



Hasina thanks AL, people for standing by her

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday in parliament expressed gratitude to her party members and people of the country for their unwavering support.

Hasina said this while referring to her return to the country from the US via London on May 7, 2007 during the army backed 1/11 government.

The PM said at that time many advisers of the caretaker government also called her and told her not to come back.

"Some even threatened us. It was said that I would

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Fishers lay nets in the Halda, the lone natural source of carp breeding in South Asia, to collect fish eggs. *Inset*, a man shows off his haul. Brood fish in the river released sample eggs -- indicating full spawning -- at several points of the river yesterday. Normally, they release eggs during the last week of April or the beginning of May every year. The photos were taken in Chattogram's Hathazari area. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN



Govt taking steps to speed up trials

Says chief justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan yesterday said only 2,000 judges are shouldering responsibility for disposing of more than 40 lakh cases.

He also said litigants often get burdened with the cost of moving the cases, which is a reality.

He was speaking at an event organised on the occasion of launch of Bangladesh Television's legal awareness programme, supervised by Justice Krishna Debnath, a former judge of the Appellate Division.

"Many times, it takes ten to twelve years for the final disposal of a case..." said the chief justice.

Hassan, however, said the government has taken various steps to speed up the justice system in the last decade. In particular, the programme for providing legal aid to the poor has been implemented, he said.

Speaking at the event, Law Minister Anisul Huq said the government has also enacted the "Legal Aid Act" with an aim to provide legal aid to the marginalised.



PDB owes Tk 33,000cr to power companies

Nasrul Hamid tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) owes power generation companies, both public and private (including Indian companies), Tk 33,108.99 crore.

State Minister for Power Nasrul Hamid placed this information in parliament yesterday. He said government power generation and transmission companies will get Tk 10,391.43 crore from PDB till February while private ones will get around Tk 15,000 crore till February.

The power generation plants set up in joint ventures will get Tk 2,417 crore from PDB. The state minister also said different companies including Adani will get Tk 5,297 crore from PDB for exporting electricity to Bangladesh.

Asked BTRC to close down all illegal news portals

Arafat tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Information and Broadcasting Mohammad Ali Arafat told parliament yesterday that his ministry has requested BTRC to close down all unregistered online portals.

He said this while replying to a supplementary question from Awami League MP Feroz Ahammed Shapon from Satkhira-1.

Shapon said Bangladesh is flooded with yellow journalism. "Is there any control measure in this regard?" In response, Arafat said his ministry is working very closely on these issues.

He said journalists are saying that those who practice this type of yellow journalism have actually become a cause of loss for professional journalists.

"This demand is from the journalist community itself," he said.

Dengue can be deadlier this year

Warn experts, call for collective action and increased awareness

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The dengue situation in the country may worsen this year, as the number of patients and fatalities continues to rise, experts said at a programme yesterday.

Speakers said the number of dengue cases reached 3,21,179 in 2023, with 1,705 deaths reported -- a record in the country's history.

From January to May 6 this year, a total of 2,323 people have already been infected with dengue, surpassing the 1,066 cases recorded during the same period last year.

Alarmingly, 23 people have died in the first four months of this year, while 11 deaths were reported during this period in 2023, they added.

"The trend we are seeing this year regarding dengue cases and deaths, is not good for us," said Kabirul Bashar, professor of Medical Entomology at Jahangirnagar University's Faculty of Biological Sciences, at the programme.

A group of doctors, teachers, and health experts were speaking at the event titled "Dengue Preparedness: Where are we in 2024?" jointly organised by BRAC and UHC Forum, a coalition of multi-skilled professionals, at the capital's Cirdap auditorium.

Presenting videodocumentation, Kabirul said dengue has increased in villages and research is needed on whether Aedes mosquitoes have gained greater virus transmission

ability, making it harder to control the outbreak.

"If it gains vectorial capacity, it will become more difficult to control," he said.

He recommended a search-and-destroy model with 285 entomology technicians visiting Dhaka north households to prevent an outbreak.



With no treatment or vaccine at our disposal, testing and mosquito control are key to dealing with dengue.

MALA KHAN
Director general of BRICM

Mala Khan, director general of Bangladesh Reference Institute for Chemical Measurement (BRICM), said Bangladesh could soon be identified as an epidemic zone by the WHO due to the rising infection and death rates.

"With no treatment or vaccine at our disposal, testing and mosquito

control are key to dealing with dengue," she said.

Meanwhile, BRICM, under the Ministry of Science and Technology, has developed a rapid antigen kit that enables home testing for dengue, she revealed.

Sheikh Daud Adnan, director of Communicable Disease Control Program at the DGHS, said hospitals are prepared to handle dengue cases. "We have already instructed doctors at upazila levels not to refer patients to the capital unless absolutely necessary," he said.

Akramul Islam, senior director of Health and Humanitarian Crisis Management at BRAC, said the organisation will engage communities through awareness campaigns and provide proper information on dengue prevention.

Health Minister Samanta Lal Sen urged collective action and increased awareness to prevent further loss of life.

"My mother died after two days of dengue fever. I understand the pain. So I have concerns about dengue. I lost my mother to dengue; no one else should," he said as a chief guest.

Presiding over the event, Hossain Zillur Rahman, convener of the UHC Forum, said, "We are not adequately prepared. This year, we need to be more proactive. We are having a discussion about district and division level dengue prevention."

Fate of 65,000 pilgrims still uncertain

Saudi authorities extend visa application deadline till May 11; hajj flights begin

RASHIDUL HASAN

Saudi Hajj and Umrah Ministry yesterday extended the visa application deadline by four more days -- till May 11, amid the uncertainty about getting visas for around 65,000 Bangladeshi hajj pilgrims.

The Religious Affairs Ministry on Monday sent a letter to Saudi authorities requesting them to extend the deadline as private hajj agencies couldn't ensure the visas within the deadline, May 7.

Earlier, Saudi authorities extended the deadline by eight days as private hajj agencies failed to complete the visa process of most pilgrims within the then deadline of April 29.

Despite extending the deadline twice, it is still uncertain whether all pilgrims will get visas, as many private agencies have yet to rent houses in KSA, which is mandatory for applying for visas.

Amid the situation, hajj flight operations by Biman Bangladesh Airlines, Saudia and Flynas will begin today.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate this year's hajj programme on May 8.

A total of 85,107 Bangladeshi people are scheduled to perform hajj this year, of which, 80,688 are under private hajj management.

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Awareness key to prevent thalassemia

Speakers tell event marking World Thalassaemia Day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sisters Zaheratul Islam Athoi and Zahina Islam Zyma remain sick for most of the year as they are thalassaemia patients.

Thalassaemia is a genetic blood disorder, passed from parents to children.

"We were diagnosed with thalassaemia during our early childhood. Almost every month we have to have regular blood transfusions as we suffer from anaemia," said Athoi.

To prevent thalassaemia, all couples must get a blood test before getting married or planning for a child.

PROF MOHAMMAD SHAHIDULLAH
Child specialist

The sisters shared their experience at a seminar held in the auditorium of Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute (BSHI) yesterday.

Mahfuzur Rahman, father of Tawhid Hossain, 11, who is a thalassaemia patient, said, "The treatment for this disease is so expensive, I cannot afford it."

To raise awareness, World Thalassaemia Day is observed by Thalassaemia International Federation (TIF) on May 8 every year.

People suffering from thalassaemia produce little to no haemoglobin, resulting in anaemia which causes tiredness, shortness of breath, and exposes patients to a variety of ailments, said Prof Md Selimuzzaman, Secretary General of Shishu Hospital Thalassaemia Center.

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Will Altadighi come back to life?

Over 1,000 trees felled without assessment, dredging work to revive waterbody on

ANWAR ALLI, Rajshahi

According to folklore, King Vishwanath dug a lake to address the people's drinking water problem, prompted by his queen's dream. The queen's stipulation was that the lake should be dug as far as she could walk barefoot. When the queen continued walking over a mile, the king's ministers intervened fearing a near impossible lake digging project. They stopped her by sprinkling alta (red dye) on her feet,

claiming she was bleeding.

The king then dug the lake from the starting point to where the queen stopped. And that's how the lake -- Altadighi -- came into existence in Naogaon around the 13th century. Another version suggests it was actually the king's mother, not his wife, who inspired the digging and that the lake was dug during the 10th century.

The lake spans 42.81 acres with dimensions of 1.20km length and 0.20km width. Over time, it began to

dry up, with the water level dropping as low as three feet.

Surrounding the lake, trees of various species were planted on 652.37 acres of land.

The Forest Department declared 264.12 hectares around the lake as "Altadighi National Park" in December 2011.

Additionally, 17.34 hectares of forest adjacent to the park were designated as a Special Biodiversity Conservation Area by the forest department on

June 9, 2016. The forest was home to numerous species of wildlife.

Despite not being at its former grandeur, the lake used to be adorned with shapla flowers. However, things changed three years ago when the forest department initiated a Tk 6.49 crore project, funded by the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund, to restore and conserve biodiversity at Altadighi.

The project, titled "Restoration and conservation of biodiversity

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SEXUAL HARASSMENT DU teacher Naadir Junaid suspended

DU CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka University authorities have suspended Prof Naadir Junaid of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism for his alleged involvement in sexual harassment of a female student.

The case has been forwarded to the university's Anti-sexual Harassment Cell for further investigation, asking it to submit a report within two months.

The decisions came from a syndicate meeting held yesterday, with Vice Chancellor Dr ASM Maksud Kamal in the chair, said one of its members.

On March 4, a fact-finding committee was formed over the allegation of sexual harassment against Naadir. It was asked to submit a report within 14 days.

The suspension order came as the committee

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