

STORIES THAT MATTERED IN 2019

As we all try to put our best foot forward into 2020, looking back into the year that was is also important as it provides insight into what we have achieved, how we have gained strength and where we have failed. Here are some of the stories published in 2019 that have defined the year and impacted us all.

JANUARY

HAT-TRICK FOR HASINA

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina led her party to a third consecutive win in parliamentary polls, securing a landslide majority in the December 30, 2018 election. She formed government for the third consecutive term on January 7 as she took oath as the prime minister, leading a 47-member council of ministers.

FEBRUARY

CHAWKBAZAR BLAZE KILLS 67

A devastating fire ripped through a building in Old Dhaka's Chawkbazar on February 21 that claimed at least 67 lives. The fire broke out around 10:40pm at a chemical warehouse on the ground floor of the five-storey building named Haji Wahed Mansion.

PLANE HIJACK BID FOILED; SUSPECT SHOT DEAD

A man allegedly tried to storm the cockpit of a Biman flight in an attempt to hijack the plane at Shah Amanat International Airport in Chattogram on the evening of February 24. He died later during an eight-minute operation by members of an army para-commando unit.

MARCH

DUCSU POLLS AFTER 28 YEARS

The much-awaited elections to Ducsu and hall unions were held on March 11 amid BCL dominance and questionable roles of the university authorities. Nurul Haque Nur, a quota reform leader, won the vice president post while BCL leaders bagged posts of general secretary and assistant general secretary.

26 KILLED IN FR TOWER FIRE

At least 26 people were killed and around 100 injured as a deadly fire tore through the 22-storey FR Tower in the capital's Banani on March 28. The building had no permission for its top four floors and there was no fire-protected staircase in the building that housed dozens of offices.



1. Hospitals across the country were full to the brim for months as a dengue outbreak took its toll on tens of thousands.
2. Rohingyas gather at a rally in Kutupalong, marking two years of their exodus from Rakhine State of Myanmar.
3. Sheikh Hasina takes oath of office for the third consecutive term, after a landslide victory in the 2018 parliamentary election.
4. Hundreds crowd the spot of a train accident in Brahmanbaria, after a collision between two trains left 16 people dead.
5. A building in the capital's Chawkbazar that housed a chemical warehouse left in ruins after a fire ravaged through it.

PHOTO: STAR, AGENCIES

NOVEMBER

26 DIE AS BULBUL BATTERS COASTS

At least 26 people were killed in nine southern districts as Cyclone Bulbul ravaged through those on November 10-11. Apart from the loss of lives, Bulbul damaged over one lakh houses, uprooted thousands of trees and flooded many fisheries in Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Patuakhali, Barishal, Barguna, Bhola, Pirojpur, Jhalakathi, Chandpur, Madaripur, Shariatpur and Gopalganj districts. Around three lakh hectares of cropland was damaged in these coastal districts, the lower parts of which were inundated as the cyclone whipped up tidal surges four to five feet higher than usual tide.

ROHINGYAS SEE A RAY OF HOPE

On November 11, the Gambia filed a case with the UN's International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing Myanmar of committing genocide against the Rohingyas. Two days later, several rights bodies filed a lawsuit with an Argentine court against Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and several top Myanmar officials over crimes against the Rohingyas. A watershed legal battle took place at the UN's highest court on December 10-11 to hold Myanmar accountable over the alleged genocide against its Rohingya minorities.

B'BARIA TRAIN ACCIDENT LEAVES 16 DEAD

A train accident in Brahmanbaria on November 12 left at least 16 dead and injured many. The accident occurred when Dhaka-bound Turna Nishita rammed Chattogram-bound Udayan Express at Mandobagh Railway Station in Kasba. Negligence of the driver, his assistant and the guard of Turna Nishita was responsible for the accident, said Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan.



APRIL

FENI MADRASA GIRL SET ABLAZE

Nusrat Jahan Rafi -- a madrasa student in Feni -- was set on fire on April 6, for refusing to withdraw a case filed against the principal for sexually harassing her. The 18-year-old lost her battle for life on April 10 at a Dhaka hospital. A Feni court on October 24 handed down death sentences to all 16 accused in a case, including the sacked madrasa principal and two expelled local Awami League leaders.

MAY

A SIGH OF RELIEF

Despite alarms of massive damage, Cyclone Fani weakened by the time it made landfall in Bangladesh on May 4, causing significantly less damage compared to that by cyclones Sidr and Aila. The death toll from Fani stood at 14.

JUNE

44 KILLED ON ROADS DURING EID-UL-FITR HOLIDAYS

Some 44 people were killed and more than a hundred were injured in road accidents across the country during the Eid holidays, with motorcycle accidents causing about one-third of the fatalities. The death toll might have been higher as many accidents went unreported.

MAN KILLED IN FRONT OF WIFE

On June 26 morning, Sabbir Hossain Nayan alias Nayan Bond and his close accomplice Rifat Farazi attacked 25-year-old Rifat Sharif, an internet service provider, with sharp weapons in front of Barguna Government College when Rifat and his wife Ayesha Siddika Minni were leaving the premises. Nayan, the prime accused in the murder case, was killed in a "gunfight" between his accomplices and police in Barguna on July 2.

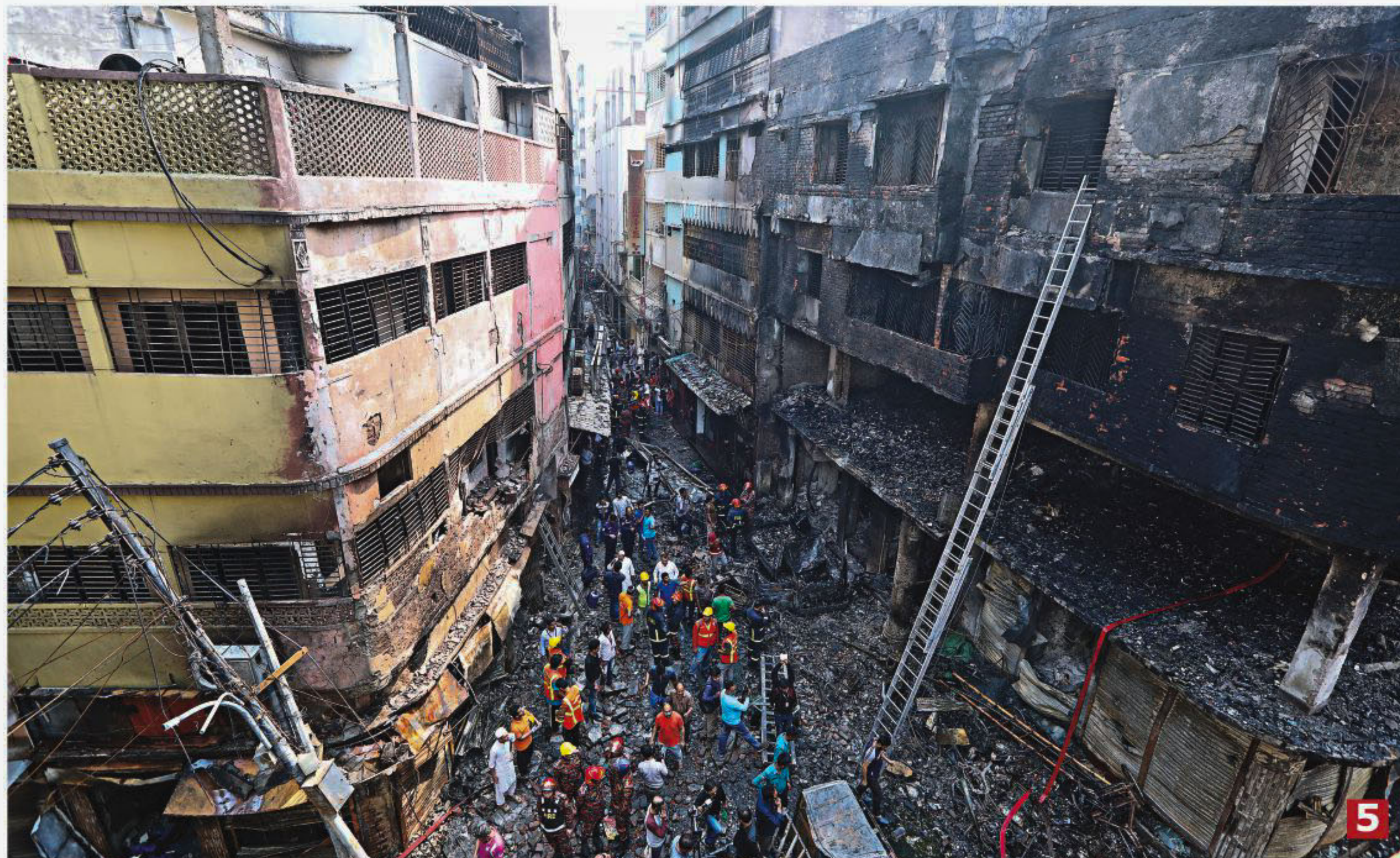
JULY

ERSHAD NO MORE

Jatiya Party Chairman and former president HM Ershad passed away on July 14 at Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Dhaka at the age of 89. He had been suffering from various ailments including infection to his lungs and kidneys. Ershad was laid to rest at his hometown in Rangpur.

DENGUE TAKES ITS TOLL

Dengue started to take an alarming turn in the capital. Throughout the month of July and August, scores of people were infected with the mosquito-borne disease while hospitals overflowed with patients. The number of patients reached all-time high and death toll continued to rise. The viral disease eventually spread across the country. By December, over one lakh dengue patients received treatment at different hospitals since January, with death toll crossing well over 100.



AUGUST

ROHINGYAS CALL FOR JUSTICE

Tens of thousands of Rohingyas on August 25 rallied at the Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, urging the international community to ensure justice for the atrocities the Myanmar military committed against them. Marking the second anniversary of the start of a brutal crackdown on them in Rakhine, they reiterated their demands for guaranteed citizenship, return to their homes in Rakhine State and safety there.

SEPTEMBER

CRACKDOWN ON 'CASINOS'

Rab arrested Jubo League Dhaka South Organising Secretary Khalid Mahmud Bhuiyan at his Gulshan home on September 18 evening for running a casino at Fakirerpool Youngmen's Club. Rab raided at least five clubs in the city the same day and detained and sentenced 182 people in connection with running casinos, gambling, and drug abuse, and sealed off at least two clubs. This eventually led to a countrywide crackdown against corruption. On September 20, Rab arrested GK Shamim, a top government-listed contractor who is known to be a Jubo League leader. On September 22, police simultaneously raided four gambling

dens housed inside Mohammedan Sporting Club, Arambagh Sporting Club, Dilkusha Sporting Club, and Victoria Sporting Club. On September 25, Rab arrested Mohammedan Sporting Club director in-charge Lokman Hossain, also a director of Bangladesh Cricket Board, at his residence. Jubo League leader Ismail Chowdhury Samrat, who went into hiding fearing arrest, ran Victoria Club. The alleged kingpin of the illegal casino business and his close aide Enamul Haque Arman were arrested from Cumilla on October 6.

OCTOBER

ONION PRICES GALLOP

Traders hiked onion prices exponentially, capitalising on India's export ban on the essential produce on September 29. Over the course of next two months, onion prices continued to rise -- hitting a staggering Tk 200-220 per kg in the capital. Government began importing onions and TCB sales to rein in prices, which started to drop in December.

BUET STUDENT BEATEN TO DEATH

Abbar Fahad, a second-year student of Buett's electrical and electronic engineering department was beaten to death by a group

of BCL men at the university's Sher-e-Bangla Hall in the early hours of October 7. The incident triggered a firestorm of protests on campuses across the country. Many took to the social media to demand justice for the 22-year-old.

4 KILLED, 100 INJURED IN BHOLA CLASH

At least four people were killed and more than a hundred injured on October 20 as zealots clashed with police in Bhola's Borhanuddin upazila over a hate conversation spread through Facebook and its messenger. On one stage of the clash that broke out around 10:30am, law enforcers had to fire shots to disperse the mob, who since October 18 had been demanding punishment of a Hindu youth they claimed was responsible for the hate conversation from his Facebook account. The zealots torched a house and vandalised 12 more belonging to the Hindu community in Borhanuddin municipality around noon. Seemingly designed to hurt religious sentiments, screenshots of the conversation went viral among social media users in the locality, and the person at the centre of the storm went to Borhanuddin Police Station and filed a general diary saying his Facebook account had been hacked.

NO MERCY FOR HOLEY ARTISAN CAFE ATTACKERS

A Dhaka court on November 27 sentenced seven militants to death for their involvement in the 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery attack, terming it a disgraceful attack aimed at assassinating the non-communal character of Bangladesh. The Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal acquitted one accused as it found him not guilty in the atrocity that left 22 people, including 17 foreigners, dead in the capital's Gulshan.

DECEMBER

FREEDOM FIGHTERS ON RAZAKARS' LIST

On Victory Day, families of a number of freedom fighters got the shocking news that the government has put their names on the list of Razakars who collaborated with the Pakistan army in carrying out mass killings and atrocities against Bengalis during the Liberation War. Amid nationwide outrage and protests, Liberation War Affairs Ministry on December 18 suspended the controversial and flawed list, three days after its publication.

FRIEND OF THE POOR PASSES AWAY

Sir Fazle Hasan Abed -- founder of world's largest NGO, Brac -- breathed his last on December 20 at a hospital in the capital. He was 83. His first namaz-e-janaza was held at Army Stadium on December 22 where thousands, including ministers, lawmakers, politicians, diplomats, and civil society members to relatives and people from all walks of life paid tributes to the friend of the poor. He was laid to rest at Banani graveyard.

OTHER NOTABLE EVENTS

- Subarnachar rape
- Fluctuations in rice price
- Fire at Chalantika slum in Mirpur
- Corruption allegations against JU VC
- Top BCL leaders removed from posts
- BSMRSTU VC at centre of controversy
- Rohingyas held with fake NIDs
- Rupnagar cylinder blast
- Migrant workers return in droves
- New Road Transport Act implemented
- Jute workers go on hunger strike
- Keraniganj factory fire
- Gazipur factory fire
- Cold waves sweep the country