



A man rides his bicycle nearly 20-25 kilometres from the Arani area of Charghat upazila to Rajshahi city, carrying mats made from date palm leaves. These mats are in high demand in the city and sell for Tk 200-220 each. The photo was taken from Kendriya Udyan in Rajshahi recently.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

SHER-E-BANGLA MEDICAL COLLEGE HOSPITAL

Severe staff shortage hampers services

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

The Sher e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) in Barishal, one of the major healthcare facilities in the country's southern region, is struggling to maintain service quality amid severe infrastructural limitations and acute manpower shortages.

Hospital records show that only 86 employees are serving against 237 approved management posts, while fewer than half the required number of doctors and officers are working against 448 sanctioned posts. The hospital now treats over 3,000 outpatients and about 2,500 inpatients daily.

"We are providing services to nearly 2,500 indoor patients with manpower barely enough to handle such a load," said a senior hospital official, requesting anonymity.

Established in 1968, SBMCH began with 396 beds. Over the years, it was upgraded to 500 beds and declared a 1,000-bed hospital in 2013, but without a corresponding rise in staff or infrastructure.

Following staff protests in July and August demanding better services, the hospital began repairing 95 malfunctioning machines, expanding facilities, and improving sanitation.

However, a recent visit to the children's ward revealed overcrowded conditions, with many young patients lying on floors, staircases, and corridors.

Alauddin Mia from Barishal's Chaumatha area said he had been staying on the hospital corridor with his two sick children for seven days due to the lack of beds.

"My children are diagnosed with pneumonia, and still they have to sleep outside for a week," he said.

Dr Uttam Kumar Saha, head of the paediatrics department, said 377 children were admitted on November 4 alone against only 70 available beds.



"Most are suffering from fever, respiratory infections, dengue, or diarrhoea," he said. "We cannot turn anyone away, even though we have space for only a fraction of them."

A similar situation was seen in the Coronary Care Unit, where cardiac patients lay on the floor for want of beds. The 22-bed post-operative ward was accommodating 54

patients.

"Those who can afford it often leave for treatment in Dhaka. Every month, we have to refer at least 30 patients elsewhere," said Nadira Begum, in charge of the post-operative unit.

Dr Sanjay Poddar, assistant registrar of the CCU, noted visible progress in cleanliness and management but said the patient load remains overwhelming.

"We managed to repair machines locally and improve sanitation, spending about Tk 9 lakh just on cleaning," said SBMCH Director Brig Gen Dr AKM Mashiul Munir Munim. "We've also installed around 100 fans and renovated over 100 toilets. We expect to get an MRI and an angiogram machine soon."

The SBMCH director said he had received "not even one percent support" from the health ministry despite repeated appeals.

"We have repeatedly requested the health ministry to approve more posts and expand our facilities, but we have yet to see any meaningful response," he said.

He said a proposal has been sent to the ministry seeking approval for new buildings and more than 100 machines.

"Due to space shortages, we are unable to accommodate all patients," Dr Munim said. "We are prioritising completion of the new cancer building so that several overcrowded units can be shifted there."

'Without Tk 10 to 20 crore, you cannot contest polls'

Says Asif Mahmud

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Local Government Adviser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain yesterday



said in Bangladesh's current political reality, contesting election requires around Tk 10-20 crore, making it difficult for people like him to participate amid the influence of black money.

"We have to think repeatedly whether to contest or not," he said while speaking at a roundtable organised by the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement at Jatiya Press Club.

Asif, also youth and sports adviser, said, "We have seen that those who talked most about reforms somehow shifted to anti-reform politics after August 5. We really don't understand what benefits this anti-reform politics brings for them. It certainly harms our country, but how does it benefit them? I fail to understand that."

He went on to say, "When it comes to democratic transformation, we seem to be going in circles. We talk about democratic change -- 300 members will go to the parliament. Among these 300, the question is, how many have Tk 20 crore?"

"In this reality, only those who have access to that 'black money' have the opportunity to participate in elections, or if someone gives it to others. Then you take money from someone to contest, and after being elected, you have to fulfil their interests," he said.

"If you take money from any businessman or anyone else to contest elections, then... that's why we have to think over and over whether to participate or not. If yes, then how? Will people vote without money? Or how realistic is it for us to hold elections under the existing system?" the adviser questioned.



Locals suffer as road remains dug up for 11 months

JAYDUL ISLAM, Netrakona

Residents of several villages in Durgapur upazila of Netrakona are suffering immensely as the five-kilometre road from Munshipara via Bhaduya to Krishnapur in Gaokandia union has remained dug up for nearly 11 months.

The roadwork, which began almost a year ago, was halted soon after initial excavation, leaving it completely unusable and in a deplorable state.

The prolonged delay in completing the road construction has left around 30,000 people from at least eight villages facing significant hassle with their daily commute, locals said.

According to the Local Government Engineering Department in Netrakona, a Tk 8 crore project was undertaken to pave the 5-km rural road. The contract was awarded in September last year to Messrs Hemayet Ali, with the deadline set for April 2026.



"The road has been abandoned soon after work began. We had thought the road would be constructed anew to make our commutes convenient. However, the situation has only worsened further," said Mustafa, a local resident.

"We can't take our paddy to the main market because of this road's present condition. We are being compelled to sell our produce locally at a lower price," said Rahim Uddin, a local farmer.

Md Azad Rahman, a representative of the construction firm, said, "Since the beginning of the project, we have been facing a severe shortage of sand. As all government-approved sand quarries are closed, it has been impossible to procure sand. Even after trying to purchase private land for sand extraction, we faced local obstacles. Without a supply of sand, it's not possible to continue the work."

Contacted, Md Munirujjaman, upazila engineer of LGED in Durgapur, said, "The contractor initially began box-cutting work, but due to complications regarding sand procurement, the work was halted."

"We have sent multiple notices urging the contractor to resume construction work. A meeting was held on October 27 in this regard. We hope the work will be completed by next year," he added.

Youth gunned down in Khulna

UNB, Khulna

A youth was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Rahimnagar village under Naihati Union of Rupsa Upazila in Khulna on Thursday night, police said.

The deceased was identified as Sohel Hawlader, son of Rustum Hawlader of the village. He had been living abroad for a long time and returned to the country a few days back.

The incident occurred around 9:00pm on Thursday in the sand field of Manik Sardar in the village.

A Sabur Khan, OC (Investigation) of Rupsa Police Station, said that Sohel had left his house to buy bread and curd when he was attacked. He was hit by eight bullets fired by the assailants in different parts of his body.

Police said an operation is underway to determine the motive behind the murder and to apprehend those involved.

15 shops gutted in Ramgati upazila fire

UNB, Lakshmipur

At least 15 shops were gutted in a fire that broke out early yesterday at Alexander Bazar in Ramgati upazila of Lakshmipur.

The fire started around 3:00am, said Khokon Majumdar, station officer of Ramgati Fire Service.

According to locals, the blaze originated from an electrical short circuit at a grocery shop and quickly spread to adjacent shops.

On information, two units of the fire service rushed to the spot and, with the help of locals, managed to bring the fire under control after about two hours of frantic effort.

Shop owners estimated that the loss caused by the fire amounted to around Tk 50 lakh.

Train operations halted at 3 Narsingdi stations for 3yrs

JAHIDUL ISLAM, Narsingdi

Train operations have remained suspended at three railway stations in Narsingdi -- Amliganj, Srinidhi, and Ghorashal -- for the past three years due to an acute shortage of manpower, with posts for station masters and officials lying vacant. This has caused significant hardship to thousands of local people who depend on trains for their commute.



During a recent visit to Amliganj Railway Station, this correspondent found the platform dusty and deserted, with an eerie silence prevailing. A large padlock hung on the station master's office door, with a sign on the window reading "Station Closed".

Much of the equipment was in disrepair, while makeshift shops had started to emerge within the premises.

A similar scene was witnessed at

Srinidhi and Ghorashal stations. In particular, the closure of the Ghorashal station -- a regional hub of industrial activity -- has negatively impacted local businesses and transportation.

According to locals, trains no longer stop properly at these stations. Instead, they halt briefly on the main line for passengers to get on and off, which poses serious safety risks.

Locals also noted that with the station masters' posts lying vacant,



the stations have faced operational collapse, leading to theft and vandalism. On July 31 and August 1, 2022, electric motors were stolen from three signal lines at Amliganj station. Earlier, motors from both ends of the station had also been stolen. As a result, none of the signal lights are now functional.

Rafiqul Islam, 42, a resident of Amliganj, said, "Now that trains no

longer stop here, we have to travel to distant stations, wasting both time and money. The station is now filled with garbage and illegal shops due to prolonged closure. We urge the authorities to immediately appoint staff and reopen the station."

Mohammad Ali, 62, from Srinidhi, said, "I used to travel easily from here, but now that's no longer possible. Walking to a distant station is very difficult at my age. Sometimes I



skip important trips due to the inconvenience."

Contacted, Md Abdul Mannan, station master of Narsingdi Railway Station, said, "Amliganj, Srinidhi, and Ghorashal stations are closed due to existing manpower shortages. The matter has been reported to higher authorities. We hope the stations will be reopened soon once station masters and necessary staff are appointed."

Mistakes were certainly

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national election. "Let me be clear: I have not called for a boycott. The point I was making was that millions of Awami League voters will not vote at all if they are denied the chance to support their preferred choice," Hasina said.

"Whatever happens our campaign will be peaceful. The last thing Bangladesh needs is yet more violent upheaval."

Speaking to the Hindustan Times, the Awami League president -- whose party's activities remain banned in Bangladesh -- expressed gratitude to India for offering refuge.

"I am deeply grateful to the Indian people for providing me with a safe haven," she said. "The connections between our two countries are broad and deep. We pride ourselves on being India's reliable partner."

Addressing the ban on her party's activities, Hasina said, "As a party, we will continue to challenge this ban legally, diplomatically and peacefully to ensure that ordinary people retain their right to choose their representatives."

Regarding her role in the 2024 crackdown on protesters, during which the UN estimates say 1,400 people were killed, she said, "...Mistakes were certainly made by some members of the law enforcement in their handling of the violence."

"But to suggest that I was directing minute-by-minute tactical responses from the Prime Minister's Office is to fundamentally misunderstand how security forces work. I repeat, at no point did I authorise security

forces to fire on crowds," Hasina said.

However, The Daily Star's own investigations found that Hasina had personally authorised the use of lethal weapons. This newspaper had reported on a phone recording from July 18, 2024 where Hasina tells her nephew, former Dhaka South Mayor Fazle Noor Taposh, "I have given instructions, now I have given direct instructions; now they will use lethal weapons. Wherever they find them [protesters], they will shoot directly."

The ousted prime minister told The New Indian Express that Awami League "ardently wishes to participate" in the next national election.

"We have to break this cycle of parties either boycotting elections or being banned, because it undermines the legitimacy of the government," she added. "Bangladesh badly needs to hold a free, fair and inclusive election, so that the country can begin to heal and move towards reconciliation."

It should be pointed out that Hasina has been accused of disenfranchising millions of voters through holding elections without the participation of opposition parties. Ironically, her regime had summarily banned the Jamaat-e-Islami just days before her ouster in 2024.

Previously, Reuters, AFP, and the UK-based Independent had published written interviews with Hasina on October 29, marking the first time she spoke to international media since taking refuge in India.