

# Close to nature

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left to follow a narrow asphalt road, which leads you to a place called Sowerighat some two to three kilometres away. Stretches of fallow land are all around Sowerighat. A branch of Buriganga once flowed through it and people took boats to cross that rivulet. Now the rivulet is dead and you cross it walking over an earth dam.

By dredging the river a housing scheme named River View piled sand over the vast floodplains all around Sowerighat. For reasons unknown to us, the planned housing activities have not gained speed yet and the sand dunes are simply left there glittering under the sun for nature lovers. Very naturally, grass and other wetland plants have grown on the sand, giving it a near-natural ambience. Most beautiful are the tall grasses with long stalks of white flowers called *Kaash* in Bangla. The dead rivulet, clogged with water weeds and hyacinth, acts as a natural pool within the dunes.

Such a sanctuary of semi wild life is not expected to be inert, uninhabited and lifeless for very long. Little wonder that it is already an abode of many butterflies, lizards, skinks, frogs and birds. Butterflies and birds are more visible and colourful than the other colonizers there. Rows of *Kaash* appeal greatly to the *munias and prinias*. Pipits and wagtails find the stubby grass field greatly attractive. Even the bare sand dunes attract birds such as kites, larks and lapwings. Large kites sit with outstretched wings to soak up the warmth from the glowing sand. Larks and lapwings look for insects moving on the dunes. Aerial hunters like shikra and kestrel target the insects, reptiles and small birds. Before pouncing on its target, the shikra hides under high branches of trees on the edge of the sand flat. The beautifully patterned kestrel flies overhead before descending on its victims. Kingfishers, on the other hand, sit motionlessly on a tree

branch.  
You have to leave your vehicle at Sowerighat and take a walk to enter the world of sand. If you start your walk slowly and head west from Sowerighat, you will be rewarded with memorable encounters with creatures big and small. A densely populated village called Arakul is near the flat sand. If you continue your walk westward for several hours, you will reach a bigger village named Mirzapur. You may as well start your return journey through Arakul or Mirzapur if you have not left your vehicle at Sowerighat.

Anyone from the city with little opportunities to see birds and other creatures will surely find a short tour of this flat sand very enjoyable. The children who get to see no wild creatures will benefit the most.

## Rat on plane

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time later.  
Air India has said that the plane will be fumigated and the presence of a rodent was being investigated.

Rats occasionally get on board aircraft along with catering and other supplies but can pose a serious technical as well as a health hazard if they chew through wires.  
The airline said that "though the presence of the rodent was not confirmed," the decision to abort the flight was precautionary and in the interests of passenger safety.

It is not the first time a rat sighting has been reported on an Air India jet this year, with one of their aircraft forced to return to New Delhi during a flight to Milan in July because of a rodent.

It is the latest setback to hit the state-owned airline, which has had to cut costs to improve its financial health.

Earlier in December, an Air India technician was sucked into an aircraft engine and killed at Mumbai airport.

## No significant

FROM PAGE 20  
The same day, publisher Ahmedur Rashid Tutul of Shuddhoswar Prokashoni, and two bloggers were attacked in Lalmatia.

Both Dipan and Tutul were Avijit's publishers.

The Detective Branch (DB) of police of Dhaka Metropolitan Police is investigating all the cases except for the one for Ananta's murder. His case is being handled by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

On February 26, US-born Bangladeshi writer and blogger Avijit was hacked to death and his wife Rafida Ahmed Bonya was critically injured in an attack near TSC on the Dhaka University campus.

Although 10 months have passed since then, no major headway has been made in the probe. But detectives say they have arrested eight people in the case.

In August, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) detained three people, including Touhidur Rahman, a Bangladesh-born UK citizen, and claimed they were behind the killings of Avijit and Ananta.

The elite force claimed Touhidur had masterminded the murders but his family refuted it. They also alleged that plainclothes law enforcers had picked him up from his home at Dhanmondi.

Earlier, Shafiqur Rahman Farabi, an alleged Hizb-ut Tahrir leader, was held at Jatrabari in Avijit murder case. However, law enforcers have not been able to prove his hand in the killing.

The DB has sent some evidence to the FBI in the US for forensic tests. However, they are yet to receive the results, said a DMP official.

Blogger Oyasiqur was hacked to death in broad daylight in the capital's Teigaon area on March 30.

Locals chased and caught two madrasa students and handed them over to the police while another suspect was detained at a checkpoint in Wari two days before the murder. The two students had told the police that he was supposed to be with them during the murder.

A Dhaka court on September 30 took cognisance of the charges against five suspected ABT members in the case. The other two key accused are absconding.

Blogger Ananta, also an activist of Sylhet Gonojagoron Mancha, was stabbed to death in Sylhet on May 12.

Six days later, police arrested three people, including a nephew of State Minister for Labour and Employment Mujibul Haque Chhunu.

Special Superintendent (organised crime) Mirza Abdullahel Baqui of CID, who is involved in the investigation, said a suspect in the case gave his confessional statement before a Sylhet court recently.

He claimed they would arrest two to three more suspects before submitting the charge sheet.

Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy was hacked to death inside his house at Khilgaon on August 7.

Devjyoti Rudro, a freethinker and friend of the slain blogger, yesterday said he had communicated with the detectives some two months ago. He was told that the investigation was underway.

Maruf Hossain Sorder, deputy commissioner (media) of the DMP, also said the same.

Asked about the delay in the probe, he said: "I can't say anything when the investigation is on."

The DB is yet to make any major breakthrough in Dipan murder as well.

## 51 migrants

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Undocumented migrants often pass through Central America in a bid to get to the United States, despite increased border scrutiny in several countries along the route.

## Bangladeshi

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commanding officer of BGB-29 Battalion in Phulbari, said the BSF men of Elenbari camp under 41 BSF Battalion in Dakkhin Dinajpur of West Bengal shot Nuruzzaman as he entered the Indian territory around 5:00am, leaving him critically injured.

Nuruzzaman was taken to a local hospital in Dakkhin Dinajpur where he died around 7:00am.

BGB officials strongly protested the incident and called for a flag meeting. They also urged their Indian counterpart to return the body as soon as possible. However, the BSF was yet to respond in this regard as of filing of this report at 7:00pm.

At least four Bangladesh nationals were killed in Dinajpur by BSF men this year. Of them, two were killed in April and two others in December, according to BGB officials.

Mohammad Khalequzzaman, commander of Dinajpur sector BGB, said they had been organising awareness programmes for locals so that they do not enter the Indian side illegally, a

# It's not enough

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court delivered the verdict in the murder case.

"I'm not satisfied with the verdict. It's an incomplete judgment," said the father of slain blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider.

Rajib used to write against Jamaat-Shibir and war criminals on different blogs under the pseudo name of Thaba Baba. He was hacked to death near his house in the capital's Pallabi on February 15, 2013.

The court handed down death penalties to two accused and sentenced six others, including the chief of banned Islamist outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team Mufti Jasimuddin Rahmani, to different jail terms for the killing.

"They [accused] are self-proclaimed killers. At least five of them confessed to the killing. Despite that, they were not given capital punishment. I can't accept this," said Nazim.

Rajib was one of the key organisers of the Shahbagh movement, which was launched on February 5, 2013. After his killing, online Jamaat-Shibir activists and some pro-Jamaat and BNP newspapers tried to brand him as an atheist.

Besides, a smear campaign was carried out against bloggers terming

them atheists. Four secular bloggers and a publisher of a slain blogger were killed by suspected militants last year.

Nazim said the killers of his son even described how they had carried out the killing. But the accused killers of the other bloggers are yet to be arrested.

"Since we didn't get the right verdict in this case, we can't expect justice for other killings," he added.

He said former Chhatra Shibir activist Redwanul Azad Rana had planned Rajib's murder, but law enforcers could not arrest him yet.

Nazim said he would file an appeal with the High Court challenging the lower court's verdict.

Prof Ajoy Roy, father of slain writer-blogger Avijit Roy, stressed the need for execution of the verdict.

"As the verdict has been delivered, the punishment should be executed after completion of all the legal procedures promptly. Then people will find some solace," he told a private TV channel.

Prof Abul Quasem Fazlul Huq, father of slain publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan, said if the criminals were tried, the number such crimes might go down.

He also underscored the need for ensuring social justice to all so that such crimes don't recur.

# Councillor aspirants

FROM PAGE 20  
Bogra, Dinajpur, Habiganj and Satkhira. The party's mayor aspirants too did relatively good in these places.

Elections in the municipalities of these districts were largely free and fair.

In Dinajpur, for example, pro-BNP candidates won both the mayor and all 12 councillor posts.

In Jhaladhaka of Nilphamari, the BNP favourite won the mayoral race and eight of the councillors were elected from the BNP camp.

But the same didn't happen in other BNP strongholds like Patuakhali, Barguna, Barisal, Bhola, Laxmipur, Noakhali, Comilla and Chittagong districts.

Take Banskhali municipality of Chittagong for an example. AL men swept the mayoral and all 12 councillor posts there.

Large-scale irregularities were reported in these areas.

A relatively fair election even in the AL strongholds has seen a good number of BNP men winning the councillor posts.

For example, though the AL-backed hopeful won the mayoral race in Phulbari municipality of Mymensingh, BNP men won six councillor posts, two more than what the pro-AL aspirants did.

**TOTAL VOTES OBTAINED**  
A total of 234 municipalities on Wednesday went to polls, held on party lines for the first time. AL candidates were elected uncontested in seven of them and elections were cancelled in 20 due to irregularities and violence.

In the rest 207 municipalities, the BNP-backed mayor aspirants won in only 19 and finished second in 139, bagging a total of 11.58 lakh votes.

On the other hand, the ruling AL candidates came out victorious in 168 municipalities and finished second in 31. It obtained a total of 25.86 lakh votes.

The turnout was around 74 percent, according to the Election Commission Secretariat.

Independent candidates won in 26 municipalities, it said.

**UNUSUAL DIFFERENCE**  
The results show an unusual gap between the numbers of votes secured by the BNP mayor candidates and their rivals from the AL camp in the areas considered BNP strongholds.

In Mirsharai municipality of Chittagong, the BNP favourite got only 475 votes while the AL candidate got 7,297 votes.

In Rangunia of the district, the BNP candidate got 2,158 votes against 12,987 votes bagged by his rival backed by the AL.

While the AL-favoured mayor candidate got 28,162 votes, the BNP candidate got only 2,120 votes.

In Sandwip, only 464 votes were cast for the BNP's "paddy sheave" symbol

while the candidate with AL's "boat" symbol got 20,690 votes.

Such an unusual phenomenon in these areas happened allegedly because of irregularities like ballot box-stuffing by the AL men.

Similar voting trends were seen in Barisal district as well.

In Banaripara municipality, the BNP candidate got only 443 votes while the AL nominee bagged 5,355 votes.

In Muladi, the BNP contender received only 596 votes but AL favourite secured 9,358 votes.

In Gauranadi, 776 was the number of votes the BNP candidate got while the AL-backed contender bagged 18,959 votes.

In Nalchhity municipality of Jhalakathi, BNP got 635 votes while AL got 13,042 votes.

In Kazipur municipality of Sirajganj, BNP candidate got only 173 votes while his opponent from the AL camp obtained 7,825 votes.

**JP'S DISASTROUS RESULT**  
The Jatiya Party won in only one out of 74 municipalities where the main opposition in parliament had fielded candidates.

The JP candidate won the mayoral race in Nageshwari of Kurigram.

More than three dozen Jamaat leaders contested the mayoral polls as independent candidates and they won in two municipalities -- Birganj of Dinajpur and Chapainawabganj.

None of the 129 mayor candidates fielded by other 17 political parties won in any municipality.

## Include war

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pride for all in the country. "We've attained our victory through a war...96,000 Pakistani army personnel surrendered to us."

Hasina mentioned that children have to nurture in their mind that the Bangalee nation is the nation of victorious ones. "Then they'll grow up with self-confidence and start loving the country and working for it," she said.

Termining today's children the future of the country, the PM said proper steps will have to be taken to let them know the long struggle for the country's independence and sacrifices made by the great sons of the soil during the Liberation War in 1971.

She said Bangladesh has become an independent country through a long struggle and supreme sacrifice of three million people, and her government's aim was to build an educated nation and establish a poverty-free country.

She asked the authorities concerned to make sure that the history of the Liberation War is projected properly in English medium text-

# BNP sees good

FROM PAGE 1  
year [2015], to engage in party activities again," said a BNP standing committee member after a meeting with Khaleda late Wednesday night.

"We knew the election would be marred by rigging, stuffing ballots, capturing of polling centres and that the ruling party would win in most of the municipalities. Despite that, we hoped that the government would lose at least 60 to 70 mayor posts even after rigging of the polls," a member of the BNP central election monitoring team told The Daily Star.

"We didn't participate in the polls with the hope that our candidates would win in 180 or more municipalities. It's true we got only 21 mayor posts but it's not a loss or a cause of shame for us. We actually won as we reached our goal. We have been able to prove to the people at home and abroad that free and fair polls are not possible under the present government," he added.

A BNP central leader said they had conveyed foreign envoys stationed in Dhaka about the widespread irregularities twice and would formally brief them soon in details.

Despite "plenty of vote rigging and stuffing ballots and other irregularities" in the polls to 234 municipalities, the BNP and the party-led 20-party alliance have decided to go for "positive politics with soft programmes" to protest against the government and the Election Commission.

Khaleda, after a meeting with senior party leaders and chiefs of some components in the alliance, decided not to enforce any hartals fearing it would earn the party a bad name at home and abroad.

"Instead of any hartals, the meeting decided that the BNP would go to people with soft programmes including rallies, discussions, and human chains showcasing the government and the Election Commission's sheer failure in holding a free and fair election, like the January 5, 2014, national polls," a BNP standing committee member who was present at the meeting told The Daily Star.

The party yesterday instructed its mayor candidates, district leaders, and members of election monitoring teams to report to the party their activities prior to and on election day.

"Through evaluation of their reports, we will be able to assess the condition of the party's grassroots ...," Emran Saleh Prince, assistant publicity secretary of the BNP told The Daily Star.

"We have also given instruction to all the mayor candidates and district leaders to send documents of widespread vote rigging, stuffing ballots and capturing of polls centres in their areas," he added. A

## 2 more killed

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injured when he went to Barguna town to see voting at Gagon Govt Primary School polling centre, reports our Patuakhali correspondent.

At least 25 people, including Nurul, were wounded in the clash between supporters of Awami League-backed mayor candidate Kamrul Ahsan Maharaj and AL rebel candidate Shahadat Hossain around 10:00am.

In the clash, Maharaj also suffered rubber bullet injuries. He is now undergoing treatment at Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College. In this municipality, the AL rebel candidate won.

However, Reaz Hossain, officer-in-charge of Barguna Sadar Police Station, claimed that Nurul might have died due to his old age.

A case was filed against over 500 unknown people with the police station in connection with the clash.

Shipon Haider, younger brother of deceased Abul Kashem in Kishoreganj's Hossainpur upazila, said his brother was a fish trader, but he was an election campaigner for councillor candidate Shahjahan Alam Kajol in ward-2 of Hossainpur municipality.

The supporters of another councillor candidate, Jahirul Islam, swooped on Kashem around 1:30pm at Hossainpur Dakhil Madrasa polling centre as his brother campaigned for Kajol, he alleged.

"They killed my brother by beating mercilessly with iron rods and sticks. They left him there in a critical condition and fled," Shipon told The Daily Star yesterday.

The victim, Kashem, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) late last night, said Sentu Chandra Das, assistant sub-inspector of DMCH police camp.

# Primary terminal exams

FROM PAGE 1  
Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman announced the results formally at a crowded press conference around 12:30pm at his secretariat office in the capital.

Students collected results from their own institutions or through internet and mobile phone SMS services soon after the briefing. Jubilant students and parents came out on the streets in cheers as soon the results were out.

success rate. With 96.79 percent, Sylhet remains at the bottom.

As in previous years, Munshiganj saw the cent percent pass rate, leaving 63 other districts behind. At the upazila level, 23 out of 509 upazilas saw cent percent pass rate.

A total of 4,640 children with special needs took the exams and over 96.64 percent of them passed the test.

The government primary schools topped the success chart with over

PRIMARY RESULTS COMPARISON		
DIVISION	PASS RATE 2015	PASS RATE 2014
DHAKA	98.74	98.28
RAJSHAHI	99	98.04
KHULNA	98.97	97.95
CHITTAGONG	98.41	98.19
BARISAL	98.30	98.71
SYLHET	96.79	94.95
RANGPUR	98.56	97.74
AVERAGE	98.52	97.92

According to the results, 28,39,238 students -- 15,20,128 girls and 12,77,146 boys -- passed the examination. A total of 41,964 students flunked the exams.

Unlike in 2014, girls were much ahead of boys in terms of success rate.

Some 29.50 lakh students took the PTE 2015 exams, conducted by the Directorate of Primary Education, on November 22 across the country. Students of class V must qualify at the exams to enrol in class VI.

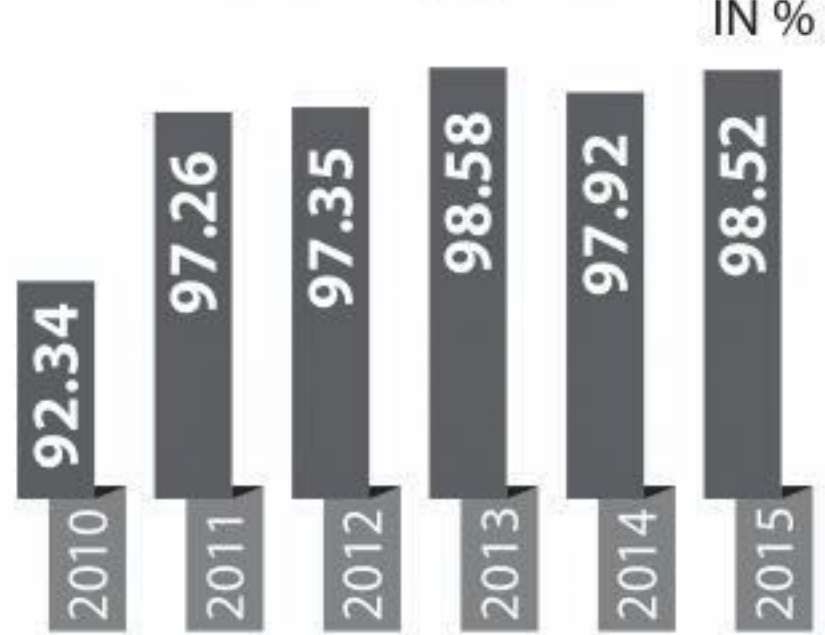
The number of total examinees and number of schools with cent percent pass rate rose remarkably with number of schools with zero percent pass rate coming down.

A total of 91,227 institutions witnessed cent percent pass rate against 72,057 in 2014. The number schools with zero percent pass rate came down to 153.

The pass rate of Ebtedai (primary level of madrasa) examinations, held along with the PTE, was 91.87 percent.

Rajshahi topped the list among all seven divisions, with 99 percent

## PTE PASS RATES



99.97 percent students passing the test. Schools affiliated with Primary Training Institute (PTI) stood second with 99.69 percent pass rate.

Asked about what made Rajshahi division outshine others, the primary minister said it was a matter of research.

About the schools that lagged behind, the minister said they would definitely look into the matter and hold accountable the people who were responsible for it.

# Fire engulfs Dubai hotel

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The blaze erupted near the world's tallest skyscraper, the Burj Khalifa, where crowds had gathered to watch the fireworks display.

Up to two million people were expected in central Dubai for the festivities. People have been asked to leave the area around the Address Hotel, which has been evacuated.

Flames rapidly engulfed much of the building, a five-star hotel and apartment complex with more than 60 storeys, within 10 minutes.

The Dubai government tweeted (in Arabic) that the fire had started on the 20th floor and has now been mostly been extinguished.

However, eyewitnesses said the fire was still raging despite the speedy response of the emergency services.

A tourist, Michelle Duque told the BBC: "All of a sudden we saw this huge black plume of black smoke coming between the Khalifa Tower and the hotel."

"The flames burst out really big and before we knew it the whole of the Address Hotel was covered in orange flames."

Another tourist told the BBC that she saw lot of debris coming down from the building.

"The problem is people inside the Burj Khalifa cannot move anywhere because we [are] kind of waiting for the fireworks display."