

PM mourns death of ex-minister Afsarul Amin

BSS, Dhaka

Awami League President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed deep shock and sorrow at the death of Chattogram-10 lawmaker and former primary and mass education minister Dr Afsarul Amin.

In a condolence message, she prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family.

Dr Afsarul Amin died at a hospital in the capital yesterday afternoon. He was 65.

Dr Afsarul, who had been suffering from cancer for the last two years, breathed his last at Square Hospital around 4:00pm, his personnel assistant Didar ur Rahman Tushar told the news agency.

The politician left behind his wife Dr Kamrunnesa, two sons, friends and well-wishers, and political fellows to mourn his death.



Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has faced protests and criticism for its tree felling activities on Satmasjid Road, which has raised concerns about the loss of greenery, right after its southern counterpart engaged in a similar development project that involves cutting down hundreds of trees on the median strip of Mohakhali-Gulshan Road to expand an island. This action contradicts DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam's recent commitment to planting two lakh trees.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

'Tree felling without permission will be punished'

Warns DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) Mayor Md Atiqul Islam yesterday said those who cut trees without the city corporation's permission will be punished.

Addressing the inauguration of a campaign by Pran-RFL, titled "Let's Save the Planet", at Hatirjheel, the mayor said, "We have already instructed to carry on development projects cutting any tree from the median of a road. I have learnt that the contractor in Mirpur cut trees, for which he was blacklisted. We have already terminated two engineers from the project."

"If any person or organisation wants to cut a tree, they will have to inform the city corporation. We will allow them if necessary, after discussing with environmentalists and town planners," he said.

"We are the ones responsible for the damage to the environment. The environment is taking its revenge. It does not rain even during the monsoon. Dhaka, in particular, has become a heat island," the mayor said.

"Many might say that there is no place to plant trees in Dhaka. We have started plantation activities on canal banks, road dividers and footpaths. I have acquired a list of trees for road medians and footpaths from Horticulture and Forest Department officials," he added.

Pointing out that plastic bottles are constantly harming the environment, Atiqul said, "Businesses are making huge profits by selling products in plastic bottles. It is unacceptable that businesses are making profits by harming the environment. To protect the environment, producers should reduce, recycle, and reuse plastic wastes as well as introduce the EPR (Extended Producers Responsibility) model."

MOHAKHALI-GULSHAN ROAD MEDIAN STRIP

Now DNCC felling trees in name of development

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Seems like the two city corporations of Dhaka cannot initiate a development project without cutting down trees.

After much protests about the tree felling in Satmasjid Road by Dhaka South City Corporation, its north counterpart is carrying out a development project at the expense of greenery.

DNCC felled hundreds of trees on the median strip of Mohakhali Gulshan Road to expand its island. Surprisingly, this comes in direct contrast to DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam's recent pledge to plant two lakh trees.

Over a span of more than six months, DNCC has felled trees while working on an almost 1.7km median strip development.

Beyond its devastating environmental impact, DNCC's tree felling also violates existing laws. The city authorities are cutting down trees without obtaining the necessary permission from the forest department, according to sources inside the department.

Despite the clear requirement to seek approval from the Divisional Forest Officer to cut any tree under Section 5 of the Forest Product Transit Rules 2011, the city authorities went ahead with the project without the necessary approvals.

However, the forest department failed to intervene when DNCC's assigned workers were felling the trees in front of their office. The old median was broken and trees were cut down to make the new median strip more convenient, said construction workers and locals.

Recently, the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at Buet stated that 20 percent green space is required in Dhaka, where there is less than 8.5 percent of such spaces.

According to DNCC sources, DNCC spent nearly Tk 22 crore on development works under the "Traffic Infrastructure Development and Road Safety" project. The project was extended until June 30 of this year.

During a recent visit, this correspondent

found that the Mohakhali-Gulshan road has seen the loss of many trees due to the ongoing renovation work on the road island in front of the National Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital. Around 30 tree trunks are scattered in various places on the road median strip, with many tree branches also buried in the soil.

This correspondent also counted that there are 150 trees on the 1.7km road median strip. More than half of these trees are at risk due to the renovation work as over a dozen trees have already fallen victim to "development". Almost 20 trees have died due to the ongoing work.

According to Google Street View and local residents, there were almost 300 trees on the median strip of Mohakhali-Gulshan Road.

Jalil Uddin, a construction worker who joined the project almost three months ago, told The Daily Star that the trees have made it difficult for them to do their work properly.

"We are removing the old median strip structures as trees are leaning over the road, often causing accidents. We have to do this to prevent accidents," he added.

Meanwhile, residents of the adjacent to Mohakhali-Gulshan Road are outraged by DNCC's tree felling.

"After the mayor's pledge to plant two lakh trees, we thought things were going to change. But now we see that these are just empty words," said Aminul Islam, a local.

Joney Enterprise, a construction company, is the contractor for the project.

Dilip Babu, managing director of Joney Enterprise, said the trees that "died" during the construction of the median strip were taken away by DNCC so that they don't fall on

the road.

He claimed that they did not cut down any trees.

However, on February 1, this construction company sent DNCC officials a letter expressing concern that there is a risk that trees might fall while working.

Babar Ahmed, deputy assistant engineer of Zone 3 of DNCC, told The Daily Star that the trees were cut down for the convenience of the work. "Initially, none of the trees were felled."

However, he could not come up with a number when asked about these "risky" trees.

Requesting anonymity, a forest official said they did not receive any application from the DNCC and nor give any permission in this regard.

Contacted, Selim Reza, chief executive officer of DNCC, said a few trees might have been taken away due to the risks while working on the median strip.

When asked about the required permission from the forest department, Reza avoided the question.

Sharif Jamil, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon and a regular commuter of the Mohakhali-Gulshan road, recently witnessed the trees being cut down.

Discussing with the designers of the project responsible for the tree felling, Jamil said it is necessary to change the perspective of those involved with such development projects. "It is possible to construct a median strip without cutting down trees."

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), said, "Tree felling is not acceptable in any way. The unnecessary median strip should not be built. This is a clear waste of money," she added.



NATIONAL BUDGET 2023-24

No fiscal resources for environment

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

Though the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has been allocated Tk 1,639 crore in the national budget 2023-24 -- a Tk 282 crore increase from the previous year's budget -- the government did not allocate any fiscal resources to deal with the environmental threats, including the rising temperature and natural catastrophes.

Climate finance experts labelled this allocation as "project-based allocation" and said this approach reflects the government's mindset of playing down the impact of rising temperatures and natural catastrophes stemming from climate change.

Out of the total allocation for the environment ministry, the operational cost amounts to Tk 788 crore, while the development cost stands at Tk 851 crore.

Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, chairman of the Department of Development Studies at Dhaka University, told The Daily Star that just a few weeks back, the country witnessed a devastating cyclone and will see many more in the coming days. On top of that, heat waves have also become regular in Dhaka and other areas.

"Despite the fact, there is no budgetary allocation to mitigate such impacts of climate change. We are still relying on our hopes of getting external loans to fight climate change. The recently appointed heat officer said Dhaka's green coverage must be expanded. However, allowing fiscal resources to that end is of paramount importance," he said.

"We ought to augment the budget for a Climate Trust Fund, which we did not. We keep discussing the impacts of climate action and the next course of action but there is

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2 killed in Jatrabari road accidents

STAR REPORT

Two persons were killed and two others injured in two separate road accidents in Dhaka's Jatrabari area early yesterday.

The deceased are Selim, 30, a bus driver of Somoy Paribahan, and Miraz Mia, 25, a tailor.

Selim, along with another driver Saddam, was returning to his Shanir Akhra home on a rickshaw after parking their buses in Chittagong Road area.

As the rickshaw reached Hashem Road, a bus of Thikana Paribahan hit it, injuring the two passengers and the rickshaw-puller, said Sajib Islam, another bus driver of Somoy Paribahan.

They were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where Selim died in the morning, he said.

Meanwhile, Miraz suffered critical injuries after a speeding bus hit him as he was crossing a road in Chourasta area. He was rushed to DMCH where doctors declared him dead, said police.

Sub-inspector Kamruzzaman of Jatrabari Police Station, said drivers of both buses fled.

BNP to hold 'youth rally' from June 17

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three associate and front organisations of the BNP -- Chhatra Dal, Jubo Dal, and Swachchasebak Dal -- will conduct a "youth rally" in six districts to promote their "Youth Rally to Save the Country" slogan.

Sultan Salahuddin Tuku, president of Jubo Dal, made the announcement at a press conference at party's Nayapaltan headquarters yesterday.

The first rally will be held on either June 10 or 11 in Chattogram, Bogura on June 17, Khulna on July 7, Barisal on July 15, and Sylhet on July 22 and the last one will be held in Dhaka on July 29.

"We will conduct youth rallies in six locations across the country. In the preceding five years, over four billion young people were unable to vote. Today, those who do not participate in Awami League politics are unable to obtain employment. In such a circumstance, we will urge the youth to come forward to save the nation," he said.

Tuku said the youth will be encouraged to establish the rule of law in the country as there is no rule of law in the country.

"The main goal of the youth rally is to make the young generation aware of the injustice and corruption of the current Awami League government."

A budget without any direction

Says TIB in statement on national budget 2023-24

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday said the proposed national budget for 2023-2024 has no direction and lacks a directive on fighting graft and money laundering as well as addressing governance and justice.

In a statement, the anti-graft watchdog said Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal in his budget speech did not recognise graft and money laundering as reasons behind the ongoing economic crisis, widening inequality and decline in foreign exchange reserve.

His speech has sent the "idea of governance and justice to exile", reads the statement.

TIB said the Covid-19 pandemic and the global crisis that emerged from the Russia-Ukraine war have undoubtedly impacted Bangladesh's economy negatively.

However, the key challenges for sustainable and inclusive development

in the country are unabated corruption and money laundering. It is not clear how a budget that lacks a directive to address these issues can prove to be beneficial to anyone. It is also unlikely that the budget will contribute to the wellbeing of the masses, said TIB.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said the finance minister, in his speech, has announced to enforce strict regulations on imports, continue to monitor letter of credit (L/C) openings and stability of the exchange rate to restructure the foreign exchange reserve and mitigate the dollar crisis.

"However,... [the minister] nonchalantly overlooked the issue of graft and continuous money laundering that have plagued the country's economy," he said.

It is not unknown to the government that the country's gross domestic product (GDP) could have been two to three percent more if corruption could be controlled even to a moderate extent, said Iftekharuzzaman.



Demanding that the human rights and fundamental demands of the Dalit community be met, activists came out with a procession in front of Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN