

# Mahathir may visit Bangladesh later this year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad may visit Bangladesh sometime later this year, according to foreign ministry officials.

"We are working on it. Everything will be fixed step by step," a foreign ministry official told The Daily Star yesterday.

The exact date of the visit has not been fixed yet, but it may be sometime later this year, he said.

Another foreign ministry official says there is a strong bilateral relation between Bangladesh and Malaysia. Malaysia has good investments in Bangladesh, especially in the telecommunication sector.

According to Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia, around seven to eight lakh Bangladeshis are working in the Southeast Asian



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# Syria returnee

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Motaj is now being interrogated on a four-day remand.

Analysing Motaj's phone records, CTTC investigators said he had communicated with around a hundred FTFs after entering Bangladesh.

Their conversations were mainly about informing each other that they had reached their home countries or other destinations safely, said a CTTC investigator.

"They spoke mostly in Arabic. "We are now trying to translate the conversations into Bangla with the help of professionals," said the investigator, requesting anonymity.

The officer further said they would send Motaj's mobile phone for forensic tests to unearth information sent through different messaging applications.

"Motaj went to Syria from Saudi Arabia. We are investigating to find his connections in that country," said CTTC Deputy Commissioner Mohibul Islam Khan.

He had earlier stayed in Syria for six months and took part in battles for the Islamic State, claimed officials of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit.

Wahiduzzaman Noor Joy, CTTC assistant commissioner, told The Daily Star that they got some information after interrogating Motaj but it was taking time as he only understood Arabic and could hardly communicate in English. He also only understood some basic Bangla words.

Investigators said that he left the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport using a ride-sharing application. Analysing the CCTV footage, the investigators identified the registration number of the vehicle he used and then communicated with the driver to pinpoint Motaj's drop-off location.

## WHO IS MOTAJ?

According to the case statement, Motaj was born and brought up in Saudi Arabia. His father Abdul Majid Bepari, a Bangladeshi, went to Saudi Arabia when he was 10. Motaj's mother is Pakistani. He has 16 siblings, including stepbrothers and sisters.

Motaj had made a number of failed attempts before getting into Syria.

He managed to make a Bangladeshi passport in 2014, using which he went to Turkey in 2016 in an attempt to get into Syria. The attempt failed and he had to go back to Saudi Arabia after three months.

He then tried to reach Syria via Egypt in 2017 but again failed and returned to Saudi Arabia. He again chalked out a new route and tried to reach Syria through a waterway the same year but failed due to inclement weather.

Finally, in May last year, he successfully reached Syria, where he stayed for over six months, according to counterterrorism officials.

After the fall of IS in Syria, he fled to Turkey and went into hiding. He worked in a restaurant during his around one and a half month stay there.

Meanwhile, his Saudi residential permit expired but he did not renew it for reasons unknown.

Afterwards, he tried to enter another European country through Greece. He also paid around 3,000 Euros to a broker for the purpose, the case investigators said.

Following a crackdown by Turkish police at the end of last year, he fled to Bangladesh.

Upon reaching Bangladesh, he soon tried to leave the country and communicated with a number of travel agents for the purpose, investigators said.



Motaj



Jute mill workers, who are on strike demanding arrears, prepare for iftar on an intersection blocking the Dhaka-Khulna highway in Khulna on the first day of Ramadan yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

# Traffic chaos as hawkers

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Arif said the hawkers were ousted from Paltan and Gulistan around four months ago.

MA Kasem, president of the federation who leads a faction of the hawkers and is also the president of pro-government Hawkers League, claimed that they did not block the streets and that they want to continue their movement in a systematic manner.

He said when the government has set up 11 holiday markets in the city and allowed hawkers in Motijheel area to set up shops on pavements after 3:00pm on weekdays, their movement blocking streets was unacceptable.

The prime minister had decided in an Executive Committee of National Economic Council meeting to prepare a list of hawkers and issue them ID cards. The listed hawkers were supposed to be allowed in the holiday markets and eventually be rehabilitated to hawkers' markets.

But the decision was yet to be implemented, he said.

DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon

also decided to rehabilitate hawkers, including sending many of them abroad as migrant workers, but a Tk 10 crore project proposal in this regard is pending with the finance ministry, Kasem said.

Mayor Khokon yesterday told The Daily Star that there was no way to allow hawkers to set up shops in Gulistan and Paltan areas.

"If they have any specific proposal regarding rehabilitation, they can come to me and we will consider if it is acceptable," he said.

## DEMRA, JATRABARI DEMO

State-owned jute mill workers continued their demonstrations for the second consecutive day demanding arrears.

Hundreds of workers of Latif Bawany Jute Mill and Karim Jute Mill also vandalised some vehicles during the demonstration, said Md Selim, officer-in-charge (investigation), of Demra Police Station.

The workers equipped with iron rods and sticks took to the street demanding arrears of two months, he said.

They halted traffic for six hours, placing broken electric poles on roads, and moved away at 2:00pm. City dwellers and commuters suffered in the sweltering heat.

Mamunur Rahman, a local, told The Daily Star that the workers took position in front of Demra intersection and Staff Quarter area and stopped vehicles, even the ones carrying patients.

Police chased and dispersed them around 11:00am but they returned after half an hour.

Mohammad Ali, CBA president of Latif Bawany Jute Mill, claimed that they did not vandalise any vehicles during the demonstration.

He said workers were due six weeks' wages while other employees and officials had two months' salaries unpaid.

Meanwhile in Khulna, workers of nine state-owned jute mills blocked Dhaka-Khulna highway at Notunrasta intersection from 4:00pm to 7:00pm demanding arrears, reports our correspondent there.

They sat on highway blocking

traffic. They even prayed and had iftar there.

Hundreds of passengers, mostly people returning from work, suffered.

Some 35,000 workers were on their third consecutive day of strike yesterday. They gathered at the intersection, and in Kabirbatta and Daulatpur.

Lutfun Nahar, a worker at Crescent Jute Mills, told The Daily Star that the mill authorities had promised paying her wages. "Fifteen days have gone since then and I am yet to get my wages. I am on the verge of starving with my family of six."

Abdul Goni, a worker of Khalishpur Jute Mill, told The Daily Star that he has not been paid in over two months.

"Like me, around 1,950 workers of the mill did not get paid. How can we run our families?"

Jute mill workers' leader Sohrab Hossain said workers were due 10 to 12 weeks' wages. "We had no choice but to go for this strike."

In Jessore, workers also gathered in Rajghat area, completely blocking traffic on roads for a few hours.

# Of melody, melancholy

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final tribute to the legendary singer at the Cen-tral Shaheed Minar from 11:00am.

He will later be taken to Ramkrishna Mission. His cremation will take place at Bardeshwari Kali Temple and Crematorium in the capital's Sabujbagh area.

Subir's surname was Phool and, coincidentally or not, he loved flowers. "My father wanted everyone to bring him flowers. Please bring him flowers to the airport, and also when you come to see him for the last time," a weeping Falguni Nandi Mou said when speaking to The Daily Star yesterday.

The versatile artiste, who considered singing to be a form of meditation and prayer which provided him with peace, was set to perform live in the recent tribute to Manna Dey on his 100th Birth Anniversary this month, but could not make it to the programme.

He suffered a massive heart attack on the night of Pahela Baishakh (April 14) and was taken to the CMH around 10:25pm. There, he was put on life support at the Critical Care Centre (CCC), and was kept under a 72-hour observation. A five-member medical board was formed for his treatment.

According to his family members, this was the third heart attack Subir had suffered. He had undergone a bypass surgery in the USA in 2013 for critical triple vessel coronary artery disease and had an an-gioplasty earlier this year.

Born in Sylhet on November 19, 1953, Subir spent his childhood in Dhaka and Kolkata. He and his nine siblings were trained in music under Ustad Babar Ali Khan. He grew up listening to Pankaj Mullick, Kundan

Lal Saigal, Sandhya Mukhopadhyay, and Manna Dey. At the beginning of his career, Subir was also a Nazrul Sangeet student.

In 1972, he recorded his first song, "Jodi Keu Dhup Jele Deye", written by Mohammed Muzakker and composed by Ustad Mir Kasem.

In 1979, he sang one of the biggest hits in his career -- "Din Jaye Ko-tha Thake", a timeless song from a film with the same title. The lyrics were written by Khan Ataur Rahman.

The artiste had the distinction of performing at the House of Commons in the United Kingdom in 1994.

He is credited with recording over 2,500 songs, including super-hit tracks like "Amar E Duti Chokh", "Ekta Chhilo Sonar Konna", "Bha-lobashi Shokaley", "Tomare Chharite Bondhu", "Tumi Emoni Jaal Petchho Shongshare", "Ami Bristir Kachh Theke", "Koto Je Tomake Beshechhi Bhalo", "Chandey Kolongko Achhey Jemon", "Keno Bha-lobasha Hariye Jaye", "O Amar Ural Pongkhirey", "Bondhu Hote Cheye", "Bondhu Tor Borat Niya", "Paharer Kanna Dekhe" and "Hajar Moner Kachhe".

Subir won the Bangladesh National Film Award five times as Best Male Playback Singer for his timeless work in the films "Mahanayak" (1984), "Shuvoda" (1986), "Srabon Megher Din" (1999), "Megher Pore Megh" (2004) and "Mohua Sundori" (2015).

He believed that every award-winning work was a team effort. "Any kind of recognition or appreciation encourages an artiste. A nod from the state is the highest honour for a performer," Subir had once said earlier in an interview with The Daily Star.

Subir learned folk music from Bidit Lal Das, a Bangladeshi folk sing-er.

He was a member of a musical troupe named Bidit Lal Das and his team, which was founded in 1972. Other members of the troupe were Akramul Islam, Jamaluddin Banna, Rakkhal Chakrabarty, Himangshu Goswami, Himangshu Biswas and others. They used to perform as a group and travelled many countries like China, India, the USA, the UK and Norway.

The group sang the song "Sadh Er Lau Banailo More Boiragi" in many performances, as it was a huge hit though incomplete. Composed by Bidit Lal Das, the number was completed with joint efforts by Ustad Rashbihari Chakrabarty and Kobi Giasuddin. It became so famous that Bangabandhu Shiekh Mujibur Rahman invited the troupe to his home. Subir was fortunate to be there with the team, and came to limelight gradually.

Since the beginning of his career, Subir collaborated with most of the music directors of our country. He worked with eminent composers like Alaaddin Ali, Pradeep Saha, Satya Saha, Samar Das, Sheikh Saadi Khan, and Alam Khan.

He also worked with the musical stars from the younger generation like Habib Wahid, S I Tutul, Bappa Mazumder, Emon Saha, Shouquat Ali Imon, Kabir Bokul and others.

He sang duets with all of his contemporary female artistes like Runa Laila, Sabina Yasmin, Shahnaz Rahmatullah, Ferdousi Rahman, Kanak Chapa and others.

A four-time recipient of Bangladesh Cine Journalist Association Awards, Subir was awarded with the Ekushey Padak in 2019. Citi-bank conferred on him the Gaan-e Gaan-e Gunijon Songbordhona award in 2012 while Channel I honoured him with the Lifetime Achievement Award in their

annual music awards ceremony in 2018.

In 2015, the artiste performed live in an instalment of Star Melodies, The Daily Star's regular initiative to promote Bangla music, to pay homage to Kazi Nazrul Islam in celebration of the National Poet's 117th birth anniversary.

After Subir fell ill again, he was taken to Singapore on April 30 on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's instructions.

His condition deteriorated once again yesterday as he had suffered from multiple organ failure at the hospital. Subir was earlier admitted to Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka on April 14 after he fell ill while returning to Dhaka from Srimangal by train.

President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, among others, expressed their deep shock and condolence at the death of such a gem.

In a condolence message, the president said, "His death was a great loss for the country and music industry". In a separate condolence message, the PM said that Subir will live on in the hearts of the people.

A sincerely professional and extremely modest personality, Subir would always mention the names of the lyricist, composer, music director and films prior to performing any song live on stage. This correspondent once heard him sharing his memories of Khan Ataur Rahman and quoted him as saying, "If you want to sing, you have to portray pictures with melody."

The singer left behind his wife Purabi Nandi, daughter Falguni Nandi and a host of relatives, friends, fans and well-wishers.

# Embrace diversity

Pope urges Balkans

AFP, Skopje

Pope Francis urged the Balkans to embrace its patchwork of faiths and ethnicities during a visit to North Macedonia yesterday, where he held an open-air mass in the capital Skopje, the proud birthplace of Mother Teresa.

The pontiff was welcomed with yellow billboards and buses bearing his smiling face after he touched down in the mainly Orthodox Christian country.

Catholics make up a small sliver -- less than one percent -- of the 2.1 million population, which also includes a large Muslim minority that is ethnic Albanian.

In an address before the country's political leaders, Francis praised the "crucible of cultures and ethnic and religious identities" in "your land, a bridge between East and West".

North Macedonia's diversity, which reflects the mix of communities in wider Balkan region, forms a "mosaic in which every piece is essential for the uniqueness and beauty of the whole", he added.

# Tigers

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then hit an unbeaten, run-a-ball 61 to guide the Tigers home with five overs to spare.

In chase of 262, openers Tamim Iqbal and Soumya Sarkar provided the ideal start with a 144-run stand. Tamim enjoyed some early good fortune when a difficult chance was dropped at cover off Kemar Roach in the second over when the left-hander was on one. Roach was again the unlucky bowler 20 overs later when Soumya, on 62, pulled towards midwicket and the fielder dropped another difficult chance. Having hit his eighth half-century, Soumya was the first to fall in the 26th over for a 68-ball 73 when he was caught brilliantly at deep midwicket by Darren Bra-vo off Roston Chase, with the fielder catching the ball inches inside the boundary, chucking it in the air before he crossed the rope and coming back in time to complete the dismissal.

Tamim had completed his 27th ODI half-century off 78 balls in the 24th over, and carried on the good work with Shakib in the form of a 52-run second-wicket partnership, of which the latter's share was 30. Tamim departed for a 116-ball 80 in the 37th over when he was caught low by Windies skipper Jason Holder at midwicket off Shannon Gabriel. That was the last bit of joy for West Indies as Shakib and Mushfiqur Rahim put on an unbeaten 68-run stand in 8.2 overs to take the Tigers home. Mushfiqur finished on an unbeaten 32 off 25 balls with two fours and two sixes while Shakib hit three fours and two maximums in his unconquered vigil.

Earlier, after Bangladesh were asked to field first, three wickets from skipper Mashrafe Bin Mor-taza and tight bowling from spin duo Mehedi and Shakib Al Hasan negated a bright start from West Indies and kept West Indies to a manageable total.

West Indies openers Shai Hope and John Campbell had each struck centuries in their opener on Sunday against Ireland while piling on a world-record 365-run opening stand. Campbell was missing with a sore back yesterday, but Sunil Ambris and Shai Hope still managed to put on 89 for the first wicket against a more disciplined attack.

The stand was broken by Mehedi in the 17th over when the off-spinner had Ambris caught at point by Mahmudullah Riyad for 38. Left-arm spinner Shakib then made it two in two overs by having Dwayne Bravo caught behind for one in the next over. A 115-run third-wicket stand followed between Hope and Roston Chase, taking the West Indies to 205 for two in the 41st over. By then, Hope had reached his second successive hundred, ending up with 109 off 132 balls with 11 fours and a six.

It was then skipper Mashrafe who drastically changed the course of the innings by sending back Chase, Hope and opposite number Holder in two successive overs to have West Indies 211 for five in the 43rd over.

Mohammad Saifuddin chimed in with the wickets of Shane Dowrich and Kemar Roach as West Indies could score just 38 runs from the last five overs.

The only black mark on Bangladesh's bowling effort was the performance of left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman, who was taken for 83 runs off his 10 overs for the wicket of Johnathon Carter.

# JP rift keeps widening

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over the party's control, a former JP lawmaker said that since its inception in 1986, the party split thrice due to internal conflicts. It may see another split in near future.

Ershad, who has been suffering from old-age ailments for the last nine months, called an emergency press conference around 11:15pm on May 4 at his Baridhara home.

"I cannot perform my daily activities as the party chief due to

ailments. That is why I am appointing Jatiya Party Co-Chairman GM Quader MP as acting chairman of the party to carry out the responsibilities until further notice," he announced.

Talking to this correspondent yesterday, a JP presidium member loyal to Raushan questioned, "What was the necessity of holding an emergency press conference around midnight to make an announcement on his [Quader] appointment as acting chairman."

Another senior party leader, who belongs to the Raushan faction, said, "We don't bother who holds the post of the party's acting chairman. We follow only HM Ershad. The party will decide on who will be the next chief in his absence."

Earlier on March 22, Ershad removed Quader from the post of acting chairman as he had been under immense pressure from the Raushan faction to do so.

He also relieved Quader of

the co-chairman post, saying his brother failed to discharge his duties and created divisions within the party. Party's senior leaders also expressed frustration over Quader's leadership, Ershad said in a statement.

The following day, Ershad also removed Quader from the post of deputy leader of the opposition.

But around two weeks later, Ershad, known for his flip-flops in politics, reinstated Quader to the post

of co-chairman.

Contacted yesterday, Quader said he didn't organise the May 4 press briefing.

"I was on my way home after having dinner with the chairman [Ershad] at his Baridhara residence. He asked me to go back to his residence, saying he wanted to announce the matter [Quader's appointment as acting chairman] before the media."

Quader claimed that almost all senior leaders are with him.