



Shekar Theke Shikhore, a monument with a 26-foot-tall sculpture of Bangabandhu, on the premises of Dhobakhola Coronation High School at Natiabari in Pabna's Bera upazila.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

NAGARBARI AND ‘MUJIB BANDH’

Pabna people’s fond memory of Bangabandhu

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, back from Nagarbari

As the nation observes the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the people of Pabna feel nostalgic because of his association with Nagarbari ferry terminal and ‘Mujib Bandh’, a flood control embankment along Padma and Jamuna rivers.

Shekar Theke Shikhore, a large monument with a 26-foot-tall sculpture of Bangabandhu, was inaugurated on February 2 in 2018, on the premises of Dhobakhola Coronation High School in Bera upazila’s Natiabari, six kilometres from Nagarbari ferry terminal.

A brief history of Bangladesh from the battle of Polashi to the 1971 Liberation War have been depicted in plaques set beside the monument.

Former lawmaker of Pabna-2 constituency Khandaker Azizul Haque Arzu contributed to making the monument.

“We demand establishing a museum here, so that locals as well as visitors from different areas can learn better about Bangabandhu,” said freedom fighter Fazlu Master.

There are also demands for taking initiative to keep alive the memory of Bangabandhu at other places associated with Bangabandhu.

On February 26 in 1972, Bangabandhu, then prime minister of independent Bangladesh, himself carried a pot of soil and put it at Bashantapur point of Nagarbari in Pabna’s Bera upazila, marking inauguration of the construction of a flood protection embankment on the Padma and the Jamuna rivers.

Locals named the 157.5-kilometre-long embankment ‘Mujib Bandh’, in fond memory of Bangabandhu.

“Once flooding by Padma and Jamuna rivers caused

damage to crops in vast areas of Pabna every monsoon. Before the 1970 elections, Bangabandhu pledged to make a flood control embankment on the two mighty rivers,” said Abdul Kader, chairman of Bera upazila parishad, also a witness of the day.

After the independence in 1972, Bangabandhu inaugurated construction of the embankment at Nagarbari, himself putting soil at Bashantapur point. Inspired by Bangabandhu, locals worked together to construct the huge embankment, which helps the farmers in Pabna to get crops three times a year,” he added.

“Nagarbari was the lone gateway of the northern districts in 60s and 70s. Bangabandhu travelled several times in Pabna and other northern districts for his political activities through Nagarbari ferry terminal. He held a rally for the historic Six-point demand in 1966 at Nagarbari ghat on his way to northern districts,” said Md Rafique Ullah, chairman of Puran Varanga union parishad in Pabna’s Bera upazila.

“Now there is no trace of the ferry terminal as the river changed its course. Most of the people of that time also passed away,” he said.

“Bangabandhu came to Pabna in 1948, 1952, 1954, 1964, 1966, and 1970 and addressed rallies at different places including Nagarbari, Pabna Town Hall and Ishwardi upazila to motivate people for joining movements for realising their rights,” said Dr Anwarul Islam, pro-vice chancellor of Pabna University of Science and Technology, also a researcher on Bangabandhu.

“After independence, he visited many places in Pabna in connection with important public affairs. It is our duty to preserve Bangabandhu’s memory at the institutional level for the future generation,” he said.



Police press charges

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the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate’s Court of Dhaka.

The IO also brought charges of assaulting and snatching of her mobile phone, wristwatch, and money.

According to the charge sheet, 16 people were made prosecution witnesses in the case, and 20 pieces of evidence were seized from different places, including the spot.

The IO said the accused matched the description the victim gave and “the biological evidence” reserved at the one-stop crisis centre of Dhaka Medical College Hospital also matched with the accused.

“The International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number of the lost mobile phone provided

by the victim also matched with the IMEI number of the phone recovered from the accused’s possession,” the IO mentioned.

The second-year student was raped and tortured while she was walking from Kurmitola bus stop to a friend’s house around 7:30pm on January 5.

After regaining consciousness around 10:00pm, she managed to make it to her friend’s house in Shewra. Later, her friend took her to DMCH around midnight.

The next day, the victim’s father filed a case with Cantonment Police Station accusing unknown people in this regard.

Rab on January 8 arrested 30-year-old Majnu from Shewra area and said he was a serial rapist and that he tried

to kill the DU student after raping her.

He was later placed on a seven-day remand.

On January 16, Majnu confessed that he committed the crime.

He told the magistrate that he was lying in wait for a victim that day. When he saw the girl walking from Kurmitola bus stop, he grabbed her from behind, gagged her, and took her to an isolated place nearby.

“I beat her up and raped her. But she was still able to escape,” Majnu said in his confessional statement, adding that he tried to strangle her and at one stage, she lost consciousness.

After rape, he took her watch, money, and mobile phone.

The rape incident sparked a firestorm of protests and condemnations across the country.

Biman slashes

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Mafidur Rahman, told this correspondent that CAAB used to earn about Tk 3 crore a day from HSA but now it earns about Tk 1 crore.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines in its latest decision suspended flights to Muscat after the government of Oman decided not to allow any Bangladeshi in due to the Covid-19 outbreak, said Tahera Khandaker, the carrier’s deputy general manager of public relations.

Earlier, Biman suspend flights to Dammam, Madina, Jeddah, Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, Kolkata and New Delhi in India, and Kuwait, Qatar and Kathmandu as the governments there decided to ban travel from Dhaka, added Tahera.

The national carrier is now operating flights to London, Manchester, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Bangkok. But flights to even these destinations have dropped.

Biman now flies to Kuala Lumpur 12 times a week instead of the usual 20, to Singapore five times instead of 14, and to Bangkok four times instead of 14, Biman sources said.

The carrier incurred a Tk 270 crore loss since February, said a top official of Biman.

Tahera said between February 28 to March 28, Biman was scheduled

to operate 914 international flights and carry 2,21,574 passengers. But the carrier could operate 584 flights and carry 1,22,963 passengers at best.

M Mohibul Haque, senior secretary at the civil aviation ministry, told The Daily Star that Biman is heading towards a serious financial crisis.

Apart from incurring losses due to suspension of flights, the national carrier was also losing money as it was carrying less freight and was earning a lot less from ground handling, Mohibul said.

If the situation does not improve in the coming months, Biman will be in difficulty to pay its 4,500 employees, of whom 3,329 are permanent, Biman officials said.

The airlines may have to seek financial assistance from the government, he said.

He also said unlike organisations of other sectors, Biman would not be able to recover the losses with extra effort and that was why the carrier is now trying to cut costs.

Global aviation industry may lose \$113 billion in sales if the coronavirus continues to spread, according to the International Air Transport Association.

Just three weeks ago, the IATA had been expecting lost sales in the range

of \$30 billion.

Airlines in Europe and Asia would bear the brunt of the pain, according to the IATA.

KSA detains

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winding down that campaign after 15 months, but the authorities later said they would start going after graft by ordinary government employees.

An anti-corruption body known as Nazaha tweeted late on Sunday that it had arrested and would indict 298 people on crimes such as bribery, embezzlement, and abuse of power involving a total of 379 million riyals (\$101 million).

Among those implicated are eight defence ministry officers suspected of bribery and money laundering in relation to government contracts during the years 2005-2015, and 29 interior ministry officials in the Eastern Province, including three colonels, a major general and a brigadier general.

Two judges were also detained for receiving bribes, along with nine officials accused of corruption at Riyadh’s Almaarefa University which resulted in severe damage to a building and caused deaths and injuries, Nazaha said.

Kurigram DC, 3 other officials

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A circular in this regard, signed by Senior Assistant Secretary AM Al Amin, was received by Kurigram Deputy Commissioner’s officer around 11:00am, reported our Lalmonirhat correspondent, quoting officials.

The three were attached to the public administration ministry, the circular read.

They were allegedly involved in torturing the journalist -- Ariful Islam, a correspondent of Bangla Tribune.

Early Saturday, a mobile court of Kurigram district administration, led by the three assistant commissioners, sentenced Ariful to one-year imprisonment after he was arrested from his home on charges of possessing narcotics.

After the arrest, Ariful’s family members claimed he was innocent and that he was being falsely implicated as he wrote against alleged corruption by the district administration, including DC Sultana.

Ariful was released on bail the next day.

After his release, the journalist alleged the raid on his home was

conducted at the DC’s instruction.

“You will be put in a crossfire. Your time is up. Recite the kalima.’ I thought they were taking me somewhere to kill me...”

These were the words of Ariful as he described being held and tortured allegedly by Senior Assistant Commissioner Nazim Uddin.

Senior Consultant (orthopaedic) Uttam Kumar Roy of Kurigram General Hospital said Ariful’s body bore multiple injury marks.

The incident was widely reported in the media, sparking outrage, especially among the journalist community.

Meanwhile, replying to a query, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said they were yet to receive any written complaint against an official of the Department of Narcotics Control over his alleged involvement in falsely implicating the journalist.

He, however, said the DNC was working to this end and would take action if the official was found guilty following an investigation.

“Law is equal for all,” he told reporters at his ministry office.

HC ASKS FOR RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

In another development, the High Court yesterday ordered the state to submit all the relevant documents over the conviction and sentencing of journalist Ariful Islam by a mobile court, reports BSS.

A High Court vacation bench comprising Justice Md Ashrafur Kamal and Justice Sardar Md Rashed Jahangir passed the order after holding hearing on a writ petition filed in this regard.

The court asked the state to submit the documents by March 23 and also asked the prosecution to inform it about the steps taken by the public administration ministry over the matter.

Senior lawyer AM Amin Uddin and Ishrat Hasan moved the writ before the court, while Deputy Attorney General Debashish Biswas appeared for the state.

The High Court on Sunday had sought a copy of the mobile court order and the list of people who were part of the mobile court raid, says BSS report.

Bangla Tribune Executive Editor Harun ur Rashid had filed the writ the same day.

Bangabandhu’s first birthday

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supplements, carry special articles and features on the life and activities of Bangabandhu.

Bangladesh Television telecasts an interview of Bangabandhu’s parents on this special occasion.

When Bangabandhu was in prison in Pakistan, his colleagues in Bangladesh government had declared this day a public holiday. But Bangabandhu in a statement says that he doesn’t think March 17 should be a holiday in the future. He however adds that March 17 this year shall be observed as a public holiday as a token of love and admiration for the great prime minister of India, Sreemati Indira Gandhi.

INDIRA GANDHI ARRIVES

Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi today flies into Dhaka to a hearty welcome carrying messages of goodwill and friendship of the people

of India for the friendly people of Bangladesh.

As her special twin-jet Rajhangshah rolls into the tarmac, loud applause welcomes the great friend of Bangladesh. Waiting to receive her were Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Begum Fazilatunnesa and their youngest son Russel, among others.

Addressing the biggest ever public meeting in Dhaka at the Suhrawardy Uddyan a few hours after her arrival, Indira Gandhi says that people of Bangladesh and India will be one in sharing the burden of humanity’s sufferings. They will together also continue the march in shaping their destinies and that both will live as good and friendly neighbours. “Our friendship and unity are based on an unshakable foundation,” she adds.

Bangabandhu in his speech at the programme declares that Bangladesh,

realised at a very high cost in terms of life and blood, believes in peaceful co-existence and malice to none. The entire Suhrawardy Uddyan shook to its depths with the full-throated affirmation from the mammoth gathering when Bangabandhu asks whether they support the Bangladesh-India friendship and are ready to take up arms to protect their freedom, which had been achieved through great sacrifice.

Representatives from the Bangladesh and Indian governments hold substantive talks at four levels during which various subjects, including trade relations, flood control, travel facilities, war crimes trial and the international situation in the subcontinent are discussed.

SOURCES: March 18, 1972 issues of Dainik Bangla, The Daily Ittefaq, Azad, Morning News, The Bangladesh Observer and Purbodesh.

Rise in dengue cases rings alarm

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He said they are seeing a high density of Aedes larvae at various wards of both city corporations -- indicating an alarming picture ahead of the dengue season.

On an average, the Breteau Index is now 10 to 12, whereas it was less than 10 last year around this time, said Kabirul.

The Breteau Index measures the number of positive containers per 100 houses inspected.

The authorities concerned will have to take advance steps right now to destroy breeding sources of Aedes mosquitoes to avert a situation like last year’s, he said.

“Mobilising people and involving them in cleaning activities is very important to control the breeding Aedes mosquitoes.”

Organisations like the Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) will have to ensure their members take necessary steps to destroy all breeding sources at their sites and do not give any scope for mosquitoes to breed, said Kabirul.

City corporations will also have to work against Aedes mosquitoes throughout the year, he added.

Entomologist Dr Manzur Chowdhury, former president of the Geological Society of Bangladesh, concurred that the number of dengue patients this year can be significant if authorities concerned do not take steps

to destroy breeding sites right away.

This is the right time to take all necessary measures as the spread of Aedes is still at a lower scale. But it will become tough to control when it spreads further during the rainy season, he warned.

The four-fold increase in the number of hospitalised dengue patients is an ominous sign, added Manzur.

DNCC Panel Mayor Jamal Mostafa said they are taking various measures, such as larviciding, adultciding, and applying malaria oil-B, as well as cleaning waterbodies to destroy mosquito breeding grounds.

He further said that from March 7 onwards, the DNCC has been monitoring mosquito-control activities by engaging 11 teams in a bid to curb both Culex and Aedes mosquitoes.

The teams have been monitoring mosquito-control activities in every ward and they will submit reports to the authorities concerned in this regard, added Jamal.

DNCC Health Officer Dr Md Emdadul Haque said they have been undertaking mosquito-control activities all year round.

“We also took necessary steps to destroy sources of Aedes mosquitoes after getting DGHS’s survey report.”

Apart from these, the DNCC is also taking various steps to raise awareness in this regard and holding advocacy meetings in all zones under its jurisdiction, he said.

The DNCC has also issued letters to various government and private organisations, such as REHAB, to take the necessary steps to destroy breeding sources on their premises, added Emdadul.

DSCC Chief Health Officer Brig Gen Sharif Ahmed said they are taking measures throughout the year to control Aedes mosquitoes as well as taking steps to address Culex mosquitoes when they breed between November and March/April.

Sharif said they have been continuing anti-mosquito drives and are trying hard to control the mosquito menace.

Another DSCC official said they conducted a crash programme to destroy Aedes mosquito hotspots following the DGHS survey.

Mayor Sayeed Khokon inaugurated a seven-day programme to begin on March 25 to destroy Aedes mosquito breeding sources identified by DGHS, said this official.

The DSCC also issued letters to various organisations like Rajuk, REHAB, DMP, WASA and BWDB to take necessary steps to destroy mosquito breeding grounds.

REHAB president Alamgir Shamsul Alamin said they have already issued letters to all of their members twice to take necessary steps to clean still or stagnant water and to undertake cleaning activities at their construction sites or project areas.

Three more infected

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Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases in Chattogram, and one facility in Cox’s Bazar would soon be equipped to test people for coronavirus. The tests are currently done only at the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research in the capital.

DGHS officials yesterday said they did not test as many people as they would like because they had been concerned about running out of testing kits and made “rational” use of available resources.

Contacted, Prof Azad said more kits sent by WHO would arrive from Dubai in two or three days. “We will then try to find out the actual number of patients in the country.”

Many officials said they fear that people who returned from affected countries may have infected others by not quarantining themselves properly.

Prof Azad held a meeting with WHO country representative to Bangladesh Dr Bardan Jung Rana at the DGHS office in the capital yesterday.

Dr Rana promised that WHO would assist Bangladesh in getting more kits and personal protective equipment (PPE) from China, Prof Azad said.

IN DARKNESS, AT RISK

Of the eight people tested positive, the first three have fully recovered, IEDCR Director Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora told reporters yesterday.

The IEDCR have so far tested a total

of 241 people. Prof Flora yesterday said the number of tests done was enough to get the actual picture.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Contacted, Prof Saif Ullah Munshi, chairman of virology department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said, “Testing 241 people is not enough to get the real picture. There is a need to routinely and randomly test people from different communities.”

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former regional advisor of WHO’s South East Asia region, said, “What happened in China, South Korea and other countries is an indication that there are 10-15 times more patients than reported.

“The government should take more drastic measures. We need strict monitoring to ensure proper quarantine. There should be arrangements to treat people at facilities and Intensive Care Units should be prepared. But our healthcare system is not ready for this. Even the most developed countries have not been able to do this. The only way is to lock down the whole country for some time.”

ARRIVALS DESPITE TRAVEL BAN

With 304 Bangladeshis, including the 95 from Italy and other European countries, a plane of Qatar Airlines arrived at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 6:48pm,

officials said.

The 95 were taken to Ashkona Hajj Camp in the city’s Uttara for health screening. The authorities will later decide whether to quarantine them at a facility or allow them to go home.

Sixty-eight of them came from Italy, Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman, chairman of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh, told The Daily Star.

The rest of the 209 passengers are from Qatar. They were allowed to go home and asked to be in self-quarantine at home for 14 days, said Dr Jahirul Islam, physician at the health desk of the airport.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Saturday said no one from Europe, except the UK, would be allowed to enter Bangladesh.

He also said all on-arrival visas would remain suspended for two weeks.

Asked about last night’s arrival, a CAAB official said Qatar Airways managed Bangladesh government’s permission through diplomatic means.

Other CAAB officials said the government gave the permission on humanitarian grounds.

CAAB chief Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman said he will issue a letter to Qatar Airways expressing his disappointment.

“We have verbally expressed our dissatisfaction to the country manager of Qatar Airways and he pledged not to repeat this,” he said.