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## SLOGGING THRU SOOT

With soot all over his body, a worker of an aluminium utensil factory in the capital's Shyampur hurriedly utilises his 15-minute break to have one of the most basic meals, a chapati soaked in tea. A hard day's work at the factory only fetches about Tk 400, with which it is hard to support a family and have a decent meal during the break.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# An evening soaked in blood

### Memories of the brutal attack on Prof Azad

SHARIFUL HASAN

It all started with a loud sound. To locate the source, I started walking from TSC of Dhaka University towards Bangla Academy. When I reached the Atomic Energy Commission, I saw a small crowd. Upon getting closer, I found a man lying face-down in a pool of blood. I turned his face toward me and recognised him instantly. "It's our Humayun Azad sir. He is a professor at Dhaka University," I shouted. "We have to take him to the hospital immediately," I urged the crowd. This was how I became a part of that bloody evening, when the illustrious writer and academic was attacked on his way home from the book fair. Eighteen years have

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## After 18 years, verdict due today

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI and CHAITANYA CHANDRA HALDER

A Dhaka court is set to deliver verdict over the murder of Prof Humayun Azad after 18 long years as the alleged negligence of investigators and prosecution delayed the trial completion.

The illustrated author and academic of Dhaka University was stabbed near Bangla Academy in the capital on February 27, 2004.

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Bleeding profusely, Prof Humayun Azad is being taken to hospital by journalist Shariful Hasan on that fateful night 18 years ago. The Daily Star is publishing this photo manipulating the colour of the image to make it look less gory.

PHOTO: FILE

# A book and a bloodthirsty terror outfit

SHARIFUL ISLAM and EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) supremo Shaikh Abdur Rahman had directed his younger brother and the outfit's military commander Ataur Rahman Sunny to kill Prof Humayun Azad for writing the book "Pak Sar Jamin Sad Bad".

After going through the book, which criticised religious fundamentalism, Rahman declared Prof Azad a Murtad (apostate) and asked Sunny to watch his movement to and from Ekushey Boi Mela.

The JMB chief took the decision in consultation with other Majlis-e-Sura (highest policy-making body) members of JMB, according to the charge sheet submitted in 2012.

Sunny and another operative Mizanur Rahman alias Minhaj first visited Agamee Prokashani, a publisher of Prof Azad's books, at the fair to identify their target.

Then on the day of the attack on February 27, 2004, Sunny led the assault team of five persons who took position opposite the gate of Bangla Academy

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## SSC, HSC FOR 2023

# Exams to be held on all subjects

## Syllabuses to be curtailed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

SSC, HSC and their equivalent exams for 2023 will be held on all subjects with full marks but on curtailed syllabuses, according to a government decision.

The education ministry yesterday decided that next year's Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams will be held in April and the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exams in June.

The decision to shorten the syllabuses was made considering the fact that the candidates of these public exams will have fewer in-person classes compared to the pre-Covid period.

Schools remained closed from March 17, 2020, to September 11, 2021, and from January 20 to February 21, this year because of Covid-19.

At a press conference at the Secretariat yesterday, Education Minister Dipu Moni said the SSC candidates for 2023 will have 162 days of in-person classes, given that those continue till December this year. They usually get 316 days of in-person classes.

If the classes for HSC candidates for next year continue till December this year, they will be able to attend in-person classes for 200 days against the usual 330 days.

The revised syllabuses for both the SSC and HSC exams will be prepared keeping in mind the fewer number of in-person classes during the pandemic.

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Even though they are banned on the highways, battery-run rickshaws swarm the Dhaka-Aricha highway at Hemayetpur and that too going against traffic at speed. Such a practice puts lives at stake and creates bottlenecks on highways.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

# HSIA to stay open 24/7 from May

RASHIDUL HASAN

In a sigh of relief, the runway at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport will remain operational for 24 hours from next month instead of June.

Hundreds of outbound passengers faced huge suffering due to chaotic situation and mismanagement at the HSIA for the last five months due to the closure of the runway from 12:00am to 8:00am every day for six months from December 10, last year.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh is constructing and expanding taxiways for the third terminal for which the runway needs to remain closed.

At least 13 to 16 international flights rescheduled their time due to the closure of the runway, sources at the HSIA, said.

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REJAUL KARIM BYRON and ZINA TASREEN

When Bangladesh agreed to provide \$250 million to Sri Lanka last year, little did it think that it would become a side character in the horror show that is unfolding in the island nation.

But that is exactly the position Bangladesh finds itself in after Sri Lanka yesterday announced defaulting on its entire \$51 billion of external debt -- an extraordinary move taken to preserve its scarce foreign currency reserves for essential food, fuel and medicine imports.

In March, Sri Lanka's foreign currency reserves plummeted to \$1.94 billion, just enough to foot a month's import bill, but analysts estimate the usable amount is about \$500 million, reports The Financial Times.

The Sri Lankan government was due to make a \$36 million interest payment on a 2023 dollar bond on April 18, as well as \$42.2 million on a 2028 note, Bloomberg-compiled data show. A \$1 billion sovereign bond is maturing on July 25. Now, payment for all is suspended.

**Although the government has taken extraordinary steps in an effort to remain current on all of its external indebtedness, it is now clear that is no longer a tenable policy.**

Sri Lanka's finance ministry

Sri Lanka's finance ministry said the suspension was a "last resort" as keeping up with repayments had "become impossible".

In short, the island country with an \$80 billion economy is teetering on bankruptcy, thanks to an alchemy of tax cuts, foreign currency-denominated debt pile-up and unforeseeable circumstances like the global coronavirus pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

And its only way out of the economic, financial and political meltdown -- which has caused widespread misery for Sri Lanka's 22 million people and has compelled them to take to the streets in recent weeks -- is to get help from the International Monetary Fund, which it was wont to as recently as February.

When formal talks begin on Monday during IMF's annual spring meetings for a bail-out package, Bangladesh will find a seat at the table as debt restructuring would most definitely be a lynchpin of the programme.

As per the currency swap agreement with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh was supposed to receive an interest payment of LIBOR + 2 percent were the amount returned in three months.

LIBOR, the acronym for London Interbank Offer Rate, is the global reference rate for unsecured short-term borrowing in the interbank market as a benchmark for short-term interest rates. The three-month LIBOR averaged around 0.53 percent in 2021.

Had Sri Lanka paid back in six months, the interest amount would have been LIBOR + 2.5 percent. But it failed to. Subsequently, Sri Lanka, which has a year to repay the loan, has assumed a higher interest rate.

"It would be wise of Bangladesh just to demand the principal amount back at the earliest," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

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