



**WR1** Sitakunda people are living in a death trap



**P5** Bhadra silts up within 2yrs of re-excavation



**P6** Trump accused of 'coup attempt' in Capitol riot



**P10** Booters face Turkmenistan today

# 'Don't oppose it'

## Kamal defends proposed amnesty to legalise offshore assets

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday defended his budgetary proposal allowing people to bring back money from abroad and legalise it without facing any question, saying the move is aimed at including it in the mainstream of the economy and reaping benefits.

Money laundered out of the country can be legalised in exchange for 7 to 15 percent tax under a new proposal meant to boost revenue and mobilise foreign currencies.

But economists as well as Transparency International Bangladesh have called the scope unethical as it would encourage more money laundering.

In his post-budget media briefing at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital, Kamal said the initiative should not be opposed.

"The people of the country have the right to the money that has



**"The people of the country have the right to the money that has gone out. Don't oppose it. If you oppose, it will not come back. What is your benefit if it doesn't come back? You may rebuke me, but there will be no benefit."**

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal

gone out. Don't oppose it. If you oppose it, it will not come back. What is your benefit if it doesn't come back? You may rebuke me, but there will be no benefit."

According to the finance minister, there is no guarantee that people who have built houses in other countries with ill-gotten money from Bangladesh or laundered money will not face any questions after 10 years.

He says the international community is increasingly becoming tough against undisclosed incomes.

"So, people should avail this amnesty. I think this is the opportune moment to bring back the money," said Kamal, adding that the money has to be brought into the mainstream economy.

The finance minister said PK Halder, allegedly involved in more than Tk 10,000 crore loan scam in Bangladesh, is now in trouble. The Indian government has said it would send back Halder and the money he had laundered to India.

In a statement, TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman called the proposal unconstitutional, immoral, discriminatory to current taxpayers, and contrary to the country's existing law.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## Stamp duties to increase up to 300pc

AKANDA MUHAMMAD JAHID

The rate of stamp duty, which has been unchanged for a decade, is going to increase by up to 300 percent from the next fiscal year as the government aims to boost revenue collection from this source to finance part of its Tk 678,064 crore budget and keep borrowing within its target.

As part of the initiative, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal in the Finance Bill-2022 proposed changes to the stamp duties on 46 types of functions.

The government wants to collect Tk 13,879 crore from the sale of stamps, which is 12 percent higher than the revised target of the outgoing fiscal year. The new target is more than four times higher than the actual collection of Tk 2,906 crore in FY2020-21.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7

### TAKEAWAYS from finance minister's POST-BUDGET BRIEFING



- ➔ More austerity from July 1
- ➔ Less important expenditure, foreign purchases to be cut
- ➔ Less important projects to be put on hold
- ➔ Tax rates cut aimed at employment generation
- ➔ Budget to benefit poor, businesses alike
- ➔ Revenue generation would be closer to target
- ➔ Govt borrowing won't crowd out private sector
- ➔ Budget contractionary



### CPD OBSERVATIONS

#### WELCOMING IN TERMS OF

- Better identification of contexts and challenges
- Expressing accountability by delineating the progress of past promises
- Continuation of fiscal measures to protect domestic industries
- Harmonisation of tax structure in case of export-oriented industries
- Relatively less election-focused

#### THE BUDGET FAILS TO

- Address inflationary issues
- Assure citizens regarding keeping prices of petroleum, fertiliser, gas and electricity unchanged
- Expand social safety net allocations in view of rising demand

#### WORSE IN TERMS OF

- Welcoming illicit income and capital flight
- Providing more support to higher income group while keeping the low and middle-income groups at bay

#### OVERALL

- INSUFFICIENT** in terms of needed measures
- INCOMPLETE** in terms of outlining strategies and
- INADEQUATE** in terms of addressing the present macroeconomic challenges

### AMNESTY TO LAUNDERED MONEY

**"Allowing money launderers to legalise their ill-gotten assets was completely unacceptable and illogical from the economic, political and ethical perspectives."**

Mustafizur Rahman distinguished fellow of CPD

**"No matter how the finance minister explains, the opportunity to bring back money laundered abroad by paying a nominal tax, it is clearly unethical protection and a reward for money launderers."**

Dr Iftekharuzzaman TIB Executive Director

# Budget offers no cure for price shocks

CPD says allocation for safety net inadequate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government in its proposed budget has failed to devise ways to cushion common people from the shock of skyrocketing commodity prices, while the allocation for social safety net schemes was inadequate given the rising demand, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) said yesterday.

The government has considered two issues – welcoming illicit income and providing more support to the rich, while keeping the low- and middle-income groups at bay, the independent think tank said in its reaction to the proposed national budget for fiscal 2022-23.

"The government has not mentioned clearly how to protect the commoners from the ongoing inflationary pressure," Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the CPD, said at a press conference at the Lakeshore Hotels in the capital.

The latest inflation data compiled by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has not represented the actual problem of the ordinary people, she said.

"Prices of some essential commodities have

increased by 40-45 percent, as per the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh," Fahmida said, adding that there was a mismatch between the original price hike of commodities in the market and the inflation rate in April.

Inflation in Bangladesh shot up to 6.29 percent in April – highest in 18 months – amid persistently high food and non-food prices, according to BBS data released on May 18. Overall inflation was 6.22 percent a month ago.

The government has set the inflation target at 5.6 percent for the next fiscal year, which also contradicts the reality, Fahmida said.

The government claims that global factors are largely responsible for the runaway inflation in Bangladesh, but its projection does not conform to its stance, she said.

"We don't know when the Russia-Ukraine war will end. On top of that, the latest wave of the coronavirus pandemic in China has dealt a fresh blow to the global supply chain," she said.

"So how is it possible to bring down the inflation rate to 5.6 percent?"

Fahmida thinks the government can still withdraw or bring down taxes on at least 29

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

# Businesses upbeat over tax measures

Say the steps will attract investment in private sector

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Business chambers and trade bodies welcomed the business-friendly measures in the proposed budget for the next fiscal year as the country's economy strives to recover from the fallouts of the pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war and high inflation.

Some tax measures proposed by the government will help attract investment in the private sector, they said.

Md Jashim Uddin, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said bringing all exporters under the uniform tax rate, which is currently available only to the garment sector, had long been a major demand of businesspeople.

In the budget proposal presented in parliament on Thursday, the government proposed making the uniform tax rates of 12 percent for non-green factories and 10 percent for green factories applicable to all exporters.

He said controlling inflation will be the biggest challenge in the implementation of the budget.

He also criticised the finance minister's proposal to give amnesty to laundered money by allowing black money to be legalised by paying 7 to 15 percent tax.

The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) is happy to see that this year's budget proposal is not like other conventional budgets and that ensuring a stable livelihood has received due focus, MCCI President Md Saiful Islam said in a statement.

"We know that future economic disruptions besides the current ones caused by the pandemic can actually increase the final budget deficit," Islam said suggesting for effective financial management to limit expenditure on the financing of government projects.

The MCCI also believed that the priority of the government will be to ensure the health and economic security of citizens as much as possible. Simultaneously, given the current backdrop of global crises and price hikes, government support is even more important to keep energy, food and fertilisers prices under control.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Rickshaw vans, with CNG cylinders installed on them, wait to enter the BSCIC Industrial Estate in Gazipur's Tongi. Refilled at a nearby CNG filling station, the cylinders are used to supply gas to some factories there. Such a risky method of supplying gas could cause accidents. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

**PADMA BRIDGE inauguration 14 DAYS TO GO**

## COX'S BAZAR CAMP Rohingya leader hacked to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A Rohingya leader was hacked to death by unidentified criminals at a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar on Thursday.

Azim Uddin, 35, was the head majhi of Block-C Rohingya Camp-18, said police.

At least 10 to 15 armed men attacked some Rohingya leaders inside the camp around 9:00pm, said witnesses.

Three leaders, including Azim, were injured and rushed to MSF NGO Hospital, they added.

On-duty doctors at the hospital declared Azim dead.

Kamran Hossain, additional superintendent of Armed Police Battalion (APBn-8), said they were conducting operations to detain the criminals.

The body was taken to Ukha Police Station, he added.

## ASYLUM-SEEKERS

### UN accuses UK of dishonesty over deportation plan

AFP, London

The UN refugee agency yesterday accused Britain of dishonesty over London's plan to send asylum-seekers to Rwanda, as a court heard an emergency bid to block the first deportations next week.

The government intends to fly the first planeload of claimants to Rwanda on June 14, after agreeing the plan with Kigali in a bid to deter illegal migrants from undertaking perilous crossings of the Channel by boat.

Refugee rights groups and a trade union representing UK Border Force personnel are challenging the plan in London's High Court, seeking an injunction against the flight on Tuesday and any beyond then.

They argue that the plan violates asylum seekers' human rights, and say the government cannot justify its claim that Rwanda is a safe destination.

Lawyers for the claimants said that Home Secretary Priti Patel's interior ministry had even claimed endorsement for the plan from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

But the UN agency's lawyer Laura Dubinsky said it "in no way endorses the UK-Rwandan arrangement".

"UNHCR is not involved in the UK-Rwanda arrangement, despite assertions to the contrary made by the secretary of state," she told the court.

Dubinsky said the would-be refugees were at risk of "serious, irreparable harm" if sent to Rwanda, and that the UN had "serious concerns about Rwandan capacity".



A destroyed city administration building in Bashtanka, Mykolaiv region, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues. The photo was taken Thursday. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Ukraine hits Russian targets in Kherson

Zelensky says troops 'holding on' in key Donbas battles

AGENCIES

Ukraine said yesterday it had launched new air strikes on Russian positions in the captured southern region of Kherson as President Volodymyr Zelensky insisted Kyiv's forces were "holding on" in the east of the country.

Ukraine is trying to carry out a counterattack in Kherson, one of the first areas to be taken by Russia after the February 24 invasion, as Kyiv's troops struggle in the eastern Donbas region.

Russian President Vladimir Putin meanwhile compared his current actions to Peter the Great's against Sweden 300 years ago, saying the tsar "wasn't taking anything, he was taking it back".

Zelensky said in his evening address that several "cities in Donbas, which the occupiers now consider key targets, are holding on".

He added that Ukrainian forces have made positive strides in the Zaporizhzhia and Kharkiv regions outside Donbas, and are in the process of "liberating our land".

He also appealed for his country

not to be left in a "grey zone" with its EU membership bid, ahead of a summit set to decide on its candidacy.

Ukraine's defence ministry said yesterday it had struck Russian military positions in Kherson, which is just north of the Crimean peninsula that was annexed by Russia in 2014, and among the first regions seized by Russia in February.

"Our aircraft carried out a series of strikes on enemy bases, places of accumulation of equipment and personnel, and field depots around five different settlements in the Kherson region," it said in a statement.

The devastated eastern port of Mariupol, under siege by Russian troops for months until it fell, is now at risk of a major cholera outbreak, Britain's defence ministry said yesterday.

There is likely a critical shortage of medicines in Kherson, the ministry said in a Twitter update. Russia is struggling to provide basic public services to the population in Russian-occupied territories, it added.

The fiercest fighting remains around the eastern industrial city of Severodonetsk, a battle that Zelensky has said is pivotal for the fate of the Donbas region.

Local governor Sergiy Gaiday said yesterday that Russian forces had destroyed a major sports centre, adding: "One of the symbols of Severodonetsk was destroyed. The Ice Palace burned down."

People in the town of Lysychansk, which is located just across a river from Severodonetsk, spoke to AFP about the stark choices the war has forced on them: either stay and brave the shelling, or flee and abandon their homes.

Western countries meanwhile reacted with outrage after pro-Russian rebels in the east sentenced one Moroccan and two British fighters to death on Thursday after they were captured while fighting for Ukraine.

Separatist authorities in the Donetsk region of the Donbas ordered the death penalty for Aiden Aslin, Shaun Pinner and Saadun Brahim, Russian media reported.

## Man lands in prison in DSA case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A Sylhet court yesterday sent a man to jail in a case filed under the controversial Digital Security Act for his "derogatory" comments on expatriates' welfare minister.

Monir Ahmed, 38, of Kargram village in Jaintiapur upazila, was arrested in Sylhet city's Sobhanighat area on Thursday night.

On Wednesday, Monir posted a "derogatory" remark on Facebook on Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Imran Ahmed, also the lawmaker of Sylhet-4 constituency.

Sabbir Ahmed, a Chhatra League activist of Jaintiapur upazila, on Thursday night lodged the case with Jaintiapur Police Station against Monir under the Digital Security Act.

Golam Dastagir, officer-in-charge of the police station, said the arrestee was yesterday produced before the court that sent him to prison.

## Woman suffers burn injuries in acid attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A woman sustained burn injuries in an acid attack in Khushiura village of Sunamganj's Dwarabazar upazila on Thursday night.

Sorufa Begum, 35, wife of Saudi Arabia expatriate Mozammel Haque and mother of three children, is now undergoing treatment at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital with burns on her face.

Quoting her family, Debdulal Dhar, officer-in-charge of Dwarabazar Police Station, said, "Someone threw acid on her around 8:00pm while she went out of the house to bring water from the tube well."

However, no one, even the victim, could identify the attacker, the OC said, adding that they recovered the bottle used for carrying the acid.

He said, "No one of her family is available to file the case. Once the victim gets well and comes back home, we will be lodging a case. But we are continuing our investigation."

## Trader found dead in Jashore

UNB, Jashore

A 37-year-old trader was yesterday found dead with a piece of cloth stuffed into his mouth near a railway track in Jashore, police said.

The deceased was identified as Lablu, son of Abdul Mannan of the Kholadanga Colony Para area.

His body was found adjacent to Kholadanga railway track around 11:00am, said Tajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station.

Lablu's father said they found the body after they started searching for him as he did not return home on Thursday night.

OC Tajul said the body was sent to Jashore Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy. "Efforts are on to identify and nab the culprits," he said.

## 'Don't oppose it'

FROM PAGE 1

"No matter how the finance minister explains, the opportunity to bring back money laundered abroad by paying a nominal tax is clearly unethical protection and reward for the money launderers."

Speaking at the media briefing, Kamal acknowledged that the budget implementation would have to go through a difficult period. "There will be many ups and downs. But we will be successful by overcoming the ups and downs."

According to the finance minister, the budget would benefit both the marginalised population and the business community alike.

Kamal pointed out that there is no country in the world that is clocking the

export growth akin to Bangladesh.

The budget has put a special focus on employment generation, he also said.

"Various tax rates have been cut. This will help investors to save money that they would be able to invest and set up industries. This will create jobs."

He defended his move to impose 15 percent VAT on laptop imports.

"The proposal is aimed at boosting local manufacturing. We have been putting emphasis on the Made-in-Bangladesh concept from the last fiscal year and we are giving priority to it."

Responding to a question on giving protection to the disclosures to be made to whiten the laundered money, Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem,

chairman of the National Board of Revenue, said the opportunity will be backed by a law passed in parliament.

"Nobody will be raised any question legally."

Shamsul Alam, state minister for planning, said the government usually frames expansionary budgets. "However, this budget is a little-bit contractionary."

The government plans to ensure a normal demand in the economy and wants to curb additional demand to avoid fuelling inflation, he said.

He said the price of fertiliser has not been increased keeping in mind the higher inflationary pressure.

Abdur Rouf Talukder, senior secretary of the Finance Division, said the scrutiny to bring another

100 upazilas under 100 percent social safety net coverage is underway.

Once the upazilas come under the coverage, another Tk 4,000 crore to Tk 5,000 crore will be needed as safety net allocations, he said.

The size of the budget was 17.5 percent of GDP in the current fiscal year, whereas it stood at 15.2 percent for FY23, he said. "The budget size has narrowed. We are trying to reduce demand through this."

Rouf noted that some austerity measures have already been taken and there would be more such steps from July 1.

"The less important expenditure — or the expenditures that are used to buy items from abroad although they are locally available — will be cut,"

he said, adding that the government would also defer the implementation of projects that don't generate revenue, directly or indirectly.

The subsidy spending in FY23 would go up to Tk 82,000 crore from Tk 53,000 crore in the outgoing fiscal year, owing to the rise in the prices of diesel and fertiliser in the international markets.

Rouf said if the subsidy on gas, electricity, diesel, and fertiliser is withdrawn, inflation would accelerate.

"But we are not going to do that."

If the prices of gas, diesel and fertiliser increase globally, the subsidy spending will rise and it would create a challenge for the economy, said the secretary.

Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur

Razzaque said the government is going to provide Tk 28,000 crore in fertiliser subsidy. This directly supports farmers.

Education Minister Dipu Moni said there is nothing to be disappointed about the allocation for the education sector.

"Now, we will have to focus on how efficiently we can implement the budgetary allocation."

A list of the schools that would come under the government's monthly payment order would be published in a week or two, she said.

Zahid Maleque, health and family welfare minister, said the budget has put emphasis on research and development, vaccine production and fighting non-communicable diseases.

## Stamp duties to increase

FROM PAGE 1

To attain the goal, the minister in parliament on Thursday proposed hiking the lowest rate of stamp, used for the acknowledgement of a debt of up to Tk 50,000, to Tk 20, up by 100 percent from the present duty.

If anyone wants to enter a partnership deal involving more than Tk 1,00,000, then he will have to spend Tk 4,000 to buy the required stamp for the agreement, up from the current duty of Tk 2,000.

Signing of a divorce deal will also be more expensive as the duty of the stamp required for this purpose will rise by 300 percent from the next fiscal year.

Currently, divorce registration requires a stamp worth Tk 500. But in the proposed bill, the stamp duty has been fixed at Tk 2,000.

To sign a deal for power of attorney, the cost of stamp of Tk 500 will increase by 60 percent to Tk 800.

The stamp required for obtaining loans, advances or any other credit facilities from any scheduled bank will cost an individual Tk 2,000, up from Tk 1,000.

For affidavits, a person will have to spend Tk 300, up by 50 percent from the current duty for the same stamp.

However, the mortgage deed in favour of a bank or a financial institution in respect of a loan will be cheaper as per the proposed bill.

Currently, the cost of stamp of a mortgage deed of up to Tk 20 lakh is Tk 2,000. But in the proposed

bill, the price of a mortgage deed of up to Tk 50 lakh will be Tk 2,000.

In his budget proposal, the finance minister on Thursday told parliament that the stamp duty rate has not been changed since 2012 although it can be a potent source of revenue.

"Considering our current state of development, increased per capita income, inflation over the years and other economic realities, the stamp duty rate charged is quite low," he said proposing for raising the rate of stamps.

Kamal said this will facilitate earning more revenue from this source and also make the stamp duty rate practical and realistic.

## Biden faces discord at Americas summit

AFP, Los Angeles

US President Joe Biden faced open criticism Thursday at an Americas summit, along with complaints about foreign pressure by Brazil's far-right leader, as he sought progress on issues from migration to climate change.

Biden is welcoming leaders from across the hemisphere in Los Angeles in a choreographed bid to show that democracy can work, amid rapid inroads by China in a region long seen by Washington as its turf.

## Businesses upbeat over tax measures

FROM PAGE 1

It welcomed the government prioritising five areas in the budget — inflation containment, agriculture and overall food security, human resource development, boosting domestic investment, increasing exports and promoting export diversification, and job creation and rural development.

The Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) said the GDP growth target of 7.5 percent is achievable if, among other factors, the GDP-investment ratio increases to the expected level.

Corporate tax rate for

certain listed and non-listed companies will be reduced by 2.5 percent subject to certain conditions, according to the proposed budget.

The policy trend of corporate tax reduction is a welcome one, but upon considering the current economic condition and infrastructure, the proposed cash transaction limit must be increased, the FICCI said.

Tax deduction at source from payment to raw material supplier will be reduced to 4 percent from 7 percent, which will increase cash flow.

"Insertion of the definition of export will reduce the complexities

of export of goods and services," said FICCI said.

Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) in a statement said enhancing private sector investment, employment generation, revenue collection and financing are some of the challenges of the proposed budget.

Budget implementation is a great challenge, the DCCI said, adding that the inconsistency between income and expenditure in the proposed budget may lead to dependency on bank borrowing or loans from foreign source.

Mohammad Hatem, executive president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and

Exporters Association (BKMEA), demanded that the government consider keeping the source tax at 0.5 percent instead of 1 percent proposed in the budget.

Abdullah Parvez, president of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI), welcomed the uniform tax rates but also demanded continuation of source tax at 0.5 percent.

He also suggested offering more facilities to start-up ventures so that they can grow and generate employment.

The president of American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh, Syed Ershad Ahmed,

expected that more incentive would be extended to the agriculture sector.

He said prices of agricultural equipment and hybrid vehicles should be reduced and that no significant economic growth is conceivable without a sustained foreign exchange reserve growth.

"Hence, instead of gross import ban, we should speed up foreign-funded projects' implementation and reconsider own-funded projects that have sizeable import components."

"We strongly recommend effective modernisation in managing all ports' operations and allowance of bonded warehouse facility for non-RMG exports too,"

Ahmed added.

Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) were pleased with the government's proposed withdrawal of 15 percent VAT on sales of PET chips and reduction of VAT on sales of man-made fibre to Tk 3 per kg from Tk 6.

Md Shahadat Hossain, president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh, said conditional reduction in tax rates for certain types of companies is a good initiative.

He said making the uniform tax rate applicable to all exporters will encourage diversification of export of goods and services.

RIGHTS IN  
BANGLADESHTake prompt  
action for civil  
liberty, safetyCongressman  
tells US House of  
RepresentativesDIPLOMATIC  
CORRESPONDENT

US Congressman Jamie Raskin has voiced support for human rights defenders, members of minority groups, and civil society in Bangladesh, saying that the Bangladesh government is persisting in threatening the basic human rights and civil liberties of its people.

Addressing the House of Representatives on June 7, he said the Bangladesh government has earned widespread criticism for its deteriorating human rights record, and for its failure to protect the most vulnerable people living in Bangladesh – indigenous people, women, religious minorities, activists, and refugees.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Amidst the bustle of vehicles on the busy Kurmitola Road, construction work of Dhaka Elevated Expressway and the metro rail can be seen at the same time, as progress steadily continues. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Will the budget  
close gender gap?

## JAMIL MAHMUD

In his latest budget speech, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal emphasised on giving importance to young women's skill development in professional and technical fields to reduce the country's gender gap.

He stressed that Bangladesh is in a better position internationally – in terms of political, economic and social empowerment of women and elimination of gender inequality – due to implementing various measures in line with the eight Five-Year Plan.

The minister mentioned Bangladesh's position in the World Economic Forum's "Global Gender Gap Report 2021", in which the country ranks 65th among 156 countries and first among South Asian nations. He said the government is working to make the position of women "satisfactory" in terms of participation in economic activities and entitlement to benefits.

While the finance minister's promise to give importance to women's skill development in professional and technical fields is a necessary step, there are a few more areas that Bangladesh needs to look at to ensure gender parity, especially in regards to closing the gap in economic participation and opportunity.

Bangladesh achieved a better position in the Global Gender Gap Report largely due to its fair scores in political empowerment (0.546 percentage points), educational attainment (0.951), and health and survival (0.962).

When it comes to economic participation and opportunity, the country's score is a mere 0.418 percentage points.

Among South Asian countries, Nepal (0.630), Bhutan (0.556), Sri Lanka (0.547) and the Maldives (0.491) have better scores than Bangladesh in "economic participation and opportunity" of women.

Also, in terms of female's labour force participation rate, Nepal (85.3 percent), Bhutan (62.3 percent), and Maldives (43.1 percent) are ahead of Bangladesh (38.5 percent).

In Laos, which ranks first in "economic participation and opportunity" with a score of 0.915 (36th in overall gender gap index with 0.750 score), female's labour force

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

PRAYER  
TIMING  
JUNE 11

	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
Azan	4-05	12-45	5-00	6-50	8-15
Jamaat	4-40	1-15	5-15	6-55	8-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Woman files  
case over  
harassment at  
DU campus

## DU CORRESPONDENT

A case was filed yesterday against an unidentified man with Shahbagh Police Station over sexual harassment of a young woman on Dhaka University campus.

The incident occurred in front of DU's Sir AF Rahman Hall on Wednesday night, said Moudut Hawlader, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station.

OC Moudut told this correspondent that police have already collected CCTV footage from the spot and are currently investigating the incident.

The victim filed the case herself with Shahbagh Police Station and confirmed that she

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Gates electronic,  
process still manual  
Additional features yet to be installedRASHIDUL HASAN and  
MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Although authorities have installed electronic immigration gates or e-gates at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA), the system still does not have all the planned functions.

This system will include features (which are yet to be installed) like verification of passenger, destination and visa information for a hassle-free immigration process.

Once the features are installed, inbound and outbound passengers will only need to face immigration officials just for the departure and arrival seal. Other immigration processes will be completed automatically.

Amid criticisms that e-gates take up more time than the existing system, Group Captain Kamrul Islam, executive director of HSIA, yesterday told The Daily Star, "We're working to include an

integrated system with e-gates, which will notify immigration officials automatically whether the passengers are carrying a valid visa or boarding pass."

BMET cards would be checked manually, since it is not possible to integrate them into the system.

Kamrul further said it may take time but passengers have given positive feedback regarding the process. Besides, work to install two more e-gates with the existing three for inbound passengers has already started.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan inaugurated the e-gates in June last year. They were opened for use last Tuesday.

At the time, Kamrul claimed that passengers with e-passports will be able to pass immigration through e-gates in only 18 seconds.

In reality, e-gates are only checking passport validity now; other processes are being carried out manually. What this

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

## Neglected, yet again

## Only 5.43pc of total budget allocated for health sector

## MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

The health sector was yet again neglected in the national budget, with Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal earmarking around Tk 36,864 crore – 5.43 percent of the total budget – for the sector.

In the past decade, the allocation for the health sector consistently remained below six percent of the total budget. According to experts, it should be as much as 15 percent to ensure that quality service is accessible for all.

The finance minister's speech contains details about setting up specialised hospitals in all divisional headquarters, along with new intensive care units and dialysis centres in district hospitals.

He, however, said too little about the government's strategies to control non-communicable diseases, – which account for 67 percent of the country's annual deaths – and reducing out-of-pocket expenditures.

"As the government spent a lot on tertiary care – making new hospitals and medical colleges – primary healthcare has always been more neglected. This budget is no exception," Dr Muhammad Abdus Sabur, adjunct professor at the Institute of Health Economics (IHE) of Dhaka University, told this correspondent.

In a pre-budget discussion, Dr Atiur Rahman, former governor of Bangladesh Bank, said, "The majority of healthcare seekers go to healthcare centres for primary services. So, the allocation for this segment should be as much as 30 percent of the total health budget."

In the past several years, around 25 percent of the health budget has been spent on primary healthcare, 39 percent on secondary and 36 percent on tertiary.

Allocating more than 60 percent of the health budget for primary care was recommended in the 1998 sector-wide approach (SWAP) for the health sector.

Meanwhile, the minister also abstained from mentioning any clear guidelines as to how

the upazila health complexes and other such establishments in rural areas can be strengthened.

He only mentioned that the government has started a screening system, including the formulation of a guideline for medication and control of the non-communicable disease.

Dr Shafiun Shimul, CDC Foundation fellow at Georgia State University, said, "I do not think the minister has proposed anything exciting in this part. It is more or less the same as the existing measures."

While the overall budget for FY 2022-2023 increased about 14.24 percent, the minister has proposed only a 12.62 percent increase for the health sector, which, according to experts, is a consequence of incremental and inflation-related issues.

## SHORTCOMINGS

- Share in total budget remains meagre
- No defined strategy to control non-communicable diseases
- Primary healthcare neglected
- No guidelines on reducing out-of-pocket expenditure

This implies that the growth in the health budget is lower compared to the total budget, despite its share in the total budget increasing from 5.2 percent to 5.43 percent.

"Hence, we cannot expect any qualitative change in the healthcare service," Syed Abdul Hamid, professor of health economics at Dhaka University, told this correspondent.

Of the total amount, the finance minister has proposed an allocation of Tk 29,282 crore for the healthcare service division in the next fiscal. The health allocation was Tk 26,165 crore in the previous one.

However, the proposed budget has an allocation of Tk 7,582 crore for the Health Education and Family Welfare Division, which is Tk 1,472 crore more than the outgoing fiscal.

Maternal voucher scheme in some upazilas has been expanded. The allocation for the Integrated Health Science Research and Development Fund remains the same, at Tk 100 crore.

When asked about the government's ability to spend the allocated funds properly, Dr Sabur, said there is a need for a reform to build this capacity.

## 1971 GENOCIDE

Demand for int'l  
recognition to be  
placed before UN

## STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Demand for international recognition of the genocide carried out by Pakistani army during the Liberation War is set to be placed before United Nations Human Rights Council.

The 50th session of the council, an inter-governmental body within the UN, will take place between June 13 and July 8 in Geneva.

An organisation of the Bangladeshi diaspora, Stichting BASUG (Bangladesh Support Group), submitted a written statement with the demand, said Mahboob Zaman, an organiser of BASUG's Bangladesh chapter.

He said that the statement was put on agenda item 3.

In the statement, BASUG reiterated the demand for international recognition of the 1971 genocide, committed against the Bengalee nation during the war.

"We demand a UN resolution... without further delay. There is an urgent need for an UN-sponsored resolution condemning atrocities that took place in 1971. The perpetrators must be brought to justice, because new generations must know what took place in Bangladesh. We cannot forget and must learn from this evil," it said.

Unfortunately, the genocide is becoming a forgotten chapter in contemporary history.

Due to lack of international recognition, the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

## NEW MARKET CLASHES

No headway in  
Nahid, Morsalin  
murder cases

## MUNTAKIM SAAD

Over a month and a half have passed, but law enforcers are yet to locate the prime suspect in the murder case of deliveryman Nahid Mia. He was killed during the recent violent clashes between Dhaka College students and New Market's shopkeepers.

No headway has been made in the investigation centring the murder of shopkeeper Morsalin either, another victim of the clash.

The prime suspect in the Nahid murder case, Emon Bashar, an activist of Chhatra League, remains on the run, as police's detective branch (DB) is yet to find him. Emon, also a Bangla department student of Dhaka College, reportedly hacked Nahid during the clash on April 19.

Nahid later died in a hospital. "We have no update about him [Emon]. We couldn't yet ascertain whether he's in the country or not," HM Azimul Haque, deputy commissioner of DB's Ramna division, told The Daily Star on Thursday.

The DB official said it will take time to submit the charge-sheet, as the prime suspect is still on the run.

The brawl that started on April 18 night had spilled into the next day, leaving two dead and others – including, journalists, students and police officers – wounded.

Nahid Mia (18), deliveryman of a computer accessories shop, and Morsalin (26), a shopkeeper at a clothing store, were killed during the clashes. DB has been investigating the two murder cases.

A total of five cases were filed in connection with the clashes. In one of them, police accused 24 individuals, mostly BNP leaders and members of its affiliated bodies. Besides, over 1,700 unnamed people were accused in five cases.

Officials said it is important for investigators to arrest Emon first to file a charge-sheet. DB seized two of Emon's mobile phones from his college hostel after the incident.

Six Chhatra League activists of Dhaka College were arrested in the Nahid murder case.

Footage and photos showed that Nahid was

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7



This may look like a garbage dump, but this pile of waste that stands tall near Siddhirganj Bus Stand on Dhaka-Chittagong highway is the result of locals mindlessly dumping their garbage on the road. Despite the stench and a host of other inconveniences it causes in the area, authorities are yet to take action. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## A tale of resilience and grit

55-year-old Balayet to sit for DU's 'D' unit exam today

DU CORRESPONDENT

Balayet Sheikh from Gazipur's Mawna had a long-held dream of roaming the corridors of Dhaka University (DU) as a student. But unfortunately for him, life had gotten in the way.

At the age of 55, Balayet is finally getting a chance to fight for his dream. He will be sitting for the admission exam today under the social sciences faculty (D unit).

In a Facebook post, Balayet sought prayers from his kin and expressed his gratitude to those involved in his journey, as his fate is set to get tested in room 802 of the mathematics department.

On May 22, US embassy in Dhaka wished Balayet ahead of the test.

In 1983, he first took preparation to sit for Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination but could not complete registration owing to financial insolvency. He tried again in 1988, but couldn't sit for the SSC exam due to floods across the country.

After months, he started his career as a photographer. At present, he is a correspondent for Daily Karatoa.

Balayet later decided to discontinue his education.

As a father of three, he had decided to set an example for his children and turn things around for himself.

In 2019, the indomitable Balayet finally passed the SSC exam and in 2021 completed his Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination.



Not being able to withstand the summer heat, a man takes a dip and leisurely swims in the Suhrawardy Udyan lake to cool off. This photo was taken in Dhaka University area yesterday. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## 2 teams inspect

FROM PAGE 5

The doctor also urged the people to rush to local health complexes, if they face any illness.

Meanwhile, Chattogram's special superintendent of police Shahnewaj Khaled led the CID team.

"We will scrutinise the samples to unearth the reasons of the fire and blast," he told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the authorities are continuing to remove rubble from the depot.

"We are removing rubble to check whether anymore body remains here," said Maj (ret) Shamsul Haider Siddique, general manager of the depot.

"There were around 4,315 containers in the depot. Of those, some of them got completely damaged, some partially, and some other remains undamaged. We will be

able to get accurate figures tomorrow [Saturday]," he said.

Till yesterday, 98 people, who suffered injuries, were kept admitted to the burn and plastic surgery unit of Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Eighteen-year-old Anwar Hossain, who used to work as a container helper at the depot, suffered severe burns.

"He [Anwar] is undergoing treatment. But we are not sure whether he will be cured completely," said Anwar's uncle Abdul Mannan.

Another victim Aminul Islam (33), who works as a staff in the depot's jute yard, suffered burn injuries in the waist and hands.

"The patients, who are undergoing treatment are out of danger till now," said Liton Kumar Palit, assistant registrar of the unit.

## Rabab Fatima

FROM PAGE 5

cabinet, according to the UN.

The secretary general extended his appreciation and gratitude to Heidi Schroderus-Fox of Finland, who is deputy to the high representative and director of UNOHRLS, for her dedication and commitment for acting as high representative.

About her appointment, she said, "I am grateful to the prime minister. She gave me this opportunity. She appointed me as the

permanent representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations with confidence and trust in me."

Ambassador Fatima brings to the position more than 30 years of experience in national and international civil service, encompassing bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, policymaking, advocacy, programme planning and implementation.

She is the current ambassador and permanent representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations in New York.

## Nationwide protest

FROM PAGE 5

a mass procession towards the Indian High Commission in Dhaka on June 16 around 11:00am.

Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Bangladesh and Islami Oikya Jote also brought out processions in the same area.

In a written statement, Hefajat-e-Islam Bangladesh Amir Mohibullah Babunagari condemned the remarks and urged the Indian government to take stern action against them.

He also urged the Bangladesh government to issue a strong statement like those of other Muslim countries, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait and Qatar.

During the protests, Mohammadpur Police Station OC Abul Kalam Azad and ASI Jahangir Alam were assaulted by protesters in Dhaka Udyan area, after the OC asked them to free the road.

The two police officers are currently undergoing treatment at National Institute of Neurosciences and Hospital.

A police sub-inspector,

deployed in Adamji Bihari Camp area of Narayanganj, was beaten by protesters inside Adamji Jame Mosque around 1:30pm yesterday. A journalist was also assaulted while trying to save the officer.

The injured were identified as Syed Azizul Haque, SI of Siddhirganj Police Station, and Billal Hossain Robin, staff reporter of Daily Manabjamin. They were later rescued by Siddhirganj police.

Protests were also held in Savar, Manikganj, Khulna, Barishal, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Pabna and Joypurhat.

During a recent televised debate, BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma made some comments on the prophet, sparking a furor among Muslims.

BJP on June 5 said Nupur was suspended from the party's primary membership, while BJP's Delhi media head Naveen Jindal was expelled for disrupting communal harmony.

Nupur later withdrew her statement on social media.

## Take prompt action

FROM PAGE 3

Raskin, who represents Maryland's 8th Congressional District in the US House of Representatives, also asked his colleagues to join him in standing with the people

of Bangladesh, especially those bravest and most vulnerable.

He urged the Bangladesh government to take immediate action to respect civil rights and safety of Bangladeshis.

## Croplands pushed

FROM PAGE 5

111.29 hectares of land, he added.

According to Brick Manufacturing and Brick Kiln Establishment (Control) Act, brick kilns cannot be established in areas declared as a municipality, city corporation, reserve forest, or sanctuary.

The act also states that they get reopened after a few days following lobbying by local influential.

Rubel Mia, owner of Asia Brick, said building brickfields on agricultural land is the most convenient way of doing business.

However, he admitted that he was breaching the rules while doing so.

Mizanur Rahman, deputy director of the District Environment office in Habiganj, told this correspondent that no brick kilns are allowed on agricultural land.

"Brickfields can only be established on nonarable land outside residential areas. It also requires clearance from the Department of Agriculture," he added.

Tofazzal Sohel, Habiganj district general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA), said, "There are no rules for setting up brickfields on agricultural land. But we do not see any application of this law in Habiganj. How does the Department of Agricultural Extension and the Department of Environment issue brick kiln clearance on agricultural land?"

Deputy Commissioner of Habiganj Ishtat Jahan, Habiganj deputy commissioner, said mobile courts are always active under her jurisdiction for surveilling the brickfields.

She said action would be taken following investigation if the approval process was manipulated for building brick kilns on crop fields.

## Will the budget

FROM PAGE 3

participation rate is 80.5 percent.

According to the global report, females share 24.4 percent of professional and technical work in Bangladesh, which is 30 percent in Nepal, 32.8 percent in Bhutan, 47.9 percent in Sri Lanka, 52.2 percent in Maldives, and 50.4 percent in Laos.

Besides, in Laos, females' share in "firms with majority ownership" is 36.5 percent and "firms with female top managers" 43.1 percent.

They are 12.7 percent and 4.8 percent, respectively, in Bangladesh.

Prof Tania Haque of women and gender studies department at Dhaka University said although there has been much improvement in terms of closing the gender gap, girls in Bangladesh still get less priority in getting support for higher education.

In terms of women's employment opportunities in correlation to skill, there are areas for improvement, since women face different

The authorities conduct occasional raids and shut down some of the illegal fields at times, but they get reopened after a few days following lobbying by local influential.

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People who laundered money abroad will be allowed to legalise their immovable assets by giving 15 percent tax and white money by paying 10 percent tax, according to the budget proposal.

They will be able to bring back their money to the country if 7 percent of the total amount is paid as tax to the government.

Mustafizur said such tax privileges given to dishonest people in the past had not yielded any positive results for the economy, rather such policies of the government will only encourage capital flight from the country.

As wealth inequality has widened during the

essential commodities, which will help common people deal with the price shock.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the think tank, said the government could give some relief to the lower-income people by increasing allocation in its social safety net programmes.

The government in the proposed budget has set aside Tk 113,576 crore for the social safety net schemes, up 1.89 percent year on year.

But the philosophy of the budget is to mobilise assets from the rich and distribute those to the poor such that basic rights of the common people can be protected," he said.

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## Budget offers

FROM PAGE 1

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The government has set a lower inflation target for the next fiscal year as it thinks that the US dollar will depreciate to Tk 86.2 against the local currency in the upcoming financial year, he added.

Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the CPD, said that allowing money launderers to legalise their ill-gotten assets was completely unacceptable and illogical from the economic, political and ethical perspectives.

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## Demand for int'l

FROM PAGE 3

history of that horror has faded in the world today. The lack of accountability undermines human rights for all, especially for Bangladeshis. Not only are they denied justice, but a central component of their history is being erased and ignored, making closure and more peaceful futures seem further out of reach, the statement said.

The 1971 genocide in Bangladesh, which was perpetrated by the Pakistan military, is one of the worst mass atrocities witnessed after the Second World War.

In nine months, the occupation army killed approximately 3 million people, violated over 2,00,000 women, and forced 10 million people to cross the border and take shelter in India.

The genocide is well documented and reported in the international media. Diplomatic correspondences and parliamentary reports during that period acknowledged what had taken place.

The Guinness Book of Records lists the Bangladesh genocide as one of the top five genocides in the 20th century, the statement added.

## Gates electronic

FROM PAGE 3

means it that it will now take 18 seconds more for immigration formalities than what it used to take, sources claimed.

GM Azizur Rahman, additional DIG (immigration) of Special Branch, said, "E-gates do not have the capacity to check visas, destinations, boarding times, and BMET cards."

Towfiqul Islam Khan, senior research fellow of the CPD, said the budget was able to "diagnose the symptoms of the ailment, but it failed to prescribe the required medications."

The middle- and lower-income groups have largely been neglected while the rich and money launderers were offered incentives, he said.

The government has proposed imposing 15 percent value-added tax on the import of laptop, which is now considered an essential piece of equipment for all, Towfiqul said.

Imposing such a tax on laptop, which saw price hike in recent times, proves that policymakers do not have any knowledge about the market, he added.

Asked if e-gates are helping immigration processes, Azizur said that earlier, they needed to verify passports and check passport holders' identification manually, but now, e-gates do those for them.

"Still, we have to be alert so that no one's able to leave the country with fake documents, especially to countries where no travel visa is required," said the official.

So far, 12 e-gates have been installed in the departure area, while three are at the arrival area of the airport.

Apart from Dhaka airport, six e-gates have been set up at Shah Amanat International Airport in Chattogram and Osmani International Airport in Sylhet.

The government has a plan to set up 50 e-gates gradually at all airports and land ports under the "E.Passport and Automated Border Control Management Project".

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The Pakistan army used organised, systematic rape as a weapon of war. Young girls and women were abducted and repeatedly gang raped in special camps run by Pakistani servicemen. The Pakistani army under a blueprint from high command, systematically killed intellectuals and professionals of Bangladesh, a spiteful and evil act.

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## Rabab Fatima new UN under-secretary general

UNB, Dhaka

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Thursday appointed Bangladesh's Rabab Fatima as high representative for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states (UNOHRLS).

Through the appointment of Ambassador Fatima, a female diplomat from the Bangladesh Foreign Service, for the first time, has been appointed as UN under-secretary general.

She will be the highest ranking person in the UN system as a Bangladeshi citizen.

Ambassador Fatima replaces Courtenay Rattray of Jamaica, who was appointed as chief de

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Within just two years of an expensive re-excavation, Bhadra finds itself filled with silt once again. Before excavation, the river was recovered from encroachers, but it is gradually being grabbed just like before. Once a wide river, Bhadra now has only a thin stream left.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN



## REMARKS ON PROPHET

### Nationwide protest against suspended BJP leader

STAR REPORT

Thousands of protesters brought out several processions yesterday in Dhaka and other parts of the country, condemning suspended Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Nupur Sharma's remarks on the prophet of Islam.

Multiple processions were brought out after Jumma prayers from Dhaka's Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, in presence of an additional police force.

The protesters demanded maximum punishment for the suspended BJP leader and called for a boycott of Indian goods.

Leaders of Islami Andolon Bangladesh, which led the protest in front of Baitul Mukarram, called for a parliament motion condemning the controversial remarks.

After the rally, Islami Andolon announced

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

# Money spent on dredging gone to waste

## Bhadra river silts up within 2 years of re-excavation

DIPANKAR ROY, *Khulna*

Only two years after the Tk 46.25 crore re-excavation project was taken for Bhadra river in Khulna's Dumuria upazila, it has once again been filled with silt. According to Water Development Board (WDB) officials, the amount of silt deposited on the riverbed is higher in the southwestern region, Dumuria being one.

The project was supposed to have two sluice gates on both sides of the river. However, the plan was scrapped following instructions from Prime Minister's Office, said Ashraf Islam, executive engineer of BWDB.

"The project was supposed to build two sluice gates at Dighalia and Teligati at a cost of Tk 30 crore, but they were not constructed," he said. During excavation, Teligati and Tiabunia embankments in Kharnia were cut off, while silt came through the two points to Bhadra and Saltha rivers.

According to WDB sources, a project worth Tk 76.25 crore was approved at an Ecnc meeting in September 2016 to dredge 30 kilometres of Saltha and Bhadra. Later, other expenses were cut, and the cost was Tk 46.25 crore.

The 2018-2019 fiscal was set as the implementation period.

Twenty-one kilometres of Bhadra were excavated, which was completed in June

2019. The project also included connecting the rivers to different areas.

Around 563 small and large installations on Bhadra, including three brick fields, were demolished before the excavation.

"Bhadra used to be over 500 feet wide, but encroachers began to fill it up in the 80s. Within a few years, the water stopped



**Bhadra used to be over 500 feet wide, but encroachers began to fill it up in the 80s. The place was cleared during excavation. But within a year the river began to fill up.**

INTAZ SHEIKH  
Resident of Shobhana village

flowing," said Intaz Sheikh (72), a resident of Shobhana village.

"However, the place was cleared during excavation. But within a year the river began to fill up."

Robiul Islam, a resident of Bamundia village, said after excavation, the soil removed from the river was kept on the banks, which later got washed away in the rain and found its way back into the river.

"This whole issue has led to the permanent closure of the area's drainage system. Now, even a drizzle triggers waterlogging. We also find ourselves faced with a lack of water for irrigation," said Sayed Ahmed of Gonal village.

"The river was vibrant even 20 years ago. Many people depended on the river for their livelihoods. It played an important role in the economic development process, contributing to transportation of goods and fishing," he said.

Visiting the area on Saturday, this correspondent saw a long field in the area where the river ran, with cattle grazing.

At present, the canals in the area measure only 10-15 feet wide. The tide does not facilitate the flow of water like it used to. The marks left on the field suggest that paddy was planted last year on the flooded land on both sides. It has now turned into a plain land. Locals have started to grab the area again.

AKM Tahmidul Islam, additional chief engineer of WDB's south-western zone, said Bhadra was supposed to have two sluice gates at both ends, which was later scrapped. As a consequence, the river has silted up within two years of the excavation.

"A new project worth Tk 1,819 crore has been sent to the department concerned for the excavation of small rivers and canals in the vicinity."



Habiganj currently has 101 brick kilns, most of which are unauthorised. The smoke, ashes and heat emitted from the kilns have been severely harming the environment and cultivable lands of the surrounding area. Every year, a large part of arable lands in the district is being destroyed, owing to the existence of these illegal kilns.

PHOTO: STAR

## Croplands pushed toward ruin

### Arable Habiganj land destroyed every year by illegal brick kilns

MINTU DESHWARA

In the last few years, 31 illegal brick kilns have been built within just 1.5 kilometres on both sides of Dhuliakhali-Mirpur regional road in Habiganj. Of them, only 15 are authorised, according to local union parishad chairman Saifuddin.

The same picture can be seen in other places in the district, including Habiganj Sadar, Bahubal, Shayestaganj, Chunarughat and Madhabpur upazilas. Government records suggest that there are 101 brickfields in the district, most of which are unauthorised.

These illegal kilns emit smoke, ashes and heat waves that adversely affect crops and the environment. Besides, the ashes gather on the surface of croplands, affecting soil fertility, said locals.

Moreover, the brickfield traders are digging up surface soil of croplands and using it to produce bricks. The area of croplands is shrinking because of the digging, they alleged.

Tamiz Uddin Khan, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Habiganj, told this correspondent that 10 hectares of arable lands in the district are being destroyed every year due to these brick kilns.

Brickfields have been set up on

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

## 2 teams inspect Sitakunda fire-ravaged depot

### 98 fighting for life

STAR REPORT

Two government teams yesterday inspected the fire-ravaged BM Container Depot in Sitakunda, where a deadly fire claimed 46 lives and left over 200 people injured on the night of June.

Of them, a team of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) collected samples from the spot to assess the accident's impact on public health.

Another team of police's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) collected samples to find out the reasons of behind the fire and subsequent blasts.

The DGHS team, led by its director Prof Nazmul Islam, also comprised representatives from Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC).

"The samples, which we have collected from the spot, will be tested in the laboratory to assess what kind of impact it may put on the people living in and around the accident area," said Dr Ilias Chowdhury, civil surgeon of Chattogram, who accompanied the team.

The team will also analyse the samples to know whether people will suffer from illness for long time, he added.

Besides, the DGHS team will chalk out a guideline, if necessary, to minimise health hazards in the area, the civil surgeon said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

## LAND-RELATED FEUD

### 26 cases against a retired teacher

ABU BAKAR SIDDIQUE AKAND, *Gazipur*

Twenty-six cases of extortion, vandalism, cheque forgery and looting.

The accused are a school teacher and his family members, who claim the charges are baseless and brought against them for a land-related dispute.

The cases were filed against retired government primary school teacher Kafil Uddin (85), a resident of Purbo Baghbari area in Gazipur, by Muhammad Imtiaz Karim, a businessman and resident of Dhaka's Gulshan area.

These 26 cases were filed in the last seven years. The last one was filed on May 16 this year with Kashimpur Police Station; a total of 11 named and 20 unnamed individuals were made accused in the case.

According to the latest case statement, the accused persons demanded Tk 20 lakh and looted chickens and trees from a cattle farm in Baghbari area on May 15.

On May 20, Kafil Uddin and his nephew Jahurul Islam were arrested in the case. Two days later, Kafil was released on bail.

However, this correspondent visited the area on May 23 and found no existence of a cattle farm there. Locals said they have not seen any such farm in the last few years.

Police are currently investigating the case. Barkatullah Khan, additional commissioner of Gazipur Metropolitan Police, is leading the probe.

According to Kafil Uddin's daughter Quamrunnahar Shova, they have an ancestral land in Baghbari, where one Imtiaz Karim has been for quite some years.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

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## South Asia protests over anti-Muslim remarks

AGENCIES

Thousands of Muslims have rallied across the South Asia nations of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan over derogatory remarks on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) by two officials from India's ruling party that has triggered a diplomatic backlash against New Delhi.

Protests were reported from various Indian cities, including capital New Delhi, yesterday as Muslims marched after the afternoon congregation prayers, raising slogans against the government and calling for the arrest of the members belonging to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Several parts of Indian-administered Kashmir observed a spontaneous shutdown to protest the derogatory remarks. Protests after the Friday prayers were also reported



from several districts in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

In Bangladesh, thousands of people protested outside Dhaka's main mosque, Baitul Mukarram, after the Friday prayers, chanting slogans such as "Boycott Indian products".

In Pakistan, a radical religious party known for frequently paralysing the country with its anti-blasphemy rallies held a march in its stronghold of Lahore after Friday prayers, reports Al Jazeera Online.

And in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, about 50 protesters staged a rally in front of the Indian embassy in Jakarta.

"The Indian government must apologise to Muslims and they must take strict action against the politicians who made the remarks," a protest coordinator told AFP.



Demonstrators raise Palestinian flags, as Palestinian, left-wing Israeli and foreign activists gather to protest near the West Bank Israeli settlement of Mitzpe Yair in the southern district of Hebron, against a High Court decision to evict Palestinian communities from Fire Zone 918, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## FACE-TO-FACE TALKS IN SINGAPORE China, US defence chiefs stay firm on Taiwan

REUTERS, Singapore

The defence chiefs of China and the United States held face-to-face talks for the first time yesterday, with both sides standing firm on their opposing views over Taiwan's right to rule itself.

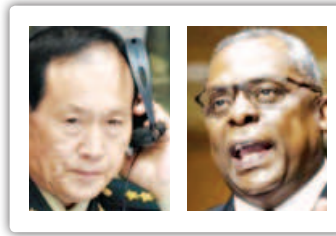
US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Chinese Defence Minister General Wei Fenghe met on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit in Singapore for nearly an hour, double the time initially allotted.

Austin and Wei's first face-to-face meeting comes as US President Joe Biden is seeking to spend more time on Asian security issues after months of focus on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The two defence chiefs spoke by phone in April.

Although both sides say they want to better manage their relationship, Beijing and Washington remain polarised over several volatile security situations, from Taiwan's

sovereignty to China's military activity in the South China Sea and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

After the meeting, Chinese and US officials highlighted the cordiality of proceedings in a sign it could help open the door to more communication between the two militaries.



However, there was no evidence of any breakthrough on settling long-running security disputes.

Wei said the talks "went smoothly". A Chinese defence ministry spokesman later said Wei reiterated Beijing's firm stance on Taiwan, which is that it is part of China.

"The PLA (People's Liberation Army) would have no choice but to fight at any cost and crush any attempt of Taiwan independence, safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity," the spokesman said.

Austin called on China to "refrain from further destabilising actions" on Taiwan, a US statement issued after the talks said.

A US official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the bulk of the meeting focused on Taiwan and Austin reiterated that Washington's position on Taiwan was unchanged, while criticising China's military aggression.

"The United States has major concerns about increasing PLA behaviour, particularly unsafe, aggressive, unprofessional behaviour and is concerned that the PLA may be attempting to change the status quo through its operational behaviour," the official said after the meeting.

## La Nina climate cycle could last into 2023: UN

AFP, Geneva

The weather phenomenon La Nina, which has affected global temperatures and worsened drought and flooding, will likely continue for months, and possibly even into 2023, the UN warned yesterday.

La Nina refers to the large-scale cooling of surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, occurring every two to seven years.

The UN's World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said there was a 70 percent chance that the protracted La Nina event -- which has held the globe in its clutches almost uninterrupted since September 2020 -- will continue until at least August. "Some long-lead predictions even suggest that it might persist into 2023," it said.

## US CAPITOL RIOT PROBE Trump accused of 'attempted coup'

AFP, Washington

A congressional panel investigating last year's mob assault on the US Capitol laid out its case Thursday that Donald Trump and his claims of a stolen election were at the heart of what amounted to an "attempted coup" to remain in power. In a prime-time presentation of its findings from a year-long probe, the special



committee sought to persuade a divided country of the existence of a deep-rooted and ongoing plot -- orchestrated by the former president -- to overturn the result of the 2020 election won by Joe Biden. "President Trump summoned the

mob, assembled the mob and lit the flame of this attack," the Republican vice chairwoman of the panel, Liz Cheney, said in her opening remarks at the first in a series of hotly anticipated summer hearings. Minutes earlier, Democratic committee chief Bennie Thompson accused Trump of being "at the center of this conspiracy." "January 6 was the culmination of an attempted coup -- a brazen attempt, as one rioter put it shortly after January 6 -- to overthrow the government. The violence was no accident," he said.

## Lanka could face dire humanitarian crisis: UN

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations warned yesterday that cash-strapped Sri Lanka's unprecedented economic crisis could develop into a dire humanitarian crisis, with millions already in need of aid. "We are concerned that this could develop into a full-blown humanitarian emergency, and we are taking action to address that concern," Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN humanitarian

agency OCHA, told reporters. The UN and its partners are appealing for \$47 million to address the immediate needs of the 1.7 million of the most vulnerable people and those most affected by the crisis, he said. Months of daily blackouts, long queues for petrol and record inflation have made daily life a misery in the South Asian island nation of 22 million people. The government has already defaulted on its \$51 billion foreign debt, and a critical shortage of foreign currency has left traders unable to import adequate supplies of food, fuel and other essential goods. Sri Lanka's worst economic crisis since independence in 1948 was already taking a heavy toll, he said, pointing out that agriculture and livelihoods had been severely affected. Many people are now "going without adequate food", Laerke said, also warning that "families' access to health services, protection and children's education is at stake."

## UN slams scrapping

FROM PAGE 12

It added that the group had published "misleading information" about extrajudicial killings and disappearances.

"We are concerned," UN rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva.

"We urge the government to immediately reconsider this decision, and to ensure that Odhikar has the ability to seek full judicial review of any such determination."

She also cautioned that the decision could "have a chilling effect on the ability of civil society organisations to report serious human rights violations to UN human rights mechanisms".

Odhikar has for years worked closely with UN

bodies and recorded extrajudicial killings by security forces as well as enforced disappearances allegedly perpetrated by the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab).

Shamdasani said that the UN rights office and independent rights experts had since 2013 documented intimidation and reprisals against the organisation.

She added that the UN secretary general "has also raised concerns about reprisals against Odhikar over the past decade for cooperating with the UN".

The intimidation and reprisals, she said, "appear to have intensified, with accusations levelled against the organisation for anti-state and anti-government

activities".

The organisation had been operating in regulatory limbo since it sought to renew its 10-year licence in 2014. Its bank account has also been frozen since then.

Shamdasani called on the Bangladesh government to shift course. "Restrictions to the right of freedom of association which do not respect the principles of necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination contravene international law," she pointed out.

She urged the government to "foster an enabling environment for civil society to undertake their work without fear of reprisals, particularly in the lead-up to the next elections."

## 11-19 million

FROM PAGE 12

years, the FAO said. Amid soaring input prices, weather concerns and increased market uncertainties stemming from the Ukraine war, the forecasts "point to a likely tightening of food markets and food import bills reaching a new record high", said FAO economist Upali Galketi Aratchilage.

## 15 killed in South Africa bus collision

AFP, Johannesburg

Fifteen people were killed and 37 injured yesterday when a bus and a truck collided on a South African highway near the capital Pretoria, an emergency services spokesman told AFP.

"The death toll is now 15 dead, and 37 people have been injured, some of them critically," spokesman Thabo Charles Mabaso said.

The accident happened before dawn, and rescue workers were called at 5:05 am.

"Emergency services arrived on scene to find a bus and truck that collided head-on, with multiple patients lying around and some still trapped inside both vehicles," emergency services said in a statement.

Eight women and seven men died at the scene, while 37 others were taken to hospital. Seven were in critical condition, the statement said.

The road was closed throughout the morning. An investigation into the accident's cause has been launched.

## Musa to be grilled along

FROM PAGE 12

arrested in the case, would be remanded in phases to glean information whether there was anyone else behind the crime.

Tipu, 55, former general secretary of Motijheel AL, came under a gun attack on March 24 when his microbus was at a traffic light in the capital's Shahjahanpur. College student Samia Afnan Jamal Prity, 22, who happened to

be in a rickshaw next to the vehicle, also got shot.

The two were declared dead after being taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Although Musa's name has come up as the coordinator of the murder, Tipu's wife has long been alleging that he is a petty criminal and someone else was behind the killing.

Asked about it, Hafiz Akhter said they would

take her statement into consideration as Tipu was a political leader.

Musa escaped the country on March 12, two weeks before the killings. Police informed the Interpol about him after his arrest in Oman on May 12.

A three-member police team brought him back home in a Biman flight on Thursday.

## Asteroid

FROM PAGE 12

formed in space environments," the study said.

The team said they found 23 different types of amino acid while examining the sample collected by Japan's Hayabusa-2 probe in 2019.

The dust and rocks were stirred up when the fridge-sized spacecraft fired an "impactor" into the asteroid.

"The Ryugu sample has the most primitive characteristics of any natural sample available to mankind, including meteorites," the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said in a statement.

It is believed that part of the material was created about five million years after the birth of the solar system and has not been heated above 100 degrees Celsius (210 degrees Fahrenheit).

Another study published in the US-based journal "Science" said the material has "a chemical composition that more closely resembles the Sun's photosphere than other natural samples".

Kensei Kobayashi, an astrophysics expert and professor emeritus at Yokohama National University, hailed the discovery.

"Scientists have been questioning how organic matter -- including amino acids -- was created or where it came from, and the fact that amino acids were discovered in the sample offers a reason to think that amino acids were brought to Earth from outer space," he told AFP.

## Philippines protests China 'swarming' around disputed reef

AFP, Manila

The Philippines has protested the "illegal" presence of over a hundred Chinese boats around a disputed reef in the flashpoint South China Sea, describing it as a source of regional instability, the government said.

Authorities spotted the boats around the boomerang-shaped Whitsun Reef in April -- a year after a similar "swarming" incident caused a diplomatic row -- but the foreign office waited till Thursday to disclose it had launched a formal complaint with the

Chinese embassy in Manila. Manila and Beijing have long been locked in a dispute over parts of the South China Sea, almost all of which China insists it has exclusive rights to, rejecting a 2016 international tribunal ruling that its historical claims were without basis.

"The lingering unauthorised presence of Chinese fishing and maritime vessels is not only illegal, but is also a source of instability in the region," the Department of Foreign Affairs said.

"The Philippines calls on China to comply with its obligations under

international law, cease and desist from displaying illegal and irresponsible behaviour, avoid further escalating tensions at sea and immediately withdraw all of its vessels from Philippine maritime zones."

The department did not disclose whether there had been a Chinese government response and whether the boats were still in the area.

China's embassy in Manila did not respond to requests for comment. The foreign department said 210 Chinese vessels 'swarmed' around Whitsun from March 7 last year, lingering in the area for weeks.



(L) The core team of musicians for Coke Studio Bangla were excellent. (R) During the performance of Coke Studio Bangla's rendition of "Ekla Cholo Re".



'Guru' James was phenomenal, as always.  
PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

## COKE STUDIO BANGLA CONCERT

# When music won against pessimism

**Coke Studio Bangla Concert will be remembered as the time that an entire day of pessimism and online trolling lost to a bunch of stubborn musicians.**

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

Let us address the elephant in the room first: Coke Studio Bangla is obviously an elaborate advert for Coca Cola. It does not take a genius to come to that conclusion: the enormous Coca Cola logo on top of the stage at Army Stadium yesterday should be enough of a 'hint'.

That being said, what the platform has done to re-ignite interest in our local scene is admirable, only exemplified by thousands of people showing up in droves in Bangladesh Army Stadium on Friday, despite an entire day of incessant rain.

The wait was tense for a variety of reasons: a virtual battlefield spawned on social media



Mizan and Momotaz Begum performing "Prarthona".



Animes Roy and Pantha Kanai performing "Nasek Nasek".

stage to sing their original promo for this season of Coke Studio Bangla: a mashup of Rabindranath Tagore's "Ekla Cholo Re", Gagan Harkara's "Ami Kothaye Paabo Tare" and Shironamhin's "Abar Hashimukh".

From that moment onwards, the crowd ate it all up. Logistically, it was not unlike any other concert - confused sound workers (it would be a stretch to call most of them 'engineers') failing to give proper references to the musicians on their monitors, artistes repeatedly asking to adjust volumes, or having to haggle about where the spotlight should be. It took a few performances until the various outputs could balance each other.

None of that seemed to matter to the crowd because emotionally, they were all

invested in having a great time: singing along not only with Arnob, Animes Roy, Boga Taleb, Ritu Raj, Nandita, Momotaz Begum and Mizan, but vibing with Jalali Set's verses and even singing along flute maestro Jalal Ahmed's rendition of "Nithua Pathare".

This is when you knew that if something positive came out of the rain, it was the fact that only the most dedicated of music lovers made it a point to stay till the very end, in this case surpassing midnight.

All of the performances were cut short. Tahsan took the crowd through a brief detour through memory lane with "Irsha" and "Alo," the crowd joyously took over "Kobe" from Nemesis, Band Lalon did two versions of "Pagol Chara Duniya Chole Na", first the Coke Studio version with Sumi and Jalali Set, the latter one being their original hit. Warfaze and Nagar Baul's performances proved that the legends, after decades of performances, still haven't lost an inch.

When it is all said and done, many won't remember the myriad of technical difficulties over the fact that the organisers, after a lot of back and forth, decided to move ahead with the show. The immense number of workarounds and plan changes was understandably visible in execution, immediately overlooked by a generous and passionate crowd. Coke Studio Bangla Concert will be remembered as the time that an entire day of pessimism and online trolling lost to a bunch of stubborn musicians.



Tahsan was visibly emotional during his performance.

**"This is when you knew that if something positive came out of the rain, it was the fact that only the most dedicated of music lovers made it a point to stay till the very end, in this case surpassing midnight."**

during the time that the concert's fate was left to the Almighty: with many taking to social media to laugh at the misery of people like us, who had waited in adverse weather despite rumours of cancellation. Others made memes while some protested, and bizarre 'counter-protests' ensued, where "anything can be made fun of" philosophy was preached by people claiming to be flag-bearers of humor.

I mentally exited the social media negativity the moment I entered the venue: a wonderful effort was made to re-construct the stage after it was partially ruined by the storm. The bedazzlement was pieced together when Arnob & Co got up on



Nemesis during their fiery set.



(L) Band Lalon impressed during the night. (M) Warfaze performing at the concert. (R) Ritu Raj and Nandita share a light moment during "Bulbuli".



## Mahima Chaudhry beats cancer

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Anupam Kher recently shared an emotional video of Mahima Chaudhry discussing her battle with breast cancer on his Instagram account. Having successfully won her battle against breast cancer, Mahima confirmed that she has started working in her next project, "The Signature" with Anupam Kher and Annu Kapoor.

Mahima revealed the details for this upcoming project, stating, "I've started shooting the movie with Anupam Kher and Annu Kapoor. The movie will be directed by Marathi filmmaker, Gajendra Ahire."

Many people were caught by surprise when Anupam Kher's shared the video, as Mahima had not shared her diagnosis with her fans. Not even her parents knew about her battle with cancer.

"The Signature" is the story of a common man, and Kher has been sharing updates about the movie's shooting on his social media regularly.



## Tanjin Tisha receives silver play button from YouTube

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Noted television actress Tanjin Tisha recently announced that she received the "YouTube Silver Play Button" for having 1 lakh subscribers. The actress took to her Facebook account to announce the news to her fans.



"During lockdown I opened this YouTube channel. I just randomly opened that and because of your love and support...I got this Silver Play Button from YouTube. I am really overwhelmed by all your support and love. Love you all," read her photo caption from the post.

The actress was last seen in "Bouer Boyosh 16" opposite Mosharraf Karim.

## BTS marches on with 'Proof'

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

BTS has finally released their new album "Proof" on music streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music and Amazon Play. The anthology album was released today, Friday, June 10.

Alongside the album, the supergroup also released the music video for the title track, "Yet to Come (The Most Beautiful Moment)" on YouTube today.

The anthology album, which has a total of 3 CDs, consists of over 48 tracks. Over these 48 tracks, many are old BTS tracks while some are new. The band wanted to do this anthology-style album to represent the past, present and future of the band as a whole for their fans. The three new songs in "Proof" are "Yet to Come", "Run BTS" and "For Youth".



## Chorki announces two new web films



ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Two new web films, "Sahosh" and "Ei Muhurte" have been announced by the streaming platform Chorki.

While the poster of Mejbaur Rahman Sumon's "Kothay Palabe Bolo Rupban", a segment of the anthology film "Ei Muhurte" was unveiled, the teaser of "Sahosh" was also released on their Facebook page and YouTube channel.

"Ei Muhurte" will also be featuring "Kolpona", directed by Piplu R Khan, and the Abar Athar directorial story "One Piece Made, Karigor Is Dead". Sazzad Khan's "Sahosh" features Nazia Haque Orsha and Mostafizur Noor Imran in the lead roles, among others.

Chorki is yet to announce the release date of the productions.

## The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

### Technicalities mustn't get in the way of free press

Govt should empower the  
media, not clip its wings

THE information minister has said that newspapers are not permitted to broadcast talk shows and videos on their online platforms "as per their declarations", and that "we will take immediate action against them" for the supposed violations. We cannot help but be alarmed by such remarks given the challenges that already surround the free press in Bangladesh. This fixation on what newspapers can or cannot do follows a "rich" tradition of inhibiting legislation on the newspaper industry, and even gives public utterance to the antagonism in which the state often appeared to stand towards the free press, more so in recent years than ever before.

For traditional media outlets, digital media is not a separate entity, but a vast, new space created through technology. Like all other industries, newspapers too are adapting to the technological changes and challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and serving readers 24/7. Digital expansion is nothing but a new distribution channel for newspapers. Global surveys show that readers are hungry for content, but they increasingly prefer to consume news from the digital space, either directly from websites or from social media. Every newspaper in the world is transforming itself to stay relevant to readers and survive financially. If it's a patron of free press, the information ministry needs to have a reality check first, before deciding on what it can do to help.

The question of whether newspapers can or cannot publish digital content (like videos) on their websites is a technicality that we fear is being weaponised to further restrict the space for journalists. The argument that they cannot is legally tenuous, morally unsound, and technically counter-intuitive as it contrasts the free, democratic nature of the digital ecosystem. Today, there is hardly any newspaper that doesn't have Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts. The ability to use them has thrown a much-needed lifeline to legacy newspapers struggling in this digital age. Restricting their use does not just go against the freedom of the press and people's right to information, but also against time itself. It also flies in the face of the so-called digital advancement the government is proud to have achieved.

We urge the government to refrain from pursuing such policies. Regulating the media is one thing; clipping its wings in the name of regulation is a totally different thing. We already have more media laws and rules than perhaps needed—with still more in the offing—but not one of them could withstand scrutiny by experts. The government should focus on rectifying those to make them media-friendly, instead of trying to subjugate it to further restrictions.

### If kids aren't safe at home, where will they be?

Study reveals a disturbing  
picture of child abuse in  
households

THE non-profit Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) has come up with a shocking revelation that about 95.8 percent of children in the country are victims of violence in their own homes. This is more than the violence they face in their educational institutions or at the community level. A whopping 86.9 percent of the children surveyed said they had faced physical violence in the name of punitive action within the households. What's more shocking is that around 81 percent of guardians were found to be supportive of physical punishment when a child is disobedient. This situation is worrying, to say the least, and if we cannot change the mindsets of parents and guardians towards children, it will have long-term detrimental effects on their wellbeing.

Children in Bangladesh face various forms of violence; sexual violence is the cruelest of them. Organisations working on child rights have done various studies and surveys that reveal a horrendous picture of sexual abuse in the country. A majority of children become victims of sexual abuse by close relatives or neighbours. The MJF survey also found that 55 percent of children face sexual violence at home. Moreover, the percentage of children facing emotional, physical and sexual abuse at schools and colleges as well as workplaces for working children is also quite high, according to the study.

The children surveyed by MJF said they did not report these issues to their parents because they were afraid of being unfairly judged. This indicates the sheer lack of awareness among parents in general about the issue of child abuse inside households. If children have to hide incidents of abuse or violence from their parents—who are supposed to have their best interests in mind—how will they learn to speak up if/when they face such things outside their homes?

Therefore, in order to ensure a safe environment for children, we must take a firm, united stand by involving families, communities, schools, as well as all sections of society. While the country's elected representatives must ensure that child rights are protected by implementing the relevant laws, the agencies and organisations working on child rights must also play their part by forming community-based committees, appointing social workers and volunteers in the communities to raise awareness of the issue and the need to protect children. It is only through proactive and well-focused measures that we can ensure a safe environment for children everywhere.

# If you pay peanuts, you get monkeys



## BLOWN IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza  
is the pro vice-chancellor of  
the University of Liberal Arts,  
Bangladesh (ULAB).

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

THE old cliché used in the title has many opponents; not too many people are convinced that money is the only factor to get skilled or efficient workers. Peanuts, in this context, is slang for low wages, and monkeys imply stupidity, and by extension, unskilled workers. A seminal essay published by the *Economic Policy* in 2011, however, upheld the phrase to suggest that when it comes to education, there is a significant link between teachers' pay and pupils' performance.

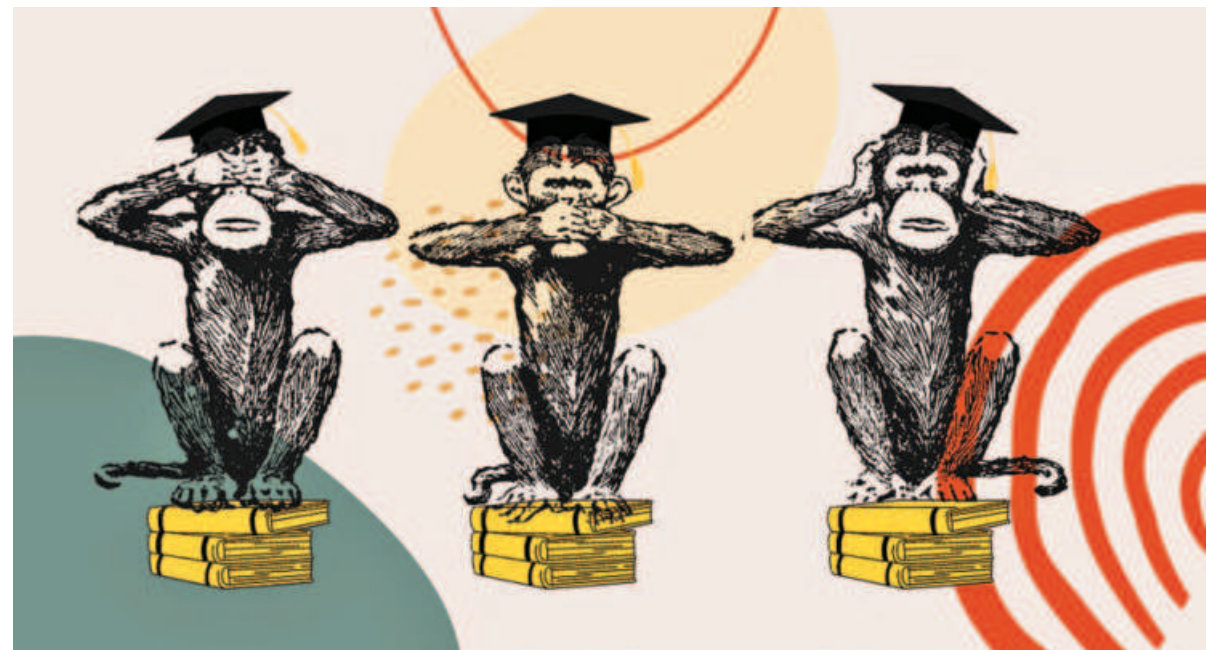
The authors of the article, Dr Dolton and Marcenaro-Gutierrez, begin with a simple question: "Why are teachers paid up to four times as much in some countries compared to others, and does it matter?" They observe that some of the best-performing education systems, such as in Finland and South Korea, recruit their teachers from the top third of their graduate cohort. Using aggregated data from 39 OECD countries over 10 years, the study argues that the relative wage in teaching determines the ability, and hence the quality of teachers the country gets. "If teachers are paid in the top 20 percent of the earnings distribution of a country, then one would expect that this profession would attract some of the most able graduates in the country. Likewise, if teaching is really poorly paid in relative terms, then one would expect that only the less able would end up in the job." The study shows that a 15 percent increase in teachers' pay would give rise to around a 6-8 percent increase in pupils' performance.

But there is a catch. This increase is not necessarily for the existing stock of teachers. An automatic pay increase will not necessarily turn the current teachers into better teachers. There should be additional incentives for them to undertake continuous professional development and in-service training to measure up to the higher pay. It would take 30-40 years to complete the cycle to replace the existing stock with better recruits. The article contends that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.

With so much talk on education as the next "megaproject" of the government, reiterated by the education minister in a post-budget briefing, I think policymakers should focus on quality teachers at all levels of education in Bangladesh—primary, secondary and tertiary. However, the moment the term "megaproject" is used, a mega concern bursts into the scene. We get worried by the trajectory of the ongoing "development" practice that focuses on bricks and mortars, land acquisition, overseas consultancy,

bureaucrats, and middlemen. Let us, therefore, be wary of the monkey business in identifying the elephant in the room: we need the right people for the right job. We need to make the right investment to get the right teachers for the right education. The same rule perhaps applies to other professional groups. It is not healthy to have a cadre officer with a

skills is allowing expatriate workers from our neighbouring countries to siphon billions of dollars from the NGO, banking, and RMG sectors. It would be interesting to compare the remittance sent in by our unskilled workers with the one sent out by skilled expats. Education, both formal and informal, is the only remedy that can bridge the gap. And for that, we will need



▲ VISUAL: STAR

**The government has done a remarkable job in spreading education and in making education accessible to all. Programmes like free textbooks, meal for school children, and uniform budget are laudable. But tempted by the number game, we often compromise quality.**

background in humanities call the shots in the health ministry, for example.

With limited resources available to Bangladesh's education sector in the proposed budget, it is even more pertinent that we strategise. The proposed Tk 81,449 crore education budget is 12 percent of the total budget. Its share in the GDP is 1.83 percent, significantly lower than the prescribed six percent. Already, the budget has been criticised for not paying the necessary focus on Covid-19 recovery and for its attempt to camouflage the information technology budget under its purview to look good on paper.

The proposal to increase teachers' pay for quality education is, therefore, going to be an anathema to the policymakers. As an English teacher, who has been involved in public and private universities, I can reflect on my field to defend my position.

I was intrigued by a newspaper article by Prof Obaidul Hamid of the University of Queensland, who referred to the recently published English Proficiency Index to tell us, "Bangladesh was placed in the low proficiency category and was ranked 65th, ahead of Vietnam (66th) and behind Nepal (62nd), Ethiopia (63rd) and Pakistan (63rd). Lebanon (34th), China (49th) and Iran (58th) were ahead of Bangladesh, in the moderate proficiency group. Except for Singapore (4th) and South Africa (12th), the very high proficiency group comprising 13 countries was dominated by European countries, led by the Netherlands (1st) and Austria (2nd)."

Our inefficiency in communication

the right educators.

Prof Hamid's own research shows that many students are acquiring English language skills from the internet in the absence of support services in school. This is also true for China and Saudi Arabia. We need expert teachers who can gear the primary and secondary students to the best practices. Clearly, the existing stock has failed for a whole gamut of reasons, including the retirement of experienced teachers, insufficient knowledge, poorly designed textbooks, a convoluted language policy, politicisation, insufficient training, paltry pay—the list goes on.

The government has done a remarkable job in spreading education and in making education accessible to all. Programmes like free textbooks, meal for school children, and uniform budget are laudable. But tempted by the number game, we often compromise quality. It is time to bring good teachers to the classroom; the rest will follow.

How do I know? Look at some of the top private universities that are in their 20s and 30s. Already, some of them have outpaced the age-old public universities in different quality measures. These universities pay handsome salaries to attract faculty members with foreign degrees, prompting a reverse brain drain. They also utilise the expertise of senior retired professors. And then there are other private universities that probably pay Tk 10,000 to a university lecturer, and are guilty of selling certificates.

Indeed, if you pay peanuts, you get monkeys.

# Can university assessment make graduates more employable?

Prof Barry Reilly is a professor of econometrics at the University of Sussex.  
Dr C Rashaad Shahab is a senior lecturer of economics at the University of Sussex.

BARRY REILLY and C RASHAAD SHABAB

THE Covid-19 pandemic has transformed almost every aspect of our lives. It has had a profound effect on the skills and competencies that labour markets require of graduates by accelerating the adoption of digital tools and increasing the demand for digital content. At the same time, the imperative to social distancing has made it impractical for universities to assess students using traditional methods, leading institutions to experiment with a variety of alternative assessment instruments. Nevertheless, universities can greatly enhance the employability of their graduates by strategically investing in some elements of these alternative assessment innovations.

The unseen exam was the mainstay of university assessment prior to the pandemic, and with good reason. The anonymised nature of exams creates a level playing field on which student work can be fairly evaluated. The unseen paper allows institutions to test the ability of students to apply what has been learnt to an unfamiliar context. The process of preparing for an exam teaches students to manage and retain information. The closed nature of the exam hall enables the institution to prevent collusion, personation, plagiarism, and other forms of academic misconduct. The time-limited nature of exams not only teaches students time management, but also

**While the ability to conduct a presentation in a boardroom remains an invaluable skill, in the post-pandemic digital economy, this skill must be complemented by the ability to simultaneously manage the live-streaming of that presentation to an online, remote audience.**

how to cope with stress in high-pressure environments.

Despite these important advantages, a major weakness of the unseen exam is the limited relevance of the assessment mode to real-life situations. As many generations of students have wryly observed, it is difficult to think of a situation in which an employer would oblige an employee to answer pre-prepared questions in an empty room without access to any notes or other resources. For this reason, even before the pandemic, universities used presentations and reports to complement the unseen exam with assessment modes that honed skills valued in the labour market.

The demands of the labour market are constantly changing, and so are the relative importance of different skills. It is widely accepted that the pandemic has increased the premium that labour markets place on digital competencies and proficiencies. So, while the ability to conduct a presentation in a boardroom remains an invaluable skill, in the post-pandemic digital economy, this skill must be complemented by the ability to simultaneously manage the live-streaming of that presentation to an online, remote audience. In addition to traditional assessment modes, we should also be asking students to submit their academic work in the form of podcasts, videos and blogs, aligning our curriculum more closely to a post-pandemic digital age.

An important advantage of using these formats is the ease with which they can be leveraged by students to create

a portfolio for potential employers. It is straightforward to upload a video or a podcast from an assessment to YouTube or other publicly accessible platforms in a way that can easily be highlighted on CVs and LinkedIn profiles. Universities that are early adopters of these innovative assessment modes would enable their students to differentiate their CVs in an increasingly competitive graduate labour market.

As with any innovation, the adoption of new assessment modes comes with an element of risk. The main purpose of assessment is to provide a barometer of student learning. With videos and podcasts, however, slick production technologies can have a disproportionate effect on the perceived quality of the submission. As a result, those grading will need to be vigilant to prioritise substance over style when deliberating over submissions.

Rumours of the demise of the unseen exam are greatly exaggerated. Compared to other assessment instruments, exams provide an exceptionally reliable and robust barometer of learning. For this reason, they should remain an indispensable part of a university's assessment portfolios. But universities should leave their degrees with other, more innovative and employment-relevant forms of assessment. Reports and presentations will continue to play an important role in assessments. But so should blogs, videos and podcasts, too, the prominence of which have increased dramatically in the post-pandemic digital economy.



MASKED FINFOOT UNDER THREAT

# A canary in the coalmine of climate change



Abida Rahman Chowdhury is a journalist at The Daily Star with interests in wildlife and biodiversity conservation.

ABIDA RAHMAN CHOWDHURY

THE story of the masked finfoot first caught my attention in 2013. Just like most other wild animals, the news on this reclusive bird that calls the Sundarbans its home was not promising. Each time I write about environmental issues, I am left wondering: Why should the extinction of some bird, a tiny butterfly or a giant elephant bother us? I mean, if you are looking for a dose of nature, you can simply cosy up on your sofa and turn on Planet Earth. They have even managed to bring to life, albeit on TV, the prehistoric dinosaurs. But I worry. I worry that the next generation, if it gets to survive the climate apocalypse, will not know the joys and perils of a life in the wilderness. That we have moved so far from nature that our only way to feel connected to it is by taking a weekend away from the city and paying money to enter forests.

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. Globally, there are only three species of finfoots across the tropics of Asia, Africa and the Americas. Asia's masked finfoot is the least known of the three, and considered the most imperilled.

The IUCN recategorised masked finfoot from "vulnerable" to "endangered" in 2009 as rates of population decline were found to be higher than previously assumed, owing to the destruction and disturbance of its habitats and, to a lesser extent, hunting and collection of eggs and chicks.

This shy and reclusive water bird, which can climb trees with its waders and swim the waters, has taken many a photographer and ornithologist deep into the labyrinth of the tide-country.

A scientific paper published in the UK-based ornithological journal *Forktail: Journal of Asian Ornithology* revealed a very small, declining global population of the masked finfoot.

The paper, titled "The status and distribution of the masked finfoot *Heliopais personatus* - Asia's next avian extinction?" was authored by a team of conservation scientists and bird experts from the University of Cambridge,



There are a few other species of birds in Asia that could be considered as threatened as the masked finfoot, currently listed as 'endangered' on the IUCN Red List.

PHOTOS: SAYAM U CHOWDHURY

address - is just a reminder of habitat degradation in Bangladesh's largest forest body. It is estimated that the eastern part of the Sundarbans currently supports between 40 and 80 breeding pairs, but with a declining population trend, according to the Bangladeshi lead author of the paper, Sayam U Chowdhury.

Threats faced by the species in Bangladesh include poison fishing, the collection of eggs and chicks from nests by fishermen, and the impacts of rising sea levels such as saltwater intrusion in key habitats, leading to a reduced freshwater supply.

There has been a sharp decline of masked finfoot population in the coastal parts of the Sundarbans concomitant with a shift of nesting habitats towards less saline areas closer to the landward edge of the forest. And at the landward edge, habitat destruction and human footprint - namely industries - inching towards the fringes of the Sundarbans, increased motorised vessel traffic, and just an overall rise in human movement within the forest premises threaten the balance of nature.

Based on field surveys, the masked finfoot population in Bangladesh is estimated to be 80-160 mature individuals. That is a huge number as it constitutes 52.6-75 percent of the global population, which is estimated to be around 108-304 individuals. This also shines a light upon the overwhelming importance of conserving this population in the Sundarbans at the global level.

We all think about tigers when it comes to the Sundarbans, but the masked finfoot is far more threatened and elusive than the tigers. If we lose the Sundarbans, it is very likely that we will lose this bird from the face of the Earth.

Saving this population and their habitat could mean turning around the clock on this species' fate on Earth. The masked finfoot depends on low-lying, undisturbed areas of forested wetlands, especially river channels with formerly little or no human activity. This is something that is still possible in the Sundarbans.

The research paper ends with a reminder that the recommendations made two decades ago by BirdLife

International (2001) remain relevant to this day. The masked finfoot appears to be the harbinger of doom if meaningful actions are not taken at each step. Measures need to be taken on all fronts. Global action to protect the planet from further impacts of climate change, something that would ensure that ice caps don't melt at the rate they are now, which would then ensure that the sea level does not rise further, which would in turn ensure that salinity does not increase in the Sundarbans any more, thus not reducing suitable habitat for the masked finfoot.

Meanwhile, we must do everything we can in the Sundarbans to reduce immediate threats. Widespread use of poison fishing, habitat degradation, water vessel traffic, disturbance from a growing tourist load and natural resource harvesters, and increased pressure on the Sundarbans for its resources to build and support factories around the tidal network must all be addressed nationally.

The masked finfoot is essentially the barometer of success, of not just Bangladesh's fight against encroachment into natural resources, but of the global fight against climate change.

**'In nature, nothing exists alone'**  
To make things a little clearer, let me break down this issue further. The natural world, for lack of better metaphor, can sometimes act like a carefully constructed domino castle. If we threaten the footing of one tile, we effectively set off a chain reaction. This particular bird, its home the Sundarbans, and us - we are all in it together.

Remember Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*? And how it launched an environmental movement, reminding us that one action can affect everything - from flora, fauna to us humans (somehow, we exist outside the realm of fauna, and maybe that's the problem)? The case of the masked finfoot is like taking a page out of Carson's book, which reminds us that "in nature, nothing exists alone."

It is time to recalibrate our environmental agenda - both on a personal and a policy level - and to keep telling ourselves that if a bird is affected now, then you will be too in due time.



I will leave the conversation over nature being contained in enclosed spaces or for small weekend getaways for another time. For now, I want to put yet another plea, another call for help to change the course we are running on. And I want to tell you why the loss of a bird somewhere far away from home should bother you.

This year's theme for World Environment Day, observed on June 5, was "Only One Earth," which begs to look at the natural world through both a micro- and a macro-lens.

Everything is connected. Take, for example, the car you are driving or being driven in, or how about the factory you run or the one you work in. The energy and fuel that it uses, the pollution it creates, the pressure it puts on natural resources and everything the environment has to supply you with to keep the wheels turning affects the environment around you.

**A species threatened like no other**  
There are a few other species of birds in Asia that could be considered as threatened as the iconic masked finfoot, currently listed as "endangered" on the

BirdLife International, Wildlife Conservation Society, and Mahidol University.

Available data compiled across all countries where finfoot is found indicates that the present population may not exceed 304 adult individuals, and could be as low as 108 individuals. And the vast majority of these individuals are likely concentrated in the Sundarbans' Bangladesh side, according to the research paper.

While previously believed to be also found in Cambodia, India, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, most countries now report either a declining population or can only cite historical sightings, with breeding populations only existing in Cambodia and Myanmar apart from Bangladesh.

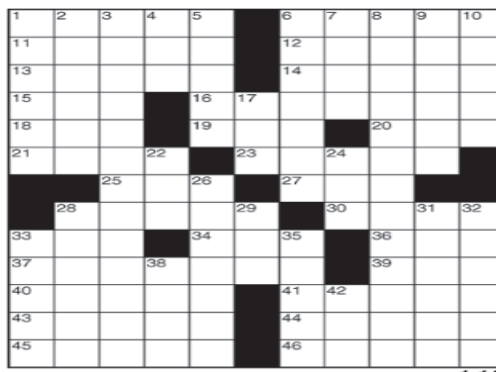
Even though BirdLife International considers the species endangered, the authors in this paper argue that, given its current status, the masked finfoot should be considered critically endangered and heading towards extinction.

The masked finfoot of the Sundarbans - that is what I will call it now, because this may very well be its last known

**Remember Rachel Carson's Silent Spring? And how it launched an environmental movement, reminding us that one action can affect everything - from flora, fauna to us humans? The case of the masked finfoot is like taking a page out of Carson's book, which reminds us that "in nature, nothing exists alone."**

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Sound from a smithy
  - 6 Absolutely not
  - 11 California cager
  - 12 President born in Hawaii
  - 13 Rust, for one
  - 14 Trifled
  - 15 Army address
  - 16 Farm measure
  - 18 Letter after zeta
  - 19 Low digit
  - 20 Crew need
  - 21 Young one
  - 23 Soothing ointments
  - 25 GI-entertaining org.
  - 27 Maui souvenir
  - 28 Gets ready
  - 30 Fabric worker
  - 33 Overly
  - 34 Corn unit
  - 36 Ring legend
  - 37 Gist
  - 39 Ray-gun sound
  - 40 Barrel piece
  - 41 Map division
  - 43 Castle part
  - 44 Game piece
  - 45 Stretches over
  - 46 Cheese choice
- DOWN**
- 1 Hanger site
  - 2 Looseness
  - 3 "Ran" director
  - 4 Homer's neighbor
  - 5 Terrific
  - 6 Imaginary
  - 7 Bassoon's kin
  - 8 "Spirited Away" director
  - 9 Last letters
  - 10 Tall boot
  - 17 Corn core
  - 22 Language suffix
  - 24 Was a pioneer
  - 26 Starting bids
  - 28 Like some convalescent care
  - 29 Pouchlike part
  - 31 Brightens
  - 32 Turns red, perhaps
  - 33 Lab work
  - 35 Takes ten
  - 38 Smooth
  - 42 Highway rescue



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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After having started the Asian Cup Qualifiers campaign with a 2-0 defeat to Bahrain, Bangladesh will look to put up a better performance when they face Turkmenistan in Kuala Lumpur today.

PHOTO: BFF

## 2nd Youth Games in Oct-Nov

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) is planning to hold the 2nd Youth Games in October-November this year, almost four-and-a-half year since the first edition in 2018.

"We decided to form a steering committee to hold the Sheikh Kamal 2nd Youth Games. Considering the curriculum and activities of schools and colleges, the Games will start in October/November before coming to an end in February-March next year," read a press release yesterday following a BOA EC meeting on Thursday.

The first edition held in March, 2018, with the participation of around 25,000 athletes across the country, featured 21 disciplines.

It was also decided at the meeting to form nine more sub-committees to operate daily activities. The BOA had before formed six sub-committees.

# Booters look for improvement against Turkmenistan

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will look to improve their performance in the Asian Cup Qualifiers in their second Group E match against Turkmenistan at the Bukit Jalil National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur today.

The match will get underway at 3:15pm (Bangladesh Standard Time) with private satellite channel T Sports broadcasting live from the venue.

After a creditable performance against Bahrain in the group opener, Javier Cabrera's charges are upbeat about putting up an improved performance against Turkmenistan, a side that is 54 places ahead of Bangladesh in the FIFA Rankings.

Bangladesh's coaching staff and players watched Thursday's Turkmenistan-Malaysia match from the gallery and Cabrera tried to provide information to his charges after analysing the way Turkmenistan played against Malaysia.

"I think we are going to improve our performance in the next match. Ready for research and ready for tomorrow's challenge. It is an important chance for us to get something against Turkmenistan," Cabrera told the reporters at a pre-match conference yesterday.

Cabrera informed that his charges would take to the ground to win the match but their main objective was to be

competitive in every match.

"Our aim is always to win, but the main objective is to be competitive. We were very competitive in our last match and the main goal is that we are able to keep that line of discipline and game sense. I am convinced that we have a chance tomorrow," Cabrera said when he was asked whether it



possible to beat Uzbekistan. Surprisingly, Turkmenistan suffered a 1-3 defeat to hosts Malaysia, who were leading 2-0 within the first 15 minutes. Cabrera believed that performance from Turkmenistan did not reflect their real character.

"Turkmenistan are a very strong side in terms of FIFA Ranking. I think they had some problems in the beginning

because Malaysia started impressively, so they were surprised. Barring the first 15 to 20 minutes, Turkmenistan were able to control the game, which was an even match. They also created some chances," Cabrera said. "I don't expect that type of beginning from Turkmenistan again because they are a really strong team and have experienced players and are a physical side. I think it is big challenge for us."

Captain Jamal Bhuiyan was also looking forward to the Turkmenistan match.

"The first game was very tight but we tried our best. I think we did all right. We conceded two goals from set-pieces, so we have to prepare better for the next match. I think the squad is also alright with the result although we wanted to win the match. After the first match, we look forward to the next match," said Jamal, who believes a change has come over the squad under new coach Javier Cabrera, who prefers to having meetings and video sessions with the players regularly.

Asked if he had belief of a win over Turkmenistan, who beat Bangladesh 3-1 in 2002 Asian Games in Seoul, Jamal said: "Of course. I believe we can win but we can't win it by saying it. We have to work hard, have to have courage, confidence. By doing this, we have good chance against Turkmenistan."

## Liton leads in Shakib's absence

SPORTS REPORTER

In absence of regular skipper Shakib Al Hasan, Bangladesh Test side's vice-captain Liton Das led the Tigers on the opening day of their three-day warm-up match against the CWI President's XI at the Coolidge Cricket Ground in Antigua yesterday.

Bangladesh, after electing to bat, lost opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy early as the youngster departed without troubling the scorers. Joy was dismissed by Jeremiah Louis in just the second over of the morning. However, experienced Tamim Iqbal and Najmul Hossain Shanto, who came in at number three, started the rebuilding work.

The duo brought the momentum back, stitching together a fifty-run partnership to help the Tigers recover from the early hiccup.

Following the three-day practice match, Bangladesh will take on West Indies in the first of the two-match Test series on June 16 at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium.

Shakib, who is enjoying a short vacation with his family in the United States, is yet to join his teammates at the Caribbean where the Tigers have already started their mission without their skipper.



## England claw back at Nottingham

AFP, London

England clawed their way back into the second Test against New Zealand with two wickets late in the opening session to leave the tourists on 195-4 at Tea at Trent Bridge on Friday.

Under a cloudy Nottingham sky and with the strip showing a tinge of green, England captain Stokes opted to bowl after winning the toss.

But the pitch was flatter than Stokes might have expected and New Zealand took advantage of some wayward England bowling as Tom Latham and Will Young put on 84 for the first wicket. Stokes dragged England back into it when he dismissed Young for 47 and moments later stand-in skipper Latham fell to James Anderson for 26.

Devon Conway (46) became Anderson's second victim while Henry Nicholls (30) fell to Stokes as the visitors slipped from 84 no loss to 169 for four before Tea.

Daryl Mitchell, the centurion from the first Test, was unbeaten on 20 while Tom Blundell was batting on six at Tea.

# Ignore the Hungary whistles, says Flick

AFP, Berlin

Germany coach Hansi Flick has told his side to keep their composure in Budapest during Saturday's Nations League match against Hungary, where the home crowd is expected to give the Germans a hostile reception.

"Everyone of us has played so many games where the atmosphere was heated," Flick said Friday.

"There may be whistles (from Hungary fans) but once the (referee's) whistle goes, the focus is on the game."

There is history between the German team and Hungarian fans from last June's 2-2 draw in Munich during the Euro 2020 group stages.

After scoring the equaliser, Germany midfielder Leon Goretzka made a heart gesture with his hands to Hungarian fans, who had turned their backs to the pitch before kick off during the German national anthem.

Thomas Mueller said Goretzka's gesture reflected the team's feelings towards visiting fans, who provoked the Germans throughout the game.

"Leon's action was spontaneous and a great reaction to what happened," Mueller said Friday.

"The Hungarian fan block didn't show its best side. His (gesture) spoke from our hearts."

Hungary pulled off a shock 1-0 home win over England last Saturday, when visiting English players

were booed by the Budapest crowd for taking a knee to promote anti-racism - before kick-off.

Both the German and English teams took a knee before Tuesday's 1-1 draw in Munich, but Mueller said there are no plans for the Germany team to repeat the gesture in Budapest.

"The English kneeled as part of their campaign. We think it's a good thing, that's why we took part," Mueller explained.

"We're open to campaigns that represent our values, but nothing is planned (before the game in Budapest)."

After draws against both Italy and England, Flick is set to name his strongest team having ruled out resting Germany captain Manuel Neuer in goal.

Five months before the World Cup kicks off in Qatar, Flick still needs to settle on his first-choice striker.

Timo Werner started against Italy in Bologna, then his Chelsea team-mate Kai Havertz was used up front against England.

Flick hinted that Werner will start in Budapest.

"We need players who are in form, which is crucial for Qatar. We don't have time to make any adjustments," said Flick.

"It is quite possible that he (Werner) will play from the start. He can score goals, which always gives him confidence."



Harry Kane looks on as Jack Grealish volleys one during a training session at St George's Park on Friday on the eve of their Nations League match against Italy. The England captain, who scored his 50th international goal against Germany three days ago, would want to see his side move off the bottom of the group and avenge their Euro 2020 final defeat with a win over the Azzurri.

PHOTO: AFP

**"To me it doesn't matter whether it's raining or the sun is shining or whatever: as long as I'm riding a bike, I know I'm the luckiest guy in the world."**

**Mark Cavendish**  
British pro racer



Cycling is one of the few sporting disciplines which has been a constant fixture in every Summer Olympic Games since the games resurrected in modern times in 1896. The discipline features multiple events, depending on the type of bicycle and the platform used for racing. Apart from the Olympics and other major multi-sport extravaganzas, cycling features prominently in world sporting calendar with glamorous events such as Tour de France and Giro d' Italia. Hence, it's safe to say cycling is a global sport which attracts audiences worldwide. In Bangladesh, though, the situation is quite different. It is still more of an amateurish pursuit, mostly borne out of either the necessity to commute or as a healthy exercise. While there has been a few of waves in cycling in recent years among the urban youth, those waves have at best fetched a few Guinness records, but next to nothing on the professional circuit. Although there is a cycling federation active for the past five decades, most of its activities are confined within organising a national championship annually. Hamstrung by fund shortages and lack of infrastructure in the country, the federation has failed to produce any medal winner in regional platforms such as the South Asian Games, nevermind bigger platforms on a continental level. In this issue of the Weekly Sports Special, we focus on two individual cyclists who have pushed their passion for cycling to earn accolades against all odds.



## Shiuli Shabnam: A woman of many hats

MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Shiuli Shabnam is making a mark as one of the few female athletes competing at the top level of two different disciplines, while breaking barriers in the male-dominated sporting scene of the country.

Competing both as a cyclist and as a runner in various competitions, the 35-year-old has carved out a growing reputation as a unique sporting personality. She has won a number of cycling events in the country while winning quite a few long distance running competitions.

But the biggest satisfaction, she feels, comes from the fact that she is helping break barrier for women venturing into male-dominated sporting disciplines.

It's not been long since the Cox's Bazar native started taking running and cycling seriously, but passion and commitment has pushed her to great lengths. Her passion for sporting activities and adventurism, though, goes a long way back.

"I used to do hill trekking earlier. In 2018, when I travelled to West Bengal for trekking the highest mountain there, I had to do a lot of running. So, I thought why not start running too. Later, I started cycling, too, from passion and that's how I became an athlete in two disciplines," Shabnam said while talking to The Daily Star.

A journalist by profession, Shabnam last month won a bronze medal in the 30km individual time trial event of the 41st National Cycling Championship after having won gold and silver medals in a number of cycling events over the past three years. She has also made at least 10 podium finishes in long distance running over the same course of time.

Her journey in sports has been met with opposition, but it has got her satisfaction nonetheless.

"Cycling is still a male sport in our country. Therefore, when I started cycling, I faced criticism from family and society but my husband stood by my passion," Shabnam, mother of one, recalled.

While living in Chattogram, Shabnam's tenants used to get a lot of complaints about her, especially for wearing tight dresses required for cycling training. But there was a positive side of the story, too, Shabnam revealed. "The same people started appreciating me when I won different competitions. So, I think the society will accept women in sports if they see us in sports more frequently."

When asked about the challenges as a female cyclist and runner she faced, Shabnam said, "The environment for women cyclists or runners is not yet friendly in our country. So, you would find very few women taking up cycling or running as sport. In different competitions, camps and during travels, I have to live and race with men in the same camp. And that is something that would discourage many parents to not allow their daughters into cycling or running."

Being a working mother, it's not easy for the 35-year-old to find time to keep her passion ignited. "It's very difficult for me in Dhaka. I have to wake up at around 4.30am and finish my practice by around 6.30am. Then I have to get my son prepared for his school. In the evening again, I practise cycling in my trainer's house," she said.

Cycling is not just a sport for Shabnam, she also takes it as part of activism. It's an opportunity for her to compete against men. If men get the opportunity in cycling and running, then women should too, opined Shabnam.

With the dream of representing Bangladesh at international arena in cycling and running or in duathlon, Shabnam has one appeal to the government: "Patronise and activate local sports bodies to accommodate and encourage women, not just in cricket and football."



## THE TRAILBLAZER

### taking Bangladesh cycling to new heights

**29-year-old Rakibul Islam won a gold medal in the 30km individual time trial during this year's 41st National Cycling Championship, following up on previous successes, including in the same event during the 9th Bangabandhu Bangladesh Games 2020. Hailing from a rural village in Rangpur's Badarganj upazila, Rakibul was also champion in the Mujib 100 Years Duronto MTB Race in 2021 and holds a Guinness world record as part of the relay team that cycled the greatest distance in 48 hours (1670.33km) last year. The Daily Star's Mostafa Shabuj caught up with the champion cyclist for an interview, the excerpts of which are below:**

**The Daily Star (DS):** How did you start cycling? When did you realise cycling was a sport?

**Rakibul Islam (RI):** Neither I nor my family ever wished that I would one day take up cycling as a profession. Before being admitted to Jahangirnagar University I did not know that cycling was a sport and could be taken up professionally. But I grew quite fond of cycling in my childhood.

My father was a primary school teacher. I have three elder sisters, all good students. Therefore, there was a lot of pressure on me to be a good student too. My father had an old cycle, but I was not allowed to use it. One of my sisters secretly taught me how to cycle.

When I was admitted to the Saidpur Cantonment Public School and College, which was 18 km from my village, I was allowed to use the old cycle to go between home and school. My father encouraged me, saying that we had to overcome financial constraints by becoming economical.

Due to those constraints, I did not expect any luxuries. I used to see my sisters wear hand-me-down school dresses. They use to write on paper with a pencil first, then wrote over it with pens.

After admission to the pharmacy department at Jahangirnagar University in 2010, I came to know that cycling was a sport. BDCyclists was an emerging cycling community in Dhaka at that time and I went to Dhaka only to see them train.

In 2012, I bought a bicycle for the first time using the money I had saved up from tutoring jobs. I then joined the JU cyclists club and started training in the morning and evening with friends, teachers and kids. I later attended a cycling race for the first time, which was organised by BDCyclists in 2013.

**DS:** You won a gold medal in the 41st National Cycling Championship recently, organised by the Bangladesh Cycling Federation (BCF). What was the story behind that?

**RI:** I was the first cyclist from outside of a service team to win a gold medal in the BCF's

41-year history. When I won a gold medal in the 2021 Bangladesh Games, the time gap between me and the next finisher was only 3 seconds. This time the finish was different. My competitor, who was second in the 41st National Cycling Championship, was one minute and 10 seconds behind me.

I have always been well-prepared and that has kept me ahead of all other contestants. I was a pharmacist with a handsome salary at Evercare Hospital (Formerly Apollo Hospitals Dhaka) from 2017 to 2021. I left the job last August and went to the hilly areas in Khagrachari to practice because I had the upcoming events at home and abroad in sight.

**DS:** What support does a cyclist need from family and others and what are the challenges they face?

**RI:** First you need your family's support. Cycling is a less popular game in Asia, even less in South Asia. So parents don't want their children to take up cycling as a profession. Cycling as a sport is also expensive. The equipment you need for racing is not available in Bangladesh. A good quality racing cycle is around Tk 10 lakhs. I bought a mid-range cycle from abroad for Tk 4 lakhs. Speaking of challenges, I said

before that families do not want their kids in cycling. The social collective mindset is to get a government or private job. You need a strong mentality to become involved in cycling because of societal expectations.

Multinational companies doing business are not interested to invest in cycling as sponsors because it is not a popular sport in Bangladesh. They are keener to invest in cricket and football.

We need good infrastructure, where we can practice and we need to arrange racing competitions. We don't have a velodrome or cycling track in our country. We only have busy roads, where cycling is risky. We do not have good coaches either. But foreign coaches are always expensive.

**DS:** How do you prepare for competitions?





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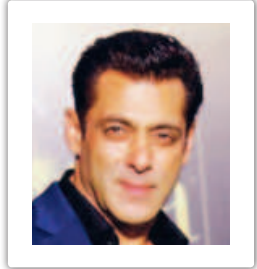


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## Salman Khan nearly killed by sharpshooter



### AGENCIES

An attempt was made to kill Bollywood superstar Salman Khan by a sharpshooter sent by gangster Lawrence Bishnoi.

The shocking details were shared in a report by Times Network. The report states that during the investigation of the Sidhu Moose Wala's murder case, officials came across that a sharpshooter almost killed Salman Khan outside his residence but the actor got saved by a whisker.

As per the report, Lawrence Bishnoi, one of the suspect in the Sidhu Moose Wala's gruesome murder case, had sent a sharpshooter with a small-bore weapon hidden in a

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5



These homesteads in Trimohoni area in the capital's Khilgaon have been built by filling up part of the Jirani canal. This part of the canal, which falls under the Dhaka South City Corporation, was much wider a few years ago. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## KILLINGS OF AL LEADER, STUDENT Musa to be grilled along with others Says DB official

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sumon Shikder Musa, a key accused in the killings of Dhaka Awami League leader Jahidul Islam Tipu and a college student, will be interrogated face to face with other accused to obtain information whether any others were behind the crime.



Musa

A top detective said this yesterday, a day after Musa was brought back home from Oman.

A Dhaka court placed Musa on six-day remand yesterday after DB Inspector Mohammad Yasin Sikder, investigation officer of the double murder case, produced him before it seeking 15-day remand.

The IO informed the court that Musa coordinated the killings and supplied the firearm which was used to kill Tipu on March 24.

Two other arrestees, Masum Mohammad alias Akash and Nasiruddin Manik, gave statements to the court mentioning about Musa's connections to the murders, he said.

So, Musa needs to be remanded for more information about the incident and recovery of the firearm which was used in the killings, the IO argued.

Earlier in the day, Additional Commissioner of the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, AKM Hafiz Akhter told a press briefing that "shooter" Akash made a confessional statement mentioning that Musa masterminded and coordinated Tipu's killing.

He said 12 other accused, who have so far been

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# No roadmap for cutting energy costs

Say experts about proposed budget

### ASIFUR RAHMAN

The proposed budget for the 2022-23 fiscal year does not outline a roadmap for reducing gas imports by increasing domestic production.

There was also no mention of phasing out the highly expensive quick rental power plants, something recommended by experts for years.

"We need to focus on overhauling and augmenting the old gas wells and completing the offshore survey to reduce our high dependency on imported LNG and fuel. But we saw nothing about this in the proposed budget," said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

Other experts said the volatile prices of fuel and liquified natural gas at international markets would be a major challenge facing the sector.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal proposed allocating Tk 26,066 crore, down by Tk 1,418 crore from the outgoing fiscal year, for the power, energy and mineral

resources ministry.

Of the proposed amount, Tk 24,196 crore will be spent on the power division and only Tk 1,870 crore on the energy and mineral division.

"As long as we continue to buy expensive power from the rental power plants and do not increase the production of gas and coal

**"Our capacity to generate low-cost electricity rises almost every year. But we don't utilise the capacity. We buy power from the expensive rental plants instead."**

from our fields, an increase or decrease in the budget allocation will have little impact," prominent energy expert Prof Shamsul Alam told The Daily Star.

"Our capacity to generate low-cost electricity rises almost every year. But we don't utilise the capacity. We buy power from the expensive rental plants instead."

The finance minister did not disclose the exact amount of subsidy to power and energy. He simply said an estimated Tk 82,745 crore will be required to subsidise fuel, gas, electricity, fertiliser, etc.

CPD estimated that the subsidy would be Tk 17,000 crore for the power sector, up by Tk 5,000 crore from the current fiscal year.

According to CPD, the transmission and distribution of electricity are still getting less priority in the power sector as 58 percent of the annual development programme is allocated for generation, and only 21 percent each for transmission and distribution.

The additional amount will be needed because of higher prices of imported fuel and payments for rental power plants, CPD Executive Director Dr Fahmida Khatun said at an event yesterday.

The high fiscal pressure may persist unless the country moves away from the expensive oil and LNG based power plants, she said.

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## BANGLADESH HIGH COMMISSION Cop opens fire outside Kolkata mission, kills self Woman hit by bullet

### OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A police constable posted near the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata's Park Circus yesterday opened fire indiscriminately and seriously injured a passerby, before shooting himself dead.

Two other passersby suffered minor injuries in the incident that happened around 2:30pm, police said.

Seriously injured Reema Singha, a resident of Howrah district, was hit by a bullet from the service rifle of constable Chodup Lepcha, Kolkata Police Commissioner Vincet Goyal told media.

She was being treated at a local hospital, he said around 4:00pm, adding that Lecha was on leave and had joined duty yesterday.

A diplomat at the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata told The Daily Star that the incident took place on a road behind the building.

Asked if Lepcha was suffering from any mental ailments, the city police chief said, "This will be investigated."

Some Indian media outlets had earlier reported that a woman riding pillion on a scooter died after being hit by a bullet during the incident.

## Asteroid samples contain 'clues to origin of life'

### AFP, Tokyo

Asteroid dust collected by a Japanese space probe contains organic material that shows some of the building blocks of life on Earth may have been formed in space, scientists said yesterday.



Pristine material from the asteroid Ryugu was brought back to Earth in 2020 after a six-year mission to the celestial body around 300 million kilometres away.

But scientists are only just beginning to discover its secrets in the first studies on small portions of the 5.4 grams (0.2 ounces) of dust and dark, tiny rocks.

In one paper published yesterday, a group of researchers led by Okayama University in western Japan said they had discovered "amino acids and other organic matter that could give clues to the origin of life on Earth".

"The discovery of protein-forming amino acids is important, because Ryugu has not been exposed to the Earth's biosphere, like meteorites, and as such their detection proves that at least some of the building blocks of life on Earth could have been

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## FALLOUT OF UKRAINE WAR

# 11-19 million more may face hunger: FAO

### REUTERS, Geneva

Reduced exports of wheat and other food commodities from Ukraine and Russia risk leaving between 11 million and 19 million more people with chronic hunger over the next year, the United Nations' food agency said yesterday.

The conflict in Ukraine has fuelled a global food crisis, with surging prices for grains, cooking oils, fuel and fertiliser. Russia and Ukraine account for nearly a third of global wheat supplies, while Russia is also a key fertiliser exporter and Ukraine a major supplier of corn and sunflower oil.

Boubaker BenBelhassen, director of the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Markets and Trade Division, said the impact of the conflict "could lead to anywhere between 11 to 19 million more hungry people - that's chronic hunger for 2022/23".

This preliminary estimation was based

on reduced exports of food commodities from Ukraine and Russia, he told reporters.

The FAO also said in a report on Thursday that spiralling costs for farm inputs like fertiliser could deter growers from expanding production and worsen food security in poorer countries facing record import bills.

"The countries that are being affected most are in the Near East/North African region given their heavy reliance on imports - especially of wheat - from these countries, but also of vegetable oil, sunflower oil," he said.

Some countries in sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia, such as Bangladesh and Indonesia, were also being "highly impacted," he added.

World production of major cereals was expected to decline in 2022 for the first time in four years, while global utilisation was also seen down for the first time in 20

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BNP supporters attending a rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club in the capital yesterday. The party organised the rally to protest the rising prices of gas and essential commodities.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## UN slams scrapping of Odhikar's licence

### AFP, Geneva

The United Nations yesterday slammed cancellation of the operating licence of rights group Odhikar, urging the Bangladesh government to "immediately reconsider".

The rights body, which has been documenting human rights violations in Bangladesh since 1994, said this week that authorities had rejected its application to renew its registration.

The order it received from the NGO Affairs Bureau, a wing of the Prime Minister's Office, said "the activities of the organisation are not satisfactory".

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PHOTOS: COLLECTED/STAR

# SITAKUNDA

## Living in death trap

MD NAZRUL ISLAM WITH PINAKI ROY

Unplanned industrialisation in Sitakunda without proper safety measures has made local people live in constant fear especially after the BM container depot disaster.

Spanning 273.47 sq km area with a population of five lakh, the upazila houses a total of 126 shipbreaking yards, about two dozen LP gas plants, three container depots, and 155 other industries – small and large.

Most of these industries are located in residential areas. As many as 12 LP gas plants have been set up in only two villages of the upazila, leaving villagers in constant worry about their safety.

In the past six years, at least 35 people have been killed in explosion and fire incidents in the shipbreaking industry of Sitakunda. On Wednesday, an accident left a worker killed in a shipbreaking yard of Sonaichhari union.

Two workers were killed due to toxic gas leaks from explosions in two shipbreaking yards last year while two others died in two yards in 2020. Gas leaks from explosions also left nine workers dead in seven shipbreaking yards in 2019.

The incident at the BM container depot made people even more horrified.

Gias Uddin, president of Sitakunda Samiti in Chattogram, told The Daily Star that the entire upazila has become a death trap. LP gas plants, shipbreaking yards, cement and steel factories, jute mills and container depots are mushrooming in the upazila without any proper planning.

Influential people have built these industries by squandering the agricultural land of the villages. LP gas plants are being

“  
However, we cannot say whether these industries have adequate firefighting system, because the approval of about 19 government agencies is required to set up the industries. So we can't monitor those directly. However, I will not be able to avoid liability in case of any accident.”



constructed by the sea without considering the environmental impact.

Vested quarters are also using their power to get clearance from the Department of Environment, he added.

Locals always fear that something terrible may happen in these factories at any time, as a result of which people may die and valuable properties may get destroyed.

Samsul Alam, a former official of the Explosives Department, said the



**Vested quarters are also using their power to get clearance from the Department of Environment, he added. Locals always fear that something terrible may happen in these factories at any time, as a result of which people may die and valuable properties may get destroyed.**

country would not move forward without industrialisation but it should be done in a planned way.

He further said the private container depots are an extension of Chattogram port.

Just as there are separate sheds for storing different types of goods inside the port, it is necessary to see whether the sheds in these private depots are separated and whether they have skilled workers, he added.

Preferring anonymity, a resident of

Mandaritola village told The Daily Star, “We, the common people, are living with gas bombs. Deadly accidents may occur anytime in this area.” Mandaritola and Nadalia villages, where 30,000 people live, house the 12 LP gas plants.

Urging all not to panic, Sitakunda Upazila Nirbahi Officer Shahadat Hossain said there was no risk of fire from these gas factories unless there was a major accident.

“However, we cannot say whether these industries have adequate firefighting systems, because the approval of about 19 government agencies is required to set up the industries. So we can't monitor those directly. However, I will not be able to avoid liability in case of any accident.”

Asked whether the construction of so many LP gas plants in such close proximity is risky, Ashraf Uddin, assistant director at the Department of Environment in Chattogram, said there was no obligation regarding distance in setting up industrial plants. But, as per the law, industries cannot be built in residential areas.

He further said it is time to ensure adequate security measures in these industries.

## CHEMICAL MANAGEMENT

### It needs to be comprehensive and integrated

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Bangladesh needs a comprehensive approach for the management of its rapidly growing chemical businesses that pose risks of fatal accidents, a chemical management expert has said.

“It needs to be comprehensive and integrated. Big industries may have some mechanisms in place for chemical management. But the situation is really alarming in small and medium enterprises,” said Prof Syeda Sultana Razia of Department of Chemical Engineering at Buet.

In a recent interview with The Daily Star, she said with increasing economic activities, the chemical market is expanding, but with no comprehensive policy for its safe management.

“It is high time that Bangladesh enforced a chemical management law through a proper regulatory authority,” said Prof Razia, also a member of Scientific Advisory Board of Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons based in the Netherlands.

Her suggestions come in the wake of the massive fire on Saturday night at Chattogram's Sitakunda, triggering a series of explosions.

At least 43 people were killed in the accident at privately-run BM Container Depot.

According to Prof Razia, people tend to ignore taking safety measures on their own, as it does not reap any immediate benefits.

“Safety measures require investment. Around the world, safety issues are ensured through enforcements [by governments].

When enforcement is ensured, people invest in safety and get benefits in the long run.”

She suggested offering incentives, also a global practice, for businesses for adopting proper safety protocols.

Prof Razia also stressed the need for building an integrated national inventory of hazardous chemicals.

“Different regulatory authorities have their own partial inventory, which is not integrated and verified. There must be a mandatory hazard labelling system and chemical registration system,” she added.

The existing inventory preparation system is complex as a whole lot of authorities are involved in approving chemical import and storage, she noted.

At the moment, chemical imports require approval from 14 authorities, including city corporation, commerce ministry, NBR, Department of Explosives and Department of Environment and fire service.

But none of them cover some crucial issues, such as transporting and sorting of chemicals, said the expert.

Bangladesh signed the Strategic Approach for International Chemical Management (SAICM), also known as the Dubai Declaration, in 2016. SAICM recommends establishing a chemical authority, a chemical act, and a national inventory of hazardous chemicals.

Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Act 2013 included a new section on the formation of a safety committee (section 90a); and provides a Chemical Management Guide to the safety committee.

In the textile sector, there are some examples of chemical management to fulfil buyers' requirements. The textile sector also faces challenges as different buyers require different safety measures due to the absence of national rules and standards for chemical management.

But if there is an accident, thousands may die even outside the chemical facility as it happened in Bhopal, India.

“We have huge storages of ammonia, chlorine, and other toxic chemicals. If they are not managed properly, they have the potential to create a catastrophe,” she said.

She also stressed on firefighters' safety.

“Although every chemical facility must have clearance from the fire service, most of the time we hear that they are clueless about the chemicals in the facility,” she added.

Often, they go for operations without knowing the type and amount of chemicals and put their lives in danger.

In some cases, evacuation is preferred to firefighting. In case of an uncontrollable fire, the recommended practice is to evacuate and let the things burn, she said.



# The Return of the Repressed

**Some writers and publishers shared discontent, in hushed whispers, about being seen pregnant with content. Others seemed very content and stepped up to bridge the gap, pitching books through prepared videos and other digital material.**

SAIKAT MAJUMDAR

As someone who writes novels, writes about them, and generally works in the medium of prose, I've always had an unspeakable envy and admiration for literary forms that take on the moving body of performance. That envy has energized my fiction in important ways. My second novel *The Firebird*, which rooted in a young boy's fascination with his mother's life as a theatre actress, tried to import the ancient force of theatre in the modern realism of the novel. Likewise with poetry – how torn is it between the realities of print and performance? *The Middle Finger*, my most recent novel, has been driven by the anxiety of this question. But this anxiety, I've come to realize in different ways, also indicates a serious crisis of liberal modernity, rooted in the bourgeois gentility of print.

This became clearest to me when a few years ago, I spent a couple of days at the Mumbai Film Festival. I was invited to speak at the author's corner, which I did, and had a fine time hanging out with several other authors, publishers, and a wide range of people from the



entertainment industry: producers and directors, architects of platforms such as Netflix, Amazon, SONY, Star, and then soon-to-be launched venue by Reliance Jio, over two days of dining and wining under the ambitious arcades of the Juhu Marriott. All right across from Jalsa, the Amitabh Bachchan residence, which no driver in Mumbai ever fails to point out while driving past.

There were also some strange things happening there. Over the two days, I kept hearing about something called

"content," which apparently writers were supposed to produce – one of the many ingredients that went into the making of a web series or a film, along with costume, set, make-up, location, cinematography, the whole nine yards.

I had never thought of writers as producing "content," which appears to be some permutation of story, character, and context to which the film or web series was to give corporeal body.

Some writers and publishers shared discontent, in hushed whispers, about being seen pregnant with content. Others seemed very content and stepped up to bridge the gap, pitching books through prepared videos and other digital material. Was that a blueprint of work to be done, or a kind slice of the labor of the cinematic producer who was being seduced to adopt it? Who could tell? In this world, probably the most generous imagination of books was as sheet music, a promise of something that is incomplete till made visual.

I'd never seen literature reveal the anxiety of performance this way before. Literature was now content, deeply discontent till given the legitimacy of a film, TV show, or web series.

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We have finally arrived at a moment when literature needs to reassess its relation

with liberal modernity. The economic and technological embeddedness of literature in the rise of print and a large middle-class with the means, leisure, and literacy to sit and read in private is again, the (crucial) scaffolding of the story here. No less important is the spirit of literature as a modern art form, with its preoccupation of authorial subjectivity, artistic interiority, creative originality, and with its relationship with realism and verisimilitude, none quite possible to imagine before the European Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, whether in European culture as well as the non-western cultures that came under the purview of this modernity through the global spread of colonialism.

**Writers, and champions of books everywhere, must take serious notice of this restlessness – one that fuses political reality with trends in cultural consumption.**

Today, much of the world feels restless with this modernity. The modernity within which both the idea and practice of literature is still embedded for the most part. Writers, and champions of books everywhere, must take serious notice of this restlessness – one that fuses political reality with trends in cultural consumption.

The anxiety of performance that haunts literature today is merely the return of the repressed.

It is a reminder that the time is ripe for literature to embody the rhythms and patterns of art forms that predate the modern – those that appear far less

affected by its current crisis than the culture of writing and reading has been. I'm imagining literature that is more musical, more rhythmic, more visual, more theatrical, more performative. Poetry, for several decades the neglected stepchild to the mainstream publisher, has renewed its vibrant micro-lives across South-Asian cities through a culture of performance, be it in cafes and galleries or in informal social collectives, and now on YouTube and Instagram. Poetry, vibrant long before modernity, was communal, religious, ritualistic, and performative before it became a new art form in print and the culture of private reading. Even as we continue to delight in the modern genre of written poetry, it is heartening to see poetry reclaim its old premodern life, which is also its new postmodern one.

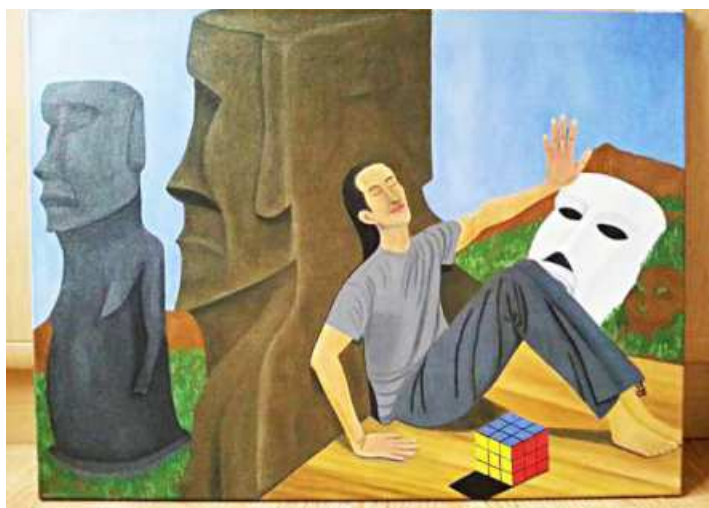
It is prose, and especially prose fiction for whom the challenge to disrupt or transcend modernity is the greatest. Prose fiction, particularly which hinges on the invented story to be read in private, is the special child of Enlightenment modernity. The material body of this genre faces a crisis today, in that neither print nor the culture of reading is what it used to be. At the same time, the expanding appetite for the creative reworking of mythical stories indicate an affinity with premodern audiences, who had no expectation of an original story but looked for retellings of stories shared by the collective memory of the community.

Fiction's disruption of modernity, in many ways, must be a disruption of its own origin, creating prose that pushes to the limit its own literariness – its containment in the abstract artifice of language, its capacity to be anthropological, its embeddedness in secular reason. Fiction that is variously performative, musical, rhythmic, visual.

There is prose that performs but is bereft of the anxiety of performance. That is performative on its own terms, without looking for performative legitimacy in another medium. Merrier if that act of translation happens – but it is complete without it, and yet miraculously disruptive of the complacency of liberal modernity in its subversive performativity.

As Arundhati Roy once said about *The God of Small Things*, that it is a deeply visual but stubbornly unfilmable book. Literature that performs, but on its own terms, not on those of others.'

Saikat Majumdar's novels include *The Firebird* (2015) *The Scent of God* (2019), and *The Middle Finger* (2022).



entertainment industry: producers and directors, architects of platforms such as Netflix, Amazon, SONY, Star, and then soon-to-be launched venue by Reliance Jio, over two days of dining and wining under the ambitious arcades of the Juhu Marriott. All right across from Jalsa, the Amitabh Bachchan residence, which no driver in Mumbai ever fails to point out while driving past.

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## The Locksmith's LUCK

**In half a minute, this too got boring and she began bouncing on all fours, leap frogging, tumbling and bouncing in every way until she had begun jumping and dancing on the bed as if on a trampoline and cackled with joy. Azhar could hardly understand what was happening. But then curiosity got better of him and he peeped through a thin shaft between the wardrobe and the door.**

MARJUQUE-UL-HAQUE

Azhar was a forty-year-old bachelor and an expert locksmith. He also owned a hardware store. He was generally considered to be a good citizen even though fifteen years ago, he went to prison for stealing jewels. But since then, he has been very careful about not getting caught. The stolen money helped him travel around and enjoy the small luxuries of life.

This time, he chose the two storied house of a rich businessman, Alimuddin. For some odd reasons, the local burglars avoided the house. Someone mentioned something about an insomniac aunt who never slept. But Azhar did not care. He studied the house carefully for a week. The house was old and not difficult to get in. So, when the family went to their village home for the Eid vacation, he decided to make his move.

The two security guards were glued to the TV screen enjoying some farcical Eid program when he climbed to the roof of the house. He entered the master bedroom hoping to get quite a lot of cash and jewelry from the steel wardrobe. Between him and the treasure, there was only this double lock.

Right at that moment, someone switched on the light in the adjacent room. Azhar quickly hid behind the door. He was just able to have a glimpse of a girl in a red saree.

This was something he had not anticipated; he had imagined that he would be climbing into the house, pick the wardrobe lock and make way with the valuables. As far as he knew, Alimuddin and his entire family had gone to their village home on vacation. Was it possible that Alimuddin had hired a caretaker to look after the house while he was away? But now what

was the best course of action? Should he go back the way he had come in, or should he wait until this girl went away? He could wait until the girl left and then quietly pick the wardrobe lock and leave with the valuables. This idea again was a daring one. An even more daring thing to do



ILLUSTRATION: FARZAD

would be to wrestle her down, tie her up and gag her with a towel. But he could then take whatever he needed without her raising an alarm.

As he was contemplating the next course of action, the red sari came into the room and turned on the lights. For a moment, she stood where she was before going to the bed and plopping down on her back like a starfish on the ocean bed. She lay down for a bit staring at the ceiling, apparently enjoying the softness of the bed, but after a while, she began to bounce up and down on the bed cooing and squealing, seemingly enjoying its comfortable bounciness. In half a minute, this too got boring and she began bouncing on all fours, leap frogging, tumbling and bouncing in every way until she had begun jumping and dancing on the bed as if on a trampoline and cackled with joy. Azhar could hardly understand what was happening. But then curiosity got better of him and he peeped through a thin shaft between the wardrobe and the door. What he saw seemed strange. There was something quite unnatural about her that he couldn't put his finger on. Her cackling made his skin crawl. Who was she and why was she wearing a gorgeous red saree and jewellery in the middle of the night?

Was she perhaps mentally imbalanced? That would explain her unnatural behavior but the mystery of her identity was still confusing. Who was she exactly? Alimuddin's daughter? Things didn't add up and finally he decided on a course of action.

Just as he had made up his mind, footsteps came up to the door and she was peering at him with wide-eyed curiosity. "How long are you going to stay in there?" she asked. Azhar was stunned, he stood rooted to the spot struggling to reply, unable to utter a single word. "Well, why don't you come out now, haven't you been in there long enough?" she giggled, held out the door and pulled him out from his hiding spot. She looked like a young

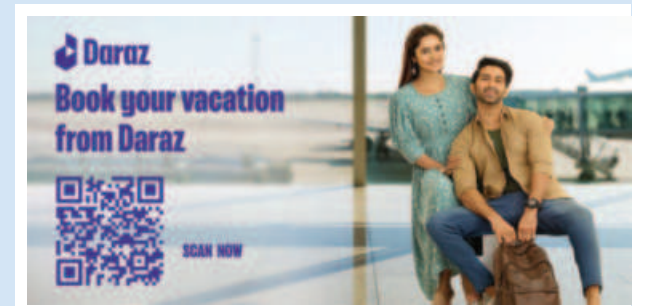
girl of seventeen but Azhar could not remember the last time he had been so bewildered.

"Okay, here's the deal – we're going to play and after we are done, you can take whatever you want," the girl said with a charming smile. Azhar decided to test his luck. The girl after all had not given him away. "I'll play," he said with some difficulty. "Okay" the girl said brightly "let's play jumping on that bed, it's so much fun." Once he and the girl climbed onto the bed, he was about to pounce on her to put her on a choke hold, but the girl dodged him and began to giggle into convulsions. He was incensed having fallen flat on his face. His plan was to quickly wrestle her into submission, tie and gag her before he opened the wardrobe. For the next ten minutes, the two of them were jumping around on that large bed, he constantly trying to catch her and she continually eluding his arms and bursting into giggles each time he failed or fell down trying to grab her.

Azhar began to breathe heavily. He was not as young as he once was; he had tripped over too many times. "I know a way to have even more fun," the girl exclaimed suddenly. "Azhar use the entire house." Azhar felt that this was too much; he might as well get caught. He was already starting to question his own sanity for doing what he had been doing. "Listen," he tried to find a way out. "I need to drink some water, also I think we've played long enough. Why don't I leave today and maybe we can play another time?" he suggested wearily.

"No, you can't leave, you agreed to play and not to leave until I said so!" she said with a mean smile. It was at that point, Azhar began to suspect of some great abnormality. He looked carefully at the girl, her chiseled face and flawless skin. Her laughter and her eyes. His knees wobbled as he suddenly recalled an old story of the woman who was killed in this very house many years ago. Wasn't she an aunt of Alimuddin? Azhar fell down on the floor, his eyes frozen on the rapidly changing form before him.

Marjuque Ul Haque is a graduate in English Literature and Cultural Studies. He loves to explore the intangible and the imaginative.



gigantic stream was falling from 290 feet above. I sat in front of that waterfall in amazement, oblivious for a while to the world. Then, seeing other team members showering, I couldn't resist myself.

But the quest was to climb to the top of the four-step waterfall. We had to climb a steep path to reach the upper steps, literally making our way through. It was so slippery and steep that we stopped short of reaching the top. It was getting too risky.

We spent as long as we could in the arms of this wild beauty. The sky was getting darker, and it was now time to return. We took the same route back. But to our surprise, this time it took us half the time to cross the trail. As soon as we crossed the jhiri trail, it started raining. Water was flowing down the hill, washing away the mud, making our trek easier and faster.

## WILD SAINGPRA the majestic waterfall



**HABIBA MITUN**

It felt so peaceful!

It was too early even for the roosters to break the tranquility of Khemchong Para, an indigenous neighbourhood in Ali Kadam, Bandarban.

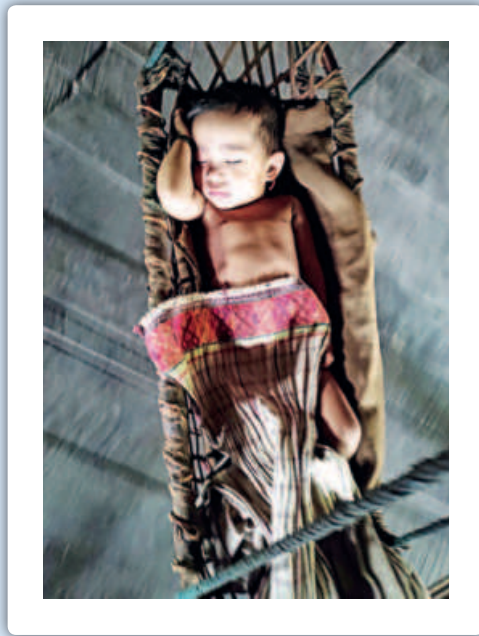
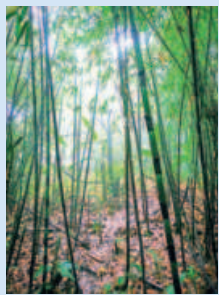
It was 5:30 in the morning. The silence was magical.

The cool breeze that was circulating in the room through the window slit made it harder for me to leave the warmth of the quilt. It rained a lot during the night.

But the next thought pushed me out of bed. I was going to meet the wild Saingpra, a majestic waterfall, that day.

As I opened the window of the cozy cottage, floating clouds greeted me with their misty, earthy embrace. The soft glow before the sunrise turned the rain-soaked lavish green mountains into a wonderland.

I had little time to get ready. Visiting Saingpra wasn't going to be easy. Day-long arduous trekking was awaiting us all.



surrounded by hills. The view was refreshing for our tired minds and soul.

The trail got tougher at this point. Landslides, caused by downpour, made the already muddy and slippery downhill trek riskier. Our progress slowed down considerably as we had to be extra cautious. One wrong step could have cost us dearly.

After a short walk down this muddy patch, we came to a dense bamboo bush. The path here was also slippery, but trekking was a little easier. After ascending for a while, we went down a jhiri poth (trail along a small stream). We took a short break here.

From there, the trail was different from others we trekked before. It was full of boulders, and each boulder was about 8-9 feet in height and slippery. And the trail was full of leeches. I felt like crying but there was no going back.

We helped each other to cross these huge boulders. It was just 10:30 am, but the trail was getting darker as sunlight barely pierced through the dense forest.

The trail was "dangerously beautiful" that day. The gorgeous landscape was a sight to remember and cherish for life.

After a while, another huge boulder stood in our way - larger than all those we left behind. We tried to climb it up but that wasn't an easy task. We looked around to find another way and noticed thick roots, which came as a lifesaver. One by one, we crossed this rock, scrambling, crawling.

After walking for another 30 minutes, it was time for a little rest. We ate dry food, before walking for another 10 minutes to reach the bottom of the Saingpra waterfall. It was around 11:30 AM.

I was not ready for what I saw. A

We reached Khemchong Para by afternoon.

The next 3 days, we trekked to seven more waterfalls including Kra Taung upper stream and downstream, Ladmerakh, Jaam Rung, Palong Khyang upper and downstream and Thang Koyain.

But the trek to the Saingpra waterfall remains the highlight of the tour.

Yes, we did it! It's been a year, but the memories are still alive.

### HOW TO GO THERE?

Take a direct bus from Chattogram to Chakariya. Then, there are local buses from Chakariya to Ali Kadam. You can take a jeep (locally known as chander gari) too. After reaching Ali Kadam bazaar, you have to take a ride on local CNG to Aamtali ghat. Here you have to hire a boat and after a 2-2:30-hour journey, you will reach Dhusri bazaar. Here the trek starts. Until you reach Dhusri bazaar again, all you have to do is "WALK".

### WHERE TO STAY?

This trek is relatively in a remote place in Bandarban. You have to rely on the cottages of local people. So plan your tour accordingly.

Another surprising issue is no one will cook for you there.

We carried food from Chattogram. However, the locals were friendly and I didn't feel unsafe for a moment during the whole tour.

### COST

The trip starting from Chattogram can be managed in 5-7 thousand taka.



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It was the third day of our tour which started on August 16, 2021. We, 11 of us from different parts of the country, set out on our mission to cover the highest summits and waterfalls in the Ali Kadam area. Nine of my travel mates were total strangers to me. But when everyone shares the same goal, bonding happens automatically.

The first two days were hectic. We summited Kris Taung (approx. 2949 feet) and Rungrang Taung (approx. 2772 feet), the two highest peaks in the Chimbuk range. After six to seven hours of trekking each day, my legs were tired. But I was determined to meet Saingpra, the highest waterfall in the Ali Kadam, come what may.

It was drizzling again.

We waited for it to stop, but there was no sign. So, after a warm, hearty breakfast of noodles and coffee, we started trekking.

From the beginning, the trail was slippery. After trekking for 30-40 minutes on the hilly trail, we reached a beautiful green flat land





## We had 1 fire extinguisher: Owner of cargo area on safety measures

SHOAB AHMED SAYAM

After the 549th fire incident that could've easily been avoided if businesses weren't absolute pieces of ... or if fire safety measures were a tiny bit better, the nation was shocked once again.

By now, every average citizen knows why the incident happened. Politicians, however, are still confused. They're still trying to figure out if it was an accident, the result of negligence, or conspiracy by the opposition.

But believing stupid citizens is a big no-no. To get definitive answers, Satireday sat down with Md Samir Mahmud, owner of the now burnt-up cargo area in Pattogram.

**Satireday:** So, what caused the fire?

**Samir:** I'm gonna be honest with you, because I'm an honest man. In fact, I think I'm the most truthful man in the entire country. This was pure negligence.

**Satireday:** Great, so you're admitting to...  
**Samir:** Negligence of the workers.

**Satireday:** Oh, great.

**Samir:** You see, I do everything for these workers. I pay them for their work. I make eye contact with them. And yet, what did they give me in return? A burnt-up cargo area. Had they been more cautious, this wouldn't have happened.

**Satireday:** But the place didn't have adequate fire safety measures. Plus, you kept chemicals there.

**Samir:** Absolute nonsense. I bought a large fire extinguisher for the area five years ago. We also had a bucket of water nearby. And what's all this about chemicals? Chemicals are everywhere, in the food we eat, the clothes we wear; we're made of chemicals!

**Satireday:** No, like, the flammable ones.

**Samir:** What does "flammable" really mean? Have you ever thought about that? Everything can be set on fire; it's all flammable. Except water, and that's why we had the bucket there.

**Satireday:** But you broke the law and didn't even inform firefighters that you're a piece of ... that you had chemicals there.

**Samir:** Rules are meant to be broken, sweetie. Business is war, and I can't lose. Next time, firefighters should keep these things in mind.

**Satireday:** Finally, what measures are you taking after this disaster?

**Samir:** I would like to apologise on behalf of my stupid workers. We will add another bucket of water for the area. We would've added two, but as you can see, I took a huge financial hit. People like us need to think about the economy.

Besides, I'll be financially assisting all families affected by this incident. What do you think, will Tk 10 lakh be enough to make them forget and be happy? Man, I'm so generous. The whole country should remember how humanitarian I am.

## PK joins race with Saudi man to marry Amber Heard

MAHBUB ALAM MUNNA

Being hit by serious penury, when Amber Heard was totally unable to pay Johnny Depp the \$10-million compensation, the amount lost in a bet over the Liverpool-Madrid UCL final, an altruistic man from Saudi Arabia came to the rescue with his fat bank accounts.

He expressed his intention to marry Amber Heard under the "If you marry me, I will pay your debts" scheme.

While asked about why he wanted to marry her despite having a wife, the man said, "I just want to help a financially broken and helpless woman. I am not polygamous. I just run a project that helps deprived and helpless women through my marrying them."

While everything was going smoothly and the man was just on the verge of paying Amber Heard's debts, PK Maldar, the multi-billionaire from Chapasthan, entered the scene as if by magic.

Maldar proposed his plan to marry Amber Heard and outplayed the Saudi man. "Hey Amber, do you know me? I am the second richest man in the world, right after Elon Musk.

Forget that oil merchant. I know how to manage girlfriends. I will make a movie called 'The Moneyman', and you will play the lead role," Maldar said in a letter sent to Amber Heard.

"By defeating the Saudi man, I want to make my countrymen proud of me. I, PK Maldar, a proud representative of Chapasthan, will do anything to uphold the dignity and pride of my nation," he added.



PHOTO: REUTERS

As the news went global, the people of Chapasthan couldn't contain their delight. Some tagged him as "The Hero of the Nation", some called him "Dulabhai of the west" and some called him "The Loverman".

"Only a few people made Chapasthan proud and PK Maldar is one of them. I myself wanted to marry, I mean help, Amber but couldn't do it due to untimely poverty. Now, I am happy that, at least a person from my country is ready to help her," Munna, a secret admirer of Amber Heard, said while crying with happiness.

When Amber Heard was asked who she would marry among the two, she employed multiple facial expressions and said, "My dog stepped on a bee..." and became silent.

## Govt to mend tea workers' broken roofs with surplus tea leaves

Commerce minister tells traffic jam

CUPPARESPONDENT

In the seventh hour of sitting in a traffic jam on the country's biggest thoroughfare, Chapasthan Commerce Minister Baki Gunchhi held an impromptu press conference for around 30 motorcyclists who had congregated around the minister's BMW over the last five hours.

"You just have to see the development to believe it," he said, although no one had asked a question. "So many cars! That just tells me how much citizens' spending powers have grown. We can't import the cars fast enough. That's why the finance minister said we will be making our own cars and exporting them.

"On the other hand, we are producing more tea than we export. What does that point to? More and more people are drinking tea. Why? Development. Progress. With the increase in local demand for tea, everyone in that industry will be benefited."

At that point, one of the motorcyclists (who happened to be a journalist because there is one every 30 motorcycles) asked how it would benefit tea garden workers, many of whom were living in dilapidated sheds in tea gardens.

"Oh, I see you read the paper. Well, development is the answer there too. We already have plans for it. Tea production is so good now, that it even exceeds local demand. So, we will repair the roofs of tea workers' houses with surplus tea leaves. Like I said, increase in spending power benefits all," he shouted over an ambulance siren that had been blaring for the last three hours.

At this point, the journalist asked why tea workers' salaries are not increased from the current Tk 120 a day, since they are contributing to increased production and because the raise would also help them mend their own houses.

"Yes, yes... Oh look, the cars are moving, great talking to you fine folks," the minister said and rolled up his window, then sat inside the stationary car for three more hours till the jam finally eased.



PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA