

DURGA PUJA Tarique calls for harmony, vigilance

UNB, Dhaka
BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday urged the law enforcement agencies to remain alert so that no attempt is made to create communal tensions or disrupt security during celebrations of Durga Puja. In a video message marking Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of Bangalee Hindu community, he also said every citizen should play a role in protecting the safety and dignity of fellow citizens. "On the occasion of Durga Puja, I extend my greetings to the Hindu community," Tarique said. He said people of all faiths in Bangladesh have been practising their religions and celebrating their respective festivals with harmony for generations. "This represents the eternal religious and social values and cultural beauty of Bangladesh."



A devotee praying to Goddess Durga at the Khamarbari puja mandap on the sixth day of the Durga Puja festival (Shashthi) yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Delayed diagnosis putting dengue patients at risk

HELEMUL ALAM

Mainuddin, 40, a resident of Abdullahpur, was admitted to Sir Salimullah Medical College Mitford Hospital in critical condition last Monday.

He had been suffering from fever since September 17 but neither consulted a doctor nor underwent a dengue test.

"We took him to a local doctor when his belly became swollen. After diagnosing dengue, the doctor advised us to take him to Mitford Hospital," said his wife, Lutfa Akter.

She admitted they had not ensured he took enough fluids, which doctors say is crucial in dengue management. "His platelet count was 25,000 when he was admitted, and later dropped to 10,000. By Thursday morning, it had risen to 24,000," she said.

Akter also said the family had already spent Tk 30,000 on blood transfusions and tests. "He had to receive four bags of blood – three white cell and one red cell transfusion," she noted.

Mainuddin, who runs a small business, said he was relieved to see progress. "I hope to fully recover soon so I can repay the loans we had to take from relatives during this illness," he said.

Another patient, Mohammad Ibrahim, 27, of Bikrampur, has been receiving treatment at Mitford since September 22, though he had been suffering from fever at least three days before admission.

"My platelet count fell to 65,000 at first, then down to 25,000. Now it is 30,000," said Ibrahim, who is also experiencing liver complications due to dengue.

The case of 13-year-old Tasim Saifee of Laxmibazar was even more severe, as he went eight days without being diagnosed despite having a fever.

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If a dengue patient arrives at the hospital in the final stage, even if measures are taken, they are usually not effective.

Prof Md Abu Jafor
Director general of DGHS

Ensure citizens' right to info, form commission immediately

Speakers urge govt at seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Civil society members at a seminar yesterday urged the government to immediately form a new Information Commission through a transparent process.

They said most applications under the Right to Information (RTI) Act are now being rejected at the lower levels due to the absence of commissioners.

"There may not be any other precedents of two major commissions remaining vacant for over a year – the Human Rights Commission and the Information Commission," said Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh.

He added that while the interim government had taken many positive steps, it set a bad example by failing to address this issue.

The seminar, titled "Right to Information Act: A Contextual Review", was organised by the Right to Information Forum at a hotel in Dhaka, marking the International Day for Universal Access to Information.

Iftekharuzzaman said the RTI Act is a strong tool against corruption but has limitations.

"Section 7 of the act excludes certain institutions from its jurisdiction. There should instead be some clear benchmarks defining national interest," he said.

He also called for the private sector and political parties to be brought under the act.

Badiul Alam Majumder, head of the Election Reform Commission, said political parties should

be brought under the act for transparency.

If political parties are not transparent and democratic, the establishment of democracy in the country will remain a distant dream, he added.

He also said RTI played a vital role in uncovering irregularities in the 2018 national election by revealing centre-wise vote data.

"Only people's participation in government can ensure good

they do not know where to access information. "We must fix this. Many are working, but we have no clear idea who is monitoring or where the feedback is going," he added.

He stressed the need for monitoring and research to ensure progress.

Susan Vize, head of office and country representative to Unesco Dhaka, said there should be clear guidelines on grounds for rejecting RTI applications.

She also suggested a citizen forum to review the commission's decisions, as going to the High Court is beyond most people's reach.

Presiding over the seminar, Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, said the right to information is in a precarious state. "The commission has been ineffective and almost non-existent for the past one and a half years," she said.

She added, "The government we overthrew had no accountability. We want a government that will guarantee citizens' constitutional, fundamental, and information rights. The interim government had a responsibility to lay the foundation for such a system."

In the keynote paper, Ruhi Naz, deputy director of Research Initiatives Bangladesh, said the RTI Act remains powerful on paper but underused in practice due to weak institutional independence, secrecy, and administrative barriers.

Ananya Raihan, chairperson of iSocial, said NGOs using public funds must also make their information accessible.

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Iftekharuzzaman
Executive director, TIB

governance, and the RTI is the means to achieve that," he said.

Speaking as chief guest, Mahmudul Hossain Khan, secretary to the Chief Adviser's Office, said many government offices fail to follow standard citizen charter formats, making them difficult for ordinary people to understand.

He said citizens often spend entire days moving between offices because

Case filed over Tongi warehouse fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Gazipur

A case was filed over the recent fire incident at a chemical warehouse in Tongi's Sahara market, accusing four named persons and some 15-20 others yesterday.

Abdul Mannan, deputy assistant director of fire service, Dhaka (Zone-3), filed the case with Tongi East Police Station.

The named accused in the case are: Ismail Hossain, 42, owner of Famous Chemical Warehouse; Solaiman, 35; Tajul Islam, 40; and Rakib, 32.

On September 22, a fire broke out at the tin shed warehouse. As firefighters battled the blaze, a sudden explosion rocked the building, injuring multiple fire service personnel.

Three Tongi fire service personnel – Khandakar Jannatul Naem, Shamim Ahmed and Nurul Huda died while undergoing treatment. A worker of a nearby shop also died from burn injuries.

Some ballot papers printed in Nilkhet

Says DU VC, denies possibility
of rigging in Ducsu polls

DU CORRESPONDENT

Acknowledging that some ballot papers for the recent Ducsu election were printed in Nilkhet, Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan yesterday ruled out any possibility of vote rigging with those papers.

"There is no opportunity for anyone to carry it in their pocket to the centre or use it," the VC said.

Printing the ballot papers in Nilkhet "did not compromise the integrity of the election process", he said at an emergency press conference at the university, as allegations of irregularities in the voting have been raised.

He, however, said, "We are embarrassed by this situation because the associate vendor failed to inform us on time."

The VC said printing ballots – regardless of its location – and cutting them are the initial steps of the process. "The security phase involves at least five layers, and in some cases, six."

The Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducsu) and hall union elections were held on September 9. Since then, panels backed by Chhatra Dal, Bangladesh Gonotantrik Chhatra Sangsad, leftist groups, and independents have alleged irregularities and partiality, pointing to the ballots being printed at an unsecured location in Nilkhet.

Niaz Ahmed said, "The location or quantity of ballot paper printing does not affect election fairness. Several steps must be completed to fully prepare ballot papers for voting."



Dhaka South City Corporation carrying out drainage work without any safety barriers or warning signs in Kakrail, right next to Willes Little Flower School and College. This poses a risk of major accidents for vehicles and pedestrians passing through the area daily. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Steps to be taken over assault in NY Says foreign affairs adviser

BSS, New York

Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain has said the government will take appropriate action regarding recent politically motivated assault on political leaders in New York upon their return to Bangladesh from the United States.

"Four advisers and political leaders sat together, and we had a long discussion to this end," he said while responding to a question from a non-resident Bangladeshi at an event in New York on Saturday.

Touhid said they discussed what action can be taken and how it will be taken.

Bangla Academy postpones Ekushey Book Fair

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangla Academy has postponed the Ekushey Book Fair, which was scheduled to be held this December.

The academy issued a notice in this regard last night, signed by its Director General Prof Mohammad Azam.

According to the notice, following a decision by the home ministry, the fair should be organised after the upcoming national election. Based on the views of the Bangladesh Book Publishers and Sellers Association and other stakeholders, the previously fixed date for the fair has been postponed.

A new date will be set later after consultations with publishers and other participants, it said.

Earlier, on September 18, the Bangla Academy had announced that the fair would be held from December 17 to January 17, taking into account the national election and the holy month of Ramadan.

Govt unveils 3 Hajj packages

Minimum cost set
at Tk 4.67 lakh

UNB, Dhaka

The government has announced three official Hajj packages, setting the lowest cost at Tk 4.67 lakh and the highest at Tk 6.90 lakh.

Religious Affairs Adviser AFM Khalid Hossain disclosed the details at a press briefing at his ministry yesterday.

Hajj Package 1 (Special), which will cost Tk 6.90 lakh, offers accommodation within a maximum distance of 700 metres from the outer courtyard of the Haram Sharif in Makkah, and in the Markazia (Central) area of Madinah, said the adviser.

Accommodation will be shared by a maximum of five people per room with six attached bathrooms. Pilgrims will stay in tents located in Zone 2 in Mina, with meals provided by the Moallem, along with D+ category services in Mina and Arafah.

AFM Khalid said Hajj Package 2 is slightly less expensive, estimated at Tk 5.58,881, and pilgrims will be accommodated within 1.2-1.8 km of the outer courtyard of the Haram Sharif in Makkah and in the Markazia area of Madinah.

A maximum of six people will share each room, with attached bathrooms, he said.

Tents will also be set up in Zone 2 in Mina with meals provided by the Moallem and D category services in Mina and Arafah, he added.

Room upgrades to 2- or 3-seaters and short-stay package options in Makkah and Madinah are available under Packages 1 and 2, subject to payment of additional charges.

The usual stay in Saudi Arabia for pilgrims will range from 35-47 days.

However, for short-stay packages, the duration will be between 22-30 days.