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**Pratik Theatre:**  
**Let there be light**



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**mistakenly decries 'brutal' Iraq invasion**



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This portion of the Sunamganj-Chhatak highway is almost submerged amid torrential rains and flash floods. With the water level of the Surma and Kushiara rivers rising, thousands in Sylhet and Sunamganj districts are suffering from a scarcity of food and drinking water. The photo was taken in Chhatak yesterday. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR



**ABDUL GAFFAR CHOWDHURY**  
1934-2022

## The man behind the iconic song

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The man best known for penning the immortal song "Amar Bhaier Rokte Rangano Ekushey February", a popular columnist, litterateur and political analyst, Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury breathed his last yesterday at a hospital in London at the age of 87.

The journalist was suffering from various age-related health complications.

Gaffar, in his late teens, in 1952, was moved with grief at the death of Rafiq, the first of the activists of the Language Movement to be shot. It provoked him to write the iconic lyric to honour the martyrs of the Language Movement.

Little did he realise that this poem would one day become a historical song portraying the intense love for one's motherland and a unique expression of remembrance of the sacrifice of the language heroes.

The tune was eventually given by Altaf Mahmud (who later joined the Liberation War and was killed by the Pakistani army) and received immense appreciation. Listeners of the BBC's Bengali service had voted the song as the third most popular Bangla song of all time.

As a staunch proponent of the spirit of the Liberation War, Gaffar inspired people with his emotive writing while working with Weekly Joy Bangla, the first newspaper of independent Bangladesh registered through the Mujibnagar government during the war.

Through his writing, Gaffar advocated the need for establishing democracy, which would lead to a non-communal, inclusive society.

His passing has evoked messages of commiseration from many important figures of the country.

President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, ministers, diplomats, distinguished personalities and top leaders of different political and socio-cultural organisations expressed deep sorrow at the death of the journalist.

In his condolence message, the president said Bangladesh lost a pioneer who was progressive, creative and believed in the spirit of the Liberation War.

The PM in her message said Gaffar Chowdhury with his talent and work upheld the spirit of the Liberation War, the non-communal spirit of the Bangalees till his death and also put forth the country's true history before the nation.

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## RAILWAY RESEARCH, DEV CENTRE Chinese firm wants joint venture with BR

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

A Chinese state-run company wants to set up a research and development centre for Bangladesh Railway (BR) in a joint venture with the BR.

The China Railway Design Corporation (CRDC) submitted a proposal to the railways ministry in January for the establishment of the centre, titled Bangladesh Railway Centre for Research and Development (BRCRD).

If approved by the relevant government authorities, the centre will be jointly funded and operated by the two state-run agencies, and the profit will be shared proportionately, according to the proposal seen by The Daily Star.

Instructed by the railways ministry, the BR evaluated the proposal and submitted its findings to the ministry last month. Its report said the proposal does not contain cost estimations or any economic and financial analysis. The proposal does not include any supporting studies either, BR sources said.

According to the proposal, the research and development centre would create "a new juncture and handle point" for the development

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## PM'S REMARKS Star editor explains

On Wednesday, 18th May, during her speech marking her homecoming from exile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made a reference to me and said: "... Dr Yunus and, what we heard, Mahfuz Anam -- they went to America, went to the State Department, and sent email to Hillary [Clinton]. Anyway ... the then World Bank president Mr [Robert Bruce] Zoellick on his last working day, not at any board meeting, stopped the funding for the Padma bridge project. However, it has turned out to be a blessing in disguise in one sense."

I categorically state that I made no such trip to the US, never visited the State Department, never sent any email to Hillary Clinton, never had any meeting or

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A boy is wholly absorbed in following the trajectory of the marbles he has tossed to start the age-old game. Although the game of marbles is no longer as popular as it once was, some local boys were seen engrossed in it on Tuesday on the bank of the Buriganga in the capital's Kamrangirchar area.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Hopeless revenue target

No major tax hike planned

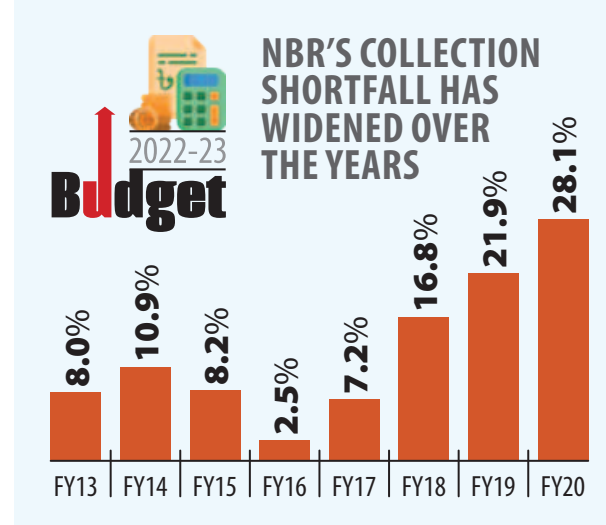
REJAUL KARIM BYRON and ZINA TASREEN

Wishy-washy -- is what best describes the government's stance on scaling up its narrow revenue base, which is posing to become the Achilles' heel to Bangladesh's growth aspirations.

While it is acutely aware of the longstanding shortcoming, it has not shown any willingness to take any bold, decisive actions to address the issue, relying instead on putting big collection targets in front of taxmen and crossing its fingers.

Take the case of the forthcoming fiscal year's collection target of Tk 370,000 crore for the National Board of Revenue, which, unsurprisingly, is the biggest yet.

The highest the NBR has managed is Tk 263,872 crore,



which was in fiscal 2020-21.

And in the first nine months of this fiscal year, the revenue authority has received about Tk 204,008 crore, meaning the target of Tk 330,000 crore will be missed by a wide margin.

Given the elevated inflation level and the recuperating economy, the government will maintain the status quo, resisting going for tax hikes, by and large, said a finance ministry official on the condition of anonymity as they are not allowed to speak with the media ahead of the budget.

"I would have gone for a tax hike on tobacco, soft drinks, alcoholic beverages and luxury cars," said Nasiruddin Ahmed, a former NBR chairman.

Given the current economic conditions, it is not possible to increase tax rates anywhere else.

"The scope is very limited. Sri Lanka slashed the VAT rates from 15 percent to 7 percent -- look, what is happening there," he added.

So, without any radical reform, getting within a touching distance of next fiscal year's target seems overly optimistic.

This raises the question of what Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal has up his sleeves.

"Strengthening VAT administration and expanding the VAT base holds substantial potential to address the tax gap," Kamal said in his letter to the World Bank in

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## BUSINESS

### Edible oil price shock may soften

Indonesia has decided to lift the ban on palm oil exports, a development that is expected to bring much-needed relief to the consumers in Bangladesh struggling to afford the cooking oil amid skyrocketing of prices.

Palm oil exports can resume from May 23, Indonesian President Joko Widodo said in an online briefing yesterday.

Local importers and traders say the move to withdraw the export restriction will bring much-needed relief to the global market as well as Bangladesh.

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