

A grander Boi Mela this year Says Bangla Academy DG at press conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

This year's Amar Ekushey Boi Mela will be grander, on an area covering 11.5 lakh square feet, as opposed to last year's fair, which was arranged on 7 lakh square feet area.

Bangla Academy Director General Mohammad Nurul Huda said this at a press conference at the academy's auditorium yesterday.

Secretary of Bangla Academy AHM Lokman, member secretary of the fair-management committee KM Muzahidul Islam, Chief Marketing Officer of bKash Limited Mir Nawbut Ali, and Managing Director of Crosswork MA Maruf were also present.

Huda said as the area of this year's book fair has increased, the number of stalls and pavilions has also increased. Bangla Academy authorities are organising the fair on its premises and the historic Suhrawardy Udyan in an area covering 11.5 lakh square feet.

He said Bangla Academy has decided to hold this year's Boi Mela from February 1, the usual date, after three long years. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will be present in person and inaugurate this year's book fair. The theme of this year's book fair is "Read the book, build the country, Bangabandhu's Bangladesh".



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A day of pure happiness

800 children get free rides on metro rail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nine-year-old Abdullah was waiting impatiently to see the arrival of a metro train at Agargaon station yesterday. As the train reached around 12:30pm, his eyes were sparkling with joy.

"I've seen the trains on TV only, but today [yesterday], I'm going to take a ride on it. I'm over the moon," said an elated Abdullah, third-grader of a primary school who started living in a government-run rehabilitation centre for street children in Kamalapur, after losing his mother last year.

Like Abdullah, around 800 children got an opportunity to ride the metro for the first time yesterday, under an initiative of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

Of them 474 were the awardees of the National Children Award Competition 2020 and 2021, and around 200 were from Shishu Bikash



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Kendra of Azimpur and Keraniganj, said Rezaul Kabir, joint secretary of the ministry.

At 11:30am, they started entering the station along with their guardians and other officials. Since then, the whole station was brimmed with the laughter and joy of children.

Finally around 12:55pm, the train started for Uttara North

station, stirring excitement among the children.

They looked out at the windows with curious eyes. Some of them were seen singing and dancing, while the train embarked on a 12-minute journey to its destination.

"Before this, I saw the Padma bridge. Today [yesterday], I got the chance to ride the metro.

It's an overwhelming moment for me that I'm on the train with my school friends and classmates," said fourth grader Suchona Akhter.

Dozens of children, who arrived at the station on several BRTC buses, shared the same sentiments.

Sarajit Kumar Biswas, a trainer of non-formal education at the Kamalapur centre who came with his students, said, "Since they got to know about this ride, they were excited. Usually, we had to wake them up in the morning and get them ready for the day. But today [yesterday], they woke up earlier than usual and got ready."

Lucky Enam, chairman of Shishu Academy, said the children have witnessed the progress of "Smart Bangladesh" through this trip.

"They are happy and excited. We are also happy to see their eyes filled with joy," said Lucky.

Deputy Project Director

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SSC exams to begin April 30

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Secondary School Certificate and equivalent examinations for this year will begin on April 30, two months later than the usual time.

"We have sent the proposal of routine for SSC and equivalent exams to the education ministry for its final approval," Inter Education Board Coordination Committee chief Tapan Kumar Sarkar told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We proposed April 30 as the beginning date of SSC exams" said Tapan, also chairman of Dhaka Education Board.

Before the Covid 19 pandemic, the SSC exams usually began in the first week of February. The exams were not held for the last couple of years due to the pandemic.

Board officials said that SSC exams for 2023 will be held on all subjects with full marks but on curtailed syllabuses, according to a government decision.

WASA MD GRAFT CASE Court asks ACC to submit probe report

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday asked the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to submit, by April 10, a probe report on the documents submitted earlier regarding the allegation of Tk 132 crore embezzlement brought against Wasa managing director Taqsem A Khan and eight others.

Shahab Uddin Sarkar, secretary of Wasa Karmachari Bahumukhi Samabay Samity Ltd, a cooperative of Wasa employees, on August 2 last year submitted a series of documents to the ACC regarding the irregularities and corruption.

Judge Md Asaduzzaman of Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court passed the order after a short hearing on a case filed by Sarkar on November 10 last year, confirmed ACC public

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PRAYER TIMING
JANUARY 31

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5:35	12:45	4:15	5:46	7:15
JAMAAT 6:10	1:15	4:30	5:50	7:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Dhaka expecting open labour migration

Says expatriates' minister ahead of Malaysia home minister's visit

PORIMOL PALMA

Dhaka is expecting Kuala Lumpur to adopt an open system that allows all licensed agencies to send workers to Malaysia free of cost or at minimum cost as Malaysian Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution Ismail visits Bangladesh on February 4.

"We will want an arrangement so that our people can go to Malaysia for jobs fast and at low cost," Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Imran Ahmad told The Daily Star.

The Malaysian minister will meet Imran Ahmad and is likely to call on the prime minister.

Bangladesh Association for International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) is also wishing to meet Minister Saifuddin during his one-day visit here.

He will be visiting Dhaka on the third leg after Indonesia and Nepal as Malaysia is aggressively seeking to recruit foreign labour to boost its economy.

Under a memorandum of understanding signed last year, Bangladesh sent around only 60,000 workers but that too at a very high cost, though job demand letters were issued for around 200,000 workers.

Industry insiders and migrant

workers said the recruitment cost for each worker is now Tk 4,00,000 to Tk 4,50,000. Only 100 recruiting agencies are allowed by the Malaysian government to send workers.

Earlier in 2018, the Mahathir Mohamad government froze the intake of recruitment from Bangladesh on allegations of forced labour, syndication and high recruitment cost.

Industry insiders and migrant workers said the recruitment cost for each worker is now Tk 4,00,000 to Tk 4,50,000. Only 100 recruiting agencies are allowed by the Malaysian government to send workers.

It was Malaysia that selected the recruiting agencies earlier. During 2016 and 2018, only 10 agencies were allowed. It was first expanded to 25 agencies last year and then to 100.

Baira general secretary Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman said they have already written to the expatriates' welfare ministry, calling to introduce an

open recruitment system so that all licensed recruiting agencies -- some 1200 in number -- can send workers to Malaysia.

Responsible Business Association -- a forum of big companies that send workers to western countries -- is recruiting workers from Nepal and Malaysia free of cost, said Noman.

He also mentioned that Malaysia is recruiting female house helps and security guards free of cost but Bangladesh is not able to send them.

"We would like to take this opportunity. We don't want to follow the previous IT system that monopolises the recruitment," Noman said.

Baira executive committee member Ali Haider Chowdhury echoed the same.

"This new government of Malaysia is seeking a change and we also want it to happen," he told this correspondent yesterday.

While in Dhaka, Malaysian Home Minister Saifuddin also may call on Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen.

"Wewantthelabourrecruitment cartel to be dismantled, the recruitment cost reduced and the rules of recruitment eased," he told journalists at the foreign ministry yesterday.

QATAR WORLD CUP HC seeks list of dead, hurt Bangladeshi workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday sought a list of Bangladeshi migrant workers who died or got injured while constructing hotels and stadiums in Qatar between 2010 and 2022 in preparation for last year's FIFA World Cup.

In response to a writ petition, the court asked the ministries of foreign affairs and expatriates' welfare to prepare the list, mentioning names of the workers, and submit it before the court.

The HC also issued a rule asking authorities concerned to explain in four weeks why they should not be directed to give adequate compensation to the workers' families.

The HC bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice Ahmed Sohel issued the order and rule following the petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Masood R Sobhan.

He submitted the petition in December last year, saying that at least 450 Bangladeshi migrant workers reportedly died.

In the petition, he mentioned that the workers were treated inhumanely in Qatar.

Argentina may open embassy in Dhaka next month

STAR REPORT

Argentine Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship Santiago Andrés Cafiero is likely to visit Bangladesh on February 26 or 27.

During his visit, Cafiero may open the Argentine embassy or consular in Bangladesh.

"They [Argentina] in principle agreed to open up an embassy or consular in Bangladesh," Foreign Minister Abdul Momen told The Daily Star over phone yesterday.

The minister also said Bangladesh also wants to open an embassy or consular in Argentina but could not say when that would happen.

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Zamzam water sale at Baitul Mukarram market suspended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection (DNCRP) yesterday suspended the sale of Zamzam water in the capital's Baitul Mukarram market.

DNCRP Director General AHM Shafiquzzaman said this during a view-exchange meeting at its head office in the capital.

At the same time, he said a special drive is underway to find out whether it is being sold elsewhere in the country.

Before taking any further decision, Shafiquzzaman said the Islamic Foundation has been requested to verify whether it is even legal to sell this water.

The DNCRP director general said, "It's a sensitive matter. After knowing about the issue,

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Throughout the stretch of Dhaka-Mawa Expressway, at least a dozen three-wheelers can be seen plying the highway amid large vehicles. Although it's illegal for these slow-moving vehicles to move on the highways, they seem to be doing so, time and again due to the lack of authorities' intervention. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

'CPD has ulterior motive'

Claims agricultural minister on the org's corruption survey

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Terming the recent survey of Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD) politically motivated, Agriculture Minister Abdur Razaque yesterday said CPD is trying to bring a particular political party to power.

His remarks came a day after the disclosure of CPD's survey, which said Bangladesh's business environment deteriorated in 2022 thanks to corruption.

As much as 65 percent of the respondents complained of corruption, which was a major barrier for them to doing business, according to CPD.

"CPD carries out surveys for political purposes. They want to bring a particular political party to power and are partners of the party," said the minister while talking to reporters at the secretariat, after a

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IN REMEMBRANCE



(28 JUNE, 1936- 31 JANUARY, 1993)

We fondly remember Late Aziz H. A. Sattar, the founding Managing Director of GMG Group of Industries, on his 30th death anniversary. He was a pioneer and a role model of industrialization in this country. His unfathomable depth of knowledge, vision, uphill struggle and firm determination may inspire all of us. Today we solicit doa for his departed soul.

Family Members,
Well Wishers & Employees of
GMG GROUP