

# PM confers Ekushey Padak 2023 19 personalities, two organisations get the award

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday conferred the Ekushey Padak 2023 to 19 eminent personalities and two organisations in recognition of their contributions to various fields.

She handed over the Ekushey Padak, the country's second-highest civilian award, at a ceremony at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in Dhaka.

The cultural affairs ministry organised the event on the occasion of International Mother Language Day.

Khaleda Manzoor-e-Khuda, freedom fighter AKM Shamsul Haque (posthumously), and Haji Mohammad Majibor Rahman received the award for their roles in the Language Movement.

Masud Ali Khan and Shimul Yusuf received the prestigious award for their contributions to acting, while Manoranjan Ghoshal, Gazi Abdul Hakim and Fazal-e-Khuda (posthumously) for music, Jayanto Chattopadhyay for recitation, Nawazish Ali Khan for shilpakala (arts), and Kanak Chanpa Chakma for painting.

Besides, Momtaz Uddin (posthumously) was given the award in the Liberation War category, Md Shah Alamgir (posthumously) in journalism, Md Abdul Majid in research, Professor Mazharul Islam (posthumously) in education, Saidul Haque in social service, Manjurul Islam (posthumously) and Akhter Uddin Mia (posthumously) in politics.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina poses for a photo with the recipients of Ekushey Padak 2023 at the capital's Osmani Memorial Auditorium yesterday. Nineteen eminent personalities and two organisations received the award this year in recognition of their contributions in their respective fields.

PHOTO: PID

## EC asks for Tk 3,954cr as polls expenses

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The Election Commission has asked the government for Tk 3,954 crore to meet the expenses of the upcoming parliamentary and local government elections and repairing 1.1 lakh electronic voting machines.

Commission officials tabled a proposal in this regard at a meeting with the finance ministry and the planning commission yesterday, said officials.

The meeting was held at the Secretariat to discuss the EC's budget for 2023-24 fiscal year.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Additional Secretary of the EC Ashok Kumar Debnath said, "No final decision has been made in this regard. They [finance ministry] have advised the commission to make the proposal more specific."

Two meeting sources confirmed that the EC's proposal included Tk 1,260 crore

for having 1.1 lakh EVMs repaired by Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory (BMTF).

According to the EC sources, the commission has asked for Tk 5,485 crore for the next fiscal year. Of the amount, Tk 3,954 crore would be needed for conducting the next general election, 6th upazila polls and several city corporation elections.

The next Jatiya Sangsad polls are likely to be held in late December this year or early January 2024.

The EC's budget for the 2022-23 fiscal is Tk 1,539 crore. Of the amount, Tk 229 crore is earmarked for conducting elections.

The commission since 2018 has bought 1.5 lakh EVMs in phases for Tk 2.35 lakh each, almost 11 times the price in India back then.

Now around five years later, 40,000 of those machines are beyond repair. The rest 1.1 lakh can be fixed for around Tk 1,260 crore, according to a BMTF proposal set

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## ADANI'S COAL PRICE

## Govt body starts with learning session

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A government committee to review coal pricing system with power plants at its maiden meeting yesterday sought information from companies concerned about how they buy the coal.

The government formed the nine-member committee, led by Power Secretary Habibur Rahman, on January 23 following reports of the power cell of the energy ministry that India's Adani Power Plant was buying coal at inflated prices.

"At the first meeting, we just

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## Ex-UP member arrested for raping 8-yr-old girl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Police on Sunday night arrested a former member of Itail union parishad for allegedly raping an eight-year-old girl in Jamalpur Sadar upazila.

Shawkat Hossain Babul, 62, was sent to jail as per a court order yesterday.

On February 13, he lured his neighbour's daughter to his house and raped her there when his wife was not home, police said.

## 3 hurt in gas cylinder blast

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three restaurant staffers were critically injured after a cooking gas cylinder exploded at Fusion Café in the port city's Khulshi area around 11:00am last morning.

Md Kashem, 18, Nur Hossain, 20, and Mubinul Haque, 22, suffered severe damage to their respiratory tracts on top of the 15 percent burns on their bodies, said Dr S Khaled, assistant professor of CMCH's Burn and Plastic Surgery Unit.

## Teacher dies in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A high school teacher was run over and killed by a brick-laden tractor in Panchagarh's Boda upazila last morning.

Jashoda Rani, 35, an assistant teacher at Futkibari High School, was going to work on a colleague's motorbike.

Afterwards, angry locals set the tractor on fire, demanding the driver's arrest.

A case was filed in this connection, said police.

## Border killing: BSF returns body after 4 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

The body of the Bangladeshi youth, who was shot dead inside Indian territory by the Border Security Force (BSF) on Friday night, was returned yesterday afternoon -- four days after the killing.

The deceased was Sahabul Hossain Babu, 33, son of Abul Hossain of Daranda (Fakirpara) in Dinajpur's Hakimpur upazila.

## Why we need proper fire plans

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apartment buildings in Bangladesh that are increasingly going higher, not that fire does not kill at low heights. We are further handicapped by our lack of awareness and cooperation; taking selfies and live streaming fire incidents by the nuisance-causing, crowding public, are serious threats to life.

The apartment building in Gulshan that caught fire on February 19 is typical of a new genre of residential buildings emanating from the 2008 Dhaka Metropolis Building Construction Rules, that allow single-stair 12-storey residential buildings with four apartments per floor.

Fire at the Gulshan building on Road 104 began in a small way from the 6th floor, initially bellowing smoke. It was so small that it was ignorable, but perilous because time is of the essence in any fire.

Where were the extinguishers? If available, did anyone know how to operate them? Uncontrolled for an hour or so, the fire characteristically flared up further and typically engulfed the upper floors, presumably via the external windows as well as the open staircase. Grenfel experienced the same route of spread.

Apartments are not prone to catching fire, given that the active cause of combustion is low. Two factors will increase the risk of fire, interior decoration with highly combustible materials which nowadays is the norm, and ageing as well as faulty and underrated electrical wiring and appliances.

Smoke prevented the residents from going down to the plaza level. When this happens, it means the stairs were inadequate in size and number, and not encased in fire rated material with rated doors.

There has to be detection and alarm systems in place to give earliest warning, providing people adequate time to escape.

Each floor should have been compartmented by design, meaning smoke and fire should have been restricted to the 6th floor, allowing residents to escape comfortably via the encased staircase/s.

Extinguishers and sprinklers are also required in such buildings, as are requisite water reservoir, hydrant and fire pump. The Fire Service had to borrow firefighting water from the lake and adjacent buildings, which is a major shortcoming in design as well as the abject failure of authorities

that granted the building permit; Rajuk and Fire Service.

The person who died from jumping off the building and others with him found it unbearable to stay in the building due to smoke and heat, and then panic set in, robbing them of basic human instincts and practical thinking.

The deaths were preventable had the architect and the owner ensured a plan that would enable the few dozen people to exit safely.

There are hundreds of similar and worse buildings. The electrical components are getting old. Stairs are open that will prevent people from getting down. There could be more fires in the near future. Let us revisit our buildings now along with our respective architects. Let us plug the leaks to first, stop a fire from starting, second, provide detection and alarm, third, design a means of escape, and fourth, find out how best to utilise our firefighting equipment and the fire service.

Owners spend a huge amount of money on a building. It will only take another a few takas per square metre to ensure safety through a fire plan.

[Nizamuddin Ahmed is an architect and writer]

## Left to die out

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across the country, with a 1.65 crore population -- around one percent of the entire population.

Of them, the flatland indigenous communities are found in Rangpur and Rajshahi regions. With around 35-38 groups, their population in Rajshahi is around 2.44 lakh, while the figure is just above 91,000 in Rangpur division, with a majority of them living in Dinajpur.

The Santals make up the biggest part of the ethnic minorities across the two divisions.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Rabindranath Soren, president of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, said all the ethnic minorities have their own separate languages to communicate among themselves.

The Santals use the Santhali language, which has its own alphabet. The Oraon community speaks the Kurukh language, which is also spoken by the ethnic people of India's Jharkhand, while the Munda community have the Mundali language.

All of these languages are now hardly used by the people of these communities, especially members of the younger generations, who, according to indigenous rights' workers, have no space -- not home or school -- to practise them.

Eventually, the lesser a language is spoken, the faster it becomes extinct.

The most commonly used language among the flatland ethnic communities is Satri.

Manik Soren, information secretary of the Adivasi Parishad, said

Sadri is still largely spoken among many of the communities. "But it is a mixed language."

Rabindranath Soren claimed that most indigenous languages in the flatlands are endangered, with around seven to eight of them already having become extinct over the years for various reasons.

Pumdo recently conducted a survey in Bagjana and Atapur unions in Joypurhat's Panchbibi upazila and found similar scenarios.

Some of the ethnic communities there are the Oraon, Pahan, Malo and Mahato.

The survey, carried out among school children of the communities, found that most of them cannot speak their traditional languages, with many never having even heard of them.

This correspondent on Monday visited Damdama village in Panchbibi municipality and found the observations to be true after speaking to a good number of school and college students.

In Uchai Jarka SC High School, with around 70 students from different ethnic backgrounds, this correspondent found that most of them are unfamiliar with their own languages.

Puja Singh, a sixth grader of the school from the Singh community, said she has never even heard about the language of her community. "I never even heard my parents speak in any such language."

Like her, most students of the school said they use Bangla for their daily communications.

Anjali Mahato, a first-year HSC student, also expressed reluctance to speak her native language.

Sanjita Mahato, a homemaker in Damdama village, said neither her parents nor her in-laws speak their ethnic language.

According to the Adivasi Parishad president, the government needs to take the lead in saving the indigenous languages of these communities in order to uphold the country's multi-cultural heritage.

An option for indigenous students to learn about their cultures and heritage in their own languages in schools, colleges and universities can be a solution, he said.

"We are yet to see any apparent steps in this regard," he said, adding that the Parishad has been demanding that the government employ at least one teacher from an ethnic community in primary schools.

"But the demand was never paid any heed to."

Asked how this could be possible considering the vast number of indigenous languages, he said, the government must find a solution in this regard. "Otherwise, all these languages will become extinct. We can still save some of the endangered languages if we start the process right now."

The government in 2017 had taken an initiative to publish textbooks in the Sadri language. "It has been six years and no such book has been supplied to any school as yet."

He added, "The languages are dying out even faster in the urban areas compared to the rural ones."

## Ensure security

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her master's from Rajshahi University, and the second is a fourth-year student at Dhaka University.

"Phulpori is my third child while the fourth is a tenth grader," he said, adding that he spends the majority of his earning on their academic expenditure.

"Being an illiterate man, I know the pain of ignorance. So, I had the

dream to educate my children," said Ataur.

Both the father and daughter demanded exemplary punishment to the culprits so that nobody dares torture any student on the campus in the future.

"When I went to the university and started attending classes earlier this month, that was the first step to fulfilling my dream," said

Phulpori.

"Unfortunately, I was humiliated and brutally tortured by the seniors on the campus and I was never prepared for this," she added.

"Now I strongly urge the university administration to take steps to prevent such incidents in the future. I want safety and security for me and all of us like me so that we can fulfil our dream."

## Phulpori was abused physically, verbally

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the media after she gave a statement before the investigation body.

Phulpori, a first-year non-residential student, alleged that Sanjida and Tabassum tortured her on the night of February 12 for staying at Deshratna Sheikh Hasina Hall without their "permission".

They tortured her from 11:00pm till 3:30am.

On February 14, the victim lodged a complaint with the university proctor, student adviser and the hall provost, demanding punishment of those involved in the torture.

The probe committee interrogated Sanjida and Tabassum from noon to 5:00pm yesterday at the office of Prof Reba Mandol of law department, convener of the committee formed by the university administration.

Other committee members include member secretary Deputy Registrar Ali Buddin Khan, Provost Council President Prof Debashish Sharma and Assistant Proctor Prof Murshid Alam.

Prof Reba told reporters that information that they got during the investigation will not be disclosed.

"We have made good progress in

## People urged not to fly kites

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if they fall on the lines.

Moreover, the authorities have to pause operations to remove those, which causes the passengers to suffer, it said.

In this given situation, the DMTCL requested the residents, living around a one-km radius of the metro rail, to prevent their children from flying kites, sky lanterns and gas balloons or any kind of flying object for the safety

of the metro rail.

Yesterday morning, the metro rail service had to be stopped for half an hour after a kite got stuck in one of its overhead electricity lines.

The authorities suspended train operations around 9:45am, Nasir Uddin Ahmed, director (operation and maintenance) of DMTCL told The Daily Star.

Services resumed around 10:15am

## Dainik Dinkal stops

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declaration out of political vengeance and Bangladesh Press Council also rejected the appeal of the paper. This is a huge blow to the freedom of expression," said Fakhrul in a statement issued on Sunday night.

He claimed that the Dhaka DC office, following the directives of the government, cancelled the declaration of the daily on December 26 last year, but the paper resumed operation on December 29 after filing an appeal to the press council, seeking a stay on the cancellation order.

The BNP secretary general demanded immediate withdrawal of the cancellation order.

According to a report of the AFP that obtained the press council's order, the printing permit of the newspaper was cancelled after the newspaper violated the country's printing and publication laws.

The council said the paper's publisher, Tarique Rahman, the acting

chief of the BNP, was a convicted criminal and was living abroad without handing over his job to another person, said the AFP report.

The report quoted Shimul Biswas as saying that Tarique submitted his resignation and appointed a new publisher, but the authorities did not accept the changes.

Speaking to The Daily Star last night, Shimul Biswas said they would take measures to resume publication of the newspaper that started its journey in 1991.

Meanwhile, factions of two journalist unions -- Dhaka Union of Journalists and Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists -- staged demonstration in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, condemning the cancellation of the declaration for Dinkal.

They demanded that the paper be allowed to resume publication. The two unions will hold demonstrations across the country on February 25, according to a press release.

after the kite was removed.

Meanwhile, the rush of passengers increased manifold due to the delay.

A similar problem occurred on Sunday as well.

Earlier on January 1, just after the New Year celebrations, the authorities had to suspend operations for two hours "on safety grounds" as a huge number of extinguished sky lanterns fell on the overhead electricity lines.

## Putin's war plans

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anniversary of Russia's invasion, reports Reuters.

Biden left Kyiv, after the five-hour long surprise visit. The US president's visit to Ukraine came just ahead of his scheduled visit to Poland later yesterday.

"This visit of the US president to Ukraine, the first for 15 years, is the most important visit in the entire history of Ukraine-US relations," Zelensky said.

Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba called the visit a "victory of the Ukrainian people and president Zelensky" and a clear signal to "the swamp" - Russia - that "no one is afraid of you!"

It was clearly timed to upstage Russia's President Vladimir Putin, due to make a major address today setting out aims for the second year of what he now calls a proxy war against the armed might of Washington and Nato.