

DHAKA

Political culture lacks tolerance for dissent
Says TIB chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
The country's political culture lacks tolerance, compassion, and respect for differing opinions, said Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB), yesterday.
"Tolerance, compassion, and respect for differing opinions – the core values of debate – are almost absent from Bangladesh's political culture," he said while addressing the opening ceremony of the Inter-University Anti-Corruption Debate Competition 2025.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Mistakes were certainly made: Hasina

Three Indian news outlets publish written interviews

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Three major Indian news outlets – The Hindu, Hindustan Times and The New Indian Express – published written interviews with ousted Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday.

The interview published in The Hindu newspaper cites Hasina as saying, "Mistakes were certainly made by security forces while responding to the uprising."

She also told the newspaper that she has not called upon her supporters to boycott the next

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

ROAD EXPANSION WORK AT RESERVE FOREST

RHD cuts nine hills without approval

SIFAYET ULLAH, *Ctg*

The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) has razed nine hills in Chattogram's Ramgarh-Sitakunda reserve forest area to expand a road without obtaining permission from the authorities.

The hill cutting, which began in May 2023, has flattened hilltops and removed around 10.14 lakh cubic feet of soil.

"The project authority only received approval for the Terms of Reference (ToR) to prepare the Environmental Impact Assessment report but went ahead with hill cutting and construction in violation of the law," said Jamir Uddin, director of the Department of Environment's Chattogram regional office.

The large-scale hill razing comes several months after the Forest Department estimated that around 4,630 mature trees would have to be felled and about 15,500 saplings relocated from the Ramgarh-Sitakunda Reserve Forest for the project. The RHD also took 90 acres of reserve forest land to expand the road.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

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JAMIR UDDIN
Director of the Department of Environment, Chattogram

According to project documents, the 38-kilometre road from Baraiyarhat to Ramgarh is being widened from 18 feet to 38 feet, along with the construction of nine bridges and 24 culverts, at a cost of Tk 1,107 crore.

Project officials said the expansion, scheduled for completion by December 2025, aims to ease the transport of goods from Chattogram port to India via the

newly inaugurated Ramgarh land port in Khagrachhari.

The Ramgarh-Sitakunda reserve forest is home to 25 species of mammals, 123 species of birds, eight species of reptiles, and 25 species of trees, according to the Forest Department.

The project authority received ToR approval from the DoE on April 28, 2022, and applied for the EIA on December 3, 2024. However, without completing the EIA, 40 percent works of the project had already been carried out, according to an internal report by the DoE's Chattogram office.

When asked why the hills were cut without permission, project director and RHD Chattogram's superintendent engineer Zahid Hossain avoided a direct answer, saying, "We were forced to raze the hills to expand the road. We have received a notice from the Department of Environment. A hearing has already been held, and we are responding to their queries."

A recent visit by this correspondent found hills being cut at more than 10 points from Baraiyarhat to Heyanko, with ongoing construction in six of those locations.

Kamal Hossain, a supernumerary professor

at the Institute of Forestry and Environmental Science at Chittagong University, said, "The unregulated cutting of hills severely destabilises the soil and disrupts the forest's natural drainage and microhabitats, putting the Ramgarh-Sitakunda Reserve Forest ecosystem at serious risk."

Cutting hills without permission violates Sections 6(a) and 12 of the Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995.

The DoE report recommended filing cases and seeking environmental compensation against the project authority and the contractor for violating environmental laws. The report, submitted in April, noted that six of the hills were razed largely in the Gheramara area.

DoE Director Jamir Uddin said a hearing had already been held regarding the hill cutting.

"RHD has disagreed with us on some points, so we have decided to conduct another field visit. However, there is no doubt that the road was built by cutting hills without permission. Once all procedures are complete, we will take action against those responsible according to the law," he said.

Dengue cases overwhelm Suhrawardy hospital

HELEMUL ALAM

Thirteen-year-old Mohammad Abdul, a resident of Chandpur, has been undergoing treatment in the dengue ward at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital since Thursday, as his parents felt uncomfortable continuing treatment at the overcrowded district hospital.

"My son had been suffering from high fever since November 1. We took him to Chandpur District Hospital on November 5, where he was diagnosed with dengue," said Anowara Begum, Abdul's mother, yesterday.

She said although her son was admitted to the hospital, the overcrowded conditions made it difficult for him to receive proper care. "That is why we brought him to Suhrawardy hospital, travelling by launch, hoping for better treatment," she added.

"He is now feeling well, and we hope he will recover soon," Anowara said.

Giti Akhtar, a resident of Savar, was admitted to the hospital on November 6, as her family did not trust the local hospitals or clinics. She had been suffering from severe pain in her legs and body.

"I am now suffering from pneumonia along with dengue and was shifted to this ward a few days ago," said Giti.

Like Abdul and Giti, many dengue patients from outside Dhaka are coming to medical college hospitals in the capital in search of better treatment – a move that sometimes puts them at even greater risk.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), at least 307 dengue patients have died, while 76,514 others have been hospitalised so far this year. Of these, 53,986 hospitalised patients are from outside Dhaka, while 197 of the reported deaths occurred in the capital.

Among the deaths, the highest number – 148 – were recorded at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, followed by 48 under Dhaka North City Corporation and 41 in the Barishal division.

HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, said patients often arrive late mainly due to delayed decision-making and referrals from outside Dhaka.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

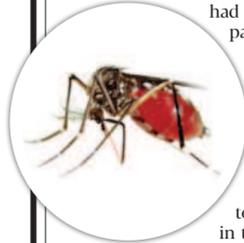


PHOTO: STAR

SM Sultan museum lies in neglect

Unfinished Sultan Ghat, poor upkeep frustrate visitors



PARTHA CHAKRABORTTY,
Bagerhat

The SM Sultan Memorial Museum in Narail, which preserves the works and memories of the renowned artist, now lies unprotected and neglected.

Construction of a two-storey, boat-shaped jetty known as Sultan Ghat on the bank of the Chitra river also remains incomplete due to a lack of funds.

Located on the bank of the Chitra, the museum houses 23 original paintings by SM Sultan and 51 replicas of his works. It now faces serious problems with

maintenance amid staff shortages. "Visitors from home and abroad come here throughout the year, especially during long holidays, but they leave disappointed as their experience remains incomplete due to the lack of proper facilities and curation," said artist Nayon Baidya.

Tandra Mukharjee, curator of the museum, said, "We are facing an acute manpower shortage. We have already applied for additional staffs. Once this problem is solved, we will be able to serve more visitors."

Visitors and locals have also demanded the completion of Sultan Ghat's construction, which began in June 2018 but came to

a halt due to fund constraints. Seven years on, the jetty now lies overgrown with weeds and bushes. "The present condition of Sultan Ghat reflects the utter neglect of the importance of preserving the great painter's memories," said Noor Alam Khan, a teacher from Bagerhat.

Wazir Ali, headteacher of Narail Collectorate School, said, "In Sirajganj, we have Rabindra University, and in Mymensingh there is the National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam University. We strongly demand that a university be established in Narail in honour of SM Sultan and to improve education in this region."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



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