

METRO RAIL OPENING

Police set seven conditions for residents, businesses

Cops cite PM's security

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have set seven conditions for residents and businesses along the Agargaon to Uttara's Diabari metro rail route for the security of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as she is going to ride the train on December 28.

According to a notice issued by police yesterday, the conditions are:

No new tenant can move into any building or flat along the route before December 29; no new offices, shops and restaurants can be opened in commercial spaces of any buildings along the route until December 28; residents have been asked not to dry clothes or stand on balconies of buildings adjacent to the route on the day; no photos and festoons can be hung in any building; no one can stay on any commercial spaces and in hotels on December 28; if there is any legal arms in any building or flat, it has to be surrendered to police stations concerned by December 25; and all banks and ATM booths on both sides of the route will remain closed from the morning.

"As per the instruction of SSF for the prime minister's security, we are distributing the notice informing the residents so that they don't face problems," Abdul Halim, assistant commissioner (Pallabi zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Hasina will travel from Agargaon to Uttara on the metro after inaugurating the service at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

People can avail the service from December 29.

Philippines 'concerned' over China land reclamation

AFP, Manila

The Philippines said yesterday it was "seriously concerned" over a report that China has started reclaiming several unoccupied land features in the disputed South China Sea.

Bloomberg reported Tuesday, citing satellite images from US officials, that new land formations have emerged around the contested Spratly Islands in the sea, where a Chinese vessel with a hydraulic excavator was seen operating over the years.



Teenage boys having a bit of fun pushing a boat into the shallow Shari river in Sylhet's Gowainghat upazila yesterday. Due to a lack of dredging, the river is now only knee-deep, hampering the movement of vessels.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Afghan women barred from entering univs

UN chief 'deeply alarmed' by Taliban ban; OIC, US condemn it

AFP, Kabul

Hundreds of young women were stopped by armed guards yesterday from entering Afghan university campuses, a day after the nation's Taliban rulers banned them from higher education in another assault on human rights.

Despite promising a softer rule when they seized power last year, the hardline Islamists have ratcheted up restrictions on all aspects of women's lives, ignoring international outrage.

A team of AFP journalists saw groups of students gathered outside universities in the capital, Kabul, barred from entering by armed guards and shuttered gates.

"The Taliban are scared of women's progress. We can raise educated children in society and they are scared of that," said 19-year Wajih Kazimi, who survived an attack on an education centre in the capital earlier this year.

The Taliban authorities wanted to "suppress" women, said Setara Farahmand, 21, who was studying German literature at Kabul University.

"They only want women to stay at home and give birth to children. That's it, they don't want anything more for them."

Male students also expressed shock at

the latest edict, with some in the eastern city of Jalalabad boycotting their exams in protest.

"It really expresses their illiteracy and low knowledge of Islam and human rights," said one male university student, asking not to be named.

At least two male university lecturers in Kabul announced they were quitting in protest.

Most private and government universities are closed for a few weeks over winter, although campuses generally remain open to students and staff.

"We are doomed. We have lost everything," said one Kabul student, who asked not to be identified.

The decision to bar women from universities came late Tuesday in a terse announcement from Neda Mohammad Nadeem, the minister for higher education.

"You all are informed to immediately implement the mentioned order of suspending education of females until further notice," he said.

Washington condemned the decision "in the strongest terms", while United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was "deeply alarmed", his spokesman said.

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also denounced the

ban, saying it was "seriously denting the credibility of the government".

"Just think of all the female doctors, lawyers and teachers who have been, and who will be, lost to the development of the country," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk in a statement.

Muslim nation Qatar -- which has played a key role in facilitating talks between the West and the Taliban -- said everyone deserves the right to education and urged Afghanistan's rulers to review the decision "in line with the teachings of the Islamic religion".

Germany meanwhile said it would put the ban on the agenda of the G7 club of wealthy nations, of which it currently holds the presidency.

It comes less than three months after thousands of girls and women were allowed to sit for university entrance exams across the country, with many aspiring for teaching and medicine as future careers.

After the Taliban takeover in August last year, universities were forced to implement new rules including gender-segregated classrooms and entrances, while women were only permitted to be taught by professors of the same sex, or old men.

Iranian deputy foreign minister to arrive in Dhaka today

UNB, Dhaka

Ali Bagheri Kani, Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs, is expected to arrive in the capital today to discuss bilateral issues and other subjects of mutual interest with Bangladesh.

During his brief visit, Kani is likely to meet with Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam, in addition to his private meeting with Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen.

In November, Kani said the Joint Economic Commission meeting and Foreign Office Consultation should take place at a mutually agreeable time to further solidify bilateral ties in the areas of trade, investment, economics, energy, chemical fertilisers, and food security.

During the discussion, Alam spoke about prospective trade relations between the two nations and pushed for more trade mission visits.

Details of their shared cooperation within the Indian Ocean Rim Association were also discussed.

Female NGO worker dies in road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A female NGO worker died after a truck ramed her motorcycle in Birol upazila of Dinajpur Tuesday night.

The deceased was identified as Dwini Arjum, 27, daughter of Monjurul Islam of Narayani village under Panchagarh's Debiganj upazila, and an employee of Rangpur Dinajpur Development Service in Birol.

She was also a former member of Bangladesh Scouts.

A truck at speed struck Dwini at Shankarpur village on the Birol-Dhukurjhari road around 7:00pm while she was on her way home from work on her scooter, said Golam Mawla, inspector (investigation) of Birol Police Station.

The truck driver managed to flee. Locals rescued her and took her to M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital where she died shortly after admission.

An unnatural death case was filed with Birol Police Station after the accident.

Five dead, over 70,000 evacuated in Malaysia floods

AFP, Kuala Krai

At least five people were killed and more than 70,000 rushed to evacuation centres in Malaysia after monsoon-triggered floods inundated the country's north, authorities said yesterday.

More than 31,000 people have fled their homes in Kelantan state while more than 39,000 residents have been evacuated to temporary shelters in neighbouring Terengganu after flooding began over the weekend, the official Bernama news agency said.

Emergency services officials said a total of five people had been killed.

Rivers their preferred site

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"We tried a lot to identify them using DNA, fingerprints, and also sent pictures to different police stations but no one responded," said Shahjahan.

WHY THE RIVERS?

Omar Faruk, a professor of criminology and police science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, told The Daily Star yesterday, "A section of murderers dump their victims' bodies in the river so that the evidence gets destroyed. Most of the bodies break down badly while some are never found."

Officers do not have the modern technologies needed for proper investigation into such cases, he said. "It ultimately leads to the submission of weak charge sheets and in some

cases final reports."

It becomes difficult for courts to deliver proper verdicts, he observed.

Ahadujaman, superintendent of police (crime and operations) of river police HQ, said it is hard to investigate a murder if the scene of the crime is not found.

The body drifts from one place to another and sometimes one district to another, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Sohel Mahmud, associate professor of forensic science at Sir Salimullah Medical College, told this newspaper yesterday that generally, bodies do not float in the river until they start decomposing.

He said evidence gets damaged or lost in the water and the bodies sometimes bear marks that were not

there when the person died.

"For instance, fish can bite or the body can be hit by vessels. These can misdirect a person conducting the autopsy," said Sohel.

He stressed the need for expert hands in conducting such autopsies. "In the case of decomposing bodies, the only things that can be detected easily are if the person got shot or had broken bones," he said.

Police probes are more important than autopsy reports in such cases, he added.

The Daily Star contacted morgue assistants in three medical colleges in Dhaka.

At least 40 decaying bodies went to Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue in a year.

Morgue assistants said they were

only able to identify about a third of the bodies recovered from different rivers.

During an inquest, SIM cards, ID cards, other documents, clothes, and ornaments can help to identify the bodies.

For example, identifying Buet student Fardin Noor Parash was difficult as his body had been in the water for three days and it had swollen up and started to decay.

Police had to use the SIM card of his phone found in his pocket to ID him.

It is a race against time for the people dealing with such bodies since they are not able to preserve the bodies in refrigerators. For this reason, they have to bury the bodies after two or three days, said morgue sources.

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highways at her office in the capital.

Hasina said the 100 highways are gifts to the nation in this month of victory.

She virtually opened a record number of 100 highways to traffic in 50 districts, within a month and a half after inaugurating 100 bridges in one day.

The new highways -- including national, regional and district highways -- are aimed to ensure a safe and uninterrupted road network as well as help reduce road accidents and travel time.

The Roads and Highways Department constructed or reconstructed the highways, whose combined length is 2,021.56km, under 48 projects at a cost of Tk 14,915 crore over the last two years.

The PM said her government opened 100 highways in a single day and earlier opened 100 bridges in a single day too. "Could anyone do that in the past? No. It is only the Awami League that can accomplish this."

"We are told that the Awami League government has destroyed the country ... I don't know if people would believe those who say that the Awami League destroyed the country even after this [opening 100 highways and 100 bridges]. That is my question."

Hasina said her government transformed the country into Digital Bangladesh and now information, as well as misinformation, can be spread using digital platforms. The government believes in the development of people so that they can lead a decent life, she said.

"We want to ensure peace, development, and security of the people ... We are moving forward, facing many obstacles time and again. Bangladesh will continue to move forward."

Referring to her government's plan to transform "Digital Bangladesh" into "Smart Bangladesh" by 2041, the PM said everyone must acquire tech skills in a "Smart Bangladesh".

'DON'T TAKE LAW INTO OWN HANDS'

Hasina asked people not to attack

motorists and not to take law into their own hands in case of any road accident.

She said no driver hits people intentionally. Instead of helping the victims, drivers flee the scene after accidents to escape mob beating, she said.

The PM said if anyone commits a crime, the person should be handed over to police. "The problem will not be solved if the driver is beaten to death."

Hasina asked all, including the administration, public representatives and teachers, to go for a massive campaign in creating public awareness to this end.

She also stressed the need for training drivers and their assistants and creating mass awareness about traffic rules.

The new highways include 32 of 653.66km in length in Dhaka division, 16 of 352.26km in Khulna, 14 of 258.90km in Chattogram, 15 of 203.95km in Rangpur, eight of 196.87km in Rajshahi, six of 142.48km in Mymensingh, four of 106.18km in Sylhet and four others of 107.26km in length in Barishal.

Of them, 99 highways were developed with government funds, while one -- the 70km Joydebpur (Gazipur)-Alenga (Tangail) four-lane highway with service lanes on both sides -- was constructed with foreign fund (Tk 3,205 crore) and government fund (Tk 2,963.64 crore).

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader spoke at the function moderated by PM's Principal Secretary Tofazzel Hossain Miah.

Road Transport and Highways Division Secretary ABM Amin Ullah Nuri made a presentation on the 100 new highways.

Out of the 22,476km road network under the RHD, there are 3,991km of national highways, 4,897km of regional highways and 13,588km of district roads.

The national highways connect the capital to divisional cities, sea ports, land ports and international highways. Regional highways connect district towns to river ports and land ports. District roads link district towns with upazilas or one upazila with another.

Election meaningless if not participatory

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Jonno Nagorik and Agami Prakashoni, said: "An election is meaningless if it is not participatory. An election is not an election at all if it is not competitive."

They unveiled two books containing information on candidates who participated in the 2014 and 2018 national elections at The Daily Star Centre.

Everyone expects a participatory national election, Hena said. "After earning [everybody's] confidence, they would be able to bring all to the elections. This is immensely important. I request the incumbent EC to start working [to gain people's confidence]."

"Only urging all to join the election is not enough... Create that confidence through what you do. The EC has to be neutral and that neutrality should be visible."

When a reporter drew his attention to the fact that the current commissioners maintained that it

was not their job to bring all political parties to the election, Hena said, "No, No, it is not correct at all. You have to bring all political parties to the election. It is our duty to hold a free and fair election. An election can be free and fair only if it is participated by all."

The EC should hold dialogues with all parties again and again, he said.

The constitution guarantees that the EC is completely independent and it is the duty of all executive authorities to assist the EC in discharging its duties. "The EC should take advantage of the constitutional guarantee in holding free and fair elections," he said.

Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said the election should be competitive, not just participatory. "There should be alternatives for voters."

The EC currently does not verify information provided by the candidates on their affidavits, he said.

"But in many cases, the candidates give false information. If false

information is given, the EC can cancel the candidature."

Brig Gen (ret'd) Muhammad Sakhawat Hussain, a former election commissioner, said there are some grey areas in the Representation of the People Order (RPO) that should be addressed.

"The Election Commission does not seem to have the capacity to verify the information provided on the affidavit."

He said during their tenure, they sent the candidates' wealth information, provided in affidavits, to the National Board of Revenue (NBR). But there was no response from the NBR.

Replying to a question on "stuffing ballot boxes the night before the 11th parliamentary election" and the statement of the then CEC KM Nurul Huda in this regard, Sakhawat said, "In the morning, the BBC showed that the voting was held on the night before the election day. The EC could have stopped voting in places where it happened. But it wasn't done."