



# The Daily Star

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## Home from prison but to be laid to rest

STAR REPORT

As Rab members were taking away writer Mushtaq Ahmed from his Lalmatia residence nine months ago, they assured the family that he would return home after a short while.



Finally, Mushtaq came back -- but dead and cold.

A pall of gloom descended on the house "Parampara" at 1/8, in Block-D as his body was brought there around 3:45pm yesterday with his family members, friends and relatives bursting into tears.

His wife Lipa Aktar was shell-shocked and speechless.

"She did not cry. Neither did she talk to anyone. It would have been better for her if she would cry," Dr Nafisur Rahman, cousin of Mushtaq, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Soon after Mushtaq was picked up in early May last year, Lipa told this

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



A cop drags a protester away after police dispersed a torch procession brought out in the capital's Shahbagh intersection area yesterday evening protesting the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed in jail custody. The protesters demanded scrapping of the controversial Digital Security Act.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## ROHINGYAS IN BHASAN CHAR Dhaka seeks UN assistance



DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has requested the UN to provide humanitarian assistance for the Rohingyas in Bhasan Char where a housing facility has been developed for one lakh Rohingyas.

Bangladesh's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York, in a statement, yesterday said, "The foreign minister explained the [UN] Secretary General of the measures taken by the Government in Bhasan Char and requested the UN's support for humanitarian assistance there for the Rohingyas."

The government of Bangladesh built a planned housing facility with Tk 3,100 crores in Bhasan Char that includes hospitals, cyclone shelters, school facilities, high flood protection embankment, while other projects are

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## COMMENTARY

### DSA: the law that jails now kills

MAHFUZ ANAM

Mushtaq Ahmed, the writer, the commentator, the socially conscious citizen, the articulate but moderate voice of dissent and a critical observer of current events is dead. The official cause will be known after autopsy. But the real cause we already know -- our cruel system, in which anybody can be picked up, locked in prison, accused of a myriad of vague "crimes" and kept confined for months without trial, without bail, and without explaining the causes of confinement. We have a system where freedom of individuals are mere playthings in the hands of the people in power and there is no redress when such instances occur.

It was the inhuman use of the Digital Security Act (DSA), the unexplained imprisonment over nine months, the six times rejection of bail, the dark maze of the legal entanglements, endless drain of money for obvious and not so obvious reasons, and the unjustness of it all that made the life of writer and commentator Mushtaq Ahmed nothing more than a dark endless hole. The reality was so inexplicably cruel and beyond reason that being alive lost all meaning.

What were the crimes for which Mushtaq was in prison where he died? The controversial DSA allows maximum 105 days for completing investigation and submitting charges. But the investigators failed to comply with it and finally charged him eight months after his arrest.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

"I also think the judiciary should be more sensible and careful. Mushtaq was refused bail six times and detained for months after months ..."

PROF MIZANUR RAHMAN, FORMER CHAIRMAN OF NHRC.

"He [Mushtaq] is a victim of government repression and [this is a] murder of freedom of expression."

EMINENT JURIST SHAHDEEN MALIK

## UNACCEPTABLE

Outrage all over after Mushtaq's death in custody; call for scrapping DSA gets louder

Star Report

Condemnation poured in and people from all walks of life, especially students and teachers, took to the streets yesterday expressing anger over the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed in jail custody.

Besides, a clash between protesters and police left several injured on Dhaka University campus.

Mushtaq died on Thursday while he was an arrestee in a case filed under the Digital Security Act. With the death of this uncompromising voice, the call for scrapping the controversial DSA got louder.

Legal experts said such a death was not only unacceptable but also shocking.

They said the detention of Mushtaq for over nine months, denying him bail so many times and his subsequent death demonstrates that people's fundamental rights to freedom of speech and thoughts have been squeezed, something which can never happen in a democratic country.

"He [Mushtaq] is a victim of government



repression and [this is a] murder of freedom of expression," eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik told The Daily Star.

Calling for scrapping of the DSA, he said such a "medieval" law cannot exist in any democratic country.

"We can formulate such laws if we don't care about democracy and want to block criticisms of the government."

Prof Mizanur Rahman, former chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, said, "People's voice is shrinking because of the Digital Security Act. It is an ominous sign for the state."

Terming the death of Mushtaq very painful and unacceptable, he said criticism of the government and sedition are two different things. "Mixing these two up will be a great mistake."

"I also think the judiciary should be more sensible and careful. Mushtaq was refused bail six times and kept detained for months after months."

Mushtaq used to write under the pen name

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

## 13 envoys ask govt for transparent probe

STAR REPORT

Thirteen heads of foreign missions in Bangladesh have expressed grave concern over the death in custody of writer Mushtaq Ahmed, who died in Kashimpur jail on Thursday, and called on the government to conduct an enquiry.

Mushtaq had been held in pre-trial detention since May 5, 2020, under the provisions of the Digital Security Act (DSA).

"We understand that he had been denied bail on several occasions and that concerns had been raised about his treatment while he was imprisoned," said the joint statement yesterday, expressing condolences to his family and friends.

"We call on the government of Bangladesh to conduct a swift, transparent, and

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

## Reckless driving claims 8 lives

Two buses collide head-on in Sylhet; one of them had no fitness certificate

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Reckless driving claimed eight lives and left 17 people injured in Sylhet's Dakshin Surma upazila yesterday morning.

A bus of London Express, which had been in service without a fitness certificate for around three months, left Dhaka for Sylhet around 12:45am.

The bus driver was driving recklessly and overtaking other vehicles. The passengers, who became panicked, warned the driver repeatedly, but he paid no heed.

It resulted in the tragic end of the journey around 7:00am yesterday when the driver lost control and the vehicle collided head-on with a bus of Ena Paribahan at Rashidpur on Dhaka-Sylhet highway, said witnesses and fire service officials.

Eight people of the two vehicles died in the accident. Of them, four each died on the spot and at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

"Our bus driver was hurrying and overtaking other vehicles recklessly. There was fog on the highway. Most of the passengers were worried and we warned him repeatedly. But the driver did not listen to us," said Mohammad Rahel, a passenger of the London Express bus.

He was talking to The Daily Star at the hospital.

"Visiting the accident spot and talking to survivors, it has become clear to us that the bus of London Express lost its control, skidded on to the wrong side of the road and collided with another bus that was coming from the opposite direction," said Kobad Ali Sarkar, deputy director of Fire Service and Civil Defence in Sylhet.

ANOTHER STORY ON PAGE 3

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



Locals look at the mangled wreckage of two buses that collided head-on on Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Rashidpur area of Sylhet's Dakshin Surma upazila yesterday morning. The accident left eight people dead and 17 injured.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## UN chief lauds Bangladesh's Covid efforts

UNB, Dhaka

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has highly applauded Bangladesh's tremendous efforts in mitigating the health and socio-economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

He said this during a virtual meeting with Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Thursday.

Referring to Bangladesh's past successes in disaster management, the UN chief said, in view of Bangladesh's ranking as a global leader in risk mitigation, he was not surprised to see such an accomplishment.

He expressed admiration for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, especially for her strong commitment to the people of Bangladesh, said the foreign ministry yesterday.

They also agreed that Covid-19 vaccination should be treated as "global public good".

The secretary-general highly appreciated Bangladesh's generosity

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4