

SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

JP MP blasts the govt over Darwin’s theory

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Jatiya Party MP yesterday in parliament lambasted the government for the inclusion of Darwin’s theory of evolution in school textbooks.

Golam Kibria Tipu, a lawmaker from Barishal-3, did that while participating in the thanksgiving motion on President Abdul Hamid’s speech.

“Saying human beings descended from apes is an anti-religious propaganda. As Muslims, we are the children of Adam ... It [Darwin’s theory] is an insult to Islam. A blasphemy law should be enacted in this regard.”

The opposition MP in his speech demanded that the government form a commission to find who were behind the inclusion of “such a controversial topic in the textbooks”.

He added, “Germany has a blasphemy law. If necessary, we can have that law in our country, and those involved in anti-religious activities should be prosecuted under it.”

Tipu further said, “No devout Muslim accepts this [Darwin’s theory]. I don’t know whether the government is aware of this ...”

The MP further alleged that it was done deliberately to put the government in a tough spot.

Zakir Hossain, state minister for primary education, AKM Enamul Haque Shamim, deputy minister for water resources, and AL MPs – SM Shahzada, Pankaj Nath, Nazrul Islam Babu, Ashek Ullah Rafiq – among others, took part in the discussion.

UK PM orders probe into ally’s tax affairs

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak yesterday ordered an investigation into a wealthy ally’s murky tax dealings as he again vowed “integrity” in his government after Boris Johnson’s scandal-plagued tenure.

As well as the probe into Conservative party chairman Nadhim Zahawi, Sunak faced hostile questions about the appointment of BBC chairman Richard Sharp, a former banker who acted as a go-between to help funnel a loan to Johnson when he was in 10 Downing Street.



PHOTO: BSS

World Bank Managing Director of Operations Axel Van Trotsenburg calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office yesterday. Van Trotsenburg is now on a visit to Dhaka to mark 50 years of partnership between Bangladesh and the World Bank Group.

Ukraine storing arms at nuke power stations

Says Russian spy service; Poland signals intent to send Leopard tanks to Kyiv

AGENCIES

Russia’s foreign intelligence service (SVR) yesterday accused Ukraine of storing Western-supplied arms at nuclear power stations across the country.

In a statement, the SVR said US-supplied HIMARS rocket launchers, air defence systems and artillery ammunition had been delivered to the Rivne nuclear power station in the northwest of Ukraine.

“The Ukrainian armed forces are storing weapons and ammunition provided by the West on the territory of nuclear power plants,” it said, adding that an arms shipment to the Rivne power station had taken place in the last week of December.

Asked about the report yesterday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the claims demonstrated the importance of maintaining dialogue with the United Nations’ nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

However, Peskov said there were currently no plans for a meeting between IAEA head Rafael Grossi and President Vladimir Putin.

Ukraine’s many nuclear power stations have been the focus of attention since the start of

the conflict. Russian forces seized the defunct Chernobyl nuclear power plant less than 48 hours after troops invaded, and also captured the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant – the largest in Europe – early in the war.

Both Kyiv and Moscow have accused each other of shelling Zaporizhzhia, and Ukraine says Russia is using the site as a de facto weapons depot, reports Reuters.

Meanwhile, Germany’s Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said her government would not stand in the way if Poland wants to send its Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine, signalling a possible breakthrough for Ukraine as it tries to bolster its forces ahead of an expected new Russian offensive.

Poland said it would seek Berlin’s permission to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine, but was prepared to do so without approval, reports AFP.

Poland already announced earlier this month that it was ready to deliver 14 Leopard tanks to Kyiv but was waiting for a clear statement from Berlin authorising the transfer.

American lawmakers pushed their government on Sunday to export M1 Abrams main battle tanks to Ukraine, saying that even sending a symbolic number would be enough to

‘Only Awami voters will come to vote’ Bogura AL leader tells campaign rally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Those who will not vote for the Awami League don’t have to go to the polling stations, said Mahfujul Islam Raj, general secretary of Bogura Sadar Upazila AL, in a campaign rally.

He was campaigning for an AL leader running for the Bogura-6 by-polls.

A video clip of his speech made at the rally held in the hall room of the Gokul Union Parishad on January 6 went viral on social media.

Awami League leaders distributed blankets among the locals there, locals said.

On December 18 last year, five BNP MPs submitted their resignation letters to the Speaker, and the Election Commission declared Bogura Sadar (Bogura-6 constituency) seat vacant.

By-polls to all five

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Three sentenced to life over murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A Pabna court yesterday sentenced three men to life term imprisonment for killing a local influential in Sadar upazila in 2008.

The convicts were also fined Tk 20,000 each, in default of which they have to serve another six months in prison.

According to the case statement, Nawjesh Pramanik, head teacher of Dighi Goahailbari Government Primary School; Montu Pramanik, and Saheb Mollah, all residents of Dighi Gohailbari village, killed Mahatab Uddin on March 16, 2008. The convicts had a long-standing dispute over the school property and various other issues with the victim.

Following the incident, Mahatab’s nephew filed a case with Pabna Sadar Police Station, accusing 12 named and 15-20 unnamed persons.

Groundwater depletion in Dhaka 2-3m a year: LGRD minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

LGRD Minister Tajul Islam yesterday said in parliament that the underground water level of Dhaka is going down by 2-3m every year, while the rate is 3m in Chattogram city.

In reply to a query from ruling Awami League MP Morshed Alam, the minister also said at present, the average underground water level in Dhaka city is 38m to 82m, depending on areas.

For Chattogram city, the average underground water level is 100m at present.

The LGRD minister said currently Dhaka Wasa is supplying 66 percent of its water from underground, while 34 percent from the surface level.

He also mentioned that the government has taken up a project to construct three big water treatment plants to reduce the dependency on groundwater in Dhaka city by 2025.

The minister said they hope Dhaka Wasa would be able to ensure 70 percent water from surface level, and 30 percent from ground level by 2025.

For Chattogram city, the minister said at present, the rate of water harnessed from underground is eight percent, while the remaining 92 percent of water comes from the surface level.

Arrest warrant against ex-UNO in sexual abuse case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A Tangail court yesterday issued an arrest warrant against a former upazila nirbahi officer of Basail in connection with a case filed against him by a female college student over sexual harassment and cheating last year.

Tangail Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Monira Sultana passed the order after evidence was found against ex-UNO Manzur Hossain during a preliminary investigation by Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI), said Md Rasel Rana, the lawyer of the plaintiff.

The girl filed the case against Manzur Hossain with the district court on June 21 last year. The court later asked the PBI to investigate the case.

Ramp up support for nations hit

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The PM focused on her government’s measures and endeavours to fight the climate change, including projects taken with the finance from Climate Trust Fund to mitigate the climate’s adverse impacts by creating green-belt, afforestation, sustainable housing and livelihood.

She said the world community is responsible for climate change but unfortunately they are not complying with their commitments to assist the climate vulnerable countries.

The World Bank MD praised PM Hasina for making incredible development of Bangladesh during her tenures.

He congratulated the PM on accomplishing massive development. The per capita income in Bangladesh was only some \$50 in 1972, which is now \$2,824, he added.

He said developing countries like Bangladesh need to create employment opportunities for youth to face the current challenges caused by the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.

The employment generation is also needed for accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), he added.

He said the World Bank has been beside Bangladesh since 1972 and will remain beside the country.

“I’ve come here to strengthen the World Bank’s partnership with Bangladesh,” said the WB official.

About the development of Bangladesh, Hasina said the country has gained fast development in the last 14 years thanks to the continuation of political stability, the government’s tireless efforts to implement its political visions and the government’s desire to work for the people.

PM’s International Relation Affairs Gower Rizvi, PM’s Ambassador-at-large Mohammad Ziauddin, PM’s Principal Secretary M Tofazzel Hossain Miah, and Senior Secretary Fatima of the Finance Division Yasmin were present.

EC’s EVM dream over, for now

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campaigns, voter education, and training officials.

The Planning Commission on several occasions sought explanations and more information from the EC regarding the DPP. This instilled doubt among many that the project might not be approved.

Election commissioners Md Alamgir and Anisur Rahman on several occasions had said that if the proposal was not approved by January 15, the commission would not be able to use the machines the way it had planned to and that the EC would have to use the EVMs it already has.

Officials concerned said the commissioners had been saying this because it takes five to six months to appoint a project director and other officials, issue work orders, import EVM parts, and prepare the machines. The EC would also need time to customise the machines, they said.

With Jatiya Sangsad polls likely in early January 2024, the EVM issue came to the fore after Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina at an Awami League meeting on May 7 said EVMs would be used in all 300 constituencies.

The ruling party and some of its alliance partners are in favour of the use of the machines but at least 19 out of the 39 registered political parties have either directly told the EC or said in public that they oppose the use of EVMs.

Thirty-nine eminent citizens on September 6 issued a statement urging the EC not to use EVMs in the next general election. It said using the machines might provoke political debate and further reduce people’s confidence in the commission.

Asked if the EC was disappointed that the proposal was shelved, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) Ahsan Habib Khan said there was no question of disappointment.

“I think any farsighted and conscientious authority with analytical ability can make such a decision due to the global economic recession,” he said, adding, “Everything will take place in line with the work plan we prepared for the 12th parliamentary polls.”

The EC will try to make full use of the EVMs it has and is already checking their quality, he said.

He said the EC used EVMs in more than 500 polls with no case of vote rigging and the candidates made no complaints about the results.

It is to be noted that through this, the expectations of most of the political parties have been met. The wishes of prominent citizens have also been fulfilled, he said.

“Now we think that people, irrespective of political thoughts, will like the decision and all political parties will participate in the elections and assist us,” Ahsan said.

“We will prove that elections can be held in a free and fair manner even if it is conducted using ballots,” he added.

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said EVMs are “controversial”. The machines are the “worst” and they can be used for “fraudulence”.

“I appeal to the EC to abandon the whole idea of using EVM in the election ...,” he said.

When more is needed

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remains a burning issue given the government’s half-hearted response now.

“When the government needed to expand its social protection programmes, it did not,” Khondker said.

What is more puzzling is that the government has enough food stock to assist the poor and low-income families in a bigger way.

A food stock of 12 lakh metric tonnes is considered adequate and the government has 19 lakh metric tonnes at present.

“The government should insist on doing more,” said Khondker, also a professor at the University of Dhaka’s economics department.

Yesterday, coarse rice, which is consumed mostly by the poor and low-income people, sold for Tk 46-52 a kilogram in Dhaka city, up 3-4 percent from a year earlier, according to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

Wheat, another staple, saw its price soar 66 percent to Tk 58-60 per kg.

And it is in wheat distribution that the government has scaled back: by 27.5 percent to 254,272 metric tonnes.

The rise in the import price of wheat following the war in Ukraine appears to have played a role in the lower wheat distribution, according to Hussain.

“But this cannot be an acceptable excuse.”

The authorities could have adjusted the composition of food by increasing the quantity of rice to replace wheat.

“The government has consistently claimed that the public stock of rice never dipped below safe levels. Yet the composition of food was not adjusted.”

There was also no food distribution under the Test Relief and school feeding programmes.

“These tend to reach the poor better than many other welfare and

workfare programmes.”

Open-market sales, the only social assistance for urban households, should have been increased by a large margin, Hussain said.

“We were under the impression this was being scaled up in response to food inflation reaching levels not seen in recent memory.”

Data shows it increased by just 1.3 percent, data shows.

“It appears that the pro-poor elements of public expenditure are eroding at a time when they need to increase very significantly,” Hussain added.

If the authorities face any supply chain disruption, they must ensure the substitute product to fill up the gap, Khondker said, while calling on the government to hunt for other sources like Canada for wheat.

Tapan Kumar Das, director (in-charge) of the department of supply, distribution and marketing of the directorate general of food, acknowledged the lower food distribution, which he blamed on the supply chain disruptions brought on by the pandemic and the Ukraine war.

“Basically, we have a shortage of wheat distribution,” he said, adding that local production accounts for just 12-15 percent of the country’s total requirement.

There is sufficient wheat stock now, Das said.

He, however, denied that the government has cut back on rice distribution this fiscal year. Rather, the government saved about 75,000 tonnes of rice from the food-friendly programme after the authority detected a huge number of fake beneficiaries across the country.

Asked whether the government is considering substituting rice for wheat in the food distribution programmes, he declined to comment.

The food secretary and the director general of DG Food did not respond to The Daily Star’s request for comment.

Sattar’s money

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The Daily Star has a copy of the affidavit in which Sattar mentioned honorarium as a lawmaker as his main source of income. However, in 2018, he mentioned business as his profession with an annual income of Tk 4.52 lakh.

The by-polls to Brahmanbaria-2 (Sarail-Ashuganj) will be held on February 1, according to the schedule announced by the Election Commission.

Sattar, in his wealth statement in 2018, said he had a house worth Tk 10 lakh in Brahmanbaria town.

After four years, he now claims that the value of the house has dropped to Tk 5 lakh, according to his affidavit.

Besides, Sattar said his wife has 40 tolas of gold which she got as wedding gifts and valued it at Tk 40,000.

About criminal records, Sattar said he was accused in two cases filed under the Special Powers Act in 2009 and 2010. But he was acquitted of the cases in 2021.

Sattar, a former adviser to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, was elected lawmaker five times from different constituencies in Brahmanbaria and Cumilla on BNP tickets.

On December 10 last year, the BNP at its Dhaka divisional rally in the capital’s Golapbagh announced that seven of its lawmakers, including Sattar, would resign from parliament.

Subsequently, the MPs submitted their resignations to Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury.

The Parliament Secretariat later issued a gazette notification declaring the seven seats vacant.

On December 18, the EC announced the schedule for the by-polls to six constituencies.

Sattar submitted his resignation letter to the BNP chief’s Gulshan office on December 29, citing personal reasons.

He collected nomination form on January 1 to contest the by-polls as an independent candidate. Hours later, he was removed from all posts of the BNP for “violating party decisions and engaging in anti-party activities”.