



## Seven more die of dengue, 567 get hospitalised

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least seven dengue patients died while 567 others were hospitalised in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, among the deaths, three were reported from Dhaka South City Corporation area, two from Mymensingh division and one each from Chattogram division and Dhaka North City Corporation.

With the new deaths and cases, the total number of dengue-related deaths this year rose to 377, while total cases rose to 92,785.

Currently, 2,189 dengue patients are undergoing treatment at different hospitals across the country.

## ACC probing corruption allegations against DNCC administrator

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-Corruption Commission has launched a preliminary inquiry into allegations of abuse of power, irregularities, corruption, and bribery against Dhaka North City Corporation Administrator Mohammad Azaz.

The probe officially began yesterday, according to a letter signed by ACC Director Shita Rony, confirming that the agency has authorised the initial investigation.

A senior ACC official, seeking anonymity, also confirmed the development to The Daily Star.

ACC sources said the commission decided to look into the allegations after receiving multiple complaints.

Azaz was appointed administrator of DNCC by the interim government on February 12 this year for a one-year term.

Meanwhile, Local Government Adviser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan said the government would take action if the ACC finds evidence of wrongdoing.

He was speaking to reporters at the Secretariat.

Azaz told The Daily Star, "I have not received any official letter regarding the investigation yet. However, I welcome it. We will extend full cooperation during the investigation."

## Proper, timely nutrition key to healthier pregnancies

Prof Keith P West tells icddr's seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Early nutritional support may play a decisive role in improving pregnancy outcomes in settings where micronutrient deficiencies remain widespread, said Prof Keith P West of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health of USA, yesterday.

He emphasised that improving women's nutrition before conception is essential for healthier pregnancies and stronger infant outcomes.

Prof West was speaking at a seminar at icddr's Mohakhali office, marking the institution's 65th establishment anniversary. The seminar titled "A Half-Century's Journey of Nutritional Pursuit across Southern Asia" reflects on decades of scientific discovery and public health

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Pedestrians use this footbridge in the capital's Shahbagh area unaware of the dangerous hole on its walkway. Although some people have tried to cover or block it, the gap still poses a serious risk to anyone who might step into it. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## PURBACHAL PLOT SCAM

# 'Blatant disregard for legal provisions'

Court slams Rajuk, housing ministry for unlawful plot allotments

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

A Dhaka court has strongly criticised Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) and the Ministry of Housing and Public Works for continuous unlawful practices in public land allotment.

Judge Mohammad Abdullah Al Mamun of the Special Judge's Court-5 made the observations yesterday while delivering verdicts in three cases filed against 23 people, including deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, over irregularities in Purbachal plot allocation.

In its findings, the court said Rajuk had "persistently and wilfully" violated statutory rules and procedures for allotting public land.

"The chairman and senior officials knowingly disregarded mandatory requirements, failed to follow procedural safeguards, and processed applications in a manner designed to favour privileged individuals," said the judge.

The court noted that allotments consistently favoured the then prime minister and her family members, officials of the Prime Minister's Office, ministers, state ministers, MPs, senior ruling party leaders, bureaucrats, and other influential people.

"Such blatant disregard for binding legal provisions

undermines the Constitution, subverts lawful governance, and turns public resources into instruments of private advantage and political patronage," the judge added.

Addressing misuse of "special categories", the court said although the law recognises

### OBSERVATIONS

» 'Special categories' misused to bypass scrutiny

» Ministry failed to supervise Rajuk, allowed irregularities

### ORDERS

» Remove involved officials from decision-making roles

» Conduct forensic audit of all past allotments

» Introduce digital, transparent lottery system

» Recover illegally allotted plots, reallocate to landless citizens

certain limited exceptions, Rajuk repeatedly approved applications without proper documentation, scrutiny, or adherence to eligibility criteria.

These actions, it said, amounted to gross abuse of office and a betrayal of the constitutional trust

placed in the authority.

### FAILURE OF MINISTRY OVERSIGHT

The court said the Housing and Public Works Ministry failed in its statutory duty to supervise, regulate, and ensure lawful functioning of Rajuk.

"By allowing irregularities to flourish, exercising only nominal oversight, and tacitly endorsing unlawful practices, the ministry directly contributed to systemic violations," Judge Mamun said.

The ministry also improperly influenced Rajuk's statutory processes by issuing recommendations for plot allotments under "special categories", enabling further procedural violations and perpetuating elite capture, the court added.

"This constitutes deliberate abandonment of lawful oversight and institutional dereliction of duty," the verdict said.

### CORRECTIVE MEASURES ORDERED

The court also ordered that all officers involved in unlawful processing or approval of allotments be immediately removed from decision-making positions, pending departmental and criminal proceedings.

It directed a comprehensive forensic audit of all allotments from the relevant period, to be

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## BNP to hold 6-day programme from Dec 7

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP yesterday announced a six-day programme, titled "Plans to Build the Country", involving its wings and affiliated bodies, including Chhatra Dal, Krishak Dal, Ulama Dal, and Swachchhasebak Dal.

The programmes will run from December 7 to 13, with no event scheduled on December 12.

"Party acting chairman Tarique Rahman will join virtually as the chief guest at each of the six programmes," Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi told reporters at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan central office while announcing the schedule.

Rizvi said the announcement is part of BNP's ongoing organisational activities, adding that leaders and activists at all levels have been assigned responsibilities to carry out the initiatives.

According to a press release, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir will inaugurate Chhatra Dal's programme on December 7.

The following day, Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed will inaugurate another Chhatra Dal event.

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# Strictly enforce electoral code of conduct

EC tells law enforcement agencies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday directed law enforcement agencies to strictly enforce the electoral code of conduct from the first day of the campaign.

Security forces will be deployed nationwide in three tiers – static security at polling centres, mobile patrols across electoral areas, and a central reserve force for emergencies.

Regarding army deployment, EC officials said its magistracy powers have been extended until February 28 next year. "They will continue to exercise those powers," EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed said after a meeting with top law enforcement officials at the commission office.

The meeting was held ahead of the upcoming national election and referendum, both scheduled for the first half of February. The EC plans to announce the election schedule in the first week of December.

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin, four other commissioners, and senior officials from the home ministry, army, navy, air force, police, BGB, Ansar VDP, Coast Guard, Rab, and other agencies attended the meeting.

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# Make maternal survival a nat'l priority: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh must urgently address postpartum haemorrhage, convulsions, preterm labour and anaemia in pregnancy – the leading causes of maternal deaths – speakers said at a seminar in the capital yesterday.

They warned that without timely and accessible healthcare for all mothers, the country will struggle to reduce preventable maternal mortality.

Speakers said maternal survival must be treated as a national priority, calling for stronger health-system accountability, wider coverage of skilled birth attendance and guaranteed antenatal and postnatal care for every woman.

The seminar, titled "Media Orientation on Maternal and Newborn Health Situation in

### RECOMMENDATIONS

» Strengthen accountability across health system

» Ensure availability of skilled birth attendants

» Guarantee full antenatal, postnatal care

» Expand access to timely emergency care

Bangladesh and Postpartum Haemorrhage, Pre-eclampsia and Leadership Development Initiative", was organised by the Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Bangladesh (OGSB) at the BMA Conference Bhaban in Dhaka.

Presenting the keynote, Prof Farhana Dewan, immediate past president of OGSB, said safe motherhood is a fundamental right. "Healthy mothers and healthy babies must remain our primary goal," she said.

Citing the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2022-23, she said the country's total fertility rate is 2.3 and needs to fall to 1.7 by 2030. Contraceptive use stands at 64 percent, with a target of 70 percent. Neonatal and under-five mortality are at 20 and 33 per 1,000 live births, respectively.

With 35 percent of births still occurring

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The local administration re-excavates this illegally filled pond in Rajshahi city's Mollapara area to return it to its original state. A joint effort by the divisional commissioner, city corporation, Department of Environment, and police stopped the illegal activity.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

## PAY-GRADE REFORM

# Secondary, pry school teachers intensify protests

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Secondary teachers threatened a shutdown, while government primary teachers resumed a nationwide work abstention yesterday, as both groups pressed for long-pending pay-grade reforms.

Teachers under the Bangladesh Secondary Teachers' Association staged a sit-in at Shikkha Bhaban in the capital, warning of a full shutdown from Monday if their four-point demand is not met.

Their main demand is upgrading assistant teachers from the 10th to the 9th grade.

Protesting teachers said several government posts with "lesser responsibilities" had already been upgraded to Grade 9, but secondary-level assistant teachers were still being "overlooked".

Witnesses said many teachers gathered at the site yesterday morning, chanting slogans. They alleged long-standing discrimination and said previous movements had led to "no meaningful progress".

"This time, we will return to our institutions only after the demands are met," said one teacher.

### PRIMARY TEACHERS RESUME ABSTENTION

Meanwhile, primary school assistant teachers resumed their work abstention yesterday to push for their three-point demand, including pay-scale upgradation.

"We will not go to classes or take part in examinations until the government issues a notification meeting our

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