

## Saraswati Puja celebrated amid festivity

AGENCIES

Saraswati Puja, a major religious festival of the Hindu community, was celebrated across the country yesterday with much enthusiasm, festivity and religious fervour.

The puja is celebrated on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of the Bangla month of Magh.

The day is called "Vasant Panchami".

Hindu devotees, especially students, worship Goddess Saraswati and celebrate the puja at educational institutions and temples.

The celebrations also included offerings of Devi Aradhona, puspajoli, archanas, anjolis, aratis, distribution of prashad, arati competitions, cultural functions and staging of dramas at temples and educational institutions.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also greeted the Hindu community on the occasion of Saraswati Puja.



A child prays intently to goddess Saraswati, who represents education, creativity, and music, in hope of her blessings, possibly for an upcoming exam. Devotees all around the country gathered at different mandaps to celebrate Saraswati Puja yesterday. The photos were taken at Dhaka and Chattogram mandaps.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON, PRABIR DAS

## Do not form committees with family, relatives

Quader urges AL members

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday asked party members not to include any "family members or relatives" in AL committees.

"Forming any committee with family members or relatives will not be allowed. Make committees with those who are devoted and were with the party during its bad times... Do not make anyone a leader just because they are a known face," said Quader while speaking at AL's Mymensingh divisional delegation meeting held at the party headquarters in the capital's Gulistan.

Addressing the leaders, Quader, also road transport and bridges minister, said, "Do not form committees through internal dealings or nepotism; committees have to be formed with devoted activists. Please form the committees immediately."

Meanwhile, he claimed that BNP never follows the path of democracy.

"We practise democracy; BNP does not. Awami League is the only one in the country that practises democracy within the party."

"BNP complained to foreigners that there is no democracy in Awami

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## 'Interference unacceptable'

Writers, artists concerned over bureaucratic influence on Bangla Academy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-three writers and artists yesterday showed their concern over the alleged interference in Bangla Academy by bureaucrats and demanded the removal of the secretary of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

In a statement, they also demanded not to put any interference in the activities of Bangla Academy, which is an autonomous body. They also mentioned that they do not want any bureaucratic interference in the internal affairs of Bangla Academy in the future.

According to the statement, Bangla Academy is a statutory autonomous organisation or institution as per section 3's sub-section 2 of the Bangla Academy Act, which was passed in the National Parliament in 2013. This institution will be run by the executive council.

This council will have three representatives from the government, and other members will comprise important personalities of the education, art, literature and cultural arenas. The secretary of the Ministry of Cultural

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# The Irani nightmare

Trafficking syndicate, with help of 2 Dhaka airport staffers, confine, torture Bangladeshi migrants, reveals CID

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Jahangir Alam Badsha, 41, is a security staff of the Civil Aviation and Mahamudul Hasan, 27, is an outsourcing staff at the air condition service of the engineering service inside the Dhaka airport.

However, they had another side hustle to take care of. When a fortune seeker, trapped by a transnational human trafficking syndicate, went to the airport to leave Bangladesh on a visit visa, their task on behalf of the syndicate was to help the aspirants board the plane without any obstacle.

In the last two years, this syndicate has trafficked at least 50 Bangladeshis to Iran. The syndicate comprises at least 15 Bangladeshi members with some Irani nationals.

The serious crime unit of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) disclosed the findings yesterday following the arrest of Badsha and Mahamudul from the capital's Dakkhin Khan area.

Md Nazrul Islam, special superintendent (SS) of CID's serious crime unit, confirmed the development to The Daily Star. "The duo used to charge Tk 15,000 to Tk 20,000 per client," he mentioned.

Besides the airport management, the duo was also involved in manipulating people to identify themselves as top airport officials, said Nazrul.

CID found out about their



PHOTO: COLLECTED

The arrested Dhaka airport staffers with CID officials.

The Irani members of the syndicate would record the migrants being tortured and send the clips to their family members, asking for ransom.

MD NAZRUL ISLAM  
Special Superintendent of CID's serious crime unit

involvement with the syndicate while investigating a case filed with the airport police station of Dhaka Metropolitan Police on November 10 last year.

A trafficking victim, who has managed to get out of the captivity of the syndicate and return to Bangladesh from Iran with an international NGO's help, filed the case, said CID officials.

Earlier on January 15 this year, CID arrested another member of the syndicate — Abdus Salam alias Selmat Ullah, 34, — from the capital's Abdullahpur area.

The syndicate used to target those who want to go to middle

east, especially to Iran or Saudi Arabia. For the journey, the syndicate first charged Tk 1 lakh and then send the fortune seekers to Dubai on a visit visa.

Dubai-based Bangladeshi members of the syndicate used to receive the aspirants from there, and charged Tk 2.5 lakh from each of them, said investigators.

To sell the migrants to locals, they would then hand them over to the syndicate's Irani members and board them on an Iran-bound boat, said SS Nazrul Islam of CID.

Upon their arrival in Iran, the syndicate used to confine and torture them for money. The nightmare does not end here. The Irani members of the syndicate would record the migrants being tortured and send the clips to their family members, asking for ransom, said Nazrul, citing the findings from the primary investigation.

The families of the migrants would then be asked to pay the ransoms to different mobile financial service accounts in Bangladesh. "A victim has paid around Tk 7 to 8 lakh to the syndicate to be released from their captivity," said Nazrul.

SS Nazrul Islam also said they have already started correspondence with the Iran Embassy in Bangladesh to identify the Irani nationals involved with the syndicate.

"We are also working to trace the syndicate's local members and rescue the Bangladeshi victims confined in their torture cells," he added.

## On the run for nine years

Death-row convict in photojournalist Aftab murder case arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A death-row convict of Ekushey Padak winning photojournalist Aftab Ahmed murder case has been arrested in Dinajpur nine years after he went into hiding after obtaining bail.

The convict, Raju Munsi, 25, had been hiding in Mymensingh, Jamalpur and Dinajpur under different guises and he never even contacted his family to avoid arrest in nine years. He worked as an assistant of a mason.

The members of Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) of police arrested Raju from Shalgram bordering area in Phulbari upazila on Wednesday, said ATU Superintendent of Police (Intelligence) MM Hasanul Zahid at a press conference yesterday.

The 79-year-old photojournalist was killed during a robbery at his home on Wapda Road in West Rampura, Dhaka on December 24 in 2013. Police recovered the body the next day.

M a s t e r m i n d e d by Aftab's car driver Humayun Kabir, Raju and several others entered Aftab's house, saying that they would rent the house

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## Data Protection Act to protect data, not control

Law minister reiterates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday reiterated that the Data Protection Act will be enacted to protect data, not to control it.

"We will place the draft of the Data Protection Act in parliament. It does not mean that suggestions from the stakeholders will not be addressed," the minister said while talking to reporters after the Deputy Commissioners' Conference in Dhaka's Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

"This act is for protecting data and will be enacted as per this policy," he added.

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## Bangladesh, India ties see significant achievements

Momen tells event marking 74th Republic Day of India

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said the Bangladesh-India relationship has seen "transformative changes", reaching a new height with significant achievements through cooperation and collaboration.

"Bangladesh attaches the highest importance to its relations with India," he said while speaking at a reception on the 74th Republic Day of India.

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pranay Verma hosted the reception.

Momen said the relationship between the two countries, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi,

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## BANNING SINGLE-USE PLASTIC

Bela serves contempt of court notice to secretaries, DoE DG

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) served contempt of court notice to secretaries of five ministries and director general of the Department of Environment over their failure to comply with a court order that banned single-use plastic in coastal areas.

The secretaries are from the commerce, environment, water resources, civil aviation, and textile ministries.

Apart from this, the chairperson of Plastic Manufacturing and Import Association was served the notice as well.

Contacted, Supreme Court lawyer S Hasanul Banna told The Daily Star that Bela along with 10 environmental organisations filed a public interest litigation with the High Court, seeking the ban, in January 2020.

Hasanul said the court on December 31, 2020, in a ruling, asked why failure to rein in plastic menace would not be declared unlawful.

It directed the ministries concerned and Department of Environment to execute the total ban of single-use plastic, by creating an action plan and executing it by 2022.

"The court also asked them to stop the use of single-use plastic at hotels, motels and restaurants in coastal areas — as well as production, carrying and sale of polythene," he added.

"As they failed to carry out the court order, we served them with the notice in this regard," he told The Daily Star.

# Once a saviour, now needs saving

The depressing state of Bibi Mariam cannon

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The task to visit Dhaka's Osmani Udyan and find the Bibi Mariam cannon might not be as easy as it seems. The area where the structure is supposed to be is completely surrounded by garbage, to the point that it seems like it's nothing but a dumping site, let alone a historical one.

The historical cannon is under the jurisdiction of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC). Even though it stands right in front of Nagar Bhaban, the artefact is rotting away due to lack of proper care.

A c c o r d i n g to historian Prof Muntassir Mamoon's book "Dhaka Samagra", Bibi Mariam was constructed in the capital during the Mughal era to protect the city from attacks by the Magh or Arakanese bandits. Local technicians, under the guidance



of Mughal engineers, built the weapon. Subedar Mir

Jumla used the cannon during a war with Assam. It was then put in front of Bara Katra at Swarighat as a war memorial. Later, it was moved to several different locations,

such as Chawkbazar, Sadarghat, and Gulistan. In 1983, it was finally placed in front of Osmani Udyan's main gate.

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw Bibi Mariam surrounded by garbage, tree branches and bricks, with plants growing all around it. The paint was peeling off the structure's body, which is covered with dirt. The disturbed eyes and nostrils

of visitors are proof that pedestrians regularly use the spot as a toilet.

Kamal Hossain, a resident of Gulistan, said this negligence is unacceptable, and something needs to be done about it.

"The cannon is a pride of Dhaka residents, and it deserves respect and care," he said.

Aslam Uddin, a nearby shopkeeper of the area, said the structure rots in negligence because no one has been assigned to take care of it.

"It's losing its historical value every day. The authorities concerned should take steps to ensure that it is properly taken care of," he added.

Meanwhile, DSCC and the Department of Archaeology (DoA) have no idea about Bibi Mariam's present condition.

Historian Prof Muntassir Mamoon expressed his anger while talking to this correspondent.

"We are fortunate that such an important artefact has not been stolen or lost in the long course of history. However, its current state is completely unacceptable," he said.

Contacted, Architect Taimur

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