



Near Baiy Road's Vqarunnisa Noon School and College campus, a manhole right down the middle of the 'tin rastar mor' is left uncovered. With no caution signs or barricades whatsoever, only a bamboo pole has been stuck inside it to warn pedestrians and vehicles of the danger it poses. Moreover, it's also become quite the nuisance for vehicular movement on the busy road that leads to the school and the nearby Monowara Hospital. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# High surcharges clipping airlines' wings

Operators demand reduced rate in letter to aviation ministry



Airlines	Main Amount	Surcharge, others	Total Debt
Biman	Tk 920.16cr	Tk 3,394.94cr	Tk 4,315.11cr
GMG Airlines (defunct)	Tk 56.98cr	Tk 311.30cr	Tk 368.29cr
United Airways (defunct)	Tk 56.88cr	Tk 298.49cr	Tk 355.37cr
Regent Air (defunct)	Tk 136.18cr	Tk 147.2cr	Tk 283.38cr

RASHIDUL HASAN

Different airlines of the country are struggling to survive due to the sky-high surcharge rate imposed by Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), according to the country's private airline operators.

In a letter sent to State Minister for Civil Aviation M Mahub Ali on Sunday, Aviation Operators Association of Bangladesh (AOAB) -- a platform for the country's privately-owned airline operators -- has demanded that the government fix a reasonable surcharge rate.

The letter said four airlines (both in operation and defunct) owe CAAB Tk 5,322 crore. The amount includes surcharge and landing, air navigation, and embarkation fees.

AOAB said a compound surcharge is in place for them, with a monthly rate of six percent, or annual rate of 72 percent, on the various arrears.

Of the total arrear, the original amount of debt is Tk 1,170 crore, while the remaining Tk 4,152 crore is due to surcharge imposed on the debt, it said.

In the letter signed by Mofizur Rahman, secretary general of AOAB, they urged the government to reduce the annual surcharge from 72 percent to 12 percent to help keep airlines afloat.

Currently, if any airline fails to pay charges to CAAB on time, it has to pay an additional 72 percent surcharge per year, which is up to 83 percent higher than neighbouring India, said Mofizur, also managing director of private air operator Novoair.

Sources at different airlines said many airlines are unable to pay their dues because of accumulated surcharge, and many even went bankrupt due to the huge debts.

At present, three airlines are operating in Bangladesh: the national flag carrier

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## Free Jhumon immediately

DU students demand at rally



Holding up a banner, the protesters yesterday gathered in front of Raju Memorial Sculpture, seeking Jhumon's release.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

DU CORRESPONDENT

Students of Dhaka University (DU) yesterday demanded immediate release of Jhumon Das, who has been in jail for over five months, after being accused in a case filed under the Digital Security Act.

Holding a protest rally titled "We Want Release of Protester Jhumon Das" at the capital's Shahbagh, the DU students urged the government to release Jhumon immediately, saying that he is innocent.

They also demanded exemplary punishment for those who carried out a communal attack and vandalised houses of the Hindu community at Sunamganj's Shalla upazila a few months ago.

They further demanded formulating a specific law to protect innocent people like Jhumon, who are wrongfully accused. SM Rakib Sirazy, former president of Dhaka University Debating Society, questioned why Jhumon did not get bail even after appealing seven times.

Jhumon is an inspiration when it comes to free-thinking and free speech.

The country should have space for people like Jhumon, he said.

Former member of DU Central Students' Union Rafiqul Islam Sabuj said some communal groups still exist in the country, and they are conspiring against people like Jhumon.

"We cannot tolerate their plans at all," he said, adding they stand by people like Jhumon, so that such citizens can live in the country safely.

Vice-presidents and general secretaries of DU's different hall unions also spoke at the programme.

Jhumon was detained on March 16 for criticising Hefajat leader Mamunul Haque in a Facebook post. The post allegedly led to the mayhem in Noagaon village of Sunamganj's Shalla upazila on March 17, which saw about 90 Hindu houses vandalised and looted.

He was sent to jail on March 17. On March 22, police filed a case against him and 20-30 unnamed persons under DSA.

He has been in jail ever since and his bail has been refused seven times so far.

## 'Govt defending a faulty design'

Petitioners tell HC on felling trees for project at Suhrawardy Udyan; court to deliver order Sept 19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court will deliver its order on the writ petition filed seeking its directive on the government to refrain from any further tree felling in the historic Suhrawardy Udyan for commercial purposes on September 19.

The bench of Justice Farah Mahub and Justice SM Maniruzzaman fixed the date yesterday.

Petitioners' counsel Syeda Rizwana Hasan told the HC that the government is defending a faulty design of an architect firm to implement the construction project in Suhrawardy Udyan, although the design is a violation of the masterplan and the previous HC verdict.

According to the design, pathways will be constructed in the Udyan, for which more of its mature, old and ecologically important trees will have to be cut. Besides, the government has no commitment to preserve such environmentally important trees there, she argued.

Opposing the petition, Additional Attorney General Sk Md Morshed told the HC that the government is implementing a big project for constructing historical monuments in Suhrawardy Udyan, all while protecting the environment, which is a policy decision.

Thousands of people will gather there on different occasions and they will need washrooms, toilets and shelter, he said, adding that the government will not construct any structures there for commercial purpose.

A six-member committee has been formed to decide how many and what kinds of new trees will be planted there, he said. Morshed argued that the government will implement the project in line with the HC's 2009 verdict.

Replying to a question, he said tree felling at Suhrawardy Udyan has remained

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## Biased selection, toothless probes plague NHRC: ASK

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The selection process of the National Human Rights Commission's (NHRC) committee is politically motivated, with only people from the ruling party getting preference, said speakers at a virtual discussion organised by Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK).

They pointed out that former bureaucrats who are not involved with human rights are given preference for the committee.

They made these observations at a discussion titled "Ensuring Government's Human Rights Accountability: Is the NHRC Fulfilling its Mandate?"

The selection is neither impartial, nor transparent or participatory, said Tamanna Hoq Riti, assistant coordinator of Media and International Advocacy at ASK.

"While political influence isn't overt, it can be understood by observing the kinds of conversations the commission has with stakeholders, and the overly cautious approach of its investigations," she said.

To mitigate the flaws of the selection process, NHRC should make sure ordinary citizens are present during the selection, she recommended.

The commission should stick to the Paris Principles when selecting and recruiting its members and chairpersons, stated ASK.

The Paris Principles are guidelines adopted by the UNHRC that delineate how institutions that protect human rights should function. The guidelines ensure the independence of the bodies.

Bangladesh's NHRC is only "partially compliant" with the Paris Principles, as accorded by the Global Alliance on National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). It is one of the 33 commissions in the world to be classified as such, with most commissions being fully compliant, speakers said.

In a recent report by ASK on a decade of the NHRC's activities, the organisation observed that the commission always recruits its secretaries, directors, and joint directors from the Public Administration through deputation on an ad-hoc basis. This adversely impacts the independence of the commission and is a violation of the GANHRI standards, the ASK report stated.

ASK also pointed out that while the NHRC

### ISSUES

- ▶ People from ruling party, former bureaucrats not involved with human rights preferred
- ▶ Selection process not impartial, transparent or participatory
- ▶ Commission overly cautious, often toothless to challenge state-sponsored violations
- ▶ Founding law restricts probe into forces, can only send letters

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Involve citizens during selection process
- ▶ Stick to Paris Principles for recruitment
- ▶ Ensure independence of NHRC
- ▶ Go to SC if govt ignores recommendations

makes recommendations to the government, it cannot ensure that the recommendations are followed.

However, speaking at the session, Kazi Arfan Ashik, director at NHRC, claimed that the NHRC functions with full autonomy from the government.

In response, SC lawyer Barrister Abdul Halim said, "Why is the NHRC not approaching the Supreme Court saying that the government is not listening to it? The NHRC is supposed to make recommendations and if the government doesn't listen then they can take it to the Supreme Court."

Speakers at the session also observed that the founding law of the NHRC itself restricts the commission from investigating any forces, including the police and Rab. The investigations are limited to just sending letters.

In 2020, the commission took up 49 complaints on their own initiative, but only one has been solved so far, observed ASK. The commission received a total of 432 complaints in the last year, of which 302 are still pending.

Zahid Hossain, human rights officer at the UN resident coordinator's office, and Md Golam Sarwar, assistant professor at the law department of DU, also spoke at the event.



## JP MP Masuda Chowdhury passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Lawmaker from reserved seats for women in parliament, and a presidium member of Jatiya Party, Prof Masuda M Rashid Chowdhury passed away early yesterday.

She was 70 years old at the time of her passing.

Suffering from various ailments, the former professor of the Sociology department at Dhaka University died at the city's Birdem Hospital at around 3:30am, said Delowar Jalali, press secretary of Jatiya Party chairman.

Masuda was receiving treatment at the Birdem Hospital for the past several days. She was put on life support on Sunday.

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## India assured us of stopping border killing: Quader

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said the Indian government has assured Bangladesh that there will be no more killing along the border.

"There have been several meetings on border killings. The Indian government has promised that there will be no more killing along the border... they will keep their assurance," he said.

Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, came up with the remarks while speaking at a press briefing at his residence in the capital.

He also said the independence and sovereignty of the country is safe only in the hands of Awami League.

The minister said though BNP leaders now talk about the border killing issue, but they try to keep alive this problem for their political gains.

"They (BNP leaders) have forgotten that the longstanding border problem between Bangladesh and India was resolved through Sheikh Hasina," he observed. Quader said BNP had not been able to resolve any problem with the neighbouring countries during its rule. "Rather, it has built walls of mistrust and lack of confidence with them."

The AL general secretary said the Hasina-led government has broken down the walls of mistrust and built a bridge of relations by upholding the interests of the country and its people.

He said though BNP tries to demonstrate an anti-Indian stance with their various remarks and statements, the party had taken a "knee-jerk" policy towards India during its stay in power.

Quader also alleged that BNP does not hesitate to sell the country's independence to go to power.



For close to 35 years, a few families in Khulna's Bil Pabla area have earned a living by extracting snail meat. After snails from nearby districts and upazilas arrive in large bags, they sort them and separate the meat from the shells. Each bag gets them Tk 70, and it's possible for a single worker to go through up to three bags a day. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN