

## A confluence

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The organisers honoured two eminent singers -- Sabina Yasmin (Bangladesh) and Arati Mukherjee (India) -- with Jibon Kriti Samman (Lifetime Achievement Awards) for their life-long contributions to Bangla music. When the two living legends took the stage, several timeless songs they recorded were played.

Apart from the organisers, the Sports Minister of West Bengal, India Arup Biswas felicitated the awardees. "I am extremely elated to receive the award. I am overjoyed to have received the award with Arati Mukherjee whom I am a fan of," said Sabina Yasmin, who later sang part of the song "Shob Kota Janala Khule Dao Na", written and composed by Nazrul Islam Babu and Ahmed Imtiaz Bulbul respectively.

"This festival, jointly organised by the music lovers of Dhaka and Kolkata, is an outstanding one. I want this festival to take place every year," Sabina added in her speech.

The festival, also aiming to diffuse the distinctive musical heritage of Bangladesh in Kolkata, is offering an array of Bangla music ranging from Panchokobi'r Gaan (songs of five great poets) to Raga-based classics, Taalbadya, Adhunik Bangla songs, folk songs, film songs and Bangla band songs.

Prior to the inauguration of the festival, a colourful Mangal Shobhajatra paraded several streets adjacent to the venue.

Renowned Bangladeshi singer Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya performed several lesser-known Tagore songs including "Tobo Doya Diye" and "Pran Chaye Chokkhu Na Chaye".

Shubhamita Banerjee, Nachiketa Chakrabarty, Fahmida Nabi and Bappa Mazumder performed Adhunik Bangla songs at the festival while Anupam Roy rendered film songs on the opening day.

A number of Bangladeshi and Indian singers together with contemporary bands Chirkutt (Bangladesh) and Chandrabindu (India) are set to perform at the festival.

## Three women

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unidentified criminals at East Bejgaon village in Sreenagar upazila on Thursday night.

According to locals, Aleya was attacked when her family members were out of home to attend a marriage ceremony of a neighbour.

Returning home, Aleya's son Didar found her bloodstained body and took her to upazila health complex where doctors declared her dead, said police.

Mohammad Younus Ali, officer-in-charge of Sreenagar Police Station, said the victim's family claimed she was killed over land dispute.

The victim's elder son Anowar filed a case with Sreenagar Police Station against four people including his uncle and cousins, the OC said.

Police already arrested one of Aleya's relatives -- Ashfarul Alam -- and are investigating the incident, he added.

## No genuine

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Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

"I am aware that many of you had to face hardships because of the complicated process of compiling the NRC. The exercise had been stuck for a decade and it's moving forward today only because of your strength," Modi said while addressing a rally in the town of Silchar in Assam.

"I assure you that no injustice will be done to any genuine Indian citizens," he added.

His statement came just days after the deadline for filing of claims by an estimated 40.7 lakh people who were excluded from the NRC draft final list ended. Of them, about 30.1 lakh people filed claims by December 31 deadline.

Modi said "the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill is related to people's lives. It is not for the benefit of anyone but a penance against the injustice and many wrongs done in the past. I hope the bill is passed soon in parliament," he said.

The bill is expected to be placed in the Lok Sabha on January 7 after the joint parliamentary committee finalised its report on the proposed legislation on Thursday.

The prime minister also spoke on his government's decision to implement Clause 6 of the Assam Accord aimed at safeguarding the cultural, social and linguistic identity of the Assamese people and providing them reservation in certain categories of government jobs.

The Indian cabinet recently approved a proposal to implement Clause 6 of the 1985 Assam Accord that ended years of violent street agitations by All Assam Students Union against "illegal" immigration from Bangladesh into Assam.

"This clause had been hanging for nearly 35 years, but now the road is clear..." he claimed," Modi said.

The BJP swept to power in Assam in 2016 in alliance with the Bodoland Peoples Front and the Asom Gana Parishad, toppling the Congress party.

## Condolences

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Yesterday, AL General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, Deputy Speaker Fazle Rabbi Miah, LGRD Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, Law Minister Anisul Huq and Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid conveyed shock at his death.

In a message, Gonoforum President Dr Kamal Hossain and its general secretary Mostafa Mohsin Montu said the country lost a great heart and a patriot.

The country is in dire need of his role in a "confrontational" post-polls political situation, they said in a message.

He could have played a role in the interest of the nation by rising above "narrow party interests", it added.

Lawmaker Rashed Khan Menon said Ashraf's legacy would remain alive.

Communist Party of Bangladesh conveyed sympathy to his family.

Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Prof Akhtaruzzaman said Ashraf was a politician with a clean image and he would be remembered as a pro-people leader.

Shammilita Samajik Andolon said he was an "uncompromising politician" in terms of upholding the non-communal spirit of the Liberation War.

The Oikya Nap, Progressive

Nationalist Party, Bangladesh Tanti League, Bangladesh Jubo Moitri, Jubo League, Zaker Party, Bangladesh Puja Uddjapan Parishad, Krishibid Institution Bangladesh, Jatiya Muktioddha Shamannay Committee, Bangladesh Nurses Association, and Imarat Nirman Sramik Union Bangladesh, among others, sent messages.

**ASHRAF'S BODY ARRIVES TODAY**  
His body will be flown back home from Bangkok this evening, the AL said in a statement.

A Biman Bangladesh flight carrying his body will reach the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 5:30pm. An AL team led by Obaidul Quader will receive the body.

The body will be taken to his government residence on Bailey Road around 7:00pm. The body will then be taken to the Combined Military Hospital mortuary.

On Sunday, Ashraf's first namaz-e-janaza will be held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban's south plaza at 10:00am.

The body will be flown to Kishoreganj Old Stadium playground where a second namaz-e-janaza will take place at 12:00pm.

A third namaz-e-janaza will be held at the Anjuman Eidgah in Mymensingh at 2:00pm.

He will be buried at Banani Graveyard after the Asr prayers.

## Pompeo expects Trump-Kim summit soon

AFP, Washington

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday again voiced optimism that a second US-North Korea summit would take place soon but said he doubted it would seal a landmark deal.

US President Donald Trump, who held a historic summit with Kim Jong Un in June in Singapore, on Tuesday revealed that he had received a "great letter" from the North Korean leader and boasted of their relationship.

"Lots of work that is left to be done, but I am confident that in the next short period of time President Trump and Chairman Kim will get the chance to meet again," Pompeo told Fox News host Sean Hannity, a prominent supporter of Trump.

He said the summit would work to "truly create a much better, safer America with less threat of not only nuclear weapons being launched at us but nuclear proliferation as well."

But asked if the next summit would lead to a lasting deal, Pompeo said: "I'd be surprised if we get all the way home in this meeting, although it would be fantastic if we did."

## Google moved almost 20b euros to Bermuda in 2017

AFP, The Hague

US internet giant Google used a legal mechanism to transfer almost 20 billion euros from the Netherlands to Bermuda in 2017 for tax purposes, a Dutch newspaper report said Friday.

Google, which is owned by US parent company Alphabet, moved 19.9 billion euros (\$22.7 billion) with a tax evasion strategy dubbed "Double Irish, Dutch Sandwich", according to 2018 financial documents cited by the financial daily FD.

The technique consists of shifting revenues from an Irish subsidiary to a Dutch shell company, which transfers the funds to another Irish subsidiary based in Bermuda, where it pays no income tax.

Google's transfer for 2017 was about four billion euros more than compared to 2016, based on annual accounts filed by Google Netherlands Holding with the Dutch chamber of commerce at the end of last year.

## 13 killed

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However, the Arakan Army spokesman denied any connection between the attacks and the anniversary.

"We are not independent yet. Today is not our Independence Day," Khine Thu Kha said.

Myanmar military spokesman Zaw Min Tun said earlier the insurgents had hit police outposts in a rugged region near the border with Bangladesh.

"These police posts are there to protect the national races in the area so [Arakan Army rebels] shouldn't attack them," Zaw Min Tun said, referring to mostly Buddhist ethnic groups in the area who are, unlike Rohingya Muslims, considered Myanmar citizens.

Arakan Army spokesman Khine Thu Kha confirmed the assault and said rebels later retrieved the corpses of seven "enemies".

He said later that rebels had freed at least 12 members of the security forces it detained in the fighting.

The attacks, he added, came in response to a Myanmar military offensive against the Arakan Army in recent weeks that had also targeted civilians.

The Myanmar military last month announced a four-month halt to fighting in the north and northeast of the country to kick-start peace talks with multiple armed groups seeking ethnic autonomy, but that announcement excluded Rakhine state.

Friday's violence erupted shortly after the national flag was raised across the Southeast Asian country to mark 71 years since independence from Britain.

Last August a UN report accused the Myanmar military of mass killings and rapes of Rohingya with "genocidal intent" in 2017 in then operation that drove more than 700,000 of them to flee to Bangladesh, according to UN agencies.

Myanmar has denied the charges, saying its military launched a counter-insurgency operation after attacks on security posts by Muslim militants.

## Norway

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Hagen added, "Our countries' good and longstanding relations are based on mutual respect and the pursuit of common interests."

"Norway will continue to work with the government and the opposition, as well as other stakeholders, to further advance the democratic and economic development of Bangladesh."

## Two more held

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sparked protest and condemnation.

Four of them were mentioned in the FIR. Nine people were sued over the incident.

The name of Ruhul, also a former union parishad member, was not included in the FIR.

Talking to reporters, the SP said Bulu was the personal assistant to Ruhul. During investigation, it was revealed that Bulu had hired people for Tk 10,000 to rape the woman.

The police officer also said Bulu had an altercation with the victim at a polling station in Sunday's national election and he also threatened her following the quarrel.

"Whoever is the offender will not be spared," the SP said, adding that they would arrest others involved in the incident soon.

"They will submit a charge sheet of the case and ensure trial of the case at the Speedy Trial Tribunal."

The woman was gang-raped allegedly by 10 to 12 accomplices of Ruhul, who is the publicity affairs secretary of Subarnachar AL, at her home early Monday.

Meanwhile, expressing deep concern over the rape, Gonoforum President Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday said, "This incident put our democratic and fundamental rights, and the freedom of expression under threat."

"The incident made us disgraceful



as a nation. Such an incident is difficult to imagine in any democratic country."

He also demanded the perpetrators be brought to book, said a press release of Gonoforum.

A team of Left Democratic Alliance yesterday visited Noakhali General Hospital where the 35-year-old victim was being treated.

It demanded immediate arrest of the culprits and their punishment through quick trial.

Protesting the rape, Chhatra League (JSD-Ambia), student body of a faction of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal led by Sharif Nurul Ambia, formed a human chain in front of Raju Memorial Sculpture on Dhaka University campus yesterday.

In another development, a delegation of 15 senior BNP leaders, led by its Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, will visit Noakhali General Hospital today to enquire about the victim, said a release.

## 'Genetic hack'

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The scientists at the university's Carl R Woese Institute for Genomic Biology say they have found a way to make the process of photosynthesis, the process by which plants use sunlight to convert carbon dioxide and water into energy, inherently more efficient.

An enzyme called Rubisco is key to the process of converting atmospheric carbon into an organic compound the plant consumes, a process known as "carbon fixation."

But the enzyme also acts to "fix" atmospheric oxygen, converting it into toxic compounds that the plant expends considerable energy eliminating -- energy that could otherwise be spent in growing. This competing process is known as photorespiration.

The Illinois team came up with the idea of implanting bits of algae DNA into the tobacco plant's cells to create a type of biological shortcut that would speed up photorespiration.

Lead author Donald Ort told AFP: "If you take a shortcut, when you're driving your car, you travel less distance, and you use less fuel."

When a plant uses less energy on photorespiration, it "is able to take that energy and put it into plant growth and plant productivity, rather than using it to metabolize this toxic compound."

The study is of particular signifi-

cance because it is the first time that the technique, which has been discussed for several years, resulted in such a major impact in an open field as opposed to a laboratory environment.

Other techniques had tried to limit photorespiration, but have often led to negative impacts on the plant's other functions.

"What's cool about this is that they've been very clever in targeting the pathway in a way that doesn't cause side effects," David Stern, president of the Boyce Thompson Institute, which was not a part of the study, told AFP.

But it is still far from being ready to be used on an industrial scale. The same team wants to reproduce their results with soybeans, black eyed peas, and potatoes. It is also necessary for the technique to work in diverse climates, notably Africa and Southeast Asia.

Some doubt they will succeed.

Professor Arnold Bloom from the University of California at Davis points out that such experiments have been carried out for the past five or six years, without achieving their goals.

He himself has published a study in Nature showing that photorespiration is not a redundant function for plants.

"Are we going to reinvent photosynthesis? I don't think so," he said.

More experiments in the fields of Illinois will hold the answer.

## Democrats take charge

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Homeland Security at current levels through Feb 8, providing \$1.3 billion for border fencing and \$300 million for other border security items including technology and cameras.

The second part would fund the other federal agencies that are now unfunded including the Departments of Agriculture, Interior, Transportation, Commerce and Justice, through Sept 30, the end of the current fiscal year.

"We're not doing a wall. It has nothing to do with politics. It has to do with a wall is an immorality between countries. It's an old way of thinking. It isn't cost effective," Pelosi told reporters late on Thursday.

As speaker, Pelosi now is situated to lead Democratic opposition to Trump's agenda and carry out investigations of his administration following two years during which congressional Republicans largely acquiesced to the president.

Trump on Thursday made an unannounced appearance in the White House briefing room to make the case for the border wall, accompanied by members of a union that represents border patrol agents that endorsed him for president in 2016. He congratulated Pelosi on her selection as speaker and said: "Hopefully we're going to work together."

"The wall - you can call it a barrier, you can call it whatever you want - but essentially we need protection in our country," Trump told reporters, without taking questions.

Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell signaled that the Democratic legislation had no future in the Senate, calling it "political theater, not productive lawmaking."

"Let's not waste the time," he said on the Senate floor. "Let's not get off on the wrong foot with House Democrats using their platform to produce political statements rather than serious solutions."

McConnell said the Senate would not take up any proposal that did not have a real chance of getting Trump's signature.

Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer urged McConnell to allow the Democratic legislation to come to a vote in the chamber and said there was no reason to keep parts of the government unrelated to the border security issue shut down because of the wall standoff.

Congressional leaders from both parties held unproductive talks with Trump at the White House on Wednesday and are to return for another round later yesterday, a sign the shutdown is likely to continue at least for the rest of the week.

After the November congressional

elections, Republicans have a 53-47 majority in the Senate and Democrats have a 235-199 margin in the House, with one seat undecided.

Trump made the wall - a project estimated to cost about \$23 billion - a key campaign promise in 2016, saying Mexico would pay for it and arguing it is needed to combat illegal immigration and drug trafficking. Democrats have called the wall immoral, ineffective and medieval.

Credit rating agency Moody's said the shutdown would cause minimal US economic and credit market disruption but there could be a more severe impact on financial markets and the broad economy if the closure is protracted.

## Mini-labs

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Dr Syed Umar Khyyam, chief of PQM-Bangladesh, said they have been working with DGDA to step up monitoring of medicines and enable labs to test the quality of medicines accurately and reliably.

The mini-labs collect samples considering the most important risk factors such as top-selling medicines, new and costly products, hard to reach areas and high disease seasons, he added.

Substandard and fake medicines can cause treatment failure and have adverse impacts on patients. They can also increase mortality and raise the chance of antibiotic resistance, said Md Mehedi Hasan, national consultant of essential drugs and medicines at WHO Bangladesh.

Maj Gen Md Mustafizur Rahman, director general of DGDA, said the drug admin carries out surveillance on medicine shops on a regular basis to evaluate the quality of medicines and take proper action against fake ones, if there is any.

"Using a mini-lab is a new idea in Bangladesh. It's a portable lab for field-level testing of medicines and it works fast."

Mini-labs have made market surveillance dynamic, the DGDA chief said.

Some drug admin staffers have been trained to run mini-labs as well.

Md Shakhawat Hossain Razu, superintendent of drugs in Barishal, said mini-labs were being used to conduct tests on suspected poor quality medicines. Only the low quality products are sent to NCL for thorough checks.

According to 2017-18 report of the DGDA, it had filed 221 cases, imposed fines of Tk 163,57,000 and seized illegal medicines worth Tk 42,60,170 in the last fiscal year.