

SUST MOVEMENT

A year of unkept promises

MAMUNUR RASHID and DWOHA CHOWDHURY

A year has gone by since the students of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) suspended their movement for the removal of the vice chancellor and other demands.

It has been exactly one year since the protesting students were promised by Education Minister Dipu Moni and Deputy Education Minister Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury that all their demands will be fulfilled.

However, most of their five-point demands, including their key demand of the resignation of Vice-Chancellor Professor Farid Uddin Ahmed, have not yet been fulfilled.

The case filed against students has not been withdrawn yet.

Treatment of Szal Kundu, the student who was fatally injured during a police firing, has been stopped. His struggle with pain after being hit by more than 70 splinters in his body continues.

The university administration has been alleged to be creating an atmosphere of fear on the campus. Students who participated in the protest are allegedly being harassed in their academic and

administrative activities.

The probe body -- formed by the university after the clash with the police -- is yet to submit its report.

The Daily Star recently spoke with Szal Kundu and Mohaiminul Bashar Raj, the spokesperson of the movement.

"I'm not well. The splinters remain inside my body, including two near my lungs. I have breathing difficulties and the grip of my right hand is not firm yet," said Szal.

"I was beaten, shot, subjected to mental abuse. Yet, no one from the university authorities came forward for my treatment after the initial operation. I don't have the money to buy my medicines, let alone to financially support my family," he added.

Mohaiminul Bashar Raj said, "After Prof Zafar Iqbal's assurance, we withdrew the hunger strike and had a meeting with education ministry officials. An intelligence official was present there, who told us that to ensure a win-win situation for the government, the VC will be removed after 3-4 months through a formal process."

"The education minister also assured that they will discuss the matter with the Chancellor. Since then, we have been

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A Khulna City Corporation worker uses a fogger machine to spray insecticide in a drain to prevent mosquitoes from breeding. Even though it's winter, the mosquito menace continues to escalate in the city due to lack of proper monitoring, claimed locals. The photo was taken in Daulatput Deyana area yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Nirmul Committee to launch cultural wing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ekatturer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee will celebrate their 31st founding anniversary on January 19. On this occasion, the committee will also start their cultural wing, primarily named Jagaran Sangskritik Squad.

Committee President Shahriar Kabir announced it in a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) yesterday.

"Before the national election in 2018, we centrally formed cultural squads, legal aid committees, medical aid committees and IT cells. Before our national conference this year, we want to complete the conferences of these auxiliary committees, which starts with the conference of the cultural squad," said Shahriar.

"We have initially named it 'Jagaran Sangskritik Squad'. However, the delegates participating in the conference will take the final decision in this regard. We think it can make an important contribution in spreading our thousand-year-old cultural heritage against the anti-liberation

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PRAYER TIMING				
JANUARY 17				
Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5:30	12:45	4:15	5:40	7:00
JAMAAT 6:05	1:15	4:30	5:44	7:30
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION				

Destroying bird habitat for a tea garden



This vast land in Moulvibazar's Kurma Chonkhul area used to be the habitat and sole breeding ground for many rare species of birds and animals. The area has been cleared of the bushes and trees to set up a tea garden instead.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

MINTU DESHWARA

The state-owned National Tea Company took the lease of Moulvibazar's Kurma Chonkhul area a long time ago. The place, surrounded by trees and bushes, serves as the sole breeding ground for the rare Golden Headed Cisticola, locally known as "Munia" in Bangladesh, and many other endangered species.

Recently, the NTC began the process of turning this area into a tea garden, by cutting all the bushes and many of the trees. This has damaged the habitat of many rare and endangered birds, including the Munia.

In response, the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Department requested the assistance of the deputy commissioner of Moulvibazar to declare the area as a "Bird Sanctuary", although many believe that the damage has

already been done.

According to the letter, chonkhula is a cow grazing land covered with grass and chaff. During the dry season, the local community collects some grass from here but most of the time it is abandoned as a pasture for cattle and a safe habitat for wild birds and animals.

The letter states that wildlife habitats are currently declining due to climate change and other adverse conditions. Many wild animals have gone extinct; many are on the verge of extinction. The forest (Chonkhola) has a variety of Munia bird species, which are not seen in any other forests in the country.

The district administration oversees all matters, including the land lease of all tea gardens in Moulvibazar. Hence, the letter requested the office of the DC to issue necessary instructions to the NTC for protecting wildlife.

Earlier, the Forest Department also issued a letter to the NTC on March 3, 2021, to preserve this land as a wildlife habitat. However, the tea garden authorities proceeded to clear the forest anyway.

Bird specialist Inam Al Haque visited the affected area on December 18. "If Chonkhula is declared a sanctuary with the help of the DC, the place will play a strong role in the conservation of rare and endangered animals. This place needs to be prevented from being used for any other purposes, including setting up a tea garden," he said.

Wildlife photographer Khukon Thounaojam said, "Chonkhula is the only breeding ground of Golden Headed Cisticola in Bangladesh. No other secondary breeding grounds were found in the country. The bird is very rare."

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, divisional forest officer of Wild Animal Management and Nature

Conservation Department, told this correspondent, "Different species of Munia, including the Golden Headed Cisticola, Red Munia, Siberian Stonechat, Button Quail, and rare species of owls and other animals can be found in Chonkhula."

"NTC is committed not to conducting further deforestation in this place. I have talked to the DC. We hope the place will be declared a wildlife sanctuary soon."

Mohammad Shamsul Islam, deputy general manager of NTC, said they have withdrawn from the plan to convert the forest into a tea garden. "We will try to make up for the damage," he added.

Mir Nahid Ahsan, deputy commissioner of Moulvibazar, said, "I have spoken to him (divisional forest officer). I will speak to the ministries concerned and talk to the garden authorities in this regard."

Families left with no roof over their head
Brahmaputra devours arable land in Kurigram char

SDILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

On the bank of the Brahmaputra, 60-year-old Sekendar Ali had sown seeds of hope for his family, with just his own hands and a spade. But little did he know, the tides of the river had a different fate in store for him.

He went from a man who owned 10 bighas of arable land and a homestead of 15 decimals -- to a miser who now owns nothing due to river erosion.

Sekendar is a farmer from Charmantala who lives in a remote char area on the Brahmaputra riverbed in Chilmari upazila of Kurigram.

After losing everything, he and his family of five took shelter on the land of a relative in another char.

"After working day and night for 15 days straight, I was able to save the crops of 20-decimal land off the river bank. But even those parts may get devoured completely," he said, talking to this correspondent in the first week of January.

Sekendar's only hope now is the 10-11 maunds of paddy that he could save from this land, which will feed his family for the time being.

Like Sekendar, around 180 families have been

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Nowadays, Sekendar Ali, a farmer living in Charmantala, a remote char area on the Brahmaputra riverbed in Kurigram, works tirelessly to save whatever crops he can in the few decimals of land he has left after the river devoured almost all of his arable land and homestead. Many like him are suffering from the same fate.

PHOTO: STAR

Woman, granddaughter killed as bus hits a rickshaw-van
3 other family members injured in crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A woman and her granddaughter were killed and three of their family members were injured in a road accident while they were returning home after attending a marriage ceremony in Ghoraghat upazila of Dinajpur yesterday.

The deceased are Ratan Bala, 55, wife of Bijoy Chandra Barman, and her granddaughter Tithi Rani Barman, 17, of Beshain village. Tithi was a ninth grader at Kacherchhara High School in Ghoraghat.

The injured are Aruna Bala, 40, Karuna Bala, 55, and Arpana Rani Barman, 7.

Abu Hasan Kabir, officer-in-charge of Ghoraghat Police Station, said all the family members were returning home after attending the ceremony of a relative in Joydebpur village in Nawabganj upazila, riding on a rickshaw-van in the morning.

As the van arrived at Balgari village around 11:30am, a passenger-bus from Dhaka hit the van while it was trying to overtake a sand-laden tractor, said the OC.

Locals rescued and took the injured to Ghoraghat upazila Health Complex.

Tithi and her grandmother died on the way to the health complex.

Dr Touhidul Anwar, family planning official of the health complex, said two of the three injured persons have been referred to Bogura as their condition was critical.

HOLEY ARTISAN ATTACK
HC to begin hearings on appeals soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court is expected to begin hearings on the death reference and appeals in the high-profile Holey Artisan attack case soon.

The matter was listed as number six on the cause list of the HC bench of Justice Shahidul Karim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman yesterday.

The bench will begin hearing the death references and appeals from the convicts after the prior cases are heard and disposed of, Deputy Attorney General Bashir Ahmed, told The Daily Star.

He, however, was unable to provide a specific date for when the HC will start holding the hearings.

On January 12, Chief Justice Hasan Fozz Siddique assigned the HC bench led by Justice Shahidul Karim to hold the hearing and dispose of the death reference and appeals.

According to the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), if a lower court orders the death penalty, the verdict is to be examined by the HC for confirmation of the punishment.

On July 1, 2016, five militants, armed with guns, machetes, and grenades, stormed the upscale eatery in the diplomatic zone in Gulshan and held the diners hostage before killing 20 of them, including three Bangladeshis, seven Japanese, nine Italians, and one Indian.

The militants were killed during a rescue operation by army commandos. Two police officials and a chef of the café were also killed during the 12-hour standoff, while another injured staffer died later.

A Dhaka court on November 27, 2019, sentenced

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