



Nurun Nahar, wife of slain journalist Abdul Hakim Shimul, receives the appointment letter for her job at a state-owned drug company from lawmaker Hasibur Rahman during a programme at Shahzadpur in Sirajganj yesterday. Shimul died on February 3 after being hit by bullets during a factional clash of Awami League. PHOTO: STAR

## CJ blames

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According to him, MPs are failing to carry out their law-making duties properly.  
Citing an example, the CJ said thousands of writ petitions were filed during the last union council elections due to the flaws in the relevant law. "Had the lawmakers performed their duties properly, the judiciary would not have to take this responsibility. There would not be such a huge pileup of case if the judiciary was allowed to do its job without interference and in its own way," said Sinha, who was appointed as the 21st chief justice in 2015.

About 31 lakh cases are now pending in various courts across the country.

It is the judiciary that protects the country and the constitution during transitional period. Even so, there are always some efforts to undermine the judiciary, he noted.

Justice Sinha, who joined law profession in 1974 and was made an Appellate Division judge in 2009, also warned that the future of any country would be bleak if those involved in the law profession faltered even a bit and even momentarily.

Replying to a question from a lawyer, the chief justice said the Bar Council examination was delayed because it could not discharge its duties properly.

Moulvibazar Bar Association President Kamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury presided over the meeting where Moulavibazar-3 lawmaker Syeda Saira Mohsin and High Court Registrar Abu Syed Diljar Hussain also spoke.

## Bangladeshi

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went near border pillar No 1057 at Dharmapur to bring cattle early in the morning. Around 5:30am, a BSF patrol team of Gudligan BOP camp opened fire on them. Tulu and Shifat were hit by bullets and Tulu died on the spot. Locals said other members of the group brought Tulu's body from the spot and left it on a road nearly 200 yards from the no-man's-land.

Nayek Subedar Mohammad Ali, Datbhanga company commander of 35 BGB battalion in Jamalpur, said, "I heard about the incident around 7:00am and rushed to the spot. Later, I sent a protest letter to BSF. A flag meeting was held near the border at 11:00am in this regard."

"BSF denied its involvement, but we challenged it. Tulu's body was handed to Roumari police," he said.

## BNP doubts

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BNP leader said, "The next general election would be voter-less and one-sided if it is held under him [Nurul Huda]. The polls would lead to the continuation of misrule of the Awami League government."

"Therefore, the nation will welcome him if he resigns from the constitutional post," Rizvi said.

Blasting the new CEC, he said his speeches are like that of an "AL spokesperson".

"The new CEC has said the polls to the national parliament should be held with an elected government in power. It's natural that the new CEC, who was an organiser of Janatar Mancha, has spoken and will speak like an Awami League spokesperson," Rizvi noted.

About the immediate past CEC, Rakibuddin, the BNP leader said, "He has proved through his work that he is very loyal to Awami League, not to the constitutional post. Because he said those who took part in the Jan 5, 2014, elections believe in democracy."

He also alleged that the new CEC already reacted to the BNP's criticism of him, saying that it was only a political strategy of the party.

The new CEC refuted the allegation of his involvement with Janatar Mancha, a platform which was against the then BNP government in 1996.

## Challenged girl rescued

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and legs. She even lost the sight in her right eye at an early age.

Fortunately, four policemen of Tejgaon Railway Outpost were near the scene at the time. One of them, with the help of the girl's father and two others, went inside the shack and pulled Batashi to safety.

"As soon as we saw the flames, we rushed to the spot and saw the father screaming for help to save his daughter," said Siddiqur Rahman, a constable of the outpost, who risked his life to rescue Batashi.

"We shoved the corrugated sheet walls of the shanty aside and rescued her," he added.

Although the girl was not hurt, she was traumatised by the incident.

Talking to this correspondent, Batashi's father Abdul Kadir said he was outside when the fire began. His wife, Anowara Begum, too was not home as she, along with some neighbours, went to a nearby church to collect "ration".

Anowara said she rushed home when she heard about the fire. However, Batashi was safe by the time she reached home.

They had been living in the slum since 1988 when their village home in Sherpur's Nokla was washed away by flood, she said.

The couple also has a son who forsook them after his marriage.

Kadir said that as Batashi cannot do anything by herself and needs constant attention, they cannot leave her alone and work outside. For this reason, they had to resort to begging.

They take Batashi in the wheelchair out on the streets in the afternoon and seek alms until night every day, he said.

They manage to earn around Tk 300 to Tk 350 every day, Kadir said, adding that with the earnings, they run the family, buy some medicines for Batashi and pay the room rent of Tk 1,600.

Asked about Batashi's treatment, he said they took Batashi to Dhaka Child Hospital thrice, but she did not recover. Doctors told them that her treatment was expensive.

Yesterday, a man suffered burns and at least 30 shanties were reduced to ashes in the fire that broke out around

9:00am. Eight units of Fire Service and Civil Defence doused the flames around 10:20am, said Belal Hossain, a duty officer at fire service headquarters.

The injured, Manik, 30, was admitted to the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital with 16 percent of his body burnt, hospital sources said.

Moyna Begum, one of the fire victims, said she could not save anything, not even Tk 50,000 she borrowed from a local Samity on Thursday. She had a tea stall just in front of her hut, but that too was gutted in the fire.

## Three workers

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the area might lead to erosion of the soil at his village which would threaten its very existence.

Abdul Karim Kim, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon's (Bapa) Sylhet chapter, said unplanned extraction of stone might cause more landslides in the area.

He alleged that lease holders often dig trenches as deep as 50-60 feet in the ground, although their permissible limit is maximum 10 feet. They do so due to lax monitoring of the stone quarries by the local administration.

The Bapa was working to create awareness among the local people about saving the Bisnakandi area from destruction, Karim told The Daily Star.

Mohammad Salauddin, upazila nirbahi officer of Gowainghat, said they had banned extracting stone at night to ensure workers' safety, but some unscrupulous traders employ workers at night to make extra money.

Sharif Jamil, joint secretary of Bapa, said it is very important to protect the natural beauty of Bichnakandi. The nearby wetlands should also be protected.

But lax enforcement of law has been causing damage to the area. No unscrupulous traders have been given exemplary punishment so far, he alleged.

Mostafizur Rahman, assistant director at the Department of Environment in Sylhet, said they would investigate the workers' death and take legal actions.

This correspondent could not reach Basid Mia, lease holder of the stone quarry, as his phone was switched off.

## Community worker

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As the villagers had misconception that arsenicosis was a curse and function of ill spirits, and that it was infectious, and that women's going out of home was a stigma, it was difficult for Monjuara to visit and deal with the villagers.

This hurdle, however, could not stop her from playing her role in creating awareness among the villagers and she kept on her work.

"I wanted to keep records of the agonies the arsenic patients go through," said Monjuara, who did her Bachelor of Arts under an Open University programme.

"I kept going out, educating people and writing," she said as the community worker, now 46, shared with her audience how she wrote her book on this problem of her village. The book, titled "Samta: An Arsenic-affected Village", was published in 2013. It is her first and the only book.

Monjuara was speaking at a discussion titled "The Arsenic Chronicles: Stories of a Silent Killer from Two Perspectives" at the city's Pathak Shamabesh Centre on Thursday. The University Press Limited (UPL), the publisher of her book, organised the programme.

AAN officials Kazuyuki Kawahara and Sachie Tsushima always inspired her to write. The society she saw in her childhood, the cultural norms as well as the agony of the arsenic-affected people in her village came prominently in her easy-to-read Bangla book.

The book is a combination of 81 articles written by Monjuara. Some of them are her work reports while the others are based on her personal experiences.

After most of the write-ups were

gathered by 2011, AAN approached the UPL that showed strong interest in publishing them as a book.

Badiuddin Nazir, editor of the book, said as Monjuara's writings have narratives of the rural people and the UPL had hardly published anything like her book before.

"I am happy that the book has been published," said Monjuara. She, however, expressed frustration over lack of interest by the government and the NGOs in mitigating arsenic.

People in Samta do not have enough drinking water as even the deep tube well water in much of the southwestern districts contains arsenic.

Between 2000 and 2016, at least 43 people died of arsenic-related diseases in Samta while many more are suffering from it. The poor and the women, who lack nutrition, are the most vulnerable, she said.

Monjuara said she also met the local government representatives and urged them to address the issue. "They come, listen and go, but don't take any action. The rich don't even go to the affected families to offer help".

The UPL also published the Bangladesh edition of "The Inheritance Powder" by British social scientist and novelist Hilary Standing, who extensively researched on Bangladesh's development since 1982.

The novel deals with the arsenic problems of Bangladesh and its links to the international aid agencies.

"Arsenic situation drove me to write the book. It has disastrous consequences on the development. So, I thought I should write it in a creative way," Hilary Standing said in the discussion moderated by Brac university's Prof Firdous Azim.

## Yanghee Lee

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Bazar during her week-long visit, diplomatic sources in Dhaka said.

During her visit, Lee is expected to also talk to local authorities in Cox's Bazar, representatives of UN organisations and members of the international community, sources said. She is also expected to meet with high government officials and discuss a broad range of Rohingya and human rights issues.

After her visit to Myanmar, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on January 24 warned about possible reprisals against people she met during her recent official visit to the country. "There is one word that has hung heavily on my mind during this visit - reprisals," the expert said.

"I must remind again that these attacks took place within the context of decades of systematic and institutionalised discrimination against the Rohingya population," she noted. The expert also went to several affected Muslim villages.

Yanghee Lee of South Korea, is a professor at Sungkyunwan University. She is highly recognized nationally, regionally, and internationally for her expertise in human rights and served as member (2003-2013) and chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2007-2011). She has also served as chairperson of the Meeting of Chairpersons of Treaty Bodies (2010-2011).

## UK envoy

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Commissioner Benoit-Pierre Laramée and Australian High Commissioner Julia Niblett also visited with Blake, a trip organised by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and World Food Program (WFP).

Meanwhile, a press release of the British High Commission yesterday said some newspapers misquoted Blake when she talked to the press during her visit to the Kutupalong Rohingya camp.

"But judgments about whether this amounted to genocide or ethnic cleansing are not ones that the high commissioner could or did make. Nevertheless she has no personal doubt that what they described would be beyond the bounds of acceptable security operations," according to the clarification of the High Commission.

The envoy thanked the Bangladesh government and international and local relief agencies, including IOM, WFP, UNHCR, Unicef, for their work to deliver immediate humanitarian support.

She said she was proud that UK Aid supported this work. "But the scale of the need is enormous and the UK will be looking at what more can be done, including ensuring that all the allegations are investigated so that those responsible for the violence are held to account."

According to Blake, the Rohingyas wanted to go home and they would not be able to do that until they could do so in safety and security and with their identity fully recognised.

"They called on us and their friends in the international community to deliver a lasting political solution that would restore their full human rights and dignity and give them hope for a brighter future," she added.

# Russia halted Syrian army, rebel clash

REUTERS, Beirut/Istanbul

Russia intervened to halt a clash between Syrian government forces and Turkey-backed Syrian rebels in northern Syria, sources on both sides said yesterday, the first confrontation between them as both sides fight Islamic State in the area.

Islamic State is under attack from separate campaigns in northern Syria by Russian-backed government forces and Turkey-backed rebels. The clash on Thursday near the IS-held city of al-Bab underlined the risk of the parallel offensives igniting new fighting between the government and its rebel enemies.

Russia and Turkey have backed opposing sides in the war but recently started cooperating over Syria, brokering a truce between government forces and rebels and working together to try to revive peace talks.

Rebel officials said the clash took place in a village southwest of al-Bab. An official in a military alliance fighting in support of the Syrian government confirmed a clash had taken place. "The Russians intervened to control the situation," said the source, speaking on condition of anonymity.

President Bashar al-Assad is supported in the war by the Russian military and an array of Iranian-backed militias.

Two rebel officials accused the government forces of provoking the incident. One of them said the government forces had moved towards their positions in tanks. "Rebels shot to warn them not to get any closer, but the tank responded and a clash erupted," said the first rebel official.

"Later on Russia intervened to calm down the situation," said the rebel official. "This whole incident felt like a test."

A second rebel official, a commander in the al-Bab area, added: "They opened fire. Fire was returned."

Both rebel officials said an armoured vehicle had been captured from the government forces.

There was no immediate comment from Russia.

Russian air strikes accidentally killed three Turkish soldiers on Thursday in northern Syria. It was not immediately clear whether the confrontation

described by the sources had taken place in the same area as the air strike.

Turkey and its FSA rebel allies have carved out a de facto buffer zone in northern Syria in territory captured from Islamic State since August in their "Euphrates Shield" operation. They have been battling to capture al-Bab since December, but escalated their attack this week, seizing the city's outskirts.

The Syrian army meanwhile mounted its own, rapid advance towards the city in the last few weeks, advancing to within a few kilometres (miles) of its southern outskirts.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said earlier this week that clashes with the Syrian forces had been avoided thanks to international coordination, including between Turkey and Russia.

## Obamacare critic confirmed as US health secretary

AFP, Washington

The US Senate narrowly confirmed Tom Price as President Donald Trump's pick for health secretary yesterday, appointing a fierce Obamacare critic who aims to implement a Republican promise to tear up the divisive health care reform law.

Price, a congressman from Georgia and former orthopedic surgeon, was confirmed as head of the Department of Health and Human Services along strict party lines, with the chamber's 52 Republicans voting for and 47 Democrats against.

Announcing 62-year-old Price as his pick last month, Trump praised him as "exceptionally qualified to shepherd our commitment to repeal and replace Obamacare and bring affordable and accessible health care to every American".

But Democratic senators arguing against Price's confirmation during a debate that stretched into the early hours of yesterday morning said he would hurt millions of Americans who depend on former president Barack Obama's signature health care reform.

## Father, son

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Talking to this correspondent yesterday, Chhoton said he had already completed tests of four subjects and did well. He hopes he will also do well in the rest of the tests.

Chhoton, who sells stamps at Ishwarganj sub-registry office, said passing SSC examination is his long cherished dream.

"I lost my father when I was only six. I was the youngest of 11 brothers and sisters," he said.

He had studied only up to class-VIII, but had to give up his study due to poverty and proper guidance. To be self-reliant, he looked for different types of small business in the area and later started working as a stamp vendor, he said.

"I want to be a deed writer, but a person who wants to get a deed writer licence must have Secondary School Certificate. But I had no such certificate and this has made up mind to start study again," he mentioned.

A father of three, Chhoton said he was also inspired by his children who are at different classes.

"If I can pass, I will go for higher secondary education and more," said Chhoton, seeking blessings from all.

His second son Iftear Jahan Raju is an eighth-grader at Biswaswari Pilot

High School, and his only daughter Sayma is a nursery student.

Chhoton's wife Jahanara Begum said her husband's devotion to study inspired her much. If her husband and son could pass their exams, she would also sit for her HSC examinations with them.

Rajib Kumar Sarker, Ishwarganj upazila nirbahi officer, said he talked to Chhoton and thanked him for his desire for study.

"It's a rare incident and Chhoton established a very positive example -- education has no age limit. His efforts will surely inspire others," the UNO said.

## No arrest

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The money goes into the pockets of a section of police officials and some leaders of the ruling Awami League and its front organisations through "linemen", they alleged.

The DSCC has been conducting hawkers eviction drives in Gulistan and its adjacent areas, including Purana Paltan, Dainik Bangla Mor and Motijheel, since January 15.

Protesting the move, the hawkers staged demonstrations.



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pays his respects after laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia yesterday. He was scheduled to meet US President Donald Trump later. PHOTO: AFP