

RU STUDENT'S DEATH Fellow students allege 'treatment delay' at RMCH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A student of Rajshahi University died last night after falling from one of the upper floors of the university's Shaheed Habibur Rahman Hall.

The incident took place around 7:30pm, said Proctor Prof Ashabul Haque.

The victim was identified as Shahriar, a fourth-year student of marketing department. He was a resident of Room No 354 of the hall, hailing from Dinajpur. His room was on the second floor of the hall.

Fellow students said he fell from a second floor balcony, but the university authorities have not confirmed it.

Proctor Ashabul said Shahriar died around 9:00pm at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH).

Residential students said after hearing a sound, they found Shahriar lying on the ground and took him to the hospital.

His death sparked a protest by RU students at the RMCH as they claimed that the on-duty doctors delayed treatment on Shahriar. They were demonstrating at the hospital till 1:30am. The authorities of RMCH and RU were holding a meeting to resolve the issue.

Meanwhile, some five or six demonstrating students came under attack by RMCH staffers, said Tarique Noor, RU's student adviser.

RMC interns alleged that RU students vandalised the hospital.

Earlier, around 11:30pm, interns at RMC called an indefinite strike and left their workplaces, citing insecurity at the hospital.

Don't use 'labour weakness' for political gains

Momen to int'l partners

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen wants international partners not to use "labour weaknesses", if there are any, as a tool to achieve political gains, but help Bangladesh overcome them with generous support and financing.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 7



A human hauler in a rundown state plies the Dhaka-Aricha Highway near Savar's Hemayetpur. Such unfit vehicles on the streets endanger the lives of its passengers, pedestrians, as well as passengers of other vehicles.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Alarm as vehicle fitness clearance at 7-year low

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

While registration of vehicles saw a sharp rise over the last fiscal year, the number of fitness clearances has dropped to a seven-year low, raising further concerns over road safety.

At least 5.42 lakh registered vehicles have been operating on the roads without the mandatory fitness clearance, which happened mainly due to poor monitoring by the authorities.

Officials concerned said a rise in advance income tax amount from July 1, 2021, and the decision to give fitness clearances to only three types of private vehicles biennially, instead of annually, from January 2020, are major reasons behind the poor number of vehicles with fitness clearance.

Apart from vehicles that have been registered but lack fitness clearance, there are thousands of unregistered vehicles whose fitness status is anyone's guess.

Unfit vehicles are one of the major reasons behind road crashes, due to which the number of lives lost is growing.

At least 3,186 people were killed and 3,500 injured in 3,776 road crashes in the first eight months of this year, according to police reports.

The numbers, however, were much lower than the estimates made by other non-government organisations.

Till June this year, 52.92 lakh vehicles, mostly motorbikes, were registered with Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA). Of them, 5.23 lakh got registered

in last fiscal year, and 4.24 the fiscal before.

All registered transport, except for motorcycles, are required to be cleared for fitness.

However, new cars, SUVs and minibuses are not required to have it in the first five years. After that period, they need to get fitness clearances once in every two years.

Only 5.64 lakh vehicles got fitness clearance in the last fiscal year, which is the lowest number since 2014-15, shows BRTA data.

Even in 2020-21 when BRTA offices remained closed due to Covid-19 pandemic, the number of vehicles with fitness clearance was 6.75 lakh.

A top BRTA official said the amount of

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5

Bridge gap

FROM PAGE 1

On October 8, Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman at a meeting between the EC and the DCs and SPs of 61 districts raised alleged that many officials show bias while discharging duties and do not spend the allocated budget properly in many cases. Anisur stopped speaking after the DCs raised a ruckus at the meeting.

Addressing the event yesterday, former chief election commissioner Justice Abdur Rouf said, "If the national election is held with a political government in power, the DCs and SPs would follow the instructions of the government, not the commission."

Immediate past CEC KM Nurul Huda said the gap between the EC and the DCs and SPs should be removed, according to meeting sources.

The statement that the DCs and SPs don't listen to the EC is not correct, he added.

Former commissioner Brigadier General M Sakhawat Hussain (retired) told reporters that he suggested installation of CCTV cameras at polling centres instead of purchasing EVMs in order to hold free and fair elections.

"It's very easy to find out even if ballots are stolen. You have a voter list with photos. What you have seen in the EVM is delicate manipulation."

According to meeting sources, another former election commissioner Kabita Khanam said a fair election is not possible without coordination with the field-level administration.

Ex-commissioner Shah Nawaz said the manner in which the DCs behaved in the recent meeting with the EC is "not desirable".

Police, magistrates played silent roles

FROM PAGE 1

assistant presiding officers who were assigned to ensure fair polls in the Gaibandha-5 constituency.

After yesterday's event, The Daily Star talked to over a dozen polling officials. More than half of them said they did not get sufficient cooperation from the police and magistrates.

"I told the probe body [formed by the EC to investigate into the voting anomalies] that some irregularities indeed took place at my polling centre," said Samsuzzoha, presiding officer of Saghata Government Primary School station.

"I tried to resist them [miscreants] but failed. Later, I sought cooperation from police, but the law enforcers showed reluctance to drive them out of my polling station."

Shafiqul Islam, assistant presiding officer of the same polling station, stated the same before the probe body.

Seeking anonymity, another presiding officer, said, "Some agents of

No end to plight anytime soon

FROM PAGE 1

"If I can't get up very early in the morning, we either have to starve or buy food from restaurants."

Not only Bida, many others in the city's Mohammadpur, Kazipara, Shewrapara, Jigatola, Banasree, Badda, Postogola, Hazaribagh, Keraniganj, Gazipur, Savar and Manikganj have complained of acute gas crisis.

The power sector that consumes 42 percent of the total gas supply had to reduce power production at around 30 gas-fired plants due to the gas crisis in July.

As power production at gas-fired plants has fallen to 5,000-5,500MW from 11,162MW per day, load-shedding across the country, according to Bangladesh Power Development Board data, has gone up to six hours a day.

INDUSTRIES SUFFER

Production at Little Star, a spinning mill in Ashulia, has slumped by more than half from its daily capacity of 12 tonnes of yarn due to the gas crisis over the last three months.

"Our production has dropped by 55 percent and we don't know when the situation will return to normal. We are at risk of losing our buyers," Md Khorshed Alam, chairman of Ashulia-based Little Star Spinning Mills Ltd, told this newspaper.

He said they have two spinning mills — one in Ashulia and the other in Bhultha. Gas is needed to run the boilers of both mills for dyeing and printing fabrics.

"The Bhultha factory was hit by the gas crisis one and a half months ago ... At times, gas pressure falls so much so that the machines shut down."

"Sometimes, it takes four to five hours to get the required gas pressure

again to resume production. If this crisis persists for long, it will be difficult to keep the business afloat," he added.

According to Bangladesh Ceramic Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BCMEA), the industry has seen a fall in production by 10 to 30 percent due to the ongoing crisis of gas.

"We need gas for a burner to produce ceramic products. The gas crisis is hampering our production. Besides, most of the goods inside a burner get damaged if there is a sudden fall in gas pressure," said Irfan Uddin, Director of FARR Ceramic Ltd.

"We are falling behind schedule and also losing many orders from foreign buyers due to the disruption in gas supply."

Irfan said three of the six burners in his tiles factory in Gazipur remain shut due to the gas shortage.

Taslim Shahriar, senior assistant general manager of the Meghna Group of Industries, said production of consumer goods in their factories in Narayanganj has dropped by 50 percent due to the gas crisis.

SHORTAGE OF CNG SUPPLY

The government, as part of gas rationing, shut all CNG stations for four hours a day in September last year. The shutdown has been extended by another hour since March this year.

Farhan Noor, general secretary of Bangladesh CNG Filling Station and Conversion Workshop Owners Association, said the government decision to shut the pumps for five hours hurt the businesses badly.

"Besides, the filling stations are not getting sufficient gas pressure," he said.

The situation has gone from bad to worse despite the government's

assurance that things would improve in three months, he added.

The gas crisis has also affected fertiliser production, as three of the four state-run urea fertiliser factories have remained shut since the last week of June.

In September, farmers staged demonstrations in Jamalpur, Rangpur and several other districts, demanding uninterrupted supply of fertiliser.

The government, however, gave assurances several times that there would be no shortage of fertiliser in the coming days, as it has enough stocks and already signed deals with several countries to import fertilisers.

WAIT TILL WINTER

Petrobangla Chairman Nazmul Ahsan said there has been 10 percent shortfall in gas supply to the national grid since the government stopped importing LNG from the spot market due to its massive price hike in the global market.

"The whole world is in a crisis right now. We will have to work together to get out of this," Ahsan told The Daily Star.

He, however, hoped the situation would improve in the coming winter.

"The demand for electricity will fall in the winter. Besides, some coal-based power plants will come into operation by the end of this year," he said, adding that it would allow them to reduce production in some gas-based power plants and supply more gas to the industries and other sectors.

In reply to a query, he said the existing system doesn't give them the option for letting the consumers know in advance about the gas supply situation like the schedule for load-shedding.

on the polling officials to give such statements against law enforcers, administration, and the AL.

The probe committee chief Ashok Kumar Debnath, however, denied the allegation.

"None pressurised them [polling officials]. Rather, they drew the actual picture and what happened on the election day," said Ashok while talking to journalists at Saghata UNO office yesterday afternoon.

Today, the probe body will record statements of the police personnel who were on election duties.

Gaibandha-5 by-polls were suspended as the EC said the situation had gone out of control.

A day later, the EC also formed a three-member committee to investigate the irregularities and asked to submit a report within seven working days.

As part of its investigation, the probe body started recording statements of polling officials on Tuesday.

Natore AL leader found dead in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Police recovered the throat-slit body of a union-level Awami League leader in Salanga area of Sirajganj yesterday morning after he was allegedly picked from his house in Natore by his rivals in the party.

Faridul Islam, 55, was the vice president of Sukash Union AL in Singra upazila of Natore.

He was also an accused in the murder case of AL leader Aftab Uddin of the same upazila.

Police and locals said he could have been killed over his rivalry with other local AL leaders.

His body was recovered from the Boalia area of Hatikumrul-Pabna highway, said Rashid Hasan, sub-inspector of Salanga Police Station.

It seems that assailants took Faridul to the spot in a vehicle and killed him there, he added.

Faridul's wife Neela Begum said, "Around 8:00pm on Tuesday, Faridul was forcefully picked up from his house by his political rivals."

Mizanur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Singra Police Station, said Faridul went into hiding after the murder of AL leader Aftab Uddin on October 9.

His opponents may have tracked him down and killed him, he added.

Locals said there was a long standing rivalry between Aftab and Faridul.

Two die from Covid, 300 test positive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people died of Covid in the 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, said a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services.

The health directorate also reported 300 new cases of coronavirus after testing 4,176 individuals.

On Tuesday, the health directorate reported six deaths from the disease.

Of those reported dead yesterday, one was a man and the other a woman. One of them was aged between 31 and 40 years while other between 71 and 80. They were reported dead in Sylhet and Mymensingh divisions.

In the same 24 hours, 411 Covid-19 patients recovered from their illness. The overall recovery rate now stands at 97.17 percent.

Woman's body found on road

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Police recovered the body of a woman by a road in Bhuapur on Tuesday morning.

Mala Akter, 26, was from Jagatpur area of Bhuapur upazila.

Mahmudul Haque, a sub-inspector of Bhuapur Police Station, said locals saw the body in Tarai area on Bhuapur-Tarakandi highway around 3:00am and informed police.

Police then recovered the body.

Independent journalism

FROM PAGE 1

authorities to remove ambiguities from it.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Division made the declaration in line with section 15 of the Digital Security Act-2018 to safeguard "sensitive" information and data from cyberattacks, reads the statement.

"Journalists' right to access to information has been hampered due to the declaration of the 29 government bodies as critical information infrastructure," reads the statement.

Because of the issuance of the gazette, there will be no scope for getting information on any failure of the organisations concerned in providing services, the council said, adding this would pose a threat to independent journalism.

At the same time, the gazette will encourage internal corruption, irregularities and a lack of accountability within the institutions concerned, it further says.

The council issued the statement after a meeting on Tuesday.

The authorities need to clarify the gazette declaring the 29 organisations as critical information infrastructure, since the Right to Information Act says access to information is a fundamental right, it noted.

The organisations include the President's Office, the Prime Minister's Office, the National Board of Revenue, Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission, Bangladesh Bank, Bridges Division, immigration and passport department, national data centre, Bangladesh Computer Council, national identity card wing, the Election Commission Secretariat, Biman, Power Development Board, Titas gas company, and Bangabandhu satellite company.

According to section 16(1) of the DSA, the director general of the digital security agency will visit, if necessary, the important information infrastructure from time to time to see if the rules of the law are being

followed properly.

Illegal entry to the important information infrastructure is a violation of the law and there is a provision for seven years' imprisonment or a fine of up to Tk 25 lakh or both.

Harming or attempting to harm the infrastructure after entering it illegally can be punished by 14 years in prison or a fine of up to Tk 1 crore or both. A repeat offender can be punished by life imprisonment and a fine of no more than Tk 5 crore or both.

The DSA is already obstructing social media, freedom of speech and freethinking. Journalists, legal experts, rights activists, representatives of the civil society, and multiple ministers and parliament members continue to make recommendations to change or revise the law.

According to the DSA, critical information infrastructures are those that control, process, circulate or preserve any information, data or electronic information that if damaged or critically affected, may adversely affect public safety, financial security, public health, national security or national integrity, and sovereignty.

Besides, the council earlier voiced concern over a move to amend the Press Council Law without stakeholders' suggestions.

The meeting was presided over by its President and The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam. It was attended by Prothom Alo Editor Matiuir Rahman, Manabzamin Editor Matiuir Rahman Chowdhury, New Age Editor Nurul Kabir, Inqilab Editor AMM Bahauddin, Jugantor Editor Saiful Alam, The Financial Express Editor Shamsul Huq Zahid, Samakal acting editor Muzammil Husain, Dosh Rupantor acting editor Mostafa Mamun, Sangbad Executive Editor Shahriar Karim, and the council's General Secretary and Bonik Barta Editor Dewan Hanif Mahmud. Dainik Azadi Editor MA Malek joined the meeting virtually.

West Indies, Ireland

FROM PAGE 1

All-rounder Jason Holder provided able support by picking up 3-12 as West Indies bundled out Zimbabwe for 122 after winning the toss and batting first to post 153-7.

Opener Johnson Charles top-scored for West Indies with 45 as the Caribbean side also found the going tough with the bat with Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza causing them problems with his off-spin and other variations to pick up 3-19.

In the day's first outing, Ireland's Curtis Campher and George Dockrell combined in an unbroken 119-run stand to take their side to an unlikely six-wicket win over Scotland to leave all four teams in Group B with a win each after two matches.

On Friday, West Indies will meet Ireland while Scotland take on Zimbabwe and the winners from those matches will progress to the Super 12 phase of the tournament.