

'Deeply moved'

Jolie writes after visiting Bangabandhu Museum; meets PM at Gono Bhaban

UNB, Dhaka

UNHCR special envoy and renowned Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie yesterday visited Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the capital's Dhanmondi and paid tribute to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

She paid the homage placing a wreath at the portrait of Bangabandhu.

Radwan Mujib Siddiq, grandson of Bangabandhu and trustee of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Memorial Trust, gave her a tour of the museum and briefed her about the life and work of Bangabandhu.

CEO of the Bangabandhu Memorial Trust Mashoora Hossain, Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Ministry's Maritime Affairs Unit Rear Admiral (ret'd) M Khurshed Alam, officials of the UNHCR and the foreign ministry were also present.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina shakes hands with UN Refugee Agency Special Envoy Angelina Jolie at the Gono Bhaban yesterday. Right, the Hollywood superstar visits the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the capital's Dhanmondi.

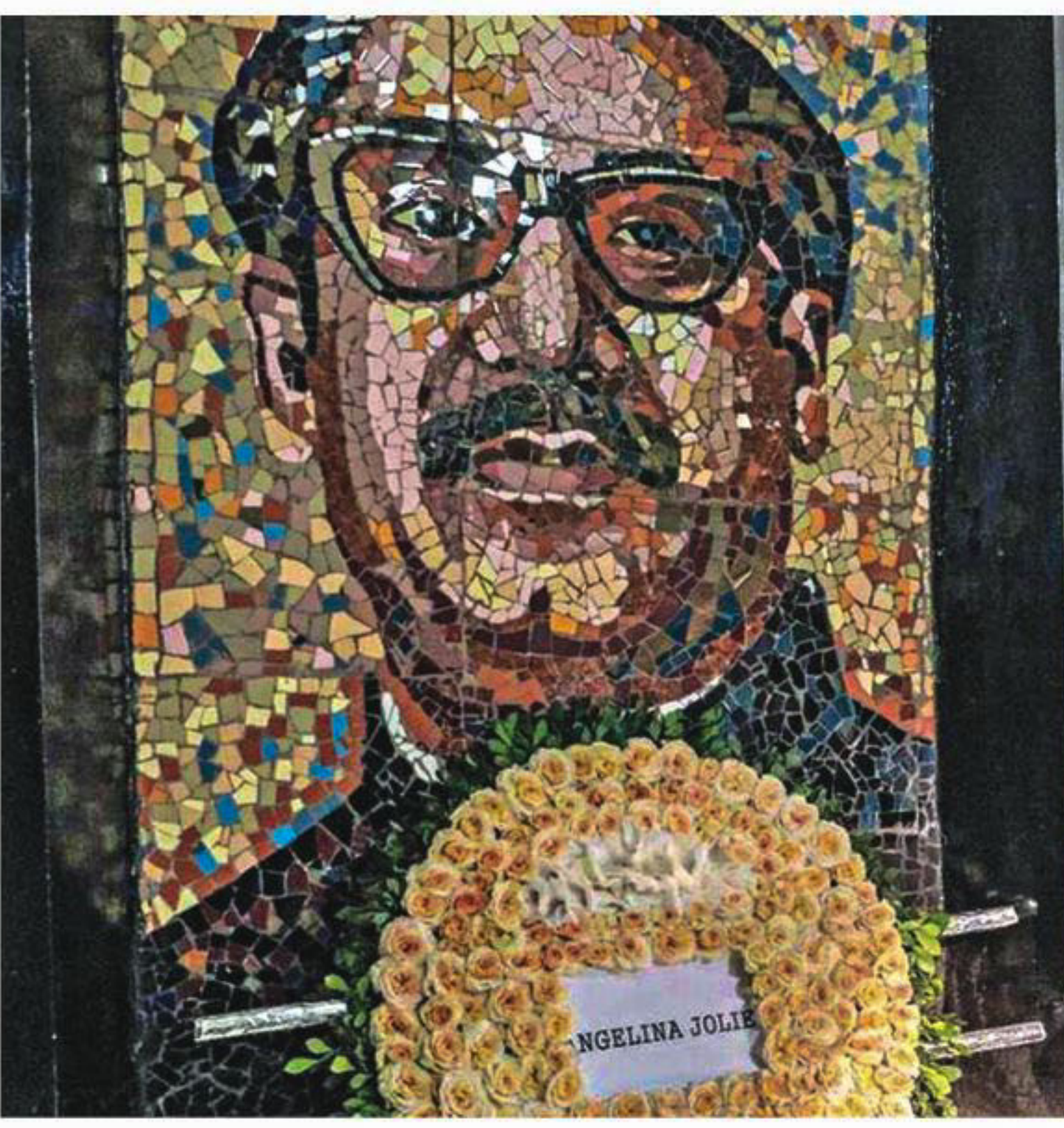


PHOTO: PID/TWITTER

UPAZILA POLLS

No compromise with irregularities

CEC warns

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda yesterday said the commission would not compromise with any irregularities in the upcoming Upazila Parishad election and if needed, it would stop voting.

He made the comment while briefing the election's returning and assistant returning officers in the capital's Nirbachon Bhaban.

The CEC also asked all concerned to take necessary steps to control violence before and after the polls.

The first phase of the five-phase election will be held on March 10.

Nurul Huda said, "If any returning officer considers that there is no congenial environment for voting, the officer can recommend stopping it. The commission will stop the voting."

"If any candidates and parties create any situation that breaches the electoral law and the situation goes beyond control of returning officer, voting might be stopped there. There will be no compromise with any irregularities in the election."

The CEC asked the returning and assistant returning officers to urge law enforcers to remain alert so that voters could come to polling stations and cast ballots for candidates of their choice without any hurdle.

Many alleged that voters cannot cast their votes freely and they are intimidated at some places, he added. "Let people vote for candidates of their choice," he told the election officials.

Although it is the responsibilities for candidates to appoint polling agents, the election officials should inspire them to do so. The officials should also take necessary steps so that polling agents can stay in the polling centres without any fear, the CEC said.

Election commissioners Mahub Talukdar, Rafiqul Islam, Kabita Khanam and Brig Gen (ret'd) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury were present at the briefing, presided over by Election Commission Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed.

On February 3, the commission announced that the first phase of upazila election would be held on March 10.

This time, the election will be held in five phases.

The last date for submitting nomination papers is February 11, while that of withdrawal is February 19.

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6 ex-ministers

chairman of the committee on food ministry, former agriculture minister Matia Chowdhury and former LGRD minister Khandaker Mosharaf Hossain on those ministries.

Awami League lawmakers Faruk Khan was made the chief of the committee on foreign ministry and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim on health ministry.

Chief Whip Noor-E-Alam Chowdhury placed eight proposals over the formation of the committees in the House.

Parliament passed the proposals by voice vote when Deputy Speaker Fazle Rabbi Miah, who was chairing the House at the time, moved the proposals.

AL insiders said Sheikh Hasina took the initiative to strengthen the government's oversight on the ministries.

On Tuesday, former shipping minister Shajahan Khan was made the chief of the committee on Liberation War ministry.

Govt can't do anything until court verdict

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supplementary question from Chattogram-2 MP Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvandary, chairman of Bangladesh Tarikat Federation.

The PM hoped that the court would pass the verdict soon and the Jamaat would be banned.

Hasina reminded the House that the Election Commission had scrapped Jamaat's registration as a political party after it had failed to fulfil the prerequisites. The registration with the EC is a must for taking part in a general election.

However, it is regrettable that Jamaat leaders became MP candidates in the December 30 polls with the BNP's electoral symbol "Sheaf of Paddy", the PM said.

The ruling Awami League secured a landslide victory in the election, bagging 257 out of the 299 seats.

Hasina expressed her gratitude to the people for not voting for Jamaat. "The people of Bangladesh totally rejected them [Jamaat men]."

She also informed parliament that the government had started negotiations with other countries to bring back fugitive convicts in different cases related to killing, money laundering, 10-truck arms-haul, the August 21-grenade attack and embezzlement of orphans' money.

"I do believe Insha'Allah we'll be able to execute their punishment after bringing them back to the country," she said.

Replying to a question from opposition Jatiya Party lawmaker Rustom Ali Faraji (Pirojpur-3), the premier said all-out efforts were underway to complete the construction of the Padma Bridge by December.

She mentioned that 62 percent of

the physical construction work of the Padma multipurpose bridge project had already been done.

Replying to another question from Awami League MP Shafiqul Islam Shimul (Natore-2), Hasina said she considered the premiership as a responsibility, not a matter of enjoyment.

"The premiership is not a matter of enjoyment to me; it is a responsibility and definitely a difficult responsibility," she said.

Talking about a comment from the MP that she made a rare record being elected the PM for three consecutive terms, Hasina said she did not do politics for making records.

In reply to a question from AL lawmaker Mahfuzur Rahman (Chattogram-3), the prime minister highlighted different reasons behind the AL's victory in the 11th general

election.

She said people re-elected her party through a free, fair and participatory election.

"This victory was an expected one," she said, adding that such predictions were made in reports prepared based on different pre-polls local and foreign surveys.

Without naming anyone, Hasina said competitions intensify if the rivals are strong. "It didn't seem to me that those who were our main rivals had any electoral preparation and strategy," she said.

Responding to a question from AL MP Bazul Haque Haroon (Jhalakathi-1), the PM said the government would formulate a plan to coordinate all research activities through the establishment of a flagship university at the national level in near future.

Children the most VULNERABLE

FROM PAGE 1

The ASK claimed that 10 victims were killed after rape.

Its records of 2018 show that 732 women and children were victims of rape across the country.

Prof Mahjabeen Haque, chairperson of Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, Dhaka University, pointed out diminishing social values and religious practices, easy availability of porn, and a culture of impunity as the primary reasons behind the rising number of rape incidents.

Detailed description of such crimes published by the media also instigates criminals, she said, suggesting careful

INCIDENTS OF RAPE IN 2018			
Month	Rape victims	Age mentioned	Aged below 18
June	80	34	30
July	81	41	31
August	52	29	26
September	56	25	23
October	46	19	18
November	49	20	16
December	21	10	8

handling of such reports.

She said children were targeted in particular because they could resist the least and could be intimidated easily.

Mahjabeen recommended that parents make their children aware of

the dangers. "They should explain what is a 'good touch' and a 'bad touch'. They should tell their children not to go with strangers."

The psychologist mentioned if a child feels uncomfortable around someone in a lift, he or she should press all the buttons.

Muntasir Maruf, assistant professor at the Department of Psychiatry at Shaheed M Monsur Ali Medical College in Sirajganj, said, "Since children can be abused, scared or allured easily, they are becoming the easy targets of rape and sexual abuse."

"Children who fall victim to abuse may suffer from mental disorders, depression and social phobia in

future," he said alluding to cases that he had handled.

Muntasir further said many incidents go unreported as families refrain from lodging complaints due to the social stigma.

Less than 2 percent of rape cases filed between 2012 and 2017 ended in conviction. This is mainly because many perpetrators force the victims to settle the matter outside courts and the legal process is so humiliating that the victims back out.

Data from Dhaka metropolitan areas paint even a grimmer picture. Just 1.06 percent cases saw convictions between 2002 and 2017, according to court and prosecution sources.

Work but no pay

FROM PAGE 1

The 26-year-old graduate joined the municipality on March 9, 2015, with high hopes. But his hopes were dashed. He has not received salaries for 22 months.

His three-member family now depends on farming for survival.

"I couldn't ensure proper treatment for my mother because of financial constraints... she died in 2016," he said.

None of the 70 staffers at Alamdanga municipality, established in 1985, has received salaries for the last 22 months.

GOVT FUNDS NOT ENOUGH

A total of 35,139 staffers work in the 260 municipalities. Of them, 12,695 are permanent, and the rest are employed on an adhoc basis.

As per the Paurashava Act, the government provides a municipality with at least 0.04 percent of the salaries for its staffers. The municipality has to arrange the rest of the amount from its revenue.

The revenue comes from holding tax and lease on local markets. It also gets two percent of the amount realised as

land tax.

The municipalities require Tk 1,249 crore annually to pay monthly salaries of all staffers, including mayors and councillors, according to the BAPS.

In fiscal 2018-19, the government allocated Tk 13.67 crore for salary funds of all the municipalities, which is only one percent of the required amount, said the association leaders.

The BAPS data shows that 326 municipalities earned Tk 1,136 crore in revenue and spent Tk 1,217 crore in fiscal 2017-18.

DEMAND FOR ALLOCATION

On Tuesday, representatives of the BAPS submitted a memorandum to the prime minister through Planning Minister MA Mannan, demanding allocation for municipality staffers from the government's non-development funds.

In March last year, the aggrieved officials and employees of these municipalities staged a five-day sit-in in front of the Jatiya Press Club. They withdrew the sit-in upon "assurance" from Abdul Malek, the then secretary of the Local

Government Division (LGD).

At that time, the ministry also formed a seven-member committee headed by Mahub Hossain, additional secretary (the Urban Development Wing) of the LGD, to look into the matter.

"We had several meetings with the secretary at that time. He assured us of meeting our demands. But there has been no progress till date," said Alim.

"We demand inclusion of the municipalities in the Upazila Parishad Act 1998 under which staffers of 17 types of local government bodies receive salaries," said the BAPS president, who filed a writ petition with the High Court on July 26 last year.

In the petition, he sought a court order for the government to pay salaries of municipality staffers from public funds.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Mahub said, "We have almost finalised our [the committee] report. But two cases are pending with the High Court in this regard. We have sought opinion from the [LGRD] ministry's legal wing on the legal aspects..."

Experts say most of the municipalities

have little scope for generating income. Those were made municipalities under political consideration despite not having the merit or characteristics to become municipalities.

Prof Tofail Ahmed, a local government expert, said, "Many localities were made municipalities under political consideration though those lacked merit."

"Most of the staffers were appointed without considering the needs or financial capability of the municipalities. As a result, some poor people are now suffering."

"The government should allocate funds immediately as a temporary solution. But there should be a commission like the ones in India to adopt a unique and centralised system for all local government institutions," he mentioned.

Tofail, also the vice chancellor of Victoria University in Cumilla, criticised the government decision to announce all the upazila headquarters as municipalities, saying "the upazila system itself is not working."

On the road to enlightenment

FROM PAGE 1

Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, the convener of the 1978 study circle, ultimately founded an organisation called Bishwo Shahitto Kendro (BSK) -- with the motto "we want enlightened humans" -- that has created generations of Bangladeshi intellectuals.

Besides reaching out to school students through BSK's excellence programme, Prof Sayeed came up with the unique idea of launching mobile libraries. Buses and trucks of different sizes have been fitted with book shelves and transformed into mobile libraries that can carry 4,000, 6,000, 8,000 and 11,000 books based on the size of the vehicle. These buses and



trucks now travel through 250 upazilas and 58 districts of the country, engaging half a million readers. In June this year, 36 new buses and trucks will be added to this fleet.

To become a member of the library, one has to give only Tk 300 as security deposit and pay a nominal monthly membership fee of Tk 20.

Thanks to these initiatives, in the last 40 years, BSK has developed a base of at least one crore readers. It has also been organising a regular study circle, called Alor Ishkool, in its building. Anyone above 18 can be a member of this circle and attend lectures on a wide range of topics -- world literature, classical and contemporary philosophy, poetry, cinema, photography, art appreciation -- while enjoying different kinds of cultural performances.

"My goal is to develop an enlight-

ened young generation who will initiate a renaissance of knowledge and excellence in Bangladesh. How can I achieve this? I need to introduce them to the biggest minds of the world who have achieved the highest order of intellectual excellence. Litterateurs and philosophers like Dante, Sheikh Saadi, Plato, Aristotle, and great religious preachers and prophets have documented their profound thoughts and ideas in their books. Instilling their intellectual resources in our minds by reading their works is the only way to achieve our vision and enrich our intellect. This is how our young can be enlightened human beings," states Prof Sayeed.

Man sent to jail on rape charges

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A Moulvibazar court yesterday sent a man to jail on charges of raping a class-III student in the district's Kulaura upazila.

The accused is Ronjit Patro, 42, of the upazila's Guabari village.

Shamim Musa, officer-in-charge of Kulaura Police Station, said they arrested Ronjit from Guabari village Tuesday night, hours after a case was filed against him with the police station.

The girl's father alleged that Ronjit took his daughter to his home luring her with money on Sunday evening and raped her in a nearby abandoned room.

He also threatened to kill the girl if she shared the incident with anybody, he added.

The father said his nine-year-old daughter, mostly vibrant in her classes, was absent from school for two days and became completely silent when she returned.

Noticing the changes, when her teachers asked, she admitted the incident, he added quoting teachers.

Polash Roy, resident medical officer of Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital, said the girl was sent to the hospital Tuesday afternoon.

She went through tests and received necessary medical attentions at the hospital, he added.

Trump

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push for peace with North Korea, but cited the halt in its nuclear testing and no new missile launches in 15 months as proof of progress.

"If I had not been elected president of the United States, we would right now, in my opinion, be in a major war with North Korea," Trump said in his address.

Trump had raised fears of war in 2017 when he threatened to rain "fire and fury like the world has never seen" on North Korea because of the threat its nuclear weapons and missiles posed to the United States.

Trump met Kim on June 12 in Singapore in the first summit between a sitting US president and a North Korean leader. Trump has been eager to hold a second summit in spite of a lack of concrete progress in persuading North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program.

His relationship with Kim, he said on Tuesday, "is a good one."

Communist-ruled Vietnam, which has good relations with both the United States and North Korea, had been widely touted as the most likely venue for the meeting.

It has been touted as a model of economic and political reform for impoverished and isolated North Korea to follow, but would require major changes to the North's personality cult and "juche" ideology of self-sufficiency.

Trump did not say which Vietnamese city would host the two leaders, but both the capital, Hanoi, and Danang have been considered possibilities.

A source at Danang airport said four US military V-22 "Osprey" aircraft flew from Japan's Okinawa island and landed in Danang on Tuesday evening. They left Danang again after a few hours, the source said.

Last week, US logistics officials visited the city, a major base for US and South Vietnamese forces during the Vietnam War, a source with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

The US Embassy in Vietnam said it did not have anything to announce regarding the summit.

US Special Representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun was due to hold talks in Pyongyang this week to map out what he called "a set of concrete deliverables" for the second meeting.

The Singapore summit yielded a vague commitment from Kim to work toward the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, where US troops have been stationed since the 1950-1953 Korean War.

In the US view, North Korea has yet to take concrete steps to give up its nuclear weapons. It has complained that the United States has done little to reciprocate its freezing of nuclear and missile testing and dismantling of some nuclear facilities.

The two-day summit could bring an agreement between Trump and Kim to end the Korean War, said Harry Kazianis of the Washington-based Centre for the National Interest, a conservative think-tank.