

### SSC routine likely to be announced on Sunday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is likely to announce a new routine of this year's Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and its equivalent exams on Sunday.

Education Minister Dipu Moni will hold a press conference in this regard on the day, said Abul Khair, the ministry's public relation officer.

On June 17, authorities postponed SSC and its equivalent exams for an indefinite period, as the floods in the country's north-east worsened.

The exams were scheduled to be held from June 19 to July 6.

Earlier, it was deferred by about four months because of the pandemic. Usually, the SSC exam takes place in February.

Dhaka Education Board Chairperson Tapan Kumar Sarkar said there is a strong possibility that the education minister will announce the date. "She

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### Boosting ties, Rohingya repatriation top agenda Foreign minister goes on trip to two Asean countries

PORIMOL PALMA

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday started a weeklong visit to two Asean countries, aiming to boost relations with the bloc and push the agenda of Rohingya repatriation.

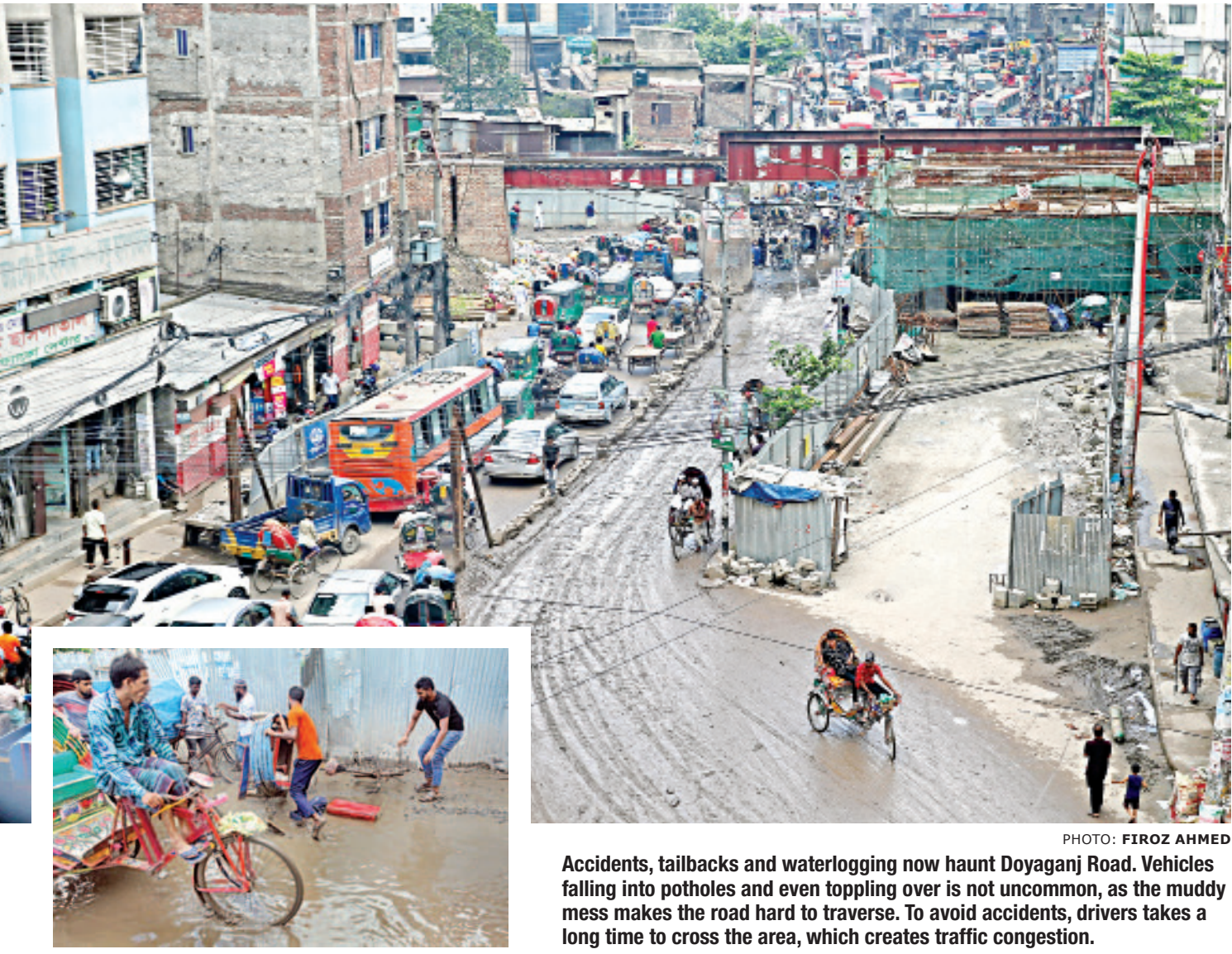
He will be visiting Cambodia, the current chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), in the first leg of his visit, beginning today, and Indonesia, the next chair of the bloc, said foreign ministry officials.

Momen, who is being accompanied by Mashfee Binte Shams, secretary (east) at the foreign ministry, and Najmul Huda, director general at southeast asian wing of the ministry, will hold bilateral meetings with Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn, who is also Asean's special envoy to Myanmar.

In Indonesia, he will meet the country's foreign minister Retno Marsudi.

"Cambodia is the current chair of Asean, and Indonesia will be the next chair. So, both the countries are important as far as Rohingya

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Accidents, tailbacks and waterlogging now haunt Doyaganj Road. Vehicles falling into potholes and even toppling over is not uncommon, as the muddy mess makes the road hard to traverse. To avoid accidents, drivers takes a long time to cross the area, which creates traffic congestion.

# Nightmare on DOYAGANJ ROAD

Potholes, waterlogging make commuters' journey unbearable while authorities play the blame game

MAHUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

"It feels like I'm going to throw up anytime now."

This is how Mahbuba Sikder described her experience when travelling on the capital's Doyaganj Road.

A resident of Jatrabari, she takes her daughter to classes every day.

"The jumps and bumps while moving through the road often become unbearable," Mahbuba told this correspondent recently.

"The alternative routes are blocked, and so, we are forced to use this road only," she explained.

Under the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project, Bangladesh Railway is erecting an overhead rail bridge, completely blocking a lane of the road.

Another lane, on which people commute, has turned into a small ditch, due to waterlogging.

And so, the pathway has remained in this condition for the last four to five months.

While commuters are in great misery, officials are blaming each other for the

problem, instead of finding a solution.

Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) officials and locals blame indifference and slow pace of project work, while authorities of the project blame both locals and DSCC.

For local and inter-district, goods-laden vehicles, Doyaganj Road, which connects four areas -- Dholaikhal, Tikatuli, Dholaipar and Jatrabari -- is an important juncture of their journey.

Its significance has jumped up as a vital connecting road after the inauguration of Mawa-Bhanga expressway, according to locals.

"Every day, one or two goods-laden vans or rickshaws almost topple over," said Akram Hossain, an on-duty police officer.

Adjacent to the road are two diagnostic centres, where many patients visit. These people go through immense distress on the bumpy road.

"My mother and I fell on the muddy road, as the rickshaw's wheel broke after hitting a

pothole," said Shoaib Ahmed, who went there to take his mother to a diagnostic centre.

To avoid accidents, all vehicles go slowly while crossing the area, which creates long tailbacks.

Contacted, traffic inspector Alamgir Hossain said they have been struggling to manage traffic on the road.

"People blame us, but we're helpless. After moderate rainfall, the road becomes even more dangerous for commuters," Hossain added.

At the monthly coordination meeting of Dhaka Metropolitan Police on June 23, the situation of the dilapidated road and public sufferings were discussed.

On June 26, DSCC Executive Engineer (Zone-5) Saiful Islam Joy, in a letter, requested the rail link project's director to take measures to repair the road on the eve of Ratha Yatra.

Contacted, Saiful said project authorities are building infrastructure by blocking all drains and have not kept any channel for water to pass.

"Due to their indifference and slow pace of work, people are suffering," he said.

The Daily Star tried to reach the director for comments over phone, but he did not pick up. He texted back, saying "I'll call you back", but did not.

Al-Amin, land acquisition officer of the project, said they are taking measures to resolve the issues.

He, however, blamed city corporations for blocking drains and locals for throwing waste. These cause waterlogging, he mentioned.

## No foreign power can influence polls

Says agriculture minister

UNB, Dhaka

Agriculture Minister Mohammad Abdur Razzaque yesterday said no matter how powerful the US ambassador or people like him are, they won't be able to play any role in the next national elections of Bangladesh.

Razzaque, however, said they will welcome any opinion or advice from the international community regarding the next elections.

He was talking to journalists after a Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) meeting at the ministry's conference room at the Secretariat.

Replying to a question, the minister said foreigners are the country's development partners. The entire world is a global village. BNP also has the right to hold discussions with them.

"The international community wants our elections to be free and fair. We've appointed a new election commissioner in this regard. Elections are held under an election commission in most of the developed countries. They don't form any caretaker government during election times. BNP is consistently talking about the formation of a caretaker government, which will never happen," said Razzaque.

He added that the next general elections will be held according to the current constitution, where there is no mention of a caretaker government.

"BNP is holding discussions with representatives of various states over the last few days. I want to tell

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## SENDING WORKERS TO MALAYSIA US observing labour syndicate issue closely

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US has been closely watching the development centring the involvement of a controversial syndicate for recruiting labour from Bangladesh to Malaysia, said a US official in Dhaka.

"Yes, we have been watching over the last several months the developments... reading news reports," she said at a background briefing at the capital's American Center yesterday, ahead of the release of US State Department's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report 2022 next week.

The official said they know that an agreement was signed by Bangladesh and Malaysia for labour recruitment several months back. She said she does not want to comment on specific relations between the two countries because it is a bilateral issue.

However, she said that they recognise the countries' vulnerabilities, whereby people can fall victim to trafficking, and this is not only relevant for Malaysia but for the Gulf and Europe too.

The comments came in response to a question on whether the US is observing or discussing the issue of a syndicate of 25 recruiting agencies, which the Malaysian government has been pushing for recruiting Bangladeshi workers.

The then Mahathir-led government had frozen labour recruitment from Bangladesh to Malaysia in September 2018, because a syndicate of 10 recruiting agencies were sending workers to Malaysia by charging each of them up to Tk 4 lakh, even though the official cost was fixed at Tk 39,000 in a deal signed in 2016.

The anomalies in recruitment also led to forced labour and labour trafficking, and debt bondage, Mahathir had said.

After over three years, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the countries last December, but labour recruitment has yet to start due to the syndication issue.

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# Resurrecting Lalkuthi

DSCC to restore its original design, make library functional again



Top, the current state of historic Lalkuthi and the library inside. Bottom, the proposed designs for the renovation.

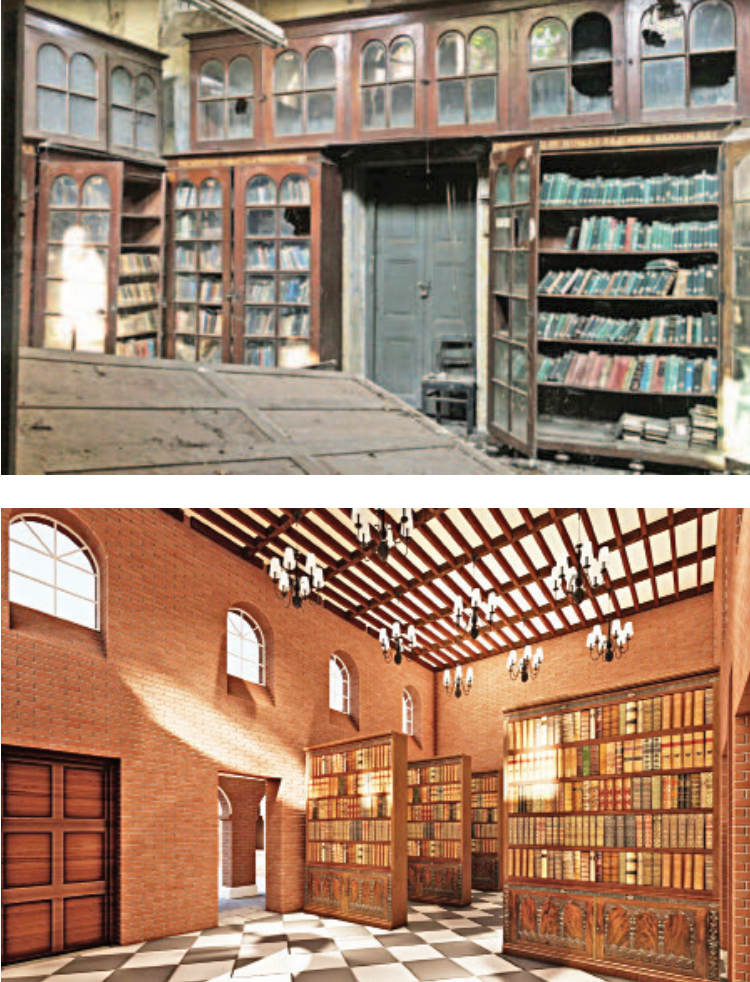


PHOTO: COLLECTED, FILE

HELEMUL ALAM

Barely three bookshelves with broken doors, shattered glass panes scattered all over the floor and damp cobweb-ridden walls -- such is the scene inside Farashganj's Johnson Hall, also known as Lalkuthi.

Johnson Hall -- one of the oldest libraries in the city along with the entire Northbrook Hall complex -- is now home to insects, spiders and rats.

But there is a good news. Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) has taken an initiative to restore the hall complex, funded by the World Bank.

Heritage specialist Prof Abu Sayeed, also the consultant for the project, said they will bring back the library and the original design of Lalkuthi.

"Northbrook Hall is historical. It had held a

reception for Rabindranath Tagore. We will restore the hall for many legendary receptions like that," he added.

DSCC chief town planner Sirajul Islam said, "We are

**Northbrook Hall is historical. It had held a reception for Rabindranath Tagore. We will restore the hall for many legendary receptions like that.**

Prof Abu Sayeed  
Heritage specialist

following all the procedures of the World Bank for the restoration. Prof Abu Sayeed is a consultant from the Bangladesh side, working with

other international heritage experts on the project. The landscaping is being done by specialists from a consulting firm."

"When we sent the plan to the World Bank, we had to send it in four stages -- cultural heritage management plan, approval documents, detailed engineering design and standard bidding documents," he added.

Siraj also mentioned that it will take around two months to complete the tender process and will take around one and a half years to complete the whole work.

**A PROLIFIC HISTORY**

Northbrook Hall, an elegant structure also known as Lalkuthi, is situated in Farashganj's Wiseghat, on the bank of the Buriganga.

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