he added.

In 2003, the government took an initiative to build the BSCIC Tannery Industrial Estate on 200 acres in Savar’s Hemayetpur area, after moving all tanneries from the capital’s Hazaribagh to prevent pollution and protect the Buriganga river.

According to Department of Environment data, the central effluent treatment plant of the estate has the capacity to treat around 25,000 cubic metres of liquid waste every day.

But the tanners generate around 40,000.

That means 15,000 cubic metres of untreated waste are now being dumped into the Dhaleshwari river.

The estate also does not have the facility to treat solid waste, including heavy metals and chromium, which is also dumped into the Dhaleshwari.

Around 1.60 lakh cubic metres of solid waste have been dumped into the river



FILE PHOTO

Discharge from the Savar Tannery Industrial Estate goes directly into the Dhaleshwari.

The Jatiya Sangsad body said the estate will be able to go into operation again only after getting clearance, which is subject to meeting all necessary requirements.

On August 23 that year, the parliamentary body recommended shutting down the estate due to widespread pollution of the local environment.

On September 9, DoE served a show-cause notice on BSCIC.

It asked BSCIC to respond to why the site should not be shut down as per the parliamentary standing committee’s recommendation.

However, the JS body said they are not satisfied with the BSCIC’s reply.

Saber Chowdhury, also a ruling Awami League MP from Dhaka-9, yesterday said there are around 4,000 red-listed factories in the country, along with 3,000-4,000 illegal brick fields.

WOMEN’S AWARD FOR CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENT

Meanwhile, Saber said they have recommended an award for women on the occasion of International Women’s Day from next year.

The award will be given to recognise their contribution in the environment sector, he said.

The ministry will formulate policies on how this will be done, Saber added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

SHARIF’S DISMISSAL FROM ACC
HC to deliver order
on March 13

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday fixed March 13 for delivering its order on a petition that sought a directive to conduct an independent inquiry into the allegations and counter allegations over the termination of Anti-Corruption Commission official Md Sharif Uddin.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman fixed the date after concluding hearing on the petition.

The bench also asked the lawyers for the petitioners and ACC to submit relevant documents, if they want, before it by tomorrow.

Lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir appeared for the petitioners while lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan argued for ACC and Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik represented the state.

On February 23, 10 Supreme Court lawyers, led by Manir, submitted the petition to the HC seeking its directive on the authorities to conduct an independent inquiry into the reported allegations and counter allegations over the termination of Sharif Uddin from the service.



International Women’s Day comes and goes every year, but the condition of the country’s women seldom improve. Demanding an end to the various forms of gender-based violence and discrimination women are subjected to every day, Samajik Pratirodh Committee held a rally in front of Central Shaheed Minar yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

A nightmare far too long

Two years of living in the age of Covid

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

Around 19.48 lakh confirmed cases and 29,096 deaths.

What began on March 8, 2020, continued to haunt the country for two long years. In the last two years, for what feels like a nightmare way too long, 6.29 million lives were claimed across the globe. The country, since then, has witnessed three waves of the Covid-19. With 74 percent of its population recently vaccinated, the fear and uncertainty have faded. No restrictions on movement are currently at play.

However, health officials, as well as public health experts, think that the threat is still looming like a recurring shadow.

In the past seven days till yesterday, the daily average number of fatalities caused by the virus was more than seven, with 446 reported cases.

“Omicron’s higher transmissibility has led to the final stage of the pandemic. However, chances are high that a new variant would cause a fresh spike,” Prof Ridwanur Rahman, a specialist on infectious disease, told The Daily Star yesterday.

However, Prof Rahman also thinks that any new variant will not be severe due to massive vaccine coverage. “If the virus stays with us like normal flu, we have to accept it and prepare for yearly vaccination.”

So far, the WHO has identified five variants of the virus as causes of concern. “Many are assuming that Omicron has less impact. The virus, on the other hand, is mutating,” said Prof Robed Amin, spokesperson of the DGHS, during an online briefing on Sunday.

THE FIRST STRIKE

“Today we are unable to say what we had been saying until now. We have found three patients...”

These were the words of the then IEDCR director Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora on March 8, after the first detection of Covid-19 cases in Bangladesh.

The announcement came 68 days after Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in China reported the first cases of Covid-19 to the WHO.

Since then, infections multiplied, the number of deaths increased with every passing day and the pandemic laid bare the vulnerability of the country’s healthcare system.

The country has so far witnessed five spikes in Covid-19 cases. The first one – caused by the Alpha variant – struck during May-June in 2020, while the second one during November-December the same year – caused by the Beta variant – was milder. The third one struck during March-April last year, but the fourth and the deadliest one occurred during July-August the same year – caused by the Delta variant. The fifth one was the least destructive during January-February this year, caused by Omicron variant.

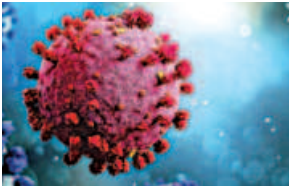
DELTA: THE DEADLIEST EVER

Despite lockdowns enforced on July 1 last year, Delta engrossed the country with its deadly grasp. On July 28, 16,230 people tested positive for Covid-19, making it the all-time highest.

The highest death toll was recorded on August 5 and 10, with 264 people perishing across the country. Hospitals were stretched to their limits, with around 85 percent of beds occupied. Oxygen demand rose to 210 tonnes a day, while the local production capacity was around 120 tonnes a day.

The latest spike, which also marked the third wave, was the fastest but caused fewer deaths.

Dr Abu Jamil Faisal, member of Epidemiology and Public Health Expert Committee at the DGHS, told The Daily Star yesterday, “We have seen that the transmission had risen following stable situation earlier. So we’re not out of danger until the virus is eliminated from the world.”



Lab Test	13,546,950
Confirmed cases	1,947,702
Isolated	442,690
Recovered	1,846,884
Death	29,089
2nd doses administered	87,310,746

SOURCE: DGHS

NIKO GRAFT CASE
Khaleda’s hearing
deferred till Apr 12

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday adjourned the hearing against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and eight others in the Niko graft case till April 12.

Judge Sheikh Hafizur Rahman of the Special Judge’s Court-9 of Dhaka passed the order after a petition was filed with the court on behalf of Khaleda, seeking an adjournment.

Masud told the court they would complete the hearing on behalf of Khaleda on the next date.

Among the accused, Giasuddin Al Mamun is now in jail, while the rest are on bail. During the hearing, Giasuddin and two other accused were present. ACC filed the case in December 2007.

PRAYER
TIMING
MAR 9



	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
Azan	5-15	12-45	4-30	6-05	7-30
Jamaat	5-50	1-15	4-45	6-10	8-00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION