



Abul Mansur's 28th death anniversary today

The 28th death anniversary of Abul Mansur Ahmad, a renowned litterateur, journalist and statesman of the sub-continent, will be observed today, says a press release.

The Abul Mansur Ahmad Memorial Committee has organised doa mahfil at Dhaka and Mymensingh on the occasion.

One of the greatest satirist of Bengali literature, Abul Mansur Ahmad was also a renowned politician, lawyer and a very powerful journalist. He was the editor of the Daily Krishak, Nabajug and Ittehad in undivided Bengal and a pioneer in progressive journalism.

A very successful politician, Abul Mansur Ahmad was the provincial education minister in the United Front cabinet under Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq and the central commerce and industries minister of the Awami League government of Prime Minister Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy. He was known for his strong stand in matters of interest of the then East Bengal.

His publications include great satires such as 'Aina', 'Asmani Purdah', 'Gulliverer Safar Nama' and 'Food Conference'. His works also include great writings on social and political history of Bengal. He has two autobiographical writings -- 'Atma Katha' (About myself) and 'Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar' (50 years of politics as I have seen it).

Abul Mansur Ahmad always propagated secularism in a manner unparalleled in the forties, fifties and sixties. His contribution towards opposition movement in the early days of Pakistan was extremely significant. He was one of the original leaders of Awami League.

He wrote about the language issue from early forties and contributed to the Language Movement as the editor of the Ittehad. He was the author of the famous Ekush Dafa (21-point programme) election manifesto of Jukta Front (a grand coalition of the three giants of his politics -- Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq, Moulana Bhashani and Shaheed Suhrawardy) in 1954 election through which the Muslim League was ousted from power. The Ekush Dafa was the first comprehensive articulation of the political, economic and cultural demands of the Bengalis of the then eastern part of Pakistan. For his political work, he suffered jail terms on several occasions during Gen. Ayub Khan's Martial Law in the late fifties.

The Bangla Academy has recently published three volumes of Abul Mansur's collected works. Three more volumes are under print.

Abul Mansur Ahmad was one of the greatest political personalities of Bangladesh who combined rare talents in three distinct fields -- politics, journalism and literary writings.

Construction of bridge over Ramna Lake opposed

Bss, Dhaka

Environment activists yesterday strongly opposed the plan for construction of a hanging bridge over the lake at Ramna Park in the city.

A meeting of the environment activists in front of the site for proposed bridge and road at Ramna Park urged the authorities concerned to discard plans for the new constructions, saying that those would damage continuity of the lake, pollute its water and destroy the beauty of the whole park.

Held under the banner of 'Save the Environment Movement' and 'Agrahi' early in the morning, the meeting was addressed by Movement Convener Abu Naser Khan with Agrahi President Mosaddek Ahmad Palash in the chair.

The meeting demanded expansion of the Ramna Lake by re-excavation of the filled up northern and southern parts, beautification by planting aquatic plants in the lake, planting of more environment-friendly trees on the banks, stopping commercial fish cultivation in the lake and not constructing any permanent structure in future in the park.

Include civil society groups in Saarc summit

Speakers tell press confce in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As civil society groups of Saarc countries represent the aspirations and opinions of their peoples, their voices should be heard in the Saarc summit, opined a group of researchers at a press conference in the city yesterday.

They also urged civil societies of other Saarc countries to make similar demands so that national governments take arrangements to accommodate civil society groups in the Saarc summit like European Union that usually accommodates and hears them.

The press conference was organised by Supra (Campaign for Good Governance) at Dhaka Reporters' Unity Auditorium ahead of 14th Saarc summit to be held in India next month.

The speakers made suggestions on a number of regional issues including Saarc development goal (SDG), mobility of labour and services, agriculture and environmental change, South Asian free trade area, inflow of foreign direct investment

(FDI) and military armament of some Saarc countries.

Supra Secretary Rezaul Karim Chowdhury said it is unlikely that South Asian countries would be able to attain millennium development goal (MDG) if the progress continues at the present rate.

To make the regional association more effective in alleviating poverty, he recommended formation of Saarc poverty reduction fund, establishing Saarc economic union, free access of unskilled and semi-skilled workers within Saarc countries and keeping education, health, food and accommodation out of the purview of privatisation policy.

For attaining sustainable development and food security in the region, members of the research group suggested taking special measures for agricultural and environmental issues.

Regarding FDI inflow in these countries, they said the governments should have full control over the FDI inflow in Saarc region and the foreign investors should offload their shares in the domestic markets

so that common people can get maximum benefit from such investments.

They also said environmentally disastrous policies of multinational companies should not be legitimised in the name of corporate social responsibility (CSR), rather the concept should be used in evaluating the environmental hazards caused by the companies and they should compensate for those.

The group also suggested greater co-operation among the Saarc countries in combating non-state terrorism, discouraging religion based politics, spreading secular education, increasing budget for human development and reducing spending on military armament.

Group researchers Md Zakaria, Syed Aminul Huq, Barkat Ullah Maruf, Md Shamsuddoha and Pradip Roy were present at the press conference.

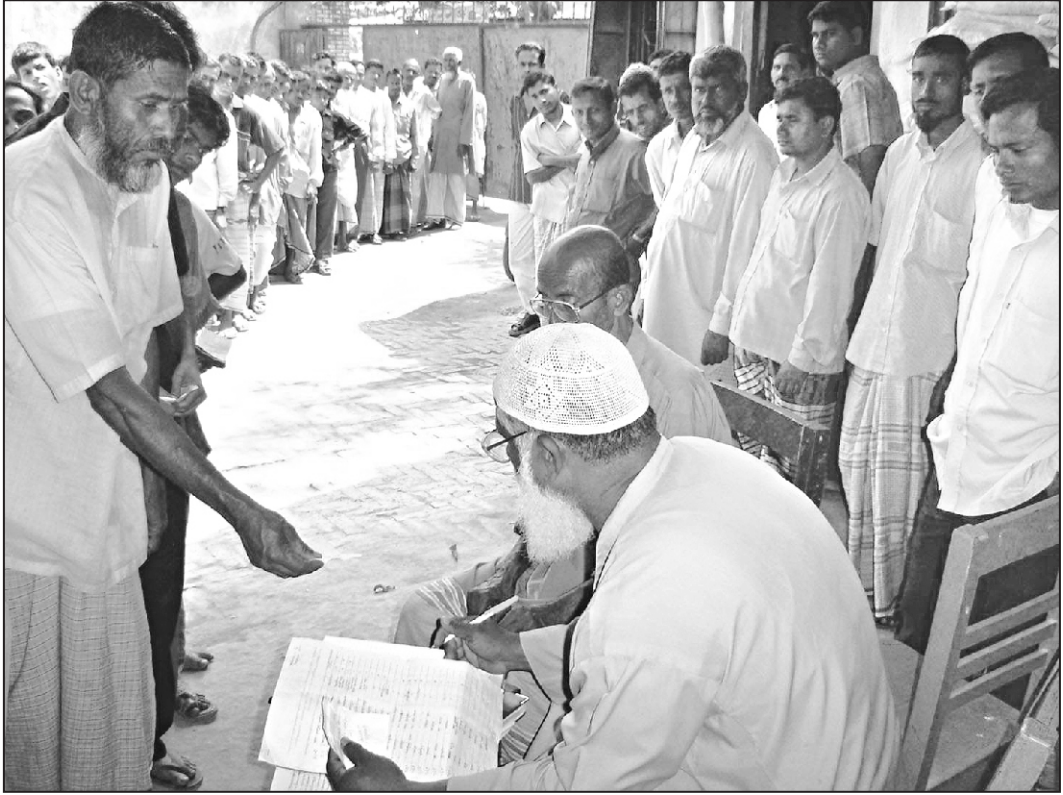


PHOTO: STAR

Farmers queuing up for fertilisers at a godown at Arulia upazila in Bogra yesterday.

Woman burnt to death in fire 150 shanties gutted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A woman was burnt to death and three others, including two firemen, were injured in separate incidents of fire in the capital yesterday.

The dead is identified as Mazeda Khatun, 70, while the injured are firemen Babul and Mahbub and Rinki, 8.

Sources at fire brigade said a fire originated from a mosquito coil at the tin-shed house of Ahmedullah of Kadamtala area in East Bashabo at around 4:25am.

Informed, the firemen rushed to the spot and managed to douse the blaze that spread to all the four rooms of the house at about 6:00am.

They also rescued Rinki, daughter of a tenant and recovered the burnt body of Mazeda, another tenant of that house.

Fireman Babul was wounded during his efforts to extinguish the fire.

In another incident, some 150 makeshift houses were destroyed when a fire broke out at Balur Math area at Mazid Khan Road of

Rayerbazar in the early hours.

The residents managed to get out of the houses quickly, but the fire blazing for about one and a half hours burnt the houses and goods inside.

On information, 13 units of the fire brigade rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control. Fireman Mahbub was injured at this time.

The fire originated from a cooking stove of a house, fire brigade sources said.

Another fire, originated due to electric short circuit at Islamic Bank Hospital at South Shahjahanpur in Outer Circular Road at 3:25pm, destroyed a computer and some furniture.

Fire fighters and the hospital staffs managed to extinguish the fire within 10 minutes before it spread to other rooms of the three-storied building.

Saarc Car Rally leaves for north

UNB, Dhaka

The Saarc car rally left for its next destination in the north yesterday morning after a ceremonial stopover in the capital.

Environment Department, Forest Department, district administration and other organisations staged a colorful programme at Manik Mia Avenue for making the rally a round of the capital.

Students rendered songs and dance performance, highlighting the country's culture, social life and environment conservation activities in front of the car rally.

At one stage, the participants got down from the cars and joined the cheering students.

The rally has been organised as part of "Green South Asia 2007" programme undertaken by the Saarc environment ministers at a conference in Dhaka on May 24, 2006 following a decision adopted at the 13th Saarc Summit.

The first-ever Saarc car rally with the participation of the member countries started from Cox's Bazar on Thursday. Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed inaugurated the rally.

LIST OF SUSPECTS Ex-BCL president Liakat expresses dismay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) President Liakat Shikder has expressed his dismay at media reports that his name is on the list of corruption suspects.

"I request the caretaker government, the Anti-Corruption Commission and the joint forces to conduct a thorough investigation into my case before officially publishing the list of corrupt people," Liakat said in a statement yesterday.

The former student leader said he is sure that if a fair investigation is carried out, it would prove him to be an ordinary person who leads a simple life and never resorted to corruption.

"I do not have my own house or apartment, nor do I have any bank balance. Even it sometimes becomes difficult for me to manage the cost of treatment of my mother and buy her medicines," Liakat said.

He also claimed that he was never involved in business activities.

"The immediate past four-party alliance government harassed me during its tenure by filing false cases one after another," he added.

Indian group calls for beheading of Taslima Nasreen

AFP, Lucknow

An Indian Muslim group has offered a 500,000 rupee (11,319 dollar) bounty for the beheading of controversial Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasreen.

The president of the All India Ittehad Council said on Friday he had declared the reward for anyone who carried out the "qatal" or "extermination" of the "notorious woman."

"Taslima has put Muslims to shame in her writing. She should be killed and beheaded and anyone who does this will get a reward from the council," Taqi Raza Khan said in a statement received in the northern city of Lucknow.

The council, based in Bareilly town also in Uttar Pradesh state, is a splinter group of the influential All India Muslim Personal Law Board.

Khan said the only way the bounty would be lifted was if Nasreen "apologises, burns her books and leaves."

Nasreen has incensed conservative Muslims for writing a novel "Lajja" or "Shame" depicting the life of a Hindu family facing the ire of Muslims in Bangladesh. The book is banned in Muslim-majority Bangladesh along with her autobiographical works on grounds of being anti-Islamic.

The author was forced to flee her homeland in 1994 after radical Muslims decried her writings as blasphemous and demanded her execution.

She is seeking permanent residence or citizenship in India.

Khan's bounty was not a Fatwa, as he was not a senior enough cleric to issue Islamic decrees.

But it drew swift condemnation from one of South Asia's most powerful Muslim seminaries.

Clergy of the Sunni seminary Dar-ul Uloom in Deoband in Uttar Pradesh, a state with a large Muslim population, said the call to behead Nasreen was "un-Islamic" and that clergy should not issue such "Fatwas."

"Unnecessary edicts increase friction in society and people of other religions start treating Islam as a barbaric religion," Mufti Arif, who sits on the board of the Fatwa committee of Dar-ul Uloom, told AFP by telephone.

But Arif backed Khan's call for 45-year-old Nasreen's expulsion from India.

There was no immediate comment from Nasreen who has lived in self-exile in Europe and the United States, but has lately been living in India.

Nasreen has been spending most of her time in Kolkata, state capital of the eastern state of West Bengal, which shares the same language and much of the culture of Bangladesh.

But she has also faced problems in India. In 2004, an Indian Muslim cleric offered a reward of 20,000 rupees to anyone who "blackened" her face, an action considered a grave insult.

Following the threat, Indian police have given her security.

Earlier this week, the writer made an impassioned plea to her "second home" India to grant her citizenship.

"I have been banished from my country. India is my second home. I have been granted a six-month visa but citizenship is being repeatedly refused to me," the author said.

"If I can't live in my own country, and if I have to stay close to home where I can speak my mother tongue, write in my own language, India is the second option. Where else will I go?" she asked.

The writer said she will soon make a fresh application for citizenship.

The Indian government has not commented on her request for citizenship.

Ctg importers sell rice, oil on open markets

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Importers began selling of essential food items, including rice and oil on the open market in the port city from yesterday.

S Alam Group began selling of four food items: rice, oil, onion and potato in two points at Sagorika and Nasirabad Industrial Area, said the sources.

Some more importers will gradually start selling on the open market at different points of the city, they said.

Abul Khair Group has been selling four items: sugar, wheat, lentil and pulse at Sagorika intersection from March 14 at fair price as per the government initiative to check the price hike of essentials.

Abul Khair opened four more outlets later at different areas.

Other importers Masud & Brothers and TK Group are also now selling the same items in ten points of the city. But the consumers demanded sale of items like rice and oil on the open market.



PHOTO: STAR

A child pays homage to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by placing flowers at his portrait near Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi in the city yesterday on the occasion of his 87th birth anniversary.

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL FESTIVAL BEGINS

Ensure rights of ethnic people

Speakers urge govt, civil society members

Bss, Dhaka

Speakers at a cultural festival yesterday called on the government and members of the civil society to ensure the rights of indigenous people in order to enrich the national culture and heritage.

The ethnic people need strong support and cooperation from the government and civil society members to establish their rights, they said at the inaugural ceremony of three-day 'Indigenous Cultural Festival' in the city Basundhara Dewan, the first woman headman of Chittagong Hill Tracts, and Bazar Chowdhury inaugurated the festival by lighting candles at Shawkat Osman Memorial Auditorium at Public Library.

Noted educationists Prof Anisuzzaman, Prof Rafiqul Islam,

former lawmaker Promod Mankin and Director of Society for the Environment and Human Development (SEHD) Philip Gain addressed the inaugural ceremony presided over by Prof Sakhawat Ali Khan, chairman of SEHD.

The media can also play an important role in highlighting the culture, tradition and heritage of the indigenous people of the country, the speakers said.

They urged the media people to help promote the culture, languages and heritage of the ethnic people and to launch a campaign to protect their ancestral homes and land.

A large number of ethnic people from Mymensingh, Sylhet and Chittagong attended the inaugural function.

FIRE AT DU HISTORY DEPARTMENT

Valuables worth several lakhs of taka gutted

DU CORRESPONDENT

A fire broke out in a room of the history department of Dhaka University (DU) damaging properties worth several lakhs of taka yesterday.

Sources said the fire might have originated from an electric short circuit. There is however scepticism that the 10-minute fire at the chairman's room might be a sabotage to destroy papers of fake admission, as the university authorities have launched a move to find out fake admission at different departments and institutes.

Chairman Prof. Muntasir Mamun said two air conditioners, some telephone sets and furniture, a rare painting, window curtains and some other valuables were damaged.

Two computers and a printer might have also been damaged due to heat of the fire, he added.

He, however, said no valuable papers were destroyed.

Ratan Kumar, an office attendant, said they saw smoke billowing out from the room at around 9:00am.

As they opened the door, they were plunged into plumes of smoke.

Students and others from around rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze.

Fire brigade units reached the spot after the fire was extinguished.

An eight-member committee headed by Arts Faculty Dean Prof Sadrul Amin was formed to determine the cause of fire and assess the loss.

After holding its first meeting, the committee said it seemed that the fire might have originated from an electric short circuit.

The committee requested the history department authorities to provide a list of damaged valuables so that it can assess the loss.

6,000 acres of land freed

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it has lost to grabbers, encroachers and squatters.

Isolated data available with various government bodies and agencies suggest that the amount of public land now in grabbers' hand is no less than 20 lakh acres. The figure is, however, much more--over 30 lakh acres, according to some studies.

Incident of land grabbing is higher in the metropolises than elsewhere, obviously due to higher level of price and value.

In Dhaka and its environs, grabbers actually far outweigh the government in terms of possession of public land. Against the 4-lakh acres of public land they occupy, the government controls only 1 lakh acre, according to reports of the district administration officials quoted by the parliamentary standing committee on land ministry on December 28, 2003.

Land Secretary Lutfar yesterday said the estimate of grabbed land is ever changing.

He expressed his optimism about the ongoing drive to recover land from the grabbers. "It has now become possible to demolish any illegal establishment, but it was totally impossible a few months ago," he said.

There is controversy surrounding how much khas land the country has and how much of it has been gobbled up.

The land ministry, the parliamentary standing committee on it and study reports cited different figures during the rule of the BNP-led alliance government.

The then land minister M Shamsul Islam told the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) in 2003 that there are only over 6 lakh acres of khas land in the country, but the parliamentary standing committee contradicted him quoting reports available from 53 districts in 2004 and said the government has 10 lakh acres of khas land.

Later, the parliamentary body disclosed that the total khas land amounts to about 14 lakh acres, of which over 5 lakh acres had been encroached on.

But a study conducted by Dhaka

University professor of economics Abul Barakat put the figure of grabbed khas land at more than 10 lakh acres.

According to the study, the government holds 33 lakh acre khas land, of which more than 8 lakh acres are farmland, 17 lakh acres non-farmland and over 8 lakh acres water bodies.

The report said all the khas non-farmland and water bodies are illegally occupied and the government has lost control of 88 percent of the farmland it distributed among the poor in the last 20 years.

According to a land ministry report submitted to a JS body on October 13, 2004, grabbers have gobbled up 4,45,726 acres or more than two-thirds of 6,43,140 acres of vested property in the country.

But Barakat's study claimed that the government is the custodian of 21 lakh acres of vested property, over 90 percent of which is now in the possession of grabbers.

At least 7 lakh acres from 9 lakh acres of Waqf estates is in illegal possession, the religious affairs ministry reported to its parliamentary standing committee in July 2003. The JS body asked the ministry to take action against the grabbers.

The forest department in a report placed at a parliamentary body in 2005 said it has lost some 12,000 acres of forestland in Gazipur and Savar to encroachers.

There are 64,750 acres of forestland in Gazipur and Dhaka and grabbers occupied some 11,400 acres of the 63,815-acre forestland in Gazipur and 600 acres of the 934 acres in Savar, said the report.

Besides, according to various government reports, over 50,000 acres of land under government departments and agencies including the roads and highways, railway and shipping ministry have been grabbed or encroached on.

Chief adviser visits Sylhet today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Chief Adviser to the caretaker government Fakhruddin Ahmed will visit Sylhet today before leaving for Habiganj where he will formally inaugurate Bibiyana gas field.

Fakhruddin Ahmed will visit the shrines of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) and Shah Paran (RA) after he arrives in Sylhet at 9:00am by a helicopter.

He will then have a meeting with the government officials of Sylhet division at the Circuit House at 10:45am.

The chief adviser will also exchange views with local elite at 1:00pm at the same venue.

He will then go to Habiganj to inaugurate Bibiyana gas field at 3:00pm.

Tk 3.75crore foreign currency seized at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials seized foreign currencies worth Tk 3.75 crore from a Singapore-bound passenger at Zia International Airport (ZIA) on Friday night.

Finding suspicious the movement of Mohammad Kabir at the ZIA, customs officials searched six packages of dried fish possessed by him at around 11:00pm and found the currencies.

The seized currencies include Saudi riyal, Singapore dollar, Euro, US dollar, UAE dirham, British pound and Brunei dollar.

Customs officials filed a case with the Airport Police Station and handed him over to the police.

Kabir however told the police that he does not own the money. One person gave him the packets saying that he will soon be back.

Hailing from Munshiganj, Kabir was going to Singapore on a tourist visa.

Obituary

UNB, Khulna

M Nazrul Islam, a photojournalist of the daily Anirban, passed away due to cancer at his residence at Arongghata in Daulatpur yesterday at the age of 37.

He left behind his wife, a son and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.



Seminar

USAID organises a seminar on 'UN convention against corruption- Implications for Bangladesh'. Venue: Lake Shore Hotel. Time: 9:30am.

Discussion

Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) will hold a roundtable discussion on 'Role and responsibilities of independent directors'. Venue: BEI. Time: 3:00pm.

Launching

The launching ceremony of 'Human Rights in Bangladesh: A Summary Report' organised by Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) will be held. Venue: Reporters' Unity. Time: 3:45pm.

Seminar

Dhaka Ahsania Mission will hold a seminar on 'Assessment of NGO techniques in adult literacy training'. Venue: Bism. Time: 8:30am.

Roundtable

Mass-line Media Centre organises a roundtable on 'Role of the media in ensuring right to information of the voters'. Venue: LGED. Time: 9:30am.