

## DIGITAL SECURITY ACT 2016

The draft Digital Security Act 2016, intended to address the need for cyber-crime legislation, according to the authorities, was approved on August 22, 2016, by the Cabinet. Rights activists have expressed serious concern that the proposed law does not have enough procedural safeguards for human rights protection. Nor does it make any reference to Bangladesh's obligation to international human rights instruments.

## ANTI-CHILD MARRIAGE LAW

The proposed child marriage prevention bill 2016 was placed in parliament on December 8 suggesting strict punitive actions against marriage between boys and girls who are below 21 and 18 years respectively. However, the proposed law has a provision for "special circumstances" under which girls below the age can tie the knot. Women and rights bodies demanded cancellation of the provision terming it contrary to the very law that has been proposed. They said it would encourage child marriage. "The law has been enacted taking the reality of our socio-economic and problems of families in rural areas into consideration," Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said while replying to lawmakers' queries in the parliament in December.

## DEMONETISATION IN INDIA

In a surprise televised address on the evening of November 8, Narendra Modi, the prime minister of India, delivered a bombshell: most of the money in Indians' wallets would cease to be accepted in shops at midnight. The two most valuable notes, of 500 and 1000 rupees (\$7.50 and \$15), were to be "demonetised", economist slang for taken out of circulation. Indians had until the end of 2016 to visit banks to either exchange their cash against newly printed notes or deposit it in their accounts. After that, their notes will become mere pieces of printed paper with no value at all. The sudden move sparked scenes of chaos outside banks and ATMs. Low-income Indians, traders, ordinary savers and tourists thronged banks to deposit expired money and withdraw lower denominations. Leading economists such as Kaushik Basu criticised the move saying that the "collateral damage" is likely to outstrip its benefits. Others said the move would have a limited impact as people will simply begin to accumulate money in new currency as soon as that becomes available.

## BRITAIN'S EXIT FROM EU

A referendum was held in June, to decide whether the UK should leave or remain in the European Union. Leave won by 52 percent to 48 percent. After the referendum Britain got a new Prime Minister - Theresa May who took over from David Cameron, who resigned on the day after losing the referendum. Like Mr Cameron, Mrs May was against Britain leaving the EU but she says she will respect the will of the people. She has said "Brexit means Brexit" but there is still a lot of debate about what that will mean in practice especially on the two key issues of how British firms do business in the European Union and what curbs are brought in on the rights of European Union nationals to live and work in the UK. The UK economy appears to have weathered the initial shock of the Brexit vote, although the value of the pound remains near a 30-year low, but opinion is sharply divided over the long-term effects of leaving the EU. Britain

also lost its top AAA credit rating, meaning the cost of government borrowing will be higher. But share prices have recovered from a dramatic slump in value.

## FORMATION OF A NEW ELECTION COMMISSION

A new EC is due in the next two months and a national election in the next two years. There is a provision for a law in the constitution on the formation of the EC, which successive governments have failed to legislate. In a welcome move in December, the President invited all major political parties to hold talks with them in regards to forming the next election commission. The dialogue on December



**President Abdul Hamid and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia talking to each other on December 18 at the Bangabhaban when a BNP delegation met him as part of a dialogue on the formation of a new Election Commission.**

PHOTO: PID



**Thanks to bold steps taken by DNCC, traffic can now move freely on Shyamoli-Aminbazar road in front of the capital's Gabtoli Inter-District Bus Terminal, much to the relief of commuters.**

PHOTO: STAR

18 between the President and the BNP Chairperson and other stalwarts of the party seemed to have gone well, a pleasant change in an otherwise acrimonious political environment.

## JUSTICE FOR TONU

The TONU murder case took social media by storm after the body of 19-year-old college student was recovered from Mainamati Cantonment area in Comilla on the night of March 20. The second year student of History at Victoria College was brutally raped and then murdered. Despite countrywide protests in social media and the streets demanding justice for TONU, her family is yet to receive justice.

## KHADIJA

On October 3, Khadija Akter Nargis, 23, a

student of Sylhet Government Mohila College and a resident of Hausa village in Sadar upazila, was stopped on her way to home from college by Badrul Alam, 30, assistant secretary of SUST unit of BCL. At one stage, Badrul started stabbing Khadija indiscriminately, leaving her critically injured. Khadija was initially admitted in Sylhet Osmani Medical College where she underwent the first surgery. Later she was transferred to Square Hospital in Dhaka. On October 4, the university authorities suspended Badrul Alam for brutally attacking Khadija. On October 5, Badrul made a confessional statement before police admitting his guilt and was sent to jail. After fighting a long battle, Khadija is now out of danger. 2016 in fact saw innumerable cases

by mismanagement.

## HUMILIATION OF A TEACHER

In the second week of May, a video clip went viral on social media showing Shyamal Kanti Bhakta, the headmaster of Piyar Sattar Latif High School in Narayanganj being humiliated and forced to squat holding his ears in the presence of local Jatiya Party lawmaker AKM Salim Osman. Shyamal told police that somebody on May 13 announced through a microphone, that he had made an objectionable comment about religion, at a school's managing committee meeting. Within minutes, angry locals thronged the school. Osman claimed he actually 'saved' the teacher from an angry mob through the said act of public humiliation. In a symbolic gesture, students across the country protested doing sit-ups holding their ears. Students from various universities also started a Facebook campaign called "Sorry Sir" to show solidarity with Shyamal. On August 7, Police submitted a probe report to the HC saying that they had found out the public humiliation of Shyamal Kanti was an "unexpected situation" which resulted from a rumour. The HC directed the chief metropolitan magistrate in Dhaka to hold a fresh inquiry with a view to unearth the offence and identify the perpetrators and submit the report to the High Court on November 3.

## THE WOES OF HABIGANJ TEA WORKERS

In August a severe food crisis gripped more than 350 tea garden workers along with around 2,400 family members as authorities of Boikunthapur Tea Estate in Madhabpur upazila of Habiganj stopped paying them wages and ration. They were reportedly living on liquid extract from boiled rice and mashed tea leaves and chillies while the authorities continued receiving their labour. On August 22, they went on a strike demanding due wages and ration. "Give me food or shoot me," said Jamuna Sawtal, an 80-year-old blind woman in the tea garden area.

## DHAKA'S MAYORS

Throughout the year Annisul Huq and Sayeed Khokon, mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation and Dhaka South City Corporation respectively, made headlines for drastic measures such as freeing vital public spaces from illegal occupation, removing illegally placed billboards, setting up waste transfer stations and building public toilets to make Dhaka a cleaner and livable city.

## THE SYRIAN WAR

More than 300,000 Syrians have lost their lives in four-and-a-half years of armed conflict, which began with anti-government protests before escalating into a full-scale civil war. More than 11 million others have become refugees as forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad and those opposed to his rule battle each other. A UN commission of inquiry has evidence that all parties to the conflict have committed war crimes. They have also been accused of using civilian suffering - such as blocking access to food, water and health

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of violence against women and children. These include rape, gang rape and maiming or killing over dowry demands.

## PRO-POOR FOOD PROGRAMME

In September, the government launched a programme targeted at the extreme poor and people with disabilities under which 5 million families were supposed to be able to purchase 30 kgs of rice per month at the rate of Tk. 10 per kg. It was a laudable move and everyone appreciated it. But there were reports of the rice ending up in the market due to corruption by officials, dealers and local influential people. Names of affluent people were allegedly included in the list of the poor. It was a classic example of how the benefits of a well-intentioned government programme could be hijacked