

# Old town sends out an SOS

FROM PAGE 1  
Talking to The Daily Star, Ashraful Islam, project director of the capital city's revised Detailed Area Plan (DAP), said setting up underground water reservoirs, creating open spaces and widening the roads can minimise loss of lives during times of tragedies. He said firefighters faced trouble to douse the fire in Chawkbazar on Wednesday night due to inaccessible alleys and a lack of fire hydrants.

- Redevelopment key to old Dhaka's disaster management
- The part of the capital stretches over around 1050 acres
- 24,000 structures crammed in 11 wards
- Most structures have no approval
- Estimated population 4,20,000
- 265 to 1100 people live per acre
- Full of hazardous chemical warehouses, factories
- Rajuk blamed for inaction

"Didn't it give rise to the number of lives lost?" Ashraful asked. Unless the hazardous chemical stores are relocated and the area is redeveloped, the danger will not go, he said. "Afflicted with high density structures, narrow lanes, heavy commercialisation and lacking open space, the overcrowded old city is sitting on a valley of impending death."

At least 67 people were killed as the fire ripped through several buildings in the Chawkbazar neighbourhood.

The incident brings to mind the Nimtoli fire that killed 124 in 2010. It had sparked a public outcry, demanding relocation of chemical warehouses and stores from the area, but little has been done in the last nine years.

Many victims of Wednesday's fire were in rickshaws and vehicles stuck in traffic on narrow roads in the area.

Talking to The Daily Star, Maj AKM Shakil Newaz, operations director of the Fire Service and Civil Defense, said firefighters could not reach the fire site with their large vehicles as the roads were too narrow.

"We faced trouble also for a lack of hydrants in the area," he said. "Air Force helicopters had to be called in to

carry water from the Buriganga river and spray it on the fire," he said.

Talking about the unplanned development in old Dhaka, Ashraful said many owners did not have permission for their buildings.

Citing the Urban Redevelopment Study of the ongoing DAP review, Ashraful said 24,000 structures cram the 11 wards of the part of the capital and most of the structures don't have the required Rajuk approval.

In such a situation, a redevelopment guideline has to be incorporated into the revised DAP, he said.

Redevelopment is an urban renewal with block-based cumulative development. It is done by merging available fragmented lands to build high-rise buildings but sparing open space for wider roads. It also ensures water reservoirs, greenery and all civic amenities.

This method dramatically improves the quality of life at any

place keeping its existing land ownership and social character intact, Ashraful said, adding, it demonstrated success in countries like South Korea, Singapore and Japan.

Prof Adil Mohammed Khan, secretary general of Bangladesh Institute of Planners, echoed Ashraful's views.

He said redevelopment was necessary for "salvaging the old town by ensuring spacious roads, open spaces like parks and playgrounds".

Twelve percent of any urban area must be wetland but it is almost absent in old Dhaka, he said.

He also said if Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk), the city's development authority, had played its role effectively, the disaster in Chawkbazar could have been averted.

Contacted, Md Shah Alam Chowdhury, Rajuk's zonal director concerned, said, "Rajuk alone cannot stop hazardous business at residential buildings if the city corporation gives trade licences and the others provide water, gas and electricity connections to them."

He said a lack of coordination among different government bodies was allowing the hazardous chemical businesses to continue even after the Nimtoli tragedy.

He also claimed to have served legal notices to many illegal businesses in residential buildings but cited manpower crisis as the reason for not evicting them.

Asked, he claimed he was not aware of the number of buildings without Rajuk approval in the old town.

## 59 'bandits' killed in NW Nigeria

AFP, Kano

At least 59 "bandits" were killed by a civilian defence force when they attacked a village in northwest Nigeria, security officials and locals told AFP yesterday.

"We killed 59 of the bandits and we lost seven men in the fight, which lasted for almost four hours," Bube Shehu, a resident of Danjibga village, said of the clashes on Wednesday.

Local reports said the death toll could be even higher, after a local government official said 15 other bandits were killed in the nearby village of Danmarke.

Shehu's account was backed by a military officer in the state but there was no immediate corroboration from police.

## China unveils

FROM PAGE 20  
She joins the digital doppelgangers of English-language anchor Zhang Zhao and his Chinese-language counterpart Qiu Hao, who were unveiled in November during the 2018 World Internet Conference in Wuzhen, Zhejiang province.

Xinhua also on Tuesday unveiled an improved version of its AI presenter Qiu Hao, named Xin Xiaohao, who is able to gesticulate in a natural manner and read the news while standing up.

An AI system has been used to synthesise the presenters' voices, lip movements and expressions based on those of real presenters.

The digital anchors offer certain advantages over humans, Xinhua previously said. They are available to work 24 hours a day on its official website and various social media platforms.

This can reduce news production costs and improve efficiency during breaking news reports.

Xinhua said that its "new employees" have taken to their roles with enthusiasm and have published more than 3,400 reports totalling over 10,000 minutes in length since November.

Net users previously welcomed the new presenters while others questioned whether they would replace their human counterparts. Some complained that the AI newscasters had a very robotic and unnatural voice.

China has become one of the leading global hubs for AI development in recent years.

Several fields such as finance, healthcare, and manufacturing have adopted machine learning systems for commercial uses.

Automating workplaces in China with AI could add 0.8 to 1.4 percent to gross domestic product (GDP) growth annually, depending on the speed of adoption, according to a report by McKinsey Global Institute.

# JeM plans even bigger

FROM PAGE 20

JeM has also claimed that it was the terror group's former operational commander Mohammad Waqas Dar who had planted the IED at Nowshera in Rajouri last week in which Army Major Chitresh Bisht was killed.

However, police officials said the entire communication among Jaish terrorists seemed to be a "psychological operation" targeted at terrorising India. "But since we have intercepted the communication, we cannot ignore it. We are on high alert and trying to corroborate the threats through other means too," a senior police officer said.

Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi resumed his attacks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a stinging tweet a week after the terror attack.

"The brave are martyred. Their families struggle. Forty jawans give their lives but are denied the status of 'Shaheed (martyr)'. While this man has never given and only taken. He's gifted 30,000 crore of their money and will live happily ever after. Welcome to Modi's NEW INDIA," tweeted the Congress president, sharing an NDTV story on the Supreme Court ordering

industrialist Anil Ambani to repay dues to Ericsson or face jail.

After the terror attack, Rahul Gandhi, in a press conference along with former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh, had said that he and his party would support the government and not get into any other discussion for the next few days.

"I will support the government and jawans in this difficult time," said Rahul Gandhi, refusing to respond to questions on political controversies.

But after a week's hiatus, both the Congress and its chief have picked up from where they left. The renewed attacks signal a change in stance after BJP leaders including party president Amit Shah took digs at the Congress after the attack.

Amit Shah said at a rally in Assam that the soldiers' sacrifice "will not go waste as it is a BJP government in power, not Congress".

Rahul Gandhi's tweet refers to his often-repeated allegation that the government and PM Modi settled for an overpriced deal for 36 Rafale jets from France's Dassault to help Anil Ambani's inexperienced defence firm bag an offset contract.

# Dheki lives on to make

FROM PAGE 20

This was possible thanks to one Kobuljan Begum.

About 250 families of Horidebpur village in Tanore upazila use the 20-year-old dheki built and owned by Kobuljan, a housewife, to get the one of a kind "dheki chhata chal".

Dheki, with its heavy wooden lever supported on a pedestal, has reinstated its place in Bengali proverbs, essays, and of course, folk songs.

In the 18th century, it was the lone tool to prepare Bengali meals. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, in his collection of satirical essays -- Kamalakanta, wrote, "I wonder what I could eat if there was no dheki on Earth!"

Dheki gave birth to the famous Bengali proverb: "Dheki shorge geleo dhan bhane (Dekhi threshes paddy even if it lands in heaven)" meaning "habits hardly change!"

As they raised the lever of the dheki with their feet, women sang along to the rhythmic sounds -- "dhik-it-dhik" -- and thus songs like "O dhan bhanire dhekite par diya, dheki nache ami nachi helia dulia" were born.

At a time when "shortcuts" are seeping into all spheres of human lives, dheki seemed to be on the verge of being eroded from memories.

Yet, it lives on for the villagers of Horidebpur and it is bringing back the lost taste in hearty meals and winter delicacies.

Kobuljan built the dheki two decades ago because she did not like the taste of rice that comes from the mills.

"After the Boro harvest, we separate a portion of the paddy that we thresh using the dheki to make flour for making puli pitha in winter," Kobuljan told this paper. "Rice threshed in modern mills does not have the same taste as the one threshed in dheki. I built it for the good taste in my meals."

The agricultural tool is used to separate rice grains from their outer husks, to make flour and grind spices mainly, according to Kobuljan. "During winter, the dheki is a must for making flour. Otherwise, puli pitha lacks its authentic taste," she continued.

Kobuljan initially kept the dheki inside her home but as a constant flow of visitors began, she later placed it on her courtyard for everyone to use.

However, she does not charge people for using her dheki. "I repair it from time to time, but I don't charge anything. I want to share the joy of tasting quality food with others," she said.

She went on to say that threshing using a dheki was an art and not everyone's cup of tea.

One Sufia Begum and her daughter-in-law Parveen Begum were threshing 10 kilogram of rice in the dheki when this correspondent visited Kobuljan's house.

"We are threshing rice to make flour for pitha," said Sufia. "We come to thresh spices during festivals."

"Pitha is baked well when we use dheki chhata chal. If we want tasty pithas, there is no better option than this," she added.

# 21 forever

FROM PAGE 20

the erstwhile Pakistan government's refusal to recognise Bangla as one of the state languages and its imposition of Urdu as the only official language of Pakistan.

Police opened fire on the procession, murdering a number of agitators.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday paid homage to the Language Movement martyrs by placing wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital at one minute past midnight, reports UNB.

They proceeded to the altar of the Shaheed Minar together in slow pace as the song on Amar Ekushey -- 'Amar Bhaiyer Rakte Rangano Ekushey February' -- played.

The president was the first to lay a wreath at the Shaheed Minar, after which the PM placed hers.

They stood in solemn silence for a while, as a mark of profound respect for the fallen heroes.

Ministers, advisers to the PM, parliament members, chiefs of the three services, diplomats, senior Awami League leaders, and top civil and military officials were present on the occasion.

Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury paid tribute to the martyrs by placing a wreath at the Shaheed Minar.

Sheikh Hasina, also president of the ruling AL, placed another wreath on behalf of her party, flanked by cabinet members and senior AL leaders.

Meanwhile, the president and the PM issued separate messages on the occasion, the UNB report adds.

In his message, the president said, "I extend my warm congratulations and sincere felicitations to all multilingual people of the world along with Bangla-speaking people."

"On the occasion, let the bond of friendship among multilingual people be strengthened, world's almost defunct languages be revived and the globe be diversified in respective societies."

The PM, in her message, said the great Ekushey was the symbol of grief, strength and glory in the life of every Bangali.

"I pay my deep homage to the memories of the martyrs. I also pay my deep respect to the greatest Bangali of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had led the language movement, and all other language veterans," she said.

"Let's build a hunger- and poverty-free and a happy and prosperous Sonar Bangladesh, as dreamt by the Father of the Nation, with the spirit of the great Ekushey," the PM added.

Meanwhile, a delegation of Jatiya Party central executive committee placed floral wreaths at the Shaheed Minar altar, says a press release.

Members of the Left Democratic Alliance, Socialist Party of Bangladesh, and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal also paid tribute to the martyrs, say separate releases.

To mark the day, different educational institutions including Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, Jagannath University, Begum Rokeya University of Rangpur, North South University, Green University, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, and Bangladesh University of Business and Technology arranged separate programmes -- discussions, blood donations and cultural sessions at their respective campuses, say separate releases.

## 'AMAR EKUSHEY' AROUND THE GLOBE

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1999 declared February 21 as "International Mother Language

Day", which has been observed globally since then.

According to a UNB report, the House of Representatives of the USA on Tuesday introduced a resolution recognising February 21 as "International Mother Language Day." The resolution, the report said, supported the goals and ideals of the day and encouraged the people of the US to observe it with appropriate ceremonies, programmes and activities.

Representatives Grace Meng, along with Jim McGovern, Raul Grijalva and Deb Haaland introduced the resolution to bring due attention to the importance of preserving linguistic and cultural heritage through education, the UNB report added.

The Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN and Bangladesh Consulate General in New York jointly arranged a programme to mark the Shaheed Day and the International Mother Language Day, says a press release.

Officials of the mission and the consulate general, as well as expatriate Bangladeshis, paid tribute to the Language Movement heroes by placing floral wreaths at a makeshift Shaheed Minar at the mission office, it says.

The programme started on Wednesday night local time as Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN Masud Bin Momen welcomed the audience.

A cultural programme comprising recitation, music and dance, and a discussion session was part of the programme.

Bangladesh Embassies in Riyadh, Tokyo, Manila, Hanoi, Tashkent, and Rome, as well as Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Mumbai, also held different programmes in observance of the day, say separate releases.

# Nimtoli to Chawkbazar

FROM PAGE 1

blaze under control, Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun yesterday said, "The chemical business in Old Dhaka has been a family business. It's like a family tradition. They don't want to go far. A lot of issues are related to this. I'm from Old Dhaka. I know this very well."

According to media reports, there are more than 25,000 chemical warehouses in Old Dhaka, of which around 15,000 are in residential buildings. Fire service officials said only around two percent storehouses have permission from the city corporation.

Most of the warehouses store chemicals and dyes, largely used in readymade garment (RMG) and textile factories.

One of the main reasons behind the concentration of such storehouses in Old Dhaka is their cheaper rent compared to those in other parts in the city. Besides, their locations also help businesses cut the chemical transportation costs.

Old Dhaka is also known as a hub for counterfeit perfume products, including scent and deodorant. Numerous warehouses have been set up to store counterfeit products.

Storehouses are built in some almost unreachable and undiscoverable rooms and buildings, meaning these are inaccessible to firefighters.

"Around 98 percent of the chemical warehouses are illegal and they operate at night. We had warned them several times, but in vain," Fire Service

and Civil Defence Director General Ali Ahmed told The Daily Star.

After the Nimtoli fire in 2010, the government had pledged to relocate chemical warehouses from Old Dhaka to a thinly populated area in Keraniganj. But it is yet to procure land to set up a chemical warehouse zone.

Shamsul Alam, chief inspector of the Department of Explosives, said following the Nimtoli incident they had banned storage of 29 explosive chemicals without their permission and decided to relocate the warehouses. "If the embargo could be implemented, yesterday's situation would not have emerged."

Chemical safety expert Prof Syeda Sultana Razia, head of the Buet's chemical engineering department, said storage of chemicals and other industrial materials in residential areas must be stopped.

"Since it is directly related to livelihoods of many people, the government must relocate and rehabilitate them first. Shutting down storages in densely populated residential areas without relocation will not help," she added.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said, "The government stood beside the victims in the 2010 fire and never played the role of a silent audience. We'll take measures to prevent recurrence of such incidents and rehabilitate the victims."

After the Nimtoli tragedy, a government probe committee had made a 17-point recommendation. It suggested

shifting warehouses to nonresidential areas, enforcing Fire Prevention and Extinguishing Rules 2003 and Bangladesh National Building Code, installing separate hydrant points in the city's different areas, forming a cross-functional licence issuing body and updating school and college textbooks to raise awareness from an early age.

Experts said the government needed to identify, sack and arrest those officials responsible for making sure that there were no illegal chemical warehouses in Old Dhaka.

The industries minister said the storehouses would be relocated to a new area at the earliest. He, however, didn't mention any time frame.

## 'Rohingyas

FROM PAGE 20

They were distributing clothes among Rohingya children near Shah Porir Dwp Jame Mosque around noon when they were attacked.

Abul Khair, officer-in-charge of Ukhia Police Station, said a policeman -- Constable Jakir Hossain -- was also injured when he tried to rescue the victims.

Police were conducting drives to arrest the culprits, the police official said.

The victims sustained critical injuries and were sent to a local hospital, the OC said.

Around one million Rohingya refugees now live in camps across Cox's Bazar district.

## What they had

FROM PAGE 1

buildings will be demolished."

### Abdur Razzaque, the then food and disaster management minister

"The committee decided to introduce hydrant points all over the country, not only inside buildings, malls and homes, but also at different points on the streets."

### Inter-Ministerial Disaster Management Coordination Committee

[Against the backdrop of a devastating fire at Nimtoli, the government directed the owners of chemical warehouses to move their stocks to a safer location by August 17, later extended the deadline till September 30, 2010.]

"Action would be taken against the traders for failing to meet the deadline set by the government. There is no scope for extending the deadline further."

### Dilip Barua, the then industries minister

"We will clean off Old Dhaka." "At least 200 locals will be given basic training on firefighting, first aid and searching for survivors."

### Brig Gen Abu Nayeem Mohammed Shahidullah, the then director general of fire service

Coast guard filed a case with Teknaf Police Station against the detainees and handed them over to the police station.

Elsewhere in the district, police arrested another man with 10,000 yaba pills around 6:45am.

The arrestee is Habib Ullah, 45, a former general secretary of pro-BNP student organisation Jatiatabadi Chhatra Dal.

Mujahidul Islam, officer-in-charge of Ramu Highway Police Outpost, said they arrested Habib on Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway. He was carrying the yaba pills in five separate bags.

A case was filed with Ramu Police Station and Habib was handed over to them.

## 12 held

FROM PAGE 20

The detainees are Kabir Ahmed, 35, Nabi Majhi, 20, Amanullah, 18, Tarekullah, 14, Kamal Uddin, 20, Md Saber, 18, Md Riaz, 14, Md Shaker, 16, Md Faisal, 16, Rahmatullah 19, and Md Riaz, 18.

# Trump bars IS woman

FROM PAGE 20

Alabama-raised Muthana is believed to have travelled to Syria on a US passport.

But a US official said a later investigation showed that she had not been entitled to her passport, adding: "Ms. Muthana's citizenship has not been revoked because she was never a citizen."

Officials declined further comment but in a loophole that could boost the government case, Muthana's father had been a diplomat from Yemen -- and children of diplomats are not automatically given citizenship.

Muthana's lawyer, Hassan Shilby, showed a birth certificate that demonstrated she was born in New Jersey in 1994 and said her father had ceased being a diplomat "months and months" before her birth.

"She is a US citizen. She had a valid passport. She may have broken the law and, if she has, she's willing to pay the price," Shilby told AFP at his office in Tampa.

He said Muthana wanted due process and was willing to go to prison if convicted.

"We cannot get to a point where we simply strip citizenship from those who break the law. That's not what America is about. We have one of the greatest legal systems in the world, and we have to abide by it."

### US-BORN AND RADICALISED

Just this weekend, Trump took to Twitter to chastise European allies that have not taken back hundreds of Islamic State prisoners caught in Syria, where Trump plans to withdraw US troops.

Comparatively few Americans have embraced radical Islam, with the Counter Extremism Project at George Washington University identifying 64 who went to join the Islamic State group in Syria or Iraq.

Muthana, raised in a strict household in Hoover, Alabama, said she was brainwashed by social media messages and headed to Syria without her parents' knowledge in 2014.

Shortly afterward, Muthana posted on Twitter a picture of herself and three other women who appeared to torch their Western passports, includ-

ing an American one.

She went on to post vivid calls on social media to kill Americans, glorifying the ruthless extremist group notorious for its beheadings that for a time ruled vast swathes of Syria and Iraq.

## 2010 HC

FROM PAGE 1

unauthorised) were stored and to submit the report to it within three months.

It also issued a rule asking the authorities to show cause as to why they should not be directed to take actions and adequate measures for preventing and fighting against eruption of fire in the city.

In the rule, the court told the authorities to explain why they should not be ordered to ensure safe and planned development of Old Dhaka and prevent the unauthorised setting up or use of buildings as warehouses and factories, and use of flammable or petroleum products or any hazardous substances, chemicals or explosives in Old Dhaka.

Petitioners' lawyer Sara Hossain yesterday told The Daily Star that the government was yet to respond to the order and rule issued by the HC after the Nimtoli tragedy, and the HC did not pass any further order on this issue.

The lawyer added that she would move another petition on behalf of her clients before the HC next week for punishment of the people responsible for Chawkbazar disaster and adequate compensation for the victims' families.

Advocate Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, one of the petitioners, told this correspondent that the incident of Chawkbazar tragedy happened as the administration concerned did not take appropriate action against those responsible for the Nimtoli incident.

Home Secretary Mostafa Kamal Uddin and Attorney General Mahbub Alam could not be reached over their mobile phones for comments.

Law Minister Anisul Huq said he was deeply shocked at the Chawkbazar incident and appropriate action would be taken after getting the investigation report on the incident.