

Zafar Iqbal stabbed in broad daylight



Professor Zafar Iqbal was stabbed in the head during a programme at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) on March 3. Professor Iqbal, a faculty member of the Computer Science and Engineering department at SUST, is a noted writer especially popular among young readers for his science fiction novels. Following the attack, he was brought to Dhaka in an air ambulance after primary treatment at Osmani Medical College and Hospital in Sylhet. His attacker was identified the day after as one Foyzur Rahman, a youth aged about 25. Counterterrorism officials said they believe the youth who carried out the attack could be a member of banned militant outfit Ansar al Islam. The noted writer was released from the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Dhaka on March 14.



The reform movement that shook the nation

Protests to reform the quota system of the country had taken place in the past as well. However, the year 2018 witnessed the protestors take to the streets with more conviction and compelled the government to scrap the quota system entirely. The protests began in April when hundreds of students under the banner 'Council to Protect Students' Rights' demanded that quotas be brought down to 10 percent as opposed to the 56 percent reserved for specific groups, including 30 percent for children and grandchildren of the country's freedom fighters. The police, in retaliation, fired tear gas shells and water cannons. Gradually the protests spread to different universities.

Members of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) tried to curb the movement by threatening the protestors and also beating them up during different protests. Female protestors were also verbally and physically harassed. At least 29 quota reform activists were also arrested by the police. The violence against peaceful protestors compelled guardians, teachers, and activists to take the streets to protest against the harassment of these activists. Barely a month after the protests began, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, at a press conference announced that the quota system would be abolished. However, three months later the protestors took to the streets again since there was no implementation of the Prime Minister's statement. Eventually, on October 3, the government issued a gazette scrapping the quota system, rather than reforming it, as had been the students' demands. The scrapping of the quotas entirely (originally meant to empower historically disadvantaged groups), however, led to relatively low-scaled protests by minority groups days later.



US-Bangla plane crash in Nepal kills 51, including 26 Bangladeshis

A US-Bangla flight from Dhaka crashed in Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport on March 12, in one of the deadliest civil aviation disasters in Nepal since 1992. A Nepali investigation found the captain, Abid Sultan, to be at fault as he was going through mental stress and anxiety which led to confusion over landing. In August, the first of the injured passengers and legal successors of the deceased received compensation (total to be paid out is BDT 346 million or USD 4.2 million) from the airliner's insurance.



For a digital space, Bangladesh launches Bangabandhu Satellite-1



Bangladesh entered the elite space club of 57 nations who have sent satellites into orbit, with its first commercial satellite launched to space in the early hours of May 12 (Bangladesh time 2:14am). Bangabandhu-1 will mostly cover South Asian countries and Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkestan and a part of Kazakhstan. The satellite under the Bangladesh Communication Satellite Company Limited is a Tk-2,765.66 crore project. It will offer Direct-to-Home (D2H) services, making access to worldwide TV much quicker. The satellite will make video distribution easier as well enabling broadcasters to effortlessly distribute their content to intermediaries like cable TV network operators or re-broadcasters like DTH operators. The satellite will have VSAT private networks consisting of voice, data, video and internet services to the banks, corporate offices etc. On June 6, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina revealed that the government has already started work to launch the country's second satellite-'Bangabandhu-2'-so that it could operate before the 15-year expiry time of 'Bangabandhu-1'.

"Abbu.... Why are you crying?"

Teknaf municipality councillor Akramul Haque was killed in a "crossfire" with RAB on May 26. Law enforcement officials claimed that Haque was a drug dealer and that the shootout happened during a combat operation. A week after his killing, his wife and two teenage daughters held a press briefing claiming he was killed intentionally by law enforcement. As evidence they released a call recording of Akram, his wife and his daughter moments before he died. The daughter kept repeatedly asking her father when he would come home. The councillor was heard sobbing on the phone and his daughter innocently asking him, "Dad, why are you crying?" Following gunshots, the phone call ended. The girl's naive and bewildered question captured the psyche of the general public and gave the crossfire victims a human face.

